

While this article was triggered by a defamatory piece by the Quilliam Foundation, I decided to tackle the issue holistically, by not only discussing the fatal flaws in the article itself, but also the problems with the organization itself, and more importantly, the fundamentally flawed attempt by the UK government to impose their own stooges as leaders for the Muslim community.

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Introduction

A few days ago I was reading a rather inflammatory piece: a piece that was billed as an “alert” (packing “urgency”) about issues that were no more urgent than my need to redo the paint in my kitchen. It was a piece that combined innuendo, hot-button words, labels, guilt-by-association, and extreme fear-mongering. In its tone, it resembled writing that would typically be more comfortable appearing on LGF, jihadwatch, frontpagemagazine or Harry’s Place (in UK).

Unfortunately, this wasn’t Robert Spencer frothing. Rather, the organization issuing the “alert” was the “Quilliam Foundation” (QF) [alternative pronunciation "*kwahyt laym*"], which formed last year, and billed as a “counter-extremism think-tank”. The alert was called “[Quilliam Alert: Islam Channel and the promotion of extremism](#)“. For those of our readers who are not aware, the QF is two-man show composed of two ‘ex-radicals’, and [funded by the UK government](#) on British taxpayers money for a cool 1 million British pounds.

“Ex-Extremist” Cottage Industry

And so continues the ongoing drama of “ex-Muslim-extremist-gold-rush”. While the world economy is souring, and large multi-national corporations declaring bankruptcy, the cottage-industry of “ex-Muslims” or “ex-Muslim-terrorists” or “ex-Muslim-extremists” is still alive and kicking, and always adding to the millionaire-pool. From [Walid Shoebet](#) and [Kamal Saleem](#) in the States, to [Maajid Nawaz](#) and [Ed Hussain](#) in the UK, it is basically the same set-up, and here’s how the “ex-extremist-who-wants-to-be-a-millionaire” reality show works:

Make up a story (fiction is okay too) of how badazz ‘fill-in-the-blanks’ you were in your past life, and how you have completely turned your life around now, seen the errors of your malevolent ways, desire to show penitence for the damage that you had caused, and now wish to usher in an era of global peace and reform by targeting the

radicals that you are so familiar with, and who, if they had their way, would annihilate life on earth as we know it.

There are plenty of adjectives to choose from to fill in the blank above: radical, terrorist, extremist, jihadist, fundamentalist, etc., and you get bonus points for adding key-words such as PLO, Hamas, Hezbollah, Ikhwaan, Hizb ul-Tahrir, Wahhabi, Jamate Islami, or Deobandi.

It is pitiful that governments are so paranoid about this threat they are willing to give them a million pounds of tax-payer's money, despite the fact that they *only* credentials they have is the claim that they are 'ex-extremists'. Such a tactic speaks volumes of the level of intelligence of those agencies that call themselves 'intelligence agencies'.

For those who do decide to follow up on this 'get-rich-quick' scheme of selling their religion for a paltry price, something really amazing always seems to have happened to them that inspired them to come around to a version of 'moderate' Islam (in one case, Kamal Saleem's amazing story of "[As a 7-year old, I carried another boy off the war-zone on my back, and he saved my life by taking bullets for me!](#) Forrest Gump anyone?).

This version of 'moderate-Islam' that they seem to discover is, rather strangely, anti-mainstream-Islam, highly pro-government, usually pro-war and many times, downright pro-Israel. In fact, if one didn't know any better, a less-discerning reader might actually confuse some such 'ex-extremists' with neoconservatives.

Sprinkle a little of "my life is in danger because other badazz Muslims want to get me", (ala Irshad Manji's bravery) and you have the perfect prototype to shop around.

To monetize at maximum levels, get a book deal (any publisher would love to sell a million books to other bigots in order to reconfirm their bigotry), set up an interview on FOX, Hannity, Melanie Phillips, etc., or in the case of QF, go straight to the Home Minister.

Add all of these ingredients together, forget about possible repercussions in the Hereafter, and 'voila', you have yourself one might sweet deal to live the rest of your (worldly) life with.

Organic Representation vs. Forced Representation

And so we continue down the same path, regurgitating the counterproductive policies of the media and the government. As I wrote [in this piece](#), the media, and by extension, the government cannot credibly plug in a representative for Muslims who is actually not an "organic" representative of Muslims. Those who claim to champion democracy should take a moment to actually study the phenomenon: you can't create a Muslim spokesman for Muslims and impose him on the community, you need to let the community choose who they really view as being a model representative of themselves.

A cursory review of the blog-world, and of private and public conversations in Muslim circles, drives the point home: no matter how much the media stuff the wallets or egos of these "created representatives", they will continue to be loved only by those who chose them, viz., the media and government. Muslims seem to develop even more mistrust for such people. You cannot rub this love off to the Muslim masses, as leadership and love is developed by Imams and religious scholars by their (a) bonafide training in Islamic knowledge, (b) continuous service to the Muslim community, and (c) garnering the respect of the public on account of their own merit, not on the shoulder of a willing media or government grant. As I stated in the [linked piece](#):

When you pick and choose those figures, especially the ones despised and sidelined by the vast majority of Muslims, then the message you are sending to Muslims is:

1. You (the media) will decide who represents us.

2. You (the media) feels that Muslims cannot decide for ourselves who we want to represent us.
3. You (the media) are creating "[Uncle Toms](#)" to represent the opinion that You (the media) want people to hear: the opinion that suits your fancy.

Lest anyone misunderstand what I am saying, no one is discouraging Muslim leadership from participating in specific government programs, with some basic conditions. It is one thing for the government to cooperate with established *INDEPENDENT* Muslim leaders in the community, in order to unite against a common threat of radicalism; it is quite to recruit marginal figures with suspect backgrounds to toe the government line in every issue, and impose them upon the Muslim community as their representatives. You can represent only those who want you to represent, you can't force representation. One would have thought that a "democratic" nation would understand that.

In fact, the result of "forced representation" is usually the opposite. As in the example of Quilliam, the founders not only failed to gain any foothold in the British Muslim community (not in ANY mainstream quarter), but they are more despised than ever before. Now tell me, how do you expect these lap-poodles to make any impact on "extremism" or to influence any Muslim in "leaving extremism"? You might have as well chosen [Nick Griffin of the BNP](#) to head the Foundation... at least you'd be honest about your intentions!

Cross-Links: The Fake Hype

A hallmark of marginal entities and neocon networks is that they use a web of friendly or surrogate websites to spread their message, in order to give the appearance that the article or the viewpoint is more popular "organically" than it really is. This is extremely popular with right-wing websites such as jihadwatch, whose article is picked up by multitudes of surrogates who echo the same message.

Thus, in our case, the QF piece was picked up on "Pickled Politics" by "Faisal Gazi" under the pseudonym "Sid". Faisal originally plagiarized the article without any references, was called out by a sharp commentator, Ravi, and went on to [bungle his excuses](#). Eventually, he blurted out the real reason for trying to stifle the Quilliam reference,

I posted this in my own name and intentionally left Quilliam off the post to see if we could have a discussion on Islam Channel without it degenerating into another round of "But Quilliam does not represent British Muslims" horse****.

Pay attention, UK Home Office, this is how much credibility Quilliam has: that even Quilliam's cronies are afraid to be associated with it!

The "Quilliam Alert"

Getting back to our piece, the Quilliam Foundation contends that the highly-popular "Islam Channel" promotes extremism. The alert claims that Islam Channel is giving too much time to "Islamists", "wahhabi graduates of Saudi universities", and for added emphasis, the Hizb Tahrir, not forgetting to mention the organization's goal of world domination, in which women and minorities are stripped off their rights.

The first question then: What is an "Islamist"? Or a 'Wahhabi' for that matter? Here's your homework, Quilliam minions: please go through [this article on the uses of the term "Wahhabism"](#), and then use the money given to you to actually think through this and give us a coherent definition.

The second question: If, as you claim, you are championing the rights of freedom and democracy, why deprive groups of *their* right to promote what they believe are legitimate causes, as long as they are doing so via democratic means? After all, each group only wishes to champion its causes, and in a democracy all ideas are given the fair and free chance to be heard, and people should be free to make up their minds. We, for one, are

not calling for the banning of the BNP or other blatantly racist organizations. Nor does any sensible person argue that Christians who lobby to ban abortions should be themselves banned from the country, even they they are attempting to impose their own 'shariah' (holy law) on the country. Once again, as long as the *means* are legitimate, any group should be allowed to function in a free environment.

The third question: you of all people, ex-Hizb Tahrir members, should be the last people on earth to throw around red-herrings and employ scare-tactics that you know to be lies. So what if a person belongs to Jamat Islami, you know coming from your background (as one of the biggest critics of JI for being 'too soft') that they are not radical extremists, but rather pacifist quietists. The 'guilt-by-association' of graduating from Madinah University is so nefarious, coming from 'Muslims', that it speaks more about your intentions and character than anything else.

Our Response:

Azad Ali

Let's start with the nonsense spewed about Azad Ali. Perhaps for many of our readers this will be the first time they have heard of Azad Ali; however, knowledge of Azad's background is not necessary, since the piece itself provides enough holes.

What is it that makes Azad an extremist? Apparently, he was suspended from his job for writing blogs which have been *interpreted* as condoning terrorist attacks. Note the weasel word *interpreted*. Who interpreted? On what authority was the interpretation made? Did anyone ask Azad about his agreement with the interpretation?

Based on a vague premise of a vague interpretation, the Quilliam alert goes on to assume that "despite his extreme views", he was elected to the council of Liberty, a human rights pressure group. Okay. So, we can assume that the Liberty group didn't know anything about Azad's "dangerous" background, but trust Quilliam- they must have some inside knowledge.

Inside knowledge? As if Quilliam didn't enough problems with credibility, they made sure what was left of it was crushed to smithereens. For their source on the Azad Ali's extremism, Quilliam editors provide us with a link to the [Evening Standard](#), which is, you guessed it right, an [English tabloid](#)! Not that the Quilliam piece is any better than tabloid journalism (*sans* the racy pictures), but let's humor them by reviewing the Evening Standard's premise for setting Azad up as an extremist:

He [Azad Ali] describes non-Muslims as "sinners" and says Muslims should "hate [non-Muslims] disbelieving actions.

Oh my god. What blasphemy! How can non-Muslims be sinners, when in fact only Muslims are sinners?! Hate disbelieving actions? What extremism! In fact, we should love trinity, we should love drinking, we should love pork-eating habits. If we don't do so, we could become the next extremists!

Yasir Qadhi

Next in line on the extremists on IslamChannel is the "wahhabi graduate" of the University of Medina, our own Yasir Qadhi. Ah yes, the buzz-word of 'Wahhabi' again; anyone who doesn't agree with your version of Islam is simply a 'Wahhabi'. According to any standard piece of writing in the modern media, a 'Wahhabi' is a Muslim who believe homosexuality is a sin, or that Shariah law is the law of God, or who shun 'mainstream' sexual practices as sins. Muslims: get over it. The abstract theological differences that differentiate some classical groups of Islam have no relevance in this media and government onslaught: any Muslim who is somewhat faithful to Islamic values is labeled a 'Wahhabist'. The term has become totally meaningless.

But what did poor Qadhi say? According to Quilliam, Qadhi denied the Holocaust and also denounced Shiasm. Blasphemy of blasphemies!

First of all, EVEN if Qadhi did both, since when do such matters equate to terrorism? In this day and age, it is okay for politicians to say that Makkah should be nuked, for mainstream Christian theologians to say that Islam is a religion of Satan, for famous personalities to claim that Muslims are inherently evil and violent- all blatant islamophobia - yet when a person questions a historical account or theological reality, he becomes an extremist?

The first charge (of alleged Holocaust-denial) actually shoots QF in the foot. Sh. Yasir wrote a very clear and honest explanation of that charge, part of which is (see [this post on MM](#)),

I was a young, budding, twenty-something undergraduate at Madinah when I gave that talk, during my very first cross-Atlantic dawah trip (I must have done over thirty by now). Its been almost a decade since that one-time mistake; I admit it was an error and an incorrect 'fact' was propagated. But even in that talk, I did not deny the actual occurrence of the Holocaust, or express any support or admiration for Hitler, or claim that all Jews were worthy of being despised or hated.

Just to clarify: I firmly believe that the Holocaust was one of the worst crimes against humanity that the 20th century has witnessed. Such a crime did not happen overnight, either. Rather, the systematic dehumanization of the Jews in the public eye of the Germans was a necessary precursor to this event. (As a side, all of this is food for thought, especially in the times that we live in, where some elements are trying to dehumanize all Muslims as well.)

But what clearly exposes the evil of QF is that the website they obtained this accusation from (a rabidly right-wing pro-Zionist website) clearly linked to this letter by Sh. Yasir and proceeded to refute it (primarily by implying it was disingenuous). In other words, QF is well-aware of this explanation and retraction, and **yet they continue to persist in spreading this**. If this does not show the true intentions of QF, I don't know what else will.

On the subject of Shias, I personally do find it oddly intriguing that it is considered permissible for some Shias (not all) to defame and degrade some of the historical figures that Sunnis venerate (such as Umar, Abu Bakr, Aisha rd); but it is not okay to call Sunnis to defend these figures and call the Shias out for what they are saying. But I don't want to go down the Sunni-Shiite tangent now.

Taking a cue from QF, another British commentator, Mehdi Hassan, penned [an article](#) against the unfair portrayal of IslamChannel (perhaps because he himself has been a guest on it), but then went on to unfairly attack Yasir Qadhi in what can be considered a confused and confusing message.

But herein lies the problem: a Sunni, by definition, will very strongly (and, at times, emotionally) disagree with Shia doctrine, and a Shia will do the same for Sunni doctrine. Such disagreements cannot be taken as a sign of 'extremism', but rather of simple affiliation. One can be committed to one's faith tradition and disagree with another, and as long as one does incite violence against another group, it should not be called extremism. What do we say of those Catholics who claim that salvation only lies within their Church, and Protestants are doomed to Hell; or of Protestants who consider Catholic prayers to saints tantamount to idolatry; or of Protestant and Catholics who consider Mormons to be evil heretics misguided by Satan himself?

Once again, though, Sh. Yasir, in a comment on the anti-Semitism clarification article, explained that clip in more detail ([please see entire comment](#), the following are excerpts of it):

The link that you allude to is from my *Kitab al-Tawhid* series, which is even earlier than the Surah Yusuf one. It is definitely the 'old' me, much more fiery and zealous in my tone... while I would not speak about Shiites in such a manner anymore... as a Sunni theologian, I cannot retract from my claim

that the belief that the Quran is corrupted is *kufr*...Hence, cooperation can and should occur with Shiites, on different levels, as it should occur with all groups claiming to be Muslim...

Lastly, please note that I have *never* said that all Shiites are non-Muslims. I have never believed that and still do not

Another interesting side-bar: Quilliam's Majid Nawaz stated in an answer to [an audience question by Yasir Qadhi](#):

AUDIENCE (M)-YASIR QADHI

Well, this leads me to another issue. You seem to have no problem with somebody called Sir John Locke, somebody quotes Tocqueville, somebody quotes any other political philosopher, but the day that a Muslim stands up and quotes what he believes to be the word of God and the word of the messenger of God, you seem to have a problem with that. I find that double standards.

MAAJID NAWAZ

Of course not, of course not. May I remind you that I began this discussion saying Besmi Allah Al Rahman Al Rahim and quoting from the Koran, and what I'm saying is, that's not the problem. Muslims engaging in politics is not a problem. *You are not from an Islamist organisation, I know you, and you're not from an Islamist background, so of course when you engage in politics, you engage in politics as an ethical, a religious person, and you follow the standards that are set up in your country.* This comes back to the question I've asked the other panel: in the West, what are the tangible aims that you would grant to political Islamists that distinguish them from normal Muslims who engage in politics?"

But wait, hold on a sec, aren't you just releasing an 'Alert' stating the exact opposite? So, what is it, Majid Nawaz? Is Yasir Qadhi an "Islamist" or he isn't one? This is what we say to a clear-cut winner here in America: scorecard baby!

Inayat Bunglawala

The Quilliam hit-job then goes on to the attack against Inayat Bunglawala, a representative of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB)-a grass-root organization that actually has a large following among Muslims.

Bunglawala's "extremist" crimes? The government broke off relations with MCB, because its general-secretary signed a statement on the Israel-Palestine issue. As this [iengage](#) article notes, "what responsibility Inayat bears for the signature of a declaration by another. Any liberal would contend that individuals be held responsible for their own actions and not the actions of others".

This is of course typical of guilt-by-association techniques that are hallmark of the neocons. More damning for poor Bunglawala (according to QF) is that he [complained to BBC](#) about its use of "extremist" labels. By that account, Victoria Brittain must also be a Muslim extremist since she makes exactly the [same case](#) (forget that she is not even a Muslim).

Global Peace & Unity Conference

Finally, the slanderous piece by Quilliam goes on to attack the Global Peace & Unity Conference, an annual event attracting nearly 30,000 people, as having "featured anti-Semitic speakers, Holocaust deniers and supporters of terrorist violence and gender apartheid - as a well as a range of hardline Wahhabi speakers - while moderate, tolerant Muslim voices have been sidelined."

I think the truth of the matter is that this is just sour grapes since the charlatans Ed Hussain and Majid Nawaz were/are not invited to this event. These two probably believe that they represent all that is moderate and tolerant. Thus, simple logic: no Ed/Majid, no moderates!

On the same post by Faisal Gazi that I mentioned earlier, a certain Imran Khan (not “the” Imran Khan) joins other commentators in literally ripping Faisal apart, and he makes this useful comment that effectively kills the Quilliam slant on GPU (note Faisal never answers any direct queries or refutations against his claims, but just goes in circles-another hallmark of someone who doesn’t have substantive arguments). This is the summary of [the comment](#):

- Out of 35 speakers in the conference line-up, 19 are Muslims and 16 are non-Muslims
- Of the 19 Muslims there is a wide range of creeds and people ranging from Sheikh Yusuf Estes to Yusuf Islam. Now Yusuf Islam is hardly the typical Wahhabi!
- We then have Jermain Jackson, Lord Sheikh, Shahid Malik, Zareen Roohi Ahmed, Salma Yaqoob, Sadiq Khan, Imran Khan. None of these can be said to be Wahabi.
- Amongst the non-Muslims we have Rev. Jesse Jackson, Rev Riah Abu El-assal (Bishop in Jerusalem), Tony McNulty, Jack Straw, Simon Hughes, Nick Clegg, Sir Ian Blair, William Rammell, Steven McLaughlin, Dominic Grieve, Ramesh Kallidai, Tony Benn, John Rees, Stephen Timms, William Rodriguez (Survivor of 9/11), Rabbi Yisroel Dovid Weiss (Netuei Karta).
- In addition there are Nasheeds which are more sufi/brailwee oriented than Wahabi. There is arts and exhibits etc.
- It really is an unfair and sensationalist piece that lacked foundation when Policy Exchange did it and still does now.
- Piece more akin to a Melanie Phillips article than “real” information.

External Refutations:

In the refutation mentioned earlier at [iengage](#), the author systematically tears apart the QF piece as well:

It is tedious to have to respond to QF’s nonsense, mostly because nonsense is all they seem to be in the business of producing. But, it is necessary to shine a light on the shallowness of their strategy if only for it to be well understood that their nonsense, whatever the volume of output, simply won’t wash.

...

The QF’s logic is to be marveled at. It appears to want to support Muslims who would thrive in a ‘secular, democratic and liberal country’, though its methods clearly pit it closer to authoritarianism and thought control, the very antithesis of the ‘democratic and liberal’ ideals they keep telling us that they espouse.

This is similar to what Thabet [mentioned here](#):

This is why I regard the Quilliam Foundation (or is it just Quilliam?) with disdain: they [attack](#) Osama Saeed (who I have also [disagreed with](#) in the past) over his support for ‘extremists’, yet they defend a [warmongering idiot](#) like Michael Gove on their [FAQ page](#).

In fact, this is why I regard a number of Muslim liberals* with disdain: their silence on racism, empire and war, if not outright complicity with it.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, I’d like to leave the readers with the following takeaways:

1. Quilliam Foundation does not represent the interests of British Muslims. It is not only because of their lack of financial independence, but because of a complete lack of credibility, qualifications and community support.
2. The statements in the QF “alert” are slanderous, and clearly run afoul of any honest attempt at gathering facts about the people and organizations attacked in the alert. Rather than alerting others to the reality of potential extremists, more than anything it alerts us to the reality of Quilliam Foundation.
3. The statements in the alert contradict other statements made by the same people at Quilliam (e.g. Maajid Nawaz on Yasir Qadhi), as well as intentionally ignoring newer statements made by those attacked, in which they clarify these accusations. This once again raises questions of credibility and draws a large cloud over Quilliam’s intentions and purpose.
4. The piece is akin to tabloid journalism, and the link to a tabloid reinforces this point.
5. The piece is meant to sensationalize and create fear. It is similar to hit-jobs by Spencer at Jihad Watch, Melanie Phillips, and other similar actors. Because there was no real research involved, this should not have emanated from a “think-tank”, which is being funded by tax-payer pounds for research and analysis.
6. It is clear that the Quilliam founders know very well that their “targets” in the alert are not calling Muslims to violence. The “targets” may have different views on morality, on theology, etc, but there is no evidence whatsoever that they ever condoned violence. So what exactly is Quilliam’s agenda?
7. We were unable to locate a single example of productive output from Quilliam that was actually accepted by the Muslim community (even a significant minority), and which led to tangible benefit for the community or even for the UK government.

Take Action

I call upon the readers (especially British readers!) to write to the Home Office, demanding that funding based on taxpayers support be stopped to Quilliam, for all the reasons mentioned in this article and in the linked articles. The Quilliam Foundation is only leading to the creation of more hostility between Muslims, and creating an unnecessary and sensationalist climate of fear and hatred between Muslims and the UK government. Furthermore, it has had negligible and undocumented impact on extremism.

Be succinct and polite. You can point them to this post for evidences. The Home Office contact can be [found here](#):

Telephone: 020 7035 4848, Email: public.enquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

If you write to them or call them, please post a comment here to encourage others.

Other Resources:

- [Quilliam Exposed](#)
- [Abdullah Quilliam: Britain’s First Islamist?](#)
- [Yusuf Smith’s Posts on Ed Hussain](#) & other “dividers”