

MEND's response to Andrew Gilligan

Leading up to the 2015 General Election Andrew Gilligan wrote a number of articles in The Telegraph which made reference to MEND and some of its staff. MEND believes his articles were politically motivated containing a series of factually incorrect statements and totally misleading insinuations which grossly misrepresented statements made by MEND staff. We present below a response to his comments and set the record straight on all the allegations.

This document covers the following:

1. MEND - The organization
2. Gilligan's attacks on MEND
3. Gilligan's crusade against Azad Ali, Head of Community Development and Engagement

1. MEND - The organization

MEND was formerly known as iENGAGE and was formed with the purpose of tackling Islamophobia through research, advocacy and community development. By empowering British Muslims to engage more effectively in media and politics we hope to address disaffection and alienation among British Muslims and inspire members of Muslim communities to play full and active roles as British citizens. We have achieved a considerable amount in its short lifespan and have had much success in engaging Muslims in the political process. An indication of its achievements to date are listed below.

Despite our track record and considerable grassroots support, we have been regularly targeted by neo-cons and the pro-Israeli lobby whose 'Cold War on British Muslims' has been marvelously dissected by Spinwatch in their analysis of the impact of strategies to exclude politically engaged Muslims from politics and the public sphere.

In a few short years, MEND (formerly iENGAGE) has achieved the following;

Advocacy

- **Website** – over 4,000 articles uploaded covering media and policy issues pertaining to British Muslims
- **Social media** – a vibrant social media platform with thousands of followers
- **Leveson Inquiry** – the only British Muslim organization to give oral evidence at the Leveson Inquiry on the Culture, Practice and Ethics of the Press
- **Briefing papers** – authored over a dozen high-quality policy briefing and consultation papers on subjects such as 'stop and search', Palestine 194, press regulation and reform among other topics.
- **Police and Crime Commissioners** – worked with Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales to secure the recording of anti-Muslim hate crime as a separate category of crime; 25% of the forces are now successfully implementing this policy.
- **Crown Prosecution Service** – MEND sits on the CPS Community Accountability Forum hate crime sub-panel
- **Recognition in documenting Islamophobia** - The Office for Democratic

- Institutions and Human Rights has upheld MEND's work on recording Islamophobia as an example for civil society organisations in the region
- **World Economic Forum** – The WEF has highlighted MEND's work as best practice in 'human rights protection and promotion'.
 - **Electoral Commission** – The Electoral Commission is partnering with MEND (among other British Muslim organisations) to improve voter registration among BME voters.
 - **Cited in numerous parliamentary reports** – our work has been recognised in a number of reports published by select committees including the Lords Communications Committee (inquiry on Press Regulation) and the Home Affairs select committee (inquiry into the Roots of Violent Radicalisation).
 - **APPG on Islamophobia** – we were instrumental in the creation of the first ever All Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia

Community Development and Engagement

- **Major Grass roots Muslim presence** – In over 20 UK towns and cities, MEND is working with British Muslims to tackle Islamophobia and play a more active role in media and politics in order to enhance civic engagement and social cohesion.
- **Master Classes** – MEND has designed a series of complementary courses designed to help Muslims better engage with the media and political institutions
- **Resources** – MEND has developed a wide range of accessible and practical resources from media toolkits to exhibitions and easy read guides, all designed to help British Muslims play more active citizenship roles.
- **Get Out and Vote** – Every major election, MEND runs a dedicated campaign to support Muslim political participation.

Our record of work and achievement clearly highlights our ethos of celebrating British Muslim identity and improving the civic engagement of British Muslims in politics and public life. We firmly believe that it is through meaningful engagement in media and politics and by tackling Islamophobia that we can successfully counter the extremists' narrative which rests on the 'clash of civilisations' thesis. We know the majority of British Muslims have no truck with the idea of a 'clash of civilisations'. We also know that British Muslims feel a sense of alienation and wide scale prejudice against their religion.

MEND is a vehicle to challenge these frustrations by empowering Muslims to engage in society, media and politics in order to change things for the better whether this be tackling misrepresentations of Islam and Muslims in the British press or counter-terrorism policies which dangerously curtail civil liberties.

In our documentation of Islamophobia, we have studied the increase in the volume of attacks faced by Muslims and the shortcomings of the legislative and criminal justice frameworks in dealing with this phenomenon. British Muslims, like other ethnic groups, deserve the full protection of the law in challenging hate crime and hate speech. We have been actively engaged with institutions and policy networks to advance the required improvements needed to take more robust action against anti-Muslim hate crime.

The Home Office report on Hate Crimes in England and Wales 2013/2014 revealed a 45 per cent increase in the volume of religious hate crime in the UK, Statistics for the period 2014/2015 are not yet available. From FOIs we have submitted to police forces in England and Wales, we have identified also identified the number of Muslim victims of race-based hate crime giving a clearer picture of the level of hate crime targeted against Muslims on the basis of race or religion. The figures presented

below offer a stark assessment of the scale of the problem. Race and religious hate crimes account for around 85 per cent of the total number of hate crimes. The number of Muslim victims of hate crime has shown a steady increase over the years.

From statistics compiled by the Home Office we are able to discern the type of attack Muslim experience with serious physical assault accounting for a greater number of attacks on Muslims compared to other groups.

Social media is another area in which research is currently developing but we know from early assessment that social media offences in respect of racial and religious hatred are rising and the political parties in their election manifestos give due credence to policy initiatives under development to rid social media platforms of hate speech and incitement to racial or religious hatred.

These developments are encouraging, as is the importance shown to recording Islamophobia as a separate category of crime by police and crime commissioners in many constabulary areas. The National Hate Crime Awareness Week initiative, run by police forces, and the resources committed to tackling hate crime is a major step forward to addressing the chronic under reporting of hate crime and the reluctance among victims to seek criminal redress for fear that nothing can be done about it.

In the wider context of prejudicial attitudes towards Muslims [on the rise in society](#) at large and wide scale media coverage of a distorting and biased nature, anti-Muslim hate crime has to be seen in the environment of general hostility towards Islam and Muslims which many Muslims argue makes them [feel insecure](#) about being a Muslim in Britain.

It is disconcerting, when academic analyses and official data, points to an increase in anti-Muslim hate crime and prejudice that arguments understating the scale of Islamophobia or scaremongering about politically engaged Muslims should perpetuate the very conditions in which anti-Muslim hate crime flourishes.

Among those journalists who have engaged in downplaying the incidence of Islamophobia and publishing near defamatory pieces about British Muslim organisations is Andrew Gilligan of The Sunday Telegraph.

2. Gilligan's attacks on MEND

Gilligan's recent articles on MEND are true to form; spurious allegations libel-proofed to protect against defamatory lawsuits but with the same "loose use of language and lack of judgment in some of his phraseology" for which his work was criticized by the Hutton Inquiry into the death of Dr David Kelly.

A view that is shared with many who have exposed Gilligan's poor journalistic record over the years (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). The various links offer an indication of just how long Gilligan has been able to get away with an abuse of power engaging in selective quotation, misrepresentation, false or unsubstantiated allegations and general mudslinging to harangue a wide range of British Muslims he derisively labels 'Islamists'. His method serves the interests of those neo-cons engaged in the Cold War on British Muslims the greatest casualty of which are "politically engaged British Muslims". As a Muslim organisation working to enhance British Muslim engagement in media and politics, MEND have been targeted in a couple of articles in recent times by Gilligan. This document addresses some of the allegations and accusations that have been thrown at us in articles published in the Sunday Telegraph on 22 March and 4 April 2015.

a) Tory candidate approached with funding to support MEND manifesto

“One Tory candidate in a winnable seat was repeatedly approached by a well-known Muslim figure offering large sums of money for his campaign if he signed up to Mend’s “Muslim manifesto”.”

Whether or not Gilligan’s claim is true, without disclosing the identity of the Tory candidate in question, let alone the potential donor, it is impossible to verify this as a credible claim.

But even if we were to assume it to be true (as unlikely as it may be based on Gilligan’s track record), is Gilligan suggesting that MEND is in a position to control who approaches whom with our manifesto or how they go about eliciting support for our policy pledges? It is the responsibility of political parties to file their donations with the Electoral Commission and the Commission’s job to investigate and flag up any impropriety. There are clear legal procedures in place to maintain integrity in our political system and to tackle corruption in party funding.

Moreover, we have had no such “well-known Muslim figure” approach us offering to support our work by providing campaign donations to candidates. Our work is focused on grassroots Muslim communities who we feel should play a bigger role in local and national politics.

The more important question, of course, is about the system of campaign and party funding and the possibility of its being manipulated to serve particular interests. It is notable that Gilligan has made no effort to look more closely at Tory party funding more generally, instead of focusing on the one Tory candidate he mentions in his article on MEND. Had he done so, in the manner of the [Bureau of Investigative Journalism](#) and his former Telegraph colleague, [Peter Osborne](#), Gilligan might have stumbled on serious issues concerning [access and influence](#) arising from various individuals linked to the [pro-Israeli lobby](#).

Candidates elicit financial support from a whole host of individuals and organisations and at a time when political parties are going out of their way to conceal their donor base, and legitimate questions are being asked about access and influence over our politics, Gilligan seems to be peculiarly concerned with one small fish when there are bigger fish, in the form of Tory party donors, to be investigated. Indeed, why cite a Tory candidate’s example without exploring further the lengths the party has gone to attract financial support and from whom? Remember the words of Baroness Warsi about the party’s [“morally indefensible” position on Israel](#), and the sources of party funding? There are clearly important questions to be asked about the access and influence enjoyed by sections of the population over politics but his fixation on Muslim community organisations betrays the exceptionalism which defines the media’s approach to minority communities where race or religion are given privileged meaning in order to essentialise the nature of the problem as stemming from religious belief or cultural practices. This approach obscures the more mundane explanations and presents the problem as one emanating from ‘facts’ about a religion; Islam.

b) MEND is a rebrand of iENGAGE and the APPG saga

“Mend itself is a rebranding of a group called Engage, or iEngage, which was removed as secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia in 2011 after The Sunday Telegraph revealed its links with extremism. The name change appears to have been enough to fool many MPs and official bodies.”

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia established in 2010 was marred by some controversy after a campaign was launched to deprive us of the status of secretariat on the basis of a number of unfounded accusations.

Gilligan regularly claims that his article unearthing our ‘links to extremists’ forced the circumstances which resulted in our removal from the secretariat position but this is wholly incorrect.

Indeed, we have it on good authority that the MP in question as much as admitted to his role in getting us removed at all costs. And who waged the “campaign” against us? In the words of Labour MP and APPG vice chair, Jack Straw, it was the Jewish Chronicle. Well, given our robust stance on the [Palestinian right to sovereign statehood](#), our criticism of the Conservatives’ revision to [universal jurisdiction law](#) to protect foreign war criminals, including Israelis suspected of war crimes in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, from prosecution in British courts, and our questioning the teaching of the ideology of [Zionism in British schools](#), it is perhaps not surprising that the Jewish Chronicle should flex its muscles to keep Muslims out of politics.

To put Gilligan’s lies to rest, a point on chronology first:

Gilligan wrote an article in the Sunday Telegraph on the APPG in November 2010. He claims the article and its uncovering of our “links to extremists” is the reason we were ousted from the APPG but the facts of the case are rather different.

We were removed from the APPG in July 2011 after a [group of Tory MPs](#) turned up in force to secure our removal having [failed in an earlier attempt](#) in January 2011. Indeed, the ousting was celebrated by the usual coterie of [neo-con blogs](#) – which gives firm indication of those with a vested interest in seeing us removed.

As to the “links to extremists” – a closer look at some of the scurrilous accusations appearing on Gilligan’s list is enough to assure anyone of just who is the extremist here.

Gilligan raises the point about our protesting Dr Zakir Naik’s entry to the UK which was blocked by the Home Secretary on grounds that Dr Naik’s presence in the UK was ‘not conducive to the public good’. Gilligan of course omits the fact that the Home Secretary’s decision was [challenged by her own staff](#) who protested against his exclusion arguing that, on the contrary, his presence would be conducive to the public good given the esteem in which he is held by British Muslims and his strong denunciations of terrorist violence. Dr Naik later [addressed the Oxford Union](#) via satellite to deliver a speech condemning political violence conducted in the name of Islam.

The wider point we were establishing was the [double standards](#) applied when it comes to freedom of speech. We saw it when [Ibrahim al-Musawi](#) was blocked from entering the UK but Geert Wilders welcomed because “free speech is a fundamental pillar of democracy”. We saw it again when [Sheikh Raed Salah](#) was subject to an

exclusion order with the subsequent legal challenge shedding considerable light on shenanigans and vested interests at play in the Home Office.

Gilligan claims our rebranding seems to have “fooled” Members of Parliament, as if to suggest caution in treating with us. But we would argue that it is the firm realisation that our removal as secretariat to the APPG was the result of a malicious campaign waged by groups indisposed to our advocating for Palestinian human rights.

Acknowledging the work we actually do and the vested interests of those who seek to frustrate our progress was well captured by the Conservative MP, Sir Peter Bottomley, who spoke in our defence during the APPG troubles and said to those who agitate against us to recognise our work for what it is and “face their own demons”.

It is no surprise that rabid among our detractors at the time, and since, was the Harry's Place blog. It was from Harry's Place that the Jewish Chronicle first approached MPs asking questions about us. Is it a fitting practice in that sphere of journalism to use anonymous, uncredited sources to fish around for information taking no pains to establish the identity of the individual/s making the allegations before putting them to the accused? Smoke and mirrors is a favoured technique among neo-cons who cross-post information in an attempt to create legitimacy for material that has no substance and is little more than opinionated drivel. The “misinformation network” is a term used to describe such lobbies and not without reason. This style of journalism is among those things we have petitioned against in our support of the work by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, which calls for proper accreditation to establish veracity in the news production process.

There is a further point in relation to the APPG on Islamophobia and that concerns transparency. This was one of the criticisms made against us to suggest our unsuitability to serve as secretariat. Not only is it supremely hypocritical for Gilligan - who himself has used sockpuppetry to conceal his identity while launching attacks on others - the question of transparency arose recently over two APPGs on which the [Henry Jackson Society served as secretariat](#); the APPG on Homeland Security and the APPG on Transatlantic Relations. The HJS refused to disclose its donors, in keeping with parliamentary standards on transparency and financial disclosure preferring to step down from the secretariat roles. At no time has Gilligan covered this issue despite an obsessive regard for "transparency" and "entryism" when writing about Muslim organisations.

Furthermore, the [Christian Institute](#) which has enjoyed privileged access to the parliamentary estate courtesy of a parliamentary pass sponsored by Baroness Detta O'Cathain, observes the same level of non-disclosure as ENGAGE formerly did. As with the Christian Institute, the only member of ENGAGE staff publicly known was Inayat Bunglawala. While ENGAGE was criticised for not exercising greater transparency over its personnel, other organisations, like the Christian Institute, have faced no such criticisms. It is indicative that the standards demanded of us and resorted to in order to justify our removal from the secretariat position were not considered relevant or necessary elsewhere. The double standards employed reinforce Muslim perceptions of one rule for and more lax rules for others.

c) Gilligan distorting MEND CEO Sufyan Ismail's comments

i) 'Kingmaker'

Gilligan wrote in the *Sunday Telegraph* on Sunday 5 April, ***"In new recordings heard by this newspaper, Sufyan Ismail, Mend's chief executive, describes the group's strategy to act as "kingmaker" in next month's election and claims it can control as many as 30 seats."***

In actual fact, Sufyan said the following:

"At a time when parliament is hung and no party has a large majority, anybody who can give any party 10, 20, 30 seats, like we can because we are heavily concentrated in a few areas, **you (the Muslim community) are what they call the kingmaker**, they have to listen to you."

The comment relays an inevitable fact of coalition-building in the event of no overall majority emerging, when small parties play pivotal roles. It also affirms the noted [significance of the Muslim vote](#) in the 2015 election, something which has been documented by Conservative-inclined right wing pressure groups such as the [Henry Jackson Society](#) and [Policy Exchange](#).

Gilligan falsely maintains that MEND's "strategy [is] to act as "kingmaker" in next month's election" and adds another demonstrable lie in asserting that "[MEND] claims it can control as many as 30 seats."

It is a matter of fact that British Muslims will be instrumental as voters in a number of parliamentary seats as evidenced from data taken from the 2011 Census. Gilligan makes out as though there is something sinister about our approach in mobilising Muslim voters but he is both out of step with the [wider interest in BME voters](#) and their voting potential in the next election.

The seriousness of the allegation suggesting we purport to play the role of "kingmaker" or that we claim to "control as many as 30 seats" is a deliberate slur to misrepresent our grassroots engagement strategy on engaging Muslim voters in the democratic process.

We have held numerous hustings events across the country to deepen MP-constituent relationships and to foster a critical, informed approach to political engagement which is in direct opposition to the 'biraderi' system which has plagued Muslim communities foreshadowing meaningful, individual engagement.

With the volume inches Gilligan has reserved for his ire against Lutfur Rahman, the former Mayor of Tower Hamlets, it is reasonable to assume that Gilligan's intent is to suggest MEND seeks to manipulate Muslim voters for its own ends. This is patently false. Our political literacy classes and grassroots efforts in establishing Working Groups confirms our ethos of empowering Muslim communities to engage more effectively in media and politics.

ii) Making it easier for British Muslims to go to Syria

In the same article of 4th April, Gilligan claims Sufyan said:

“David Cameron recently said that British Jews fighting for the IDF [Israeli army] will not be prosecuted”...“But British Muslims going to Syria fighting against Assad... will definitely face interrogation. Now do you think that if we landed those 20 seats or 30 seats, he [Cameron] would have the audacity to say that to the Muslim community? Not a chance!”

Again, Gilligan completely misrepresents the words spoken and their meaning. Sufyan in his talk at Zakariyya mosque in Bolton, to an assembly of local Muslims, said:

"If the Muslim community can show it can deliver 20, 30 40 seats, they have to take us a lot more seriously than they have been taking us. David Cameron recently said in Haaretz newspaper that, British Jews coming back from Israel ...killing Palestinians, blowing up hospitals, killing Palestinians on beaches, all fine. As far as he [David Cameron] is concerned, British Jews who have been fighting for the Israeli Defence Force will not be prosecuted.....but British Muslims going to Syria, fighting against Assad, whatever the rights and wrongs are, as we saw with Moazzam Begg and others will definitely face interrogation.

"Now do you think, if we landed those 20 seats or 30 seats, he would have the audacity to say that to the Muslim community, not a chance".

There is clearly a context here, which is the deep frustration felt by British Muslims on the disparity in treatment between British Jews going to Israel and fighting for the IDF versus Muslims going abroad to engage in conflict, especially those fighting **against** ISIS. There is also the broader disparity in the [case of white Britons](#), some of them former soldiers, who have also spoken of their plans to go abroad and fight ISIS.

The issue of British Muslims engaging in conflicts abroad and the parallel drawn with British Jews who serve in the IDF is a subject that has been raised on a number of occasions following last year's conflict in Gaza, most notably by [Robert Fisk of the Independent](#) but also by Labour MP Yasmin Qureshi and Grahame Morris both of whom raised the issue which we hear among Muslims all the time - why is there differential treatment in the way in which Government approaches British Muslims who have gone abroad to take part in conflicts abroad and the regular service of British Jews in the IDF?

Grahame Morris MP asked the [PM in the House of Commons](#), following announcement of passport seizure plans last September: "The Prime Minister has set out his arguments for the withdrawal of UK passports. Given the strong evidence of Israeli war crimes in Gaza-we have heard about 500 children being killed under a terrible bombardment-will British citizens fighting in the Israel defence forces be treated in the same way as those returning from Syria and Iraq?"

The significance of voting as a means of contesting the manner in which legislation is proposed, particularly that which has a disproportionate impact on British Muslims, which much counter-terrorism legislation does, is exactly the proper way of articulating Muslim concerns and interests at the perceived double standards employed by politicians. By engaging in the political process, British Muslims are better placed to challenge these double standards.

Moreover, for the record, MEND have repeatedly denounced ISIS and its terrorist activities at our events which have served as vital platforms for us and other Muslim leaders to unequivocally condemn the group that goes by the name 'Islamic' State.

d) Politicians standing by Muslim community

Gilligan further asserts in his article of 5th April,

"Mr Ismail claimed that a 2013 arson attack which destroyed a Muslim community centre in Muswell Hill had been condoned by the rest of society, saying: "Did you hear one politician condemn it? Even one politician? When was the last time you saw a church burnt to the ground – I bet you can't think of one?"

Gilligan goes on to cite the words of condemnation by a number of senior politicians including the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, and shadow Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper.

But Gilligan misses the broader point Sufyan was intending which was that at a time when Muslims were engulfed in a spate of attacks following the murder of Drummer Lee Rigby, there was widespread criticism of the muted response from senior politicians.

The claim that politicians were late to condemn the attacks is borne out by these facts:

The [Muslim Council of Britain](#) wrote to the then Communities Secretary to protest at the lack of Government action on tackling the spate of attacks on the Muslim community.

David Cameron and the Home Secretary were both criticised for not speaking out on the bomb attacks in the West Midlands, which narrowly averted major fatalities only because the bomb timed to go off at the time of Friday prayer when the mosque would be heaving suffered when the hour of prayer was brought forward - As the editor of the [Muslim News, Ahmed Versi](#) put it during a press hearing in Downing Street: *"There is concern in the Muslim community that the PM is not concerned about the welfare of the Muslims at such a time."*

It is noteworthy that the Home Secretary wrote of being "shocked and saddened" in an article for a Pakistani language newspaper *a month after* the first bomb was discovered.

The [Deputy Chief Constable of West Midlands Police, Dave Thompson](#), who were dealing with bomb attacks, a murder inquiry and an English Defence League demonstration all occurring in the same period, similarly expressed disquiet about the lack of concern for the welfare of British Muslim citizens. In a blog, Dave Thompson wrote: *"I wonder if you picked another faith and said that there would be a series of bombings at places of worship during a major religious period and the police had a picture of the alleged attacker you might think it would get more coverage?"*

The same sentiments were echoed by Labour MP and [Shadow Home Office minister, Chris Bryant](#), who in a visit to the West Midlands in July 2013 said, *"It's a shame we have not seen the Prime Minister say anything about it. He could have been more forceful about attacks on the Muslim community"*.

The comments about the upsurge in anti-Muslim hate crime and the lack of official condemnation for the vulnerability experienced by British Muslims by the Prime Minister and Home Secretary, both of whom have readily and enthusiastically addressed the subject of extremism and radicalisation but could not bring themselves to address a situation which was the cause of tremendous fear and anxiety to British Muslims, would have dawned on Gilligan if he did not spend quite so much time [downplaying anti-Muslim attacks](#) particularly those experienced in the summer of 2013.

e) Gilligan's lies on numbers on physical attacks on Muslims

Mr Ismail also claimed that there were "500 physical attacks" on Muslims, "mainly women," in London in 2013. This was the total number of alleged Islamophobic crimes reported to police that year, the vast majority of which were not physical attacks on people

Andrew Gilligan has made Islamophobia bashing into something of a pastime frequently returning to the theme of how Islamophobia is not a big deal and that figures show that it is either declining, or not as big a problem as homophobia or anti-Semitism.

The aggregate number of religious hate crime in London was *631 in 2012-2013* and *915 in 2013/14*.

The number of Islamophobic hate crimes recorded by the Metropolitan Police Service in London in *2012-2013* was *518* and in *2013-2014* was *495*. Compare this to the figures for anti-Semitism in the capital which MPS figures show in 2012-13 was 153 and in 2013-2014 was 297. We retrieved the information from FOIs submitted to the Met (for September –August in each year respectively).

As for whether Islamophobic hate crimes are physical attacks or not, the [Home Office report on Hate Crimes in England and Wales in 2013-2014](#), states:

"[P]ublic order offences and violence against a person were the two most common offences associated with hate crime for all strands except religion. For religious hate crime, public order offences were the most common (46%) followed by more serious criminal activities such as criminal damage and arson (25%)."

That is, in the case of religious hate crime, the tendency for physical attack is much greater than for all other forms of hate crime.

Furthermore, according to the Mayor of London's Office for Crime and Policing report detailing a new [Hate Crime strategy](#) for the capital:

"In terms of the profile of hate crime victims, self-identified ethnicity was given as 32% Black, 31% White and 29% Asian. However, the report acknowledges *that the largest number of victims of street-based, anti-Muslim hate crime are female, as attacks are often based on appearance and dress.*

"The report reveals that since October 2011, the number of recorded offences in each monitored category of hate crime (race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity) has increased. Racist and religious hate crimes make up the largest proportion of offences accounting for 88.4% of all hate crime. While 74.7% of all hate crimes were flagged as race and religion based, 13.7% were related to faith

alone and the data indicates that, overall, the *volume of faith hate crime offences are increasing.*"

Gilligan further states that Sufyan said:

f) *"Anti-Muslim hate crime had risen by "more than just about any other hate crime you can imagine."*

He adds his own views on anti-Muslim hate crime, stating ***"In fact, it has risen by less than many other forms of hate crime, including anti-Semitic and homophobic crime, both of which are also far greater per head of population."***

Again, Gilligan shows a marked ignorance of the facts.

According to the Home Office report on [Hate Crime in England and Wales in 2012-2013](#) and [2013-2014](#), racial and religious hate crime accounts for the vast majority of hate crimes amounting to 88.7% and 89.4% respectively.

We submitted FOIs to all police forces in England and Wales, bar the Met (whose Islamophobia figures are presented above) and the City of London Police and British Transport Police, to better understand the number of race-based and religion-based hate crime suffered by Muslim victims.

It may evade Gilligan's limited understanding of these issues, but anti-Muslim hate crimes are often prosecuted as 'racially aggravated' offences, not just as 'religiously aggravated' offences, making both the racial and religious hate crime categories relevant. We asked the forces to provide us details on the number of Pakistani and Bangladeshi victims of race hate crime as reported by the force in the Home Office report. We also asked each force to provide us with the number of religious hate crimes which were logged as or considered to be Islamophobia. The figures are not complete because in some cases victims did not offer their self-identified ethnicity.

What we did find from our FOIs is this: there were 5,320 racial and religious hate crimes in 2013-2014 where the victim's ethnic identity was Pakistani/Bangladeshi or religious identity was Muslim. This is greater than the number for homophobic crime (4,622), disability hate crime (1,985) and transgender hate crime (555) reported in that year. The number of anti-Semitic crimes in 2013-2014, according to ACPO (available on the True Vision site) was 318 (for all forces in England and Wales, including Northern Ireland).

The Home Office report also notes that religious hate crime increased by 45% between 2012-13 and 2013-14. The only form of hate crime which rose by a greater percentage in this period was transgender.

The facts about anti-Muslim hate crime is that it is increasing as noted in the report by the Mayor of London's Office for Crime and Policing and the Home Office hate crime report.

As for per capita figures, given that anti-Muslim hate crime is not adequately captured by current reporting mechanisms, only a handful of police forces record Islamophobia as a separate category of crime, it makes little sense to derive further comparisons by breaking figures down by population size.

Gilligan uses this technique to try and dilute the significance of anti-Muslim hate crime rather than focus on the more important factor in compiling comparative data – the quality of the dataset. Without better collation of anti-Muslim hate crime, making per capita comparisons makes little sense. Unless you have a biased motive?

There is a further, fascinating facet to Gilligan’s obsession with underplaying Islamophobia and that is his take on anti-Semitism. It is quite strange that someone who spends so much time rubbishing one type of hate crime should be more amenable to another. But perhaps the reason, as [this article would suggest](#), is the opportunity coverage of anti-Semitism gives Gilligan to bash Muslims yet again.

Firstly, on figures and facts – though Gilligan concedes that the figures he cites are “not from a professional poll – but from a survey publicised on Jewish community organisations’ mailing lists and social media. Despite efforts to weight the results, the self-selecting nature of the respondents probably skewed the answers. The other poll was done by a professional pollster, but some of the questions seemed rather loaded” – he continues to present information suggesting “a rising tide of anti-Semitism”. This despite the fact that one of the polls which he draws on was debunked as methodologically flawed.

He then elaborates on a number of examples of alleged abuses by Muslim groups which purportedly stokes anti-Semitism but there is no reciprocal interest shown, investigative or otherwise, in the Islamophobia evinced by members of the British Jewish communities.

Labour MP, Ivan Lewis, bravely spoke out against Islamophobia among British Jews recently saying,

“I find it incredible that the Jewish community can have double standards on this matter. If we are out there fighting anti-Semitism and asking for zero tolerance on it, then if even a small minority engages in Islamophobia, we lose moral authority and legitimacy and we cannot have double standards. I think we have a disturbing amount of anti-Muslim elements in our community, and if the Jewish community doesn’t call people out on what is frankly racism, then it is shameful.”

Lewis states that there is “a disturbing amount of anti-Muslim elements in [the Jewish] community” and while Gilligan has shown significant interest in alleged Muslim anti-Semitism, he has never, to our understanding, explored the nature and scale of Jewish Islamophobia. Why not?

And it is not as though evidence would be hard to come by given the work done by true investigative journalists, like [Dr Nafeez Ahmed](#), [Hilary Aked](#), and [Tom Mills](#). [Tom Griffin and Professor David Miller](#), on the network of [pro-Israeli individuals](#) and organisations that feed the Islamophobia industry in the UK in much the same way their [counterparts do in the US](#) (not surprising, given many of the intersecting alliances).

On this final point, it is worth adding that Gilligan has actually attempted to [dismiss the threat from far right extremist groups](#) going so far as to suggest that Anders Behring Breivik’s “main motive” cannot have been “hatred of Muslims” even though a manifesto the Norwegian murderer compiled is replete with references to [anti-Muslim websites and bloggers](#).

g) Spurious allegations on business practices

Gilligan alleges

"Much of Mend's money may come from the proceeds of tax avoidance. Sufyan Ismail, its chief executive, is a Lancashire businessman with reported assets of £65 million who earned his fortune by creating one of the country's biggest tax avoidance consultancies.

"Mr Ismail, who lives in a leafy lane near Bolton, has been able to kill two birds with one stone, depriving the infidel British state of tens of millions in revenue while making himself extremely rich. As well as advising others how to avoid tax, OneE's accounts show that it paid more than £26 million in two years into an "employer-financed retirement benefit scheme" and millions of pounds in "loans" to Mr Ismail. The £26 million could, of course, represent generous pensions for OneE's 45 staff, averaging almost £600,000 each, nearly 10 times' their average salaries. Or it could be a scheme to save Mr Ismail and his fellow directors paying almost any income tax. HMRC bluntly describes schemes of this type, which are legal, as "tax avoidance."

"Another of Mr Ismail's companies, the now-liquidated 1st Ethical Tax Planning, was subject to an HMRC investigation, according to documents at Companies House. The directors were reported by the liquidator under the Company Directors' Disqualification Act, though Mr Ismail has not been disqualified. The auditors of OneE Group resigned in 2013 and the accounts of a related company, OneE Tax, have been revised and resubmitted – twice."

Again, Gilligan shows, at best, his extraordinary naivety, at worst his unhealthy cynicism. Sufyan's former business involvement in OneE Group entailed tax planning to ensure clients invested in bona fide investments, be it property or pharmaceuticals. Quite often, these investments are subject to government approved tax reliefs which HMRC itself provides guidance on as can be seen [here](#) and [here](#).

Although tax avoidance is not a clearly defined concept, when an investment is at the core of the planning and HMRC provide guidance on claiming reliefs it is safe to say you are not likely to be engaged in anything resembling tax avoidance.

Gilligan infers that the reporting of a company run by Sufyan to the liquidator under the Directors Disqualification Act is proof of misdemeanor with little regard for due process which entails a mandatory requirement to report any company which is liquidated to the liquidator as a matter of practice. He carefully asserts the caveat, *though Mr Ismail has not been disqualified*, while failing to point out that the process of reporting to the liquidator under the terms of the Directors Disqualification Act is usual practice. This is no less than a cowardly attempt to cast false aspersion on Sufyan's credentials as a businessman.

The referral to the liquidator is a matter required by law and in no way implies wrongdoing by directors of a company. Reasons for company directors dissolving a company are many and varied; shifts in business focus, change in market conditions etc. These reasons are not untoward, they are perfectly normal business practice.

The Insolvency Service guidance entitled "Insolvency – A Guide for Directors" found [here](#) states (emphasis added): -

*“In a creditors' voluntary liquidation, the Insolvency Practitioner **must** send the Secretary of State a report on the conduct of all directors who were in office in the last three years of the company's trading”.*

The guidance also goes on to say that (emphasis added):

*“If the Insolvency Service **is investigating** a particular individual's conduct, it **will always** make best efforts to contact the person and seek to engage with them at as early a stage as possible.”*

Sufyan was never contacted by the Insolvency Service in respect of the company liquidation and there is no substance to the allegation that the reporting itself constituted evidence of malpractice. This is a defamatory slur by Gilligan.

Gilligan also makes another deeply embarrassing error when he states ‘**The auditors of OneE Group resigned in 2013 and the accounts of a related company, OneE Tax, have been revised and resubmitted – twice**’.

Gilligan appears to be inferring possible underhanded behavior by claiming the auditors resigned. This, again, is indication of a deliberate attempt to malign the reputation of Sufyan as a businessman and the award winning companies that he has founded.

The episode also relays evidence of Gilligan's credentials as an ‘investigative’ journalist given that very little effort appears to have been expended to uncover the reason behind the auditors stepping down.

In fact, the company auditors at the time, PKF, were taken over by a larger firm BDO. The move entailed the resignation of all staff of PKF as they transitioned to their new status under BDO's ownership.

As for company accounts being resubmitted, even twice, this not at all uncommon in the business world when minor adjustments need correcting. The firm's resubmission of accounts was simply to cater for the adjustment of a minor issue and it would have been quite easy for Gilligan to identify the correction by studying the accounts submitted rather than rely on resubmission as certain proof or inference of misconduct.

h) MEND's manifesto demands Islamists are brought into partnership with Whitehall

Gilligan asserts:

“Mend's “Muslim manifesto” attacks the way that the government has treated Islamists as “beyond the pale” and demands they be brought into “partnership” with Whitehall. Mend wants to return to the position under the previous administration where non-violent extremists were treated as legitimate representatives of their community. Mr Ali, for instance, was the chairman of the main liaison group between the Muslim community and the Metropolitan Police.”

Gilligan tries to suggest that we are “attacking” Government on engaging with

'Islamists' when our manifesto plainly points out the inconsistency in the Government's approach given the definition of Islamist/Islamism advanced by its own Prevent Strategy 2011.

He also suggests that we are alone in refuting the Government's ridiculous attempt to criminalise 'non-violent extremism'. The body of evidence on how flawed this approach is has been so well covered (see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)), it beggars belief that Gilligan can continue to persist in framing the argument as one advanced by Muslims alone.

Gilligan further ignores criticisms from more [well-placed individuals](#) like Baroness Warsi about the Government's record on engaging with Muslims.

The truth is, the Government's counter-radicalisation policy has been widely discredited as "[toxic](#)" and not fit for purpose. At the heart of its failure has been its misdirected emphasis on 'Islamism' over more pertinent causal factors and its poor engagement with Muslim communities. Rather than see the current predicament, of an estimated 700 young people having left the UK to join ISIS, as an indictment of its failed policy, the Government has responded with ever more draconian legislation than take a long, hard look at what it has failed to get right. The fact that the effects of liberty-curtailing counter-terrorism policies impacts disproportionately on Muslims is largely overlooked. Well, not for us and the many British Muslims who campaigned against the Counter Terrorism and Security Act. Our manifesto and lobbying on the Counter Terrorism and Security Act is an attempt to forge a more successful, evidence based approach to counter-radicalisation dispelling the misconceived notion that 'non-violent extremism' is the 'conveyor belt' to violent extremism.

j) MEND's manifesto falsely claims the Government's policy continues to conflate religion with extremism

Gilligan further asserts:

"The manifesto claims that the Government's promotion of British values "provides a fertile environment for the festering of far-Right ideas" and says that "integration narratives" are "concerning". It claims, falsely, that "government policy continues to conflate religion with extremism"."

Evidence of the conflation of religion with extremism can be uncovered in a raft of public statements, policy discussions and political speeches delivered by Conservative ministers since taking office in 2010.

In February 2011, the PM gave his notorious "Munich speech" in which he declared:

"[T]errorism is not linked exclusively to any one religion or ethnic group....we should acknowledge that this threat comes in Europe overwhelmingly from young men who follow a completely perverse, warped interpretation of Islam, and who are prepared to blow themselves up and kill their fellow citizens."

The Extremism Task Force, which was convened by the Prime Minister after the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby in May 2013, reported in December 2013 stating the definition of "Islamist extremism" to be "*a distorted interpretation of Islam*".

And in an address to the Australian parliament last year, introducing some of the counter-terrorism measures the Home Secretary was due to announce, the PM

spoke of the “extremist narrative” which fuels terrorism adding *that “We must continue to celebrate Islam as a great world religion of peace.”* Why would it be necessary to refer to Islam as “a great world religion of peace” if the inference was not that extremism is in some way a perversion or distortion of that religion?

Cameron also rejected notions of extremism and radicalization being fueled by “poverty”, “exclusion from the mainstream”, and “foreign policy”.

If other causal factors are eliminated, what are we to believe other than the fact that religion is the primary factor identified by the Government as the “root cause” of extremism and radicalization? The references in the Taskforce report to Sayyid Qutb and Maududi reinforce the preoccupation with religion above all other, and [more relevant, causal variables](#). An error on the Government’s part which was observed in the Communities and Local Government Inquiry into Prevent which noted:

*“Regarding the Government’s analysis of the factors which lead people to become involved in violent extremism, we conclude that there has been a pre-occupation with the theological basis of radicalisation, when the **evidence seems to indicate that politics, policy and socio-economics may be more important factors in the process.** Consequently, we suggest that attempts to find solutions and engagement with preventative work should primarily address the political challenges.”*

It would seem the Government, like the Labour Government before it, has not heeded the committee’s advice.

k) MEND uses selective evidence

Gilligan states;

- i) *It makes valid points about discrimination against Muslims in employment and anti-Muslim attacks, which are on the rise, albeit from a low base. But it uses selective evidence, often choosing the gloomiest opinion polls and the most damning studies to paint a picture of a community under siege. (Mend’s Facebook page is far more inflammatory, hosting, for instance, an article which says that Muslims may face a holocaust).***

Gilligan is intent on portraying British Muslims as ‘crying wolf’ when they raise the issue of Islamophobia even as a BBC poll recently showed that almost 1 in 2 British Muslims feel that [prejudice against Islam in the UK](#) makes it harder to be a British Muslim; a You Gov poll in which over half of Britons said that they think there is a [“fundamental clash”](#) between Islam and British values; and 27% of young Britons (aged 18-24) say they [don’t trust Muslims](#).

Gilligan appears to suggest that Muslims have never had it so good when polls and everyday experiences suggest otherwise.

As for the claim on MEND’s Facebook page featuring an article on how “Muslims may face a holocaust”, MEND cannot find *any evidence* of any such article on our Facebook timeline.

ii) The far right is shrinking not growing

Gilligan states:

It (MEND) also claims that far-Right extremism is a “growing problem”. But, according to the anti-fascist group Hope not Hate, the British far-Right is “shrinking” and “in its worst state for almost 20 years”. The manifesto claims that a “surge in Islamophobic hate crime” after the killing of the soldier Lee Rigby included the murder of Mohammed Saleem, a Muslim. Mr Saleem was killed three weeks before Drummer Rigby’s death, by a Ukrainian racist who had been in Britain for five days.

We did, more than a month ago, write a letter to the editor of the Sunday Telegraph accepting the error in our chronology on the death of Mohammed Saleem, advising that the error had been corrected post-publication. Why did Gilligan not mention this? Because it suits his narrative to ignore the truth and peddle lies.

As for the quote from Hope not Hate on the state of the British far right, we think few Muslims will give the claim that the far right “shrinking” much credit at a time when Britain First boasts more Facebook likes than the major political parties; the English Defence League continues with its campaign of hatred in streets up and down the country; and UKIP presents a formidable challenge to the mainstream parties whilst its members’ Islamophobic comments makes regular headlines. Professor Nigel Copsey, an expert on the far right in Britain, in a contribution to the Runnymede Trust report ‘[Race and Elections](#)’ highlights the fallacy of imputing from the far right’s declining electoral appeal that there are no other dangers that emerge from their presence on the political landscape.

l) The group promotes hate-preacher Haitham al-Haddad as well as Shaykh Abu Eesa and Shaykh Yasir Qadhi.

Gilligan states;

Group also promotes Haitham al-Haddad, a hate preacher who describes democracy as “filthy” and says that “all the kuffar [an insulting term for non-Muslims] will go to hellfire.”

Gilligan is on form again with a half-truth suggesting that we have “promoted” Haitham al-Haddad. In actual fact, we have critiqued the media’s hysteria over a fun day organised for families, Muslim and non-Muslim, which was subjected to awful [anti-Muslim bigotry](#) by the Daily Mail’s resident bigot Richard Littlejohn.

If standing up to bigots in the press and challenging inaccurate reporting is what passes for “promotion” then count us in because we will, proudly and robustly, challenge attempts by the British media to peddle anti-Muslim bigotry.

Gilligan has also taken us to task over the presence of Shaykh Abu Eesa and Shaykh Yasir Qadhi speaking at our recent conferences on political engagement and Muslims being actively engaged in shaping the future of Islam in Britain.

There are two, related, issues to this. First of all, the conferences were about Muslims playing an active part in politics and society and the two speakers were there to address that topic and that topic alone. We did not provide a platform for the discussion of any other issues and did not indulge views expressed by speakers or

participants which would run contrary to our ethos. We will not answer to claims alleged against others and leave it to them to respond to the accusations. (The responses by Shaykh Abu Eesa and Shaykh Yasir Qadhi to allegations can be found [here](#) and in the first comment box on this page: <https://www.facebook.com/yasir.qadhi/posts/10152922938268300>)

The second, more important issue is that of sharing platforms and engaging in a dialogue with individuals one may disagree with. We have been strong proponents of freedom of speech and of the virtues of openly challenging those who hold views that may be offensive or with which one may disagree. We are supportive of the stance the Liberal Democrats have espoused of "flexing our muscles" through argument and engaging with other views in order to challenge them openly and persuasively.

There are those in neo-con circles who have preferred a more cowardly approach of disseminating dodgy briefings against Muslim speakers with a view to scaring off politicians from engaging with them.

Nick Clegg famously shed light on this "[bizarre and underhand behaviour](#)" when he exposed *Policy Exchange* and its briefing against the Global Peace and Unity conference in 2008. Clegg damned the document which was secretly sent to politicians to get them to pull out of the conference with use of material that was derided as "variable" in accuracy and bearing "a notable lack of evidence to support many of the claims."

Not that this was the lowest *Policy Exchange* sank to in its smear campaign. As Clegg pointed out, the briefing cited: "evidence...from the Society for American National Existence, **an organisation which seeks to make the practice of Islam illegal, punishable by 20 years in prison.** I need hardly point out how illogical it is to attempt to criticise one set of extreme views by citing another."

But then criticising one set of extreme views by citing another has been a regular strategy deployed in neo-con circles. Reports by Spinwatch and the Center for American Progress have tracked the intersecting interests and networks populated by American and UK based Islamophobes which disseminate anti-Muslim hatred. While Gilligan and journalists and bloggers have frequently harpooned Muslims over "intolerance" and "hate speech" criticising their sharing of platforms with individuals considered to be illiberal. But the [fulminations and diatribes](#) of staff at the [Henry Jackson Society, the Quilliam Foundation](#) and their many supporters on the right, all of whose claims are used to label Muslim groups as intolerant, are conveniently and deliberately ignored creating a double standard on values of liberalism, equality and human rights.

3. Gilligan's crusade against Azad Ali, Head of Community Development and Engagement

Gilligan's crusade against Azad Ali predates Ali's employment with MEND and stems from the period when Gilligan was employed at the *Evening Standard*.

Given Gilligan's penchant to undermine his rival's opponent in the Mayor of London election, alliances built by the then Mayor with Muslim organisations were part and parcel of Gilligan's offensive strategy in support of Boris Johnson. Gilligan repeatedly undermined the Mayor's work with Muslim organisations labelling them "extremists" and "Islamists" as a means of smearing Mayor Livingstone though as we have shown above, Gilligan was quick to excuse racism and xenophobia when expressed by his allies.

Azad Ali has been one such Muslim individual whom Gilligan has obsessed with and demonised.

In his articles in the Sunday Telegraph on 22 March and 5 April, Gilligan wrote the following about Azad Ali, respectively:

"Mend's director of engagement, Azad Ali, is an extremist who has supported the killing of British troops, praised the al-Qaeda ideologue Anwar al-Awlaki and said that "democracy, if it means at the expense of not implementing the Sharia, of course no-one agrees with that."

"Other avowed Mend democrats include Azad Ali, the group's head of community development and engagement, who has written of his "love" for Anwar al-Awlaki, the al-Qaeda recruiter; said that the Mumbai attacks were "not terrorism"; justified the killing of British troops and stated that "democracy, if it means at the expense of not implementing the Sharia, of course nobody agrees with that"."

Azad Ali has been involved in social activism through involvement in a range of British Muslim organisations for over 25 years. He has provided vital support and platforms for dialogue with Muslim communities for a variety of statutory and law enforcement agencies including the Metropolitan Police Service and the Civil Service.

Despite his years of positive intervention in the area of interfaith dialogue and Muslim engagement in public life, Ali has been repeatedly victimised by certain journalists and bloggers with accusations of 'extremism' surfacing in a number of interlinked blogposts and newspaper articles.

A good portion of the negative commentary is based on a blog, 'Between the Lines' that Ali contributed to and which was run by the Islamic Forum Europe, one of several British Muslim organisations to which he has been affiliated. The blog is no longer active.

We will deal with each of Gilligan's accusations in turn:

- **British troops**
- **Anwar Al-Awlaki**
- **Mumbai attacks in 2008**
- **Democracy**

British troops

In an article published by the *Mail on Sunday* on 18 January 2009, extracts from one of the blog entries by Ali on the concept of 'jihad' in Islam and reflections on the writings and statements of Islamic scholars on the subject, were used to suggest he supported the view that *"killing British troops in Iraq is justified"*.

Ali proceeded to sue the newspaper for libel. In his judgment, Mr Justice Eady acknowledged that the arguments advanced by Ali's lawyers, that the newspapers selectively quoted from the blog entries to misrepresent the thrust of his argument and willfully ignored a large body of other content that dispelled the notion that Ali was a "hardline extremist" were "deserving of careful consideration".

Ali's defence pointed out that qualifying statements and commentary which contextualised Ali's blogs on the concept of jihad, on the distinction between combatant and non-combatants in war, and on Hamas and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian Territories were deliberately omitted to suit the newspaper's preconceived idea that Ali was an "extremist".

Furthermore, the newspaper failed to offer Ali a right of reply to the allegations before they were published in the Sunday paper. The paper also falsely claimed that Ali has been suspended from his civil service post in the Treasury Department on account of the blogs. In fact, Ali was suspended pending investigation by his employers after the newspaper announced its intention to publish the story about Ali thereby contributing to the Treasury's course of action, not retrospectively reporting it.

The investigation mounted by the civil service into Ali's conduct and any possible breach of the Civil Service Code exonerated Ali of the allegations and he returned to his post in June 2009.

The subsequent accusations have centred upon Mr Justice Eady's judgment that Ali's blogs could be construed as "taking the position that the killing of American and British troops in Iraq would be justified."

Detractors insistent on portraying Ali as "hardline" and an "extremist" have resorted to regular references to Mr Justice's Eady's remarks without noting them in their entirety, that is, that Ali's claims that the Mail on Sunday had deliberately misrepresented his blog entries and selectively quoted from them were "deserving of careful consideration".

Ali was unable to appeal against the decision due to financial constraints. He has therefore been unable to further the opportunity of "careful consideration" of his blogs in a bid to clear his name.

Anwar Al-Awlaki

Anwar Al-Awlaki, an imam and religious scholar who has served as chaplain at George Washington University, is a figure who has been the subject of some controversy following his incarceration in Yemen in 2006. Al-Awlaki attributed his detention in a Yemeni facility and his subsequent torture, as having been instructed by the US government. Since the publication of the [US Senate Intelligence Committee's report](#) into the CIA's sanctioning of the widespread use of torture and the horrific techniques employed, such as intravenous "rectal feeding," the world has come to learn more about the human rights violations that have been perpetrated against individuals suspected of involvement in terrorist activities by governments that proclaim observance of the rule of law and human rights conventions.

In Al-Awlaki's case, it is alleged that his [incarceration and mistreatment](#) resulted in his radicalisation. In the context of the Intelligence and Security Committee's Report on the intelligence relating to the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby, in which the failure to fully investigate allegations of mistreatment by Michael Adebolajo were highlighted, it is important to take due regard of the impact of mistreatment on the radicalisation process and the need to take such allegations seriously.

What is relevant for our purposes here is that Al-Awlaki was a respected scholar in the US and a fully integrated member of the outreach initiatives undertaken by the US Government after 9/11 participating in various programs and attending a lunch at the US Department of Defense.

The suggestion that Ali was expressing "love" for a man who later became an al-Qai'da recruiter and hunted by the US for his part in radicalising Muslims to commit acts of terror ignores the period in which the comments were made by Ali and the trajectory of [Al-Awlaki's shift to radicalisation](#). There was a period in which Al-Awlaki was feted by American politicians as a model American Muslim. Al-Awlaki's reputation as an Islamic scholar in this period was appreciated by a wide section of American and Muslim communities. His later turn to radicalisation has been rejected by Muslim communities on both sides of the Atlantic. It is important to make a distinction between when the comments were made given the radical turn that Al-Awlaki took to [later condone acts of terror](#). **Ali made his remarks about Al-Awlaki when the latter was still a respected Muslim scholar who advocated Muslim integration and civic responsibility.** Gilligan of course willfully omits this in his reporting.

Mumbai attacks in 2008

This particular claim rests on a comment Ali made in a blog posted after the attack on the Taj Mahal hotel and other sites in Bombay in November 2008 in which 174 people died.

The comment explored the easy application of the word "terrorism" to incidents of political violence by the media and the need for a more judicious approach that presented clearer details of acts of premeditated, organised violence in a way that did not abuse the term "terrorism". The comment was not intended to underplay the seriousness of the incident or the likelihood of it being an act of organised violence for political ends. Given the backlash that Muslim communities often face when incidents are reported as "terrorism", Ali was making a wider point about language and its responsible use.

[Padraig Reidy of Index on Censorship](#) makes a similar argument in reflective piece on the Chapel Hill murders in which three American Muslims were shot by a neighbour known to espouse hostile views.

Reidy questions whether the gunman, Stephen Hicks, is a "terrorist" writing, "[N]onetheless it's curious, and depressing, that the ideologically and politically loaded word "terrorism" must be invoked for any act of violence involving Muslims, even when they are the ones who suffer from it. It's time we were all clearer with our language."

Ali's comment in relation to the Bombay attacks was in much the same vein raising the issue of whether the term "terrorism" is overused and less reliable or instructive as a result.

It is perhaps indicative of the lengths Ali's detractors have gone to, to engage in character assassination ascribing sinister meaning to legitimate questions which have been explored elsewhere.

It is worth pointing out that after the terrorist attacks in London in 2005, Ali worked alongside the Metropolitan Police Service to facilitate co-operation and community confidence at a time of heightened tensions. Ali has been at the forefront of supporting confidence building strategies to improve community policing following the worst terrorist attacks in London.

Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that questioning the application of certain nomenclature is a relatively innocuous exercise when engaged in by others, such as

Reidy, but when Muslims question the validity of the term 'terrorism' to explain each and every atrocity, including those of which they are the primary target, they are criticised.

Democracy

In an article dated July 2010, Gilligan repeated many of the same allegations levelled against Ali adding the comment that Ali is purported to have told an undercover reporter from Channel 4's Dispatches programme: *"Democracy, if it means not implementing the shari'ah, of course nobody agrees with that."*

It is also worth considering the broader point Ali was making to the undercover reporter that believers find it difficult to reconcile religious beliefs and edicts with parliamentary democracy where laws passed can conflict with moral values held by the faithful. This is not a position unique to Muslims as Christian concerns at the passing of the Same Sex Marriage Act in 2014 demonstrated. It is because Muslims are singled out for voicing concerns about moral conflict that their remarks about the encroachment on the rights of religious people are treated with circumspection.

The issue has taken on some significance in recent days with a number of commentators highlighting the feeling among British Christians of being treated like ["lepers"](#) in the UK's largely [non-religious culture](#).

The essence of Gilligan's animus toward MEND and British Muslims is revealed in his references to British Muslim engagement in politics as establishing a "bridgehead" or "entryism" but as Sunny Hundal points out on [Liberal Conspiracy](#), **"The Telegraph would never (any more) run headlines like 'secret plan by gays to take over Whitehall' - so why is this kind of language acceptable regarding Muslims?"**

Why indeed?

Addendum:

Azad Ali has responded to the scurrilous allegations which have thrown at him over the years. A copy of his blogpost clarifying the truth buried beneath the layer of lies is reproduced below:

FYI – Clarity on repeatedly published lies about me.

As many of you will know – I have a Wikipedia page – yep I do! Quite a popular one as it turns out given the trouble some individuals take to rehashing oft-repeated lies about me. I'm just not sure which one of my greatest 'fans' dedicates their time to set this up (someone needs to get a life) but let me make some corrections on the content there as well some other comments that are regurgitated about me all too frequently as if repeating them will give them the force of truth.

I have made these clarifications on numerous platforms and programmes but I realised that I still need to put this down on paper, so to speak. So here goes:

Wikipedia page

1. Muslim Safety Forum – “Ali left the post of chairman in 2008, then resigned entirely from MSF in 2009 after publicity over his extremist comments. In July 2010, he was reinstated as MSF’s chairman.”

My term as Chair of the Muslim Safety Forum (MSF) ended in 2008. I never resigned from the MSF, as minutes from the MSF meetings will prove, as well as minutes of meetings with the Police at New Scotland Yard which took place around this time. I guess to have been re-elected in 2010 is a form of reinstatement! The lie about my resignation was to add credence to the smear that I had done something wrong and was forced to resign. That was not the case at all as the facts will bear out.

2. Links to Al-Qaida – “Ali has stated that he has attended talks with Abu Qatada of al-Qaeda. In a 2008 IFE blog, Ali called al-Qaeda's Anwar Al-Awlaki "one of my favourite scholars and speakers". Ali has denied that the 2008 Mumbai attacks were terrorism.”

Abu Qatada:

Yes I attended a seminar in the late 80's/early 90's where Abu Qatada was one of the speakers. FYI – Abu Qatada was not a representative of Al Qaeda but just a Muslim speaker. He was not under any suspicion nor was there any criminal investigation about him at the time which might have merited caution. More importantly, attending a public meeting is no crime no matter who is on the speaker's platform. This lazy and nefarious link by association is a desperate attempt to smear my character and the work I have been doing. What shall we make of those journalists that had lunch, dinner or worked with Jimmy Saville or attended parties he hosted, do we label them as paedophiles, simply due to them being there? Of course we don't and rightly so.

Anwar Al-Awlaki:

Anwar Al-Awlaki was an imam and religious scholar who at one time served as a chaplain at George Washington University. He has been the subject of some controversy following his imprisonment in Yemen in 2006. This is the same Al-Awlaki who respected by the US Government who engaged him on a number of the outreach initiatives after 9/11 participating in various programs which culminated in him being invited to lunch at the US Department of Defense.

So it would seem the US government once thought highly of him, just as I did. I have distanced myself from his comments following his incarceration in Yemen in 2006, like many others who knew him, including the US government, yet this context is missing and not referenced in any of the remarks since published about my having spoken highly of him. The omission of my public disassociation with the person Al-Awlaki later became is a deliberate attempt to tell one fragment of the truth not the “whole truth”.

Mumbai attacks:

This comment refers to an article where I discussed the quick and easy labelling of the Mumbai atrocity as a terrorist incident. The impression given is that I did not condemn this incident, which I actually, categorically did. My remarks about the kneejerk labelling of some atrocities as ‘terrorism’ but not others is not new nor is it unique to Muslims. When others have questioned the media's labelling of an incident as ‘terrorism’, for reasons good or ill, their views are regarded as a legitimate

contribution to the debate on nomenclature and its uses. Why am I, as a Muslim, not permitted to contribute to this debate and why, when Muslims question if 'terrorism' is the correct appellation for an atrocity are we demonised as diminishing the significance of a heinous crime? What's good for the goose, is good for the gander – unless you're a Muslim of course.

Killing of British troops:

I have never called for the killing of British troops. I challenge anyone to produce the evidence that suggests I have uttered any such words. What is used to smear me is the fact that I quoted from Abdullah Azzam's son in a reference to the Iraq war and the resistance to the Allied attack against Saddam Hussein. He said: **"If I saw an American or British man wearing a soldier's uniform inside Iraq I would kill him because that is my obligation. If I found the same soldier over the border in Jordan I wouldn't touch him. In Iraq he is a fighter and an occupier, here he is not. This is my religion and I respect this as the main instruction in my religion for jihad."** The Irish Times - <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/the-son-of-the-father-of-jihad-1.1027271>

Compare this his original statement as found in the Irish Times to what Andrew Gilligan writes *"If I saw an American or British man wearing a soldier's uniform inside Iraq, I would kill him because that is my obligation ... I respect this as the main instruction in my religion for jihad."*

He completely misrepresents the statement and the point I was making in my article about war, the concept of the 'theatre of war' and combatants and non-combatants. I was making no such claims to the legitimate targeting of British soldiers. Nor was I defending, in citing from Abdullah Azzam's son's comments, the killing of British troops in Iraq. Again, this is another tedious act of smearing by association, in this case by quoting someone without a disclaimer but perhaps Mary Fitzgerald, who wrote the article for the Irish Times, is saved from having to offer such a disclaimer because she isn't a Muslim?

Okay so that covers the Wikipedia page. Now to other oft repeated smears:

Democracy:

In an article dated July 2010, Andrew Gilligan writes that I said "Democracy, if it means not implementing the shari'ah, of course nobody agrees with that."

This was broadcast on Channel 4's Dispatches programme, where an undercover reporter followed me around for 8 months. Lucky me!

For those who haven't seen it, the secretly filmed scene is of myself with my colleagues broadcasting our live (let me say that again LIVE) radio show which was being streamed online. The comment was in response to a caller who asked a question about democracy in a Muslim majority country and whether I support it. I answered yes of course and I gave the example of how some of the Muslim rulers were elected in history. The caller then asked would people, that is Muslim people in a Muslim majority country accept democracy if it didn't implement shari'ah – to which I answered of course they wouldn't. You see, the context here is missing in the smears Gilligan puts about on me.

There is a more significant dimension to the question of applying religious law and it isn't specific to Muslim majority countries, it occurs in debates in non-Muslim majority countries too. During the passage of the Same Sex marriage Bill the Christian

churches organised a campaign (Coalition 4 Marriage) to reject the legislation citing Biblical references on the definition of marriage (Genesis 2; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7; Ephesians 5:31) in opposition to the Government's proposals to 'redefine' marriage by permitting same sex unions. Some Christians also circulated leaflets during the 2015 general election encouraging voters not to elect those incumbent MPs who supported the Same Sex Marriage Bill.

If Christians are free to espouse views about laws in a democratic society that they feel go against Biblical law, why not Muslims? And surely the purpose of a democratic society is to allow for different points of view to be expressed, within the law?

What exactly is wrong with Muslims who live in a Muslim majority country electing someone who will implement Shari'ah? Or are Muslim countries not allowed to make their own choices in governance and Muslim voters not allowed to express their support or disapproval through the ballot box?

Hammas:

Another favourite attack on me is that I support Hamas. Apparently Hamas is a 'terrorist organisation' – not so according to the proscribed list of Terrorist organisations on the Home Office website.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/417888/Proscription-20150327.pdf

Indeed, as we speak our ministers and mandarins are meeting with Hamas on a regular basis. And a previous select committee on Foreign Affairs has actually advised Her Majesty's Government to engage 'moderate elements' within Hamas in peace talks in order to assure a lasting, durable peace in the resolving the Middle East conflict. The President of the International Crisis Group, Louise Arbour, made a similar argument 5 years ago after the Mavi Marmara incident.

The EU was forced to remove Hamas from its list of 'terrorist organisations' last year after the EU's general court ruled that its designation was "based not on acts examined and confirmed in decisions of competent authorities but on factual imputations derived from the press and the internet".

It is quite pitiful that 'investigative' journalists cannot even be relied upon to corroborate their claims about 'terrorist' organisations instead of taking their cue from lobbies who actively pursue the delegitimisation of Hamas's electoral victory.

What's it all about?

The purpose of smearing me and other Muslim activists and organisations is best explained in the report I mentioned earlier titled "The Cold War on British Muslims" by Tom Mills, Tom Griffin and David Miller of SpinWatch – have read of it here: http://www.thecordobafoundation.com/attach/SpinwatchReport_ColdWar12.pdf and look out for the seminars on this subject coming to a place near you, soon!