

Muslim extremists' 'campaign of lies' to undermine the government's fight against terror

Activists spreading fear and confusion among Muslims over ministers' Prevent policy



Ifhat Smith talks to Sky News

By Andrew Gilligan

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An organised campaign to undermine Britain's fight against terrorism can be revealed today.

Islamist activists linked to Cage, a group known to sympathise with terrorists, are using coordinated leaks to mainstream news organisations, including the BBC, to spread fear and confusion in Muslim communities about the Government's anti-terror policy, Prevent.

'To inoculate children against radicalisation, teachers need to encourage free-flowing debate inside schools...'

Kevin Courtney, deputy general secretary of the NUT

Investigations by the Telegraph reveal that several widely reported recent stories about Prevent are false or exaggerated – and many of the supposedly “ordinary Muslim” victims are in fact activists in the campaign, known as Prevent Watch. The stories include a claim which became a cause célèbre for Prevent's opponents –

that a Muslim schoolboy from London was “interrogated like a criminal” for using the phrase “ecoterrorism” in class.

The boy’s mother, Ifhat Smith, who took the story to the media, presented herself as a traumatised ordinary Londoner. She is in fact an activist in the Prevent Watch campaign and a key figure in the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, which believes in replacing secular democratic government with Islamic government.



Jahangir Mohammed, a Cage activist

In a “scathing” court judgment to be published shortly, Mrs Smith’s legal claim against her son’s school and the Government has been dismissed as baseless and she has been ordered to pay £1,000 for wasting court time.

In November, the BBC reported that the east London council of Waltham Forest had mistakenly released the first names of some primary school pupils thought at risk of radicalisation.

The release came as the result of a parent’s Freedom of Information Act request for correspondence about Prevent. The parent concerned, Haras Ahmed, described Prevent as “a disaster from start to finish”, and said he was “appalled [that] children’s data, such sensitive data, are released.”

However, a council spokesman said that the names had been blocked out in the release sent to Mr Ahmed but that the information sent had been “manipulated by a third party to reveal the

blocked-out names.”

- Children 'profiled' with 'counter extremism' questionnaire
- Extremist 'infiltration' in hospitals, schools and civil service to be investigated

In the coverage, Mr Ahmed presented himself as merely an ordinary parent. However, he is also an activist in Prevent Watch. An online search would have revealed that he was listed to speak at a meeting with the group only four days after the story aired.

Prevent Watch heavily promoted a BBC story about a Muslim boy in Accrington, Lancashire, whose family was supposedly visited by police under Prevent after he wrote at school that he lived in a “terrorist house,” a misspelling of terraced house.

Police said the visit had nothing to do with Prevent, terrorism, or the spelling mistake and was, in fact, carried out because the child also alleged that he was the victim of a violent assault. Clive Grunshaw, the Lancashire police and crime commissioner, has complained to the BBC about the story.

The corporation and other media outlets have issued corrections but Prevent Watch continues to promote the false story on its website and Twitter feed.

“Extremists and terrorist sympathisers are using the media to make it harder for the authorities to fight terrorism,” said Hannah Stuart, research fellow at the counter-extremism think tank the Henry Jackson Society.

“Journalists need to check basic facts and ask simple questions about the identity and motivations of the people making these claims, otherwise Prevent Watch and Cage will be allowed to continue frightening and alienating Muslims with their campaign of lies.”

Prevent Watch’s website includes other cases which have nothing to do with Prevent. They include an account of how a female student, “HH,” felt offended when a lecturer made a joke about her joining Isil, and how a schoolgirl, “SA,” felt offended when her teacher posed questions to the class about democracy and British institutions.

It also claims as “victimisation” a number of cases where a Prevent referral was clearly warranted, including that of a law student, “DF,” who was later convicted of terrorism offences.



Weyman Bennett, a hard-Left activist Photo: Corbis

Prevent Watch is linked to Cage, which notoriously defended “Jihadi John”, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant killer, and is described as an “apologist for terrorism” by Boris Johnson. Prevent Watch has links to Mend, an extremist front group which wants to let Muslims fight in Syria.

At a rally in Waltham Forest later this week, Mrs Smith and Mr Ahmed will share a platform with Jahangir Mohammed, a Cage activist, regular speaker at its events and co-author of at least three reports for Cage, one of which described Prevent as a “cradle-to-grave police state.”

In an article in the Socialist Worker for Cage, Mr Mohammed blamed the security services for radicalising Michael Adebolajo, one of the killers of Drummer Lee Rigby. There is no suggestion that Mrs Smith or Mr Ahmed are supporters of terrorism.

Another speaker at Wednesday’s rally will be Weyman Bennett, a hard-Left activist who has falsely claimed that Prevent criminalises any opponent of the Government, stating that “if you question Cameron, you are a non-violent extremist.” Alex Kenny, a member of the NUT's ruling national executive, will also speak.

As The Telegraph revealed last week, Mr Kenny and other NUT leaders and activists in east London are working with Cage and Mend to undermine Prevent, even though teachers have a legal duty to safeguard pupils from extremism.

Rob Ferguson, an NUT activist, orchestrated a statement which falsely claimed that Prevent has caused attempts to ban school prayers and targeted young people “for the views they hold on issues such as government foreign policy.”

The NUT has refused to take action against him.

Kevin Courtney, deputy general secretary of the NUT, said: “It is quite correct to raise any legitimate concerns about the Prevent strategy that could result in unintended negative consequences. To inoculate children against radicalisation, teachers need to encourage free-flowing debate inside schools, but one concern is that children will be reported over things they say which are not of an extremist nature.”

Prevent Watch’s website and Twitter feed quote many false and inflammatory statements about Prevent, including a claim that “a child simply praying has now become an act that requires state surveillance and intervention.”

The group describes as “excellent” a guide by the National Union of Students which claims that even feeling “anxious or reserved in class,” having “a desire for political or moral change,” or “questioning western media reporting” makes students “liable to court-sanctioned accusations of radicalisation”.

None of these are grounds for intervention and few real Prevent interventions are directly police led. As with the child in the “eco-terrorist” incident, most incidents are resolved quickly and informally at school level. Others may involve a referral to Channel, a mentoring programme run by Muslim civilians in which participation is voluntary.

Prevent Watch claims that Prevent “singles out” Muslims because it is “racist”. Almost all terrorist plots and attacks in Great Britain over the last ten years have involved Muslims, and all those who have joined Isil are Muslim. However, only 56 per cent of those referred for Channel interventions are Muslim.

A spokesman said: "Prevent Watch has supported over 130 cases where people have been adversely impacted by Prevent. Only a small selection are documented on our website. Our case studies provide the evidence base to the 360 leading Professors, Academics, professionals in Terrorism and community leaders who have signed on open letter, available on our website, calling for the end of Prevent."

Mrs Smith, the mother in the “eco-terrorist” case, told BBC Radio London that what happened to her son was the act of a “police state” with the boy “interrogated,” “treated as a criminal” and “targeted because he was a Muslim.”

However the judgment against her, described as “scathing” by two counter-extremism officials who have seen it, says the school acted properly. It finds that the supposed “interrogation” of the teenager using “police state” and “criminal” methods was conducted by two school staff on school premises, had nothing to do with the criminal justice system or police, and lasted ten minutes.

No further action was taken and the boy returned to classes normally. In a strong rebuke to Mrs Smith, the judge required her to pay £1,000 of the other side’s costs, the sources said.

One counter-extremism source said: “It is hard to believe a professional solicitor allowed her to bring this absurd action. What she was asking for is for the Department for Education to suspend all engagement with the Prevent agenda because it was ‘discriminatory’ against Muslims. When you see Muslims all over the country being radicalised, who is Prevent supposed to be for?”

It can also be revealed that Mrs Smith, also known as Ifhat Shaheen or Ifhat Shaheen-Smith, is - or was until at least September 2014 - in charge of the London office of Ennadha, a Tunisian Islamist party which grew out of and is allied to the Muslim Brotherhood.

In 2014 Ennadha, through Mrs Smith, hired an American PR firm, Burston-Marsteller. Under the United States’ Foreign Agents Registration Act, the firm is required to submit details of its foreign clients. Mrs Smith’s role as head of Ennadha’s London office is shown in documents filed under the Act at the US Treasury.

An official British Government review last month found that the “secretive” Brotherhood “was prepared to countenance violence - including, from time to time, terrorism” to achieve its aims and said that its affiliates in the UK had “consistently opposed programmes by successive Governments to prevent terrorism.”

Many Brotherhood members, the review said, claim that “the attacks on 9/11 were fabricated by the US, and the so-called ‘war on terrorism’ is a pretext to attack Muslims.”

The review said that British members of the Brotherhood explicitly “anticipated the forthcoming ‘victory’ of Islam over capitalist democracy” and condemned “aspects of Muslim Brotherhood ideology and tactics in this country” as “contrary to our national security.”



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