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*Developments in Radicalisation  
and Political Violence*

# British foreign policy and Bosnia: The rise of Islamism in Britain, 1992—1995

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Jonathan Bronitsky

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## Developments in Radicalisation and Political Violence

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## Summary

The subject of domestic radicalisation was immediately propelled to the fore of security studies in the UK after the bombings in London on 7th July 2005. Unfortunately, attempts to decipher the emergence of this phenomenon have occasionally been impaired by myopia. Members of the media, policymakers and academics alike have often attributed Muslim radicalisation *solely* to the West's military action in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as its inability to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While foreign policy is certainly a powerful impetus to radicalisation, it is critical that one considers events prior to 11th September 2001 in order to fully appreciate the connection between them. This is because the seminal period in the rise of domestic radicalisation and Islamisation in Western Europe has been largely disregarded, overlooked and ignored.

Throughout the Bosnian War of the early-1990s, British Islamists rallied support for the Khilafah (Caliphate) by hailing its re-establishment as the only true guarantor of Muslim security. Their campaign centred upon a parallel drawn between the societal issues faced by Muslims in Britain and the unspeakable conditions endured by their coreligionists in Bosnia. British Islamists, above all, stressed that the targets of ethnic cleansing were none other than 'well-integrated, European Muslims, blonde and blue-eyed'.<sup>1</sup> These victims, who despite converting from Eastern Orthodox Christianity to Islam under the Ottoman Empire, ate pork, consumed alcohol, married outside the faith and attended mosque infrequently.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, British Muslims—who are often darker-skinned and more devout—were made to feel that their personal security and prospects for integration had suddenly evaporated. Most importantly, their anxieties were intensified by the geographical proximity of Bosnia and the West's failure—and its perceived unwillingness—to bring the hostilities to an end.

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- 1 Philip Lewis, *Young, British and Muslim* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007), p. 130
  - 2 Evan F. Kohlmann, *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe: The Afghan-Bosnian Network* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), p. 115

Against the background of events in Bosnia, this burgeoning Islamist current in Britain succeeded in radicalising a new generation of Muslims. Significantly, it garnered an unprecedented degree of awareness in Britain for the concepts of *jihad* (sacred struggle), the *Ummah* (the Islamic community) and the *Khilafah*, all of which supplied the ideological framework for the attacks that were carried out in metropolitan England one decade later. Alas, Bosnia is still carelessly listed as one in a series of indistinguishable “Muslim grievances”. It is the intention of this paper, therefore, to assist in lifting the Balkan conflict to its rightful place within the historiography of radicalisation and Islamisation in Western Europe.

## About Jonathan Bronitsky

Jonathan Bronitsky is currently undertaking a PhD in History at Pembroke College, Cambridge. His research focuses on Anglo-American intellectual history in the early stages of the Cold War. In 2008, he completed an MPhil in International Relations at Cambridge, the thesis of which formed the basis of this paper. Jonathan has also spent several years in Washington, DC, researching issues involving foreign affairs at both a think-tank and a crisis management and communications firm.

# British foreign policy and Bosnia: The rise of Islamism in Britain, 1992 – 1995

*This is happening in the heart of Europe and we have not done any more to stop it. It is in Europe's sphere of influence. It should be in Europe's sphere of conscience. There is no conscience. We are little more than an accomplice to massacre.*

(Former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher)<sup>3</sup>

## Introduction

Britain is a bulwark of democracy, an economic and military powerhouse, a key member of NATO and a possessor of one of the coveted permanent seats at the United Nations Security Council. However, it took more than three years for John Major's government to confront the Bosnian Serbs in the Balkans. At the outset, the government contended that the war was little more than a territorial dispute in which Britain had no part to play. Yet, even when the sinister intentions of the antagonists became evident, it sought to convince itself of its own powerlessness. The government fought against calls for action by first rejecting the 1993 “lift and strike” option, proposed by Bill Clinton's administration, and then insisting upon both the ineffectiveness of potential Western air strikes and the military prowess of Ratko Mladić's forces.

Britain, in the eyes of many, was baulking given its role in the international community. Opposition to the government, both

<sup>3</sup> Philip Webster and Robert Morgan, ‘Thatcher says massacre brings shame on west’, *The Times*, 14th April 1993

domestic and foreign, drew attention to the darker underpinnings of the conflict—the likes of which had not been witnessed on the continent since the Second World War. The Balkans were not suffering from a reciprocal fight over land, it was argued, but rather from an extreme nationalist attempt on behalf of Bosnian Serbs to create an ‘ethnically pure Greater Serbia’.<sup>4</sup>

This was evidenced by the efforts of Radovan Karadžić and Mladić to exterminate not only Muslim life, but also all signs of Islamic identity. For example, innumerable mosques were levelled in the wake of destruction while Eastern Orthodox Christian and Catholic churches were left virtually unscathed.<sup>5</sup> And while all of the factions contributed to the violence, Muslims by far suffered the most. Their trials culminated in the appalling murder of around 8,000 unarmed men and boys over the course of five days in 1995—an event that later became known as the “Srebrenica Massacre”. A three-year study carried out by the Research Documentation Center in Sarajevo found that at least 97,200 people were killed in the war, 65 percent of whom were Bosnian Muslims.<sup>6</sup>

The horror of Srebrenica, in combination with a number of developments at the international level, finally forced Britain to arms. ‘It is difficult to avoid the conclusion’, writes Jane Sharp, senior research fellow at King’s College London, ‘that the main reason Britain did not halt Serb aggression against Bosnia is that policy makers in Whitehall wanted Serbia and its proxies in Bosnia to prevail’.<sup>7</sup> A non-Muslim correspondent for the Runnymede Trust writes,

*During the Bosnian war I had many encounters with politicians, including a senior cabinet minister. It was clear to me that irrespective of their political loyalties their reluctance to sanction military intervention in Bosnia was rooted in a large degree in their reluctance to support the*

4 Brendan Simms, *Unfinest Hour: Britain and the Destruction of Bosnia* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 10

5 *Ibid.*, p. xv

6 ‘Bosnian war dead figure announced’, *BBC News*, 21st June 2007. <news.bbc.co.uk>

7 Jane Sharp, *Honest broker or perfidious Albion? British foreign policy in former Yugoslavia* (London: Institute of Public Policy Research, 1997), p. 8

*creation of a new Muslim polity in Europe. ‘Muslims have a tendency to radicalism’, the cabinet minister told me, when I asked why the government was refusing to lift the arms embargo against the Bosnian government.*<sup>8</sup>

The Balkan catastrophe resulted in the most forceful and sustained Islamist reaction to any event hitherto in Britain. To an extent, however, its ideological and material underpinnings had been set in motion several years before. The bellicose concept of global *jihad* that was being perfected on the battlefield of Afghanistan was steadily exported to Britain throughout the 1980s. This occurred through the influx of money—particularly “petro-dollars”—*ulema* (religious scholars) and literature from the Middle East and South Asia.<sup>9</sup> While these elements were all in place by the time of the “Rushdie Affair” in 1989, undoubtedly, it was the exceptional circumstances of Bosnia that provided the catalyst for the full-fledged emergence of Islamism in Britain.

## Overview

This paper is divided into four parts. The first, titled ‘The Message’, discusses the broad historical agenda of Islamism and the ultimate jihadist aim: the re-establishment of the Caliphate. This part also outlines the manner in which British Islamists tailored that agenda to the realities of the Bosnian War for the purpose of radicalisation.

The second part, ‘The Response’, describes various Muslim reactions, both at home and abroad, to British foreign policy toward Bosnia. This part further describes several types of Islamist entities that existed in Britain during the war.

The third part, ‘The Community’, contextualises the response to British foreign policy through an overview of the domestic

8 Gordon Conway, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia (London, Runnymede Trust, 1997), p. 10. Found in Anthony McRoy, *From Rushdie to 7/7: The Radicalisation of Islam in Britain* (London: The Social Affairs Unit, 2006), p. 22

9 Interview with Haras Rafiq (3rd June 2008, London, UK)

conditions faced by British Muslims. Additionally, it outlines Muslim awareness and understanding of the war. This part further speculates about the lack of attention dedicated to Bosnia as well as the potential outcome from a hypothetical “early intervention”.

Finally, this paper concludes with a series of considerations and recommendations for policymakers in light of the impact that British foreign policy toward Bosnia had upon the British Muslim population.

## The Message

*Dear brothers and sisters, the vital issue for Muslims the world-over is to resume ruling by what Allah (swt) has revealed through establishing the Khilafah... in order to demolish the systems of Kufr and to replace them with the laws of Islam... and to carry the message of Islam to the world by da'wah and jihad.*

(Hizb ut-Tahrir, ‘The Way for Revival: The Methodology of Hizb ut-Tahrir for Change’)<sup>10</sup>

### *The crescent's call to Britain*

At the onset of hostilities in Bosnia, a number of British and foreign-born Islamists realised that they had been presented with a unique opportunity, which they quickly acted upon. They created in the minds of British Muslims an association between their own mistreatment and the suffering of their co-religionists in Bosnia. These Islamists then were instrumental in gaining currency for the concepts of *jihad* and religious solidarity with the *Ummah*. Islamism considers these two concepts to be the pillars for the re-establishment of the Caliphate, which was abolished by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on 3rd March 1924. Throughout the war in Bosnia, the Caliphate was presented as the only genuine investment

<sup>10</sup> ‘The Way For Revival: The Methodology of Hizb ut-Tahrir for Change’, Hizb ut-Tahrir (London: Al-Khilafah Publications), pgs. 1 – 2. INFORM archive, London School of Economics, London, UK

in Muslim security as confidence in Western institutions dissolved.

The Islamist propaganda campaign proceeded through two semi-distinct phases. During the first, which only lasted for several months, its advocates interpreted the British government’s detached posture as an indication that it would be averse to preventing future injustices against Muslims throughout the world. The result was restrained disapproval of official foreign policy. Islamists went further in the second phase: Western hesitation was portrayed not only as cloaked support for the Christian Serbs, but also as an implicit endorsement for the wider eradication of Islam in Europe. The result was overt condemnation and calls for active self-defence.

The initial shift in rhetoric occurred in part because Bosnian Muslim fatalities were mounting with no sign of intervention. It was, nonetheless, also a strategic necessity as reporting of the war increased and the first wave of volunteers and jihadists returned from overseas. British Muslims and Arab *muhajideen* were aghast at the sight of the fair-skinned Bosnian Muslims and their secular lifestyle. Even the goal to re-establish the *Khilafah* elicited friction. Dr. Mustafa Ceric, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, stated in the midst of the conflict that he was unaware of ‘a single Bosnian Muslim who wanted an Islamic state run on the Islamic religion’.<sup>11</sup> Once these stark physical, cultural and attitudinal differences were laid bare, British Islamists tailored their argument to British Muslims of South Asian-descent to ensure spiritual cohesion.

Throughout the second phase, which lasted the rest of the conflict, Islamists concentrated on the themes of personal security and integration. They actively encouraged marginalised Muslims in British society to identify first with their religion. This tactic was skilfully employed to transcend the barrier of nationality. In the end, the dissimilarities of the Bosnian Muslims, which almost caused the Islamist campaign to flop, became the key to capturing the attention of British

<sup>11</sup> Adam Lebor, *A Heart Turned East: Among the Muslims of Europe and America* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1997), p. 55

Muslims who had been disconnected from previous conflicts, such as those in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The rhetoric used by Islamists was hostile at times, particularly in connection with the necessity to and means by which to re-establish the Caliphate. Radicalised Muslims, nevertheless, abstained from the use of physical violence—at least at home. In the 1980s, the British government entered into an ‘unwritten contract’ with arriving extremist elements, providing them with a ‘covenant of security’.<sup>12</sup> In other words, Islamists were unofficially permitted free reign so long as they desisted from inciting or committing acts of violence. Accordingly, they navigated a precarious course between legality and legitimacy, couching their agenda in ambiguous terms while managing to convince their supporters of tangible progress.

At the outset of the war, the spokesman for Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT)<sup>13</sup> confirmed that the mission of his organisation was the re-establishment of the Caliphate. While he considered violence ‘irrelevant’, he added, ‘we neither condone nor condemn it’.<sup>14</sup> In a 1995 interview with Omar Bakri Muhammad, founder of HT and al-Muhajiroun in Britain, he stressed, ‘there is the intellectual *jihad*. There is the military *jihad* in the battlefield... And there is the jihad to establish the international state of Islam’. When asked which form was taking place in the UK, he responded, ‘For now, it’s an intellectual *jihad*. But Muslims are ready. We are ready to

12 Mark Townsend, et al., ‘Investigation: The global terror network’, *The Guardian*, 21st March 2004. <[www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)> and Sarah Jamie Burnell, ‘The London Bombings: Radicalisation and its implications’, Institute of Defence Strategic Studies, *IDSS Commentaries*, 14th July 2005, p. 1

13 Hizb ut-Tahrir means “Party of Liberation.” It was founded by Taqiuddin al-Nabhani, an Islamic scholar and judge, in Jerusalem in 1953. Since then, HT has spread to more than forty countries and is estimated to have more than one million members. Frank Schneider, ‘Hizb ut-Tahrir: A threat behind a legal façade?’ Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California. 7th June 2006. <<http://stinet.dtic.mil>>. HT founded its UK branch in 1986 and remains very active, despite being banned in nearly every other country in which it operates. Shiv Malik, ‘For Allah and the caliphate’, *New Statesman*, 13th September 2004

14 Ian Black, ‘The Muslims: Prayers and Pride Amid the Blast Rubble’, *The Guardian*, 28th July 1994, p. 2

defend ourselves. We must be strong in our minds. We must be physically strong too’.<sup>15</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the majority of British Muslims who came to support the re-establishment of the Caliphate during the Bosnian War understood perfectly that the British state would not be overthrown—at least in the near future. Instead, former and current Islamists stress that the essential task is to establish the groundwork for the Caliphate through the mental preparation of the Muslim community.<sup>16</sup>

## The response

*It really doesn't matter whether we perish or survive the lesson will always be there. And it is a simple one: that the Muslim community must always be vigilant and must always take their destiny in their own hands. They must never rely on anyone or anybody to solve their problems or come to their rescue...*

(Dr. Mustafa Ceric, Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina)<sup>17</sup>

Several types of Islamist entities operated in Britain during the Bosnian War. The first, of which HT is the prime example, actively recruited individuals for radicalisation and was comprised primarily of young native-born British Muslims. Their efforts were characterised by public events, particularly on university campuses. These entities often employed the use of multimedia “shock” materials, such as documentary films that showed the massacring of Bosnian Muslims.

The Muslim Parliament of Great Britain is representative of a second form of Islamist institution. Institutions such as Parliament provided an intellectual forum for middle-aged

15 Jon Ronson, ‘Oh, what a lovely jihad’, *The Guardian Weekend*, 29th March 1997, p. 21. The name al-Muhajiroun means “Emigrants” and was chosen by Bakri Muhammad as a reference to the early followers of the Prophet Muhammad. Found in Mahan Abedin, ‘Al-Muhajiroun in the UK: An Interview with Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammed’, The Jamestown Foundation, *Spotlight on Terror*, Vol. 2, Iss. 5, 23rd March 2004

16 Interview with Shiraz Maher (20th May 2008, London, UK)

17 ‘A Conversation With Dr. Mustafa Ceric’, *Q News*, Vol. 3, No. 7. 13–20th May 1994, p. 5

Muslim small-business owners, professionals and scholars in addition to higher-ranking members of groups such as HT. Through debate and discussion, they refined pan-Islamist concepts for use with Bosnia. Because these entities drew their membership from “pre-exposed” individuals, they focused less on recruitment and more on raising domestic material backing and foreign ideological support for the jihad in Bosnia.

Another type of group, which was less formal and arose spontaneously among concerned Muslims, was backed by “grassroots” support. Individuals associated with these community-based entities were not commonly members of formal Islamist groups. So although they were not strictly involved with the process of radicalisation, they often regurgitated jihadist rhetoric that they had heard on the street. These individuals also served to heighten awareness of the conflict and collect money for Bosnian Muslims. The grassroots organisation’s choice of venue varied from the public park to the community centre dining hall.

A final form of Islamist group consisted of relief organisations that, while based in Britain, carried out operations in the Balkans. The activities of the relief organisations were often noble: collecting and distributing aid supplies to Bosnian Muslims in the form of food, water and medicine. Their members, however, were known to—not infrequently—transition from aid worker to combatant after witnessing the plight of their coreligionists. Other relief organisations, while operating under a façade of legitimacy, concentrated on gathering material support for jihadists and the Bosnian Army.

### *At home: ‘the black flag of Islam above Downing Street’*

During the Bosnian War, HT, more so than any other organisation, gained traction for the three central concepts of Islamism: *jihad*, *Ummah* and *Khilafah*. It ‘introduced the notion of *jihad* to the streets of Britain’, asserts Ed Husain, former member and college leader of HT. ‘Our call for one in Bosnia was not limited to east London but heard all across

the UK. As we predicted, the *Ummah*, once given the idea, delivered’.<sup>18</sup> ‘Nobody else was open to talking about the Islamic state until Hizb ut-Tahrir came onto the scene’, stated Haras Rafiq, head of the Sufi Muslim Council.<sup>19</sup>

The Islamist group assumed the vanguard position at the beginning of the conflict in 1992. It commenced its campaign by widely distributing terrifying accounts of Serbian carnage throughout Muslim communities. For example, in the July 1992 edition of *Khalifah*, HT reprinted a report from the Muslim News Agency that ‘Chetniks and Serbo-Montenegrans aggressors... carved signs of crosses with knives and red hot irons on their [Bosnian Muslim] bodies, cut their sexual organs, dishonour mosques, step over pages of the Qur’an and commit other brutal crimes’.<sup>20</sup>

After introducing the conflict to the streets of Britain, HT concerned itself with recruiting an elite cadre of foot soldiers among second and third-generation youth, which they considered to be the most impressionable and passionate members of the Muslim community.<sup>21</sup> It believed that a strong, intelligent base, which ‘tried by fire’ with Bosnia, would be capable of leading others well into the future.<sup>22</sup>

This conscription scheme was developed by Syrian-born Omar Bakri Muhammad, who arrived in England on 14th January 1986 after being expelled from Saudi Arabia. While the bulk of his efforts were dedicated to the establishment and leadership of the branch of HT, he also maintained a skeletal structure of al-Muhajiroun in Britain, which he resurrected almost ten years later.<sup>23</sup> Bakri Muhammad’s emphasis on the recruitment of youth—and especially

18 Ed Husain, *The Islamist: Why I joined radical Islam in Britain, what I saw inside and why I left* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), p. 119

19 Interview with Haras Rafiq (3rd June 2008, London, UK)

20 ‘Rape of Bosnia Continues’, *Khalifah Magazine*, Vol. 3, Iss. 1. July 1992, p. 1. INFORM archive, London School of Economics, London, UK

21 ‘The Way For Revival: The Methodology of Hizb ut-Tahrir for Change’, Hizb ut-Tahrir (London: Al-Khilafah Publications), p. 35. INFORM archive, London School of Economics, London, UK

22 Interview with Shiraz Maher (20th May 2008, London, UK)

23 Mahan Abedin, ‘Al-Muhajiroun in the UK: An Interview with Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammed’, The Jamestown Foundation, *Spotlight on Terror*, Vol. 2, Iss. 5, 23rd March 2004

university students—was critical because it coincided with the substantial influx of Muslims into an educational system that had recently instituted a range of multicultural policies, such as open enrolment.<sup>24</sup>

HT's influence within Muslim communities was felt almost immediately after its establishment. The general public in Britain became aware of its activities in 1993 when the group protested against the Israeli-Palestinian peace process through extensive leafleting, media appearances and talks at universities and mosques.<sup>25</sup> One year later, *The Guardian* reported that HT had 'taken over nearly all the Muslim student societies at London University colleges and campuses in other areas where Muslims form a large part of the community'.<sup>26</sup>

Under Bakri Muhammad's leadership, HT turned its sights to the Balkans, persistently sponsoring and organising events on academic campuses that demonstrated the suffering of Bosnian Muslims. HT also developed intimate relationships with Islamic student organisations, which frequently led to overlapping memberships. For instance, HT was closely associated with a Muslim student organisation at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) known as the "1924 Committee." In 1994, the school's administration banned the Committee's speakers after it was revealed that the organisation expressed views in meetings and literature that were highly reminiscent of those espoused by HT.<sup>27</sup>

In November 1992, the London School of Economics (LSE) played host to "Bosnia Week," which was sponsored by the student-run Islamic Society, an affiliate of HT. Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, mastermind behind the 2002 kidnapping of journalist Daniel Pearl, is the most high-profile individual known to have been connected to the event. While a series of documentaries were shown, Sheikh claimed that one in

24 Suha Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest: Hizb al-Tahrir and the Search for the Islamic Caliphate* (London: Grey Seal, 1996), pgs. 16–18, 171–172

25 *Ibid.*

26 Kathy Evans, 'Radical Time-Bomb Under British Islam', *The Guardian*, 7th February 1994, pg. 6

27 Claire Sanders, 'Islamic group accuses SOAS of "cowardice"', *Times Higher Education*, 4th November 1994. Iss. 1148, p. 2

particular 'shook my heart'.<sup>28</sup> That 45-minute film was titled *Destruction of a Nation* and, among other horrors, depicted Serbs castrating captured Bosnian Muslims in detention camps.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, Ed Husain introduced his fellow students at Tower Hamlets College to the conflict in early 1993. He booked a lecture theatre at the college under the title "The Killings Fields at Bosnia" after watching a thirty-minute videocassette that portrayed the ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims. At the time, his intention was to simply raise awareness of the conflict and collect donations for the Bosnian Muslims.<sup>30</sup>

In tandem with the targeting of campuses, HT sponsored, organised and directed community events. Husain prepared for an affair, titled "Bosnia Today – Brick Lane Tomorrow," by distributing over 30,000 leaflets to houses, markets and mosques. The event consisted of a protest march through the East End and a meeting in a local park. The demonstration was backed by HT but disguised under the banner of "Concerned Muslims Living in Tower Hamlets." Similar protests and marches against Western non-intervention were held in Slough, Birmingham, Oldham, Manchester, Newham and Southall.<sup>31</sup>

At its boldest, HT lambasted the West and advocated the re-establishment of the Caliphate in large venues. On 7th August 1994, HT cosponsored the Khilafah Conference at Wembley Stadium, an event attended by more than 10,000 Muslims from around the world and described by the BBC as 'one of the biggest gatherings of Muslims ever held outside the Middle East'.<sup>32</sup> Participants at the conference decried

28 Nick Fielding, 'The British jackal,' *Sunday Times*, 21st April 2002 and Faisal Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 88

29 Sean O'Neill, 'Public schoolboy who turned to terror', *The Daily Telegraph*, 16th July 2002, p. 4

30 Ed Husain, *The Islamist: Why I joined radical Islam in Britain, what I saw inside and why I left* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), p. 74

31 *Ibid.*, pgs. 116–119

32 'Conference Calls for Single Islamic State', *Courier-Mail*, 9th August 1994



the legitimacy of Western governments and vehemently endorsed the Islamic state.<sup>33</sup>

On 13th August 1995, HT's "Rally for Islam" in Trafalgar Square attracted more than 3,000 people.<sup>34</sup> Bakri Muhammad stood on a podium 'in the shadow of Nelson's column' and called for holy war in Britain. He proclaimed that he would not rest until 'the Black Flag of Islam flew over Downing Street'. He even designated British citizens as a 'legitimate target' 'because London called for the destruction' of the Caliphate in 1924.<sup>35</sup>

Despite Bakri Muhammad's accomplishments with HT, he bitterly broke away on 16th January 1996, almost ten years to the day since he had arrived in Britain, citing 'a violation of Islamic rules by the worldwide Amir'. Soon after, Bakri Muhammad revived al-Muhajiroun, which had been kept on 'life support under the aegis of Hizb ut-Tahrir' since 1986.<sup>36</sup> Within the year, the new group proudly announced its presence at SOAS and LSE and its plan to further cultivate Oxford, Cambridge and Durham. This development supposedly occurred right after the war ended and groups such as HT were expelled from university campuses.<sup>37</sup>

In spite of this evidence, other sources suggest that al-Muhajiroun was active during the war. In 2005, *The Times* reported that the group openly 'boasted' of recruiting British Muslims to fight.<sup>38</sup> In a 2004 interview, Bakri Muhammad specifically referred to the group's participation in the conflict, albeit as part of a 'broader humanitarian effort'. However he revealed that he encouraged the support of Bosnian Muslims 'when the law in the UK permitted *that*

33 'Conference in London champions Islamic state, destruction of Israel', *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 8th August 1994, p. 5A

34 Edward Gorman, 'Britain's radical Muslims tell gays to mend their ways', *The Australian*, 15th August 1995

35 Jon Ronson, 'Oh, what a lovely jihad', *The Guardian Weekend*, 29th March 1997, p. 19

36 Mahan Abedin, 'Al-Muhajiroun in the UK: An Interview with Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammed', The Jamestown Foundation, *Spotlight on Terror*, Vol. 2, Iss. 5, 23rd March 2004.

37 Lucy Manning, 'Hardline Muslims Target Students', *The Guardian*, 24th August 1996

38 Sam Knight, 'Birmingham and its links to militant Islam', *The Times*, 27th July 2005. <www.timesonline.co.uk>

*type* of intervention [author's emphasis]'.<sup>39</sup> If there remains any doubt as to his motives, in 1995, he suggested that instead of accepting food from the West, Bosnian Muslims ought to 'eat Serbs'.<sup>40</sup>

Interestingly, Islamist groups like HT mainly avoided mosques as a channel for recruitment and radicalisation because they were not high-density targets for youthful leaders. Although the influx of Islamism from the Middle East and South Asia was starting to increase in earnest at the beginning of the 1990s, the imported ulema were older and detached from the Muslims who had been raised in Britain. As Hanif Kureishi, author of *The Black Album*, explains, 'a lot of kids hate the mosques... hate the mullahs, who they think are corrupt and have the wrong ideas'.<sup>41</sup>

Another major Islamist organisation, with a more intellectual bent, came into existence just before the beginning of the war. On 4th January 1992, Dr. Kalim Siddiqui, an Indian British writer, Islamic activist and founder of the Muslim Institute for Research and Planning in London, established the Muslim Parliament of Great Britain.<sup>42</sup> The organisation, which continues to operate today, is structured upon its 1990 document, 'The Muslim Manifesto: A Strategy for Survival'.<sup>43</sup>

The Muslim Parliament held two major conferences during the war, both of which were dedicated not only to the subject of Bosnia, but also to the complementary topics of *jihad*, *Ummah* and *Khilafah*. The first was held on 13th November 1993 at London's Institute of Education and was titled 'Bosnia and the Global Islamic Movement'. There were more than 3,000 people present who were urged to

39 Mahan Abedin, 'Al-Muhajiroun in the UK: An Interview with Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammed', The Jamestown Foundation, *Spotlight on Terror*, Vol.2, Iss.5, 23rd March 2004.

40 David Harrison, 'Battle for Islam's future', *The Observer*, 13th August 1995, p. 12

41 Hanif Kureishi, 'Sweet Kids with Shocking Ideas', *Newsweek*, 29th May 1995, p. 1

42 Robert Carle, 'Islamists in the "Rainbow" Coalition', *Society*, Vol. 45, No. 2, April 2008, p. 186

43 Hartley Dean and Zafar Khan, 'Muslim Perspectives on Welfare', *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1997, p. 205

either fight or donate money in the Bosnian Muslims' 'holy war' against the Serbs. A series of speakers accused Western governments of 'aiding and abetting the Serbian campaign of rape, ethnic cleansing and murder' through their backing of the 1991 United Nations Security Council's arms embargo. 'This is not ethnic cleansing', claimed Muhammad al-Asi, an imam from Washington DC, 'it's a holocaust. All you can give now is blood or money. Nothing else can substitute'.<sup>44</sup> Bosnia was still at the top of the Parliament's agenda three years later when it hosted its second major conference, 'Hiroshima to Sarajevo: Fifty Years of the United Nations'.<sup>45</sup>

The Parliament was also dedicated to collecting material support for use abroad. For example, it maintained an Internet forum that regularly featured discussions on Bosnia. One post read, 'the support we Muslims need to give to the Bosnians and the Bosnian government is Jihads Funds – hard currency that the Bosnians can spend according to their priorities [not money for bandages]'.<sup>46</sup>

All of the groups mentioned thus far were in operation before the war, and therefore, decisively attached themselves to the Islamist cause in Bosnia. But British Muslims unaffiliated with any particular entity were also inspired to action. This was due to the combination of mounting frustration with the West's impotency and the unimpeded saturation of Islamist ideology within Muslim communities. The outcome was the appearance of "grassroots" groups throughout Britain that were dedicated to effecting change in Bosnia. They conducted town hall meetings, protest marches and fundraising drives. For instance, in Manchester, a group of Muslim women founded *al-Masoom*, whose marches garnered the attention of the local Member

44 'UK Muslims Urged to Join Bosnian "Holy War"', *The Observer*, 14th Nov. 1993, p. 3

45 'International Conference on "Hiroshima to Sarajevo: 50 years of the United Nations"', The Muslim Parliament of Great Britain, 22nd October 1995. INFORM archive, London School of Economics, London, UK and 'ICIT – Dr. Kalim Siddiqui biography 3/5', The Institute of Contemporary Islamic Thought, 17th April 2000. <[www.islamicthought.org](http://www.islamicthought.org)>

46 'The Muslim Parliament...' The Muslim Parliament of Great Britain. (Internet forum), 1994–1995. Anonymous source

of Parliament as well as others outside of the city.<sup>47</sup> It is worth noting that Bosnia had a transcendent effect, an ability to cut across Muslim society and mobilise traditionally apolitical actors—in this case, women.

In March 1994, the Bradford Eid Committee held the 'Charity Dinner for Bosnia and Kashmir', an event significant enough to draw the attendance of Muhammad Sacirbey, then-Bosnian Ambassador to the United Nations.<sup>48</sup> Advertisements, which had been posted in community centres and Pakistani restaurants, asked in both English and Urdu, 'Does anybody care?'<sup>49</sup> Speeches were delivered at the event by a local businessman, a woman injured in Bosnia, the Human Rights Officer of the Muslim Parliament of Great Britain, a prominent member of both Young Muslims UK and the Islamic Society of Britain and a white academic who had converted to Islam.<sup>50</sup>

The theme of the evening was the need for Muslim self-defence through religious solidarity. According to an account of the proceedings, Majid, the Human Rights Officer of the Muslim Parliament, beseeched that charity in the form of food was 'simply fattening our brothers and sisters for their death'. Others blatantly argued that the Bosnian Muslims needed to be 'armed and assisted in their bid to defend themselves in *jihad*'. To this end, the Muslims Parliament's 'Arms for Bosnia Fund' was mentioned. Majid concluded by explaining that British Muslims would be the next to undergo persecution in Europe. By supporting the *jihad* in Bosnia, the attendees would be investing in the future security of the *Ummah*.<sup>51</sup> For as Husain recalls, 'We believed, we knew, Bosnia would not be the last *jihad*'.<sup>52</sup>

47 Prina Werbner, 'Divided Loyalties, Empowered Citizenship? Muslims in Britain', *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3. 2000, pgs. 320-321

48 Sean McLoughlin, 'In the Name of the Umma: Globalization, "Race" Relations and Muslim Identity Politics in Bradford.' Found in W.A.R. Shadid and P.S. van Koningsveld (eds.), *Political Participation and Identities of Muslims in Non-Muslim States* (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1996), p. 214 and interview with senior official, New Scotland Yard, Counter-Terrorism Unit (5th June 2008, London, UK)

49 McLoughlin, 'In the Name of the Umma', p. 214

50 *Ibid.*, pgs. 214-219

51 *Ibid.*, pgs. 217-218

52 Ed Husain, *The Islamist: Why I joined radical Islam in Britain, what I saw inside and why I left* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), p. 75

## *Abroad: backyard jihad*

Support was not limited to activity on the home front. A number of British-based Islamic relief charities in Britain provided humanitarian aid, such as food, water and medicine, to Bosnian Muslims. Other organisations, although registered as charities under UK law, raised material support for jihadists and the Bosnian Army. Furthermore, a number of British Muslim aid workers abandoned their role to become combatants after they arrived in Bosnia.

It is impossible to determine exactly how many British Muslims travelled to Bosnia, let alone approximate the number that engaged in violence versus strictly humanitarian efforts. At the time, not even the British security apparatus systemically analysed the movement of individuals in and out of the country.<sup>53</sup> A handful of sources, nonetheless, demonstrate that the British Muslim presence in Bosnia was anything but insignificant.

Bahukutumbi Raman, a member of the Dehli-based Observer Research Foundation, claims that at least two hundred British Muslims of Pakistan origin were recruited by Harkat ul-Ansar (HUA), trained by the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence and deployed to Bosnia.<sup>54</sup> Hamed Mesanovic, Travnik's deputy commander, recalls that there were so many 'British volunteers' helping the Bosnian army that it became 'almost a daily occurrence to see a soldier wearing the blue and white Bosnian fleur-de-lys speaking in a broad Glasgow or Manchester accent'.<sup>55</sup> From his experiences, Moazzam Begg, estimated that there were 'thousands' of British Muslims in-country.<sup>56</sup>

British-based Islamic relief organisations played a complex role in the conflict. Regardless of the sincerity of their intentions, their aid workers often became jihadists.

53 Interview with former senior official, Secret Intelligence Service (24th April 2008)

54 Bahukutumbi Raman, 'How London Brought Terror Upon Itself', *Asia Times Online*, 16th July 2005. <www.atimes.com>

55 Adam Lebor, *A Heart Turned East: Among the Muslims of Europe and America* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1997), pgs. 46–47

56 Telephone interview with Moazzam Begg (13th May 2008)

A senior official of New Scotland Yard's Counter-Terrorism Unit explained that once British Muslims arrived, 'they would see how bad things really were which would then galvanise their thoughts'.<sup>57</sup> For example, not long after Abu Mujahid al-Brittani had completed his university studies in 1993, he decided to assist with humanitarian relief efforts in Bosnia. He initially transported food and medicine while raising money and awareness of the conflict. Two years later, he was killed in "Operation Badr," fighting to capture the Vozuca region of Bosnia.<sup>58</sup>

Other British-based Islamic relief organisations actively raised funds to purchase and distribute weapons. Using various techniques, they built up an appearance of authenticity to protect themselves against legal repercussions. According to Kathy Evans of *The Guardian*, Britain witnessed an explosion in the number of Islamic charities dedicated to less than 'purely humanitarian aims'. These organisations included the Young Muslims, al-Muntada al-Islami, Muslim Welfare House, the Murabitoun, Islamic Foundation and the Islamic Studies Centre.<sup>59</sup>

Another example is the Muwafaq Foundation, an organisation founded at the beginning of the 1990s by Saudi multimillionaire Yassin al-Qadi.<sup>60</sup> Based in Sudan but primarily dedicated to Bosnia, it was registered as a charitable trust on the British island of Jersey. In 1992, it opened an office in Croatia and the following year, it expanded operations to Sarajevo. By June 1993, a group of about 750 Afghan-Arabs, funded by the Foundation and advised by Iranians, had formed the al-Muwafaq Brigade in the Zenica region of Bosnia.<sup>61</sup>

57 Interview with senior official, New Scotland Yard, Counter-Terrorism Unit (5th June 2008, London, UK)

58 Evan F. Kohlmann, *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe: The Afghan-Bosnian Network* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), pgs. 138-139

59 Kathy Evans, 'Radical Time-Bomb Under British Islam', *The Guardian*, 7th February 1994, p. 6

60 Victor Comras, 'Al Qaeda Finances and Funding to Affiliated Groups', Center for Contemporary Conflict, *Strategic Insights*, Vol. 4, Iss. 1. January 2005, p. 3

61 Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins, *Alms for Jihad: Charity and Terrorism in the Islamic World* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pgs. 121–123. Found in 'Muwafaq Foundation', Cooperative Research History Commons. 2008. <www.cooperativeresearch.org>

In 1993, the Muslim Parliament of Great Britain established Bait al-Mal al-Islami, a charity registered under British law to finance and administer provisions for underprivileged families and students. Abroad, the organisation supported Bosnian Muslims through its 'Arms for Bosnia' fund, later known as the 'Jihad Fund'.<sup>62</sup> The name was simply tailored after the British government ruled the former illegal.<sup>63</sup> According to the Parliament, material support was required 'when most Muslims were concentrating only on humanitarian work'.<sup>64</sup>

The Muslim Parliament even used an Internet chat forum to solicit funds. 'According to the Bosnians', stated a thinly veiled post, 'they are not short of manpower and usual charity supplies are not the highest priority for them'. 'WHAT THE BOSNIANS SAY THEY NEED IS HARD CURRENCY WITH WHICH THEY CAN BUY THE THINGS THEY REALLY NEED'. The post then encouraged readers to send money to the nearest Bosnian embassy or alternatively, 'the Muslim Parliament's Jihad Fund in the UK'.<sup>65</sup> For the latter, it casually provided the Parliament's address on Fulham Palace Road. Instructions were also listed for cheques and money orders. A post that followed requested the donation of a laptop to the Bosnian forces for 'trajectory calculations'. Massoud Shadjareh, then Chairman of the Parliament's Human Rights Committee, was listed as the contact for the organisation.<sup>66</sup> He is now the Chair of the Islamic Human Rights Commission.

The Convoy of Mercy was another Islamic charity registered in the United Kingdom that operated in Bosnia. According to its website, which was in operation in 2008, their mission was 'to provide humanitarian assistance to the beleaguered Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina'. The Convoy encouraged volunteers to join its ground convoys

62 Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within: Muslims in Britain Since 1800* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd, 2004), p. 363

63 Sean McLoughlin, 'In the Name of the Umma', p. 214

64 'ICIT – Dr Kalim Siddiqui biography 4/5', The Institute of Contemporary Islamic Thought, 17th April 2000. <www.islamicthought.org>

65 'The Bosnians say they don't need B(lankets)', The Muslim Parliament of Great Britain (Internet forum), 1994–1995. Anonymous source

66 Massoud Shadjareh, 'The Bosnian forces need a laptop for trajectory calculations', The Muslim Parliament of Great Britain (Internet forum), 1994–1995. Anonymous source

that transported aid from Britain to the Balkans.<sup>67</sup> In the face of ostensibly benevolent motives, Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh claims that his particular expedition organised clandestine support for jihadists.<sup>68</sup> His story is especially illuminating, and thus, deserves elaboration.

Sheikh grew up in Wanstead and entered LSE in the autumn of 1992.<sup>69</sup> He joined the Islamic Society, which organised a Bosnia Week, and was recruited there by Jaish-e-Muhammad, a Pakistan-based Islamist group.<sup>70</sup> He accompanied his father several months later on a business trip to Pakistan, where he surreptitiously linked up with militants from Jaish-e-Muhammad.<sup>71</sup> Upon his return to Britain, Sheikh decided to join 'a convoy of mercy' in Bosnia. On his expedition, he was convinced by a veteran Pakistani-militant at the Croatian border to become a jihadist.<sup>72</sup>

In 1994, he was arrested in India for kidnapping three Britons and an American. While interrogated by Indian police, he revealed that he had been radicalised by the Bosnia Week event at LSE. In particular, he elucidated upon how much he had been impacted by the 45-minute film, *Destruction of a Nation*.<sup>73</sup> In 2002, Sheikh was arrested, convicted and sentenced to death by hanging for Daniel Pearl's abduction and murder.

Begg, one of the British Muslims formerly held in extrajudicial detention at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, worked extensively with the Convoy in Bosnia from 1994 through to 1996.<sup>74</sup> He denies taking up arms but admits to having donated money

67 'Convoy of Mercy', Convoy of Mercy. 23rd February 2008. <www.islamicarchitecture.org>

68 Nick Fielding, 'The British jackal', *Sunday Times*, 21st April 2002

69 Sean O'Neill, 'Public schoolboy who turned to terror', *The Daily Telegraph*, 16th July 2002, p. 4

70 Michael Meacher, 'Britain now faces its own blowback: Intelligence interests may thwart the July bombings investigation', *The Guardian*, 10th September 2005, p. 20

71 Sean O'Neill, 'Public schoolboy who turned to terror', *The Daily Telegraph*, 16th July 2002, p. 4

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74 Telephone interview with Moazzam Begg (13th May 2008)

to the Bosnian Army.<sup>75</sup> However before he was transferred to Cuba from the US Air Base in Bagram, Afghanistan in January 2003, Begg told FBI interrogators that he had undergone ‘basic training’ in Afghanistan before conducting ‘five or six missions’ with the Convoy.<sup>76</sup> He admitted, ‘I felt that *jihad* was an appropriate way to deal with those who harmed Muslims’.<sup>77</sup>

## The Community

*The Bosnian Muslims were white, they looked the same as Europeans, they were integrated, secular. Bosnia wasn't an Islamic republic by any sense. It wasn't a home of radical Islam or anything. It was a very integrated and assimilated society. This was going on upon Europe's doorstep. No one was intervening, no one was responding. There was a sense that 'we'll be next'.*

(Shiraz Maher, former northeastern director of Hizb ut-Tahrir)<sup>78</sup>

## Personal security and integration

The success of the Islamist campaign rested upon the convincing parallel fashioned in the minds of British Muslims between their own conditions and those facing their coreligionists in Bosnia. Unfortunately, Islamists were able to draw upon lamentable circumstances that were determinative in the lives of many marginalised British Muslims.

At the beginning of the 1990s, racism, which Professor Dick Hobbs of LSE describes as ‘part of the East End’s

75 Tahir Abbas, ‘Ethno-Religious Identities and Islamic Political Radicalism in the UK: A Case Study’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 27, No. 3. Dec. 2007, p. 359

76 Con Coughlin, ‘Begg “told FBI he trained with al-Qa’eda”’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 9th March 2006, p. 10

77 Telephone interview with Moazzam Begg (13th May 2008)

78 Interview with Shiraz Maher (20 May 2008, London, UK)

ideological inheritance,’ was extensive throughout Britain.<sup>79</sup> On the heels of the Rushdie Affair, Islamists portrayed Bosnia as the escalation of the Christian crusade against Muslims in Europe. ‘The European Community has allowed this genocide’, wrote Shabbir Akhtar—now Professor at Old Dominion University—‘not because the Bosnians are devout Muslims but because their ancestors were devout Muslims [author’s emphasis]’.

In June 1993, an editorial in *The Independent* warned that the mishandling of Bosnia combined with domestic social issues—mainly racism—‘could mark the beginning of a new self-consciousness for European Muslims’.<sup>80</sup> Columnist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown published a comparable article less than a month later, which described building distrust among middle-class Muslims due to inaction in Bosnia.<sup>81</sup> The following year, she relayed swelling Muslim fear of violence and segregation associated with rising ‘white tribalism and nationalism’. She lamented, ‘even the most circumspect Muslim now sees through the sophistry and hypocrisy of the “new world order” to make connections between Bradford and Bosnia’.<sup>82</sup>

Many individuals who were influenced by Islamism—and already sceptical of British society—turned their backs on the prospect of integration. Some Muslims shun ‘liberal secular nation states’ because it is seen as ‘antithetical to living the life of “a Good Muslim”’, explains Professor Tahir Abbas of Exeter University. Others do so because they ‘experience a sense of dislocation and alienation, perceived or real’.<sup>83</sup> In particular, scores of young Muslims came to associate “Britishness” with right-wing political nationalism. Begg

79 Dick Hobbs, *Doing the Business: Entrepreneurship, the Working Class, and Detectives in the East End of London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 11

80 ‘Fears for Muslims as Bosnia burns’, *The Independent*, 19th June 1993, p. 16

81 Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, ‘Made to feel like trespassers on European soil’, *The Independent*, 5th July 1993, p. 13

82 Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, ‘A new Islam for the West’, *The Independent*, 14th February 1994, p. 17

83 Tahir Abbas, ‘Muslim Minorities in Britain: Integration, Multiculturalism and Radicalism in the Post-7/7 Period’, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3. August 2007, p. 291

explained that after dealing with racism during his childhood, ‘the concept of feeling “British” wasn’t something that could in any way compare to being Muslim’.<sup>84</sup>

### *Awareness and understanding of the conflict*

A significant number of British Muslims, although concerned about Bosnia, were largely uninformed with respect to specific policies, events and political actors in the war. This also held true for Islamists, based upon contextual analysis of primary source material published from 1992 through 1995. The degree of understanding, nevertheless, appeared to vary significantly between, and even within Muslim communities. This was due essentially to either the presence or absence of Islamist elements.<sup>85</sup>

It is also worth noting, although perhaps self-evident, that Islamists did not attempt to affect foreign policy through formal channels because of their inherent distrust of the British government. Genuine engagement would have led to the damaging recognition that the government’s policies were not motivated by anti-Islamic animus. Additionally, Islamists knew that such interaction would have harmed their credibility on the “Muslim Street.”

### *Bosnia forgotten*

Why has Bosnia been ignored? The most likely explanation is that the Islamist reaction to Bosnia was not significant enough to warrant sustained attention, particularly within the media. After all, despite their inflammatory rhetoric and incredible displays of enmity, Islamists avoided the use of physical violence in Britain.

The government, on the other hand, simply failed to take the precursors of Islamism seriously. According to former CIA officer Marc Sageman, it ‘thought that all of its subjects were happily British’. He also blamed racism within the police

84 Telephone interview with Moazzam Begg (13th May 2008)

85 Telephone interview with Gina Khan (12th June 2008)

force because ‘it blinded them to something new in the Muslim communities. Young Muslims were seen as “brown-kids” and “troublemakers” and the police missed the coming of a new ideology’.<sup>86</sup>

A senior official of New Scotland Yard’s Counter-Terrorism Unit pointed out that police resources were ‘thin’ at the time. Whereas the Metropolitan Police’s anti-terrorism centre now contains approximately 1,300 officers, it consisted of only ninety before 2001. Consequently, during the Bosnian War, it was forced to focus its efforts on combating the Irish Republican Army, which was actually causing casualties and physical damage.<sup>87</sup>

Ironically, it took events outside of Britain to sound the alarm on the Islamist threat. From July through to October 1995, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) orchestrated a deadly series of bombings against the Paris regional train network. There was a sense of urgency, explained a former senior official of the Security Intelligence Service, because the group had also been using London as a ‘back base’, especially for the publication of Islamist literature.<sup>88</sup> But in the end, it was the GIA’s choice of lethal tactics that finally ‘brought Islamism home’ to Britain.<sup>89</sup>

### *A hypothetical*

How would British Islamists have reacted to an earlier intervention? This is a fascinating question, but most likely one that is impossible to answer with certainty. If the blasé response to the West’s proactive measures in Yugoslavia in 1999 is any indication, it seems that Bosnia would not have made the list of historical grievances. After all, an outright defence of Muslims would have been diametrically at odds with the Islamist worldview that the West is intrinsically

86 Telephone interview with Marc Sageman (17th June 2008)

87 Interview with senior official, New Scotland Yard, Counter-Terrorism Unit (20th May 2008, London, UK)

88 Interview with former senior official, Secret Intelligence Service (24th April 2008)

89 Interview with senior official, New Scotland Yard, Counter-Terrorism Unit (20th May 2008, London, UK)

anti-Islamic. Paradoxically, there is still the possibility that an intervention at the time of Bosnian “strength” could have been framed as an attempt to choke Muslim influence.

The Bishop of Rochester, Dr. Michael Nazir-Ali points out that a number of “grievances” cited by the Muslims in Britain might in fact have a legitimate basis. He adds, nonetheless, that the complaints often assume the position that ‘it is always right to intervene where Muslims are victims (as in Bosnia and Kosovo), and always wrong when they may be the oppressors or terrorists (as with the Taliban or in Iraq), even when their victims are also mainly Muslims’.<sup>90</sup> For example, the same Islamists who had adamantly contested intervention in the Gulf War positively couched the need for action in Bosnia in “humanitarian” terms. Yet following the intervention in the Balkans, Islamists completely revised their historical account. In a flimsy attempt to illustrate the so-called “double-standards” of Western foreign policy, Islamists then began to recall the West’s “rescue” of Muslims in Iraq but its “abandonment” of them in Bosnia.

Shiraz Maher, former northeastern director of Hizb ut-Tahrir, affirmed, ‘there will always be a grievance. And where there’s no grievance, Islamists manufacture a grievance’.<sup>91</sup> Islamists will simply find another conflict ‘as *cause belli* [sic] in the quest for the promised caliphate’, states Isaac Kfir, a senior researcher at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism.<sup>92</sup> ‘If the West pulled out of the Middle East tomorrow, what are these guys going to do?’ questioned Maher. ‘They’re not going to say, “Thanks very much, we’ll live in peace with you now.” They want the world’.<sup>93</sup>

90 Michael Nazir-Ali, ‘Multiculturalism is to blame for perverting young Muslims’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 15th August 2006, p. 16

91 Interview with Shiraz Maher (20th May 2008, London, UK)

92 Isaac Kfir, ‘Islamic Radicalism in Britain’, *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 6, No. 3–4. Fall & Winter 2007, p. 101

93 Interview with Shiraz Maher (20th May 2008, London, UK)

## Conclusion

*The London bombings and the anniversary of the massacre in Srebrenica... were two seemingly unrelated stories... Though separated by 10 years and 1,000 miles, the two are actually rather closely linked.*

(Zeyno Baran, Director, Center for Eurasian Policy, Hudson Institute)<sup>94</sup>

After 7th July 2005, it became clear that radical Islam was no longer just a spectre of foreign origin. Some were even quick to claim that the British Islamists’ reliance upon physical violence marked a new phase in the wider confrontation with the West. True, the attacks were unique because they were carried out at home. But they were not entirely unprecedented as, for more than a decade, British Islamists had played a crucial—and often deadly—role on the frontlines of the global jihad.

Throughout the Bosnian War, scores of radicalised British Muslims were combatants, fighting alongside Arab *muhajideen* and against Serbian forces. Although largely overlooked, British Islamist participation in international affairs continued after the signing of the Dayton Agreement, particularly in Chechnya and Kashmir.<sup>95</sup> In another instance, two years before the attacks in London, Omar Khan Sharif, who was raised in Derby, detonated a suicide device on the promenade in Tel Aviv, killing three civilians and wounding more than fifty.<sup>96</sup> In the midst of the Balkan conflict, he attended meetings held by HT while studying at King’s College London.<sup>97</sup>

In Britain, and perhaps Western Europe as a whole, Bosnia is the prime—yet least recognised—case for the study of domestic radicalisation. By framing government policies, both at home and abroad, as inimical to their religion,

94 Zeyno Baran, ‘Bosnia and Terrorism’, *The Baltimore Sun*, 25th July 2005

95 ‘British Muslims join holy war’, *BBC News*, 26th June 2000. <news.bbc.co.uk>

96 ‘Details of April 30 - 2003 Tel Aviv suicide bombing - 3 - Jun - 2003’, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 3rd June 2003. <www.mfa.gov.il>

97 Shiv Malik, ‘NS Profile – Omar Sharif’, *New Statesman*, 24th April 2006

Islamists succeeded in crystallising Muslim anxieties about personal security and integration. As a result, marginalised Muslims distanced themselves even further from British society. Those who were radicalised by Islamism came to identify with the Ummah, jihad and the re-establishment of the Caliphate.

It is also important to understand that Islamist groups have adjusted their overarching strategy to adapt to contemporary circumstances. While before they competed for influence, now they act in concert as an ‘Islamist alliance’, owing to increased security procedures and enhanced terrorism legislation. ‘They’ve always had a loose shell on them and now that they’ve been out in the cold’, stated Maher, ‘that shell has hardened and become stronger’.<sup>98</sup>

As a part of their alliance, Islamists adjusted the content of their narrative from that of the *Ummah* and the Caliphate to one of “social injustice.” This was done to deflect mainstream criticism and augment their base of support, particularly among non-Muslims.<sup>99</sup> Current conflicts, such as those in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kashmir and Israel-Palestine, are now framed, not by religion, but by international law, sovereignty and human rights. In other words, Islamists have tried to disguise their religio-political objectives with a flair of morality. This has yielded an intriguing alignment—given their stance on the rights of women and homosexuals, for example—with the political left. Yet even with the transition in means, the end has remained constant. British Islamists still ardently believe that the most pressing issue facing the Muslim world is the need to re-establish the Islamic state.<sup>100</sup>

98 Interview with Shiraz Maher (20th May 2008, London, UK)

99 Interview with Haras Rafiq (3rd June 2008, London, UK)

100 Interview with Shiraz Maher (20th May 2008, London, UK)

## Considerations and recommendations for policymakers

1. Domestic radicalisation in the UK must not be solely attributed to post-9/11 foreign policy. The West’s failure to halt Serbian aggression in Bosnia represented a crisis of morality to British Muslims, and for many, acted as an impetus to radicalisation. Thus, while there are certainly various connections between foreign policy and radicalisation, they are not as straightforward as often proclaimed by the media, policymakers and academics.
2. A full understanding of domestic radicalisation in Britain requires the recognition that it is a protracted process. The failure to consider Bosnia has limited the ability of policymakers and intelligence experts to appreciate the flexibility and creativity of jihadist narratives with respect to foreign policy.
3. Muslims are not affected by each and every international conflict in exactly the same way. British Muslims who were virtually unaware of the Soviet War in Afghanistan and indifferent to the Gulf War felt deeply threatened by the events that unfolded in the Balkans. The context of any conflict, which may involve geographical proximity as well as domestic affairs, should be measured and distilled with care.
4. Islamisation does not inevitably denote radicalisation. Individuals who participated in domestic demonstrations and events were not necessarily impelled to violence—or even convinced of the Islamist agenda. Similarly, not all of the British Muslim combatants in Bosnia were radicalised by Islamist propaganda.
5. The government must develop a greater appreciation of the connection between “home” and “abroad”. The success of Islamist propaganda depended upon their ability to create a parallel between the less-than-ideal conditions faced by British Muslims at home and the unspeakable conditions endured by Bosnian Muslims abroad. Hence, the government failed to consider even



overt displays of concern, such as campus events and neighbourhood marches, as evidence of a fundamental shift in public sentiment. Regrettably, the government missed the opportunity to develop a narrative to either pre-empt or counter vilifying accusations that fomented within Muslim communities across Britain.

6. Incentives must exist to help overcome institutional bureaucracy and reward creative thinking. A number of individuals within the government's security apparatus who were concerned with the building anxiety and frustration within British Muslim communities were blocked from attracting either an appropriate audience or adequate resources.

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ICSR is a unique partnership of King's College London, the University of Pennsylvania, the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya (Israel) and the Regional Center for Conflict Prevention at the Jordan Institute of Diplomacy. Its aim and mission is to bring together knowledge and leadership to counter the growth of radicalisation and political violence. For more information, see [www.icsr.info](http://www.icsr.info)

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