

Ties that Bind

How the story of Britain's
Muslim Soldiers can forge
a national identity

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About the Author

Shiraz Maher is a Senior Research Fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), Kings College London. He is currently writing an intellectual history of al-Qaeda, exploring the development of its political thought by drawing on hitherto unexamined material. Prior to joining ICSR, Maher worked as a Senior Fellow at Policy Exchange.

Maher was previously a journalist reporting on terrorism, radicalisation and the Middle East. He has interviewed members of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia for the BBC and has embedded with the Pakistan Army, accompanying them on missions against the Pakistani Taliban in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas along the Afghan border. Most recently he reported on the Egyptian revolution, spending time in Tahrir Square with protesters and opposition leaders.

He is on the advisory board of the Institute for Middle East Democracy, and Student Rights, a non-partisan group dedicated to supporting equality, democracy and freedom from extremism on university campuses.

Maher holds degrees in History from the University of Leeds, and Cambridge University.

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Contents

	Acknowledgements	5
	Executive Summary	6
	Introduction	7
1	Muslims in the World Wars	13
	First World War	13
	Recruiting for war	13
	Supporting the troops: The Indian Comfort Fund	21
	Fighting spirit and motivation: Sepoys in the trenches	23
	Between Caliph and Crown: Turkey enters the war	27
	Silk letters: dissent and mutiny	38
	Their name liveth forevermore: Remembering the fallen	42
	Second World War	44
	Indian Muslims, Congress and the looming war	44
	Recruiting for war and military modernisation	46
	Conclusion	56
2	British Muslims and Barriers to Entering the Armed Forces	60
	Barriers to entry: practical arguments	60
	An ‘ummah consciousness’	60
	Loyalty and treason: the debate today	64
	‘War on Islam’	66
	Barriers to entry: Theological arguments	69
	The Army	69
	The Police	72
	The Security Service	74
3	Conclusion – Reviving Muslim Service in the Armed Forces	77
	Muslim attitudes to the armed forces	78
	Fears of racism and discrimination	79
	Guarding against infiltration	81
	Religious ‘gatekeepers’	85
	Appealing directly to Muslims	89
	Reviving the historical record of service	92
	Appendices	94
	Appendix 1: Citation of Sepoy Ali Haider for a Victoria Cross	94
	Appendix 2: Indian Army Muslim Victoria Cross awards during the First World War	95

Appendix 3: Indian Army Muslim Victoria Cross awards during the Second World War	95
Appendix 4: Muslim George Cross winners	95
Bibliography	96

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Executive Summary

Muslims have a long and distinguished record of service in the British armed forces. But, in recent years, this history has been lost amidst the competing narratives of the far right and hardline Islamists. These two blocs are united in their assertion that a good Muslim cannot be a loyal Briton. This runs in the face of a collective past.

During the two World Wars:

- Indian Muslim leaders successfully defined the conflicts as political in nature, not religious.
- Indian Muslim leaders successfully counteracted the propaganda of Germany, the Ottoman Empire and pan-Islamists, which sought to portray fighting for Britain as a betrayal of Islam.
- Even after the entry of the Ottoman Empire into the First World War on the side of Germany, the vast majority of Muslims serving in the British armed forces remained loyal to the Allies' cause.
- The British military and politicians sought to provide for the spiritual and cultural needs of Muslim servicemen.
- The British military and politicians went to great lengths to prove that the Empire was in no way involved in a religious conflict with Islam.

However, this proud record is in danger of becoming a forgotten footnote of British history. It needs to be revived in a contemporary context if we are to escape the binary and exclusivist messages that can isolate British Muslims from our armed forces.

- The Government must continue to work hard to counter the divisive messages of Islamists and the far right – which assert that the possession of Islamic beliefs is a barrier to pursuing a career in the armed forces.
- The notion that Britain is at war with Islam needs to be confronted. The Government should offer a counter-argument that refers to those occasions in which the British military has acted in defence of Muslims – and Muslims in defence of Britain.
- The MoD should vigorously promote the lifelong skills and qualifications that an armed forces career can offer.
- The armed forces must continue to meet the spiritual needs of its servicemen and women. But there should be less consultation with self-appointed community groups from outside the military structure over the appointment of faith-specific chaplains. Anyone involved in the religious affairs of the armed forces must have sufficient experience of life in the military.
- The MoD should update its recruitment techniques. It should engage Muslims directly and not through 'gatekeeper' organisations.
- The heroic record of Commonwealth soldiers in the two World Wars should be more fully reflected in the history curriculum.

Introduction

‘Like that, I think you cut it off like you cut a pig. Then you put it on a stick and we say, this is to all Muslims, man, we likes to, we want to join the Kuffar army, this is what will happen to you. Then we throw the body, burn it, send the video to the chacha [uncles, a term for Mujahideen leaders in Afghanistan or Pakistan]. The chacha can release it there. These people gonna go crazy.’¹

This is the transcript of the conversation of Parviz Khan with a friend in November 2006 – signalling his intention to decapitate a fellow-Muslim for serving in the ‘infidel’ British armed forces. Khan was subsequently convicted of conspiracy to kidnap this soldier,² with the intention of seizing the soldier from Birmingham’s city centre and holding him hostage in a garage, before killing him and filming the act. The plan was eventually thwarted after West Midlands Police arrested Khan along with other members of the cell – but the damage he hoped to cause was already done.

The plot plunged certain parts of the British Muslim community into fear, particularly those who choose to integrate and identify themselves as British. It marked a profound shift in the tactical behaviour of al-Qaeda inspired terrorists in Britain, too. Conventional acts of terrorism rely on their indiscriminate nature to breed a generalised sense of fear – the idea that any of us could be the random victim of a terrorist attack. But this plot was different. It was not indiscriminate. Instead, it deliberately sought out and targeted those Muslims who were deemed to have abandoned or ‘betrayed’ their faith simply because of their support for their own country.

This kind of attitude had previously manifested itself on the streets of Baghdad – but never in Britain. Following the allied invasion of Iraq and the removal of Saddam Hussein, scores of young Iraqis were killed in suicide bombings that targeted either those who voted or else those who joined the Iraqi security forces. The terrorists reasoned that anyone who participated in the civil infrastructure of post-Saddam Iraq was automatically endorsing the Allied invasion. They were immediately guilty of apostasy – and thus deserving of death.

The animosity that Parviz Khan harboured for Muslims who joined the armed forces is borne of an Islamist worldview and the belief that Britain is at war with Islam. The controversies surrounding military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq have only fuelled this perception among certain Muslims, prompting a minority to sometimes cheer the deaths of British servicemen. In 2007, Mizanur Rahman was one of four men to be convicted in relation to the angry protests held outside the Danish Embassy following the publication of cartoons which satirised the Prophet Mohammed. Remarkably, Mizanur Rahman’s anger was not just directed against Danes, but also against British soldiers in Iraq. He was filmed screaming into a loudspeaker at the rally saying: ‘We want to see their blood running in the streets of Baghdad. We want to see

1 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7242891.stm>

2 http://cps.gov.uk/news/press_releases/107_08/

the Mujahideen shoot down their planes the way we shoot down birds. We want to see their tanks burn in the way we burn their flags'.³ Ever since then, Islamist cheerleaders have become increasingly vocal in their denunciation of the British Army.

Recognition of soldiers' achievements after a difficult campaign in the Middle East – and with another continuing in Afghanistan – has meant that servicemen returning from tours of duty are now greeted by applause from crowds of well-wishers. Inspired partly by American homecoming parades, this outpouring of public affection marks a dramatic break from the past when the lives of British soldiers were hidden from public attention – including a prohibition against the wearing of military fatigues outside of barracks – for fear of terrorist attacks by the IRA.

However, for the troops of the Royal Anglian Regiment, after months of difficult service in Iraq and with some of their fellow servicemen lost in battle, there was one last insult awaiting them on their return on 10 March 2009. Despite a massive crowd welcoming the men back as they marched through Luton, a small group of Islamist protesters disrupted their homecoming. Holding placards and banners, the group denounced them as 'war criminals' and the 'butchers of Basra', shouting that they should 'go to hell'.

The backlash was furious. Not only did well-wishers at the Luton homecoming immediately turn on the group, but an organisation calling itself the English Defence League (EDL) later grew as a direct result of those protests.⁴ Since then, the English Defence League has succeeded in mobilising sizable crowds in several cities.⁵ The first of these was in Luton city centre just a few weeks after the Islamist protesters heckled the returning soldiers.

The Islamist demonstrations which marred the return of soldiers from the Royal Anglian Regiment constituted a watershed. There have been similarly galling occasions in the years since. The abortive protest march through Wootton Bassett planned by Anjem Choudary's Islam4UK caused great controversy in January 2010.⁶ More recently, members of Muslims Against Crusades heckled soldiers processing through Barking in June 2010⁷ and in the same year burned a model of a poppy on Remembrance Day.⁸ The idea that soldiers who risked their lives to defend the country should be abused on their return home handed both the English Defence League and British National Party (BNP) a golden opportunity.

Indeed, when General Sir David Richards (now Chief of the Defence Staff) announced plans to attract more Muslims to the armed forces in 2008, the BNP was highly critical of the initiative arguing:

Maybe the General [Sir David Richards] would like to explain to Keith Brown's family (along with too many others) who have had their husband and father murdered, by a Muslim, just why they should feel safer to know that whilst their grief is still raw, the British Army, will be training other Muslims in their area to become ever more proficient killers!

And whilst he's at it, General Richards might care to take a moment to explain to all those Britons who have lost loved ones fighting Muslims in Afghanistan, just how he can justify the British Army training Muslims, within Britain, to become better equipped to participate in a future Jihad – against the British people!!!!⁹

3 See: http://www.cps.gov.uk/news/press_releases/145_07/index.html; and <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6904622.stm>

4 <http://englishdefenceleague.org/about-us/mission-statement/>

5 <https://englishdefenceleague.org/news>

6 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/jan/10/islam4uk-cancels-wootton-bassett-march>

7 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10324027>

8 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/8126357/Muslims-clash-with-police-after-burning-poppy-in-anti-Armistice-Day-protest.html>

9 <http://bnp.org.uk/2008/07/muslims-to-be-wooded-into-british-army/>

Later, when the Armed Forces Muslim Association was launched in October 2009, another prominent website linked to BNP members and supporters called ‘Green Arrow’ similarly lambasted the presence of Muslims in the armed forces. Describing Islam as ‘the cult of the dead paedophile’, the article said ‘no true Brit’ would ever feel safe

...with a bunch of moslems [sic] whose loyalty is not towards **Our Country** but to a dead pervert...¹⁰

The Green Arrow website is not on the outer fringes of the BNP. Detailed analysis by the anti-fascist campaign group, Nothing British about the BNP, reveals that the Green Arrow author was a ‘welcome guest’ of the Bridgend BNP in December 2008.¹¹ The website has also been used to publicise the views of individuals such as Bill Murray, former secretary of the Welsh BNP who left the party to become director of Soldiers off the Street.¹²

Of course, the views of the BNP and their supporters find little traction with the vast majority of people. But the campaign which delivered a measure of electoral success to the BNP during the European elections in June 2009 focused on – in part at least – an anti-Muslim platform which exploited these fears.

Such concerns will only have been exacerbated by the Fort Hood shootings carried out in November 2009 by a Muslim serviceman, Major Nidal Malik Hasan, in the United States Army. Expressing radical beliefs and making contact with Anwar al-Awlaki – an al-Qaeda theoretician – Hasan’s activities did attract the attention of the FBI, although no action was taken.¹³ Hasan later betrayed his comrades and countrymen by killing 13 people and injuring a further 30 at the Fort Hood base in Texas. It prompted widespread debate and concern, among both Muslim and non-Muslim communities, about the place of Muslims in the armed forces of western countries.

Those concerns are very real – and widely held across the country. For example, Gallup, a global opinion research company, and the Coexist Foundation, which is a UK-based charity promoting better understanding between Abrahamic Faiths, teamed up to create the Muslim West Facts Project (MWFP). It aimed to ‘disseminate the findings of the Gallup World Poll to key opinion leaders in the West and Muslim world’.¹⁴

Polling conducted by the MWFP in 2009 revealed the chasm between the perception of the British public as a whole, compared to that of British Muslims regarding the question of whether Muslims are loyal to this country (see figure 1 below).¹⁵ Almost half of the general public (49 percent) do not believe Muslims are loyal citizens, compared to 82 percent of British Muslims who believe that British Muslims are loyal – revealing a marked disjuncture between the way Muslims and the wider community view the former.

Despite the loyalty most Muslims feel towards Britain, there is an apparent scepticism and perceived lack of belonging where the armed forces are concerned (see Table 6, page 78). The armed forces today need to better communicate their message, by demonstrating the long-standing record of service which Muslims have rendered to this country since they first joined the forces of the East India Company in 1757.¹⁶ A letter in October 2009 signed by three former Chiefs of the General Staff – Lord Guthrie, General Sir Mike Jackson, General Sir Richard Dannatt – and Major General Patrick Cordingley, who previously led the 7th

10 <http://www.thegreenarrow.co.uk/index.php/writers/arrow-straight/335-armed-forces-muslim-association-launched>; (emphasis from original article retained)

11 <http://www.nothingbritish.com/10/bnp-blog-condemns-the-contribution-of-muslim-servicemen/>

12 Ibid.

13 Protecting the Force: Lesson from Fort Hood, Report of the DoD Independent Review (January 2010); Also see: <http://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/investigation-continues-into-fort-hood-shooting>

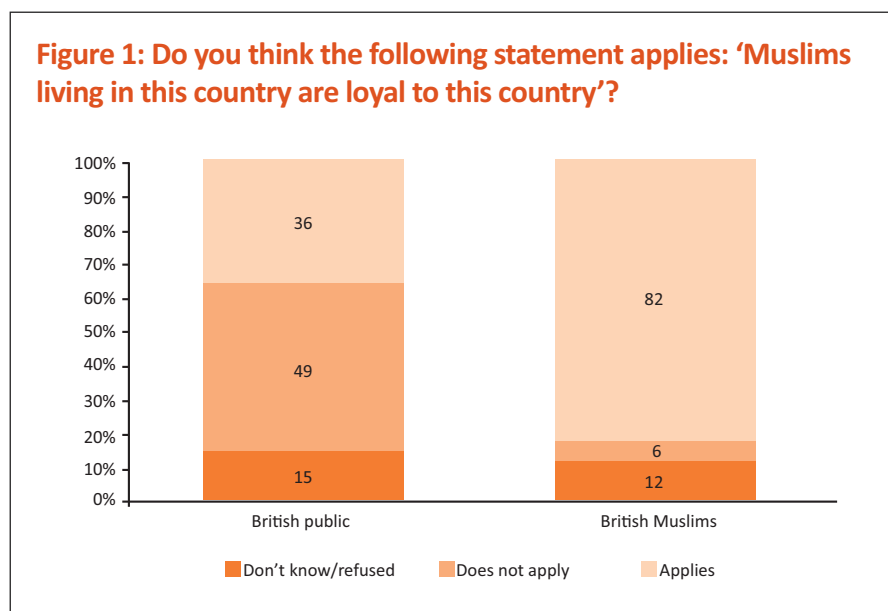
14 www.muslimwestfacts.com. See also: <http://www.euro-islam.info/2009/05/15/the-gallup-coexist-index-2009-a-global-study-of-interfaith-relations/>

15 The Gallup Coexist Index 2009: A Global Study of Interfaith Relations (Gallup, 2009) p.20

16 David Omissi, Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army 1860-1940 (London, 1994)

Armoured Brigade (Desert Rats) in the first Gulf War, went some way towards addressing this.¹⁷ Their letter called on the BNP to ‘cease and desist’ from hijacking ‘the good name of Britain’s military’. It continued:

Commonwealth soldiers, who comprise about 10% of the Services, represent an invaluable contribution to the success of Britain’s military, both in history and the current day. Many have won the highest awards.¹⁸



Popularising the record of Muslim servicemen who fought for Britain in the First and Second World Wars is one of the ways the armed forces can undermine the canards of the BNP – while reconnecting with British Muslims and encouraging them to consider military careers.

It is a remarkable fact that hundreds of thousands of Muslims volunteered to fight for Britain during the First and Second World Wars. In 1914 they even fought the ostensible Muslim power of the day – the Ottoman Empire – with whom it was feared their loyalties might lie. Why did they choose to fight for Britain? What motivated them? And how did they reconcile the competing demands on their loyalty – between a King who required their services, and an Ottoman Sultan who, as Caliph, demanded their loyalty as the successor to the Prophet Mohammed and leader of the Muslim community?

Of course, it was not just Muslims who volunteered. During the Great War, over one million men from across the Commonwealth enlisted for the British war effort from territories as far and wide as the British West Indies to Egypt; from the Indian subcontinent to Mauritius, Fiji and China.¹⁹ Hindus, Sikhs and others from within the Indian Empire played their own particular distinguished parts in this record of service. But their role in the service of the Crown is not contested today, either from within or without their own communities, in the same way as is that of Muslims. That is why a renewed focus on what really happened to Muslims in past conflicts holds so much of the key to their future participation in our national life.

The effect of 9/11 on Muslim identity in the West has been acute, causing many to regard the relationship between their creed and country as being in

17 *Stolen Valour: How the forces of extremism and racism are hijacking the good name of Britain’s military, and what needs to be done to stop them*, edited by James Bethell. See: www.nothingbritish.com/StolenValour.pdf

18 *Ibid.*

19 http://www.wewerethere.defencedynamics.mod.uk/ww1/background_ww1.html

conflict. A study produced in 2009 by the Department for Communities and Local Government, entitled ‘The Pakistani Muslim Community in England: Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities in England’, found:

Young people consulted for the study defined being British as an essential part of their identity...however, according to young respondents, the identity issue has become very critical post 9/11 and 7/7...[Some] feel unsupported by the British system and culture, and [are] made to feel like strangers in what they consider as their home.²⁰

Yet the challenges facing young Muslims today are not unprecedented. They existed even more acutely almost a century ago, when the Ottoman Caliph claimed suzerainty over all Muslims. When the Sultan sided against Britain in the Great War, there were real fears that Muslims in the Indian Army might rebel. They did not. Instead, Indian Muslims were largely able to manage, almost seamlessly, these supposedly competing claims for their allegiance. There are important lessons contained in that history for British Muslims, the State, and wider society. Popularising their story, particularly in the context of their military contributions, almost invariably reveals episodes of selfless sacrifice and valour.

Such examples need not always be that distant, either. In 2006, Lance-Corporal Jabron Hashmi was killed after suffering injuries in a Taliban rocket attack on his Platoon House in Helmand. He is the only British Muslim serviceman to have died in combat since 2001. I visited the Hashmi family at their home in Birmingham in 2009 and interviewed Jabron’s older brother Zeeshan, who also served in the armed forces, completing two tours of duty in Afghanistan. Lost among rows of anonymous terraced housing in Small Heath, an area with a large Muslim population, Zeeshan and his sister, Zoubia, told me about their brother over cups of coffee.

‘[Jabron] went to Afghanistan hoping to build bridges between the East and the West. He combined his love of Islam with the love of Britain and his main reason for joining the army was to make a difference. He certainly did that’, Zeeshan said.²¹ Jabron’s commitment is something that the family is keen to honour. Two beaming pictures of him dressed in full military regalia with a glowing smile have pride of place in their living room, alongside copies of the Quran and rolled-up prayer mats.

Both brothers were born in Pakistan’s lawless North-West Frontier Province. After moving to Britain in 1994, they completed their education before enrolling in the armed forces. ‘I chose to be here’, Zeeshan said, ‘and we should be like anyone else and give back to our society in whatever way, whether it’s joining the army or the civil service or being a doctor – that’s up to you’.²²

Zeeshan was most keen to point out the significance of Jabron’s death. Coming just days before the first anniversary of the July 7 attacks, he contrasted the positive contribution that young Muslims can make with the horrors which a small minority have sometimes perpetrated. ‘We all have to break the barriers ourselves. Jabron’s death reflects on Muslims generally, not just my family’, he said. ‘Being Muslim does not restrict us from bring British’.²³ Yet significant segments of Muslim opinion believe it does. This pamphlet explores why such controversy surrounds Muslim participation in the armed forces today – and how this particular tradition of Muslim service can once again be revived.

²⁰ *The Pakistani Muslim Community in England: Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities* (Department of Communities and Local Government, March 2009), p.37. DCLG produced 14 different reports, each examining a different ethnic Muslim group.

²¹ Shiraz Maher, ‘My brother died for Britain and Islam says family of first soldier to be killed fighting the Taliban’, *Sunday Times*, 10 February, 2008. See: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article3341040.ece>

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*



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Muslims in the World Wars

First World War

At the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, India was still a largely rural, agrarian and unindustrialised society with low literacy rates. However, the presence of military scribes who wrote letters on behalf of sepoys – Indians who served as infantry privates in the British Indian Army – has ensured a rich seam of written source material is available to historians of the period. And these scribes were busy men. Estimates suggest that during March 1915, Indian soldiers were writing as many as 10,000-20,000 letters per week.²⁴ These letters are examined along with a broader exploration of the intellectual life of Indian Muslims, illuminating the depth of their relationship with the British state.

Recruiting for war

Even before war was formally declared on 4 August 1914, the Indian Army – the consolidated military force of the British Raj in India during the last half-century before partition – was put on heightened alert as conflict in Europe looked increasingly unavoidable. Four days after hostilities finally started, the Indian Army began full mobilisation and within weeks the first soldiers were arriving in active theatres of war. It was a shock to the system for the sepoys who suddenly found themselves in distant and unfamiliar lands. The

“Four days after hostilities finally started, the Indian Army began full mobilisation and within weeks the first soldiers were arriving in active theatres of war”

British Army in India was also struggling because it lacked a recruitment policy (unchanged since the aftermath of the Indian Mutiny in 1857) that could keep up with the demands of the Great War. When the Mutiny occurred, the standing power of the Indian Army was just over 200,000 soldiers, compared to just under 40,000 British.²⁵ The bulk of these men had been drawn from just three Indian presidencies – the name by which some of the administrative units of British India were known – including Bombay, Madras and the Bengal. British policy subsequently changed, concentrating more on men from the Punjab, North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Nepal, who, it was hoped, would prove more loyal. By the time the Great War started, the shift in areas targeted for recruitment by the Indian Army was remarkably noticeable as shown in the table below.²⁶

24 David Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters 1914-1918* (London, 1999) p.7

25 Barbara Metcalf and Thomas Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India* (Cambridge, 2006); Also see: David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, chapter 1

26 This is compiled from data adapted from, Omissi, *Sepoy and the Raj*, p.11; and L/MIL/7/5483, IOR, BL, London. Note that percentages have been rounded up and therefore do not add up precisely.

Table 1: Regional origin of Indian Army recruitment expressed as percentage of total, 1862-1914

Region	Year			
	1862	1885	1892	1914
Hindustan east of the Yamuna (including the UP and Bihar)	21.4	16.4	13.0	12.4
Bombay (including Rajputna and Central Indian provinces)	22.9	21.3	22.6	14.8
Madras	30.5	26.2	21.7	9.0
Nepal, Punjab and NWFP	25.2	36.1	43.0	63.6

The received wisdom after the Mutiny was that regional recruitment should be ‘balanced’, thus limiting the risk of rebellion if one province was subverted; and that the size of India’s army should be reduced. The Army’s shift in emphasis towards predominantly north-western regions was principally motivated by the fear that India would soon have to defend itself against a Russian invasion. In the late nineteenth century, Russian power continued to seep southwards, most notably with the capture of Samarkand. Fear of that confrontation prompted Lord Roberts (then a Lieutenant-General) to emphasise recruitment from the Punjab and NWFP, whose men he regarded as being among the most ‘warrior like’ in India. It was an idea that ultimately gave rise to the ‘martial races’ theory which suggested that certain groupings, due to their ethnic and genetic composition, made better soldiers. London embraced the idea, with the Eden Commission Report on the Indian Army reporting to Parliament that ‘the Punjab is the home of the most martial races of India and is the nursery of our best soldiers’.²⁷ It ensured that the new Indian Army recruited particularly heavily from the northern and north-westerly regions of the country. Those areas that did attract the attention of military recruiters often became intensely loyal and receptive to British rule – reaping the benefits that service to the Raj often brought.

By 1914, the Muslim population of British India was 57 million, of which eighty percent was concentrated in the northern regions from the Bengal in the east to the Punjab and NWFP in the west.²⁸ The table below gives an indication of just how heavily recruitment was focused on these regions during the early stages of the war.²⁹

Table 2: Regional recruitment to the Indian Army of active combatants, 1914 – 1916

Region	Year			
	1914	1915	1916	Total
Punjab	14000	46000	50000	110000
NWFP	3000	6000	5000	14000
Nepal	3000	14000	15000	33000
Rest of India	8000	28000	32000	68000
Total	28000	93000	104000	225000

27 Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, p.12

28 Yuvraj Prasad, *The Indian Muslims and World War I: A Phase of Disillusionment with British Rule, 1914-1918* (Delhi, 1985) p.43

29 Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj* p.39

However, the unrelenting demands of the Great War soon made the ‘martial races’ policy unsustainable and the social base of recruits was consequently expanded to include Kumaonis, Coorgs, Hill Brahmins, Gauris and Mahars – the Kumaonis and Mahars gaining themselves an esteemed place in the Indian Army after 1918, having been previously rather overlooked by ‘martial races’ recruitment policies. Groups previously considered ‘incapable’ of being good soldiers were now drafted in to support the war effort. ‘Those classes who formerly never entered the Army are now being hustled into doing so’, a Muslim from Lyallpur wrote to a sepoy in the trenches.³⁰ This shift in recruitment policy also lightened the burden placed upon those rural communities from which ‘martial fighters’ were traditionally drawn. Coming from only a small number of villages and tribes, it was not unheard of for all the men of a particular village to supply almost all the recruits for a single regiment.³¹

This was acknowledged by the Indian mail censor’s office, which suggested maintaining morale on the home front by distributing newspapers there about events in France. Writing to the India Office in London, a Captain Howell reported:

*It is well known that certain regiments are almost entirely recruited from certain districts. In fact, the majority of regiments are more or less closely connected with one or two particular districts. I do not see that there would be any great difficulty about supplying the newspapers in those districts with the casualty lists of the local regiments and other news about the share of those regiments in the war.*³²

Territorially biased recruitment of this kind, reminiscent of the formation of ‘Pals’ regiments, furthered the risk of entire generations being collectively lost and devastating specific communities. Yet, despite the rules being relaxed to allow for the recruitment of ‘non-martial races’, the first half of the war effort continued to be furnished principally by men from traditional sources, as illustrated in Table 2 (see p.14). Indeed, by the end of the war the Punjab had supplied around 360,000 men alone, of which just under half were Muslim.³³

The scale of the conflict was unprecedented. Peacetime recruitment only required around 15,000 men annually – about 75 per regiment. But the remorseless toll of the killing fields in Flanders and Mesopotamia ensured those annual figures were now insufficient to meet even the monthly demand for men. To sustain the scale of numbers needed for the Indian Expeditionary Forces in France and Mesopotamia, changes to the recruitment procedure were also needed to ensure a fresh and constant supply of recruits. The demands of the Great War meant that a more centralised recruitment strategy became unavoidable and the Indian Army was forced to abandon its existing policy of allowing individual regiments to recruit sepoys directly in accordance with their own needs. This had been a long favoured approach because it ensured that recruits felt a particular sense of attachment to their regiment, something reflected in the two oaths of allegiance they swore: the first to the King, and the second to their regiment. The regimental oath was often the most meaningful part of a soldier’s pledge because, although notions of loyalty to the King ran deep, he remained a distant figure to many Indians with whom they could not easily identify.³⁴ Their regiment was, by contrast, comprised of their own countrymen and formed an integral part of their daily routine.

³⁰ Ibid, p.38

³¹ Indian Mail Censor’s Office, Boulogne, 27th November 1915, Censor of Indian Mails, 1914-1918, L/MIL/5/828/64, IOR, BL, London

³² Indian Mail Censor’s Office, Boulogne, 27th November 1915, Censor of Indian Mails, 1914-1918, L/MIL/5/828/64, IOR, BL London

³³ Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj* p.39

³⁴ T. A. Heathcote, *The Indian Army: The Garrison of British Imperial India 1822-1922* (London, 1974)

extremely labour intensive and risked diverting otherwise able soldiers from more pressing duties – prompting the Indian government to enlist the support of its volunteers, pensioners, provincial officials and policemen, to help with recruitment.³⁵

During the Great War, recruiting handbooks were issued to British subalterns to make the process easier, which provided a brief survey of all the major Indian religions along with practical and cultural advice – including information on festivals, ceremonies, village life, food and dress.³⁶ The ‘handbook programme’ actually predated the First World War and grew out of a struggle between Field Marshal Roberts and Brigadier General Arbuthnot over the ‘martial races’ theory – with the latter being opposed to it. Roberts was utterly committed to the doctrine and believed the entire success of British rule in India would rest on whether the ‘martial races’ theory was formally adopted by the Army. To bolster his position, he initiated the ‘handbook programme’ which began the process of meticulously and systematically cataloguing all the different ‘martial races’. After Roberts succeeded in championing his theory, the handbooks became a regular part of military recruitment and were therefore easily adapted to cope with the increased demand for men during the Great War. Indeed, one of the features behind the decision to target certain ‘warlike’ indigenous groups was the fear that, left unemployed, they would create trouble for the Raj.³⁷ The jockeying for position between Roberts and Arbuthnot was beneficial for the Indian Army too, forcing the government of India and military officials to give extended and careful consideration to the best methods for recruiting sepoy. One obvious rule which the handbooks stated was that locals supporting the Recruiting Officer had to be of the same caste and ethnic background as those they were trying to recruit. The handbook demanded:

*Men of good stamp and physique, and smart in appearance, should alone be selected, as these points influence a desirable recruit. A slovenly recruiter generally brings in recruits of his stamp, and gives the regiment a bad name in the district.*³⁸

Recruiting teams would normally be sent away for periods of 4-6 weeks by the Central Recruiting Directorate, during which time they were expected to immerse themselves within the communities from which they hoped to draw recruits. These teams would be supervised by a Recruiting Officer and his assistant who would typically spend six months on a recruiting tour of duty. Their role was to oversee the recruiting teams and also gather more specialised information on the localities in which they were operating. Thus, they were charged with gaining ‘a greater insight into their habits, customs and peculiarities’.³⁹ They were also responsible for creating relationships with leading civil officials in each district, who ‘often assist them to obtain a good class of recruit and to establish a connection’.⁴⁰ The handbook stressed that the following points should be impressed by the Recruiting Officer upon a recruiting party:

1. That they are entirely responsible that the men they bring in are of the right class, and that they should obtain a verification of the recruit’s statement from the village headman.

³⁵ Recruiting in India before and during 1914-1918, L/MIL/17/5/2152, IOR, BL, London.

³⁶ There is an entire series of ‘recruiting handbooks’ which outline the religious and cultural sensitivities of India’s different ethnic groups. These are held in the collection L/MIL/17/5/2155-2168, IOR, BL, London.

³⁷ Kaushik Roy, ‘Recruitment doctrines of the colonial Indian Army: 1859-1913’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 1997, Vol. 34, No. 3, pp.321-354

³⁸ *Recruiting Handbook for Hindustani Musalmans and Musalmans of the Eastern Punjab*, compiled under the orders of the Government of India by Major W. Fitz G. Bourne (Tenth Jats) Late Recruiting Officer for Hindustani Musalmans (Calcutta, 1914) p.28 L/MIL/17/5/2159, IOR, BL, London.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p.27

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.27

2. That it is far better to bring in a few good recruits than a number who are below or who only just come up to the required standard.
3. That they are entirely under the orders of the Recruiting Officer and are to look upon him as their Commanding Officer as long as they are out recruiting.
4. That the rejection of unsuitable recruits militates against recruiting in the districts from which they come.

The attention of Commanding Officers was also drawn to more pragmatic matters such as the need to appreciate the harvest season. While a bad harvest might inspire a large number of recruits, 'a good year may restrict the number of recruits available'.⁴¹ Similarly, it advised that villagers should not be approached during times of intensive ploughing, sowing and harvesting when parents would be less willing to lose the services of their son. Even so, men from rural areas were stereotypically favoured over those from cities because 'it cannot be disputed that the town Musalman is not a suitable man for the Army, being usually the possessor of all sorts of vices'.⁴²

The handbooks were rather detailed, a testament to the importance the Raj and military officials placed on recruiting what they considered to be the highest calibre of men. Careful attention and analysis was given to the composition and quirks of Indian society, furnishing recruiters with the knowledge base to help them connect with those communities from which they hoped to win recruits. The handbook on recruiting Punjabi Muslims provides a remarkable insight into the British official perception of South Asian Islam in the early twentieth century, noting that the majority of Indian Muslims:

*...follow a Hinduised form of Islam which has adopted many practices and superstitions from Hinduism, due to the fact that all races which become domiciled in India merge eventually into the type of the native.*⁴³

Some aspects of the handbook's characterisation of South Asian Islam are inaccurate – for example, the Muslims to which it refers are not those who became 'domiciled in India', but were often converts from Hinduism and animistic beliefs to Islam. Yet the handbooks do reveal an important point about the kind of Islam practised by typical sepoys – and the 'barracks Islam' – that grew out of their military experience. The cultural and spiritual world of the typical Indian sepoy was grounded in mysticism, saintly intercession and the syncretisation of Islam and Hinduism. These recruits were largely illiterate and divorced from the bourgeois lives of their counterparts in big cities (whose comparative cosmopolitanism made them more inclined to follow secular and nationalist leaders). Rural Muslims were therefore often a more attractive proposition for the Indian Army than those in urban centres.

The result of this focus on rural areas and Muslims who practised what might be termed 'folk Islam' is stark when contrasted against the experience of Muslim armies and leaders elsewhere. The Indian Muslim leadership which headed nationalist agitations for independence consisted of men such as Mahomed Ali, Shaukat Ali, Syed Ameer Ali and Muhammad Ali Jinnah. None had any military experience.

The contrast with other anti-colonial movements is noteworthy. For example, Egypt's nationalist uprisings were twice led by military leaders. Colonel Ahmed

41 *Ibid.* p.28

42 *Ibid.* p.47

43 *Ibid.* p.33



Copyright:(left) National Army Museum: 82nd Punjabis, Awan (Punjabi Musalman), 1908 (c)

Copyright (right) National Army Museum: Awan (Punjabi Musalman) Sepoy of the 30TH Punjabis, and a Lance Naik Malikdin Khel (Afridi) of the 20th Duke of Cambridge's Own Infantry, 1908 (c)

Orabi mobilised Egyptian nationalists against British forces during the battle of Tel el-Kebir in 1882;⁴⁴ and Gamal Abdel Nasser led the Free Officers Movement in the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. In Iran, Reza Shah overthrew the Qajar dynasty and took control of the country in 1925. Similarly, in 1924 Mustafa Kemal had established the modern Turkish state. Of course, none of them sought to establish an Islamist order but their nationalist aspirations reflected the politicised atmosphere of the cantonments in which they served. By contrast, the fact that no significant Muslim leader – nationalist or Islamist – emerged from the Indian Army is reflective of the depoliticised culture and ‘folk Islam’ of the ordinary sepoy serving in the Indian Army.⁴⁵

To support the new structures created by the Central Recruiting Directorate, Lieutenant General Hudson arranged for extra funds to be made available which were used to incentivise recruiters in their work. However, most of them refused to accept these bonuses, which allowed the Central Directorate to amass extra funds. These funds were later used to dispense gifts and organise collective entertainment for all recruiting officers.

As increasing numbers of men volunteered, regimental sizes grew with one extra *havildar* (sergeant) and *naik* (corporal) being added per 20 soldiers, and an additional *jemadar* (the lowest rank for a Viceroy's Commissioned Officer) per 114. Structural changes in military recruitment also affected civilian volunteers – sweepers, water carriers and cooks – for whom individual regiments were previously responsible. Responsibility now passed to the central authorities, which formalised their otherwise casual status and issued them a monthly salary. Sweepers were entitled to 5 rupees 8 annas a month, while water carriers and cooks received 6 rupees 8 annas.⁴⁶

The ferocity of the fighting on eastern battlefronts provoked fears that German and Ottoman forces might eventually try and stage a desperate attempt to invade

44 He was also known as Urabi Pasha. For more see: FO 78/3324 ff. 70-1, National Archives, London.

45 Nile Green, *Islam and the Army in Colonial India: Sepoy Religion in the Service of Empire* (Cambridge, 2009) p.14

46 Gordon Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches: The Indian Corps on the Western Front 1914-1915* (Gloucestershire, 2006) p.129

India. Although a long way from the main theatres of war, the Indian home front was not immune to the conflict. In 1914-1915, the south-eastern coast town of Madras came under sustained German shelling from the *Seiner Majestät Schiff* (SMS) Emden – a light cruiser from the Imperial Navy – causing death, injury and widespread damage to infrastructure.⁴⁷ Indians therefore wanted to create an army dedicated to pursuing their national interest, with one leader telling the Viceroy, ‘we rely upon you to defend us, but we see your great and numerous preoccupations elsewhere, and we want to learn how to defend ourselves and how to help you more’.⁴⁸

By April 1918, General Sir Charles Monro, the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, similarly felt a force was needed to safeguard India against the possibility of a German-Ottoman invasion. He consequently told London that he proposed to create two divisions, three infantry brigades, and six cavalry regiments for the specific purpose of defending India, which he planned to station just outside the Khyber Pass.⁴⁹ Disagreements continued between the War Office and Commander-in-Chief over whether this was necessary, although the latter persisted until it was easier for Whitehall to simply concede to his demands. In the meantime, India was also reassured that were it to suffer an attack, more troops would immediately be made available for its defence. Yet this was not the national army Indians had been hoping for and, as their requests continued to fall on deaf ears, the Viceroy acknowledged there had been ‘a marked diminution in the belief in our sincerity and honesty of purpose’.⁵⁰

Indians also resented the government’s refusal to award them commissions, even on a temporary basis.⁵¹ Most Indians were deemed by the British to be unfit to be officers, and there were fears that European soldiers might be unwilling to take orders from them. It accentuated fears among some Indians that they were fighting for an ungrateful Empire whose interests did not always match their own. They continued, however, to push for commissions throughout the war. In July 1917 the War Office warned:

*[The Army Council] have warned that to grant commissions to natives of India would entail a great risk from the military point of view, in that it involves placing native Indians in a position where they would be entitled to command European Officers.*⁵²

Yet by the following month, plans were agreed in principle for some Indian officers to be commissioned, although this did not actually happen until after the war was over. Shortly after the conflict ended, Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India, told Parliament that ‘commissions are going to be given to efficient soldiers, subject to His Majesty’s approval’, through one of four categories:

1. A certain number of substantive King’s commissions in the Indian Army to selected Indian officers who have specially distinguished themselves in the present War.
2. A certain number of King’s commissions conferring honorary rank in the Indian Army to selected Indian officers who have rendered distinguished service not necessarily during the present War, and who, owing to age or lack of educational qualifications are not eligible for substantive King’s commissions. Such honorary commissions will carry with them special advantages in respect of pay and pension.

⁴⁷ Geoffrey Bennet, *Naval battles of the First World War* (London, 1974)

⁴⁸ CAB/23/6, National Archives, London.

⁴⁹ CAB/24/50, National Archives, London.

⁵⁰ CAB/24/54, National Archives, London.

⁵¹ CAB/23/6, National Archives, London

⁵² Curzon papers on admission of Indians to the major ranks of the Army, Mss. Eur. F/111/442, IOR, BL, London.

3. A certain number of temporary but substantive King's commissions in the Indian Army to selected candidates nominated partly from civil life and partly from the Army.
4. A certain number of King's commissions to Indians on qualifying as cadets at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. For this purpose ten Indian gentlemen will be nominated annually during the War for cadetships.⁵³

Eleven commissioned officers were granted the King's commission shortly afterwards. By 1923, the figure had risen to just twenty three – far short of the 200 that Indians had hoped for.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the First World War was a catalyst for dramatic political and military change in the latter phase of the Raj, speeding up 'Indianisation'.⁵⁵

Supporting the troops: the Indian Comfort Fund

There was a clear sense within the Indian Army of the need to show respect and sensitivity for soldiers' feelings. The men were so far from home that it was important to pay particular consideration to their religious needs. If nothing else, these comforts would help them acclimatise to their new environment faster than would otherwise have been possible. Religious figures therefore featured as much as possible in the regiments, routinely blessing the men, their weapons and colours before battle. Commanding officers also developed close relationships with these religious figures who, although officially acting in only a pastoral capacity, were in fact vital catalysts in maintaining morale and developing inter-regimental solidarity.

Nonetheless, arriving in the trenches for the first time was an overwhelming experience. These conditions were exacerbated by an exceptionally sharp winter in 1914, coupled with poorly built trenches that often caved in. The men were also desperately under-equipped, and not suitably clothed for the winter rain, snow storms or icy conditions in which they found themselves.

To help Indian soldiers adjust to these demanding conditions, the Indian Soldiers' Comfort Fund (ISC) – a civilian charity – was established in October 1914 in England to supplement the official military provisions already being made for Indian men.⁵⁶ Primarily based in hospitals, the ISC administered care to Indian patients, supplied them with comforts, financial assistance and clothing, while also liaising with German and Ottoman officials when Indian troops were captured and taken as prisoners of war. The fund was led by British officials who had previously served in India, such as Sir John Hewitt, former Lieutenant Governor of the United Provinces. He served as chairman of the fund and was supported largely by former members of the Indian Civil Service, as well as Indians living in England. Lord Curzon, a former Viceroy, also supported the initiative by temporarily loaning his London residence to the ISC so they could transform it into their campaign headquarters. They collected donations from the general public, whose assistance helped the Indian Corps in France and Mesopotamia. Around £150,000 was raised through private donations and another £45,000 from businesses – a figure which the historian Gordon Corrigan suggests exceeds £5 million in real terms today.⁵⁷

During the first twelve months of conflict, the ISC sent over 78,000 pairs of socks, 12,000 balaclavas, 85,000 handkerchiefs and 850,000 envelopes; along

⁵³ *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, July 22, 1918, Vol. 108, cc1429-31

⁵⁴ CAB/24/52, National Archives, London.

⁵⁵ Pradeep Barua, *Gentlemen of the Raj: the Indian Army Officer Corps, 1817-1949* (London, 2003)

⁵⁶ Papers of the Indian Soldiers Fund established to provide comforts and clothing for Indian troops and prisoners of war in France and Mesopotamia during the First World War, Mss Eur F120, IOR, BL, London.

⁵⁷ Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches*, p.199

with 40 gramophones, 130 footballs, 125,000 pounds of sweets and a staggering 22,000,000 cigarettes.⁵⁸ As with the preparation of food, special care was taken to ensure that religious artefacts and scriptures were handled in accordance with religious laws. A letter from the ISC to Colonel Strachey at the India Office said:

...we have, during the past few months, received from India very large consignments of religious literature suitable for Mohammedans, for Sikhs and for Hindus.....In the case of the Qurans and the Granth Sahibs we took extreme precautions, in connection with the packing of these religious volumes, to ensure the susceptibilities of our Sikh and Mohammedan soldiers should not be offended. For the Qurans we employed the Secretary of the "All India Moslem League" in London, and the Maulvi of the Mosque at Woking, to do the packing and despatch.⁵⁹

Muslims were sent copies of the Quran of which there were around 900 in total, along with an additional 1400 extracts of key verses. Sikhs were given copies of their religious books too, as well as a steel bracelet, kara, comb, kirpan, and dagger, khanda – which they are required to wear at all times by Sikh religious law. These items came from Sheffield mills. Much of the money for this came from the ISC fund; but a large part was also donated by leaders from India, such as the Begum of Bhopal. Of course, communal violence was a constant feature of political life in India and the government was concerned that these rivalries might be replicated in military life. According to Gordon Corrigan, proselytising among soldiers was therefore banned and they were not permitted to change religion.

Providing for the spiritual welfare of soldiers on the frontlines was not just a cynical ploy to ensure their continued support. The ISC continued to campaign vociferously on behalf of all Indian soldiers – including those captured by the enemy – and was keen to supply them with humanitarian assistance where possible. Lord Curzon raised the question of their treatment in Parliament:

We have in this country a Committee, with which I am closely associated – the Indian Soldiers' Fund – which has raised, and which distributes, large sums of money for the sending out of comforts to our Indian soldiers at the Front and for the relief of the wounded at home. In our efforts to ascertain what we could do for the prisoners, we have since the beginning of the war succeeded in procuring only one list of Indian prisoners from the Prisoners of War Help Committee, a list which contained a little over 300 names. Apart from that we have been dependent entirely upon stray pieces of information which have reached us in letters from officers who are themselves prisoners in different parts of Germany. In such cases – lamentably few, as I admit they are – we have done what we could to send out relief and to provide remittances of money to these unhappy men.

[...] surely this obligation is one which ought not to rest on a private Committee, necessarily imperfectly supplied with information, but ought to be undertaken and discharged by the India Office itself.

[...] Amid the great issues with which we are dealing this matter may seem of small importance, but in India, it is of great importance indeed. I feel that I may, therefore, in addressing this appeal to the noble Marquess, address it, not merely to his humanitarian instincts, which alone, I think, would impel him to move, but to the larger interests of the State which are directly involved.⁶⁰

58 Ibid. Also see, Mss Eur F120, IOR, BL, London for a more thorough breakdown, although Corrigan consolidates the figures helpfully in his book.

59 Censor of Indian Mails, 1914-1918, L/MIL/5/828/25, IOR, BL, London

60 *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, May 18, 1915, column 1044

By spring 1915, the government had managed to collate the names of approximately 500 men being held captive by the Germans. The ISC continued to send them small food parcels and newspapers through the Swiss Red Cross, whose cooperation allowed the material to pass into German camps. Remarkably, some soldiers inside the prisoner of war camps continued to send letters to their regimental commanders through the Red Cross, explaining who had buckled under German questioning and what secrets had been given away. It demonstrated a remarkable and sustained commitment from these men who, despite capture, remained committed to the success of the Entente's war effort.

As the conflict drew to a close, the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, asked the Prime Minister, David Lloyd-George, to remember and reward the service of the sepoys. He discussed the possibility of awarding East African German Colonies to India for settlement, allowing Indian soldiers to be gifted land in a way that could not be done in their 'congested' homeland. He noted:

German East Africa does offer a possibility of free colonisation to Indians, and I must press the Cabinet in considering the disposal of German Colonies to consider this great Imperial question with utmost care. There is not in India a possibility of suitably rewarding with land a fraction of the soldiers who have placed their services at the disposal of the Empire, and it is land above all things that the Indian soldiers and peasants want...We shall be guilty of a grave dereliction of Imperial duty if we do not see that the Indian has some opportunity of Colonisation, arising out of the Indian partnership in this war.⁶¹

Fighting Spirit and Motivation: Sepoys in the trenches

What motivated these men to keep fighting? It is easy – and tempting – to dismiss the Indian Army as a purely mercenary force serving for pay and pension. Certainly, there are some for whom this was true; although, significantly, a letter from Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy from 1910 to 1916, to the Secretary of State for India, Lord Crewe, noted that Indian Army salaries were not much higher than what men on a basic agricultural or farming wage could expect.⁶²

For many, serving Britain was the honourable thing to do. In part this was bound up with social Indian conventions relating to *izzat* – honour. But for some, Muslim and otherwise, they also felt a religious duty to serve. In part this was a result of the post-Mutiny changes in the Army – which shrunk its size and made it highly selective, giving it an aura of exclusivity. One letter from a father in Sargodha to his son in the trenches said:

May God bring you back safe and sound! The Commissioner Sahib held a public Durbar on 22nd December. The Nawab Nurbazar Khan produced 100 recruits and the other leading residents of the district brought forward another 300. The Indian people are prosperous and are eagerly accepting service in the army, and they consider it a great privilege to help Government at such a crisis.⁶³

Some of the honour associated with military service derived from the opportunity it created for displaying courage, bravery and loyalty – traits that were highly valued in many Indian villages. Achieving and losing honour in these ways was only possible through the eyes of fellow sepoys, who understood an informal and unspoken code of conduct. Relatives back home were kept informed

61 CAB/24/67, National Archives, London.

62 CAB/24/54, National Archives, London.

63 From Sultan Mahomed Khan, Sargodha to Rissaidar Moh. Nur Khan, 36th Jacob's Horse, France (22nd February, 1918), Censor of Indian Mails 1914-1918, L/MIL/5/828/197, IOR, BL, London.

of achievements and would often encourage acts of heroism in their own letters to sons and brothers on the frontlines. Indeed, a letter sent from the Punjab to relatives in the 41st Dogras warned:

“Some of the honour associated with military service derived from the opportunity it created for displaying courage, bravery and loyalty – traits that were highly valued in many Indian villages”

Now, indeed, is the opportunity of showing your worth to Government. If you betray any cowardice, weakness or disloyalty you will be forever dishonoured and disgraced. The man who fears on the battlefield, or displays any pusillanimity, is sure to be killed. Dulce et decorum est pro patri mori...I will be delighted if any one

of you (names mentioned) displays great bravery, and makes a name for himself amongst his countrymen and before the Government. God has afforded you a splendid opportunity to display your loyalty.⁶⁴

Of course, the question must be asked – why did Indians under the Raj regard it as an honourable thing to serve the King? Again, the letters written by men in the trenches seldom give uniform reasons. Motivations are rarely homogenous and linear. However, some Muslims believed it was their religious duty to serve, as this letter from a father to his son in the 6th Cavalry explains:

It is our duty to serve the Government with our lives and property, for the King is the shadow of God. He who does not serve his King is a thorough traitor. Pray that God may soon give us victory.⁶⁵



Copyright: Imperial War Museum (Q_056325): VCOs (Viceroy's Commissioned Officers) and other ranks of 129th Baluchis take aim in the trenches on the outskirts of Wyttschaete, Belgium.

64 Punjabi Muslim from Cavalry, Poonch State, Kashmir, to 41st Dogras, May 1915, Censor of Indian Mails 1914-1918, L/MIL/5/828/261, IOR, BL, London.

65 From Jemadar, 18th infantry, Hong Kong, to Sepoy, 6th Cavalry, France, Urdu, 13th December 1915, Censor of Indian Mails 1914-1918, L/MIL/5/828/80, IOR, BL, London

In addition, there was a confidence in the justness of Britain's cause that helped inspire an even greater sense of Muslim support for the King. One father told his son: 'We believe that our King George the V [sic], will secure victory, because whatever he does, is done according to right, and he is fighting this war for the cause of right and justice'.⁶⁶ Significantly, that letter was written in 1916, well after the Ottoman Empire entered the conflict against Britain and began imploring Muslims to revolt. It reveals that Muslim commitment was continuous during the war and remained undiminished, even when circumstances were difficult. The conviction of Muslim soldiers in the validity of Britain's cause was further demonstrated through their eulogising of fallen comrades. A letter from a Ressaidar – a mid-level rank in the cavalry and armoured units of the Indian Army – to the father of a man killed at Cambrai read:

Your son is a hero who has given his life for his King. He is not dead; he lives forever. He has gone straight to Paradise, because that is the reward of death in the field of battle in the service of the King. He has in fact achieved in an instant that which saints can only hope to secure after many years of trial. Earthly love is a small thing compared with the joys of Paradise.⁶⁷

Military service also gave significance to Indian Muslim identity in nationalist politics. Muslim leaders would continually point to the high number of Muslims in the Indian Army when negotiating with British officials and used it to safeguard their position within Indian society against perceived threats from the Hindu majority.⁶⁸ Military wages also helped fund the building of mosques, seminaries and Sufi shrines throughout the Punjab and NWFP, and allowed those from otherwise peasant backgrounds to fund Hajj pilgrimages to Makkah and Madinah.⁶⁹

None of that mattered in the trenches, where the Indian Army had to pay particularly close attention to ways of maintaining the morale of Indian servicemen. One of the ways to achieve this was to ensure that, despite wartime food shortages, the different religious requirements of all the soldiers were observed. Some Jewish servicemen ate Kosher, including those from the Zion Mule Corps that fought in Gallipoli from 1915-16 and the HM Judeans (Royal Fusiliers) who served in Palestine from 1917-19;⁷⁰ Muslims ate halal; neither Jews nor Muslims ate pork; Hindus did not eat beef and the Brahmin were vegetarian.⁷¹ To make things harder, many of the men would only eat food prepared by their own caste, and with halal meats there were additional rituals which had to be observed to bless the slaughter. Although each Indian regiment had been responsible for employing its own cooks prior to the war, the Indian government now administered this centrally to ensure that cooks were sent where needed. Whenever temporary supply problems arose, meaning that the specific dietary requirements of the men could not be accommodated, they were supplied with a basic ration of rice, chappatis, lentils and vegetables.

However, the Indian Army's determined commitment to meet the dietary requirements of its men was widely appreciated – as revealed in David Omissi's authoritative collection of sepoy's letters. 'Believe me that they honour one of our soldiers to an extent of which we are not – and never could be – worthy', wrote one sepoy.⁷² Another told his parents: 'We are spending our days most comfortably here. We have every convenience for living and the best of food. In fact we are better off than we were in Rawalpindi!'⁷³

66 Punjabi Musalman from France, to Kashmir, 6th March 1916, Censor of Indian Mails 1914-1918, L/MIL/5/828/328, IOR, BL, London

67 Report based on statistics from December 1st 1917 to 20th March 1918, Censor of Indian Mails 1914-1918, L/MIL/5/828/170-175, IOR, BL, London

68 Muhammad Saleem Ahmad, *The All India Muslim League: a history of the growth and consolidation of political organisation* (Pakistan, 1988); Also see: Yuvaraj Deva Prasad, *The Indian Muslims and World War I: a phase of disillusionment with British rule, 1914-1918* (New Delhi, 1985)

69 Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, p.98

70 Martin Watts, *The Jewish Legion and the First World War*, (London, 2004). Consultations also with the Jewish Military Museum, AJEX – Assoc of Jewish Ex-Servicemen & Women.

71 Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches*

72 Shah Nawaz (Hindustani Muslim) to Signaller Daiyad Abdul Shah (Shahpur, Allahbad, UP), 1 September 1915 (135), in David Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War: soldiers' letters, 1914-18* (New York, 1999)

73 Mohammed Zabul Shah to Abdul Salam Shah (Farrukhabad, United Provinces) 28 November 1916 (449) in David Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War: soldiers' letters, 1914-18* (New York, 1999)

The Army also proved sympathetic to the desire of sepoy to practise their religious rituals, recognising the positive role spirituality played in many of the soldiers' lives. One of the military censors observed, 'the Indian soldiers, like most Orientals, value the minute observation of their religion far above anything else, and a few rupees expended on Qurans, extracts from the Granth, kirpans, Brahminical threads and the like would give more pleasure than a great deal of sweetmeats and tobacco'.⁷⁴ Special dispensations were therefore made for Muslim soldiers during the month of Ramadan to ensure they could fast between sunrise and sunset. 'The arrangements here to enable our people to keep Ramazan [fasting] are excellent. Colonel Southey Sahib – perhaps you know him – has made excellent arrangements and takes great trouble for us Muslims', wrote one sepoy, 'his arrangements for our food during the fast are very good, and he has put us all together in one place, because during the fast it is not easy to live with Sikhs and Dogras. I cannot describe how good his arrangements are'.⁷⁵ This was done by rotating the number of men through different regiments to ensure the soldiers had an opportunity to open their fast collectively, while provisions were also made to allow soldiers to offer supplementary Ramadan prayers at night – a move deeply appreciated by them.

It reflected the overall religiosity of these men who remained deeply committed Muslims, while maintaining a clear sense of their duty to the British Empire. Writing to his parents, a sepoy reassures them: 'I pray five times a day', adding that he observes halal meat, while another confided to finding it hard.⁷⁶ 'I have scrupulously performed all the necessary rites, prayer, charity and abstention from what is lawful; but the flesh is now beginning to assert itself.'⁷⁷ The men also appreciated receiving copies of Holy Scriptures which kept them motivated on the frontline. One of the Pathans serving in the trenches told another soldier, 'By all means get me a holy Qu'ran...make every effort to get me a holy Qu'ran. Never mind the price; I will pay it.'⁷⁸

Soldiers also wrote regularly to scholars in India asking them to settle disputes and clarify points of religious theology relating to their time in France.⁷⁹ The letters reveal a vibrant Muslim identity which successfully juggled worldly and spiritual demands, as illustrated by the obituary of sepoy Mohammed Khan: 'he was a very strict observer of every practice laid down for the orthodox Muslim and he was besides, God knows, a pattern of loyalty to the government'.⁸⁰

The importance of religion to many soldiers meant that religious festivals were always keenly observed with Eid prayers providing a rare opportunity for all the Muslim servicemen to gather together. Around 1500 soldiers offered Eid prayers in the trenches in July 1917, after which their non-Muslim counterparts joined them to share a celebratory meal of food, sweets and tea.⁸¹ The soldiers' letters make plain just how important these religious occasions were, injecting small bursts of joy into an otherwise dangerous and dreary experience. Commenting on his third Eid in France, Abdul Ali told his parents: '...[during the Eid service] prayers were offered for the victory of our King. After that we had sports and such a display of joy that I cannot describe it. All the [Generals] thanked us for what we had done, and now at midnight full of happiness I am sitting down to write this letter'.⁸²

This kind of camaraderie among troops was not uncommon. On Christmas Eve in 1914 a famous ceasefire was brokered between German and British forces. This included the sepoy who occupied frontline positions that night, too. Indeed, the proximity of the trenches meant that soldiers on opposing sides could, at times,

74 Omissi, *Sepoy and the Raj* p.101

75 Havildar Ghufuran Khan (Afridi, 129th Baluchis) to Subedar Zaman Khan (Depot, 129th Baluchis, Karachi, 43), 4 August 1915 (113) in David Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War: soldiers' letters, 1914-18* (New York, 1999)

76 Malik Sher Khan to Alam Sher Khan (Lyallpur, Punjab) 11 September 1916 (399) in David Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War: soldiers' letters, 1914-18* (New York, 1999)

77 Jemadar Abdul Khan to Hezrat Sahib Khanka Mujidali (Delhi, India) 20 February 1917 (490) in David Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War: soldiers' letters, 1914-18* (New York, 1999)

78 A Pathan to Sepoy Bahram Khan (40th Pathans, Brighton) 31 October 1915 (176) in David Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War: soldiers' letters, 1914-18* (New York, 1999)

79 Hayat Ali Khan (Punjabi Muslim) to Lance Naik Maulvi Talib Khan (129 Baluchis, Infantry Rail Head, France) 23 October 1915 (169); Also see(414), in David Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War: soldiers' letters, 1914-18* (New York, 1999)

80 Naik Buland Khan (Punjabi Muslim) to Mohammed Ashraf Khan, son of the late Subedar Gul Mohammed Khan (Peshawar, NWFP), 5 October 1915 (155) in David Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War: soldiers' letters, 1914-18* (New York, 1999)

81 Abdul Ali Khan (6th Cavalry) to Fazl Ali Khan (Multan, Punjab) 22 July 1917 (554) in David Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War: soldiers' letters, 1914-18* (New York, 1999)

82 *Ibid.*

communicate with each other over the rattle of gunfire and agree on periods of short respite. When the Christmas truce was brokered, British forces manned part of the line running south from the Ypres salient for 27 miles to the La Basse Canal. Soldiers shouted across the trenches to each other, met in no man's land, shared cigarettes and even sang Christmas carols together, although there was some dispute about which language they should sing in. German parapets were fitted with miniature Christmas trees. These were made of small pine cones and glowed behind candlelight when lined across the German trenches; these reminded Indian troops of Diwali, the Hindu festival of light.



Copyright: Getty Images (GettyImages_83513318): Indian troops serving with the British Army pray outside the Shah Jahn Mosque in Woking, Surrey, during the Muslim Festival of Baqrid, or Eid al-Adha, circa 1916

Soldiers on both sides of the divide also took the opportunity to compare their official Christmas gifts, sent courtesy of King George V and the Kaiser respectively. Tommies were rewarded with plum puddings and a 'Princess Mary box' – a small square case made of metal engraved with an outline of George V's daughter – which was filled with sweetmeats, chocolates, butterscotch, cigarettes and tobacco. There was also an accompanying picture of Princess Mary and a letter from King George wishing the troops a speedy victory – although the war was clearly not 'over by Christmas' as had been first anticipated. German troops were not forgotten either and were sent a large Meerschaum Pipe along with a box of cigars.⁸³

The soldiers received these measures with the good nature in which they were intended. There is substantial evidence from the censors' reports that these gifts and letters not only helped maintain morale, but also helped soldiers adjust to life in a new and hostile terrain. Gifts and concessions made them feel valued and allowed them a degree of individuality in the otherwise anonymous regime of trench life.

Between Caliph and Crown: Turkey enters the war

The situation for Muslim sepoy became more complicated three months after the war began when, on 7 November 1914, the Ottoman Empire entered the conflict and sided with Germany. This immediately provoked a flurry of activity in India, sparking a debate among Muslims – who now found themselves caught between Caliph and Crown. Mahomed Ali summed up the national mood in India,

⁸³ Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches* p.124-125

declaring, 'what was dreaded most by every Mussalman in India, and what had long kept them in a state of intolerable anxiety and suspense has at last come to pass. Great Britain is at war with Turkey'.⁸⁴

The government feared that Muslims in the Indian Army would either defect to the other side or just mutiny. Secular Indian nationalists also expected Muslims to rebel in large numbers and thought it an opportune moment to provoke wider unrest within the Army by inciting Sikhs and Hindus. Censors on the Western Front intercepted an anonymous letter intended for Indian soldiers, which declared:

I pray to all my brothers, Hindu and Mussalman, to join together and break the English lock. There is no withstanding Germany. Germany burns up all who come (against her). Let no army come from India. Soon there will be a mutiny in India. Let all men join and put an end to the English. Germany marches forward dealing death. She has put Belgium to death and half of France. Very soon she will be the death of England too...The name of Germany is breathed throughout the world like the name of Harankash (a Demon) – hail Germany hail! Tear off the veil and listen. Verily my words are true.⁸⁵

When members of the Indian Revolutionary Army were later arrested in Toulouse, the discovery of seditious literature intended for distribution among sepoys only heightened the government's fears. Military authorities swiftly banned a number of Indian journals, including the *Hindustan Student*, *Justice*, *Spur* and *Indian Sociologist*.⁸⁶ Much more serious, however, was the specific propaganda being directed at Muslims by both the German and Ottoman forces. The most significant was a fatwa issued by the Ottoman government. Authored by the Sheikh al-Islam, Essad Effendi, it was written in a traditional 'questions and answers' format, imploring Indian Muslims to switch their allegiance.⁸⁷ The fatwa was popularised around India by pan-Islamist leaders who had an existing relationship with the Ottoman Empire through Muslim groups such as the Anjuman-e Khuddam-e Ka'aba Society (Society of the Servants of the Ka'aba, founded in 1913) and the Red Crescent Medical Mission (founded in 1912). Their previous cooperation with the Ottoman Empire, ostensibly for aid missions, meant that officials in Constantinople already had an established network of sympathisers in India to call on.

If several enemies unite against Islam, if the countries of Islam are sacked, if the Moslem populations are massacred or made captive; and if in this case the Padishah in conformity with the sacred words of the Koran proclaims the Holy War, is participation in this war a duty for all Moslems, old and young, cavalry and infantry? Must the Mohammedans of all countries of Islam hasten with their bodies and possessions to the Djat? [Note: Jihad, Holy War.]
Answer: Yes.

The Moslem subjects of Russia, of France, of England and of all the countries that side with them in their land and sea attacks dealt against the Caliphate for the purpose of annihilating Islam, must these subjects, too, take part in the holy War against the respective governments from which they depend?
Answer :Yes.

⁸⁴ The Comrade, 7 November 1914, Centre for South Asian Studies, Cambridge (located at Cambridge University).

⁸⁵ Note by the Censor, 3 February 1915, Censor of Indian Mails, 1914-1918, L/MIL/5/828/231, IOR, BL, London

⁸⁶ Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches* p.67

⁸⁷ Charles Horne *Source Records of the Great War*, vol. III (Indianapolis, 1923) p.147. (The Sheikh al-Islam is the highest religious authority)

Those who at a time when all Moslems are summoned to fight, avoid the struggle and refuse to join in the Holy War, are they exposed to the wrath of God, to great misfortunes, and to the deserved punishment?

Answer :Yes.

If the Moslem subjects of the said countries should take up arms against the government of Islam, would they commit an unpardonable sin, even if they had been driven to the war by threats of extermination uttered against themselves and their families?

Answer :Yes.

The Moslems who in the present war are under England, France, Russia, Serbia, Montenegro and those who give aid to these countries by waging war against Germany and Austria, allies of Turkey, do they deserve to be punished by the wrath of God as being the cause of harm and damage to the Caliphate and to Islam?

Answer:Yes.

It was not just the Caliph who called on Indian Muslims to switch sides – the German Kaiser also made repeated attempts to win them over. Thousands of leaflets were dropped from aircraft into British trenches and were scattered across no man's land. They were even hoisted aloft German parapets and mailed to Indian soldiers when possible. German propaganda also included the suggestion that the Kaiser had converted to Islam – and was waging a war on its behalf! Such attempts to imbue the conflict with religious idioms largely failed – although news of the Kaiser's supposed conversion was cheered in Calcutta where, for a while, limited sympathy was expressed for the German position. An intelligence report reveals that 'there are also several rumours that the Kaiser has turned Muhammadan as he has the whole of Christian Europe arrayed against him. There is some talk of raising funds for the assistance of Turkey as the war will be a 'Jihad', a war against the European powers for the protection of Islam'.⁸⁸

German and Ottoman forces particularly targeted their propaganda at troops who had been captured as prisoners of war. For example, Muslim soldiers held at the Zossen camp in Germany were visited in July 1916 by Mustafa Nedin Bey, an Ottoman official and President of the National Defence Society. He told the sepoys:

*We are glad to have been invited here by the exalted Germany government. We bring you the greetings of our ruler and the Caliph, since you are our brothers in faith...you have not fought for your rights, for your faith and for your home: you have been dragged into the conflict by force...special instructors have been summoned hither to instruct you in your religion and language. We hope that you are showing yourselves grateful and will spread further among your brothers at home what you have learnt here. Remember always that you are the sons of the Turkish people...if you have that in mind you will progress, and a day will come when it is to be hoped that we shall all be united, welded together into a single people.*⁸⁹

The Ottoman ambassador also attended and told prisoners: 'The Sultan is the Caliph and merciful father of all Mohammedans. He thinks of you all and loves

88 The war: Muslim feeling; expressions of loyalty, L/PS/10/518, p.268, IOR, BL, London

89 The war: German propaganda among Muhammadans, L/PS/11/88, p.55, IOR, BL, London

you'.⁹⁰ German officials further appealed to Muslim sepoys, arguing that British imperialism was a malignant and subjugating force, from which only the Kaiser could deliver emancipation. Sepoys were told:

*Remember India, where the English have shot the entire population of many Mohammedan villages, sparing neither old men, women or children. The victory of the Germans who have always been on side of Islam, is certain. We shall conquer our enemies by armies or culture or money for it is impossible to buy each of them.*⁹¹

Propagandising to captured soldiers was an attractive proposition for the German authorities. By August 1916, they held 150 Muslim sepoys and began intensive

“The German Kaiser made repeated attempts to win over Indian Muslims... propaganda included the suggestion that the Kaiser had converted to Islam and was waging a war on its behalf”

plans to pacify them.⁹² Baron Max von Oppenheim, who led the German Intelligence Bureau for the East in Constantinople, formed a committee of Arab, Turkish, Persian and Indian nationalists in Berlin to persuade Indian prisoners that Germany's victory was imminent.⁹³ To achieve this, sepoys from the subcontinent and Africa were

treated well and taken on stage-managed excursions around Germany. It was hoped that when these sepoys returned home, they would take with them a message of German resilience and impending triumph.⁹⁴

The most significant literary propaganda for Indians came from members of the Ghadr party – a nationalist, revolutionary movement – which had been established in San Francisco in 1913. The Ghadr party was not a Muslim initiative and when the Great War started, it backed Germany. It attracted financial support from the Kaiser which ‘gave it a fresh impetus’.⁹⁵ The Ghadr's founder, Har Dayal, eventually fled to Berlin – where an Indian National Committee was established to advise the German Foreign Office on the best way of disseminating its propaganda in India, including to Muslims.⁹⁶ For a while, they also translated material for the Germans, much of which was distributed to Indian prisoners of war.

The Indian National Committee closely coordinated its efforts with those of a similar committee established by the Ottomans in Constantinople, led by Sheikh Shawish. The Ottoman committee was already distributing its own weekly newspaper, *Jehan-i-Islam*, published in Arabic, Turkish and Urdu.⁹⁷ The Germans, though supportive of the initiative, nonetheless regarded the pan-Islamist tone of Ottoman publications as being problematic. The message had only limited appeal, even among Muslims, while alienating secular nationalists. A Muslim member of the Indian National Committee, Dr Hafiz, was despatched from Berlin to give Ottoman propaganda more direction. He immediately established a new publication with German financial assistance and developed propaganda operations in Constantinople to such an extent that by the time he left in April 1916, the Ottoman committee was employing 60 members of staff for propaganda purposes alone.⁹⁸ Notably, this propaganda was no longer targeted exclusively at Muslims living in countries under British control – but also at those living elsewhere.

90 Ibid, p.5

91 Ibid, p.41

92 Ibid, p.50

93 Ibid, p.45

94 Ibid, p.46

95 Ibid, p.9

96 Ibid.

97 Ibid, p.10

98 Ibid.

It would seem, therefore, that the Germans were happy to support seditious Indian and Ottoman publications until mid-1915, after which they broadened their approach by also appealing to diaspora communities in neutral countries. Their material also had taken on a different tone by this point. It did not rely exclusively on religious exhortations when directed at Muslims (although there was still plenty of these); rather, it again emphasised Germany's military strength, presenting the Kaiser as an inevitable victor.

The British Foreign Office was keen to counter this propaganda. It was feared that sepoys repatriated from Europe might spread German propaganda once they reached home. The British also feared that the views of these returning soldiers could find a much broader audience during Muslim holy festivals such as the Hajj, when believers from around the world congregated in Makkah.⁹⁹ The Foreign Office and India Office both circulated 'as widely as possible' their own newspaper, *El Hakikat*, which was published in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and 'Hindustani' – which covered four different Indian languages.¹⁰⁰ A similar publication was also produced in Chinese for communities in Kansu and Turkestan. Pamphlets outlining Britain's relationship with Turkey, and the significance of Belgian neutrality, were also distributed to explain the reasons for war.¹⁰¹

There were practical steps to be taken, too. The Foreign Office invoked the Rome Postal Convention (1906) to close down distribution channels used by the German and Ottoman committees – principally the mail – through which subversive pamphlets and newspapers were sent. Pressure was also exerted on the French and Italians who, by 1916, also prohibited the circulation of similar materials.¹⁰²

In India, sympathetic Muslims were mobilised to vocalise their support for the Empire by authoring newspaper articles rebutting German claims.¹⁰³ The Censor of Indian Mails suggested these articles should point out that 'appeals to our men to desert us and go over to the Germans are a strong proof that the latter are seriously short of fighting men owing to their enormous losses'.¹⁰⁴ The government of India did not want to take any chances, fearing that if German propaganda was allowed to succeed, it could severely undermine British rule in the subcontinent. A report on the internal political situation in the Punjab issued four days after the Ottoman government entered the war noted that 'it was felt that so long as agitators and extreme newspapers were restrained from attempts to rouse fanaticism, there would be no trouble'.¹⁰⁵

This was easier said than done. Appeals to Indian Muslims – both religious and secular – continued throughout the war, remarkably even after Indian forces had helped to conquer and occupy Constantinople in 1918. The British director of military intelligence noted, 'there is little doubt of the fact that determined efforts are being made by various unobtrusive methods to enlist the sympathies of Indian Mohammedan soldiers, often in a manner calculated to give that sympathy an anti-British or at least an anti-Christian bias'.¹⁰⁶ Sepoys were frequently accosted outside the Dolmabahçe mosque after Friday prayers by Turkish naval officers, who implored them to rebel and undermine the British war effort. Attempts were also made to steer Indian soldiers to prayers at the Sultan Ahmad mosque, which became a hotbed of pro-Turkish activity. Soldiers who prayed there were told that Britain is the 'arch-enemy' of Islam and therefore could not be supported by any true Muslim. Similarly, leaflets handed out at the Selimieh mosque read:

99 Ibid, p.23

100 Ibid, p.27

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.

103 Indian Cavalry Corps, 25 October 1915, Censor of Indian Mails, 1914-1918, L/MIL/5/828/70, IOR, BL, London

104 Ibid.

105 The war: Muslim feeling; expressions of loyalty, L/PS/10/518, p.152, IOR, BL, London

106 Director of military intelligence on Turkish attempts to subvert Indian troops stationed in Constantinople, L/MIL/5/747, IOR, BL, London

To our brothers, the Indian Muslim soldiers. The time has now arrived. Come to our aid. Let us crush the enemies of our Caliphate and of our capital, namely the powers of the Entente. We are ready. We are waiting for you, our brothers.¹⁰⁷

These appeals failed to stir widespread passion among Muslim sepoys. A report by mail censors on the Western Front concluded that, 'in the circumstances it is really surprising that so few men should have yielded to the temptation' and that, 'as yet the enemy's brand of Pan-islamic [sic] propaganda has found small success amongst the Indian Musalmans and the behaviour of the Indian troops in France very strikingly illustrates the same thing'.¹⁰⁸

The same was true back in India. Although Indian Muslims had supported the Caliph in his spiritual capacity and his claim to authority over Islam's holy sites in Makkah and Madinah, the popular leader Mahomed Ali immediately distanced himself from the fatwa for jihad. Yet Ali was not reflexively pro-British. He had previously supported Ottoman causes such as the Indian Red Crescent Society in 1911, which supplied medical aid to civilians affected by the Italian-Ottoman war over Tripoli. However, the call to jihad by the Ottoman government was a step too far. He argued that 'whatever the Turkish case may be in the present crisis, the Indian Mussalmans are fully aware that it does not bear any religious character...The Sultan in his capacity of the servant of the sacred places, is not required to inflect his temporal interests, and we emphasise this because when he believes, whether rightly or wrongly, that his temporal interests require him to act in a particular manner, he must not expect that our temporal interests will invariably require us to act in the same manner...our temporal interests may differ and in this case the Turks must pursue their interests and leave us to pursue our own'.¹⁰⁹

Mahomed Ali made it clear that while he accepted the Caliph's authority over spiritual matters, this war was a worldly affair. Although he empathised with the plight of the Ottomans, he did not regard the Caliph as a universal political ruler of all Muslims. 'As long as the holy places of Islam are free from hostile menace [in the Arabian Peninsula] and the principle of the absolute and free Islamic protection over them remains intact, no Mussalman in India would shrink from any sacrifices that he may be called upon to undergo in the best interests of his country', he explained.¹¹⁰ Ali later reasserted these views in a now famous article, 'The Choice of the Turks', where, despite expressing sympathy for the Ottoman government which had been treated badly by European powers prior to 1914, he explained they had still been wrong to side with Germany.¹¹¹ Crucially, his views were endorsed by the important Sufi cleric Maulana Abdul Bari, who later encouraged a number of other leading ulema to also give pledges of allegiance to the British government – after convening a meeting in Delhi.¹¹² Similar pledges followed meetings in Budaun, Mahrera, Sultanpur and Bulandshahr, along with statements expressing condemnation of Ottoman activity.¹¹³

The essential point here is that Indian Muslim leaders were objective and dispassionate, employing reason to reconcile the difficult circumstances in which they found themselves. They used their influence to impress the need for fairness on their congregations. For example, during a town hall meeting in Bankipore – a typical method of conveying political sentiment to disparate communities of

107 Ibid.

108 Supplementary Letters forwarded by the Censor, Indian Mails in France, 4th December 1915, Censor of Indian Mails, 1914-1918, L/MIL/5/828/91, IOR, BL, London

109 The Comrade, 7 November 1914, Centre for South Asian Studies, Cambridge

110 Ibid.

111 The Choice of the Turks, reproduced in, *Indian Muslims: A Documentary Record*, edited by Shan Mohammad (Meerut, 1982) p.14

112 L/PS/10/518, file 4947/1914, IOR, BL, London

113 The war: Muslim feeling; expressions of loyalty, L/PS/10/518, p.6, IOR, BL, London

Hindus and Muslims – the government noted that ‘several speakers in eloquent terms pointed out blessings of British rule, adopted resolutions expressing deep sense of heartfelt loyalty and unflinching attachment to British Throne and King Emperor and prayed for victory and success of British arms ... [they] assured the Mussulman public that the war is not a religious one’.¹¹⁴ Similarly at a meeting in Cachar, a Muslim leader, Haji Nasib Ali Majumdar, expressed regret that the Ottomans had entered the war, but said ‘Turkey has been induced by the Satanic influence of the Kaiser’.¹¹⁵ His colleague Dr. Abdul Gafur then introduced a resolution which stated that by participating in this ‘wicked war on the side of Germany’ (which is ‘the common enemy of all right-thinking nations’) the Turkish Sultan had forfeited the sympathy of Indian Muslims. In the event, Gafur succeeded in passing his motion unanimously – that Muslims should remain loyal to Britain because Turkey had made a gross error by supporting the Kaiser.¹¹⁶ Indeed, a report explaining what transpired at the meeting found that delegates were told, ‘as loyalty to the ruling monarch is an article of faith and fidelity to his person and throne the most salient feature of Islam’, it was the duty of Indian Muslims to remain loyal to the government.¹¹⁷ These public meetings were complemented by the distribution of free Urdu and Pushtu leaflets explaining the situation in Europe to ordinary Muslims. Notably, much of this was financed by donations from Muslim rulers of princely states.¹¹⁸

Indeed, just three days before the Ottoman Empire entered the war two Indian barristers, Saiyid Abdur Rauf and Ibni Ahmad, in Allahabad, wrote a letter in which they noted that a number of communications had been sent from Indian Muslims to the Sultan asking him not to side with Germany against Britain.¹¹⁹ Their letter expressed the hope that Britain and Turkey would reconcile their differences peacefully, with the authors noting their ‘faithfulness to the former and our religious relations with the latter’.¹²⁰ Their letter also demonstrated a remarkably sober and conscientious acceptance of the responsibility that comes with prominent position. It continued, ‘we should patiently and quietly try to preserve peace in the country. Influential persons among us should instruct the ignorant as to the true facts and keep them in the right attitude’.¹²¹

The weight of that responsibility was felt elsewhere too. The Honorary Secretary of the Bihar and Orissa Muslim Students’ Brotherhood, Abulkhair Kalim, sent a letter to the Chief Secretary of the Government of Bihar and Orissa six days after the Sultan entered the war.¹²² He told them that a meeting of the Provincial Muslim Students’ Brotherhood had been held – where the members resolved to ‘exhort their brother-students to act on the advice of their leaders and remain loyal to the British throne’.¹²³

A letter sent by Kalim to the *Express* the previous day similarly expressed shock at Turkey’s entry into the war.¹²⁴ He said that members of the Muslim Students’ Brotherhood ‘were deeply attached to the Sultan and had all along recognised him as the head of our religion’.¹²⁵ However, he was also keen to point out that ‘our loyalty and devotion to the British Throne cannot even slightly be affected, and we cannot fail to realise our obligations to the government of His Majesty. Whatever the claims of Turkey to our consideration and sympathy, those of Great Britain, I daresay, are no less strong’.¹²⁶ Remarkably, Kalim explains his appreciation for the religious liberty that British rule inspired in the subcontinent – coupled with financial help and subsidies to help facilitate the performance of religious rites.¹²⁷

114 Ibid, p.35

115 Ibid, p.60

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid, p.30

119 Ibid, p.7

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid.

122 Ibid, p.35

123 Ibid.

124 Ibid, p.35-36

125 Ibid.

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid.

‘For, after all, the Mussulmans are not an ungrateful people’, he noted, adding they would do nothing ‘to embarrass Government at the present juncture’.¹²⁸ Again, Kalim’s approach to the dilemma which confronted many Muslim leaders at the time was to objectively consider the facts of the matter, rather than insisting Muslim loyalty automatically had to align along confessional lines. His letter also revealed that assurances by the British government regarding the preservation of Islam’s holy sites assuaged his concerns about the possibility that their sanctity could be violated.¹²⁹

Mosques were keen to play their part, too. Government reports showed that locals in Upper Burma had received a Union Jack from the Commissioner which was flown at the mosque throughout the war.¹³⁰ Similarly, reports from Hyderabad revealed that special prayers were offered daily for Britain’s success in the war.¹³¹

It was not only theological considerations that moulded Muslim opinion in favour of the government. A speech by Muslim leaders in Devanhalli, a small town just outside Bangalore in southern India, also noted the considerable assistance Britain had offered the Sultan during times of crisis.¹³² Indeed, it was held that Britain had done so ‘in consideration of the Mussulmans in India’.¹³³ Among the examples given were:

- During the Russian-Turkish Crimean War, when Britain helped the Ottoman government by providing men and money.
- During the Russo-Turkish War, when the Russians reached Constantinople, the ‘help of our benign British turned away the Russians in despair’.
- During the Second Balkan War in 1913, Britain sent financial aid from India and England to the Ottoman Empire at the request of Indian Muslims.¹³⁴

The Devanhalli meeting similarly observed that Britain, despite having been betrayed by the Sultan, had vowed to preserve the sanctity of Islam’s holy sites – a promise they felt no other government would have made in similar circumstances.¹³⁵ The meeting ended with the recognition that Britain treated Muslims and ensured their rights better than even Muslim governments had done, something the Devanhalli delegates were keen to acknowledge. They noted that ‘we wish to assure the government that the loyalty of the Indian Mussulmans to the British will not be affected by the present turn of affairs in the European War. They [Indian Muslims] will not turn their faces away from this [Britain], the greatest Muhammadan power, under whose shadow they enjoy the freedom which was denied even by Islamic governments. Our Islam orders us to be obedient to the reigning sovereign’.¹³⁶

Similar sentiments were also expressed by the Moplahs – the name given to those Muslims in Kerala of mixed Arab and Indian descent. The statement, read by Bava Haji, noted that India had been ruled by the Mughals for almost two centuries before the British and it is ‘a fact admitted even by Mussulmans that during their administration this land was not so peaceful as it is now’.¹³⁷ While acknowledging that the Sultan had ‘absolute control in religious matters’, he reiterated the commonly held opinion within India that the Great War was not a religious conflict and therefore Muslims owed Turkey no special favour.¹³⁸ Indeed, Haji warned, ‘any one lacking in devotion and loyalty to the British

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid, p.41

131 Ibid, p.484-5

132 Ibid, p.83

133 Ibid.

134 Ibid.

135 Ibid.

136 Ibid.

137 The War, Moslem feeling: Part 2 (1914), IOR/L/PS/10/518, p.15, IOR, BL, London

138 Ibid.

Government will be guilty in the presence of God'.¹³⁹ Generally, Indians were not very sympathetic to the situation in which the Sultan found himself, regarding his wounds as largely self-inflicted. A stinging letter from the Nawab of Dujana State to the Commissioner of the Ambala Division, sent in January 1915, argued that 'Turkey has waged war against Islamic interests and against the will of the Muslim world, and so she also must suffer the consequences. No sane Mohammadan will have now anything to do with her and she alone must reap what she has sown so wildly'.¹⁴⁰

There was a general perception among Muslim leaders and the British that those who were most susceptible to Ottoman propaganda were uneducated rural communities. A report prepared by the British Director of Criminal Intelligence explored the 'attitude of Indian Mahomedans towards the war in Europe'.¹⁴¹ Considering the possibility of rebellion within the police force, it observed that 'some of the best officers are, however, inclined sentimentally and religiously towards the Caliph. Some of the young officers of the Aligarh school are rather inclined towards [sic] Mahomed Ali's pro-Turkish Pan-Islamism. But, on the whole, the feeling in the force are [sic] believed to be highly satisfactory'.¹⁴² By contrast, it noted that in 'the Army there is much less educated Pan-Islamism than in the Police. Nor have there been any signs of uneducated fanatical feelings'.¹⁴³ Much of the reason for this was because of the different recruitment patterns. The Indian police force consisted of only a patchwork force, operating in large urban centres where radical ideas – and the leaders who propounded them – were more concentrated than in rural provinces. By contrast, the Indian Army focused its recruitment on rural areas, attracting a different kind of Muslim to the armed forces.

The report identified Mahomed Ali as an influential pan-Islamist leader who could incite a pro-Ottoman agitation within India. It found 'direct Turkish influences work chiefly through the educated pan-Islamists, the leaders of whom are Mahomed Ali and his friends and associates. These people have been playing with fire but are not ready to burn themselves, though somewhat careless of the consequences to others of their insidious words, writings etc. They are very anxious to derive personal and political advantages from the war. They would like the British Government to be dependent on them and they will be very disappointed if the war does not enhance their power, position and prestige. They are not content to be mere loyal units of a heterogeneous Empire'.¹⁴⁴

These accounts can, however, create a misleading impression that Indian Muslims were intimately bound up with Ottoman affairs – and obsessed with international matters. This, however, was not the case. A letter from W. F. Rice, Chief Secretary to the government of Burma, sent to a high-ranking official in the government of India a few days after the Ottoman entry into the war, noted events in the town of Moulmein in lower Burma. Rice observed that local leaders had 'considered the question of holding a meeting to make a public pronouncement of their loyalty to the British government, but came to the conclusion that the great majority of the local Mohamedans took absolutely no interest in the conduct of Turkey, and that it would be only attaching undue importance to the feelings of the community to hold a meeting'.¹⁴⁵

None of this should detract from the very real concerns that Indian Muslims had when the Ottoman Empire entered the war. They had an affinity for the office

139 Ibid.

140 Ibid, p.19

141 The war: Muslim feeling; expressions of loyalty, L/PS/10/518, p.495, IOR, BL, London

142 Ibid., p.498

143 Ibid.

144 Ibid.

145 Ibid., p.41

of the Caliph. Yet they did not regard it as either infallible or beyond reproach. Its decision to support the Central Powers in the Great War was judged by Indian Muslims to have been an error. Furthermore, it was a political decision in their eyes, largely devoid of religious considerations, despite the Caliph's attempts to convince them otherwise. Thus, Indian Muslims acted in their own national interest, which meant supporting the British war effort and opposing the Ottomans. That much was confirmed in a letter by Khan Bahadur Sahi, a prominent Muslim leader in Madras and former Sheriff, who noted that 'in accordance with the tenets of Islam all Mahomedans without doubt recognise the Sultan to be their Caliph, or Spiritual Head, but the present conflict cannot be regarded as a religious war. It is a political war, and it is not, therefore, imperative or obligatory for any Mahomedan to take any part in this sad undertaking of Turkey'.¹⁴⁶ Again, like other Muslim leaders, Sahi exercised his responsibilities carefully – urging Indians not to be 'duped and gulled, by believing everything to be Gospel truth, through pure ignorance'.¹⁴⁷ He continued, 'I consider it necessary, as a Mahomedan gentleman of some standing, to join in the chorus, and urge my countrymen to be faithful and loyal British subjects, and not to be misled by mischievous people whose chief aim is to propagate lies'.¹⁴⁸

This attitude was reflected by soldiers in the trenches who also viewed the conflict in temporal, and not religious terms. 'Turkey, it is true, is a Muhammadan power, but what has it to do with us? Turkey is nothing to us at all. The men of France are beyond measure good and honourable and kind. By God, my brother, they are gentlemen to the backbone! Their manners and morals are in absolute in accord with our ideas. In war they are one with us and with the English. Our noble king knows the quality and worth of his subjects and his Rajas alike. I give you the truth of the matter', wrote a Muslim soldier in an unsigned letter from France.¹⁴⁹ A report by the Censor for Indian Mails reveals that letters like this were by no means isolated cases. 'It will be seen that Indians of all classes in their private correspondence either express sentiments of loyalty or give injunctions to those whom they are addressing from which those sentiments may fairly be inferred', it notes.¹⁵⁰

His remarks are typical of the sentiment expressed by many Muslim troops during the war. The words of support did not just flow from the trenches back to India. Parents also encouraged their children to keep fighting despite the Ottoman fatwa. '...You must always do the government's work faithfully. It is very difficult to get such a King [as we have]. The Turks are not our paternal uncle's children!...The Turks made war on our government without any cause. Our government repeatedly told the Turks before the war to remain neutral, and that their security would be arranged for in every way. But the Turks would not be advised, and now they are giving away their country with their own hands,' Sirfraz Khan told his son in the 18th King George's Own Lancers.¹⁵¹

Distinguishing between the Caliph's temporal and spiritual authority was not an entirely unprecedented idea in South Asian Islam. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, whose ideas were certainly known to the Ali brothers and Abul Kalam Azad, a Muslim scholar and leading figure in the Indian freedom movement, articulated a similar concept towards the end of the nineteenth century. He had responded to an article carried by *The Pioneer* on 28 September 1897, which argued, 'It cannot be denied that in the event of war between Mohammedans and

146 Ibid., p.90

147 Ibid.

148 Ibid.

149 Unsigned Muslim officer to his brother in Central India, December 1914, L/MIL/5/828/226, IOR, BL, London

150 Extracts from reports made by the Censor for Indian Mails in France; No. 264A/12, 26th December 1914, L/MIL/5/828/226, IOR, BL, London

151 Sirfraz Khan to Dafadar Alam Khan (18th Lancers, France) 16 April 1916 (291) in David Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War: soldiers' letters, 1914-18* (New York, 1999)

non-Mohammedans the former are religiously bound to side with their co-religionists...Mohammedans inhabiting any part of the globe must take part with the Sultan, provided he chooses to wage war with any people not being the followers of the Prophet'.¹⁵² However, Sir Sayyid insisted,

Mohammedans who live under the protection of a non-Mohammedan sovereign as his subjects are not allowed by their religion to intrigue or to spread rebellion at any time against him. Further, in the event of a war between non-Mohammedan and Mohammedan sovereigns, the Mohammedan subjects living under the protection of the former are strictly prohibited by their religion to side with the latter or to assist him in anyway...**Moreover it should be borne in mind that the wars of the present day, though they are waged between Mohammedans themselves or between non-Mohammedans, or between Mohammedans and non-Mohammedans, cannot be taken as wars of religion or crusades, because they are not undertaken with religious motives; but they are entirely based upon political matters and have nothing to do with Islamic or religious wars.**¹⁵³

Although some of his ideas lacked popular appeal, Sir Sayyid's influence in this respect was clearly felt. But it was not just Indian Muslims who felt conflicted once the Ottomans entered the war. Muslim majority countries under British dominion around the world experienced the same tensions as their Indian counterparts. Again, the response was almost always measured. A telegram from Sayed Ali al-Mirghani, one of Sudan's most prominent religious leaders, noted that 'this war is against the interest of the Moslems and has nothing whatever to do with religion. On the contrary the true Mohammedan faith bids its followers be grateful and faithful to their obligations. In this instance Turkey has been unfaithful to her promises and to her assertions that she would remain neutral'. He went on to declare the loyalty of the Sudanese to Britain, 'that just Government whose great respect for our religion and interest in our welfare is proved by the progress which has been made in our country through justice and civilization'.¹⁵⁴

A letter from the Governor-General of Nigeria to the Secretary of State in London reveals a similar atmosphere among Nigeria's Muslims. A number of native chiefs expressed their support for the British war effort, and the emirs and chiefs of the Northern Provinces – then home to an estimated five million Muslims – contributed £38,000 from their Native Treasury balances. It had been prompted by the news that India was contributing men, money and munitions to the war effort and the Nigerians had wanted to do the same as 'some practical proof of their loyalty to His Majesty'.¹⁵⁵ This had been a 'matter of intense pride to the emirs and chiefs'.¹⁵⁶ Shehu Bukar Garbai, the emir of Bornu, had personally donated horses, donkeys, bullocks, carriers and corn, telling the Governor-General, 'I am the King of England's servant. Why should I not help him?'¹⁵⁷

Even a Turkish Muslim who was the former Consul General for the Ottomans – and who lived in London – expressed his support for the British war effort. He was angered by reports that Germany was trying to incite Muslims to rebellion because Turkey had sided with it, and argued that 'our Holy Faith enjoins upon us to be loyal to whatever country under whose protection we reside. Recognising the religious liberty, equity and justice accorded by England to the Musselmans who dwell under its flag, we feel confident that our brethren throughout the British Empire will decline to listen to the wicked behests of Germany'.¹⁵⁸

152 The Sultan and the Caliphate and the Law of Jihad, *The Pioneer*, 28 September 1897, reproduced in *Writings and Speeches of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, edited by Shan Mohammad (Bombay, 1972) p.253

153 Ibid. Author's emphasis.

154 The War: Muslim feeling; expressions of loyalty, p.214-5, L/PS/10/518, IOR, BL, London

155 The War: Muslim feeling: Part 2, 1914, p.58-9, L/PS/10/518, IOR, BL, London

156 Ibid.

157 Ibid.

158 The War: Muslim feeling; expressions of loyalty, p.429-31, L/PS/10/518, IOR, BL, London

Muslims reacted with greater calm to the news that Turkey had backed Germany than most officials in Whitehall could have anticipated. Crucially, they won Muslim support by allaying their concerns about maintaining the sanctity of religious sites in Makkah and Madinah. But their strategy went far beyond simply reacting to Muslim fears. The government demonstrated its track record of guaranteeing religious liberties for Muslims – and Indians listened. A Punjabi soldier in the trenches wrote to the *Continental Daily Mail* newspaper explaining:

The Mussalmans are fighting against the Turks. Why? Because they love British Empire, they value the blessings of the British rule. India has not spared money nor anything required for this war and is putting forth all her resources to help to win the war. But what a pity that while the loyal sons and subjects of British Empire in India are doing their best to win the just and right cause, the pacifists in England strives [sic] to ruin the ideal.¹⁵⁹

Silk Letters: dissent and mutiny

Dissent and mutiny is an aspect of Indian Muslim history which has caught the attention of al-Qaeda – and their leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is keen to project an image of Muslim rebellion under the Raj to Pakistani Muslims today.

In August 2008, when instability in Pakistan was at its peak and President Musharraf was preparing to stand down, the US Army discovered a document written by the then deputy leader of al-Qaeda, entitled ‘A Message from Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri to Pakistan Army and the People of Pakistan’. The document argues that Pakistan’s armed forces have become a proxy of the United States government and that American influence in the region is comparable to British imperial power during the Raj.

I request each Muslim in Pakistan to remember the glorious history of their noble scholars who resisted fiercely any and all cooperation with or support for the British Indian Army.

Sheikh ul Hind Maulana Mehmood ul Hasan said in his fatwa to the students of Aligarh University: ‘You have no choice but to abandon supporting and championing Islam’s enemies whether in practice or in belief And the religious basis of this matter is undeniable’. And he wrote in his letter to the Jamiat-i-Ulammaa meeting in Amritsar: ‘The fiercest enemies of Islam and Muslims are the British so it is mandatory to stop supporting them’.

And his student Sayyed Hussain Ahmad Madni stood up in court to say: ‘Joining the British army; helping another to join it or advising him to join; and supporting the British army or giving it loans for war: all are haram’.

[...]

Don't you see how the Indian armies which were killing Muslims yesterday at the orders of the British, are themselves the forces of [Musharraf] what are today killing Muslims in Afghanistan and the tribal areas of Pakistan at the orders of the Americans? Don't [Musharraf's] forces provide the Crusaders with information, bases, airports, and even detention and torture centers? Don't they supply them with food and fuel to kill, detain, torture, and humiliate Muslims in Pakistan and Afghanistan?

Don't you notice how when Sayyed Hussain Ahmad Madni quoted the statements of past British politicians about their crusade, he was quoting word for word Bush, when he declared his new crusade against Muslims? Isn't it clear that the Malta detention centre, in which Sheikh-ul-Hind and Sayyed Hussain Ahmad Madni were jailed, is comparable to the Guantanamo camp? Isn't it

159 Punjabi Mahomedan. From --, Supply Agent, Supply and Transport Corps, to the Editor, *Continental Daily Mail*, 36, Rue de Sentier, Paris (undated), Censor of Indian Mails, 1914-1918, L/MIL/5/828/147, IOR, BL, London

clear that we are fighting a new battle in an old war? It is the same struggle against the same enemies. The facts are the same, only the names and faces have changed.¹⁶⁰

Yet discipline and insubordination was never considered too problematic among the Indian Corps, many of whom would have regarded it as deeply dishonourable to rebel against direct orders. A legal framework was in place, detailed in the Manual of Indian Military Law – which was adapted for Indian needs from basic British military law.¹⁶¹ It created a raft of potential liabilities including death, imprisonment, flogging, transportation, and dismissal – though actual punishments tended to be relatively light and issued only sparingly. The full weight of the military law was, however, invoked when three trans-frontier Pathan regiments deserted their posts in Mesopotamia following Turkey's entry into the war in 1914.¹⁶² These soldiers were not just motivated by German and Ottoman propaganda calling for rebellion, but were also influenced by letters from relatives in India encouraging sedition. While these letters were untypical of the views held by the majority of Indian Muslims, an anonymous letter sent to Muslims in the 6th Cavalry cautioned, 'All the Muslims who have died in this war fighting for the British will spend an eternity in hell. Kill the English whenever you get a chance and join the enemy. If you do not win in this world, you will at all events gain in paradise...join the enemy and you will expel the kafir from your native land. The flag of Islam is ready and will shortly be seen waving'.¹⁶³

This kind of appeal was relatively rare, but is significant because it foreshadowed the kind of Islamist intemperance and separatism regularly displayed today. By the end of 1915, government apprehension about the Pathans had meant it had stopped recruiting them over official fears they could not be trusted.¹⁶⁴ After all, the Pathans mainly hailed from the North-West Frontier Province over which the Raj only had tenuous control. The region was then – as it is now – largely insular and inward looking, with its leaders attaching little importance to engaging with the government of India. This made the relationship between the Raj and NWFP Muslims weaker than it was, for example, in the lives of Muslims from the Punjab.

Yet the nature of Pathan dissent was highly significant. The troops did not object to fighting Turkish troops and other Muslims because of a politicised 'ummah consciousness', but rather they were concerned about the proximity of the conflict to revered shrines. The majority of those soldiers continued to serve when moved to different theatres of war away from sensitive areas. Notably, of those who refused to fight, very few actually crossed over to the other side and took up arms against Britain.

Indeed, Indian Muslims had displayed more reservations when fighting against the Afghans than when they were asked to confront Ottoman troops – whose ostensible aim was to defend the Caliphate. They often shared a common ethnicity and history with the Afghans. Indeed, support in India for the Afghan Amir was arguably higher than it was for the Turkish Sultan-Caliph. During the Second Afghan War of 1878-80, even Lord Roberts recalled that 'the Mohammedan element in my force gave me considerable anxiety'.¹⁶⁵ This strain on their loyalties had been so severe that the government refused to use them during the subsequent Frontier expedition of 1897-98. Similarly, when the Afghan Amir was drawn into a minor skirmish with British troops in May 1919, nearly 1200

160 'A message to the people of Pakistan by Ayman Zawahiri' (As-Sahab Media, downloaded from restricted al-Qaeda forum – Ansarnet). Also see, <http://terrorism.foreignpolicyblog.s.com/2008/08/30/al-qaedas-second-in-command-speaks-out-on-pakistan/>

161 British Army: Manual of Military Law 1914, L/MIL/17/1/2110, IOR, BL, London

162 Nominal rolls of Indian prisoners of war suspected of having deserted to the enemy or of having given information to, or otherwise assisted the enemy after capture, L/MIL/17/5/2403, IOR, BL, London

163 Anonymous letter to the Risaldar-Major of the 6th Cavalry, March 1916 (279) in David Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War: soldiers' letters, 1914-18* (New York, 1999)

164 Ibid, p.121

165 Omissi, *Sepoy and the Raj*, p.129

Muslim sepoys refused to fight.¹⁶⁶ Had a politicised ‘ummah consciousness’ been prevalent among Indian Muslims, they would have felt just as uncomfortable about fighting Ottoman soldiers as Afghan ones. Yet the number who refused to fight the former compared to the latter reveals that Indian soldiers were more responsive to ethnic and tribal, rather than religious, sensitivities. The British government, however, sometimes failed to appreciate this and remained convinced that Indian Muslims were developing pan-Islamic links with the Sultan.¹⁶⁷

Indeed, the extra-territorial allegiances of Indian Muslims towards the Ottoman state were strictly limited to spiritual affairs, explaining the anxieties of Indian Muslims following the Armistice. They feared that any peace treaty imposed on Turkey might erode her religious authority and consequently undermine the security of Islam’s holy sites. It was this concern which drove them to campaign for leniency after the war through the Khilafat movement, despite having fought against Turkish troops just months earlier.

Some Indian ulema also responded to the Ottoman call for jihad. Ubaidullah Sindhi, who had joined the Deoband seminary in 1888 shortly after converting to Islam, was a close friend of Maulana Mahmud al-Hasan, who was responsible for developing his understanding of religion and politics.¹⁶⁸ Hasan was an ambitious scholar who envisaged an enlarged role for India’s ulema in public life and was disappointed with the ascetic concerns of Deoband’s management. When war broke out, Hasan was keen to use it as an opportunity for jihad. He arranged secret meetings at his house, where the prospect of waging holy war in the frontier region, coupled with a domestic uprising, was discussed.¹⁶⁹ But both men were already under surveillance and, fearing internment, decided to flee the country. Sindhi was the first to leave and moved to Afghanistan in August 1915.¹⁷⁰ The following month, Hasan left for the Hijaz with a cadre of supporters.¹⁷¹

The war also presented a unique opportunity for non-Muslim nationalists to undermine the Raj. Operating out of Germany, they coordinated their efforts under the leadership of Har Dayal, a Hindu who created the revolutionary socialist Ghadr Party. He decided to send representatives to Kabul, with the intention of offering secular support for jihadist initiatives (with the aim of winning India’s freedom).¹⁷² The gathering delegates were soon disappointed when the Afghan Amir confessed that he was unwilling to antagonise the British by supporting their endeavour. Sindhi’s buoyant optimism turned to despair as he grew sceptical of Raja Mahendra Pratap, Dayal’s nationalist representative in Kabul. Increasingly he regarded their presence in Kabul as a hostile Hindu movement, behind the non-sectarian nationalist veneer.¹⁷³ However, Sindhi was helpless and, having failed to incite jihad, established a ‘provincial Indian government’ in Kabul along with the nationalists who also took refuge in Kabul.¹⁷⁴

German officials who had accompanied the nationalist delegation to Kabul left in 1916 after instigating contact between the ‘provincial Indian government’ and Turkish officials who were, in turn, in regular contact with Hasan.¹⁷⁵ Based in Madinah, Hasan was able to establish relations with Ghalib Pasha, the Ottoman Governor of the Hijaz. Pasha gave him another document, urging the Muslims of south Asia to rebel against British rule and assured them of Turkish assistance. ‘Oh Muslims! Attack the tyrannical Christian government under whose bondage you

166 Ibid., p.129

167 *Sedition Committee Report* (Calcutta, 1918), L/PS/20/38, IOR, BL, London; Also known as the ‘Rowlatt Report’.

168 Ubaidullah Sindhi, *Zati da’iri* (Lahore, 1997), p.21

169 *Sedition Committee Report*, L/PS/20/38, IOR, BL, London

170 Ibid.

171 Ibid. The Hijaz is a province on the west coast of present-day Saudi Arabia in which Makkah and Madinah are located.

172 Ubaidullah Sindhi, *Kabul men sat sal: Aktubar 1915-1922, ek tarikhii yad dasht* (Lahore, 1976) p.24

173 Ibid., p.26

174 *Sedition Committee Report*, L/PS/20/38, IOR, BL, London

175 German War: German emissaries to Afghanistan, L/PS/10/473, file 3443/1914, Pt 2, IOR, BL, London

are... hasten to put all your efforts, with strong resolution, to strangle the enemy to death and show your hatred and enmity for them', read the 'Ghalibnama'.¹⁷⁶ Hasan decided that it was too dangerous for him to carry the letter back to India himself and asked Mohammed Mian Ansari to take it on his behalf. Despite high security, Ansari was able to smuggle the document through to Kabul, where he was received by Ubaidullah Sindhi. The prospect of forging an international jihadist alliance excited Sindhi, who devised a plan with Ansari and the Turkish representatives to facilitate the realisation of Hasan's goals. They suggested forming a group – 'Hizbullah' – an 'army of God', with centres in Madinah, Constantinople, Tehran and Kabul ('Hizb' is usually used to denote a party). Overall control would rest with Hasan, while Sindhi would take charge of the Afghan forces. It was an elaborate plan which aimed at building an alliance of pan-Islamic sympathisers for a coordinated attack on the Raj.¹⁷⁷ The details were carefully written on three pieces of yellow silk, which were then stitched into the inner lining of the messenger's coat to avoid detection.¹⁷⁸

Shaikh Abdul Haq was asked to transport the letters to Sind from where Shaikh Abdul Rahim would take them to the Hijaz. However, while on his way, Abdul Haq was stopped and detained by the Commissioner of Multan who, despite reading the letters, thought little of them. He nonetheless forwarded the information to the Punjab Criminal Investigation Department, into whose jurisdiction Abdul Haq was transferred. They took the letter much more seriously, and after interrogating Haq, discovered the extent of the conspiracy.¹⁷⁹ Ubaidullah Sindhi and his aides were subsequently arrested by the Afghan Amir and turned over to the British.

The date on these 'silk letters,' 9 July 1916, makes it clear that Sindhi was unaware of developments which were already taking place in the Hijaz. The government was nonetheless perturbed by events such as this and misinterpreted the nature of pan-Islamic threats. In reality, the actions of Sindhi and Hasan were unknown in India until after the war, when the Sedition Committee Report was eventually published. The failure of their endeavour exposed the inexperience of Hasan and Sindhi, whose bipolar views were symptomatic of the sheltered environment in which they were raised. Much of their early planning centred upon an assumption that the Afghan Amir, Habibullah Khan, was prepared to fight the British. When he proved unwilling, Sindhi was left dumbstruck and failed to generate alternative ideas until after he had received Hasan's letter from Madinah. The second plan, in which Sindhi argued for the creation of 'God's army', was also poorly planned. Although he wrote a detailed letter to Hasan, most of the people earmarked for commanding posts in his new army had not been consulted over their willingness to participate in the scheme – and, again, most proved unwilling.¹⁸⁰

Similar fears persisted throughout the conflict. Even as late as 1918, parts of the Indian Civil Service feared that Muslims might side with the Ottomans

“ Much of the recent scholarship into the activity of Indian Muslims reveals how this threat was more perceived than real, that the numbers who supported subversive activity were negligible and that most of their plans were little more than fantastic and fanciful ”

176 *Sedition Committee Report*, L/PS/20/38, IOR, BL, London

177 *Ibid.*

178 Afghanistan: the silk letter case, L/PS/10/633, file 4260/1916, IOR, BL, London; Sindhi, *Kabul men sat sal*, p.43

179 Prasad, *The Indian Muslims and World War I*, p.143

180 *Sedition Committee Report*, L/PS/20/38, IOR, BL, London

against the British Empire. They desperately tried to broker a deal with the Afghan Amir who, sensing an opportunity to bolster his position, urged the British to equip his men with the arms needed to fend off a potential German-Ottoman invasion. It was an outrageous demand for more weapons – which Britain would have been unlikely to afford even during peacetime, let alone during the fourth year of a world war. He requested 400,000 magazine rifles, 400 guns with ammunition and 4 million rupees. With this, the Amir assured the Viceroy, ‘no foreign enemy will ever pass through Afghanistan towards India’.¹⁸¹ But there was also little appetite, either in India or in Whitehall, for agreeing to those demands – particularly as the British remained unsure of the Amir’s true intentions.

Official estimates of seditious activity and threat were frequently overstated by British officials, reflecting their wartime fears. Much of the recent scholarship into the activity of Indian Muslims reveals how this threat was more perceived than real; that the numbers who supported subversive activity were negligible; and that most of their plans were little more than fanciful.¹⁸²



Copyright: (Left) Imperial War Museum (IWM_PST_012577): Urdu text – Total Victory

(Right) Imperial War Museum (IWM_PST_012580): Urdu text – This Soldier is defending India

Their name liveth forevermore: remembering the fallen

By the time the guns fell silent on 11 November 1918, the Great War had claimed over 5 million lives from the Entente powers – of which just under 1 million comprised the imperial war dead. During the preceding four years, India provided over 1.27 million men of which 74,187 were killed and a further 69,214 seriously wounded.¹⁸³ The Indian Army had not given prior consideration to making proper arrangements for the fallen, with the conflict’s scale and intensity being so unexpected. While the Army concerned itself with combat matters, it fell to Sir Fabian Ware to start the process of recording the war dead, something which gave rise to the current emphasis on commemoration and methodical record keeping.

181 CAB/24/54, National Archives, London.

182 For example, please see: Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Harvard, 2008)

183 *The Commonwealth War Graves Commission Annual Report 2006-2007*; aggregating the figures for modern day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Ware was the director of Rio Tinto Limited, the mining company, and had tried to enlist for war in 1914 but, aged 45, was rejected as being too old. Keen to serve in the conflict, he nonetheless made his way to France and led a mobile unit of the British Red Cross with the intention of administering aid to soldiers. His attention was soon distracted by the lack of any centralised system for recording the war dead, prompting fears that the sacrifices of millions would be lost without trace. His unit began turning its attention towards this and received the tacit support of the British Army. Ware's team was quickly deluged with requests from loved ones on the home front, desperate for information about relatives – and soon began doing more than simply registering the deceased. By October 1915, both the Army and government recognised the importance of his work and transformed the Red Cross mission into the Graves Registration Commission, which the Army formally absorbed within its own operating structure.

In May 1917, Ware made an appeal at the international Imperial War Conference for the establishment of a specific body to deal with fallen soldiers from the Empire, which gave rise to the Imperial War Graves Commission.¹⁸⁴ It was created by Royal Charter with the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VIII, as President and Ware as Vice-Chairman.

This reflected a wider shift in Whitehall which now concerned itself with ensuring that the contribution of imperial soldiers was properly recognised and that their religious sensitivities were observed when performing last rites. Colonel Chitty, who led the Kali Panchwin battalion, along with the Imperial War Graves Commission, contacted Maulana Sadrudin, imam of Woking Mosque – Britain's first such structure – about how to commemorate Muslim soldiers and what arrangements should be made for their funerals.¹⁸⁵ A burial ground was eventually opened near the mosque, in Brookwood, with the Commission making funds available for its purchase and for the imam to hire additional staff to cope with the increased workload.

Proposals were also made, although unsuccessfully, by Lord Headley, 'to mark our appreciation of Muslim loyalty and devotion by electing a site in London and building thereon a handsome mosque as a memorial offering by the nation'.¹⁸⁶ The suggestion encountered stiff opposition from government ministers who were weary of giving undue recognition to one religious community over others, and alternative recommendations were made to build non-denominational war memorials which commemorated all.

The Commission adopted this idea immediately after the war and enlisted the efforts of leading architects – Sir Edwin Lutyens, Sir Herbert Baker and Sir Reginald Blomfield – along with Rudyard Kipling to produce the inscriptions for the graves of the unknown and to begin commemorating the men through architectural and horticultural displays.

More recently, the Queen officially inaugurated the opening of the Memorial Gates located towards the top of Constitution Hill in London on 6 November 2002. There, four Portland Stone columns commemorate the contribution made by men and women from the Empire in both World Wars. These recognise not just the servicemen who fought, but also the contribution of money and munitions vital to the war effort.

The columns bear the names of Africa, Bangladesh, the Caribbean, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The memorial itself provides lasting, albeit overdue,

¹⁸⁴ It was renamed the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in 1960.

¹⁸⁵ *Burial ground for Muslim soldiers in Brookwood Cemetery*, L/MIL/7/17232, IOR, BL, London

¹⁸⁶ *Proposal to build a mosque in appreciation of Muslim soldiers' loyalty in, or near, London*, L/MIL/7/18861, IOR, BL, London

recognition of the contribution which men from across the Commonwealth made to the British war effort. Indeed, shortly after the war the British government in India concluded:

*The Indian Corps reached France in the nick of time and helped to stem the German thrust towards Ypres and the Channel Ports during the autumn of 1914...India has sound reason to be proud of the way she surmounted the inherent obstacles and obtained such a marvellous result.*¹⁸⁷

This is the history of the victorious – but voiceless – to which we must now give fuller expression and understanding.

Second World War

Through Indian eyes the Second World War was an altogether different affair to the First. Whereas there had been enthusiastic support for the British war effort in 1914 and a desire to demonstrate Indian loyalty to the Crown – of course, with one eye firmly fixed on winning further freedoms for India – by 1939 the revival of European hostilities was seen by many as more of an inconvenience. Certainly, the unravelling of the Ottoman Empire over two decades earlier meant there was no obvious conflict between political and spiritual powers for Muslim sepoys in 1939 as there had previously been. Moreover, this time, any rallying to the colours was seen by some as being at odds with the aspirations of the Indian National Congress.

Indian Muslims, Congress and the looming war

The growing autonomy Indians enjoyed at provincial and national levels meant that throughout the 1930s, Indian leaders were less concerned by internecine strife within Europe. After all, the Congress was finally beginning to realise its vision and in 1938 succeeded in winning eight out of eleven provincial assemblies. A decision, however, was made by Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy – who announced in September 1939 that India would once again contribute to Britain's war effort. The Congress was outraged that it had not been consulted and refused to cooperate with the Viceroy's command. This prompted a wave of resignations from Congress-controlled provincial assemblies. Of course, the Congress did not support Hitler; but things were very different from what they had been on the outbreak of the Great War. In part, this was borne out of frustration that the rewards for Indian participation in 1914 had been so limited. Congress and others now considered India to be on the verge of independence, and the war was therefore regarded by some as an impediment to political development.¹⁸⁸

Gandhi also advised Britain against conflict, arguing instead for the pursuit of non-violent means against Nazi expansionism. In an open letter he urged:

No cause, however just can warrant the indiscriminate slaughter that is going on minute to minute ... I do not want Britain to be defeated, nor do I want her to be victorious in a trial of brute strength ... I want you to fight Nazism without arms ... I want you to lay down the arms you have as being useless for saving you or humanity. You will invite Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini to take what they want of the countries you call your possessions. Let them take

¹⁸⁷ *India's contribution to the Great War* (Calcutta, 1923) p.221

¹⁸⁸ Mahatma Gandhi, *Gandhi: Hind Swaraj and other writings* (Cambridge, 1997)

possession of your beautiful island with your many beautiful buildings. You will give all these, but neither your souls nor your minds. If these gentlemen choose to occupy your homes, you will vacate them. If they do not give you free passage out, you will allow yourself, man, woman and child to be slaughtered, but you will refuse to owe allegiance to them ... I am telling His Excellency the Viceroy that my services are at the disposal of His Majesty's Government, should they consider them of any practical use in enhancing my appeal.¹⁸⁹



Copyright: Imperial War Museum (D_005154): A portrait of an Indian soldier outside Woking Mosque, following the Eid ul Fitr ceremony.

Gandhi did not just oppose the war but also described those Indians who chose to fight as 'mercenaries', expressing his desire to see the Indian Army disbanded.¹⁹⁰

The Congress was estranged from the Raj, creating some problems for military recruiters during the early stages of the war. With the war in Europe proving more

189 Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah of Pakistan* (Oxford, 1984) pp 187-188

190 Military – Indian Army, L/I/1/1035, file no. 462/80E, p.178, IOR, BL, London.

difficult than the government had expected – and worried also by Japanese military success – a committee was despatched from Whitehall to the subcontinent in the hope of enlisting greater Indian support for the war effort. Led by Sir Stafford Cripps, historians are divided over the precise terms of reference his mission was afforded and whether he was actually authorised to promise India Dominion status in return for its support.

Such promises were not new. Many Congress leaders were wary and Gandhi repented by offering the government an ultimatum – immediate-self rule in return for their support. When the government refused, Gandhi launched the Quit India movement, a renewed campaign of national civil disobedience. Meanwhile the Japanese Imperial Army had just triumphed in Singapore and was busy amassing troops on the Burmese border. The demise of the Raj seemed imminent, inspiring nationalist leaders Subhas Chandra Bose and Mohan Singh to create the Indian National Army – a paramilitary force known colloquially as the *Azad Hind Fauj*.

Yet the government of India was ready for this. It swiftly crushed the Quit India movement by imprisoning Congress leaders from the outset, thereby cutting off the brains of the movement in the incipient phase of rebellion. It was not allowed to take root anywhere – in the way that previous campaigns such as Non-Cooperation and Salt Satyagraha had. This meant that Quit India was confined to localised disturbances and lacked national coordination. To ensure that trouble did not flare up anywhere, over fifty battalions of troops were also deployed to smother any trouble. Of course, there were some momentary losses of control; but given the pressures facing the Raj, a remarkable degree of grip was maintained. Indeed, the Viceroy grew so sure of his ability to manage any unrest that he told London, ‘the present regime could carry on quite comfortably till the end of the war...it was this knowledge and the fear that we should do so which was making the intellectuals so bitter’.¹⁹¹

Recruiting for war and military modernisation

Indian troops were not immediately called up following the outbreak of war, although Linlithgow had been quick to declare that India was ready to support British campaigns wherever necessary. It had seemed unimaginable to anyone in India that the subcontinent should become embroiled in yet another World War. When General Sir Robert Cassels, Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, inquired what support the British government wanted from India in September 1939, the reply came that it was unlikely Indian troops would be needed at all during the conflict. Aside from three mule transport companies led by Punjabi Muslims which were shipped to France, there were no immediate plans to draft extra recruits or even to mobilise existing battalions.

Neglect after the Great War meant that the Indian Army, though one of the most professional outside Europe, was drastically under-equipped by contemporary standards. In 1939 there were only 189,000 men enlisted in the Army, of whom 65,000 were not battle-ready. The fighting force consisted of 82 infantry battalions, coupled with a further 37 from the British Army. Two more were based in Hong Kong and another two in Singapore. A typical battalion consisted of 662 men, including 12 officers and 17 VCOs (Viceroy’s Commissioned Officer). Within each battalion was a central headquarters company which contained an

¹⁹¹ Judith Brown, *Modern India: the origins of an Asian democracy* (Oxford, 1992) p.324

administrative platoon, a light-machinegun support platoon, and signals platoon. They were accompanied by four rifle companies.¹⁹² The lack of technological development was endemic. There were artillery shortages, and no anti-tank units, and only eight anti-aircraft guns for the entire country. Engineering and signalling divisions similarly lacked reliable equipment. The Royal Indian Air Force was comprised of little more than a dozen rickety and barely functioning machines. Even the Royal Indian Navy only consisted of seven sloops, along with three frigates, four corvettes and an assortment of minesweepers, trawlers and gunboats.¹⁹³ India's lack of preparedness was inevitable following years of under-investment in the Indian armed forces. During the 1930s the budget for military expenditure had markedly declined from Rs.652.3 million to Rs.474.7 million.¹⁹⁴

The technicalities of recruitment in the Second World War remained the same as during the First. In fact, the government continued to use the Recruiting Handbooks that had previously been issued, explaining the different castes and ethnic groups in India and the kinds of messages they responded to. Similarly, motivations relating to honour (*izzat*), pride and sense of duty to the Crown remained the same. As before, great emphasis was also placed on securing comforts for the servicemen, thus making the horrors of their experience more bearable. German leaders had prioritised similar measures during the First World War, but Hitler did not regard the pastoral care of his soldiers to be of much importance and therefore took little interest in their treatment. By contrast, Churchill stressed the importance of delivering comforts to British and imperial forces.¹⁹⁵

Delivering these comforts, however, was not always possible. An article in *The Times of India* notes that Indian forces stationed in the Middle East and Central Asia had two primary grievances – that they were not able to visit home often enough and that welfare arrangements were often substandard.¹⁹⁶ On average, soldiers were only able to visit home once every three years, causing them considerable distress since many were drawn from peasant farming backgrounds and they consequently worried about their land. They also worried about being separated from their families for such an extended period of time – a problem exacerbated by the illiteracy of many servicemen's families and the government's inability to provide an affordable airmail service to courier letters when they were written. *The Times of India* argued that Indian soldiers found it 'doubly hard, since of all Allied fighting men he is perhaps the most considerate husband and son. Apart from the little he spends in the canteens, he sends all his pay home'.¹⁹⁷ Soldiers also had little confidence in the District Soldiers' Board in India which was supposed to look after their interests back home while they were serving abroad. Matters were further complicated due to the male-only composition of the Boards. Prevailing social practices in India meant they could not approach the wives of servicemen directly to enquire about their health and wellbeing, leaving many with little information about their spouses.¹⁹⁸ There were also logistical problems with the administration of welfare and recreation provisions. The government of India had taken direct control of this for Indian soldiers, even when they were serving alongside British soldiers. It created problems for delivering adequate provisions for some Indian soldiers compared with a more efficient service for British troops. This invariably caused resentment.¹⁹⁹

192 Byron Farwell, *Armies of the Raj: From the Great Indian Mutiny to Independence 1858-1947* (London, 1989) p.304

193 *Ibid.*, p.304

194 *Ibid.*, p.304

195 Michael Burleigh, *Sacred Causes: Religion and Politics from the European Dictators to Al Qaeda* (London, 2006)

196 Military – Indian Army, L/1/1/1035, file No. 462/80E, p.31a, IOR, BL, London

197 *Ibid.*

198 *Ibid.*

199 *Ibid.*

However, there were also areas of first rate provision. The article acknowledged that Indian soldiers were receiving excellent medical treatment. They were also well fed, developing ‘a taste that will probably last’ for English cigarettes and beer.²⁰⁰ The soldiers were also equipped with the latest kit which they enjoyed – particularly their berets. ‘In every detail his dress is now the same as that of a British Tommy’, *The Times of India* reported, ‘with the result that for the first time the Indian sincerely and completely feels that he is an Allied fighting man’.²⁰¹

Even during the latter stages of war and shortly after it ended, provisions continued for Indian prisoners of war captured in Europe and subsequently released. They were temporarily housed at a facility in Norfolk before being repatriated. Around 10,000 servicemen passed through between September 1944 and February 1946, and while waiting to return to India, enjoyed a recreational

“On average, soldiers were only able to visit home once every three years, causing them considerable distress particularly as many were drawn from peasant farming backgrounds and they consequently worried about their land”

programme of games and sight-seeing trips. Two garden parties were hosted at Buckingham Palace for these soldiers.²⁰²

As ever, food was a problem – although Indian troops returning from prisoner of war camps were given indigenous food in the Norfolk facility. Indeed, providing suitable food remained an issue throughout the conflict (as it had been in the First World War) with

different religious groups requiring their own cooks. Ever increasing numbers of chefs were needed as the conflict intensified, prompting one journalist to conclude: ‘The food problem alone is a Quartermaster’s nightmare’.²⁰³ There was now, however, a willingness by at least some of the servicemen to eat together at the same table – a significant development from 1914 when sepoys had refused to eat in their uniforms and insisted on ritual bathing before meals. But for Muslim soldiers, this conflict was much more straightforward than the last – without the involvement of a belligerent Muslim power to contend with.

In the early part of the war, a small pamphlet, ‘The Muslim attitude to the War’, was seized upon enthusiastically by British officials. Written in Beirut for an Arab audience by a Syrian journalist, Najati Sidki, it explained why Muslims should stand with Britain during the war.²⁰⁴ The Orientalist historian Arthur John Arberry, who translated the pamphlet, described it as ‘the authentic voice of Islam: this is the direct answer to the fantasies of Nazi and fascist propaganda’.²⁰⁵

The pamphlet, which was completed in 1941, states:

*There is a vast difference between the ideological cause for which the British, the French, the Polish, the Czech, the Norwegian, the Dutch, the Belgian peoples are fighting, and that for which Hitler and his aggressive German crew are engaged. The former cause constitutes an appeal for the freedom of nations and the enjoyment of natural independence; the latter contains a call for the strangling of liberties and the destruction of the very existence of all peoples, by methods to which history can afford no parallel.*²⁰⁶

The pamphlet goes on to consider ‘the war of ideologies’ raging in Europe – and argues that Muslims are compelled by the Quran to side with Britain because she stood for progress and liberty. Detailed comparisons with Hitler’s national

200 Ibid.

201 Ibid.

202 Ibid, p.13

203 Ibid, pp.70-72

204 *The Muslim attitude to war*, L/1/1/876 file no. 462/38 A, pp.61-78, IOR, BL, London

205 Ibid, p.62

206 Ibid, p.63

programme are also reproduced to show how they conflict with normative Islamic values, leading Sidki to conclude that ‘the followers of the four orthodox schools of Islam must in the nature of things abhor every heresy which runs counter to the Muslim spirit, and especially the Nazi heresy, which divides mankind into groups and classes according to a blood-theory’.²⁰⁷ The Nazis are also portrayed as ‘breaking pledges’, after Hitler reneged on promises made in the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. ‘Muslims view with horror the Nazi practice of violating promises and pledges’, Sidki wrote.²⁰⁸

The pamphlet is peppered with careful but deliberate parables and stories from Islamic history which suggested that Muslims had no choice but to oppose Hitler.

Whitehall mandarins quickly realised the significance of circulating the pamphlet in India, as did some Muslim leaders such as Sir Hassan Suhrawardy, an adviser to the Secretary of State for India. Indeed, the Director of Information’s assistant recorded:

This is a remarkable presentment of the Muslim attitude to the war and is, I think, most important and valuable at the present time.

The manner in which Muslim ideals are placed in contrast to those of the Nazis is particularly well done. It shows Islam’s protection of the weak against the strong as a contrast to Nazi oppression and cruelty.

Quotations from the Koran and other Muslim writings are most apt and convincing. The author shows that Nazism is the enemy of Islam, that the lofty principles of Islam are in direct contrast to the reactionary principles of Nazism.

The difference between the German and Muslim treatments of conquered peoples and their keeping of pledges is emphasized in a most convincing way and will appeal strongly to all lovers of liberty.

The material contained in the article is so valuable that it should, I consider, be made available in a number of Indian vernaculars and in Persian for distribution throughout Persia and Afghanistan.

The article, besides being a strong presentment of the Muslim point of view, will be a splendid contribution to the Allied cause and the English version should be made available widely in the British Empire and in the U.S.A. It is one of the most powerful contributions to the “War Aims” of the Allies which have so far appeared.²⁰⁹

To help disseminate the message in India, the imam of Woking Mosque offered his services to the Ministry of Information (MOI), translating the pamphlet from Arabic to Urdu. The MOI had planned to produce and send 6000 copies to India although Whitehall correspondence reveals how this idea was abandoned because:

The Imam has suggested that if the printing and distribution of an Urdu version were undertaken by a private firm, the value of the pamphlet might be greater than if it were done purely under government auspices. The Imam further suggests that Khaja Abdul Ghani, Manager, Muslim Book Society, Azeez Munsel, Brandeth Road, Lahore, might be approached in this connection. The Society is closely connected with the Woking Mosque, and any profits attaching to the printing and sale of books by the Society are used in the furtherance of Muslim work in India and in England.²¹⁰

207 Ibid, p.64

208 Ibid, p.68

209 Ibid, p.93

210 Ibid, p.85

The pamphlet was widely circulated. The government of India, for example, maintained a list of sixty-three different ‘Muslim owned newspapers’ across the country with express instructions that they should ‘receive all war material; ordinary departmental material and articles of Islamic interest’.²¹¹ Partial analysis conducted by the Home Department of the government of India revealed that it received 804 column inches of coverage from just twenty-three different newspapers – although the Home Department was keen to point out that ‘as only a selection of the Muslim press is analysed in this bureau, the real results achieved are undoubtedly greater’.²¹²

For good measure, in addition to translating the pamphlet from Arabic to English, Arberry also submitted ‘dialogues written by myself’ to the MOI which were to ‘ultimately be published in Arabic through secret channels and will appear as having been composed by a Muslim Arab’.²¹³ Some of the pamphlets written by Arberry included:

- What do the Germans think of the Arabs?
- What is a quisling?
- Are the Germans friends of the Arabs?
- What do the Germans think of Islam?
- What have the Germans done to Islam?

These pamphlets were framed as a series of conversations between a father and son – they all bore the subtitle ‘conversations with my son’ – and took a dialectic form. In ‘What do the Germans think of the Arabs?’, the father explains Nazi thinking to his son – first in terms of Hitler’s attitudes towards the Arab people, before explaining the Nazi view on Islam. The son, known as ‘Ahmad’, starts by saying, ‘I repeated what you told me concerning the lies and hypocrisy of the Germans and their leaders to my friends at school, and they asked me if I could prove that the Germans are in fact the enemies of the Arabs and Moslems. They asked me if the German leaders and writers have ever expressed their opinion of us Arabs and Moslems openly, and if so, what this opinion was’.²¹⁴

Naturally, the pamphlet then offers a systematic analysis of the Nazi view towards both the Arabs and Muslims while showing how some aspects of their belief – such as the idea of Aryan racial superiority – contradicted verses from the Quran. The father explains:

*[In Mein Kampf Hitler] will not undertake to champion the rights of any oriental peoples who may consider themselves to be oppressed by other nations. So much for his pretence to have the cause of Arabs at heart. In another passage, speaking of those Egyptians and Indians whom he had met in Germany, Hitler describes them as ‘gabbling pomposities’ and ‘inflated Orientals’. So much for Hitler’s opinion of the Arabs and Moslem peoples, whose friend and saviour he now pretends to be.*²¹⁵

Similar sentiments are expressed in ‘Are the Germans friends of the Arabs?’, although it offers much more history of the conflict itself, explaining Germany’s remilitarisation of the Rhineland and invasion of Poland.²¹⁶ Unsurprisingly, by the end, ‘Ahmad’ concludes ‘it is the duty of Moslems not to have anything to do with men who are liars and unjust tyrants [i.e. the Nazis]’.²¹⁷

211 Ibid, p.55

212 Ibid, p.46

213 Ibid, pp.7-32

214 Ibid, p.7

215 Ibid, p.9

216 Ibid, p.17-19

217 Ibid, p.20

The pamphlet, ‘What is a quisling?’, defines a quisling as anyone who ‘is a traitor to his country’.²¹⁸ Speaking more directly about Arabs who might support the Nazis, the father tells his son:

*When German agents come and whisper in his ear that they will assist him to save his country, he is easily deceived by their pretences and so is willing to deliver his country into their hands, hoping to obtain his reward from them. This is one kind of quisling.*²¹⁹

Injunctions from the Quran about Satan leading people astray clearly suggest to the Muslim audience (for whom these pamphlets were intended) that Nazi plans are comparable to those of the devil.

It is clear that Arberry borrowed heavily from the style which Najati Sidki adopted in his original pamphlet. However, whereas Sidki delivered parables and examples from Islamic history for his readers, Arberry’s pamphlets educate more broadly about events in Europe.

They also present a much wider selection of Nazi writings and tracts about those aspects of its doctrines that concerned Arabs – such as its attitudes towards Islam. Passages from the Quran are also invoked alongside speeches made by British parliamentarians in order to draw parallels between Islamic and British interests in the war. ‘Ahmad’ is consequently told by his father:

*I do not think it is impiety to compare the victory of the RAF in the Battle of Britain with the victory of our Lord Mohammed in the Battle of Hubaiyya [sic]. God’s words came true again in the [Islamic] year 1359 as they did in the year 6.*²²⁰

Thus, any Arab who supported the Nazis ‘would have proved himself unworthy of his Arab blood, and would have departed the fold of the faithful’.²²¹

Following the war, efforts were also taken to ensure that the contribution of Muslim servicemen was acknowledged and celebrated. For example, as the war approached its end, King George VI visited the Islamic Cultural Centre in Regent’s Park. The site was a gift from the British government, and Parliament made £100,000 available for the centre. It was to be supplemented after the war with a mosque funded from Muslim sources. A press clipping reported:

*King George was really fulfilling the dreams of Britons and Muslims who in the lifetime of his grandfather, Edward VII, had advocated the establishment of some such focus within the heart of the Metropolis. As long ago as 1910, it was realised that in the capital of an Empire which had more Muslim subjects (100 million) than Christian subjects (80 million), there ought to be special facilities for the spiritual and cultural welfare of such Muslims as resided in Britain or were passing through London.*²²²

Government was also very keen to ensure that the Indian contribution did not go unnoticed. Copies of ‘India at War’ – an encomium to Indian participation produced by the India Office – underscored the vital role Indian forces were playing. The booklet, translated into six different languages, was sent far and wide – with copies despatched to both Houses of Parliament, the Boy Scouts, Prison Commission, and the Labour and Conservative Parties.²²³

218 Ibid, p.13

219 Ibid.

220 Ibid, p.16

221 Ibid.

222 The Muslim attitude to war by Najate Sidki, L/1/1/876 file no. 462/38 F, pp.17-20, IOR, BL, London

223 European War, Booklet: India at War, (1941) L/1/1/903 file no. 462/46, IOR, BL, London

Clearly, the government was keen to avoid the feelings of disappointment that many sepoys experienced after the Great War, when India failed in their eyes to be rewarded adequately for its sacrifices. This time, they wanted to ensure that soldiers felt adequately lionised – although Churchill still wanted to resist awarding India Dominion status.

These appeals worked however. As in 1914, Muslims made a sober assessment of the dilemma facing them – as Indians, Muslims and subjects of the Crown. Indeed, throughout the war, Indian Muslims were once again proportionately over-represented in the Army compared to their numbers in Indian society. The table below gives an overview of the religious composition of the Indian Army 1940-1945.²²⁴

Table 3: Religious composition of the Indian Army 1940 – 1945

		Jan.1, 1940	Jan.1, 1942	Jan.1, 1945
Muslims	Number	92,841	279,507	447,580
	Percent	37.5	37.6	32.0
Hindus	Number	93,132	299,850	649,900
	Percent	37.6	40.4	46.5
Sikhs	Number	31,797	79,118	94,270
	Percent	12.9	10.7	6.7
Christians and others	Number	2,494	19,715	141,830
	Percent	1.0	2.7	10.1
Gurkhas	Number	27,196	64,681	103,260
	Percent	11.0	8.7	7.4
		247,460	742,871	1,436,840

Indeed, up to 65 percent of the troops from the Indian Army who fought in campaigns in North Africa, Italy, Malaya and Burma were Muslim.²²⁵ An article written by General Mark Clark, Commander of Allied Forces in Italy, for the *Washington Post* after the war ended marvelled at the contribution of the Indian Army:

*The men from India are indeed far from home. And their stake in the overthrow of Nazism may seem less immediate, though it is by no means less real, than that of the Englishmen and Americans at whose sides they fight. Whatever political differences may exist within the British Empire as to the status of India, it is clear that the Indian army has recognized that adjustment of them must be deferred until the common enemy is defeated and the common danger overcome. They have taken their part in the defence of the principle of human freedom and have earned for their own aspirations the respect and support of free men everywhere.*²²⁶

A letter was sent from the India Office to the BBC, in which the Secretary of State acknowledged that it was ‘a very heartening thought that the overwhelming bulk of Mohammedan opinion is on our side in this war’.²²⁷

Indeed, the government believed that ‘in most Mohammedan countries opinion is not merely friendly, it is either actively friendly, or is ready and eager to become

224 Omissi, *Sepoy and the Raj*. Also see: Annual Return showing the Class Composition of the Indian Army, Indian States Forces, Frontier Corps and Levies, Military Police, Assam Rifles, Burma Frontier Force and Hong Kong-Singapore Royal Artillery on 1st January 1933 to 1940, pp. 126-29, L/Mil/14/236, IOR, BL, London; Annual Return on 1st January 1942, pp. 186-9, L/Mil/14/236, IOR, BL, London. Also see: <http://www.defencejournal.com/sept99/martial-races.htm>

225 Byron Farwell, *Armies of the Raj* p.310

226 Military – Indian Army, L/I/1/1035, file No. 462/80E, p.34, IOR, BL, London

227 Muslim attitude to war by Najate Sidki, L/I/1/876 file 462/38 B, pp.8-9, IOR, BL, London

so at a suitable opportunity [...and] when we say that Mahommedan opinion in general is on our side, we are talking of a very powerful asset indeed'.²²⁸

Muslims were motivated to back the British war effort for many of the same reasons as motivated them in the First World War. They included the fact that Britain ruled over more Muslims than any other worldly power. Indeed, almost half of the world's Muslims lived under British rule or in countries that enjoyed exceptionally close ties with the Empire.²²⁹

Not only that, but Britain safeguarded their rights better than any other power. By contrast, Italian control of East Africa (comprising parts of modern day Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia) was characterised by instability, violence and chronic under-investment. Nor were stories about German officials brutally crushing Herero rebellions in modern South-West Africa or the Maji Maji in east Africa forgotten.²³⁰

Yet Muslim support could not sustain the war effort alone. The Indian Army needed men – so many that by 1945 an aggregate of just over 2.5 million recruits had served, creating the largest volunteer army in history.²³¹ Once again, the Army was forced to abandon its traditional 'martial races' approach to recruitment and offered to enlist any and all capable men. A written commentary produced by HM Stationery Office about 'India at War' noted that 'provinces, areas and peoples who have hitherto been represented sparsely or not at all' now found a place in the armed forces. For many, it was their first contact with the Raj.²³² A report on India's Modern Army produced in 1945 found that 'men who have never seen a motor car have to be turned into mechanics. The bulk of recruits have to be taught to read and write. Many even have to learn to wear a pair of boots'.²³³

The relaxing of rules relating to recruitment meant that volunteers now came through at an average rate of about 50,000 per month. Although some have dismissed these Indian soldiers as mercenaries, it is worth noting that the basic pay of an infantryman was no higher than that received by most unskilled workers. Indeed, when the threat of Japanese invasion looked most acute in 1942, after the fall of Rangoon during the Burma Campaign, enlistments reached their peak. A newspaper article suggested this was 'proof enough that a great many Indians recognize their stake in this war'.²³⁴

Broadening the base of potential applicants in this way meant that the quality of those applying for commissioned ranks increased. 63 percent of aspirants were accepted, compared to just 46 percent before. To cope with extraordinary pressures being applied on the Indian Army there was also a need to create a fast-track for officer training, with more than 1000 being trained per annum by 1942.²³⁵ In 1939 there were only 307 Indian commissioned officers, rising to 11,000 by 1945. Before the war, the proportion of British to Indian officers was 5.5 to 1. Recruitment of emergency commissioned officers meant that by 1945 the proportion was 1.5 British to 1 Indian.²³⁶ By the end of May 1945 there were also three Indian Officers from combat units who had reached the rank of Brigadier, and a further 220 who were either Colonels or Lieutenant-Colonels.²³⁷

Indian officers in the Army fell into two classes – the Indian Commissioned Officer (ICO) and the Viceroy's Commissioned Officer (VCO). The ICO was essentially the same as his British counterpart, exercising the same authority including, for example, command of British personnel who were attached to some of the technical units of the Indian Army. The VCO had no counterpart in

228 Ibid.

229 Ibid.

230 Jan-Bart Gewald, *Herero heroes: a socio-political history of the Herero of Namibia, 1890-1923* (Oxford, 1998); J. D. Fage, A. D. Roberts, Roland Anthony Oliver, *The Cambridge History of Africa: From 1905 to 1940* (Cambridge, 1986).

231 Military – Indian Army, L/1/1/1035, file No. 462/80E, pp.70-72, IOR, BL, London

232 European war, booklet – India at War, 1941, L/1/1/903 file no. 462/46, IOR, BL, London

233 Military – Indian Army, L/1/1/1035, file No. 462/80E, pp.70-72, IOR, BL, London

234 Ibid.

235 India at War, 1941, L/1/1/903 file no. 462/46, IOR, BL, London.

236 Military – Indian Army, L/1/1/1035 file No. 462/80E, pp.147-9, IOR, BL, London

237 Ibid, p.26

the British Army. He was neither an NCO nor a Warrant Officer, and despite his length of service, was always junior to any ICO. Few VCOs spoke English, and their primary role was to forge the link between the NCOs and the officers. Although an Indian regiment would have been composed of companies of Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus, the VCO for each company would have been of the same race or religion as the men in that particular company. However, these officers were drawn from all classes and religions, and command units were made up of men of every sect.²³⁸ This accelerated social and administrative development forced modernisation and 'Indianisation' sooner than it otherwise would have.

The high number of Muslims in the Indian Army meant that they flourished under this officer scheme – a factor also aided by their 'martial race' categorisation. One of the martial races, the Pathans, was described by an American journalist as 'a fierce tribal people whose profession is war'.²³⁹

Table 4: Class composition of Indian infantry as percentage

	Caste Hindus	Mussalmans	Sikhs	Others (including Scheduled Caste)
1 Punjab	50%	50%	–	–
2 Punjab	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	–
Madras	50%	25%	–	25%
Indian Grenadiers	50%	50%	–	–
Mahratta Light Infantry	100%	–	–	–
Rajput Rifle	66.6%	33.3%	–	–
Rajput	50%	50%	–	–
8 Punjab	50%	50%	–	–
Jat	50%	50%	–	–
Baluch	25%	75%	–	–
Sikh	–	25%	75%	–
Frontier Force Regiment	25%	50%	25%	–
Frontier Force Rifle	25%	50%	25%	–
14 Punjab	25%	50%	25%	–
15 Punjab	25%	50%	25%	–
16 Punjab	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	–
Dogra	100%	–	–	–
Ram Garh Rifle	100%	–	–	–
Kumaon	100%	–	–	–
Assam	–	–	–	100%
Sikh Light Infantry	–	–	100%	–
Mahar	–	–	–	100%
Bihar	–	–	–	100%

The seamlessness with which the Indian Army managed this transition surprised external observers. *The New York Herald Tribune* described India as 'a confused medley of race, religion and language' which 'militates at the outset against the formation of a large force, drawn from the population at large'.²⁴⁰ There seemed to be genuine surprise at the Indian Army's ability to bring together the largely disparate forces of the Raj and unify them within a single unit. But the paper overstated the case when it suggested the Indian Army had 'contributed to the breakdown of caste and religious barriers without offending the principles

²³⁸ Ibid, pp.70-72

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, p.32

involved in those distinctions' – even if it was true to some extent.²⁴¹ A telegram from the government of India's 'Department of Information and Broadcasting', sent to the British Ambassador in Washington, and to the Secretary of State for India, in November 1942 noted that 'the Indian Army has lived up to soldiers tradition of being outside political or communal rivalries and Indian troops have invariably done their duty when called upon to deal with disturbances, either political or communal'.²⁴² Yet there were problems too. Political turmoil in India over religious flashpoints caused turbulence within the Army, again causing soldiers to worry constantly about the state of their families back home.²⁴³

Nonetheless, it was a period of dramatic change. The old system of 'class' regiments was also disbanded, although infantrymen were allowed to continue fighting in companies defined along 'class' lines (see Table 4 above for the class composition of the Indian infantry).²⁴⁴ It was deemed that this would create stronger unity in infantry companies – that would translate into a better fighting spirit for the men. The journalist Charles Rolo focused on modernisation in the Indian Army in an article published by *Tomorrow* in February 1945, arguing that this decision to allow 'class-defined' infantry companies was vindicated by events in Tunisia where, during a fierce battle, it had been enough for the Sergeant-Major to appeal to the class consciousness of the infantrymen and simply shout: 'Jats never retreat! Muslims never retreat! Advance! Advance!' He noted that 'fired by this appeal to their class honour, the Jats and Punjabis put in a bayonet charge that sent the surviving Germans fleeing up the hillside'.²⁴⁵

Of course, 'martial races' were still critical to the Indian Army; but the tenfold expansion it experienced coupled with the vast increase in mechanisation and the technical services, meant that men of all classes had no choice but to mix – though they were not always keen on it.²⁴⁶ At the insistence of Field-Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, even 'untouchables' (in peacetime recruited only as 'followers') could now enlist in the combat ranks.²⁴⁷ In his article, Charles Rolo observed:

*Today the soldier of high caste finds himself in the tank or jeep with the erstwhile leather worker and street cleaner, whose shadows would once have defiled him, and he has learned to accept them as comrades-in-arms.*²⁴⁸

It was a remarkably labour-intensive process and, by the end of the war, over 8 million Indians were doing some form of auxiliary work for the armed forces; more than 5 million were employed in war industries; and 1 million worked on the Indian railways. It meant that Cavalry regiments now had tanks instead of horses, with modern mechanised weapons, artillery, and motor vehicles.²⁴⁹

The pace of change was remarkable. Since the outbreak of war, the size of the Indian Army had increased by more than 11 times; its Navy by 15 times and the Air Force by 10 times – by volunteer enlistment alone.²⁵⁰ This growth allowed the Army to adapt to the challenges of modern warfare. Indeed, British Generals in India were keen to ensure that the Indian Army's achievements were not overlooked. Copies of a speech by General Sir Mosley Mayne, Secretary in the Military Department of the India Office, on 'India's war effort' given at the Annual Meeting of the East India Association in July 1945 – were later sent to the India Office in London to ensure the message was reaching home.²⁵¹

241 Ibid.

242 Ibid, p.178

243 Ibid.

244 For more on class lines see: Ibid. For table, see Francis Toker, *While Memory Serves*, (London, 1950) p.653 Also see: <http://www.defencejournal.com/sept99/martial-races.htm>

245 Military – Indian Army, L/1/1/1035, file No. 462/80E, pp.70-2, IOR, BL, London

246 Ibid, p.70-72

247 Ibid.

248 Ibid.

249 Ibid, pp.147-9

250 Military Pamphlets, L/1/1/858, file No. 462/36 (i) (a), IOR, BL, London

251 Ibid.

General Mayne's primary concern was to address what he perceived to be the ignorance in Britain of India's war effort, resulting in the sepoy receiving less credit than they deserved. He noted that in the summer of 1939, Indian troops had been safeguarding the empire's communications by deploying an infantry brigade to reinforce the peace-time garrison of Singapore; while the 4th Indian Division was despatched to Egypt.²⁵²

Once the Second World War started, soldiers went to theatres of conflict all over the world. The 5th Indian Division and some garrison and administrative units were sent to the Middle East; the 4th Indian Division took a leading role in the first battles in the Western Desert. The 5th Indian Division launched the British offensive against Italian East Africa in 1940 from Sudan, and won a series of battles which helped overwhelm Italian forces there, with the help of the 4th Indian Division.²⁵³

The 4th Division later also played a significant role in the second battle of El Alamein with the 8th Army, fighting their way to the Mareth Line despite suffering 15,000 casualties.²⁵⁴ It was reported that they captured 100,000 prisoners.²⁵⁵ Eventually soldiers from the 4th Division were involved in the breakthrough to Tunis, where General von Arnim and his staff surrendered to them.²⁵⁶ This victory would mark one of the decisive turning points in the Western Desert Campaign.

General Mayne's speech at the East India Association followed a similar address given in London the previous month at the United Services Institute.²⁵⁷ Indeed, in those remarks he showered the Indian Army with praise, lauding their bravery, resilience and desire to 'take a prominent part in the final knockout of the Axis', according to reports in the *Buffalo Evening News*.²⁵⁸ He seems to have been particularly impressed with India's ability to fight on multiple fronts, after steadying itself along its western border only to be attacked by the Japanese from the East.²⁵⁹

It was not just British Generals who were keen to acknowledge the Indian contribution either. An article published in New Delhi's *The Statesman* on 19 December 1944 highlighted the praise of an American General, Lt-Gen Raymond Wheeler, for the role played by Indian soldiers in Burma. 'These Indian troops performed their duties in an excellent manner and were loyal and faithful to the Americans with whom they served. The administration and discipline of these units was superb', he said.²⁶⁰

That contribution was eventually honoured with India's representation at a Victory Parade held in London on 8 June 1946, where more than 700 members of India's fighting services participated in the celebrations.²⁶¹

Conclusion

Muslim participation in the Second World War was the product of a sense of personal agency which sprang from more varied sources than in the Great War. Yes, the same ideas about honour, loyalty and service still applied – but many Indian Muslims were also becoming unsure of their place in Indian society. Communal violence in the years before the outbreak of war was especially high and persisted throughout the conflict. It was particularly bad during religious festivals such as Eid, when Hindus and Muslims clashed over cow-slaughter.²⁶² Indeed, after scuffles broke out at the Aligarh College, a subsequent arson attack on the local police station resulted in over 40 policemen being injured.²⁶³

252 Ibid.

253 Ibid.

254 Military – Indian Army, L/I/1/1035, file No. 462/80E, p.147-9, IOR, BL, London

255 Ibid.

256 Ibid.

257 Military – Indian Army, L/I/1/1035, file No. 462/80E, p.30, IOR, BL, London. The United Services Institute is now known as the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies.

258 Ibid.

259 Ibid.

260 Ibid, p.75

261 India's contribution to victory: statement made after the defeat of Japan, L/I/1/1162, file No: 462/150 (A), p.2-3, IOR, BL, London

262 CAB/24/284, National Archives, London

263 Ibid. Also see CAB/67/5/14, National Archives, London



Copyright: Imperial War Museum (D_005149): Muslims in Britain: Eid ul Fitr celebrations, 1941. Men of the Royal Indian Army Service Corps at prayer during the Eid ul Fitr ceremony in a tent, which has been set up alongside Woking Mosque

Muslim fears of Congress convinced Islamic leaders that their fortunes were bound up in some ways with those of the Raj. The British government recognised this too, and emphasised to Muslim leaders that only they could protect Muslim interests in a Hindu majority country. When the Prime Minister sent the Lord Privy Seal, Sir Stafford Cripps, to India in July 1942 to discuss the implementation of a new Indian constitution, he found:

While none of the minorities are prepared openly to oppose the claim for Indian self determination, and all of them professedly support that demand, they are none of them ready to abandon the idea that the British government should in some way interfere in the process of making the constitution of a free India to secure provisions in the constitution for their protection.²⁶⁴

264 CAB/66/26/13, National Archives, London

This underscored the symbiotic relationship between Muslims and the Raj. Yet not everyone was happy about it. For many provincial leaders the constant jockeying for position between different parties on the national stage – including the Muslim League and Indian National Congress – only inflamed communal tension in their municipalities, leaving them to bear the brunt of any violence that followed. A letter from the Punjabi Muslim leader, Nawaz Malik Khizar Hayat Khan, to Sir James Grigg, Secretary of State for War, chastised him for placing such a premium on those groups.

The popularity of Congress is confined to certain sections of the people. Its strength is based largely on the wealth of many of its members and its popularity has been earned by the preaching, in season and out of season, of hatred of Britain. Alien rule is distasteful to every country and community and Congress has cheap popularity by exploiting this distaste to the full. It has made full use of the opportunities afforded by the lack of firmness and determination on the part of an administration which has always retreated before the demands of this vociferous minority. For all its claims to the contrary, the Congress had done nothing to promote the welfare of the masses.²⁶⁵

He was similarly scathing about the Muslim League which (much like the Congress) he regarded as being a largely urban phenomenon safeguarding the particular interests of the industrialised elite. He therefore concluded, ‘it cannot be assumed that these organisations represent the classes whose cause [they] plead’.²⁶⁶ Instead, he advocated sidelining the Congress and League to directly empower those

enlisted and loyalist classes who have supported the war effort [who] have many interests in common irrespective of community...they should be given an effective voice in any discussions on the solution of the present deadlock and of India’s future constitution. At the peace conference which will meet after the War, those powers who have risked all to defeat the common enemy will have a deciding voice in solving international problems – not those who have stood aside from the struggle or opposed the allies. That principle should apply to India also. Those who have worked hard and loyally that India might play a worthy part in the struggle, should be listened to and not those who have stood apart from and sabotaged India’s war effort.²⁶⁷

He explained that ‘the loyalists are no less anxious for self government than the non-cooperators, but they understand the value of, and desire to preserve, the British connection and to see India as a free and equal partner of the British Commonwealth of Nations. They have shown they love their country by their deeds and not by the declamation of empty phrases’.²⁶⁸

By the end of the war that commitment and sacrifice meant independence for India was now inevitable. Following the Japanese surrender on 14 August 1945, the Secretary of State for India and Burma, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, despatched a telegram to the Viceroy, Viscount Wavell, expressing his gratitude for India’s contribution to the war effort:

‘At this moment when the Allied cause has achieved its final triumph in the defeat of Japan it is my privilege to convey to you the congratulations of His Majesty’s Government on the truly magnificent part which India has played. We in this country are deeply conscious of the vital

²⁶⁵ CAB/66/58/25, National Archives, London

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

contribution which the armed forces of India, the Princes, and the people as a whole, have made, not only on the battlefields, but in the workshops and factories which have transformed India into a great arsenal and fighting base. The unsurpassed gallantry and endurance of the Indian forces throughout this long and bitter struggle are beyond all praise, and will stand recorded as a most glorious page in India's history. Those who have made the supreme sacrifice in this greatest world struggle for the triumph of right over might are not here to rejoice with us to-day in this moment of victory, but their names are remembered with thankfulness and pride'.²⁶⁹

269 India's contribution to victory: statement made after the defeat of Japan, L/1/1/1162, file No: 462/150 (A), p.41, IOR, BL, London

2

British Muslims and Barriers to Entering the Armed Forces

The relationship between Muslims and the British armed forces – indeed, between Muslims and the British state – is very different today to what it was during the first half of the twentieth century. While the challenges facing British Muslims are far from unique, too many today are unable to reconcile their worldly and spiritual identities in the way their ancestors did.

Polling by the Pew Global Survey reveals that British Muslims are deeply suspicious of our armed forces and their intentions.²⁷⁰ Indeed, very few Muslims are willing to sign up for active service today – with only 600 currently enlisted in the armed forces.²⁷¹ That amounts to just 0.3 percent of the overall total – while The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life in 2010 estimated that Muslims comprised 4.6 percent of the population.²⁷²

This section of the report considers the practical and theological arguments put forward by Islamists who suggest that true Muslims can neither join the British armed forces nor be loyal to this country. It also provides a case study of the existing relationship between the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and the Ministry of Defence, exploring the implications of engaging the MCB on these matters.

Barriers to entry: practical arguments

An ‘Ummah Consciousness’

The idea of suicide bombers striking in Britain, though long feared, was unprecedented until July 2005 – when a small cell of four men targeted London commuters. Just days later, it was discovered that the perpetrators were British, hailing from West Yorkshire. The four bombers were apparently unremarkable. One worked as a classroom assistant in Dewsbury and another in his father’s fish and chip shop. But what made these seemingly ordinary men turn their backs on Britain?

The ringleader of the attacks, Mohammed Siddique Khan, offered a telling insight into his mindset in his suicide video saying:

*Your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world... until you stop the bombing, gassing, imprisonment and torture of my people we will not stop this fight.*²⁷³

270 The Gallup Coexist Index 2009: A Global Study of Interfaith Relations (Gallup, 2009) p.23

271 UK Defence Statistics 2010, published by the Defence Analytical Services and Advice (DASA); see more at: http://www.dasa.mod.uk/modint_ranet/UKDS/UKDS2010/pdf/UKDS2010.pdf

272 Muslim Networks and Movements in Western Europe (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2010) p. 5

273 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4206800.stm>

When Mohammed Siddique Khan referred to ‘my people’ he was not talking about his fellow countrymen in the UK. He was referring instead to a politicised notion of the global community of Muslims known as the *ummah*. For Islamists, ideas such as loyalty, identity and allegiance are framed by the fraternity of faith – not geography. Unanchored from territorial boundaries, this worldview seeks to unite Muslims globally on the basis of their confessional identity, overriding (and in many cases, negating) every other aspect about their person. The nation-state and its associated nomenclature is therefore an artificial and contrived unit devoid of legitimacy. It follows that if individuals feel distant – and in some cases disconnected – from the state, then they are less likely to serve it. That message of separation and confrontation is what led Mohammed Siddique Khan and his accomplices to betray their country. The skewed inversion of their loyalties and responsibilities was confirmed by his suicide video in which he declared: ‘I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters’.²⁷⁴ The terrorist attacks he led were the natural outgrowth of that politicised ‘*ummah* consciousness’ which has spread unchecked in many parts of the Muslim community.

The word *ummah* itself appears in the Quran and linguistically means ‘nation’ or ‘community’. The reformist Indian scholar of Islam, Asghar Ali Engineer, has shown how this idea has traditionally been understood broadly, referring to any kind of community – religious, geographic, racial – and insists that it can even be applied to classifications within the animal kingdom.²⁷⁵ He explains:

[...] it is only in [the] spiritual and religious sense that Muslims can be described as one *ummah*, not in [any] political sense. In [a] political sense Muslims constitute [an] *ummah* separately in every country along with others, may they be Hindus or Christians or Buddhists.²⁷⁶

Arguing that the *ummah* should have primacy over everything else has far-reaching consequences. It does not just mean that Muslims develop extra-territorial allegiances in foreign conflicts, but that there are also strict limits to their Britishness. Addressing a conference on the theme of ‘Justice: A call to humanity’, the former spokesman of the Muslim Association of Britain, Azzam Tamimi, declared:

I don’t ever believe that there is something called European Muslims. We are Muslims in Europe not European Muslims. We have an identity, we have our *aqidah* (Islamic creed), we have a *shariah* (law) and we have an *ummah* that we are proud of.²⁷⁷

The difference between being a ‘European Muslim’ or a ‘Muslim in Europe’ may appear merely semantic – but its implications are profound. Tamimi tells his audience they should only consider themselves as ‘Muslim in Europe’, because he advocates adherence to a separate identity, allegiance, belief and even law. That message estranges its adherents from the prevailing climate of normative British values today.

Indeed, in its more extreme manifestations, this politicisation of the *ummah* may not entail simply embracing a metaphysical identity that is decoupled from geography, but may also involve adopting the associated nomenclature of assorted Islamist values that come with it. Attaching political allegiance to the *ummah* in this way is inherently bound up with a much broader Islamist

274 Ibid

275 Asghar Ali Engineer, *Essays in contemporary politics of identity, religion, and secularism* (Delhi, 1999); *The origins and development of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur, 1990); and *The state in Islam* (particularly chapter 2) (India, 2006)

276 Asghar Ali Engineer, ‘The political universe of Islam’. See: <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~rtavakol/engineer/politics.htm>

277 <http://www.islamicforum-europe.com/live/ife.php?doc=articleitem&itemId=327>

worldview that advocates a culture of separation – and sometimes even confrontation.

It is arguably some of the most extreme Islamist movements in Britain – such as Muslims Against Crusades (MAC), Al-Muhajiroun (ALM) and its successor groups, Al-Ghurabaa, the Saved Sect (sometimes also referred to as ‘the Saviour Sect’) and Islam4UK²⁷⁸ – that believe most passionately in the concept of the *ummah*. They are explicit about coupling the idea of an *ummah* consciousness with estrangement from the British state, arguing that Muslims are obliged to maintain separate systems of law, economics and allegiance. An article written by Hizb ut Tahrir (HuT) in 2002 urged its followers:

*We must realise that we are part of the global Muslim Ummah and not British Muslims or Western Muslims. We should not localise our vision and forget the problems of the Muslims worldwide whether they are in Palestine, Chechnya or Pakistan. We should not become integrated into the corrupt Western society and accept their diseased notions of democracy, freedom and Capitalism.*²⁷⁹

The concept of the *ummah* is therefore inextricably intertwined with an identity that is almost exclusively formed on confessional lines and informed by a series of Islamist values that are deemed to be incompatible with those of the West. Al-Ghurabaa similarly launched a campaign in 2006 entitled ‘Islamic values vs. British values’ – again, presenting the two as diametrically opposed.

Of course, these isolationist messages help young Muslims reconcile the pressures of their self-imposed exile from wider society by insinuating that normative Islamic values and those of the British state are fundamentally divergent. Therefore, the further away you move from one – the closer you are to the other. Thus, it follows, that the more individuals alienate and estrange themselves – and, as a result, the more tension they feel with the society around them – the better Muslims they are actually becoming. It is a powerful theological conundrum which helps reconcile estrangement with familiarity. Al-Ghurabaa consequently told their followers:

...the Muslim has his own identity that is based on Islam [even] though he may be living in a society that carries a Kufr identity. That is also why it is inevitable that they will clash with each other. So the fundamental pillar of the [Muslim] identity is the Aqeedah (Islamic belief)...²⁸⁰

HuT described this ‘clash’ of values as ‘unmistakably ideological’ and wrote an ‘open letter to the Muslims in Britain regarding the dangerous call of integration’, arguing that integration:

...aims to destroy Islam by making Muslims reject their Aqeedah and embrace the Aqeedah of secularism that calls for the separation of Deen (religion) from life... Our advice to the Muslims in Britain is to distance themselves from the call of integration by steadfastly adhering to the rules of the Islamic Shari'ah in all matters and by realising the fallacies and errors of the Western way of life.²⁸¹

Therefore, if integration is a sinister plot designed to subvert Islam, the only option available to Muslims is to identify with the *ummah*, which offers a supra-cultural

278 Note that Al-Muhajiroun and its successor groups are banned in the United Kingdom under the Terrorism Act 2000.

279 What can Muslims in Britain and other non-Muslim countries do to re-establish the Khilafah?, HuT publication. A copy of this is in Policy Exchange's possession.

280 http://web.archive.org/web/20060619191124/www.alghurabaa.co.uk/Deen/walaa_baraa/identity.htm

281 An Open Letter to the Muslims in Britain Regarding the Dangerous Call of Integration, Hizb ut Tahrir, Britain, leaflet (May 17, 2002). A copy of this is in Policy Exchange's possession.

identity. It is not an identity grounded in either the East or West, but instead negates all culture and is more interested in cultivating an abstract and transcendental confessional identity. This is precisely what HuT aimed to popularise in 2003 when it organised a major conference in Birmingham entitled ‘British or Muslim: Identity, values, vision’, which attracted just under 10,000 delegates. The question of identity was reduced to a simple binary choice between Islamism and Britishness.

The conference suggested Muslims should seek to create parallel communities which do not rely on the British state and are self-sufficient. A special edition of *Khilafah magazine*, then a monthly HuT publication, carried a series of articles explaining how this could be done by exploring a range of social issues from housing to education; and drug abuse to marital problems. It even contained ‘a rough guide to living with non-Muslims’!²⁸²

“The concept of the *ummah* is therefore inextricably intertwined with an identity that is almost exclusively formed on confessional lines and informed by a series of Islamist values that are deemed to be incompatible with those of the West”

HuT also even produced a slick film for the conference. This masterstroke of propaganda juxtaposed cold, atomised and sterile images of the British state against those of personalised and character-led Muslim actors. One participant in the film – a member of Hizb ut Tahrir – told the audience:

*I’m not British even though I was born in this country, and I’m not Palestinian even though my parents were born in Palestine – and my children, they’re not Pakistani even though their mother’s parents were born in Pakistan. No. We are Muslim, and our allegiance is not to Britain or any Arab culture or any Pakistan culture. Our allegiance is only to Allah and to Islam.*²⁸³

It can be tempting to dismiss these examples from Hizb ut Tahrir and Al-Ghurabaa as representing only the fringes. Yet, while they are at the forefront of articulating this idea most vociferously – it is by no means restricted to them alone. Two *Dispatches* investigations by Channel 4 have obtained footage showing children being taught an isolationist message in schools.²⁸⁴ The presenter of the latter documentary wrote at the time of its release:

*We recorded a number of speakers giving deeply disturbing talks about Jews, Christians and atheists. We found children as young as 11 learning that Hindus have ‘no intellect’. We came across pupils being told that the ‘disbelievers’ are ‘the worst creatures’ and that Muslims who adopt supposedly non-Muslim ways, such as shaving, dancing, listening to music, and – in the case of women – removing their headscarves, would be tortured with a forked iron rod in the after-life.*²⁸⁵

One of the best known Deobandi leaders in the country is Riyadh ul-Haq. A large-scale investigation conducted by *The Times* into his preaching in 2007 also revealed him to be promoting an exclusionary religious and political identity for British Muslims. In one sermon entitled ‘On Our Responsibilities as Muslims’ delivered in May 2006, Haq reinforces the idea of a politicised, global *ummah* consciousness.

It’s become insane that as Muslims in this country we are more concerned about the frequency of our bins being emptied than we are about Muslim women being raped, children being

282 *Khilafah Magazine* (September, 2003). A copy of this is in Policy Exchange’s possession.

283 ‘British or Muslim: The identity dilemma’, Hizb ut Tahrir video (2003). A copy of this is in Policy Exchange’s possession.

284 See: *Undercover Mosque*, 2007, transcript supplied to Policy Exchange by Hardcash Productions; and *Lessons in Hate and Violence*, broadcast February 14, 2011.

285 <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/dispatches/articles/lessons-in-hate-and-violence-feature>

massacred, old men being put to death and buried alive, and entire populations being subjugated and being made victims of genocide in other parts of the world.

[...]

If a foot or a toe of the Muslim ummah's body is suffering in a remote part of the world, then the pain should radiate throughout the body and affect us here and we should feel it.²⁸⁶

Another talk is dedicated to warning his congregation against 'imitating the disbelievers'.²⁸⁷ It is a ruthlessly isolationist message telling Muslims they should not just guard against 'imitation' of non-Muslims, but that they should also avoid any form of integration with them, including having them as friends. He similarly poured scorn on Muslims who say they are 'proud to be British', remarking: 'Even that mentality is a love of the ways and the places of the kuffar [infidels]'.²⁸⁸

It demonstrates just how deeply embedded these ideas can be within the British Muslim community – presenting substantial ideological 'barriers to entry' for any young Muslim thinking of pursuing a military career. The Muslim Council of Britain's former spokesman, Inayat Bunglawala, estimates that around 35-40 percent of British mosques are controlled by Deobandis.²⁸⁹ Of course, there is no suggestion that all Deobandi mosques – or their congregations – share the views expressed by Riyadh ul-Haq. However, the heavy Deobandi presence in British mosques means a large number of British Muslims will potentially have been exposed to the kind of reactionary views not dissimilar to those espoused by men like Haq.

Loyalty and treason: the debate today

The situation for those Muslims who therefore choose not to identify with an increasingly politicised ummah is increasingly difficult. This is, they are told, a doctrinal matter – as intrinsic to Islamic belief as ritual aspects like prayer or fasting. Thus, those refusing to adopt a political identity based on the ummah are seen to be denying their faith – a crime for which many extremists believe the death penalty must apply.

For example, a member of the now defunct Al-Ghurabaa, the Islamist preacher Abu Izzadeen (also known as Omar Brooks), was secretly filmed at the Regent's Park Mosque in 2004 explaining what should happen to any British Muslim who decided to join the Army:

Whoever allies himself with the kafir [infidels] against the believers, he is one of them. So, those enemies to Allah who join the British government – because remember my dear Muslim brothers, the British government, they are crusaders – [audio indistinguishable]... crusaders who come to rape and kill Muslims. Whoever joins them; he joins the British Army, he joins the American Army; he's a murtad-kafir [apostate/infidel] and his only hukm [ruling/judgement] is for his head to be removed.²⁹⁰

It is worth stressing that Izzadeen did not have the mosque's permission to make a speech on their premises, nor did they condone his actions (indeed, they later called the police to evict him and his supporters).²⁹¹

Abu Izzadeen's comments eventually prompted his arrest. During the subsequent trial, the Crown Prosecution Service told the court that Izzadeen had even 'called for people who work for the Americans in Iraq to be killed if they so much as give an American a glass of water, give them food or clean their vehicles'.²⁹² The Crown

286 <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article2401708.ece?print=yes&randnum=1248666326255>

287 <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article2401603.ece?print=yes&randnum=1248666333129>

288 Ibid.

289 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2009/may/15/minab-mosques-imams-islam>

290 A copy of this video recording is in Policy Exchange's possession. The speech was made by Izzadeen in 2004 and broadcast by ITN (for ITV) News in 2006. It has subsequently been reported here: <http://www.metro.co.uk/news/36178-radical-behead-muslim-soldiers> and here: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/uk_terror_theat/default.stm

291 The author was present at the mosque that night.

292 http://web.archive.org/web/20080829164700/http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/prosecution/violent_extremism.html#11

Prosecution Service later secured convictions against Izzadeen on charges of ‘fundraising for terrorism and inciting terrorism overseas’.²⁹³

That kind of exclusionary mentality – ‘us’ and ‘them’ – promoted by men like Abu Izzadeen and Parviz Khan has ensured that being a Muslim in the British armed forces has become an exceedingly contentious matter. The issue came to a head when Lance-Corporal Jabron Hashmi was killed fighting the Taliban in Helmand province in 2006. The battle for his legacy was fiercely contested from the outset.

A short distance from the terraced home where Hashmi grew up in a working class, inner-city part of Birmingham, a visiting imam at a local mosque railed against him. ‘There was an individual who was killed in Afghanistan recently – what was his name? His name was a Muslim name you know what they’d written in a tabloid newspaper? “Hero of Islam”! “Hero of Islam” who went into the Muslim Afghanistan to kill Muslims. Why? Because their [the Taliban] crime is implementing Islam’, he told the congregation, ‘The hero of Islam is the one who separated his head from his shoulders’.²⁹⁴

While making a film for More 4 News (a sister production of Channel 4 News) in 2007, I interviewed Shah Jalal Hussain, an associate of Abu Izzadeen’s, about his feelings towards Jabron Hashmi and Parviz Khan’s plot. Hussain refused to condemn the beheading conspiracy and told me he believed Jabron Hashmi would be punished in hell as an apostate and traitor to Islam. Invoking Islamic ideas of purgatory, he said: ‘I believe [Hashmi] is being punished in his grave right now’.²⁹⁵

The views expressed by men like Abu Izzadeen and Hussain are not just a challenge to those who join the armed forces. During an extensive interview Hussain also told me that any Muslim who joined the police force or intelligence services also ran the risk of apostasy and that he wanted to ostracise them from the community – including forcibly ejecting them from mosques. Izzadeen was filmed echoing similar sentiments when he railed:

*If the police come to your house, whoever killed them, he has no blame on his neck because he defended his awrat [modesty], his wife. So, are you gonna [sic] spy on the Muslim, for them to break down the house of your brother, and arrest him and his wife? Is that Islam? ...Stay far from the Jews, from the Hindus, the Sikhs, the kaffir [infidels] and be allied to the Muslims.*²⁹⁶

Views like these are often inextricably intertwined with a wider Islamist worldview that seeks to alienate Muslims from wider society by preaching exclusivity and isolation. Indeed, the unspoken corollary is that those who support the state’s uniformed services are being disloyal to Islam and have committed a mortal heresy, punishable by death.

Those views can sometimes spill over into more than just theoretical discussion. The Crown Prosecution Service said that Izzadeen had ‘called for people to fight the British, the American, the Japanese all of America’s allies in Iraq and Afghanistan...He then calls for people to fight with their money, prepare the jihad, and sponsor the Mujahideen’.²⁹⁷ In 2008, both Hussain and Abu Izzadeen, along with four other men, were convicted on assorted charges of fundraising for terrorism and inciting terrorism overseas.²⁹⁸

The main theological infrastructure which inspires such thinking comes from the Salafi-Wahhabi doctrine known as *al-Walaa wal-Baraa*. There is no precise translation into English of this term although one of the most authoritative

293 Ibid.

294 Transcript from ‘Undercover Mosque’ supplied by Hardcash Productions, producers of ‘Undercover Mosque’ for Channel 4, *Dispatches*.

295 Author interview with Shah Jalal Hussain, East London, 2007. This interview was broadcast on More4 in 2007. The interview is available at: <http://mp.channel4.com/more4/news/news-opinion-feature.jsp?id=529>

296 A copy of this video recording is in Policy Exchange’s possession. The comments made by Hussain were broadcast in Shiraz Maher’s film for More4 News in 2007.

297 http://web.archive.org/web/20080829164700/http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/prosecution/violent_extremism.html#11

298 Ibid.

Arabic-English dictionaries, Hans Wehr's *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, gives its meaning as 'devotion and disavowal' for the sake of God.²⁹⁹

Just as the modern understanding of an *ummah* consciousness has become inherently political, so too have the ideas relating to the concept of *al-Walaa wal-Baraa*. It has enabled extremists to declare other Muslims heretics – crucially, not on the basis of doctrinal belief, but solely on political orientation or action. The process by which those Muslims who are deemed to have fallen outside the faith are condemned is known as *takfir*.

This doctrine has made the boundaries of modern Islam – and the associated issue of what actions constitute apostasy – inherently political. Indeed, Professor Ann Mayer, an expert in Middle East and Human Rights law at Pennsylvania University, told me that the issue of apostasy in Islam has become more prevalent now than at any other time in its history, largely due to the political context in which Islam finds itself today.³⁰⁰

There are some parallels here with the ostracisation of Roman Catholics serving in the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), after nationalists successfully painted an image of the RUC as 'a Protestant force for a Protestant people'.³⁰¹ The campaign to undermine Catholic support for the RUC was highly effective, ensuring they remained under-represented – often limited to around just 12 percent of the overall force.³⁰² Indeed, Henry Patterson, a politics professor at the University of Ulster, says Catholic representation in the rank-and-file reached a high watermark at 13.7 percent before declining consistently from the 1950s onwards.³⁰³ Today, it could be said that for some Muslims the British armed forces are seen in equally simplistic and misleading terms: 'a Crusader force for a Christian people'.

'War on Islam'

Some Islamist leaders have portrayed Western actions since 9/11 as a 'War on Islam' – making it hard for Muslims to support British military activity in places like Afghanistan and Iraq.

This view is sometimes espoused by those with a vested interest in keeping Muslims separate from the wider society – thereby allowing them to exert greater control over these parallel and semi-autonomous communal clusters. For example, Hizb ut Tahrir, which campaigns for a puritanical Islamic theocracy, has been at the forefront of efforts to promote a skewed interpretation of British military objectives post-9/11. In 2004 its then leader, Jalaluddin Patel, told the Jamestown Foundation:

...the declaration of [the] "War on Terror" by America which is in reality a cover for a war on Islam and Muslims. After 9/11 America invaded two Muslim countries and imposed its own sovereignty on these countries through the might of its military. America has been working hard to remove any semblance of political Islam. The Americans have put forward policy initiatives that engage with Muslims at one level but only in a way that dilutes Islam and reduces the Islamic ideology to a mere religion that is compatible with Western capitalism.³⁰⁴

Western action is consequently reduced to a neo-imperialist venture, a new 'civilising mission' for a new century which seeks to subjugate Islam. Patel's reasoning draws support away from the armed forces and creates a culture of

299 Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, (Beirut, 1980) p.833 and p.1100; or see *al-Mawrid (English/Arabic and Arabic/English)* dictionary

300 Author interview with Ann Mayer, March 2008.

301 *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, April 8, 1986, vol.95 columns 19-26

302 Henry Patterson, *Ireland since 1939: The Persistence of Conflict* (Dublin, 2006), pp. 3-4

303 Ibid.

304 [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[swords\]=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx_ttnews\[any_of_the_words\]=jalaluddin%20patel&tx_ttnews\[pointer\]=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=284&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=7&cHash=c2d3ce9d16](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[swords]=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx_ttnews[any_of_the_words]=jalaluddin%20patel&tx_ttnews[pointer]=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=284&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=c2d3ce9d16)

distrust and suspicion which undermines any sense of a unified national sentiment in the country.



Copyright: Getty Images (GettyImages_71364379): Lance Corporal Jabron Hashmi, of the Intelligence Corps.

This worldview is not confined to extremists: elements of its philosophy are widespread within parts of the Muslim community. Even some key government partners have advocated the idea that Britain and America are at war with Islam, while simultaneously enjoying official recognition from the state. One such group is the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), which was involved in the foundation of the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB),³⁰⁵ a body created after 7/7 to regulate mosques.³⁰⁶

Anas Altikriti, a founder and a former president of the MAB, told a BBC audience in 2004 that he believed the 'War on Terror' was a 'War on Islam'.³⁰⁷ He said that the West aimed:

305 MINAB founders.
<http://www.minab.org.uk/information/founders>.

306 *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, May 20, 2008, column 155. Also, see: <http://www.minab.org.uk/about-us/executive-board>

307 <http://www.dohadebates.com/debates/debate.asp?d=26&s=1&mode=speakers>

to fight not only Muslims in their physical presence and existence, but also Islam in the set of principles, its codes, its essence and its contents... My friends, there can be little doubt that this war on terror has gradually but surely changed and transformed into war on Islam.³⁰⁸

Altikriti was participating in the Doha Debates, a series hosted by BBC World News, and spoke in favour of the motion: 'This house believes that the war on terror has become a war on Islam', to a televised audience of nearly 300 million in 200 countries – giving some idea of just how widely this idea is being discussed.³⁰⁹ It also suggests that western leaders who hope to 'reach out' and reassure Islamist constituencies that the West is not weighted against them, will struggle to make progress against such rhetoric.

The unspoken corollary of Altikriti's position is that, if the West is indeed at 'war with Islam', then all Muslims would have to view insurgents – such as those in Iraq – as fighting for a legitimate cause. During a 'live dialogue' session with Islam Online, Anas Altikriti explained:

The struggle of the Iraqi people, militarily and politically must continue until the occupier leaves and a true patriotic and democratic government is elected, In sha'a Allah...³¹⁰

Altikriti was then asked whether this meant he supported the insurgency. He replied:

I am all for the effort and struggle to free Iraq and end the occupation. I would rather that happen without any silage of blood on any side, the coalition forces or the Iraqis. If there are political avenues that are efficient and would work, then they must be exhausted. However, to expect to rule people with guns and missiles and not expect a reaction in kind is extremely foolish and naive. Also, to occupy a people and expect them not to retaliate is also unrealistic. Even the United Nations recognizes the right of an occupied people to free themselves using any means and methods, and the Iraqis aren't exempt from that liberty. However, my wish is that not one single Iraqi is killed, not one single American or British soldier is killed...and Iraq is freed from occupation. If that can be achieved, then I'm all for it.

[...]

[The Iraqi people] have been wronged for far too long, but now they are fighting for their freedom and future. I can only remind them that it is with unity and standing together that we can achieve our goals and realize the objectives that have been beyond us for so long. Also, if anything, we have learnt from the dark era of the Ba'ath regime, never ever to allow injustice to go unpunished and unchecked. We must never ever allow a tyrant to flourish or a wrong-doer to get away with any in the future.³¹¹

It is not the first time Altikriti has espoused such views. A report on the Muslim Brotherhood's official English language website, Ikhanweb, says:

Altikriti called upon members of the Iraqi resistance to embolden its true patriotic image before the world and refrain from killing for the sake of killing but only to resist the occupation. He concluded by reaffirming the right of the Iraqis to engage in legitimate resistance against foreign occupation abiding by the international laws and traditions.³¹²

308 <http://www.dohadebates.com/debates/debate.asp?d=26&s=1&mode=transcript#142>

309 <http://www.dohadebates.com/page.asp?p=3259>

310 <http://web.archive.org/web/20080416012817/http://www.islamonline.net/livedialogue/english/Browse.asp?hGuestID=r7f9Lt>

311 Ibid.

312 <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=4138>

Azzam Tamimi, a former spokesman of the MAB, has advocated a similar message to that of his counterpart Altikriti. Speaking at a conference on ‘justice’, he told the audience:

*I tell you, the governments of Britain and the United States of America have been trying to turn this war on terrorism in to a war on Islam. All those alleged plots they are talking about, and I don't believe any of them! I don't believe any of them! And let this be recorded and let this be conveyed around the world!*³¹³

Significantly, Tamimi insists that his deeply political analysis is not just a subjective opinion open to debate, but an inherently doctrinal matter closely linked to the central normative theme of Islam – monotheism.³¹⁴ Again, there is a welding together of politics with matters of faith, reducing otherwise expansive topics to simple binary choices and stifling debate. Dissenting Muslims are not just lesser Muslims, but are also committing themselves to undermining their own faith. Such arguments are effective emotional pressure points – goading ordinary Muslims into absorbing highly curious and loaded political mantra as divine diktat.

Barriers to entry: theological arguments

The Army

Yusuf al-Qaradawi, one of the best known Islamist clerics in the world today, was asked about Muslim participation in non-Muslim armies shortly after 9/11. Although based in Qatar, al-Qaradawi is chairman of the Dublin-based European Council for Fatwa and Research, and has frequently visited Britain – most recently in 2004. He told his interviewer:

I would like here to stress the fact that Islam has prohibited a Muslim to fight his fellow Muslim brother to the extent that indulging in such a fight is considered a form of disbelief or kufr and a behavior pertaining to the pre-Islamic ignorance.

[...]

Here, the question arises: what about a Muslim recruited in the army of a non-Muslim country that is at war with Muslims? Such helpless Muslim soldier has no choice but to yield to the orders of his army commanders and he has no right to say ‘No’ or ‘Why’? This is a well-known military system worldwide.

Such Muslim finds himself on the horns of a dilemma when his country and the army he joins tend to attack a Muslim country. What shall he do while he is no more than a small gear in a huge machine?

The opinion, which is more akin to the sound juristic view here, is that a Muslim shouldn't indulge in a war against his fellow Muslim brothers, and he may justify his position by asking for a leave or (a temporary) exemption from the military as the true conscience of a Muslim dictates that he shouldn't indulge in killing a fellow Muslim brother without a justifiable reason. However, if there is no way but to participate, then a Muslim can join the rear to help in military service (i.e. not to participate in face-to-face confrontation).

The Muslim soldier may resort to this form of limited participation in order to avoid harm to himself as well as to the Muslim community of whom he is part and parcel. Without this (limited participation) the Muslim as well as the Muslim community may be accused of high treason. Such an accusation may pose a threat to the Muslim minority and this may also

313 <http://www.islamicforum-europe.com/live/ife.php?doc=articleitem&itemId=327>

314 Tamimi says, for example, “the value of justice in Islam is synonymous with the value of tawheed, Monotheism, and the evidence, I'm not making it up, read in the Quran...” at <http://www.islamicforumeurope.com/live/ife.php?doc=articleitem&itemId=327>

disrupt the course of da`wah that has been in full swing since tens of years ago, and has started to reap fruits.

Muslims, being part and parcel of the (American) society, should intermingle with the existing civilization but they are not allowed to dissolve culturally and forget about their religious identity. They shouldn't behave in a way that makes fingers of accusations point at them to the extent that the society may consider them as fifth column. Muslim individuals should not set their conscience at ease and refuse to participate in the war, if this will endanger the whole Muslim community.

[...]

As we have stated above, if a Muslim is forced to participate in fighting, he should avoid direct confrontation as possible as he can. Even while participating in such a war, a Muslim should have an innate feeling of resentment, as it is the case of the true believer who has no means to rectify the abominable by his hands or his tongue, yet he expresses his disapproval by showing innate resentment, which is the least of faith.³¹⁵

The message given by al-Qaradawi here is contradictory. There is nothing wrong with joining the armed forces per se, he says in his fatwa. Yet the nature of the moral dilemmas and caveats he then proposes makes any meaningful military service almost impossible. Indeed, for an average Muslim reading the fatwa, the ruling is ambiguous and heaped with constant evocations to find alternatives to serving in frontline duties. Qaradawi's one-time vice-chairman in the European Council for Fatwa and Research, the late Sheikh Faysal Mawlawi, was more forthright about the dilemmas facing Muslims who join non-Muslim armies:

There is no doubt that the American Muslim is between the devil and the deep blue sea and he is facing a difficult situation.

[...]

However, if the American Muslim soldier has no choice but to take part in a direct military actions against his fellow Muslim brothers, then he is considered overwhelmed beyond limit, and he will bear the responsibility of his choice both in this world and in the Hereafter.³¹⁶

As the Qaradawi-Mawlawi fatwa was issued just weeks after 9/11, they acknowledge they were keen not to issue a blanket fatwa given the challenges that would face American Muslims in the coming weeks and months. Although it is clear from the fatwa that both Qaradawi and Mawlawi would prefer Muslims not to join non-Muslim armies, their ruling did leave American Muslims with some wriggle-room.

Indeed, the difficulties in this dichotomous message were revealed eighteen months later when, shortly before the Iraq War, Qaradawi used his Friday sermon at the Omar Ibn Al-Khattab Mosque in Qatar to warn Arab governments against letting allied forces use their land, air and naval ports as a launch pad for military action. He declared this action was expressly forbidden, and also told the congregation that:

Resisting the invaders is an individual duty [incumbent] on all Muslims. If the enemies invaded a Muslim country, the people of that country should resist and expel them from their territories... It is an individual duty on all Muslims, men and women.³¹⁷

315 http://web.archive.org/web/20080329230105/http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503544516

316 Ibid.

317 <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sr&ID=SR3004>

This ruling was much less equivocal than his earlier pronouncement. Indeed, the public utterances of both Qaradawi and Mawlawi, since their fatwa was issued in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, have become increasingly unbending. In August 2009, Mawlawi issued a lengthy paper on the Citizenship of Muslims in Europe, which considered the duties of Muslim citizens and, in one section, gave particular attention to the subject of Muslims fighting in non-Muslim armies. He conceded it was ‘one of the controversial points. It may cause a conflict between a European Muslim’s commitments as a citizen, on the one hand, and as a Muslim, on the other’.³¹⁸ Again, he started by reiterating the basic premise that joining the armed forces is not forbidden per se; but on this occasion he was much more forthright in explaining instances when it would be forbidden for Muslims to serve. He wrote:

...if the army exceeds the role of defense and unjustly attacks other countries, a Muslim is not allowed to participate in such attacks; it does not matter if the attack is launched against Muslims or non-Muslims.

[...]

Therefore, we say that the Muslim — as a soldier in a European army — is not allowed to participate in any unjust aggression even if against non-Muslims.

[...]

The impermissibility is even more conclusive if the army concerned wages an attack against a Muslim country.

[...]

So, put clearly, a Muslim is not allowed to engage in a fight under the flag of his national army, if this fighting is led against Muslims. It may be difficult for a Muslim, who is a soldier in a European army, to abide by his religious duty in this regard. However, he has to be clear and honest from the very beginning; he should declare this position to the authorities.

A solution may be provided in the European codes of law, as most may relieve the soldier of a fight that may cause him religious embarrassment, otherwise he may resign. In this case, I say that, if there is no solution, the Muslim soldier should resign as he is absolutely not allowed to participate in fighting against his fellow Muslims anywhere.³¹⁹

Of course, it was this kind of issue that concerned Indian Muslims during the Great War, when they were drawn into conflict with Muslim soldiers from the Ottoman Empire. Scholars then were able to reconcile the tension of Muslims fighting for opposing national armies without arguing for the kind of outright prohibition that Mawlawi did.

Closer to home, Mufti Saifur Rahman Sahib from the London Darul Uloom is the most concise in his opinion, simply telling British Muslims:

It will not be permissible to work in the armed forces if the work conflicts with sharia. This is [sic] includes causing harm to Muslims or innocents be it directly or indirectly.³²⁰

A fuller answer was given by Mohammad Siddique Seddon in 2003 when he was a Research Fellow at the Islamic Foundation. He was asked about Muslim participation in non-Muslim armies a few months after the Iraq War began. The question put to him stated: ‘Would I be disloyal to Islam if I joined the British Army? Shouldn’t Muslims be active in all fields and professions?’ He replied:

318 http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_C&cid=1248188089986&pagename=Zone-English-Living_Shariah%2FLSELayout#9

319 Ibid.

320 <http://www.islamopediaonline.org/fatwa/it-permissible-join-british-army>

*There is nothing wrong in defending one's country, but it is wrong for a country to transgress against others. Joining the British army for purposes other than defending the country against invasion or [for] aggressive attacks may be problematic for Muslims.*³²¹

Seddon's view is based on the same essential model as Qaradawi's earlier judgement. He affirms that, in principle, there is nothing to stop a young Muslim from joining the armed forces, followed by a series of caveats and moral dilemmas – which can be coupled with the idea of owing an overriding loyalty to the ummah.

In that sense, the terms of all these rulings are rather vague and raise more questions than they answer. Seddon says that Muslims can join the armed forces if they wish to defend the UK, but not in the event of 'aggressive attacks'. With this question being asked against the background of the Iraq War, the issue of whether a young Muslim should see Britain's military campaign there as a defensive move is left unaddressed.

This notion of incompatibility between the British armed forces and observant Islam is treated much less equivocally by Anjem Choudary, the founder of the now proscribed Islam4UK and organiser of their abortive Wootton Bassett march in January 2010. In a blog post from March 2011, the provocative and marginalised Choudary condemned the Bradford Council of Mosques for 'encouraging Muslims' to join the British armed forces and asserted that 'a Muslim will become an apostate if he fights for the British army against fellow Muslims'.³²²

Many Islamist leaders such as Qaradawi often argue that al-Qaeda represents an 'aberration' of Islamic theology. Yet, if that is their view, then why not encourage many more young Muslims to join the British forces to fight against it? After all, the notion of fighting against errant sects who undermine the Muslim faith – but claim to act in its name – is not unprecedented in Islamic history. Following the assassination of the third Caliph, Uthman ibn Affan, in 656, a civil war known as 'Fitnat Maqtal Uthmān' – the fitnah (mischief) of the killing of Uthman – erupted when Muslim forces subdued different sects which they regarded as deviating from the faith. Why, then, are some Islamist scholars today so reluctant to encourage Muslim participation in actions which target movements such as al-Qaeda?

The Police

Islamists who suggest British Muslims should refuse to serve in the armed forces do not all limit their exclusionary message to military service alone. The same principle is often also applied to discourage those hoping to join the police force or the intelligence and security agencies. While neither of these could be said to be 'at war' with Muslims in the way the armed forces are, the idea that they are somehow weighted against Islam (and that a Muslim's overriding loyalties must always be to other Muslims) is again too often used to discourage them from joining. Like the armed forces, the number of Muslims in the police force fails to reflect their demographic presence.³²³

According to the banned group Islam4UK – one of the incarnations of Omar Bakri's followers in Britain – Muslims who join the police force are guilty of apostasy. They insist that Muslims working for the police force are upholding and

321 <http://web.archive.org/web/20080416025534/http://www.islamonline.net/livedialogue/english/Browse.asp?hGuestID=cr7HxF>

322 <http://www.anjemchoudary.com/press-releases/british-army-exposed-and-bradford-council-of-mosques-shamed>

323 *Diversity In Modern Policing*, (Demos and National Association of Muslim Police, 2008), p. 6

implementing man-made law, instead of the Shariah. This reinforces a secular and liberal state not based on Islam, something the group and its followers regard as expressly prohibited. Muslims who ignore this are not just committing a sin, but have strayed into heresy by negating the Shariah. A leaflet telling Muslims not to join the police force says:

Those Muslims who join the police have left Islam for Kufr [disbelief] and deserve nothing in the dunya except our hatred and animosity and hatred [sic] and nothing in the hereafter except hellfire. There is no difference of opinion on it nor should we argue about what they deserve as that is decided by Allah.

[...]

So if anybody comes to you asking you to join the police force, do not be confused about him and do not respect him nor call him 'brother' or 'sir', but call him by his name, 'Munafiq'³²⁴...³²⁵

“ According to the banned group Islam4UK Muslims who join the police are guilty of apostasy. They insist that Muslims working for the police force are upholding and implementing man-made law, instead of the Shariah ”

Islam4UK have an almost negligible following among British Muslims, but propagation of such views on joining the police force has not always been confined to those on the most extreme fringes of Islamist politics. The *Dispatches* investigation into British mosques in 2007 discovered that at a mosque run by UK Islamic Mission (UKIM) in Sparkbrook, Birmingham, one preacher told the congregation:

Is it correct, is it viable, to join the police? How can you be implementing the laws of kufr? [Islam] means a rejection of the concept of democracy, rejecting the entirety of the system.³²⁶

Ironically, UKIM has previously worked with the police force and invited officers to its annual conference. In their defence, UKIM insisted the man filmed by *Dispatches* was only a visiting preacher and not the regular mosque imam. But these kinds of sentiments do translate into actual problems for Muslims engaged in frontline service. For example, after Israel launched military activity against Hezbollah in 2006, following the kidnapping of two soldiers, a Muslim in the Metropolitan Police Service refused to take up his post guarding the Israeli Embassy. The move was condemned by fellow officers, one of whom said, 'We're going down a very, very slippery slope if we then start having postings based on individual officers' conscience'.³²⁷

Keeping Muslims away from the police force is not just relevant to those who might consider joining. It also has serious implications for ordinary Muslims on whose assistance the police force are increasingly dependent. Consider the successful recent prosecution of Andrew Ibrahim (he later changed his first name to Isa), a convert to Islam who planned to bomb the Broadmead shopping centre in Bristol. Ibrahim had already built himself a suicide vest and acquired most of the active ingredients needed to construct his bomb. It was only community-led intelligence that resulted in his arrest after the imam at the Bristol Muslim Cultural Society notified the local police force of his concerns.³²⁸ *The Independent* reported Detective Superintendent Nigel Rock from Avon and Somerset Police as saying:

324 Literally means hypocrite – but has a much more derisory and pejorative connotation among Muslims.

325 Joining the Police: Apostasy; <http://web.archive.org/web/20090106132040/http://www.islam4uk.com/aaqeedah/al-walaa-wal-baraa/50-al-walaa-wal-baraa/139-joining-the-police-apostasy>

326 Transcript from 'Undercover Mosque' supplied by Hardcash Productions, producers of 'Undercover Mosque' for Channel 4, *Dispatches*.

327 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/5410094.stm>

328 <http://www.bmcs.org.uk/>

This was a landmark case due to the very fact that the initial information came direct from a member of the Muslim community to police. The fact that the Muslim community had that trust and confidence in the police to feel able to make that call is hugely significant. The police and public of Bristol owe a huge thank you to our Muslim community.³²⁹

Yet some self-styled Muslim leaders have poured scorn on the idea of Muslims cooperating with the police force. Following a raid in Forest Gate in 2006, Muslim relations with the Metropolitan Police Service were under strain. Of the two men arrested, one had been shot during the arrest, but neither was charged with any offence. Yvonne Ridley pounced on the situation, telling a Respect Party meeting in Newham that Muslims should:

Boycott the police and refuse to co-operate with them in any way, shape or form... This goes from asking the community copper for directions to passing the time of day with a beat officer. We should enforce non-co-operation.³³⁰

The following year, shortly after then Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, Sir Ian Blair, was said to have been furious at a Muslim policewoman's refusal to shake his hand at a passing-out parade, Ridley again launched a scathing attack against both the police force and 'self-important Muslim leaders [who] instead of standing up to the Establishment [...] are scuttling around like Uriah Heep characters without dignity or self respect'.³³¹ After accusing the Metropolitan Police Service of being 'institutionally racist' and creating an 'anti-Muslim culture' within, she says:

Perhaps now Muslim leaders will wake up to the rancid qualities of the Met and see the force for what it is ... Islamophobic to the core from the top downwards.³³²

These are not isolated incidents. Ridley is a high-profile campaigner for Islamist causes in Britain, speaking at large public rallies and broadcasting to a domestic and international audience through the Iranian-sponsored Press TV. Using her position to suggest Muslims should not cooperate with the police force because it is inherently biased against Islam and Muslims has real and damaging social effects among her following.

The Security Service

It is perhaps the covert work of intelligence and security agencies that elicit the most suspicion from Islamists. It is impossible to know how many Muslims work for the Security Service and Secret Intelligence Service because such statistics are not revealed, although MI5's website does say that 8 percent of its employees are from ethnic minorities.³³³ It is clear, however, that since 9/11 the Security Service has frequently spoken about a need to expand its base of Muslim personnel, and had shifted to a more open phase of public engagement by advertising vacancies publicly for the first time in its history. In recent years the Security Service has actively advertised for speakers of South Asian and Arab languages, suggesting these areas are under-resourced. Indeed, in 2007 the BBC's Asian Network was given unprecedented access to serving intelligence officers from a Muslim background, with the aim of dispelling some of the

³²⁹ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/muslim-convert-jailed-for-suicide-vest-bomb-plot-1750988.html>

³³⁰ <http://www.abdalullah.co.uk/template1.php?page=press-release>

³³¹ <http://web.archive.org/web/20090301212119/http://yvonneridley.org/yvonne-ridley/articles/the-muslims-the-met-4.html>

³³² *Ibid.*

³³³ <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/output/how-many-people-work-for-mi5.html>

myths that surround the Security Service.³³⁴ Nonetheless, suspicions remain high.

Islamists argue that spying is generally prohibited in Islam, making any form of intelligence gathering forbidden. This distinguishes intelligence careers from those in the military or police force, because even jurists who do not want Muslims to join the latter, rarely give a blanket prohibition. Instead they approve the basic idea of joining – but then pepper the ruling with so many caveats that it renders practical service in either the police force or armed forces impossible. However, there are a plethora of fatwas expressly forbidding any form of intelligence work outright. For example, an unsigned but popular Salafi fatwa, which is widely circulated and reproduced on Salafi/Islamist websites, reveals:

*Spying is the ultimate form of treason, and for a Muslim it is a major sin. While it is a form of alliance with the disbelievers, the ruling on it may range from a declaration of disbelief and apostasy to a state of major sinfulness. If its motivation is a longing for the victory of the disbelievers, and a hope for their subjugation of the Muslims, then this is the act of a disbeliever, however if a person was motivated by a desire for some personal or worldly gain or something similar, then it is a major sin.*³³⁵

The premise here is that anyone working with the intelligence agencies is immediately committing a major sin within Islam. There is no equivocation in the fatwa. The key issue here among Islamist scholars is always two-fold: the first stresses that such work is categorically prohibited, while the second advocates the most extreme of punishments. Notably, these opinions do not just come from Middle Eastern clerics, but from those in the West too. For example, Sheikh Muhammad Iqbal Nadvi, who is Imam at the Calgary Mosque in Canada, says that a Muslim who spies for ‘the enemies of Islam’

*[...] is not considered a Kafir (disbeliever), rather he is treated as a traitor for that country, if it is proven. The punishment for this act is beheading or death, but he will be buried as a Muslim.*³³⁶

Particularly worrying are the sermons of American-Yemeni scholar, Anwar al-Awlaki, who in 2009 published a pamphlet, ‘44 Ways to Support Jihad’.³³⁷ He starts by offering a stark insight into his world view:

*Jihad is the greatest deed in Islam and the salvation of the ummah is in practicing it... Jihad becomes obligatory on every Muslim.*³³⁸

One of the specific methods he gives for supporting the mujahideen is to ‘preserve their secrets’. He writes:

*The enemies of Allah will try to recruit Muslims to infiltrate Islamic work. They will tell them that we are doing this to protect the Muslims. They may carry along with them scholars who would approve that. Part of your role in protecting the mujahideen is by warning the Muslim community that spying on a Muslim for a non-Muslim is nothing less than kufr.*³³⁹

Awlaki currently lives in Yemen and has been targeted by US drones. Yet this has not prevented him from disseminating his virulent views around the world in the

334 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7112190.stm>

335 <http://kalamullah.com/fatwa08.html>

336 <http://web.archive.org/web/20070319070958/http://www.islamonline.net/livfatwa/english/Browse.asp?hGuestID=17qftL>

337 Anwar al-Awlaki, *44 Ways to Support Jihad*. A copy of this is in Policy Exchange’s possession.

338 *Ibid*, p.2

339 *Ibid*, p.9

past by utilising the internet for online broadcasts, and issuing books, and audio lectures. Indeed, the Department for Homeland Security website hosts a speech by Charles Allen which states:

*Another example of al-Qa'ida reach into the Homeland is U.S. citizen, al-Qa'ida supporter, and former spiritual leader to three of the September 11th hijackers Anwar al-Awlaki – who targets U.S. Muslims with radical online lectures encouraging terrorist attacks from his new home in Yemen.*³⁴⁰

340 Keynote Address at GEOINT Conference by Charles E. Allen, Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis /Chief Intelligence Officer (October 28, 2008) http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/speeches/sp_1225377634961.shtm

341 <http://www.ummah.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-79166.html>; <http://www.ummah.net/forum/showthread.php?t=83179>.

Please note that it is unclear whether Awlaki actually spoke at the event.

342 <http://74.125.93.104/search?q=cache:ZvoC0GIPQ6IJ:cit yisoc.com/+city+isoc&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk>

343 Ibid.

He has not just targeted the US. Awlaki was invited in 2006 to speak via video link at Westminster University by the Islamic Society.³⁴¹ In 2009 the Islamic Society at City University also planned to host Awlaki via a video link – although his attendance was later cancelled after the university received complaints.³⁴² However, prior to this, the Islamic Society at City University had promoted Awlaki's writings on their website, including a link to his own webpage from where pamphlets such as the one detailed above can be accessed.³⁴³ The promotion of men like Awlaki and their views in Britain creates massive barriers to entry and cooperation for Muslims considering a career in the Security Service. This is particularly damaging, especially as the Security Service and police force need high quality intelligence from communities in order to carry out their work effectively.

3

Conclusion – Reviving Muslim Service in the Armed Forces

Ideological and practical barriers to entry have made it increasingly difficult for young Muslims to seriously consider military careers. Overcoming them is crucial if the Ministry of Defence wants to succeed in recruiting more Muslims to the armed forces, to build more representative and successful services. At present, there are no official targets for recruitment of specific religious minorities.³⁴⁴ Instead, there is a more general emphasis on boosting the overall level of ethnic minority representation. The current percentage targets for 2011/12 are:

- Army – 4.3%
- Royal Navy – 3.5%
- Royal Air Force – 3.6%³⁴⁵

The MoD has regularly fallen short of realising these targets.³⁴⁶ The latest figures available for the 2008/09 recruitment cycle reveal the following intake of ethnic minorities (targets for that cycle follow in brackets):

- Army – 3.1% (4.3%)
- Royal Navy – 2.1% (3.5%)
- Royal Air Force – 2.2% (3.6%)³⁴⁷

The overall aim of the armed forces is to achieve 8 percent ethnic minority representation by 2013, bringing it in line with the level of ethnic minority representation in British society. Yet the MoD states that ‘Ethnic minority personnel are beginning to make progress towards the highest ranks in the armed forces although, given the low starting position, it will take many years before they are fully represented at all levels in the Services’.³⁴⁸ This is a remarkable position for the armed forces given that men from across the Commonwealth were willing volunteers during the upheavals of the last century.

Indeed, concerns about the MoD’s failure to attract minorities resulted in the Defence Select Committee launching an ‘e-consultation’ in 2008, which invited members of the public to share their opinions on why minorities are shunning military careers.³⁴⁹ The Committee stated that they ‘were especially keen to investigate the disconnect that exists in the number of recruits from ethnic minorities who choose to join the Services’. These findings contributed to a

344 Asifa Hussain and Mohammed Ishaq, ‘British Pakistani Muslims’ Perceptions of the Armed Forces’, *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 28, No. 4, Summer 2002, pp.601-618; also Policy Exchange Freedom of Information request to Ministry of Defence (Ref: 29-07-2009-112613-003)

345 Policy Exchange Freedom of Information request to Ministry of Defence (Ref: FOI-24-05-2011-121509-007)

346 Equality and Diversity Scheme Annual Report 2008-2009 (Ministry of Defence), p. 7.

347 Ibid.

348 Ibid, p. 6.

349 <http://web.archive.org/web/20080625215457/http://forums.parliament.uk/defence-recruitment/index.php?index,1>

lengthy report, which, in part, sought ‘to examine why ethnic minority personnel formed such a low proportion of the Armed Forces’.³⁵⁰

The number of Muslim servicemen in the armed forces over the last three years is given in the table below.³⁵¹

Table 5: Numbers of Muslims in UK Regular Forces by service at 1 April, 2008-2010

	2008		2009		2010	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
All services	390	0.2	500	0.3	600	0.3
Army	300	0.3	410	0.4	500	0.5
Royal Navy	40	0.1	40	0.1	40	0.1
Royal Air Force	50	0.1	50	0.1	60	0.1

Senior politicians and military figures have also joined the efforts to create British armed forces that better reflect our population. In April 2009, the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces Bob Ainsworth appealed at the Armed Forces Muslim Conference for more British Muslims to join up, saying it was ‘vitaly important that our army, navy and air force are reflective of the hugely diverse society in which we live’.³⁵² In June 2008, it was widely reported that the then Commander-in-Chief of British Land Forces, General Sir David Richards, had told an internal MoD journal that he wished to recruit more Muslims into the armed forces.³⁵³

Muslim attitudes to the armed forces

The most authoritative academic study exploring Muslim attitudes to recruitment was published back in 2002, but it still offers a remarkable insight into Muslim perceptions of the armed forces.³⁵⁴ It focuses specifically on Muslims of Pakistani ethnic origin – the group which comprises half of the British Muslim community. The study polled 300 British Muslims of Pakistani ethnic origin and found that 46 percent said they would consider a career in the armed forces; the remaining 54 percent said they would not.³⁵⁵ Reasons given by those who said they would not consider a military career are listed in the table below.

Table 6: Reasons why British Pakistani Muslims would not consider a career in the armed forces

Reasons for not joining	% Response (all)	% male	% female
Concern about the profession	26	21	28
Lack of knowledge about armed forces careers	20	21	19
Racism and lack of equal opportunities	16	24	7
Prefer further education	13	13	13
Prefer non-military/civilian careers	8	9	8
Not patriotic about Britain	6	7	6
Dislike British foreign policy	6	3	10
Disruption to family life	5	2	9

350 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmslect/cmdfence/424/42404.htm>

351 Adapted from the UK Defence Statistics 2010, published by the Defence Analytical Services and Advice (DASA); see more at: <http://www.dasa.mod.uk/modint/ranet/UKDS/UKDS2010/c2/table213.php>

352 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/apr/03/muslims-urged-join-armed-forces>

353 <http://www.socialcohesion.co.uk/blog/2008/06/british-army-plans-to-recruit-more-muslims.html>

354 Asifa Hussain and Mohammed Ishaq, British Pakistani Muslims’ Perceptions of the Armed Forces, *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol.28, No. 4, Summer 2002, pp.601-618.

355 *Ibid*, p.606

Over a quarter of respondents (26 percent) expressed a concern about the profession – which included the perception that a military career was not prestigious, or a dislike of the armed forces because of opposition to war, or the belief that the culture and training are too unwelcoming. Nonetheless, there is a potentially untapped market here. In 2010 the Equality and Human Rights Commission revealed that:

33% of Muslim women (of working-age) have no qualifications, and only 9% have a degree.³⁵⁶

and

Muslim men are also most likely not to have any qualifications (24%) and again, least likely to have a degree (11%).³⁵⁷

Between 2007 and 2009, Muslim men were also the least likely to be found working in managerial or professional or associate professional occupations (35 percent).³⁵⁸ Indeed, they are the most likely to fill low skilled jobs. 36 percent of Muslim men were involved in plant and machinery factory work and in unskilled elementary work.³⁵⁹ In the study looking at Muslim attitudes towards the armed forces, it was this category of respondents – those working in manual and low skilled jobs – who expressed the greatest likelihood of considering a military career (79 percent).³⁶⁰ Support for this option was similarly high among the unemployed (59 percent) – another problem particularly acute in segments of the British Muslim community.³⁶¹ There is consequently a real opportunity for the armed forces to advertise itself to this category, explaining the lifelong skills and qualifications which a career, for example, in the Royal Engineers, can bring. This can help to challenge the concerns they have about the profession while offering them a tangible and structured career path linked to more conventional qualifications.

Fears of racism and discrimination

Significantly, what mattered to Muslim men the most (24 percent) was the perception of racism and lack of opportunity for progression. This is a problem that has been exacerbated in recent years. The public debate following the Macpherson label of ‘institutional racism’ – though originally applied only to the police force – has caused a wider shift in the way minorities perceive organisational cultures, including that of the armed forces.³⁶² This has been coupled with repeated media coverage of alleged bullying and racism within the armed forces – including embarrassing accusations that structures on Catterick garrison’s firing range resembled mosques.³⁶³

This problem has been compounded by the ‘War on Terror’ and British military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq – conflicts used by Islamists to suggest that the British Army is somehow engaged in a ‘War on Islam’. The MoD has been committed to creating a non-discriminatory culture for years. According to Humayun Ansari, in the 1990s ‘[t]he armed forces introduced measures to cater for Muslim needs, such as ration-packs that included halal food, and allowed Muslims to pray five times a day unless it was impossible for operational or

356 *How fair is Britain? Equality, Human Rights and Good Relations in 2010. The First Triennial Review* (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010), p. 358

357 Ibid.

358 Ibid, p. 429.

359 Ibid.

360 Asifa Hussain and Mohammed Ishaq, British Pakistani Muslims’ Perceptions of the Armed Forces, *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol.28, No. 4, Summer 2002, p.607

361 *How fair is Britain? Equality, Human Rights and Good Relations in 2010. The First Triennial Review* (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010), p. 405

362 Sarah Neal, The Scarman Report, the Macpherson Report and the Media: How Newspapers Respond to Race-centred Social Policy Interventions, *Journal of Social Policy* (2003), Vol. 32, No.1, pp.55-74

363 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/north_yorkshire/8609650.stm

‘practical’ environmental reasons’.³⁶⁴ Yet, despite these efforts, the MoD is struggling to allay the fears of many Muslims. However, challenging perceptions of racism will therefore also require a commitment to directly confront the Islamist canards which create ‘barriers to entry’. This might include highlighting the role of the British armed forces in delivering humanitarian aid following the 2005 earthquake which devastated Kashmir, claiming almost 75,000 lives. Seventy six members of 59 Independent Commando Squadron Royal Engineers and ten members of 42 Commando Royal Marines – all specialists in mountain and cold weather operations – were deployed to help.³⁶⁵ Their tasks included:

- Building 30 large school shelters, including one to replace a girls’ school destroyed by the quake in the village of Mukhdoom Kot at 6000 feet;
- Building 17 health centres, including one for the World Health Organisation;
- Putting out a house fire;
- Rescuing an 11-vehicle aid convoy trapped in deep snow;
- Distributing food and clothing to remote areas.³⁶⁶

More recently, the MoD could point to the role of the British armed forces following the catastrophic floods in Pakistan last year. The RAF was heavily involved in the relief efforts, transporting tents, food and medical supplies to Islamabad.³⁶⁷

Of course, there are countless examples the MoD could offer; but what matters is a willingness squarely to confront the charges levelled against them by Islamist opponents. This was how Muslim support for the British war effort in 1914 was sustained, despite the Ottoman Empire inciting Indian Muslims to revolt. Today, how could Islamists argue that Britain is somehow weighted against their faith when in the first Gulf War, it was British troops who safeguarded traditional Muslim regimes, such as Saudi Arabia? Similarly, it was British soldiers who acted in defence of Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo during the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s. Articulating this case over and over again to Muslim audiences should go some way towards dispelling fears that the military is an institution at odds with them.

Fears about racism have also been fanned by the rise of the BNP and their attempts to employ military imagery in their favour – providing them with a spurious veneer of patriotism. Their 2009 European Parliamentary campaign was based on a ‘Battle of Britain’ theme.³⁶⁸ The BNP even adopted a Spitfire – ironically, a Polish one – as their logo for the initiative.³⁶⁹ Associating the armed forces with the far right in this way almost certainly fuels the perception that military culture is hostile to minorities. However, as already highlighted in the introduction to this pamphlet (see pp.7-8), the Services have vigorously challenged and resisted BNP attempts to appropriate military heritage for their purposes. This is a welcome step as more than a quarter of those interviewed (28 percent) argued that challenging racism should be a top priority for the MoD.³⁷⁰ Yet there is no comparable fight-back against Islamists – who too often tarnish the reputation of the armed forces for their own political aims.

This must be urgently addressed. After all, it was that willingness to confront the Ottoman government’s propaganda in the Great War that retained Muslim support. What did they fight for? Yes, the cultural and religious rights of soldiers

364 Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within: Muslims in Britain since 1800* (London, 2004), p. 204

365 <http://web.archive.org/web/20090114074807/http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/MilitaryOperations/PakistanPrimeMinisterMeetsEarthquakeReliefTroopsAtDowningStreet.htm>

366 Ibid.

367 <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/MilitaryOperations/PakistanFloodReliefUpdate.htm>

368 The BNP refers to this campaign, interchangeably, on its website as both: ‘the battle for Britain’ and ‘the battle of Britain’. For consistency, the correct name of the original RAF campaign to which the BNP are referring is used: ‘battle of Britain’.

369 <http://bnp.org.uk/tag/bnp-battle-of-britain-road-show/>; also see: <http://bnp.org.uk/index.php?s=%C2%A3390%2C000>

370 Asifa Hussain and Mohammed Ishaq, British Pakistani Muslims’ Perceptions of the Armed Forces, *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol.28, No. 4, Summer 2002, p.612

from different backgrounds were respected, as already documented earlier in this pamphlet (see pp.21–27) – but the government of the day was also unequivocal about the rightness of its cause. The moral case against the Central Powers, which the Ottoman Empire supported in the First World War, and against Nazi Germany in the Second World War, was clearly explained to men across the Empire. As already illustrated, they largely responded to the openness and clarity of that message, buoyed by Britain’s surety of purpose.

Guarding against infiltration

Such self-confident messages are too rare today. The corollary is that anger and dissent has increased, alienating large sections of the British Muslim community from the armed forces and its mission. The pressures on active servicemen in this respect can be exceptionally high and the Fort Hood attack in America in November 2009 demonstrates the dangers. Indeed, as the global jihadi movement continues to adopt an increasingly decentralised structure by inspiring ‘self-starters’, such risks are only likely to increase. Mitchell Silber, Director of Intelligence Analysis at the New York City Police Department, confirmed this view in his testimony to the US Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on the Fort Hood attack. ‘[The] home grown threat ... has no operational relationship with AQ Core, but consists of individuals radicalized in the West, who utilize al-Qaeda ideology as their inspiration for their actions’, he told the Committee.³⁷¹ Combating that threat means understanding the ideological challenge groups such as al-Qaeda pose and identifying those susceptible or likely to be influenced by its message.

The official inquiry conducted by the Department of Defense (DoD) into the attack at Fort Hood, however, attracted heavy criticism after one of the inquiry’s co-chairmen, former Secretary of the US Army, Togo West, said:

*Our concern is with actions and effects, not necessarily with motivations.*³⁷²

Of course, without motivation there would not have been any terrorist attack. That much is evident from the actions of Major Nidal Hasan who proselytised his radical beliefs and maintained contact with radical preachers such as Anwar al-Awlaki. Indeed, Awlaki celebrated the Fort Hood shootings with the following statement on his website:

Nidal Hassan is a hero. He is a man of conscience who could not bear living the contradiction of being a Muslim and serving in an army that is fighting against his own people. This is a contradiction that many Muslims brush aside and just pretend that it doesn't exist. Any decent Muslim cannot live, understanding properly his duties towards his Creator and his fellow Muslims, and yet serve as a US soldier. The US is leading the war against terrorism which in reality is a war against Islam. Its army is directly invading two Muslim countries and indirectly occupying the rest through its stooges.

Nidal opened fire on soldiers who were on their way to be deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. How can there be any dispute about the virtue of what he has done? In fact the only way a Muslim could Islamically justify serving as a soldier in the US army is if his intention is to follow the footsteps of men like Nidal.

371 The Fort Hood Attack: a preliminary assessment, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, evidence of Mitchell D. Silber, available at:

http://hsgac.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?fuseAction=Hearings.Hearing&Hearing_ID=70b4e9b6-d2af-4290-b9fd-7a466a0a86b6

372 U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), News Transcript, DoD Briefing with former Army Secretary West and Adm. Clark (Ret.) from the Pentagon (15 January 2010). Available at:

<http://www.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=4536>

[...]

The fact that fighting against the US army is an Islamic duty today cannot be disputed. No scholar with a grain of Islamic knowledge can defy the clear cut proofs that Muslims today have the right – rather the duty – to fight against American tyranny. Nidal has killed soldiers who were about to be deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan in order to kill Muslims. The American Muslims who condemned his actions have committed treason against the Muslim Ummah and have fallen into hypocrisy.

[...]

May Allah grant our brother Nidal patience, perseverance and steadfastness and we ask Allah to accept from him his great heroic act. Ameen.³⁷³

Despite this, the DoD report failed to consider the ideological impulses that motivated Major Hasan. West explained, ‘Our concern is not with the religion.

“ Careful consideration will need to be given to precisely what criteria are needed to identify potentially worrying behaviour by individuals susceptible to extremism ”

It is with the potential effect on our soldiers’ ability to do their job’.³⁷⁴

Even by this standard, no consideration is given to what effect adherence to Islamist beliefs might have on active servicemen.

The other co-chairman of the DoD inquiry, former Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Vernon Clark

(Ret.), explained that the DoD report did not concern itself with issues of self-radicalisation – and, therefore, the associated issues of subversion and infiltration. ‘We were examining, policies, procedures, programs, and so we weren't out there digging around in that’, Clark said.³⁷⁵

It is clear however that had greater emphasis been given to exploring the ideological sympathies of Major Hasan, then his attack might have been thwarted. At the time of perpetrating his outrage at Fort Hood Major Hasan possessed ‘SECRET’ security level clearance. The DoD report, ‘Protecting the Force: Lesson from Fort Hood’, admits:

This background investigation did not include a subject interview or interviews with co-workers, supervisors or expanded character references. We believe that if a more thorough investigation had been accomplished, his security clearance may have been revoked and his continued service and pending deployment would have been subject to increased scrutiny.³⁷⁶

The report suggests that it can be difficult for concerned colleagues to know when – and what – information should be offered to their superiors. Current guidelines, it says, ‘do not provide commanders and their personnel with clear distinctions or thresholds for what constitutes significant information that should be forwarded’.³⁷⁷

Careful consideration will need to be given to precisely what criteria are needed to identify potentially worrying behaviour by individuals susceptible to extremism. Yet the US Army is already well experienced at combating extremist groups within its ranks and, in this respect, the challenge posed by Islamist groups – and their sympathisers – is not unprecedented.

For example, the DoD already has an established policy of not tolerating groups, practices or activities that are discriminatory or extremist in nature. These

373 <http://web.archive.org/web/20091110043834/http://www.anwar-alawlaki.com/?p=228>

374 <http://www.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=4536>

375 Ibid.

376 *Protecting the Force: Lesson from Fort Hood, Report of the DoD Independent Review* (January 2010) pp.12-13 Available at: http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/DOD-ProtectingTheForce-Web_Security_HR_13jan10.pdf

377 Ibid, p.13

guidelines have been periodically reviewed and updated in line with changing attitudes and events – as occurred in 1996 after two servicemen were found to be white supremacists and guilty of racially motivated murder against African-Americans in the previous year.³⁷⁸ As a result, the Army issued a detailed pamphlet on ‘Extremist Activities’, which explored the dangers of white supremacist and neo-Nazi infiltration in the Army.³⁷⁹ It explains, ‘Participation in extremist organizations and activities by Army personnel is inconsistent with duties of military service’.³⁸⁰ US servicemen are told they must ‘reject participation in extremist organizations and activities’.³⁸¹ The document offers a wide construction of what kind of group might be defined as ‘extremist’:

*Extremist organizations are ones that advocate racial, gender, or ethnic hatred or intolerance; advocate, create, or engage in illegal discrimination based on race, color, gender, religion, or national origin; advocate the use of or use force, violence or unlawful means to deprive individuals of their rights under the United States Constitution or the laws of the United States or any State by unlawful means.*³⁸²

In February 2011, the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee released a report by its Chairman, Senator Joseph Lieberman (I-CONN), and Ranking Member, Senator Susan Collins (R-ME), entitled, ‘A Ticking Time Bomb: Counterterrorism Lessons From The U.S. Government’s Failure To Prevent The Fort Hood Attack’.³⁸³ In contrast to the West/Clark report for DoD a year earlier, this document confronted Hasan’s motivations in detail and attempts to specify an established practice for tackling ‘radicalization to violent Islamist extremism’ amongst US military personnel.³⁸⁴

Building on the potential threats outlined in ‘Extremist Activities’ (which focused on far right and neo-Nazi groups),³⁸⁵ the report bluntly states that it is ‘clear that ... DoD lacks the institutional culture, through updated policies and training, sufficient to inform commanders and all levels of servicemembers how to identify radicalization to violent Islamist extremism’.³⁸⁶ It advises that:

*‘DoD should reform religious discrimination and other equal opportunity policies to distinguish violent Islamist extremism from legitimate, protected religious observance of Islam so that commanders will not be reluctant to deal with displays of violent Islamist extremism’.*³⁸⁷

Before the report’s publication, one of America’s most distinguished soldiers, General Jack Keane (USA, Ret.) told the Committee that the current challenges facing the US military are not unprecedented. ‘It is very similar to what we experienced at Ft Bragg in the late 90’s where we were wrongfully tolerating extremists in our organizations who displayed a pattern of behavior that put them at odds with the values and character of the Army’, he said.³⁸⁸ Had the guidelines outlined in the ‘Extremist Activities’ pamphlet been followed, it is likely that Major Hasan’s behaviour – such as his adherence to fundamentalist Islamic dress and proselytising which included ‘explaining’ the mindset of suicide bombers – would have triggered alarm bells.

The US Senate Committee report thus highlights three existing policies under which Hasan could have been dismissed from the military long before he carried out his deadly act of terrorism.³⁸⁹ However, ‘A Ticking Time Bomb’

378 <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=40488>

379 *Extremist Activities*, Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-15 (1 June 2000). Available at: <http://www.kaiserslautern.army.mil/sites/installation/DA%20PAM%20600-15%20EXTREMIST%20ACTIVITIES.pdf>

380 *Ibid*, p.1

381 *Ibid*, p.2

382 *Ibid*.

383 *A Ticking Time Bomb: Counterterrorism Lessons From The U.S. Government’s Failure To Prevent The Fort Hood Attack* (U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, February 2011), available at: http://hsgac.senate.gov/public/_files/Fort_Hood/FortHoodReport.pdf

384 *Ibid*.

385 *Ibid*, p. 46.

386 *Ibid*, p. 9.

387 *Ibid*, p. 49.

388 The Fort Hood Attack: a preliminary assessment, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, evidence of General John M. Keane (US Army, Retired), available at: http://hsgac.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Hearings.Hearing&Hearing_ID=70b4e9b6-d2af-4290-b9fd-7a466a0a86b6

389 *A Ticking Time Bomb: Counterterrorism Lessons From The U.S. Government’s Failure To Prevent The Fort Hood Attack* (U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, February 2011), pp. 46-7

provides another powerful argument for updating recruitment processes and personnel monitoring through the assertion that ‘such specific policies and training are essential to protect the thousands of Muslim-Americans who serve honorably in the military from unwarranted suspicion arising from their religious practice’.³⁹⁰

The British armed forces have not pronounced as much on this topic as their American counterparts. The armed forces application form tells potential recruits:

*Your application will be rejected if you are (or have been) a member or supporter of – or associated with – any group or organisation whose purpose includes provocation to racial hatred and violence.*³⁹¹

Similar statements appear on the careers websites for the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force which respectively state, ‘Your application will definitely not be accepted if you’ve ever been, or still are, a member of a group that stirs up racial hatred and violence’;³⁹² and, ‘Your application will be rejected if you are, or have been, a member, supporter or associated with any group or organisation whose purpose includes incitement to racial hatred and violence’.³⁹³

It is not clear how the armed forces define ‘racial hatred and violence’, or by what standard a particular group will be deemed to be inciting or provoking others to it. In this respect, the threshold seems unduly narrow when compared to the apparently broader construction of ‘extremism’ put forward by the US Army. Some indication of the British armed forces’ thinking is given in the ‘Naval Personnel Management Handbook’, which states:

- a) *Service life precludes membership or support for extremist groups or organisations whose purpose includes incitement to racial hatred and violence. The Naval Service has a ‘Zero Tolerance’ Policy towards racial discrimination or harassment and is determined to eradicate any racial behaviour within the Service.*
- b) *There are numerous such groups and organisations, e.g. COMBAT 18, with frequently changing names and objectives. Candidates, who, during the recruiting process, declare themselves members of such groups, have unspent convictions for racially motivated offences or express extreme racial views, are to be interviewed and rejected for lack of personal qualities.*³⁹⁴

Yes, ideas of racial superiority and purity may be inspired by European totalitarianism during the last century – but to define ‘extremism’ through such a narrow prism now overlooks the changing dynamics of extremist ideology and its agents in the twenty-first century. It ignores the broader set of normative British values that our armed forces are expected to protect, including legal and constitutional equality for all, which denies discrimination on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, and faith. For so long as these factors are excluded from consideration, vetting procedures run the risk of missing potential extremists.

All members of the armed forces are currently vetted by the Defence Vetting Agency (DVA).³⁹⁵ Their role is to ‘provide an acceptable level of assurance as to the integrity of potential and serving civilian and military MoD employees and Defence Industry staff who will be, or are, given authorised access to sensitive Government information or valuable assets’.³⁹⁶ To achieve this, different levels of security clearance apply in different circumstances, as explained by the DVA:

390 Ibid, p. 49.

391 Her Majesty’s Armed Forces Application Form Guidance Notes, p.2 Available at: http://www.army.mod.uk/documents/general/AFCO_Form5-U.pdf

392 <http://www.raf.mod.uk/careers/canijoin/youcantjoinif.cfm>

393 <http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/careers/how-to-join/eligibility/>

394 *Naval Personnel Management Handbook* (September 2009) Available at: <http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/load/package/68/br3book/ch06.pdf>

395 *Defence Vetting Agency Framework Document* (2006) p.4 Available at: http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/92C6679F-CAE5-442F-8D86-662AD926146C/0/dva_framework_document_2006.pdf

396 Ibid, p.9

- ? **Counter Terrorist Check (CTC)** for people employed in posts with proximity to public figures, access to information or material assessed to be of value to terrorists or unescorted access to establishments assessed to be at risk from terrorist attack. A CTC does not allow a person access to, or knowledge of, protectively marked assets.
- ? **Security Check (SC)** for people employed in posts which have substantial access to SECRET assets or occasional controlled access to TOP-SECRET assets.
- ? **Developed Vetting (DV)** is needed for people with substantial unsupervised access to TOP-SECRET assets.³⁹⁷

The dangers of misjudgement were highlighted in 2006, when Iranian-born Daniel James was arrested on suspicion of spying for Tehran. James was later charged with two offences under the Official Secrets Act 1911. This included ‘communicating information to another person, and collecting documents useful to an enemy’.³⁹⁸ He was also charged with misconduct in a public office.

In November 2008, James was convicted of the first offence. The Deputy Head of the Crown Prosecution Service’s Counter Terrorism Division, Deborah Walsh, said, ‘Daniel James was unanimously convicted by a jury on the first espionage charge’.³⁹⁹ Walsh added that he ‘betrayed not only the British Army but the country he was supposed to serve, when he collected and passed on information which could be useful to an enemy’.⁴⁰⁰

Indeed, James operated at the highest levels while serving as a translator for General Sir David Richards, who was then head of the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) in Afghanistan. He also had ‘level one security clearance’, meaning he was able to move about the base in Kabul freely and had access to a ‘yellow card’ which listed the Commander of ISAF’s daily schedule.⁴⁰¹

While serving as a translator to General Richards, James sent emails to Col Mohammad Hossein Heydari, who was the Iranian military assistant at the Iranian Embassy in Kabul at the time.⁴⁰² ‘I am at your service’, began one of the emails sent by James.⁴⁰³

It underscores the need for tighter regulations and ongoing monitoring of those afforded the highest levels of security clearance. That much was confirmed by James’ own counsel. Passing sentence, the judge said: ‘Your counsel has said you should never have been put in the position you were put in and you were obviously unsuited to that position. I have no doubt there is force in that submission’.⁴⁰⁴

Religious ‘gatekeepers’

One of the most dramatic findings of the study into the attitudes of British Muslims found that they placed almost no emphasis on the views of religious ‘gatekeepers’ when considering a military career. Indeed, only 3 percent said that making provisions for religious practice and observance should be used to market the armed forces to Muslims. The report says:

It was found that [religious] leaders have their own personal views on the services and can try to prevent young Asian people from joining, no one cited religious or community leaders as a good medium for recruitment. This is significant because many senior army officers in interviews often cite contact with religious and community leaders as a possible method to recruitment of minorities.⁴⁰⁵

397 <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/WhatWeDo/SecurityandIntelligence/DVA/WhatWeDoNationalSecurityChecks.htm>

398 CPS decides no retrial for Daniel James – soldier faces sentence over Official Secrets breach. See: http://www.cps.gov.uk/news/press_releases/172_08/

399 Ibid.

400 Ibid.

401 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7711341.stm>

402 CPS decides no retrial for Daniel James – soldier faces sentence over Official Secrets breach. See: http://www.cps.gov.uk/news/press_releases/172_08/

403 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7711341.stm>

404 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7754981.stm>

405 Asifa Hussain and Mohammed Ishaq, British Pakistani Muslims’ Perceptions of the Armed Forces, *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol.28, No. 4, Summer 2002, p.612-13

Institutionalising group recognition in this regard can therefore be counterproductive. It implicitly tells young Muslims that the state regards their confessional identity as being the most important feature about them.

The group currently accredited to the MoD as an advisory body is the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB). A freedom of information request reveals that the MoD has ‘a Religious Adviser ... nominated by ... the Muslim Council of Britain’.⁴⁰⁶ Indeed, it would appear from the MoD’s own website that the groups officially consulted on Islamic matters are the MCB – and, on one occasion, the Islamic Society of Britain. Some key events and appointments include:

- The Armed Forces Muslim Conference 2008 was dominated by leading figures from the MCB, including Khurshid Drabu and Mohammed Abdul Bari.⁴⁰⁷
- The Second Sea Lord, Vice-Admiral Sir Adrian Johns, hosted Mohammed Abdul Bari and colleagues at the Portsmouth-based frigate HMS Richmond in February 2007.⁴⁰⁸
- The MCB was invited to meet the then Chief of Defence Staff, Sir Jock Stirrup, and senior aides in January 2007: the MCB members in attendance were Mohammed Abdul Bari and Sir Iqbal Sacranie. The MCB said the ‘meeting was at the invitation of the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) Sir Jock Stirrup at his offices in the Ministry of Defence in London’.⁴⁰⁹
- The then Chief of Defence Staff, General Sir Michael Walker, and a small team of senior officers gave a presentation in March 2005 to the Muslim Council of Britain’s governing body at the Islamic Cultural Centre, Regents Park.⁴¹⁰
- Members of the MCB were invited to a Portsmouth Naval Base in February 2004, as guests of then Vice-Admiral Sir James Burnell-Nugent.⁴¹¹ Those in attendance were Khurshid Drabu, Daud Abdullah and Shiban Akbar.
- Khurshid Drabu has held multiple roles within the MCB – including chairman of the Legal Affairs Committee; a member of the board of counsellors; member of the Chaplaincy Committee; and chairman of the MCB Friends Committee. He is currently listed as the advisor on Constitutional Affairs; and has been involved with the group since its creation in 1997. He describes himself as having ‘played a leading role in the formation of the Muslim Council of Britain in 1997 as author of its Constitution and the first Chair of its Legal Affairs Committee’.⁴¹² According to the MCB’s website, ‘the elected office bearers of the MCB rely heavily on Mr. Drabu for advice and support’.⁴¹³

Remarkably, although the MoD established links with the MCB from as early as 2002, then Secretary General Sir Iqbal Sacranie told his group’s Annual General Meeting in 2005:

Recently the MCB invited the British Army’s chief of staff and other military top-brass, as part of its regular programme of engagement with the decision-makers. Of course the issue of Muslims serving in the Armed Forces were in the fore-front of our minds. This is one of those areas where Muslims in Britain have yet to work out appropriate terms of ‘accommodation’, to use the term of my colleague in the MCB, Muhammad Iqbal Asaria.⁴¹⁴

But what are these terms of ‘accommodation’? Consider that in 2004 MCB officials were invited as representatives of the Muslim community to attend the

406 Policy Exchange freedom of information request to MoD.

407 Conference programme in Policy Exchange’s possession.

408 http://www.mcb.org.uk/article_detail.php?article=announcement-625

409 http://www.mcb.org.uk/article_detail.php?article=announcement-619

410 <http://ukinmalaysia.fco.gov.uk/en/newsroom/?view=News&id=2097271>; Also see: http://www.mcb.org.uk/features/features.php?ann_id=873 and http://www.mcb.org.uk/features/features.php?ann_id=888

411 http://www.mcb.org.uk/article_detail.php?article=announcement-301

412 <http://web.archive.org/web/20090519065045/http://www.iftc.uk.com/speakers.php>

413 http://www.mcb.org.uk/features/features.php?ann_id=879

414 *MCB Eighth Annual General Meeting* (14 May 2005). Available at: http://www.mcb.org.uk/downloads/Secretary_General_2005.pdf

Remembrance Sunday ceremony in London, marking the signing of the Armistice in 1914. At the same time, infantrymen from the Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) were fighting a fierce battle with insurgents in Fallujah – the site of some of the most intense guerrilla fighting after the capitulation of Saddam’s forces the previous year. Earlier that day, before attending the remembrance service, then Deputy Secretary General of the MCB, Mohammed Abdul Bari, gave an interview to the BBC’s Sunday Show on Radio 4. This exchange shows how Roger Bolton pressed Bari on the legitimacy of those fighting against British troops.

Roger Bolton: Good morning

Abdul Bari: Good morning

RB: You’ve called the assault on Fallujah barbaric, but wasn’t its occupation by Iraqi militants and foreign fighters, using civilians as shields, also barbaric?

AB: Well we have to see what happened in the beginning, erm, as mentioned by some of, er, your people interviewed and I think agreed by the international community, that the occupation of Iraq was illegal. So, er, if people of Iraq want to come out and fight against the occupation army, we know that we also mention somewhere, we know there could be some people from outside Iraq that are coming and that is because the main reason that the occupation happened.

RB: Do you think therefore that armed resistance of the sort we are seeing in Fallujah is legitimate? Do you support the fighters who are ranged against American and British troops?

AB: Well, people of Iraq have to decide, because the war has been imposed on them.

RB: I’m sorry, I’m asking if you, not the people in Iraq, do you therefore think it is legitimate for people to fight against the American and British troops in Iraq?

AB: Well, it’s for the people of Iraq to decide.

RB: But it certainly could be legitimate, you’re not telling them it’s wrong.

AB: Well, what we are saying is that the occupation of Iraq itself was wrong.⁴¹⁵

What is it that the MoD expects an organisation such as the MCB to deliver – particularly when Muslims themselves are saying that such groups have no bearing on their decision to join the armed forces?

Indeed, the MCB produced a short pamphlet in 2009 titled, ‘Remembering the Brave: the Muslim contribution to Britain’s Armed Forces’.⁴¹⁶ Their paper briefly outlines the historical contribution of Muslim service during the First and Second World Wars, noting many of the same characteristics of Muslim participation and motivation as recorded in the historical sections of this pamphlet. Interestingly, the MCB report acknowledges that during the Great War, ‘British Muslims supported the war effort in quite rational terms’.⁴¹⁷

That was certainly the case. After all, how else could Muslim support for Britain be reconciled with the fact that British forces were actively fighting Ottoman troops for most of the war? Yet the pamphlet goes on to dismiss Muslim under-representation in the armed forces today by saying that ‘this is partly attributed to contentious operations that the United Kingdom is engaged around the world’.⁴¹⁸ Of course, while Britain’s military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq have attracted controversy, their potential ‘contentiousness’ is almost incomparable to that which faced Indian Muslims in 1914 when the Ottoman government incited them to jihad. The MCB pamphlet does not adequately explore the theological and political basis of Muslim motivation in the First and Second World Wars, which allowed ordinary Muslims to reconcile the competing demands on their allegiances.

415 A copy of this recording is in Policy Exchange’s possession.

416 *Remembering the Brave: the Muslim contribution to Britain’s Armed Forces* (A special report by the Muslim Council of Britain) (MCB, 2009). Available at: http://www.mcb.org.uk/downloads/RememberingtheBrave_MCB.pdf

417 *Ibid*, p.6

418 *Ibid*, p.9

Portraying itself as a representative body of British Muslims, surely the MCB should be best placed to learn the historical lessons of the British Muslim experience and chart a way through the current challenges they face.

In an interview with *Muslim News*, then Chief of the General Staff, General Sir David Richards, expressed his frustration at the lack of an ‘alternative view’ being given to young Muslims:

*This is a war that needs to be fought and can be won. We haven't sold this very well and we've debated it before and we need to do better. It is very important for the Muslim community to be exposed to an alternative view as it is for the rest of the nation. The Taliban kill many more Muslims than we do.*⁴¹⁹

That they do – but there are few who are prepared to make that case to young Muslims in the way Indian leaders did during the last century. General Richards went on to explain that he does not want Britain to be ‘perceived as the enemy force’ and outlined the necessity of his mission in Afghanistan:⁴²⁰

If we gave up Afghanistan tomorrow, I absolutely guarantee that if you are an AQ [al-Qa'ida] member or Taliban they will pour back into southern Afghanistan and they will have the freedom to then plan and train and conduct operations which now they don't have.

[...]

*We have promised the people of Afghanistan we would help them and bring them out of the impasse and horrors of the two generations worth of war. So if we are going to renege on our promises and let the Taliban and AQ back [ordinary Afghans] are going to be extremely anti west at that point and will probably have no option but to welcome AQ back into their midst.*⁴²¹

There is a case, of course, for saying the MoD should resist engaging with Muslims through communal and religious groups, appealing to them directly as they would any other citizen. Yet, if it does wish to continue partnering with Muslim organisations, then there are alternatives to the MCB, such as Shaaz Mahboob from British Muslims for Secular Democracy (BMSD). He has been much more forthright than any other Muslim leader in expressing his thoughts about the dangers and challenges currently facing British soldiers. Like Indian Muslim leaders who rationalised the situation in which they found themselves after Turkey entered the Great War in 1914, Mahboob points out:

British Muslims did not object to the military campaign against former Yugoslavia, in fact hailed it, when fellow Muslim Kosovars benefited from the war on foreign soil, deemed by the Serbs as foreign invasion and interference. Yet when it comes to brutal regimes and their atrocities such as the ones in Darfur or Afghanistan, the Muslim silence is deafening.

*It is high time British Muslims recognise and acknowledge that in order to exert their rights as British people, they must also fulfil their civic and moral responsibilities by beginning to show solidarity with the rest of the society, especially where it matters the most.*⁴²²

Yet, because groups such as BMSD do not market themselves as gatekeeper ‘umbrella’ organisation with scores of affiliates, their views too often go unheard by officialdom. Similarly, Khurshid Ahmed, speaking whilst Chairman of the British Muslim Forum, issued a statement in 2006 telling British Muslims that if they joined the armed forces and were killed, they would be considered

419 <http://www.muslimnews.co.uk/paper/index.php?article=4360>

420 Ibid.

421 Ibid.

422 <http://www.pickledpolitics.com/archives/5178>

martyrs.⁴²³ His views provoked a flurry of activity and he later issued a clarification of his position explaining:

...we [the British Muslim Forum] encourage British Muslim citizens to play a part in all aspects of British life. This included pursuing careers where Muslims were under-represented including the Armed Forces of this country. As citizens of this country, our allegiance must be demonstrated in all spheres.

[...]

As far as the much contentious issue of 'martyrdom' is concerned, they were, and are, my personal views and have been supported by our scholars: anyone making the ultimate sacrifice of his/her life for their country is considered by that country a national hero and a martyr. The word martyr is widely used by countries throughout the world to honour their heroes. The British Armed Forces are the same. Why should a British Muslim soldier not be honoured in the same way as any other British soldier?⁴²⁴

“The MoD and armed forces appoint faith-specific chaplains to meet the religious needs of servicemen and women”

Appealing directly to Muslims

The MoD and armed forces appoint faith-specific chaplains to meet the religious needs of servicemen and women. In the case of Muslims, the MoD employs a full-time clerically qualified Muslim chaplain. Our military is both a politically sensitive organisation and an institution that should be equally welcoming for British citizens of all backgrounds. These significant appointments certainly do not require interference from self-appointed community groups outside the formal military structure, which claim to represent what Muslims think. The armed forces should be able to promote themselves to all British citizens without reference to activist groups whose central purpose is not the defence of the realm. The most effective solution both for Muslims and the armed forces is the outreach work the Muslim chaplain has carried out in the United Kingdom and also in theatres of operation overseas. In contrast, those who hold advisory roles in the religious affairs of the armed forces may have insufficient experience of the demands of life in the military.

The move away from the traditional model of appealing to Muslims through gatekeeper organisations and sectarian groups means that new ways must be found to reach them. The academic study of Muslim attitudes found that Muslims themselves suggested that the MoD should target educational institutions (16 percent) and provide more information specifically targeted at them about military careers and life in the armed forces (15 percent).⁴²⁵ This would require the MoD to directly engage young Muslims in new ways, possibly through initiating a schools tour with lectures and seminars delivered by serving Muslim soldiers.

A serving Muslim soldier in the Army told Policy Exchange about his tours of duty in Iraq, particularly in Mosul and Umm Qasr – where he was able to freely attend congregational prayers in a local mosque wearing British military uniform without any problems. Indeed, he explained that many Iraqis in the south

423 This is a different Khurshid Ahmed to the one who is a member of the Jamaat-e Islami party in Pakistan and chairman of the Islamic Foundation in Leicester.

424 <http://www.mpacuk.org/content/view/3158/102/>

425 Asifa Hussain and Mohammed Ishaq, British Pakistani Muslims' Perceptions of the Armed Forces, *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol.28, No. 4, Summer 2002, p.612

regarded him, and the British forces, as their allies. These are powerful stories for young Muslims to hear, far removed from the al-Qaeda worldview which paints a picture of universal Muslim disgust at western military intervention in Muslim countries. Al-Qaeda’s message is belied by the actual experience of Muslim soldiers serving in those conflicts. Indeed, some of those I met while compiling this report are not just remarkable soldiers, but also have an impressive command of the Arabic language and knowledge of Islamic sciences. Surely they are far better placed than FCO officials in addressing the concerns of mosque congregations about the tensions between British foreign policy, being Muslim and serving their country?

There are other ways to engage Muslims, too. In May 2008, 120 soldiers from the Royal Malay Regiment became the first all-Muslim Company to provide the ceremonial guard for a British monarch.⁴²⁶ The red jackets and black bearskins of the 1st Battalion Welsh Guards gave way to the white tunics, and brocade ‘sampins’ (sarongs) of the Royal Malay Regiment, after they arrived in London on an official visit to strengthen ties between Malaysia and the UK.

Major Norhisham bin Kamar, of the Royal Malay Regiment, noted that it was a proud moment for them: ‘This is a very historical moment for us doing this job, and we will show the best to the audience here, as well as to the Queen’. He continued:

Nowadays there is some difficulties between religion. Here we will show that Muslim countries can work together with non-Muslim countries. We came from a Colonial country – there’s no problem with us – and can show how Muslim countries have no problem to work together with other people.⁴²⁷

While in London the Royal Malay Regiment also participated in the Royal Windsor Castle Tattoo, Beating Retreat on Horse Guards and the Royal Hospital Pageant. These activities, however, remained largely unnoticed – but could go a long way towards reassuring Muslims about the nature of military service. These avenues, previously unexplored, must now be investigated to assess just who is best placed to convey the government’s message to those in the difficult areas it hopes to penetrate.⁴²⁸

426 <http://web.archive.org/web/20090904051438/http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/HistoryAndHonour/FirstMuslimBattalionGuardsTheQueen.htm>

427 Ibid.

428 For example, lessons might be learnt from Bradford Army Recruitment Information Office (ACIO) and Bradford City Council. Bradford ACIO offer those interested in an armed forces career both one day courses, known as ‘Personal Development Activities’, and longer, five day, residential courses. Furthermore, the ACIO and council have worked together on projects to bring local Muslims into contact with the armed forces and, significantly, a number of serving and ex-serving Muslim soldiers.

Table 7: Reasons given for why Muslim women should not join the armed forces

	% all respondents	% Male	% Female
Clash with religion and culture	38	33	48
Masculine profession	28	25	31
Sexism and harassment	25	33	15
Racism and lack of equal opportunities	5	6	3
Not patriotic about Britain	2	3	–
Dislike of British foreign policy	2	–	3

Engaging Muslims directly with less reliance upon interlocutors has obvious benefits. Indeed, such an approach could even bring Muslims into contact with groups they previously considered closed off. Another remarkable revelation in the academic study into Muslim attitudes towards the armed forces discovered that just under half of the women surveyed (48 percent) said they would consider

a military career, compared to 43 percent of men.⁴²⁹ Indeed, 60 percent of the Muslim male respondents questioned said they considered the armed forces a suitable environment for Muslim women.⁴³⁰ This is even more surprising when considering the alleged social conservatism of much of the British-Pakistani Muslim community and the gatekeeper groups that have traditionally been said to represent them. Despite the reservations of some surveyed,⁴³¹ it opens up the possibility of recruiting from a much broader pool of potential candidates than previously considered.

The issue remains: how should the MoD reach out to the untapped pool of potential Muslim recruits? The study into Muslim attitudes examined which mediums and methods had made an impact, by asking Muslim respondents where they could remember seeing an advertisement for the armed forces. They found that a combination of advertising on Asian television and in Asian tabloids produced the best results – with 55 percent saying they had seen an advertisement there – compared with 34 percent saying they had seen advertising on British television and in British tabloids.⁴³² The proliferation of Asian language satellite channels and ethno-centric media means it has never been easier to target specific communities with a highly focused message. Indeed, radical Islamist groups such as Hizb ut Tahrir have bought advertising slots on Asian satellite channels in the past, to deliver their message directly to their core audience.⁴³³ Again, in terms of outreach for recruitment and engagement purposes, religious establishments did poorly: only 5 percent of those surveyed said they encountered military material there.⁴³⁴



Photograph supplied by Captain Afzal Amin

429 Asifa Hussain and Mohammed Ishaq, British Pakistani Muslims' Perceptions of the Armed Forces, *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol.28, No. 4, Summer 2002, p.606

430 Ibid., p.609

431 Ibid., p.610

432 Ibid., p.611

433 Personal knowledge of the author.

434 Asifa Hussain and Mohammed Ishaq, British Pakistani Muslims' Perceptions of the Armed Forces, *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol.28, No. 4, Summer 2002, p.611

Reviving the historical record of service

Respondents in the poll conducted by Hussain and Ishaq were asked if they have, or had, a member of their family with a record of military service. Almost half (49 percent) responded positively. This suggests that attempts to revive the Muslim record of service from the last century will resonate with a substantial portion of the community. The researchers also found a strong correlation between the willingness of respondents who were amenable to joining the armed forces and those who have, or had, a family member with a record of military service. From the entire sample of those who were polled, 46 percent said they would consider signing up to the armed forces – of which 77 percent had a tradition of military service in their family.⁴³⁵ Similarly, of those who said they would not consider a military career (54 percent), only 28 percent had a record of military service in their family.

The statistics demonstrate that there is a substantial category of potential recruits who are sympathetic and well disposed to the notion of a military career – if the Services can find a way of connecting with them. Consideration should therefore be given to expanding the national curriculum for history in schools to include the contribution of Commonwealth soldiers. For example, relatively little about the First World War beyond the Western Front is currently taught; and, even then, too little recognition is given to the diversity of the men who served there. Similarly, just as schools are encouraged to take trips to the Nazi concentration camps, they should also be encouraged to explore the fields of Flanders and Ypres where scores of sepoy soldiers served alongside men from the 'Pals Brigades'. It can be a remarkable – and moving – experience to attend the nightly Last Post ceremony at the Menin Gate memorial in Ypres bearing the names of 54,896 men from Britain and the Commonwealth who gave their lives there in the Great War.⁴³⁶



Copyright: Getty Images (GettyImages_72449702): Wooden, crescent moon shaped markers representing Muslim soldiers stand among crosses bearing remembrance poppies, in the Royal British Legion Poppy Factory Field of Remembrance in Westminster Abbey on November 8, 2006 in London, England.

435 Ibid., p.606

436 See Commonwealth War Graves Commission: http://www.cwgc.org/search/cemetery_details.aspx?cemetery=91800&mode=1; and also: <http://www.greatwar.co.uk/ypres-salient/memorial-menin-gate.htm>

Certainly, there have been noteworthy efforts to bring this record to the attention of the wider public, such as the ‘Exhibition Islam and Shared War Project’, which ran in Watford during January 2011. This weekend exhibition, supported by Watford Borough Council, sought to inform visitors about the courage displayed by Indian volunteers during the two World Wars.⁴³⁷ For the last 11 years, the MoD has run an exhibition – ‘We Were There’ – attempting to highlight the contribution of Commonwealth soldiers to the British armed forces.⁴³⁸ But more can still be done. This story remains one of the most colourful and moving in our history: what is now needed is a renewed push from Government to give it expression in the contemporary era, thus inspiring a new generation to serve the nation.

437 http://www.watfordobserver.co.uk/leisure/localexhibitions/8792490.India_s_war_effort_honoured_in_pictures/

438 <http://web.archive.org/web/20090528193632/http://www.werethere.defencedynamics.mod.uk/index.html>

Appendices

Appendix 1: Citation of Sepoy Ali Haider for a Victoria Cross

Fusignano, Italy, 9 April 1945

Havildar Ali Haider, 13th Frontier Force Rifles, Indian Army.

In Italy, during the crossing of the River Senio, near Fusignano, in daylight on 9th April 1945, a Company of the 13th Frontier Force Rifles were ordered to assault the enemy positions strongly dug in on the far bank. These positions had been prepared and improved over many months and were mainly on the steep flood banks, some 25 feet high.

Sepoy Ali Haider was a member of the left-hand Section of the left-hand Platoon. As soon as the Platoon started to cross, it came under heavy and accurate machine gun fire from two enemy posts strongly dug in about 60 yards away. Sepoy Ali Haider's Section suffered casualties and only 3 men, including himself, managed to get across. The remainder of the Company was temporarily held up.

Without orders, and on his own initiative, Sepoy Ali Haider, leaving the other two to cover him, charged the nearest post which was about 30 yards away. He threw a grenade and almost at the same time the enemy threw one at him, wounding him severely in the back. In spite of this he kept on and the enemy post was destroyed and four of the enemy surrendered.

With utter disregard of his own wounds he continued and charged the next post in which the enemy had one Spandau and three automatics, which were still very active and preventing movement on both banks. He was again wounded, this time in the right leg and right arm. Although weakened by loss of blood, with great determination Sepoy Ali Haider crawled closer and in a final effort raised himself from the ground, threw a grenade, and charged into the second enemy post. Two enemy were wounded and the remaining two surrendered.

Taking advantage of the outstanding success of Sepoy Ali Haider's dauntless attacks, the rest of the Company charged across the river and carried out their task of making a bridgehead.

Sepoy Ali Haider was picked up and brought back from the second position seriously wounded. The conspicuous gallantry, initiative, and determination combined with a complete disregard for his own life shown by this very brave Sepoy in the face of heavy odds were an example to the whole Company.

His heroism had saved an ugly situation which would — but for his personal bravery — have caused the Battalion a large number of casualties at a critical time and seriously delayed the crossing of the river and the building of a bridge. With the rapid advance which it was possible to make the Battalion captured 3 officers and 217 other ranks and gained their objectives.

Ali Haider was invested with his Victoria Cross by King George VI at Buckingham Palace on the 30th October 1945.⁴³⁹

439 London Gazette, 3 July 1945,
<http://www.victoriacross.org.uk/bhaidar.htm>

Appendix 2: Indian Army Muslim Victoria Cross awards during the First World War⁴⁴⁰

<i>France & Belgium 1914 – 1918</i>			
Rank	First Name	Last Name	Regiment
Jemadar	Mir	DAST	55th Coke's Rifles (Frontier Force) att'd 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force)
Sepoy	Khudadad	KHAN	129th Duke of Connaught's Own Baluchis
<i>Mesopotamia 1914 – 1918</i>			
Rank	First Name	Last Name	Regiment
Naik	Shahamad	KHAN	89th Punjabis

Appendix 3: Indian Army Muslim Victoria Cross awards during the Second World War

<i>Burma 1943 – 1945</i>			
Rank	First Name	Last Name	Regiment
Jemadar	Abdul	HAFIZ	3rd Bn, 9th Jat Regiment
Lance Naik	Sher	SHAH	7th Bn, 16th Punjab Regiment
Sepoy	Fazal	DIN	7th Bn, 10th Baluchi Regiment
<i>Italy 1944 – 1945</i>			
Rank	First Name	Last Name	Regiment
Sepoy	Ali	HAIDER	6th Royal Bn (Scinde) 13th Frontier Force Rifles

Appendix 4: Muslim George Cross Winners

Name and Rank	Date awarded	Organisation	Posthumously awarded
Captain Mateen Ahmed Ansari	18 April 1946	7th Rajput Regiment, Indian Army	Yes
Lance Naik Islam-ud-Din	5 October 1945	Jat Regiment, Indian Army	Yes
Noor Inayat-Khan	5 April 1949	Special Operations Executive	Yes
Havildar Abdul Rahman	10 September 1946	9th Jat Regiment, Indian Army	Yes

⁴⁴⁰ The lists are illustrative of the awards given to Muslim soldiers. A precise communal breakdown is not possible because of the difficulty in ascertaining the religious identity of recipients from the names alone.

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Muslims have a long and distinguished record of service in the British armed forces.

But this record has been almost completely obliterated in recent years by the competing narratives of the Far Right and of hardline Islamists. Both blocs, for their own ideological reasons, seem to assert that one cannot be both a loyal Briton and a good Muslim at the same time.

In Ties that Bind: How the story of Britain's Muslim Soldiers can forge a national identity, former Islamist Shiraz Maher recaptures this lost history of Muslim service to the Crown. He shows that in the past the Muslim authorities in India successfully faced down Islamist propaganda and emotive appeals to their confessional obligations – and made it clear that there were no religious reasons for not fighting for the British Empire. This was particularly the case in the First World War, even when this country was locked in combat with the Ottoman Caliphate.

Maher shows that this collective past constitutes the basis of a new shared future – which can endure in no less testing circumstances. It also forms the basis for enhanced recruitment of Muslims to the armed forces, without political preconditions attached.

Shiraz Maher is a Senior Research Fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) at King's College London and a former activist for the Islamist group Hizb ut Tahrir.

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