



FORUM FOR
FOREIGN
RELATIONS

The Cleric and the Activist: Iran's Guardianship and the Brotherhood's Mission in the UK

By Catherine Perez-Shakdam - Executive Director FFR

Table of Contents

By Catherine Perez-Shakdam - Executive Director FFR.....	0
Table of Contents.....	1
Foreword.....	2
Summary.....	5
Divergent Origins, Convergent Visions.....	7
Ideological Parallels: Apostasy, Heresy, and Authority under Islamist Rule.....	8
Enforcing Orthodoxy – Apostasy and Heresy.....	8
Defining Political-Religious Authority.....	9
Heresy, Takfir and Sectarianism.....	10
Exporting the Islamic Revolution and the Ikhwani Da'wa: Global Influence Operations Compared.....	11
Tehran's Worldwide Revolutionary Export.....	11
Media and Disinformation.....	12
Clerical Networks and Training.....	12
The Muslim Brotherhood's Transnational Da'wa and Infrastructure.....	14
Civil Society Fronts and "Stealth Islamism".....	14
Transnational Preaching and Education.....	15
Alliances and Influence Networks.....	15
The UK Front: Ideological Penetration and Societal Impact.....	16
Iranian Influence in Britain.....	16
Brotherhood Footprint in the UK.....	17
Shared Threats to UK Society.....	19
Key Policy Recommendations: Countering Islamist Ideological Penetration.....	19
1. Strengthen Enforcement of Laws Against Extremism and Terrorist Glorification.....	20
2. Proscribe the IRGC and Maintain Pressure on Extremist Affiliates.....	20
3. Investigate and Disrupt Foreign Funding and Influence Networks.....	21
4. Build Institutional Capacity to Recognize and Counter Ideological Subversion.....	21
5. Bolster Civil Society Resilience and Democratic Coalitions.....	22
6. Leverage Foreign Policy and International Cooperation.....	23

Foreword

David Martin Abrahams former Vice President of Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)

There is a growing awareness—though not yet matched by sufficient resolve—that Britain today is facing a subtle but profoundly dangerous form of ideological infiltration. It is not new. It does not declare itself with bombs or bullets. Instead, it speaks through charities, cultural platforms, and polished rhetoric. But its aim is no less radical: to undermine the principles of liberal democracy and replace them with a system rooted in religious absolutism.

In this important research brief, *The Cleric and the Activist*, the Forum for Foreign Relations lays bare the strategic convergence between two of the most enduring and insidious ideological forces of our time: the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood. Often treated as adversaries, the brief shows they are more aligned than most would care to admit. Where Iran has exported its doctrine of Wilayat al-Faqih—a model of clerical dictatorship disguised as religious guardianship—the Brotherhood has built a transnational network that advances its aim of an Islamic state through social pressure, political manipulation, and institutional capture.

Both reject the core values that underpin British society: democracy, pluralism, equality before the law. Both view the secular state not as neutral ground, but as an obstacle to be overcome. Both hold deeply exclusionary and coercive views about women, minorities, dissenters, and those who do not conform to their dogma.

What this brief highlights, with clarity and authority, is how these ideologies have gained a foothold in the UK. It traces their presence in academic discourse, media representation, and civic spaces once thought untouchable. It maps out the legal and policy blind spots—some of which we have created ourselves through misplaced tolerance or political hesitation.

The authors do not sensationalise. They document. And in doing so, they make a compelling case for the urgent enforcement of Britain's own laws, including the National Security Act and the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme. These are not theoretical tools. They exist to protect the public, to defend our national interest, and to ensure that no foreign power—least of all one with a record of sponsoring terrorism and repressing its own people—can operate freely on British soil.

I support the recommendations laid out in this report without hesitation. Proscribing the IRGC is long overdue. Investigating the networks that launder Brotherhood ideology through respectable channels must no longer be delayed. And building a cross-government and cross-community strategy to expose and challenge these currents of extremism must be a national priority.

As someone who has long championed cross-faith cooperation, international dialogue, and the security of democratic societies, I believe it is possible to act firmly without fear

mongering, to be vigilant without being divisive. But action must come. Because silence, as history reminds us, is always interpreted as permission.

I commend the Forum for Foreign Relations for this critical work, and I urge policymakers, civil servants, community leaders, and allies abroad to read it closely. The hour is late, but it is not too late. Britain still has the power—and the responsibility—to draw a clear line between freedom of belief and the weaponisation of belief to undermine freedom.

This report is a step toward reclaiming that clarity.

By Catherine Perez-Shakdam - Executive Director, Forum for Foreign Relations & We Believe In Israel

There are moments in the life of a nation—rare and often imperceptible at first—when the danger it faces is not that of bombs or bullets, but of silence. A silence cultivated by the careful, measured infiltration of ideas that masquerade as grievances, that parade as piety, that cloak themselves in the language of the oppressed but speak the dialect of domination.

In this report—lucid, unflinching, essential—we are confronted with the reality that two currents of Islamist totalitarianism, so often thought to be irreconcilable, are in fact converging. The Muslim Brotherhood on one side, borne of Sunni orthodoxy and revolutionary cunning; on the other, the Islamic Republic of Iran, that Shi'a theocracy born of blood and martyrdom, enthroned under the banner of *Wilayat al-Faqih*. They are distinct, yes. But they are kindred spirits in one crucial regard: they deny the possibility of liberty except as submission.

What they share is not a theology but a strategy. Not a heritage but a horizon. They preach different hadiths, they quote different imams, but they march under the same ambition—that sovereignty must belong to the divine, as interpreted by the few, and imposed upon the many. That the law of God, as they alone understand it, must supersede the laws of men. And that apostasy, dissent, pluralism—these are not rights to be defended, but sins to be punished.

This is not a religious quarrel. It is not, as the polite salons of London would have it, a clash of values, best navigated with nuance and cultural sensitivity. It is a struggle—no, a confrontation—between two visions of civilization. One that embraces the dignity of doubt, the sanctity of the individual, the disorder of democracy. And another that dreams of order through fear, unity through erasure, obedience masquerading as faith.

Britain, the cradle of parliamentary reason and liberal moderation, has become a stage on which this ideological play unfolds. On its streets, in its schools, within its civic institutions, the agents of this convergence walk freely—chanting death while claiming freedom, calling for annihilation while protected by the laws they would overthrow.

And still, there is silence.

This brief dares to break it. It names the threat. It exposes its theological mechanics, its methods of propagation, its transnational scaffolding. It challenges us to see not only the weapons but the words, not only the violence but the ideology that precedes it. It reminds us that propaganda is not noise, but war by other means.

It is not enough to condemn terrorism when bombs fall. We must confront the ideologies that plant them in the minds of men. We must say: no, not here. Not in the name of our freedoms. Not in the heart of the world's oldest democracy. This is our line in the sand.

And so, let this document be a reckoning. Let it be read not as a policy brief alone, but as a moral imperative. Let it awaken those who sleep under the illusion that

democracies die only when they are attacked from without. No—they die, too, when they are eroded from within, when they lack the courage to call tyranny by its name.

Read this. Share it. Act upon it.

The time for polite equivocation has passed. The time for vigilance, for principle, for resistance—has come.

Summary

This brief explores the ideological convergence between the Muslim Brotherhood¹ and the Islamic Republic of Iran's doctrine of *Wilayat al-Faqih*² (Guardianship of the Jurist), two movements often perceived as divided by sectarian lines but in fact united in their political vision. Despite their Sunni-Shi'a theological differences, both traditions uphold a worldview in which religious authority is elevated above secular governance and political legitimacy derives from divine law rather than the will of the people. The ultimate aim, whether framed in Sunni or Shi'a terms, is the establishment of an Islamic order in which the *ummah* transcends national borders and where state structures exist to serve a religious mission.

At the core of both systems lies a commitment to rigid orthodoxy. Apostasy and heresy are not simply theological matters but criminal acts, frequently punishable by death. In Iran, the legal and judicial apparatus allows for capital punishment against those deemed to have deviated from "true Islam," often targeting political dissidents, religious minorities, or secular reformers. The Muslim Brotherhood's ideological framework, though not formally institutionalised in a state, similarly sanctions the persecution of those who depart from accepted dogma. Senior Brotherhood figures such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi³ have publicly defended the death penalty for apostasy, and Brotherhood-inspired regimes have historically upheld or enforced such measures. The result in both cases is a climate of enforced conformity, in which dissent is equated with treachery and reformers are silenced through fear or force.

Both models fuse spiritual and temporal authority. Iran's *Wilayat al-Faqih* centralises absolute power in the hands of the Supreme Leader, a cleric invested with the dual legitimacy of jurist and ruler. Under this system, the Guardian Council and other clerical bodies are empowered to override elected institutions, ensuring that the state remains theocratic in substance even if democratic in appearance. The Brotherhood envisions a similar fusion of faith and governance, seeking to restore a caliphate or Islamic emirate led by those versed in sharia. While the Brotherhood has often employed democratic mechanisms tactically, its leadership has repeatedly subordinated democracy to religious law, viewing popular sovereignty as conditional upon fidelity to Islam. Both traditions, in different ways, reject liberal democracy not only as flawed but as fundamentally incompatible with divine rule.

¹ Zachary Laub, "Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," *Council on Foreign Relations*, last updated January 25, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/background/egypts-muslim-brotherhood>.

² Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, *What is Velayat-e Faqih?*, accessed March 21, 2025, <https://institute.global/insights/geopolitics-and-security/what-velayat-e-faqih>.

³ Counter Extremism Project, "Yusuf al-Qaradawi," accessed March 21, 2025, <https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/yusuf-al-qaradawi>.

Iran⁴ and the Brotherhood have also each constructed powerful transnational networks to spread their respective ideologies. Tehran's revolution is exported through a well-resourced matrix of clerical delegations, educational institutions, media outlets such as Press TV, and intelligence-linked proxies such as Hezbollah. It blends hard and soft power to cultivate allegiance to the Supreme Leader far beyond Iran's borders. The Muslim Brotherhood, operating without a state sponsor but with deep grassroots presence, has developed a global da'wa infrastructure, using affiliated charities, schools, student organisations, and community groups to influence Muslim communities in the West and the Global South. Both movements leverage modern communication platforms, from satellite television to social media, to amplify their messaging, frame global events through a theological lens, and promote a transnational Islamic identity that resists integration into secular, pluralist societies.

This convergence of ideology and strategy represents a direct threat to liberal democracies—including the United Kingdom. Both Iranian-aligned and Brotherhood-affiliated networks exploit the very freedoms that define open societies to disseminate extremist narratives, glorify terrorist actors, and undermine democratic norms. In London, events like Al-Quds Day—coordinated by organisations linked to Iran's regime—have become platforms for anti-Western and antisemitic incitement. Brotherhood-linked groups similarly operate behind the veneer of civil society, promoting separatism, undermining counter-extremism initiatives, and reframing Islamism as legitimate political dissent. Together, these parallel currents corrode social cohesion, embolden radicals, and normalise intolerance within communities already vulnerable to identity-based polarisation.

This brief offers a groundbreaking and urgent reassessment of the Brotherhood–Wilayat al-Faqih nexus. It reveals not only the theological and strategic overlap between these two strands of political Islam, but also the growing sophistication with which they penetrate open societies and challenge the legitimacy of the modern nation-state. For a country like the United Kingdom—committed to pluralism, rule of law, and civil liberties—the implications are profound. A coherent and confident strategy is now essential, combining legal enforcement, foreign policy instruments, civic education, and institutional resilience. The brief concludes with concrete recommendations aimed at safeguarding British sovereignty, protecting vulnerable communities, and ensuring that the values of a liberal democracy are neither eroded from within nor manipulated by those who reject its very foundations.

Divergent Origins, Convergent Visions

The Muslim Brotherhood and Iran's revolutionary doctrine of *Wilayat al-Faqih* emerged from different corners of the 20th-century Islamic world, yet today they increasingly

⁴ Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, *Beyond Borders: The Expansionist Ideology of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps*, accessed March 21, 2025, <https://institute.global/insights/geopolitics-and-security/beyond-borders-expansionist-ideology-irans-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps>.

mirror each other's ideological and strategic contours. The MB was founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna in Egypt as a Sunni revivalist movement reacting against colonialism and secularism. It sought to restore Islam's primacy in governance and society, rallying around the slogan "*The Qur'an is our law; Jihad is our way*". Wilayat al-Faqih, formulated by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in the 1970s, was a Shi'a revolutionary concept that became the cornerstone of Iran's post-1979 Islamic Republic. It vested supreme political authority in a high-ranking jurist (the *Faqih*), asserting that in the absence of the infallible Imam, a qualified cleric must govern as the guardian of God's law on earth.

At first glance, the Brotherhood's Sunni populism and Iran's Shi'a clerical rule might seem doctrinally incompatible – indeed, historical sectarian divides and geopolitical rivalries separate them. Yet both movements share a fundamental *Islamist worldview*: that Islam is not merely a personal faith but a comprehensive socio-political system meant to dominate state structures. Each rejects the Western ideal of secular, pluralistic governance. Each yearns for a transnational Islamic polity – whether revived as a Sunni *caliphate* or led by a Shi'a Supreme Leader – that would *supersede the Westphalian nation-state*. This convergence has been evident in their rhetoric and alliances. For example, Ayatollah Khomeini framed Iran's revolution in pan-Islamic terms and reached out to Sunnis by elevating causes like Palestine; similarly, many Muslim Brotherhood ideologues, despite being Sunni, admired the 1979 Iranian Revolution as a triumphant model of Islamic resurgence. Over the decades, Iran has forged tactical partnerships with Brotherhood offshoots such as Hamas in Gaza, united by common enemies (Israel and pro-Western regimes) and common objectives.

Crucially, both the Brotherhood and Iran's leaders define their political missions in *religious terms*, imbuing temporal conflicts with cosmic significance. They cultivate a loyal constituency of believers who see obedience to the Islamist project as obedience to God. This brief delves into the *ideological and strategic overlap* between these two streams of political Islam – examining how each defines and enforces core concepts like apostasy and heresy, how each asserts religious authority over society, and how both have systematically spread their doctrines beyond their borders. By understanding these parallels, we can better grasp the full spectrum of Islamist ideological penetration facing the world today, and craft effective responses. The analysis focuses especially on implications for the United Kingdom, a democratic society where Iranian and Brotherhood networks have both sought influence.

Ideological Parallels: Apostasy, Heresy, and Authority under Islamist Rule

Enforcing Orthodoxy – Apostasy and Heresy

A defining feature of both the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology and Iran's Wilayat al-Faqih system is the *intolerance of dissent from their religious orthodoxy*. In classical Islamic

jurisprudence (sharia), *apostasy* – the act of a Muslim renouncing Islam – is traditionally punishable by death, and both traditions adhere to this severe view. In Iran, the principle is enshrined in law: while the Islamic Republic’s penal code does not explicitly list apostasy, the Iranian constitution’s Article 167⁵ empowers judges to impose sharia-based punishments. Thus, converts from Islam, outspoken atheists, Baha’is (whom the regime deems “heretics”), and even Muslim political dissidents have faced accusations of apostasy or “spreading corruption on earth” – charges often met with execution or long imprisonment. Ayatollah Khomeini himself set the tone by pronouncing *heresy and blasphemy capital crimes* in the revolutionary state. Through the 1980s, numerous Iranians were executed as *murtadds*⁶ (apostates) or “enemies of God,” including leftist dissidents and members of minority faiths; even in recent years, cases have been recorded of Iranians sentenced to death for apostasy or heretical views. The law may cloak these punishments under vaguely defined offenses like “insulting Islam” or “corruption,” but the religious rationale is clear: *deviating from the regime’s approved creed is a crime against God and state*.

The Muslim Brotherhood, operating mostly as a movement rather than a state, has nonetheless consistently advocated that an Islamic government must enforce sharia – including the penalty for apostasy. Brotherhood jurists and preachers have rarely if ever repudiated the classical ruling. On the contrary, influential MB-linked scholars have explicitly affirmed it. Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, often described as the Brotherhood’s chief ideologue in recent decades, openly stated that if Muslims had been free to leave their religion, “Islam wouldn’t exist today” – implying that only the fear of execution has preserved the faith. During the Brotherhood’s brief tenure in power in Egypt (2012–2013), President Mohamed Morsi did not move to outlaw apostasy punishment; indeed, his Islamist-drafted constitution increased the role of sharia and left such medieval hudud penalties on the table. Elsewhere, wherever Brotherhood-affiliated leaders have wielded influence, they have *failed to eliminate or actively supported* apostasy laws. In Sudan, for example, Hassan al-Turab⁷ – an Islamist often aligned with MB thought – oversaw the implementation of sharia in the 1980s, during which a renowned reformist was executed for “apostasy” in 1985 and apostasy remained a capital crime for decades. The Brotherhood’s stance on “heresy” (unorthodox beliefs) similarly hews to rigidity: heterodox sects like the Ahmadiyya or secular interpretations of Islam are anathema in Brotherhood theology. Sayyid Qutb, one of the MB’s most celebrated theorists, went so far as to declare contemporary secular-Muslim societies to be in a state of *jahiliyya* (pre-Islamic ignorance), effectively branding nominal Muslims who live by non-Islamic laws as *apostates by behavior*. Such views have fueled a culture of takfir (excommunication) in which Brotherhood-inspired actors have labeled opponents – including Muslim political leaders who reject the MB agenda – as *kuffar* (infidels), a logic that violent jihadist groups have extended to justify assassination and

⁵ Islamic Republic of Iran. *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (1989). Accessed March 21, 2025. https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989.

⁶ Yaqeen Institute, *The Issue of Apostasy in Islam*, accessed March 21, 2025, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/the-issue-of-apostasy-in-islam>.

⁷ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, s.v. “Hasan al-Turabi,” last modified June 15, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hasan-al-Turabi>.

rebellion. In sum, both the Brotherhood and Iran's Wilayat al-Faqih model enforce an absolutist conception of religious truth. *Leaving the faith – or even interpreting it in a liberal way – is beyond the pale*, and the prescribed remedy is harsh punishment, up to death. This creates a chilling effect on reformers and ensures that the politico-religious leadership maintains a monopoly over defining “true Islam.”

Defining Political-Religious Authority

Alongside policing belief, the MB and Iran's Islamist regime both vest ultimate *political authority in religious leadership*. They reject the notion that sovereignty lies with the people, insisting that it belongs to God and thus must be exercised by those who best understand God's law. In Iran, this principle is explicitly institutionalized in the office of the Supreme Leader (Vali-ye Faqih). Khomeini's doctrine of *Wilayat al-Faqih* not only empowers a top cleric to rule – it effectively makes his rule *infallible* within the system, as he is considered the guardian implementing divine will. The Supreme Leader and his Guardian Council can vet or overrule any elected body if it contradicts Islamic principles as they interpret them. This *fusion of mosque and state* means Iran's government claims a kind of theocratic legitimacy unprecedented in modern Shi'ism, extending even beyond Iran's borders – Khomeini asserted that the guardianship of the jurist applies to the entire Muslim ummah, not just one nation. Dissent against the Supreme Leader's line can thus be portrayed as religious deviance or treason. Notably, in 1988, Khomeini issued a fatwa leading to the massacre of political prisoners, branding members of the opposition⁸ (the Marxist-Islamist Mojahedin-e Khalq and others) as apostates from Islam who deserved death – a grim intersection of political and religious “heresy” enforcement. Under Ayatollah Khamenei, this linkage of temporal authority to divine mandate continues: loyal clerics preach that obeying the Supreme Leader is a religious duty, while disobeying him equates to sinning against Islam. Iran's constitution itself proclaims allegiance to God's sovereignty and the imamate theory, subordinating all popular legislation to *Vilayat-e Faqih*. Accordingly, the entire structure of state authority is anchored in a formalised clerical hierarchy, with ultimate power vested in the chief jurist and his network of religious institutions.

The Muslim Brotherhood's approach to political authority is comparably theocratic, though executed through movement activism⁹ rather than a formal state charter. From its founding, the MB conceived of Islam as a comprehensive system (“*din wa dawla*” – religion and state) and aimed to restore a form of the caliphate, or at least Islamic governance, across Muslim lands. Hassan al-Banna wrote of Islam as “creed and state, book and sword,” and the Brotherhood's structure reflected quasi-state discipline: members swear *bay'ah* (a pledge of allegiance) to their General Guide (al-Murshid

⁸

Anton La Guardia, “Khomeini Fatwa Led to Killing of 30,000 in Iran,” *The Telegraph*, February 4, 2001, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/1321090/Khomeini-fatwa-led-to-killing-of-30000-in-iran.html>.

⁹

Hala Mundhir Fattah, “The Politics of Regional Trade in Iraq and the Gulf, 1745–1900,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004): 98–106, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40262657>.

al-‘Am), obeying him as they would a legitimate ruler. In Brotherhood ideology, *sharia law is supreme*, and any man-made law contradicting it is null. The slogan “The Qur’an is our constitution” became central to MB propaganda – not a metaphor, but a literal political program. Sayyid Qutb went further to argue that sovereignty (*hakimiyya*)¹⁰ belongs solely to God; democratic institutions that do not implement sharia are illegitimate and tantamount to idolatry of human rulers. While the MB as a pragmatic organization sometimes participated in elections and parliaments, this was generally seen as a means to eventually achieving an Islamic state, not an endorsement of secular democracy. Indeed, *whenever the Brotherhood or its offshoots have neared power, they have moved to entrench an Islamist authority*. In Egypt, President Morsi asserted expansive decree powers beyond judicial review and pushed through a constitution emphasizing sharia. In Gaza, Hamas (born from the Brotherhood) established a one-party Islamist rule after winning elections, showing little tolerance for opposition. The Brotherhood envisions a *pan-Islamic governance* as well: Qaradawi and other MB thinkers wrote of gradually uniting Muslim-majority countries under a new caliphate once local regimes had been “corrected.” While the MB does not have a single figure with the absolute aura of Iran’s Supreme Leader, it does have a *vanguardist concept*: a disciplined group of true believers must seize the levers of state and implement God’s law for the masses. In both the MB and Wilayat al-Faqih paradigms, therefore, *religious “experts” hold final say over society*. Liberal notions of individual rights, popular sovereignty, or separation of religious authority from state are dismissed as Western artifices. This convergence underscores why both movements perceive secular governance as not just wrong, but *ungodly* – and why they so readily trample constitutional pluralism when in power.

Heresy, Takfir and Sectarianism

Another chilling parallel is how each tradition handles internal dissent within Islam. The Islamic Republic of Iran, as a Shi’a theocracy, has been merciless toward religious minorities it considers heretical¹¹ – especially the Bahá’í community (branded as traitorous apostates), which is denied basic rights and periodically persecuted. Sunni Muslims in Iran who reject the principle of clerical rule are likewise treated with suspicion or worse. Ironically, the Iranian regime has even been accused by hardline Sunnis of committing *heresy* itself – Khomeini’s claims of near-absolute clerical authority spurred some Sunni scholars to denounce him as a blasphemer. For its part, the Brotherhood’s legacy in the Sunni world contributed to the modern epidemic of takfirism¹² – declaring fellow Muslims to be infidels. Qutb’s writings inspired more radical offshoots (Al-Qaeda, ISIS) to takfir secular Muslim rulers and populations. The Brotherhood officially distances itself from such extremism, but its own record is mixed.

¹⁰ Faraj S. Abdullah, “The Doctrine of Wilayat al-Faqih: A Contemporary Perspective,” *Open Journal of Political Science* 12, no. 3 (2022): 375–388, <https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation?paperid=115600>.

¹¹ Iran International, “Iran’s Supreme Leader Reiterates Anti-Israel Stance, Slams West,” *Iran International*, June 3, 2024, <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202406034451>.

¹² Nader Hashemi, “Rethinking Religion and Democracy: Islamist Political Engagement in the Modern Middle East,” *Political Theology* 16, no. 6 (2015): 512–532, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48600052>.

It has at times made common cause with Shi'a Islamists (during the 2006 Lebanon war, MB cheered Hezbollah's fight; Hamas enjoys Iranian support), showing pragmatism over sectarian divides. Yet Brotherhood clerics have also engaged in sectarian incitement when expedient – for instance, MB figures in Syria in the 1980s and during the recent civil war framed the Alawite-dominated Assad regime in Damascus as a heretical tyranny to be overthrown in a jihad. What unites both the MB and Wilayat al-Faqih doctrine is a *dualistic worldview*: one either submits to their vision of “true Islam” or is classified as an enemy of Islam. Apostates, heretics, secularists – all fall on the wrong side of that binary and thus become legitimate targets for suppression. This zero-sum mentality severely undermines pluralism and helps explain the violent zeal of both movements' followers when dealing with opponents.

Exporting the Islamic Revolution and the Ikhwani Da'wa: Global Influence Operations Compared

Tehran's Worldwide Revolutionary Export

“We shall export our revolution to the whole world,” declared Ayatollah Khomeini, “Until the cry ‘There is no god but Allah’ resounds over the whole world, there will be struggle.”

From its inception, the Islamic Republic of Iran viewed itself not as a normal nation-state, but as the launchpad of a global Islamist revolution. Exporting the revolution became a formal state policy, pursued through both violence and persuasion. In the hard-power domain, Iran's clerical regime created the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its expeditionary Quds Force to train, arm, and direct militant proxies across the Middle East – from Hezbollah in Lebanon to Shi'a militias in Iraq and the Houthis in Yemen – establishing an “axis of resistance” aligned with Tehran's ideology. But equally significant has been Iran's *soft-power empire*: a sprawling network of institutions, media, and clerical influence designed to spread Khomeinist doctrine transnationally. Tehran has bankrolled and built Islamic centers, mosques, and cultural charities on every continent, often under the auspices of organizations like the Al-Mustafa International University¹³ (which trains foreign seminarians in Qom), the AhlulBayt World Assembly¹⁴ (connecting Shi'a communities worldwide), and assorted “cultural centers” attached to Iranian embassies. These institutions propagate the regime's ideology by hosting religious classes, commemorations of Iran's revolution, and loyalty-building activities among diaspora Muslims. For example, the Islamic Centre of England in London¹⁵ – ostensibly a community religious venue – was until recently run by a cleric directly appointed as *Representative of Ayatollah Khamenei*, Iran's Supreme Leader. It has hosted pro-regime rallies and sermons extolling Wilayat

¹³ Wikipedia, s.v. “Al-Mustafa International University,” last modified March 17, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Mustafa_International_University.

¹⁴ AhlulBayt World Assembly, homepage, accessed March 21, 2025, <https://www.ahl-ul-bayt.org/en/>.

¹⁵ *The Jewish Chronicle*, “Islamic Centre of England,” accessed March 21, 2025, <https://www.thejc.com/tag/Islamic%20Centre%20of%20England>.

al-Faqih, effectively operating as an outpost of the Iranian theocracy on UK soil. Similar hubs exist in places like Iraq, Nigeria, and South Asia, where local Shi'a populations are encouraged to see Iran's leader as their own guide.

Media and Disinformation

Iran has invested heavily in global media to amplify its revolutionary message. It operates multi-language propaganda outlets – such as Press TV (English), Al-Alam (Arabic), HispanTV (Spanish) – which broadcast regime-approved narratives worldwide. These channels push Tehran's line on issues like the vilification of Israel, justification of Iran's nuclear program, and denigration of Western policies, often cloaked as “news” or Islamist commentary¹⁶. Beyond official media, Iran engages in covert *disinformation campaigns*: Western governments and tech companies have uncovered extensive networks of fake social media personas, “troll farms,” and inauthentic websites disseminating Iranian talking points or conspiracy theories. Such campaigns aim to sow discord, spread anti-Western sentiment, and even influence elections abroad. For instance, Iranian-linked online actors have been caught impersonating journalists or activists to plant stories that advance Iran's geopolitical goals (e.g., smearing regional rivals like Saudi Arabia or circulating antisemitic tropes). Tehran's information operations are sophisticated and increasingly global, mirroring Russia's playbook in many ways. By weaponizing the open internet, Iran can reach young Muslims in Europe or Africa with tailored propaganda, often under the radar of authorities.

Clerical Networks and Training

Central to Iran's ideological export is the *movement of missionaries*¹⁷. Thousands of clerics educated in Iran – both Iranian and foreign – have been dispatched to communities from Central Asia to Latin America. These emissaries preach Khomeini's revolutionary interpretation of Shi'ism, building loyalty to the concept of the Supreme Leader. In some cases, Iran has facilitated conversions to Shi'a Islam specifically loyal to its doctrine; in others, it at least ingrains a political outlook sympathetic to Iran. The IRGC's Quds Force often works hand-in-hand with these religious networks, blending ideological indoctrination with material support. A striking example is Lebanon's Hezbollah, which began as an Iranian-inspired clerical movement and remains ideologically beholden to Iran's Supreme Leader (Hezbollah's members formally swear allegiance to him as their *wali al-faqih*). Iran has replicated versions of this model elsewhere – for instance, in Iraq, where it cultivated factions that accept Khamenei's spiritual leadership, or in Nigeria, where a pro-Iranian Shi'a movement led by Ibrahim Zakzaky¹⁸ emerged after he was influenced by the Iranian revolution. Through

¹⁶ Sophie Barnett, “Jeremy Corbyn Accused of ‘Pandering to Antisemitism’ over Press TV Appearance,” *The Telegraph*, April 27, 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/04/27/jeremy-corbyn-anti-semitism-press-tv-social-media/>.

¹⁷ American Iranian Council, “The Origins of Hezbollah,” November 12, 2021, <http://www.us-iran.org/news/2021/11/12/the-origins-of-hezbollah>.

¹⁸

scholarships, religious conferences, and funding of madrassas, Iran methodically creates a *transnational clerical cadre* that disseminates the ideals of its revolution. These networks have also helped Tehran build political influence: they can mobilize rallies (such as annual Quds Day marches¹⁹ on the last Friday of Ramadan in various capitals), lobby host governments, and sometimes even interface with local Islamist groups outside Shi'a circles.

Protesters at an annual Al-Quds Day rally in London hold placards such as “Freedom for Palestine” and “Hands off Al Aqsa,” reflecting how Iran’s revolutionary doctrine blends anti-Israel agitation with Islamist zeal beneath the facade of civil protest. Tehran orchestrates Quds Day demonstrations worldwide – from the Middle East to Europe – as showpieces of its ideological export. These rallies, often coordinated by Iran-linked groups under innocent names, serve to project Tehran’s narrative into foreign public spheres, incite anti-Western and antisemitic sentiment, and claim leadership of the Muslim ummah in opposing “oppressors.” In the UK, the London Quds Day march (organized by a pro-Iran charity) exemplifies this strategy: it uses Britain’s freedoms to champion Iran’s theocratic and militant worldview on the streets of London.

Through this multifaceted approach – institutions, media, clerics, and orchestrated events – Iran has effectively built an ideological state apparatus abroad. It has *anchored loyal adherents to Khomeinist ideology in diverse societies*, from Europe to Africa to the Americas. These adherents not only echo Iran’s propaganda, but can also provide cover and recruits for Iran’s covert operations. The result is that Iran’s revolutionary reach far exceeds its borders: it can influence discourse in Muslim diaspora communities, rally crowds to intimidate its enemies overseas, and create headaches for Western law enforcement by blurring the line between free speech and foreign subversion.

The Muslim Brotherhood’s Transnational Da’wa and Infrastructure

Decades before Iran’s revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood pioneered its own form of “Islamist internationalism.” As early as the 1930s-40s, Hassan al-Banna’s movement was sending organizers to spread the Brotherhood model across the Arab world.²⁰ By the mid-20th century, branches or affiliate groups had sprung up in Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Sudan, and beyond – all loosely coordinated in what the MB came to call the *International Organization*. The Brotherhood’s vision was inherently transnational: it rejected the national borders imposed by colonial powers and instead saw the global Muslim community as one. Their work, al-Banna taught, must proceed in stages: *first*,

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. “Ibrahim El-Zakzaky.” *Religious Prisoners of Conscience Database*, accessed March 21, 2025, <https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/ibrahim-el-zakzaky>.

¹⁹ Stewart Bell, “Al-Quds Day Marches in Canada Condemned for Promoting Extremism and Antisemitism,” *National Post*, May 31, 2019, <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/al-quds-day-marches-in-canada>.

²⁰ Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, *Hezbollah: Profile of the Lebanese Shiite Terrorist Organization of Global Reach Sponsored by Iran*, March 2010, https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/Data/pdf/PDF_11_033_2.pdf.

reform the individual; then the family; then society; then the state; ultimately, unite the states. This long-term and patient strategy of *da'wa* (proselytization and Islamic education) has been the Brotherhood's hallmark, adapting to local contexts while maintaining a common core ideology.

Civil Society Fronts and “Stealth Islamism”

Unlike Iran, the MB never had a single government to bankroll its expansion (except briefly in Egypt 2012–13). Instead, it relied on building grassroots institutions – Islamic societies, charities, student unions, mosques – that would embed it within each target society. In the West, especially, the Brotherhood perfected the art of operating behind benign civic façades. Throughout Europe, MB-linked activists founded organizations that presented themselves as mainstream representatives of Muslim communities, while quietly promoting Brotherhood-approved interpretations of Islam. For instance, in 1989, Brotherhood members from several countries formed the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe²¹ (FIOE), ostensibly to serve Muslims in Europe. In reality, FIOE was *the umbrella for virtually all Ikhwan (Brotherhood) groups on the continent*, uniting national MB franchises in France, Germany, Britain, and elsewhere. Headquartered in a UK Islamic Foundation property and led by key MB figures, FIOE (now rebranded as the Council of European Muslims) became a primary interlocutor with European Union institutions – leveraging its moderate public image to win recognition and even EU funding. Under FIOE's wing, the Brotherhood set up specialized sub-organizations: a *youth network* (FEMYSO, which engages in student activism and has been called “the de facto voice of Muslim youth of Europe”), an *Islamic educational institute* to train imams and chaplains in Europe, an *Association of Muslim Schools*, and a Europe-wide publication *Al-Europiya*. Each of these serves the dual purpose of spreading Brotherhood-influenced religious education and normalizing the presence of an Islamist social order within Western societies. A similar pattern is observed in the United States, where Brotherhood-linked individuals helped found groups like the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), which present as civil rights or community organizations while sometimes forwarding agendas aligned with MB thought. Such “front” organizations allow the Brotherhood to embed itself in civil society, often without the Brotherhood label, thus avoiding the stigma attached to the MB name in certain countries while continuing its work. Security agencies in Europe have noted that Brotherhood-associated networks “*reject the essential values of [Western] society*” even as they engage with government as community partners. This duplicity – preaching integration in public while inculcating separatism in private – has earned the Brotherhood a reputation for *stealth Islamism*.

²¹ Global Muslim Brotherhood Daily Watch, “Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe,” accessed March 21, 2025, <https://www.globalmbwatch.com/federation-of-islamic-organizations-in-europe/>.

Transnational Preaching and Education

The Brotherhood also exports its ideology through itinerant preachers and modern media. One of the most important vehicles has been satellite television and internet. Sheikh Qaradawi, based in Qatar, reached millions across the Arabic-speaking world (including diasporas in the West) through his TV program “Sharia and Life” on Al Jazeera, where he preached the Brotherhood’s blend of conservative social mores, anti-Western rhetoric, and gradualist Islamist politics. MB-affiliated media outlets (websites, YouTube channels, social media pages) disseminate content in many languages – from Turkish to Swahili – extolling political Islam and framing global events through an Islamist lens. They glorify “martyrs” in Palestine, condemn Western military interventions as “crusades,” and defend the notion of jihad against oppressors. In recent years, the Brotherhood’s online presence has proven adept at targeting youth: producing slick videos and memes that fuse Islamist themes with grievances about injustices (like authoritarian regimes in the Middle East or discrimination in Europe). Additionally, the MB has a long history of establishing *Islamic schools and centers of learning* abroad. In the 1960s, Brotherhood exiles in West Germany founded the Munich Islamic Center, which became a hub for training imams who then served communities across Europe. The Brotherhood’s pedagogical materials²² – books, curricula, teacher training – have been widely distributed, spreading a consistent message emphasizing sharia adherence, Muslim unity against external threats, and the eventual goal of an Islamic order. Over decades, this educational outreach created what one expert called “non-territorial Islamic states” within Europe – a developing parallel society bound by MB’s interpretation of Islam and quietly lobbying for the application of sharia to its members. In Britain, for example, MB-influenced groups have advocated for *sharia councils* to handle family disputes, effectively seeking a semi-autonomous jurisdiction for Muslims. While these efforts are usually framed as harmless religious accommodations, they are part of the Brotherhood’s long game to *incrementally assert Islamic parallel governance*.

Alliances and Influence Networks

The Muslim Brotherhood’s global success also owes to alliances with states and other movements when convenient. During the Cold War, Saudi Arabia (though Wahhabi, not Brotherhood, in ideology) provided refuge and funding to MB figures because of their mutual anti-Communism and anti-Nasserism – leading to a cross-pollination of MB ideas into the Saudi-sponsored Muslim World League and international Islamic conferences. In recent times, *Qatar* and *Turkey* have become major enablers of the Brotherhood²³. Qatar’s Al Jazeera gave MB voices a global megaphone; Doha financially supports Brotherhood-affiliated causes (like Gaza’s Hamas regime or Islamist

²² Cynthia Farahat, “The Muslim Brotherhood’s Concept of Education,” *Hudson Institute*, March 28, 2023, <https://www.hudson.org/national-security-defense/the-muslim-brotherhood-s-concept-of-education>.

²³ i24NEWS, “One Hundred-Page Report Exposes Qatari and Turkish Support for Muslim Brotherhood,” September 30, 2020, <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/international/1601555388-one-hundred-page-report-exposes-qatari-and-turkish-support-for-muslim-brotherhood>.

parties during the Arab Spring). Turkey under President Erdoğan – himself influenced by MB founder al-Banna and ideologue Qutb – has become a sanctuary for exiled Brotherhood members from Egypt, Syria, and elsewhere, and a base for their media (several MB-run TV channels beam from Istanbul). These state patrons amplify the Brotherhood's transnational reach, effectively providing it the resources of a country without it having to formally govern one. The synergy between Iran's networks and the Brotherhood's is mixed: in some conflict zones they are at odds (Syria's MB versus Iran-backed Assad), but in others, they coordinate against common foes (as seen in Iran's support for Hamas against Israel). Taken together, Iran's Wilayat al-Faqih apparatus and the Brotherhood's international organization represent two powerful models of Islamist globalization. They sometimes compete (for influence over Muslim hearts) and sometimes collaborate (over shared objectives), but they unmistakably reinforce a broader Islamic revivalist zeitgeist that challenges Western interests and liberal values.

The UK Front: Ideological Penetration and Societal Impact

The United Kingdom provides a striking microcosm of how both Iranian *Wilayat al-Faqih* proponents and Muslim Brotherhood networks seek footholds in a Western democracy. The UK is home to vibrant Muslim communities (Sunni and Shi'a), enjoys strong free speech protections, and has an influential role in global media and politics – making it a prime target for Islamist ideological influence. Over the past decades, Britain has inadvertently become a *theater for competing and complementary Islamist agendas*.

Iranian Influence in Britain²⁴

The Islamic Republic, through its diplomatic missions and cultural arms, has long attempted to court British Shi'a Muslims and even segments of Sunnis to its revolutionary cause. One focal point is the annual Al-Quds Day rally in London, inaugurated in the early 1980s at Khomeini's behest. Every year, processions in the heart of London call for the "liberation of Jerusalem" and the destruction of Israel, with participants often waving Hezbollah flags and chanting in support of Iran's supreme leader. Far from a spontaneous grassroots protest, the Quds Day event is *coordinated by pro-Iran organizations* – chiefly the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) and allied groups – effectively acting as extensions of the Iranian regime's propaganda machine. These rallies have raised serious concerns in the UK: they glorify proscribed terrorist organizations (despite UK law banning support for Hezbollah and Hamas) and have featured overt antisemitic banners and speeches. Yet, leveraging Britain's liberty, the organizers claim political expression rights, forcing police into a bind. The UK's failure until now to halt or significantly curb Quds Day incitement has been dubbed "*a symbolic victory for the Islamic Republic*", proving Tehran can mobilize on British soil

²⁴ Henry Jackson Society. *Iran's Influence in the United Kingdom*, 2020, <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/publications/iran-influence-united-kingdom/>.

with relative impunityfile-e6smg6odsuzbsevervhzxe. Beyond Quds Day, Iran's influence radiates through institutions like the Islamic Centre of England (ICE) in Maida Vale, London. Under the directorship of clerics appointed by Khamenei, the ICE became a locus for regime-aligned sermons and events, such as memorials for IRGC General Qassem Soleimani (killed by a US strike in 2020) where speakers praised him and by extension Iran's revolutionary agenda. British authorities have grown increasingly alarmed: Members of Parliament have accused the ICE of spreading the Iranian regime's extremist views, and security services monitor it for links to Tehran's intelligence. Iranian state media (Press TV) had its UK broadcasting license revoked by Ofcom in 2012 for airing forced confessions, yet it continues to operate online and via sympathetic UK journalists to influence public opinion²⁵. More darkly, Iran has engaged in transnational repression on UK soil – harassing and threatening Iranian dissidents and expatriate critics. British-Iranian journalists have required police protection after credible death threats traced to Iranian operatives. In 2023, the UK government publicly acknowledged Iran had plotted to kidnap or kill individuals on British soil at least 15 times within a year²⁶. This mixture of soft-power outreach and hard-power intimidation encapsulates Iran's approach: *push the ideology, and silence those who oppose it*. The net effect is a UK environment where Tehran's narrative (anti-Israel, anti-West, pro-theocracy) finds a platform, and where segments of British society – especially in some Shi'a immigrant communities – are pulled toward a *Khomeinist identity* that conflicts with integration and loyalty to democratic norms.

Brotherhood Footprint in the UK

Britain has also been a key base for the Muslim Brotherhood's global activities. Since the 1950s, when MB members fled Nasser's crackdown in Egypt,²⁷ London has been a haven for Islamist exiles. Over time, British Muslim charities, student groups, and activist organizations with quiet MB affiliations proliferated. One prominent example was the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), established in 1997²⁸ by Brotherhood sympathizers. MAB gained prominence as a co-organizer of the huge anti-Iraq War demonstrations in 2003, presenting itself as a voice of British Muslims in mainstream politics. Yet its founders were linked to the Brotherhood's Syrian and Egyptian branches, and it invited speakers like Qaradawi (who was later banned from the UK due to extremist statements). The Brotherhood's strategy in Britain has often been to *embed within legitimate causes* – anti-war, pro-Palestine, anti-Islamophobia – and steer the discourse toward its Islamist objectives. Charitable organizations with alleged

²⁵ Charlotte Tobitt, "Ofcom Revokes Press TV's UK Licence," *Press Gazette*, February 3, 2021, <https://pressgazette.co.uk/publishers/broadcast/ofcom-revokes-press-tvs-uk-licence/>.

²⁶ Dan Sabbagh, "Met Police and MI5 Have Foiled 15 Iranian Plots Against British or UK-Based Enemies," *The Guardian*, February 18, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/feb/18/met-police-mi5-foil-15-iranian-plots-against-british-or-uk-based-enemies>.

²⁷ Shadi Hamid and Meredith Wheeler, *Collusion to Crackdown: Islamist-Military Relations in Egypt*, Brookings Institution, February 2014, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/en-collusion-to-crackdown.pdf>.

²⁸ Muslim Association of Britain. "History of MAB," accessed March 21, 2025, <https://www.mabonline.net/about-us/history-mab/>.

Brotherhood ties have also operated out of the UK, raising and funneling funds that sometimes end up supporting Islamist projects abroad (a notable case is *Interpal*, a British charity accused by some governments of channelling money to Hamas). The UK's capital has even served as a media hub: the online outlet *Middle East Monitor* (MEMO)²⁹, for example, is run by MB-aligned activists and frequently publishes pro-Brotherhood and pro-Hamas content aimed at English-speaking audiences. During the Arab Spring, London-based Brotherhood figures were instrumental in lobbying the UK government and international community to support Islamist parties in Egypt and Tunisia. And after the Brotherhood was ousted and repressed in Egypt in 2013, many of its members and fellow travelers took refuge in the UK, keeping the flame alive in exile.

British authorities have not been blind to this. In 2015, Prime Minister David Cameron's government commissioned a comprehensive review of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology and activities in the UK. The report (authored by Sir John Jenkins) concluded that association with the Brotherhood "*should be considered as a possible indicator of extremism*" and noted that the MB's opaque networks in Britain had "*extremist tendencies*" contrary to UK values and security. However, the government stopped short of banning the MB, instead increasing scrutiny. The Brotherhood operates through lawful entities, making it a challenge to proscribe without overt criminal conduct. Still, the UK has banned Hamas (the Palestinian branch of the MB) entirely as a terrorist group, and has taken action against individuals inciting hatred. The bottom line is that the Brotherhood's influence in Britain is mostly *indirect but pervasive* – shaping narratives and activism within the law's limits, but in ways that may undermine social cohesion and promote separatist, sharia-first mindsets in Muslim communities. The signs of ideological penetration are subtle: a growth of parallel Islamic arbitration forums; student Islamic societies inviting hardline preachers; UK-based Muslim advocacy groups reflexively opposing counter-extremism programs (like Prevent) by casting them as "Islamophobic." These reflect, in part, the Brotherhood's campaigning, which often paints Muslims in the West as under siege and urges resistance to "assimilation" or governmental oversight.

Shared Threats to UK Society

Despite originating from different sects, the Iran-aligned networks and the Brotherhood-influenced networks in the UK can reinforce each other's impact. Both propagate a narrative that loyalty to the global Muslim *ummah* trumps **civic loyalty** to Britain. Both accuse the British state of being part of a grand Western oppression of Muslims – Iran's proxies echo this through anti-UK, anti-US rhetoric, and Brotherhood actors do similarly when criticizing British foreign policy or domestic counter-terror measures. The result can be alienation of some British Muslims from mainstream society, creating fertile ground for radicalization. Indeed, British security services have long worried that non-violent extremist ideology creates a climate for terrorism. *Both the Brotherhood and Khomeinist propaganda blur the line between politics and faith*, indoctrinating followers to see conflicts like Israel-Palestine or the War on Terror not in

²⁹ Middle East Monitor. Homepage. Accessed March 21, 2025. <http://www.middleeastmonitor.org.uk>.

nuanced terms but as binary jihad against infidels. This has translated into real security incidents: British men have gone abroad to join jihadist fronts (some inspired by Brotherhood-style grievance narratives, others by Iranian proxy militias), and domestically, hatred stirred up by these ideologies has led to threats against British Jews, ex-Muslims, and secular Muslims. The UK prides itself on multicultural tolerance, but that very openness has been manipulated. As one policy brief on Iranian influence noted, *“Iran actively weaponises the democratic freedoms of the United Kingdom... to incite hatred, glorify terrorism, and undermine social cohesion”*. The same could be said for Islamist groups connected to the Brotherhood.

In sum, the UK faces a *twin ideological assault*. On one flank is the state-sponsored Shi’ite extremism of Tehran, operating via well-placed centres and events that challenge British authority and spread theocratic, anti-Western propaganda. On the other flank is the diffuse Sunni extremist undercurrent of the Brotherhood and its affiliates, embedding within civil society to subtly shift British Islam towards political militancy and separatism. Both ultimately seek to erode the liberal, secular character of British public life, each in their own style. This convergence is a clarion call for Britain to bolster its defenses – legally, politically, and socially – to preserve an open society that is resilient against those who would abuse its freedoms to destroy its values.

Key Policy Recommendations: Countering Islamist Ideological Penetration

Britain now stands at a pivotal juncture in safeguarding its democratic values and national security against the combined ideological threats of the Iranian regime’s Wilayat al-Faqih doctrine and the Muslim Brotherhood’s transnational Islamism. The UK government has recently enhanced its toolkit – for example, the National Security Act 2023 and a new Foreign Influence Registration Scheme provide means to expose and prosecute foreign state interference – but these tools *must be applied with will and consistency*. Building on existing measures and the insights of this analysis, the following actionable steps are recommended to counter the malign influence of both Iran-aligned and Brotherhood-affiliated networks in the UK:

1. Strengthen Enforcement of Laws Against Extremism and Terrorist Glorification

The UK should enforce its counterterrorism and hate speech legislation *rigorously and even-handedly*. It is already illegal to support proscribed terrorist organisations like Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the UK – yet rallies and meetings (from Quds Day marches to smaller campus events) have featured open praise for these groups. Police and prosecutors must be empowered and instructed to act decisively when individuals or organisations cross the line from opinion into incitement or terror glorification. This means proactively monitoring events where such extremism is likely, collecting evidence (e.g. recordings of chants, flags, speeches) and pursuing

prosecutions without hesitationfile-e6smg6odsuzbsevervhzxe. “Civil liberties must never be a shield for those intent on dismantling the liberal order”file-e6smg6odsuzbsevervhzxe– UK authorities should make clear that freedom of expression does *not* protect the promotion of violence or the intimidation of minority communities. A zero-tolerance approach, applied equally to Iran-backed Shi’ite extremists and Brotherhood-inspired Sunni extremists, will deter brazen displays of support for Islamist militancy on British streets.

2. Proscribe the IRGC and Maintain Pressure on Extremist Affiliates

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) – the paramilitary spine of Iran’s regime – remains at the heart of exporting Iran’s revolution and orchestrating violence abroad, yet it is *not fully banned* in the UK. Following the lead of allies like the United States, Britain should move to designate the IRGC in its entirety as a terrorist organization. This would criminalize any collaboration with or support for the IRGC or its fronts (including the Quds Force), closing a glaring gap in Britain’s security frameworkfile. Such proscription would send an unambiguous signal that Tehran’s agents and cut-outs are not welcome on UK soil – and it would empower law enforcement to shut down IRGC-linked activities (financial transactions, meetings, recruitment) before they metastasize. On the Sunni Islamist side, the UK should continue to *closely monitor Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups* and be prepared to take action if clear links to violence or subversion emerge. Some Brotherhood offshoots (like Hamas) are already banned; others operate legally but bear watching. Government may not yet find sufficient legal cause to ban the MB as a whole, but it should not shy away from publicly calling out organizations that, while not overtly violent, propagate extremist ideologies contrary to British values. A designation of the Brotherhood as an extremist organization (short of terrorist listing) could be considered, which would formalize the scrutiny of MB-linked entities under the lens of Prevent (the counter-extremism program). At minimum, continued vigilance and political pressure should be applied to groups proven to be MB fronts – for example, by excluding them from government consultations and funding until they demonstrate transparent rejection of extremist positions.

3. Investigate and Disrupt Foreign Funding and Influence Networks

Both Iran’s government and Brotherhood networks rely on *money and direction from abroad* to sustain their UK operations. The government must launch formal investigations into the funding streams, logistical coordination, and foreign ties of key entities suspected of acting as proxies. For Iran, this means scrutinizing organizations like the Islamic Human Rights Commission (which coordinates Quds Day) and the Islamic Centre of England, among others, using the full powers of the National Security Act and the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme. Any UK organization acting on behalf of a hostile foreign power (be it Iran or any other state) should be compelled by law to register as a foreign agent and disclose its funding sources, or else face criminal

penalties. This level of transparency will itself have a deterrent effect; sunlight can dissuade covert theocrats. Similarly, charities and NGOs with suspected Brotherhood links should be investigated by the Charity Commission and security services to map their international connections – particularly funding from states like Qatar or Turkey or from global MB networks. If evidence shows that ostensibly charitable funds are being used for political or extremist propaganda purposes, the UK authorities should freeze assets, revoke charitable status, or even proscribe the organization. A more robust *Foreign Influence Registration* regime, properly enforced, will flush out the hidden hands guiding UK Islamist groups and allow for targeted action against them.

4. Build Institutional Capacity to Recognize and Counter Ideological Subversion

A recurring challenge in dealing with sophisticated Islamist networks is that British officials at the local and national level often lack the expertise to identify subtle forms of subversive activity. The government should therefore invest in comprehensive training for police officers, intelligence analysts, prosecutors, and relevant civil servants on the symbols, rhetoric, and tactics of both Iranian and Brotherhood-affiliated groups. This could involve workshops on understanding Shia Islamist iconography (e.g. recognizing Basij or IRGC insignia, Wilayat al-Faqih slogans) and Sunni Islamist cues (Muslim Brotherhood mottos, hand gestures like the Rabaa sign used by MB supporters, etc.). Training should also cover typical patterns: for instance, how Iran might use cultural programs as cover for recruitment, or how Brotherhood-connected charities may funnel money. Enhancing intelligence-sharing among UK agencies is key – MI5, Special Branch, the Charity Commission, and even HM Revenue & Customs (for following money trails) should coordinate efforts and pool information about suspect organisations. The government might establish a dedicated *Ideological Threats Task Force* bringing together counter-terrorism police and extremism specialists to focus on non-violent Islamist actors specifically. When front-line officials are better equipped to spot warning signs early – such as a community centre suddenly distributing Khomeini's literature, or a student society hosting speakers who advocate sharia over British law – they can intervene with preventative measures (community warnings, added surveillance, or quiet diplomatic pressure on foreign embassies bankrolling such efforts). Early identification and consistent, law-based pushback will make the UK a much more hostile environment for extremist influence operations.

5. Bolster Civil Society Resilience and Democratic Coalitions

The ultimate defense against Islamist ideological penetration is a *strong, aware, and united civil society*. The UK government, alongside local authorities and civil society leaders, should implement programs to inoculate communities against extremist propaganda and to empower moderate voices. This includes:

- **Educational Initiatives:** Introduce or expand curricula in schools (and materials in mosques) that promote critical thinking and awareness of disinformation, so younger generations of British Muslims learn to recognize and reject the

distortions of Islamist extremist narratives. Encourage community-led educational circles that counter the simplistic worldview offered by MB or Iranian propaganda with authentic, pluralistic interpretations of Islam and history.

- **Support Moderate and Counter-Extremist Voices:** The vast majority of British Muslims do not subscribe to the Brotherhood or Khomeinist line – their voices must be amplified. Government can provide grants or platforms to *grassroots organisations, scholars, and imams* who champion an Islam fully compatible with UK civic life. This could involve sponsoring seminars and media content that debunk extremist interpretations (for example, clarifying that apostasy laws are obsolete or that there is no religious obligation to support distant political conflicts). Celebrating and highlighting those Muslims who contribute positively to British society undercuts the narrative of victimhood Islamists use.
- **Interfaith and Cross-Community Alliances:** Invest in initiatives that bring Muslim communities into partnership with Jewish, Christian, and other community groups to jointly reject hatred. For instance, a coalition of faith leaders could hold events condemning Al-Quds Day incitement and affirming that British people of all faiths stand against imported antisemitism and sectarianism. This would rob Iran-aligned agitators of the ability to claim they represent “Muslims” versus “others” – instead, the *real* Muslim leadership in Britain is side by side with others upholding peace and tolerance.
- **Community Alert Networks:** Encourage mechanisms for communities to report extremist activities or pressure safely. Iranian diaspora who feel threatened by regime agents, or Muslim parents worried about MB-influenced teachings at a local youth club, should know whom to turn to. The government can enhance confidential hotlines or local liaison officers to receive tips and then act swiftly to investigate or provide protection. In particular, British Iranians who protest against the Tehran regime (as seen in 2022 during the Mahsa Amini uprising³⁰) need assurance that UK authorities will shield them from Iran’s intimidation – more visible policing around Iranian diplomatic sites, and legal action against those who harass dissidents, is warranted. Likewise, British Muslims who oppose Islamist extremists (ex-Muslims, liberal activists, etc.) should be supported through security advice and public solidarity to embolden their stand.

6. Leverage Foreign Policy and International Cooperation

The UK’s response should also be coordinated with allies and embedded in its foreign policy. Diplomatically, Britain must continue to hold Iran accountable on the world stage – not only for nuclear ambitions and terrorism, but for its *export of theocratic extremism*. This can be done by raising the issue of Iran’s interference and propaganda in international forums (UN, G7, etc.), and by working with European partners on a unified approach to curbing Iranian influence networks across Europe. For example, if multiple European countries move in lockstep to close down Iran-funded “cultural centers” acting as spy hubs, Iran will find it harder to retaliate or cry foul. On the Brotherhood front, the

³⁰ UK Parliament Commons Library, “Two-Year Anniversary of the Mahsa Amini Protests in Iran,” September 14, 2023, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/two-year-anniversary-of-the-mahsa-amini-protests-in-iran/>.

UK should engage in frank dialogue with nations like Qatar and Turkey that have relationships with the MB, conveying that while Britain respects their right to domestic politics, it will not tolerate foreign support for Islamist movements undermining British security. If needed, use *targeted sanctions* or travel bans against key foreign individuals who direct or bankroll extremist activities in the UK (for instance, an IRGC commander running an influence ring, or a wealthy Brotherhood financier funding agitprop in Europe). Britain's intelligence agencies should step up information-sharing with counterparts (in the Middle East, South Asia, and North America) to map the full transnational web of these Islamist networks. Given that both Iran's regime and the Brotherhood exploit global connectivity, only a global cooperative response can significantly disrupt them. The upcoming Integrated Review of UK Security and Foreign Policy should explicitly recognize *Islamist ideological warfare* as a hybrid threat – akin to how hostile state propaganda or far-right extremism are recognized – and allocate resources accordingly.

By implementing these recommendations, the UK can begin to turn the tide against the ideological infiltration it faces. The goal is not to target Islam or curtail legitimate debate – it is to robustly defend Britain's open society from those who abuse openness to preach intolerance and violence. Through law and policy, Britain can draw a firm line: everyone is free to worship and to voice opinions, but plotting to impose theocratic rule, glorifying terrorist entities, or serving a foreign authoritarian agenda will be met with unified resistance. The effect, over time, will be to marginalize the influence of both Iran's revolutionary clerics and the Brotherhood's zealots within the UK, and to strengthen the resilience of Britain's Muslim communities against extremist manipulation.

The challenge of confronting Islamist ideology in its diverse forms is one of the great strategic battles of our time – a battle for the hearts and minds of communities, and for the preservation of a world where faith and freedom can coexist. The Muslim Brotherhood and Iran's Wilayat al-Faqih regime may differ in theology, but they are *two sides of the same coin*: each melding religion with totalitarian ambitions, each mobilizing believers to defy the modern democratic state, and each ruthlessly silencing those who stray from their dogma. Their ideological overlap – on apostasy, on the subjugation of individual rights, on the ultimate illegitimacy of secular authority – means that success for one emboldens the other. A militant theocracy in Tehran that exports its doctrine bolsters Islamist hardliners everywhere; a tolerated Brotherhood network in Europe that advances its agenda under the radar provides moral cover to theocrats who say “the West is weak.”

Britain and its allies must therefore respond with a *whole-of-society strategy*. This brief has outlined how Iran spreads its revolutionary creed via institutions, media, clerics, and lies – and how the Brotherhood spreads its vision via preaching, social activism, and front groups. The UK can no longer treat these as distant problems or separate phenomena. They meet on the streets of London, in the discourse on university campuses, and in the online spaces where young British Muslims seek answers. The answer Britain must offer is firm and inspiring: a recommitment to its liberal democratic values coupled with an unflinching defense against those who seek to undermine them.

By enforcing laws decisively, exposing and uprooting foreign subversion, and uplifting the voices of moderation and truth, the UK can counter the siren songs of both Khomeinism and Islamism. In doing so, Britain will not only protect its own national cohesion and security, but also stand as a beacon to other nations grappling with similar threats. The ideological extremists thrive on Western paralysis and indecision; it is time to prove that our open societies possess the resolve to confront and overcome their narrative of inevitability. With vigilant action and principled unity, the UK can ensure that *neither the jurist's guardianship nor the Brotherhood's call* will ever supersede the timeless British guardianship of freedom, human dignity, and the rule of law.