



THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL COHESION

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Welcome to the July email update from The Centre for Social Cohesion. The CSC is the first think-tank in the UK to specialise in studying radicalisation and extremism within Britain. The Centre is an independent, non-partisan think tank.

Sharia Law debate and al-Muhajiroun

The CSC formally requested last month that the government proscribe radical Islamist group al-Muhajiroun.

CSC Director Douglas Murray was due to speak at a debate entitled 'Sharia law vs British law', organised by a student society and hosted by Conway Hall against Anjem Choudary, head of al-Muhajiroun. However al-Muhajiroun hijacked the debate, with members of the radical organisation committing violence, attempting to enforce segregation between the sexes, and intimidating and threatening several members of the audience. A man at the event has alleged that he was assaulted by a member of al-Muhajiroun, and is pressing charges, while the police are investigating several incidents perpetrated by the group at the event.

As a result of the disorder and the actions of al-Muhajiroun, the debate did not take place. Murray announced in a press release:

'I am happy to debate anyone's opinions in a free and fair open debate. It's what keeps liberal democracies free. It's what liberal democracy is all about. But under these circumstances – where a mob takes over an event, resorts to violence and forces gender segregation – then such a debate cannot take place'.

The CSC subsequently issued a [press release](#) urging the British government to ban al-Muhajiroun.

The events received wide coverage throughout the press, with a comprehensive account of events provided by [Asian Image](#). The event was also covered in the [Daily Telegraph](#), [Daily Mail](#), [Independent](#), [Guardian](#), and [Evening Standard](#), as well as [Harry's Place](#) blog.

CSC Director Douglas Murray wrote an article for the *Guardian's* [Comment is Free](#) detailing the events at Conway Hall and stressing the necessity of debating the extremist mindset of the likes of al-Muhajiroun in public. Murray explained:

'As with the BNP, while they are legal and are being given a platform by independent organisations, they cannot go unchallenged... I have had too many experiences of finding just one person or a couple of people, usually young, who have genuinely never had their minds opened up by contrary opinions. Even when they don't agree with a new opinion, they can at least become aware that the point of free societies is that we don't agree. On anything. And certainly - for well known reasons - never unanimously. Never finally. The debate is the thing'.

Murray was also interviewed by BBC Three Counties Radio, Sunrise Radio and Secure Freedom Radio in the United States regarding the debate.

Earlier in the month, following al-Muhajiroun's announcement that they were planning to relaunch, the CSC published a [press release](#) revealing that one in seven Islamist-related convictions in the last decade were either members of, or have known links to, the organisation.

The Centre in the Press

In the July/August summer double issue of Standpoint magazine, CSC Researcher Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens has a [featured article](#) on sharia banking, where he discusses the origins of this system and how the government is engaged in promoting it with some of Britain's leading Islamist organisations. The article was reproduced on the [Hudson Institute](#) website.

Hitchens' article received coverage in both the [Independent](#) and the [Jerusalem Post](#), and spoke about his article's findings for US syndicate news radio organisation IRN News. Hitchens will also regularly contribute to Standpoint magazine's newly-launched online [blog](#), which will also feature contributions from Nick Cohen, Michael Burleigh, Shiraz Maher, Jessica Duchon and Joshua Rozenberg.

CSC Researcher Houriya Ahmed wrote a detailed condemnation of the University of East London in wake of their decision to allow their Islamic Society to host Sheikh' Abu Usama Adh Dhahabee at their annual dinner. Dhahabee is a convert who has advocated jihad in an Islamic state, preached hatred against non-Muslims, and said that apostasy and homosexuality are punishable by death. Houriya explained that whilst freedom of speech should allow a diversity of opinions to be presented at universities, students should not be exposed to those 'who preach religious intolerance, hatred and misogyny'. Houriya's article was posted online at [Harry's Place](#) and [Spittoon](#).

Houriya also wrote an article for the *Guardian's* [Comment is Free](#) on 'Is Europe's future Christian?', where she argued that only through a secular society can true freedom of religion flourish. Houriya said:

'There is absolutely nothing wrong with people displaying their faith by wearing a cross, hijab or turban. This does not make the public domain religious, but uses public life to express varying forms of religiosity. Secularism is not an alternative to religion, but necessary for religious freedom. Maintaining Europe's secular tradition is vital for the free expression of diverse forms of faith'.

Following French President Nicolas Sarkozy's speech in which he announced his decision to back a parliamentary commission to research whether the burkha (including the face veil) should be banned in France, CSC Director Douglas Murray wrote an article for the *Daily Express* in support of Sarkozy's stance:

'Women who wear the full face and body covering – and the men who generally make them wear it – often claim that the wearing of the burkha is a religious right. It is no such thing. The burkha is a political, not a religious, symbol. It represent the most hard-line and intolerant strand of Islam and as such has more in common with the uniforms of totalitarian systems than it does with the wearing of religious symbols'.

Murray was also quoted speaking out in defence of Sarkozy in the [Daily Telegraph](#), [Daily Star](#) and in an additional article in the [Daily Express](#).

In Murray's monthly column for [Standpoint](#), he criticised the mainstream political parties in the UK for their unwillingness to discuss issues that the British public are deeply concerned over, such as immigration, and the ways in which this has allowed the BNP to gain a foothold in British politics. Murray concluded:

'Fighting over the same irrelevant piece of ground, the major parties are no longer worthy of the people. They must either change radically or be replaced. Westminster needs not reform, but revolution'.

Murray also spoke to [BBC News](#) after a recent study revealed that there had been a 30% rise in the number of terrorist and hate websites, especially Holocaust denial websites. Murray argued that although these sites publish opinions which are demonstrably false, they should still be tolerated 'otherwise what is true becomes dogma and then becomes incapable of being defended'.

Murray was the feature of an extensive article in *Politiken*, the largest left wing daily newspaper in Denmark. The interview highlighted the work that the CSC is currently engaged in. Murray was quoted discussing the increased number of sharia courts in Britain in the [Hindustan Times](#).

Media & Public Appearances

CSC Director Douglas Murray addressed key politicians and diplomats at the Engelsberg conference in Sweden, in which he discussed interventionism post-Iraq and highlighted the main problems with President Obama's foreign policy, with specific regard to Iran, and the potential consequences this has for the Middle East. Murray also gave a speech to the [Danish Free Press Society](#) on freedom of speech in Europe and the work being done by the Centre for Social Cohesion. The audience included politicians, policy-makers and journalists.

Murray was part of a panel discussing 'Faith Schools: Social disaster or an obligation and necessity?' at the London Jewish Cultural Centre in London. Murray spoke alongside Shakil Ahmed, Principal at Islamic secondary girls' school the Ayesha Community Education, Alastair Falk, former Head teacher at King Solomon High School and Director of Educational Leadership at the United Jewish Israel Appeal and Dr Jonathan Romain, Rabbi of Maidenhead Synagogue and other guests.

In June Murray also addressed ambassadors, policy makers and government officials at the Foreign Office for the Anglo-Israel Association at an Ambassadors' Roundtable event.

Murray appeared on Nicky Campbell's show on BBC Radio 5 discussing whether Britain was the world's 'most evil' nation, in the context of comments made by Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Murray also discussed whether it was the end of Barack Obama's honeymoon period for the BBC World Service, and appeared on BBC News 24 commenting on the arrests of British Embassy staff in Iran. He was

interviewed by Sunrise Radio on whether Britain should ban the burkha.

Following his participation at the Middle East Forum's conference on Libel Lawfare in Capitol Hill, Washington DC, Douglas Murray was [interviewed](#) by Frank Gaffney, Director of the Centre for Security Policy, where he outlined the problems that Britain faces regarding the increasing threat that Islamists pose to the freedom of speech through blasphemy legislation.

Upcoming

Douglas Murray will be appearing on BBC One's Big Questions this month. He will also be addressing students at the University of Liverpool.

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The Centre for Social Cohesion is an independent think tank

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