

Letters to the Editor,
The Sunday Telegraph,
111 Buckingham Palace Road,
London SW1W 0DT.

Tuesday 10 March 2015

Dear Sir,

It is not often that a British Muslim organisation has cause to give thanks to Andrew Gilligan but on this occasion, I am obliged to acknowledge his identifying a minor error in our recently published manifesto ('Extremism in Britain: now the crackdown is launched', Sunday Telegraph, 8 March).

Gilligan rightly points out an error in the reference to the brutal stabbing of Mohammed Saleem as having occurred the month before the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby and not, as we have incorrectly noted, "months after". This has since been corrected.

The error in no way however, justifies Gilligan's unsubstantiated claims that we have inferred "that the killing of Drummer Lee Rigby led to the murder of a Muslim man" - we categorically do not make any such causal link - or that our manifesto "includes demonstrable lies". It is notable that Gilligan can point to no such "demonstrable lies" in his article.

Indeed, it is ironic that our reference to the murder of Mohammed Saleem and the lack of proportionate focus in counter-extremism strategy on far right extremism is manifest in Gilligan's cover story which deals exclusively with the Government's clampdown on 'Islamist extremism'.

During the passage of the recently enacted Counter Terrorism and Security Bill, Lord Bates spoke in the upper chamber on the legislation's also dealing with the threat posed by far right extremism of which Mohammed Saleem was an innocent victim. But policy initiatives have left us in no doubt that tackling the security threat posed by white supremacist movements and far right ideologies is an afterthought and not a key plank of counter-extremism policy despite the Security Minister, James Brokenshire, warning of the "deadly consequences" of the far right threat.

British Muslim organisations have developed a thick skin to resist Gilligan's McCarthyite obsession with portraying them as 'Islamists' and closet 'extremists' and his deliberately downplaying the scale of Islamophobic hate crime in the UK. His destructive narrative emboldens only those who believe Muslims have no place in Britain's future. At MEND, we prefer to focus on the things that matter; the political and economic integration of British Muslims. It is the best antidote to extremists whether al-Qaida inspired or the far right.

Yours faithfully,

Sufyan Ismail
CEO, MEND