



**MEND RESPONDS TO CREST'S REPORT:  
"LISTENING TO BRITISH MUSLIMS:  
POLICING, EXTREMISM AND PREVENT"**

Muslim engagement  
& development

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## “Listening to British Muslims: policing, extremism and Prevent”

### Briefing Paper from Muslim Engagement and Development

March 2020

The Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (Crest) released a new report in March 2020 entitled “Listening to British Muslims: policing, extremism and Prevent”.

Whilst the report makes some valid observations about how Islamophobia is a significant concern for the vast majority of Muslims in the UK, and the relationship between British Muslims and the media, it nonetheless suffers from some severe pitfalls in that it overlooks significant problems with PREVENT, adopts a flawed conceptualisation of PREVENT which it uses to present a distorted view of Muslims towards it, and gives tacit endorsement to the “Independent” Commission for Countering Extremism (and its Commissioner).

### Who are Crest?

Crest advisory describes itself as a “team of crime and justice specialists.”<sup>1</sup> It states on its website that it works with the pro-PREVENT Commission for Countering Extremism, led by Sara Khan, as well as several police forces.<sup>2</sup> These partnerships suggest a pro-PREVENT bias.

The contributors to Crest’s report include individuals such as the pro-PREVENT Akeela Ahmed, who sits on the Cross-Government Working Group on Anti-Muslim Hatred, and Qari Asim, who sits on the government’s Islamophobia panel as an advisor. Another contributor to the study is pro-government Dilwar Hussain, who founded the Islam reform organisation ‘New Horizons in British Islam’, and has been a Senior Programme Advisor to the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD),<sup>3</sup> which counts Rashad Ali, one of the founders of the pro-PREVENT Quilliam Foundation, as its Resident Senior Fellow. Hardly a ‘critical’ panel of advisers.

Crest say they “research, consult and communicate for clients across the crime and justice sector,” raising questions that as to whether they are more akin to a Public Relations agency that provide bespoke research to communicate the message of those who contract their services. This raises the issue as to who funded and commissioned the study in question.

The BBC reported “the research was funded by a charitable trust with an interest in policing and crime reduction which for security reasons does not wish to be identified.”<sup>4</sup> Given the

<sup>1</sup>“Crest Advisory | Crime and Justice Specialists | United Kingdom.” Crest Site Official. Accessed March 5, 2020. <https://www.crestadvisory.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>“Dilwar Hussain.” ISD. Accessed March 5, 2020. [https://www.isdglobal.org/isd\\_team/dilwar-hussain/](https://www.isdglobal.org/isd_team/dilwar-hussain/).

<sup>4</sup> BBC, “Muslim ‘support’ for ‘Toxic’ Anti-Extremism Scheme,” *BBC News*, March 2, 2020, sec. UK, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51676923>.



interests of several organisations in the curtailing of the human rights of Muslim communities in the UK, the lack of transparency in who funded this report is worrying.

## Problems with Crest's report

### *Controversies surrounding PREVENT that the Crest report overlooked*

PREVENT is fundamentally flawed. It suffers from a lack of evidentiary basis, places an undue focus on ideology, lacks viable definitions, and there is no robust evidence that it is effective.<sup>5</sup>

It also provides inadequate training to those who are under a statutory duty to act under it and conflicts with safeguarding. These factors have contributed to the unacceptable levels of "false positive" referrals under PREVENT and, significantly, legitimised the targeting of Muslims as a suspect community, as shown by the disproportionate number of referrals of Muslims.

For more details about the problems with PREVENT, see MEND's submission to the Independent Review of PREVENT [here](#).

### *The "neutral explanation" myth*

Crest's report makes claims that suggest that Muslim communities across the UK support the PREVENT strategy. The authors say that when offered a "neutral" explanation of PREVENT, 80% of British Muslims and 85% of the wider public offered broad support for it.<sup>6</sup>

There are many issues with this assertion by Crest. Firstly, an inference can be drawn from the statement which would suggest that opposition to PREVENT stems from ignorance; once PREVENT is explained in "straightforward and neutral way," Crest claim people would support it.

However, the notion as to what amounts to a "neutral explanation" is highly subjective, and examining how Crest framed PREVENT for participants in their study illustrates a failure – whether intentional or not – to highlight the concerns raised by groups spanning the breadth of the human rights and civil society sphere.

Crest, in page 108 of its report, have the following to say about PREVENT:

*"Prevent is a government programme to try and stop people from being drawn into radicalisation and terrorism before it happens.*

*It is run by local police forces and councils and works to prevent extreme right-wing radicalisation as well as extreme Islamist radicalisation.*

*If Prevent workers feel someone is a serious concern they may be offered one-to-one mentoring from an appropriate adult such as a youth worker or imam who can help educate them and support them in*

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<sup>5</sup>Editor, Fiona Hamilton, Crime & Security. n.d. "Most Programmes to Stop Radicalisation Are Failing." *View.TheTimes.Co.Uk*, sec. news. Accessed March 9, 2020. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/most-programmes-to-stop-radicalisation-are-failing-0bwh9pbtg>.

<sup>6</sup>Crest Advisory, "Post," Crest Site Official, March 1, 2020, <https://www.crestadvisory.com/post/executive-summary-listening-to-british-muslims-on-policing-extremism-and-prevent>.

*their life to help guide them away from radicalisation. This is entirely voluntary and does not involve getting a criminal record.*

*Prevent also includes a duty on public sector workers such as teachers and doctors to report signs of radicalisation to the police and council, who then consider whether any further action is needed.*

*It also includes funding for organisations such as youth groups, faith groups and education programmes to work in communities against radicalisation.”<sup>7</sup>*

Looking at this clearly positive description of PREVENT, it is clear that the authors deliberately avoided discussing the many legitimate criticisms and controversies surrounding it; this hardly qualifies as a ‘neutral explanation’.

Indeed, Dal Babu, the former chair of the National Association of Muslim Police, criticised the research, saying it sought to “mislead and conflate safeguarding with the PREVENT programme”, noting that PREVENT “does not have the trust of the community.”<sup>8</sup> This observation has merit. Most Muslims, as with other communities in the UK, would agree that terrorism should be stopped, however, very few would agree to being treated as a suspect community and criminalised via false positive referrals.

### *The Commission for Countering Extremism*

Crest say the government set up an “independent Commission for Countering Extremism to advise it on policies and powers it may require in response to the increase in police recorded hate crime”.<sup>9</sup> Whilst this statement may seem innocuous at first glance, it serves to legitimise the role of Commissioner for Countering Extremism and its current holder, Sara Khan, which has proven to run counter to the interests of Muslim communities across the country.

Ms Khan’s appointment to the role gave rise to concerns that Muslim communities will refuse to liaise with her, as articulated in a letter signed by more than 100 Muslim organisations and leaders,<sup>10</sup> thereby defeating the purpose of her appointment to the role. The fact, therefore, that Crest’s report legitimised a body void of community support suggests a fundamental lack of understanding of the views of grassroots Muslims.

### **Conclusion**

The track record of PREVENT shows that it is discriminatory and unfairly targets Muslims, and this fact, coupled with its lack of scientific credibility and absence of evidence that it works, illustrates how it is undeserving of support generally – let alone from Muslim communities.

It is, therefore, worrying that a study which purports to shed light on the views of Muslims towards PREVENT seemingly misleads its participants into endorsing a means of their own oppression and entrenched disadvantages.

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<sup>7</sup> Crest, “Listening to British Muslims: Policing, Extremism and Prevent,” March 1, 2020, [https://b9cf6cd4-6aad-4419-a368-724e7d1352b9.usrfiles.com/ugd/b9cf6c\\_d12a4911772d4e04a683b69561c86501.pdf](https://b9cf6cd4-6aad-4419-a368-724e7d1352b9.usrfiles.com/ugd/b9cf6c_d12a4911772d4e04a683b69561c86501.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> BBC, “Muslim ‘support’ for ‘Toxic’ Anti-Extremism Scheme,” *BBC News*, March 2, 2020, sec. UK, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51676923>.

<sup>9</sup> Crest, “Listening to British Muslims: Policing, Extremism and Prevent,” March 1, 2020, [https://b9cf6cd4-6aad-4419-a368-724e7d1352b9.usrfiles.com/ugd/b9cf6c\\_d12a4911772d4e04a683b69561c86501.pdf](https://b9cf6cd4-6aad-4419-a368-724e7d1352b9.usrfiles.com/ugd/b9cf6c_d12a4911772d4e04a683b69561c86501.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> MEND, “Over 100 Muslim Organisations and Leaders Send a Letter to the Home Secretary Calling for Sara Khan to Be Sacked as Chair of Countering Extremism Commission,” Muslim Engagement and Development, January 29, 2018, <https://www.mend.org.uk/100-muslim-organisations-leaders-send-letter-home-secretary-calling-sara-khan-sacked-chair-countering-extremism-commission/>.

This fact, along with its lack of transparency as to the funding for its report and its endorsement of individuals many in Muslim communities feel to be working against their interests, make it an unreliable study, which should be approached with caution.

**If MEND can be of any assistance to your work, please feel free to contact**  
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