

# The visual rhetoric of UK counter-terrorism

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# Visual rhetoric

Theory and practice relating to use of visuality to convey meaning or a rhetoric of the image (Barthes, 1977)

Al Qaeda's post-classical terrorism (Wieviorka and White, 2004) showed awareness of global rhetorical process (Heath, 2008: Matusitz, 2013) and visuality.

Spatial grandeur replaced with smaller scale enactment via digital artefacts of fear and recurring *topos* or themes, such as orange jumpsuits.



# Research Aims

1. Collect and curate the visual rhetoric of counter-terrorism in the UK.
2. Interpretive analysis of artefacts using visual material rhetoric methodology (Reiss, 2015) to address 2 research questions:

**What does the visibility of UK counter-terrorism look like?**

How was it made/by who using what? (materiality)

**What is the argumentation of the visual rhetoric?**

What does it say/what effects did it/might it have? (consequentiality)

Supplementary consideration of what does the artefact tell us about the assumptions, structure and purpose of UK counter terrorism at the time of its making? (temporality). What were/are the means of distribution (circulation)

# Methodology

- Systematic online search of all UK police forces to identify regional Prevent web sites, twitter feeds and other online visual material from 2012-2017.
- Review of press releases, Ministerial Statements and Select Committee appearances and reports from Home Office from 2012 -2017 on counter-terrorism and social cohesion initiatives.
- Visual content was analysed in workshops for consideration of materiality/consequentiality with colleagues with expertise in graphic design, public information campaigns, online graphics, web site design.

# Findings

Collection and curation found three types of visual material relating to counter-terrorism:

1. Regional police force online projects using a combination of:
  - a. Locally-produced material
  - b. Materials from nationwide Police or Home Office initiatives.
  
2. Home Office projects implemented at national level by government departments, agencies or contractors.

# Derbyshire Police (East Midlands Prevent, run by East Midlands special Operations/Special Branch)



## Materiality

“It is badly produced in Adobe Photoshop and looks amateurish overall. The labels not straight and lack perspective. The whole thing looks unofficial but not in a good way – it is just incompetent. It is an attempt at creating something but is artless. It is as if someone has said let’s quickly do something for the twitter account. It actually looks like a joke.”

# Northamptonshire Police Prevent Twitter Account



Preventing  
vulnerable  
individuals  
from being  
radicalised

**Safeguarding Against  
Radicalisation & Extremism**



# Regional UK Police Forces: Prevent on Twitter



HELP *for* HEROES

Design Expectations  
**NATO FORCES**  
a quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog



Preventing  
vulnerable  
individuals  
from being  
radicalised

**Safeguarding Against  
Radicalisation & Extremism**







Preventing  
vulnerable  
individuals  
from being  
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**Safeguarding Against  
Radicalisation & Extremism**



## **Materiality/Consequentiality**

“The type in the centre is aggressive – like a military stencil – and covers extremism and radicalisation. Then there is the softer message and vulnerable people but that is in red too. The figure humanises the Prevent idea and uses a similar silhouette visual to Help for Heroes – the military theme again. And finally a third element of the Northants Police badge. These three visual and text ideas do not really belong together.”

# Nationwide initiatives deployed locally: The panic button



**TERRORIST & EXTREMIST MATERIAL ONLINE INSPIRES HATRED. TOGETHER WE MUST STOP IT.**

 [www.preventtragedies.co.uk](http://www.preventtragedies.co.uk)



**STOP TERRORISTS' & EXTREMISTS' ONLINE PRESENCE**





**REPORT ONLINE TERRORIST & EXTREMIST MATERIAL HERE**

**STOP TERRORIST & EXTREMIST CONTENT SPREADING ONLINE.**

 [www.preventtragedies.co.uk](http://www.preventtragedies.co.uk)

### Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit (CTIRU)

The CTIRU put considerable effort into removing online terrorist and extremist material. The Police rely on the public to report concerns about online content. Report it by following the 4 steps below:

-  Click on the red 'STOP' button found on Prevent Tragedies, police and other websites.
-  Click the 'Start Now' link.
-  Complete the online form.
-  The CTIRU will initiate the removal process if the reported content meets the assessment criteria.

# Panic button



## Materiality/Consequentiality

A professional design. The text – linguistic message – co-mingles terrorism and extremism – with the mediation of a device.

“The imagery – and use of red – has a sense of a panic button. The visual inference is that if we press the button it will stop the panic. It also implies a form of functionality behind it, that if we press it something happens, which is quite authoritarian, yet it doesn’t really do anything apart from refer to another website.”

# Findings

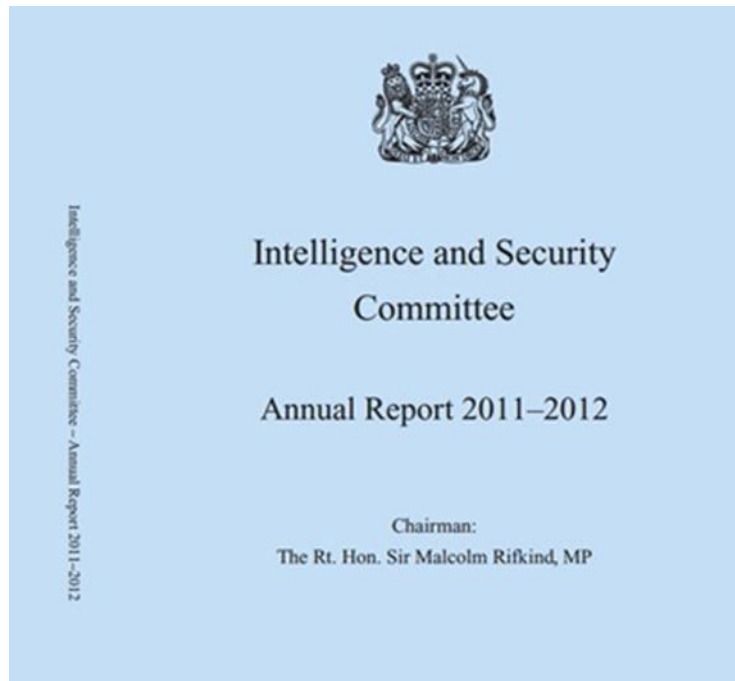
The initial phase of collection and curation found three types of visual material relating to counter-terrorism:

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# Home Office-sponsored projects: Visual rhetoric shows exemplars of moderation



“Sharper and more professional counter-narrative products.”



The Home Secretary said RICU\* was “currently road-testing some quite innovative approaches to counter-ideological messages”.

\*Research Information and Communication Unit.

Intelligence and Security Committee (2012). Oral Evidence, Home Secretary, 19 January. Intelligence and Security Committee Annual Report 2011-2012. London: HMSO.





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FAST is a UK based organisation providing support to vulnerable families and individuals whose lives have been affected by the trauma of losing loved ones to hateful ideologies and groups. That is why we are here to help you and your family.

Learn more about the work we do →





An outsourced digital confection or visual rhetoric for moderate Muslim civic society?

FAST – Families Matter | Branding + Posters 21 July 2014 “launch event”.

“We produced the content for the folders which were handed out, and the posters that you can see in the photos – the quotes on the posters come directly from the short film made by Breakthrough Media.”

(Direct Design, 2014)

Visual rhetoric and techniques from politics.  
Small scale spatial enactment to reduce risk and fit television format.



inspire

#MakingAStand

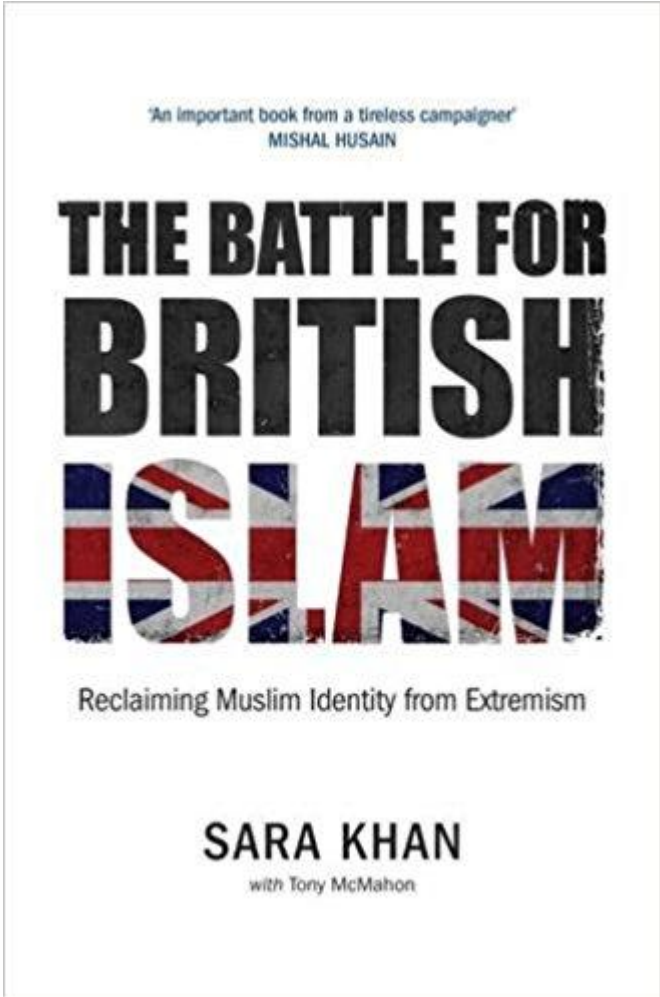
inspire



#MakingAStand

www.wewillinspire.com

# Exemplars of Moderation and Indexicality: This is moderate Islam looks like



Press coverage of 24 September 2014 Inspire Making a Stand launch in London

Being moderate is not enough.  
Obligation to fight back and  
resist “extremists”



9 July 2015, Fightback starts here launch in London



**I AM BRITISH. I AM MUSLIM. I AM A SOLDIER.**



# Conclusions:

## 1. Local Police:

- a. Locally-produced Prevent material is poor quality, inconsistent and looks bad. The argumentation, messages and overall purpose is not clear.
- b. Weak and muddled argumentation. No pictures of people, no personal appeal that offers help, just a militaristic sense of process. Target audience is not clear, and some material seems focussed on maintaining contact with a growing Prevent clientele (NHS, teachers etc.) rather than public.
- c. Overall visual rhetoric is unconvincing, with fragmented messages perhaps reflecting fragmented implementation of Prevent

# Home Office projects

“Sharper and more professional counter-narrative products” required the help of sharp, professional marketing, web design and media specialists who had previously worked in advertising and PR agencies such as M & C Saatchi, Bell Pottinger and on campaigns for the Conservative Party.

The result is a synthetic construct of state messaging on counter-terrorism combined with formulaic corporate visuality - as a result of using a corporate communications firm rather than deploying realistic representations and rhetoric of Islamic civil society.

It looks like a slick corporate website built to a formula – which it is. The communicative purpose is clear but leads nowhere and lacks foundation beyond driving traffic (Husks).



# Home Office projects

## What is the visual argumentation?

“You can not be trusted because you may be extreme.”

“If you are moderate, that is no longer enough, you need to make a stand, fight back and report on others.”

“Muslims need to decide whose side they are on”

“Since you cannot organise, we are imposing a moderate Muslim civil society that will fight back.”

“Moderate Islam looks like this – draped in the Union Jack.”



# Home Office projects: Not for public disclosure

State-sponsored digital confections by advertising and PR agencies like Breakthrough Media in some cases passed off as web sites and twitter feeds of moderate Muslim civil society and include visual rhetoric that is at best naïve and at worst deceptive, condescending and securitising of Muslims.

A Home Office briefing note on the work of Breakthrough Media in support of moderate Muslim civil society projects was headed “Not for Public Disclosure”, hinting perhaps at the deception involved in a visual rhetoric project of mixed messages and secretive web sites that give no address, charity numbers, contact emails etc., ironically matching the Home Office’s own warnings on what to look for in fake/suspect web sites.



UK Charity Registration Number: 1078489  
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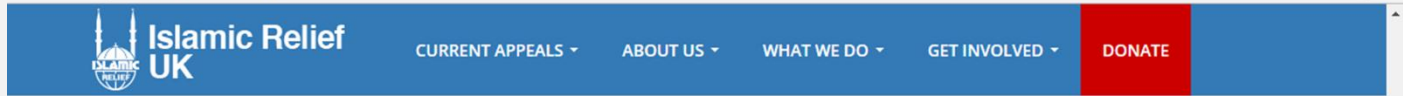
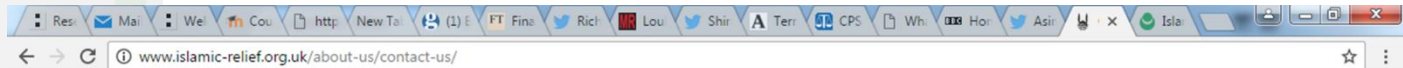
- Ramadan appeal
- Palestine appeal
- Gift of Eyesight
- Gift of life
- Orphans appeal
- Water for life appeal

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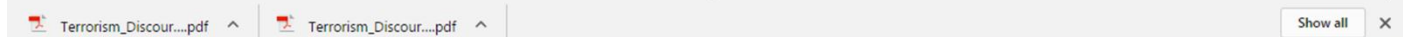
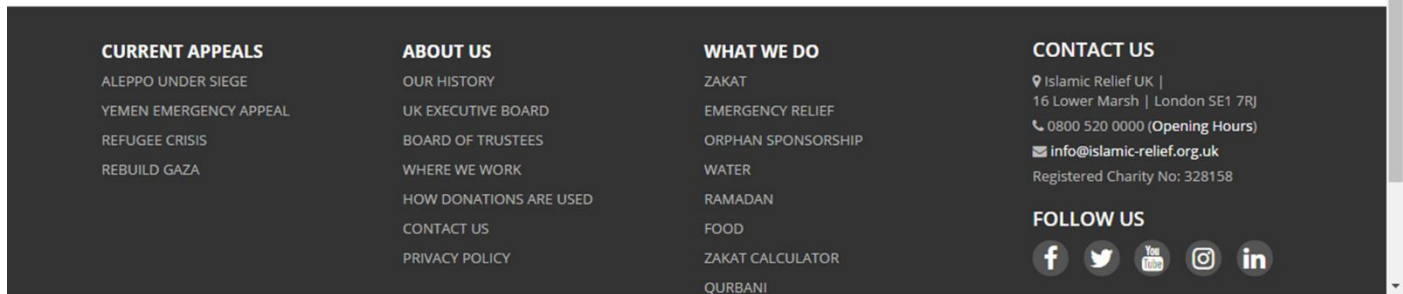
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## UK Executive Board

The UK Director chairs the UK Executive Board which is made up of Islamic Relief UK's heads of department who are specialists in their specific fields with a wealth of experience in the humanitarian sector.



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### Imran Madden (UK Director)



Since graduating from St Mary's University in 1987, Imran Madden has gained more than 16 years' experience in the humanitarian sector, spending 11 years in leadership roles at Islamic Relief.

Currently Director of Islamic Relief UK, Imran previously headed the Humanitarian Department at Islamic Relief Worldwide, was the UK Manager from 2000 to 2002 and Emergencies Manager from 1997 to 2000.

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