

Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir David Richards, and The Rt Hon Lord Hutton of Furness, endorse study on Muslim participation in the British Armed Forces authored by ICSR Senior Research Fellow, Shiraz Maher.

On Monday one of the United Kingdom's leading think-tanks, Policy Exchange, launched a pamphlet recording the historical contribution of Muslims to the British Armed Forces. Authored by ICSR Senior Research Fellow, Shiraz Maher, the report recaptures the lost history of Muslim service to the Crown and shows how this collective past can constitute the basis of a new shared future.

Maher also shows how this record has been almost completely lost in recent years by the competing narratives of the Far Right and of hardline Islamists who argue that one cannot be both a loyal Briton and a good Muslim at the same time. The report challenges that dangerous assertion by demonstrating how fiercely proud Muslims reconciled the competing demands on their spiritual and temporal identities during the last century – and how they can do so again today.

Speakers who endorsed the report at its launch included General Sir David Richards, Chief of the Defence Staff, The Rt Hon Lord Hutton of Furness (Chairman of the Royal United Services Institute and former Defence Secretary), Kris Hopkins MP (Conservative, Keighley), Khalid Mahmood MP (Labour, Birmingham Perry Barr), and Fiyaz Mughal (faith adviser to the Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg).

The launch was also supported by the mother and two sisters of Lance Corporal Jabron Hashmi, the last British Muslim serviceman to have been killed in action, and Imam Asim Hafiz, the Armed Forces Muslim chaplain.

The report's key recommendations include:

- The Government must continue to work hard to counter the divisive messages of Islamists and the far right – which assert that the possession of Islamic beliefs is a barrier to pursuing a career in the armed forces.
- The notion that Britain is at war with Islam needs to be confronted. The Government should offer a counter-argument that refers to those occasions in which the British military has acted in defence of Muslims – and Muslims in defence of Britain.
- The MoD should vigorously promote the lifelong skills and qualifications that an armed forces career can offer.
- The armed forces must continue to meet the spiritual needs of its servicemen and women. But there should be less consultation with self-appointed community groups from outside the military structure over the appointment of faith-specific chaplains. Anyone involved in the religious affairs of the armed forces must have sufficient experience of life in the military.

- The MoD should update its recruitment techniques. It should engage Muslims directly and not through 'gatekeeper' organisations.
- The heroic record of Commonwealth soldiers in the two World Wars should be more fully reflected in the history curriculum.

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