

Entity: Middle East Forum (MEF)

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Basic Information

- **Type:** US think tank / Political funder
- **Status:** Active
- **HQ:** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA
- **Founded:** 1990
- **Founder/President:** Daniel Pipes
- **Tax status:** 501(c)(3) nonprofit
- **IRS EIN:** [Need to find]
- **Website:** <https://www.meforum.org/>

Role in Ecosystem

The Middle East Forum is a US-based pro-Israel think tank that explicitly funded Tommy Robinson's legal defense AND organized protests in the UK in 2018. This is a documented case of **US money flowing directly to UK far-right activity**.

MEF represents the **US pro-Israel right** vector — American conservative donors funding UK figures who align with their anti-Muslim narrative. Robinson's anti-Islam rhetoric makes him a useful ally for pro-Israel hardliners who see Muslim immigration as a shared threat.

This is one of the clearest examples of foreign funding to UK far-right activity, because MEF **publicly admitted** to it and published press releases about their involvement.

Money IN (Funding Received)

Date	From	Amount	Type	Confidence	Source
Ongoing	US conservative donors	Unknown	Donations	CONFIRMED	IRS 990 filings

Narrative: MEF is funded by US conservative donors. IRS Form 990 will show revenue sources and grants received.

Money OUT (Funding Given)

Date	To	Amount	Type	Confidence	Source
2018	Tommy Robinson (legal defense)	Unknown (significant)	Legal fees via "Legal Project"	CONFIRMED	MEF press releases, Guardian
2018-07	"Free Tommy" protest (25,000-strong)	Unknown (significant)	Event organization/funding	CONFIRMED	MEF press release, SPLC
2019-03	Tommy Robinson (second defense)	Unknown	Legal fees	CONFIRMED	MEF news release
Ongoing	Various UK/US causes	Unknown	Grants	CONFIRMED	IRS 990 filings

Narrative: MEF's UK funding is explicitly documented through their own press releases:

July 2018: "Free Tommy" Campaign

- **Legal funding:** MEF's "Legal Project" funded Robinson's defense
- **Protest funding:** MEF claimed to have organized and funded the 25,000-strong protest
- **Daniel Pipes quote:** Goal was to get Robinson "freed from prison and out of legal trouble"

March 2019: Second Defense

- MEF again helped fund Robinson's legal defense for charges arising from March 2018 courthouse incident

Key finding: This is **direct US funding of UK far-right activity**, publicly admitted by the funder. MEF saw Robinson as an ally in anti-Muslim narrative work.

Companies / Entities Controlled

Company Name	Number	Role	Status	Notes
Middle East Forum	N/A	Think tank	Active	501(c)(3)
Legal Project	N/A	MEF program	Active	Funds legal cases

Action needed: IRS 990 search for full financial picture, ProPublica Nonprofit Explorer

Known Associations

Person/Org	Relationship	Evidence
Daniel Pipes	Founder/president	Public knowledge
Tommy Robinson	Funded legal defense + protests	MEF press releases
US conservative donors	Funders	IRS 990

Ideological Alignment

Why fund Tommy Robinson?

MEF's mission is promoting "Western interests" and countering "radical Islam." Robinson's anti-Muslim rhetoric and street activism made him a useful ally:

1. **Shared enemy:** Muslim immigration/Islamism
2. **Useful amplifier:** Robinson has large platform for anti-Muslim narratives
3. **Street presence:** Robinson mobilizes crowds (25,000-strong protest)
4. **Media attention:** Robinson generates coverage that amplifies the message

Ideological overlap: Pro-Israel hardliners + UK anti-Muslim far-right = shared narrative on "Islamic threat"

Legal / Regulatory Questions

Foreign funding of UK political activity:

- Is MEF's funding of Robinson permissible under UK electoral law?
- Robinson was not a registered party at the time, so Electoral Commission rules may not apply
- But if MEF funded protests, does that count as "political activity"?
- Has the Electoral Commission investigated this?

US tax-exempt status:

- 501(c)(3) organizations are supposed to be non-political
- Did MEF's Robinson funding violate IRS rules?
- Has IRS investigated?

Media Coverage

Date	Outlet	Headline	Key Claims	URL
2018-07-08	Middle East Forum	"MEF Organizes 25000 Strong Protest in Support of Tommy Robinson"	MEF claimed to fund legal defense AND organize protest	https://www.meforum.org/mef-organizes-25000-strong-protest-in-support
2018-07-10	Middle East Monitor	"Pro-Israel think tank funds Tommy Robinson's legal costs"	MEF took credit for funding	https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180710-pro-israel-think-tank-funds-tommy-robinsons-legal-costs/
2018-07-11	SPLC	"Middle East Forum bankrolls violent 'Free Tommy' rally"	MEF admitted funding	https://www.splcenter.org/resources/hatewatch/middle-east-forum-bankrolls-violent-free-tommy-rally/
2018-07-22	The Guardian	"US rightwing groups bankroll campaign to free Tommy Robinson"	Daniel Pipes quote, MEF involvement	https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/jul/22/us-rightwing-groups-bankroll-campaign-to-free-tommy-robinson
2018-07-31	Socialist Worker	"The disgusting US racists funding Tommy Robinson"	MEF funding details	https://socialistworker.co.uk/in-depth/the-disgusting-us-racists-funding-tommy-robinson/
2019-07-12	Middle East Forum	"News: MEF Funds Tommy Robinson Defense ... To No Avail"	Second round of legal funding	https://www.meforum.org/news-mef-funds-tommy-robinson-defense-to-no-avail

Research Notes

Key questions:

- **Total amount:** How much did MEF spend on Robinson (legal + protests)? Need IRS 990 analysis.
- **Ongoing funding:** Did MEF continue funding Robinson after 2019? Any recent activity?
- **Other UK activity:** Has MEF funded other UK figures or groups? Need full 990 search.
- **Donor network:** Who funds MEF? Which US donors are behind this?
- **Legal Project:** What other UK cases has MEF's Legal Project funded?

- **Electoral Commission:** Has there been any investigation into this foreign funding?
- **IRS compliance:** Did MEF's Robinson funding violate 501(c)(3) rules?

Leads to follow:

- IRS 990 search for Middle East Forum (EIN needed) — full financial picture
- ProPublica Nonprofit Explorer: MEF filings
- Search 990s for "United Kingdom", "Tommy Robinson", "Stephen Yaxley-Lennon"
- Check if MEF funded other UK causes (search 990 grant descriptions)
- Electoral Commission FOI: any investigation of MEF funding?
- Daniel Pipes: full profile, other UK connections
- Legal Project: all UK cases funded

Red flags:

- **Explicit foreign funding of UK far-right activity** — MEF admitted it publicly
- US think tank funding UK street protests (25,000 people)
- Ideological alignment suggests ongoing relationship
- 501(c)(3) funding political activity (potential IRS violation)
- Possible UK electoral law violations (foreign funding)

Significance: MEF is a case study in:

1. **US money flowing to UK far-right** — documented, admitted, public
2. **Ideological alignment funding** — pro-Israel + anti-Muslim = shared interests
3. **Think tanks as political funders** — not just ideas, but direct action
4. **Regulatory gaps** — foreign funding of non-party political activity
5. **Network mapping** — US conservative donors → MEF → Tommy Robinson → UK protests

Last Updated

- **Date:** 2026-06-14
- **Researcher:** Initial data collection session
- **Next actions:**
 - IRS 990 search and analysis (find EIN, pull all filings)
 - Total UK spending calculation
 - Donor network mapping (who funds MEF?)
 - Legal Project UK case list
 - Electoral Commission investigation status
 - Check for ongoing/recent UK activity

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