

Another Threat to British Democracy Emerges

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The Prevent strategy originally set up in 2006 by Tony Blair's government was reviewed by the 2011 coalition government and then fully updated in a 116 page document that describes the potential threat of terrorism in Britain:

"Intelligence indicates that a terrorist attack in our country is 'highly likely'. Experience tells us that the threat comes not just from foreign nationals but also from terrorists born and bred in Britain. It is therefore vital that our counter-terrorism strategy contains a plan to prevent radicalisation and stop would-be terrorists from committing mass murder. Osama bin Laden may be dead, but the threat from Al Qa'ida inspired terrorism is not. The Prevent programme we inherited from the last Government was flawed. It confused the delivery of Government policy to promote integration with Government policy to prevent terrorism. It failed to confront the extremist ideology at the heart of the threat we face; and in trying to reach those at risk of radicalisation, funding sometimes even reached the very extremist organisations that Prevent should have been confronting."

The basic strategy was then redefined as:

"First, we will respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat from those who promote it. Second, we will prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support. Third, we will work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation."

All seems good and reasonable in a lengthy document, written and signed off by the then Home Secretary Theresa May.

Clearly, the Prevent programme was originally designed to combat terrorism. It's new rollout included mandatory [training](#) for public bodies. By 2015 over half a million public sectors workers had undergone Prevent training, which included schools and the NHS.

Criticisms of the strategy emerged that included the alienation of Muslim communities, that it restricted freedom of expression and impacted on human rights. This [has been echoed](#) by a number of NGOs. A UN representative [also suggested](#) that the Prevent programme was having the opposite of its intended effect by "dividing, stigmatising and alienating segments of the population".

The government has said the strategy was working and "had made a significant impact in preventing people being drawn into terrorism". This was widely reported in the press

throughout the last five years.

Less publicly known is that the Prevent strategy is part of “Channel”. This is another strategy where the Police work with public bodies, including local councils, social workers, NHS staff, schools and the justice system to identify those at risk of being drawn into terrorism, assess what the risk might be and then develop tailored support for those referred to them.

At this point, with criticism or not, most of what is laid out seems on the face of it to be reasonable given the difficulty in approaching problems such as being radicalised, not forgetting that radicalisation is an ideology and nothing else.

The [Canary](#) news outlet has published documentation acquired by ‘Cage’ that proves the Prevent strategy, a strategy designed purely for prevention of terrorism has defined the Occupy movement, anti-fracking environmentalists, the Green Party, and individuals in anti-war and anti-austerity protests – as extremists worthy of being in the collective group of ‘terrorist threats.’ One document even highlights individuals who ‘home educate’ their children as a threat to national security.

We always knew a few years ago that organisations like the Occupy movement were under extreme surveillance and infiltration tactics and yet were still defined as ‘domestic extremists’ and placed in the same category of al-Qaida and IRA Terrorism in what emerged as [Project Fawn](#). In that leak even student protests were targeted by police and listed as threats to society alongside David Copeland, a neo-Nazi who carried out a nail-bombing campaign in 1999. It looks like the Prevent strategy is going the same way as recent terror related legislation over the last few years that was either broadened or abused.

The Guardian [reported](#) back in 2015 that

“A coalition of police monitoring groups, the [Network for Police Monitoring](#) (Netpol), accused the City of London police of conflating protest with terrorism and violence. Kevin Blowe, a co-ordinator of Netpol, said this was repeated around the country and was the “result of including ill-defined labels, like ‘domestic extremism’, within the language and strategies of counter-terrorism”.



Another document released by Cage states that 87 percent of those being monitored are individuals, 11 percent are institutions, but that only 2 percent are ideologies. Emerging threats were referrals coming from Syria – hardly a big surprise given Britain’s role in destroying yet another sovereign nation without good reason.

Netpol went on to say at the time that:

“Programmes like the government’s Prevent strategy overwhelmingly target and stigmatise Muslim communities, but as Project Fawn shows, they also provide plenty of scope to include almost any group of political activists that the police dislike or consider an inconvenience. There a real disdain for legitimate rights to exercise freedoms of expression and assembly in a free society, which leads to individuals having their lawful activities recorded and

retained on secret police intelligence databases.”

Since then the government have gone on to create more anti-radicalisation programmes, in addition to Prevent.

- Pursue—its main aim is “to stop terrorist attacks”.
- Protect—“to strengthen our protection against terrorism attack”.
- Prepare—“where an attack cannot be stopped, to mitigate its impact”.

Meanwhile, Britain’s freedoms continue to be massively eroded by a government hell bent on ensuring our endemic surveillance state is supported through legislation such the Investigatory Powers Act that effectively legalises a range of tools for snooping and hacking by the security services over the wider general public. Whistleblower Edward Snowden stated that –

“The UK has legalised the most extreme surveillance in the history of western democracy. It goes further than many autocracies.”

Snowden has not been proved wrong.

The Guardian [reported](#) six months ago that Liberal Democrat peer Lord Strasburger, one of the leading voices against the investigatory powers bill, said:

“We do have to worry about a UK Donald Trump. If we do end up with one, and that is not impossible, we have created the tools for repression. The real Donald Trump has access to all the data that the British spooks are gathering and we should be worried about that.”

Within this Act, journalists are no longer protected – another sure sign of autocratic tendencies.

In the end, even Max Hill QC, the barrister appointed by the government to be the independent reviewer of terrorism laws in the United Kingdom has said enough is enough.

Speaking exclusively to [The Independent](#), a few days ago, Max Hill QC, the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, argued potential jihadis can be stopped with existing “general” laws that are not always being used effectively to take threats off the streets and that the *“Government should consider abolishing all anti-terror laws as they are “unnecessary” in the fight against extremists”*.

Hill also expressed concern over the threat to civil liberties posed by some proposed anti-terror measures, warning laws aimed at tackling hate preachers could easily veer into the territory of “thought crime”.

David Videcette, a former Scotland Yard counter-terror detective, agreed, arguing that police should be using “disruption” techniques that are frequently applied to organised crime.

“The profile of religious extremists is changing, they are more criminal-based,”

he told [The Independent](#). "We need to be better ... the counter-terror work needs to be more crime-focused."

Max Hill and David Videcette's comments will fall on deaf years though.

Like so many other Acts of parliament, terror laws in their various guises are being used for nefarious reasons. Under the cover of national security, legislation such as the Public Space Protection Orders, the expansion of Privately Owned Public Spaces, The Anti-Terrorism and Security Act, the Terrorism Act and RIPA continue to be used against civil society, civil liberty and human rights.

Considering that the BBC – a publicly funded organisation [uses terror laws](#) to hunt down licence fee dodgers, local councils use them for council tax arrears, [dog fouling, illegal sun bed use and even feeding pigeons](#), was it really any big surprise that the Prevent strategy was going to be abused by the authorities in their continued battle against the civil liberties of the general public in yet another threat to the principles of British democracy.

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