

## Britain briefing: June 2022

### Counter-terrorism & Counter-extremism

Former Counter-terror lead Mark Rowley appointed Metropolitan Police chief

- In early July, former National Lead for Counter-terror Policing [Mark Rowley was announced](#) as new commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, replacing Cressida Dick.

Chosen to clean up the image of the scandal-ridden force, Rowley's appointment represents the increasingly porous relationship between British policing and counter-terrorism.

- After his retirement from policing in 2018, Rowley has remained in the orbit of counter-terror work, and has made frequent interventions calling for increased securitisation.

For example in 2018 he was appointed to the board of the Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) under the tenure of Sara Khan, and [led on its legal review](#) on countering "hateful extremism" - as part of the effort of the CCE and other agencies to collapse [hate crime into extremism](#).

- He has argued for engagement with [Prevent to be made mandatory](#) rather than consensual and suggested the introduction of lie-detector tests as part of Prevent.

Additionally, he has blamed the failures of Prevent on "naive cultural sensitivity and...infiltration of Prevent by highly questionable groups" - echoing the line taken by the likes of the Henry Jackson Society and Policy Exchange more recently.

He has also asserted the need for courts to be more [proactive in removing children](#) from those convicted of offences under terror laws, and has argued for offenders to be given [indefinite prison sentences](#) until they can prove they are 'no longer a risk to the public'.

- In a lecture for the right-wing thinktank Policy Exchange, [Rowley compared](#) CAGE and MEND to far-right groups like the EDL.

In the same lecture he simultaneously praised now-Prevent reviewer William Shawcross as an "impressive leader" for his role in countering 'extremism' as chair of the Charity Commission - during which time it launched an [unprecedented crackdown](#) on Muslim and pro-Palestine charities.

- In short, Rowley will find himself very much at home among the current government, and his role at the Met fits well with the alignment between pro-security and hard rightwing actors in major positions of power - including William Shawcross' role as Prevent reviewer.

## National Security

### Online Safety Bill amended to include proposed duty on social media platforms to 'proactively tackle state-sponsored disinformation'

- The Online Safety Bill was introduced to Parliament in March. It pioneers a framework that grants the government unprecedented ability to control and manage online content and online service providers, such as social media platforms, via the regulator Ofcom.
- The Bill as introduced was focused on illegal content, such as Child Sexual Abuse and terrorist content, but allows for the targeting of 'legal but harmful content', [which can be defined and amended](#) by Parliament.

Harmful content [is defined as](#) content which *'may fall short of amounting to a criminal offence, [but] can have damaging effects on individuals - creating toxic online environments and negatively impacting a user's ability to express themselves online'*,

- In June an [amendment was added](#) to the Bill which places a duty on social media platforms to *'proactively tackle Russian and other state-sponsored disinformation aimed at undermining the UK'*, and *'minimise people's exposure to state-sponsored or state-linked disinformation aimed at interfering with the UK'*.

In doing so, the amendment connects the Online Safety Bill to the National Security Bill, also currently making its way through Parliament, which forms part of Britain's major foreign policy pivot away from counter-terrorism and towards countering 'hostile state threats'.

- With the government currently in disarray after Boris Johnson's resignation, the passage of the Online Safety Bill is [temporarily on hold](#) until a new Prime Minister is put in place.

Given that the Bill has been developed since Theresa May's tenure as Prime Minister, there is little to suggest that Boris Johnson's successor will deviate from plans to drive the Bill forward - though Liz Truss's supporters [have said that](#) she would 'revise online safety laws to ensure they do not damage freedom of speech' if

she succeeded.

- The dangers of the Online Safety Bill are clear, and it fits [within a pattern](#) of Western governments instituting an architecture enabling them to carefully manage content and discourse online.

The gradual expansion from targeting illegal content to 'lawful but harmful' content to the politicised notion of 'disinformation' is deeply troubling and a blank cheque for censorship.

## MI5 & FBI issue joint announcement on 'threat' posed by China, as part of shift towards public advocacy

- On 7th July, the heads of MI5 and the FBI held a [joint press conference](#) to warn that China posed the 'biggest long-term threat to our economic and national security'.
- This follows recent high profile moves by security services to direct attention towards China, such as MI6 director Richard Moore [stating last year](#) that "*Adapting to a world affected by the rise of China is the single greatest priority for MI6*" and MI5's alert about [alleged Chinese 'agent'](#) Christine Lee influencing parliamentarians in January of this year.
- The announcement also further signals the pivot towards combatting alleged 'hostile state threats' under the banner of national security - which is rapidly coming to replace the 'counter-terrorism' framework as the primary means of securitisation in Britain.
- Moreover, the joint press conference - described as 'unprecedented' - is another example of the increasing visibility and public advocacy undertaken by security agencies - something that MI5 chief [Ken McCallum mentioned](#) as being a focus for him upon his appointment in 2020.

CIA Director William J Burns [recently mentioned](#) this as an important part of his agency's work going forward, as well.

## Implications from the Russia-Ukraine war

### New Army Chief warns that British soldiers should be prepared to fight in Europe

- Speaking on the ongoing war in Ukraine, the British Army's recently appointed Chief Sir Patrick Sanders made [the disturbing statement](#) that "*We are the generation that must prepare the Army to fight in Europe once again*".

The statement signalled a troubling escalation of rhetoric around the war, and marked the gradual ratcheting up of Britain towards a full war posture against Russia.

- In addition to the dangers posed by active military intervention itself, Britain formally declaring war with Russia would also alter the legal status of foreign fighters travelling to Ukraine to fight Russia.

While Britons have been [discouraged from travelling](#) to fight Russia thus far - to do so currently may violate the Foreign Enlistment Act 1870 - a formal declaration of war would legitimise the flow of fighters between Britain and Ukraine, who may encounter and/or ingratiate themselves with the far-right forces that constitute a serious organised presence in the Ukrainian forces.

- Any further escalation towards formal participation in the war would also likely see an increase in the targeting, repression and censorship of anti-war or otherwise dissenting viewpoints within Britain, which have been subject to an unprecedented crackdown since the onset of the war in February.

### Marking NATO summit, Boris Johnson pledges increase in military contribution to NATO and spending on military

- Between 28-30th June, NATO held its summit in Madrid, Spain.

To mark the summit, Boris Johnson announced his ambition to [increase Britain's military spending](#), from a commitment of 2% of Britain's annual GDP to 2.5% by the end of the decade.

He also pledged to increase Britain's direct contribution [towards NATO's fighting force](#), including military equipment and forces.

- Though he announced his resignation as Prime Minister shortly afterwards, this commitment is unlikely to be challenged by his predecessor, with an appetite among

ministers to extend this spending commitment further - not least from Conservative leadership [finalist Liz Truss](#).

- These pledges also come alongside Britain's active expansion of its military footprint in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war, and its ambitions to expand its military presence further afield as part of its 2021 Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy.
- With the Russia-Ukraine war looming in the backdrop, the NATO summit agreed on a new 'Strategic Concept' [outlining its strategic direction](#), which included a significant pivot to Russia and China, an emphasis on the risks of conflict and instability across Africa and the Middle East, and introducing new threshold triggers for NATO's Article 5 'collective defence' treaty.

## Other

### Bill of Rights introduced to replace Human Rights Act

- The [Bill of Rights](#) was finally introduced to Parliament on 22nd June, having long been touted by government ministers as part of the post-Brexit reorganisation of the British judiciary.
- The Bill of Rights is designed to replace the Human Rights Act 1998 in favour of a rights and judicial framework that grants greater control to the Government, and to 'rebalance' the relationship between the courts and Government.

The Bill explicitly subordinates the judicial wing of the state to Parliament and the government, marking a brazen politicisation of the legal process and eroding any judicial independence.

It also outlines cases where human rights law and processes effectively do not apply, insulating some of Britain's most egregious state practices from any semblance of accountability.

- In the lead up to the Bill's publication, ministers have been explicit that the revocation of the Human Rights Act will be used to restrict the rights of prisoners convicted under counter-terror laws.

In April 2022, [Dominic Raab stated](#) that the Bill of Rights will be used to legitimise the expansion of prison segregation wings for 'extremist' prisoners to *"prevent terrorists using the Human Rights Act to claim a 'right to socialise' in prison"*

This is reiterated in the government's [press release](#) for the Bill, which also states that the Bill *'will make it easier to deport foreign criminals by allowing future laws to*



*restrict the circumstances in which their right to family life would trump public safety and the need to remove them.'*

## Reforms introduced to weaken Parole Board

- In late June, Justice Minister Dominic Raab [introduced a Statutory Instrument](#) to Parliament to reform the role of the Parole Board in deciding on the release of prisoners.

It grants the Deputy Prime Minister greater control over determining the release of 'high risk' or 'dangerous' prisoners from jail, while weakening the power of the Parole Board to grant release.

- Under the reforms *'Recommendations for release or moves to open prison for the most serious offenders - including murderers, rapists, terrorists and those who have caused or allowed the death of a child - will [now] be made by the Deputy Prime Minister before going to the Parole Board for its final decision'*.
- This move forms another part of a shift toward politicising the judicial process and weakening institutions of the judiciary, alongside the Bill of Rights. Reforms in the Counter-terrorism and Sentencing Act 2021 also restricted the standard release for certain terror offenders.