

## Britain briefing: August 2022

*Reporting period: 8th August - 7th September 2022*

### Counter-terrorism and Counter-extremism

Revelation of British intelligence complicity in detention and torture of Jagtar Singh Johal in India

- Jagtar Singh Johal is a British national [who was abducted and detained by police](#) in the Indian state of Punjab in November 2017.
- While subject to torture in detention he signed and recorded a confession to involvement in pro-'Khalistan'/Sikh separatist groups, and is currently facing charges of conspiracy to murder and 'being a member of a terrorist gang.'
- In August it was revealed that Johal's arrest [took place after Indian authorities](#) were tipped off by British MI5 and MI6.

Johal has [issued a case at the High Court](#) against the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the Home Office and the Attorney General for damages for 'breaches of the Data Protection Act 1998, assault and battery, negligence and misfeasance in public office'

- During a Parliamentary debate on the case called after the revelations, [demands were made](#) by David Davis MP for the government to initiate a review into cases, including Johal's and other known incidents, of British complicity in the torture of British citizens abroad.  
The government response [was non-committal](#).
- Collaboration between the British and Indian government over the repression of alleged Sikh separatist activists has stretched back to at least the 1980s, and the British government has made a number of recent moves to deepen 'counter-terror' collaboration with the Modi government.

These include Boris Johnson's meeting with Indian Prime Minister Modi in April, where an [emphasis on tackling pro-Khalistani groups](#) was made explicit, and the meeting of the the India-UK Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism in London, where expanding transnational collaboration on counter-terrorism [was announced](#).



## Revelations of Canadian intelligence role in smuggling Shamima Begum and the 'Bethnal Green 3' into Syria

- As part of media coverage of an upcoming book by former *Sunday Times* security correspondent Richard Kerbaj, it was reported that schoolgirl Shamima Begum had had [her travel into Syria to join IS facilitated by a Canadian intelligence](#) asset in 2015, among 'dozens' of others.
- The role of the Canadian intelligence asset, Mohammad Al Rashed, had [previously been reported in 2015](#) after he was detained by Turkish authorities.

The latest accusation, however, has elicited more widespread coverage and controversy, particularly in light of actions taken by the British government against Shamima Begum since - including [depriving her of her British citizenship](#), thereby leaving her stateless.

- According to coverage, British authorities were made aware of the asset smuggling British citizens to Syria, and agreed to cover up Canada's role after being asked by Canadian authorities.
- The case of the three schoolgirls - Shamima Begum, Amira Abase and Kadiza Sultana, also known as the Bethnal Green 3 - leaving to join IS in February 2015 was a major political development for British counter-terrorism, used to justify the expansion of invasive security policies at the height of IS' power.

Both Amira Abase and Kadiza Sultana are believed to have died. Shamima Begum resurfaced in the Al-Hol camp in Northeastern Syria in 2019, and had her citizenship revoked by then-Home Secretary Sajid Javid - who likely was aware of the role of Canadian intelligence in her travel.

- The revelation has brought under further scrutiny the decision by Javid, and the way that the act served as an opportunist political exercise, rather than out of any meaningful concern for the British public.

More broadly, the case further undermines the British government's policy - an outlier internationally - to deprive citizenship of Britons held in the detention camps in Northeastern Syria, rather than to bring them home to prosecute.

- It should also raise serious questions of how British and international intelligence agencies facilitate acts that they can publicise and prosecute, thereby justifying an extension of their own powers and budgets.



## Latest Home Office statistics on counter-terror policing indicate turn towards targeting children

- The Home Office released its latest [statistics on counter-terror policing, arrests and prosecutions](#) for the year July 2021-June 2022.

Among the major takeaways from the data was a notable turn towards children being caught up in terror arrests and prosecutions, with the highest ever number (33) of under 18 year olds arrested during this period - 16% of all arrests.

- The most common offences for which individuals were charged and convicted were for Section 58 of the Terrorism Act 2000 (Collection) and Section 2 Terrorism Act 2006 (Dissemination).

Both of these are offences that are very likely connected to consumption of sharing of terrorist-designated online or digital content.

- As noted by the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation on his [recent report](#) on online terror offences, there has been a troubling increase in minors being arrested for online terror-related offences - which according to him *'calls into question the use of special powers in the minds of the public and, as I have witnessed, in the minds of police officers required to exercise those powers.'*
- This is backed up by the fact that, of the 58 terrorism-related convictions concluded by the Crown Prosecution Services, this past year saw the highest ever proportion of non-custodial sentences, such as community service (14; 24% of convictions).

This again indicates that counter-terror powers are being used for prosecuting offences which courts themselves do not believe pose a risk to the public.

- A more in-depth analysis of the statistics by CAGE [can be found here](#).

## Fourth IS 'Beatle' arrested and charged in Britain

- Londoner [Aine Davis](#) was deported to Britain by Turkish authorities in August, and arrested upon arrival.

He was subsequently charged with charges relating to possession of a firearm for a purpose connected with terrorism, and fundraising for terrorism.

- Davis, also known as 'Jihadi Paul', was the fourth member of the so-called 'Beatles' - four British nationals serving as executioners for IS, including Mohammed Emwazi, aka 'Jihadi John'.

- He will [face trial in February 2023](#).

## National Security

National Crime Agency Director General appointed, after 'cronyism' scandal mars process

- The latest Director General of the National Crime Agency (NCA), among the most senior policing roles in the country, has concluded with the [appointment of Graeme Biggar](#).

Biggar's previous roles included serving as Director for National Security at the Home Office, Chief of Staff to the Defence Secretary, and working on response to terror attacks in 2017 and the implementation of the Investigatory Powers Act - the so-called 'Snooper's Charter'.

- The appointment process had [earlier been marred by scandal](#) after the Prime Minister's office had intervened to try and secure the role for Bernard Hogan-Howe, an ally of Boris Johnson, forcing a re-run of the application process.
- The scandal was another example of failed attempts by Boris Johnson's office to put allies in place in key institutional roles in order to further expand the government's political influence - including an attempt to institute former Daily Mail editor Paul Dacre as chair of communications regulator Ofcom last year.

## Other

New Prime Minister Liz Truss unveils new Cabinet, and continues rightward lurch of government

- The Conservative Party's leadership election concluded on 5th September, with Liz Truss beating contender Rishi Sunak by 57.4% of votes to 42.6%.

As the clear frontrunner for much of the race, Truss was able to define the terms of the election, forcing Sunak to make [increasingly desperate appeals](#) to 'culture war'-style politics to try and secure votes.

- Upon taking the role she initiated a Cabinet reshuffle, with [significant ministerial appointments](#) including:



Suella Braverman as Home Secretary, replacing Priti Patel.

Tom Tugendhat as Security Minister, replacing Stephen McPartland.

James Cleverly as Foreign Secretary, replacing Liz Truss.

Ben Wallace continuing in his role as Defence Secretary.

- Despite the changes, the new government is expected to serve largely as continuity with the Johnson government, particularly on key matters of foreign policy and security.

As Attorney General Suella Braverman [intervened to secure a review in the Court of Appeal](#) of the decision to clear the anti-racist protestors that toppled the Edward Colston statue, for example. She has made clear her [intentions to ramp up the inhumane anti-migrant policies](#) of her predecessor, and to continue the government's attacks on the European Convention on Human Rights.

Meanwhile Tom Tugendhat, despite being framed as a party 'moderate', has a background serving in the Iraq and Afghan wars and is especially hawkish on China, indicating continuity with the expansion of 'National Security' policies seen under the Johnson government.

- Truss emerged as the standard bearer for the Conservative party's right wing - and has been notably hawkish in her response to the Russia-Ukraine war.

Truss, however, lacks the political acumen and charisma that ensured Boris Johnson's success in consolidating the party and voters behind him.

It remains to be seen whether she will attempt to compensate with increasing appeals to 'Culture Wars' and racist populism.

Policy changes under the new government: Bill of Rights shelved, tweaks to Online Safety Bill expected

- Shortly after the new Cabinet took up their roles, it was [announced that the Bill of Rights](#) - designed to replace the Human Rights Act, and drastically weaken rights protections in Britain - was being 'shelved'.

It is likely that the Bill will return in some form - perhaps after being modified and tightened up legally - and that its postponement is to stave off an early public confrontation that the new government is not enthusiastic about facing.

- The election of Liz Truss is also expected to lead to some amendments to the Online Safety Bill.

During the leadership election, [her supporters stated that](#) she would 'revise online



safety laws to ensure they do not damage freedom of speech' if she succeeded.

MP Nadine Dorries, who had been spearheading the Bill as Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, has also stepped down from her role after the Cabinet reshuffle.

## Britain invited to new pan-Europe body in early test of PM Truss' alliances

- In the immediate aftermath of the Russian operation in Ukraine, a number of world leaders announced proposals at creating new international forums, groupings or bodies in order to consolidate or facilitate shifting geopolitical alliances.
- One such proposal was for the 'European Political Community' [announced by French President Macron](#) as a parallel body to the EU, and which would allow membership from states outside the EU such as Ukraine - and potentially Britain.
- [Britain has been invited to the first meeting](#) of the European Political Community in October, and the response of new Prime Minister Truss will be seen as indicative of her stance towards repairing relations with Europe and/or maintaining her predecessor's commitment to a pro-US/Atlanticist thrust.