

Britain briefing: September 2022

Reporting period: 8th September - 7th October 2022

Counter-terrorism and Counter-extremism

Arrest over 1996 IRA bombing as part of return to 'Troubles'-era investigations

- A man was [arrested at Birmingham airport](#) and questioned in relation to the 1996 Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) bombing in Manchester city centre.

The attack was carried out towards the end of the so-called 'Troubles' in the North of Ireland, in which the British state and army played an active and brutal role on the side of unionists.

- This arrest comes amidst a string of recent moves regarding the 'Troubles' and IRA activity during the period.

Following the arrest counter-terror police [stated that they](#) had been "*reinvestigating [Troubles-era cases] for several years; with a team of dedicated detectives re-examining the original case files and pursuing new lines of inquiry.*"

Earlier this year ex-MP/journalist Chris Mullins successfully [won a court case](#) against an application made by police under the Terrorism Act 2000 which would have forced him to disclose source material into the 1974 Birmingham pub bombings, believed to have been carried out by the IRA.

The case and application related to Mullin's investigations into the case of the Birmingham 6, six Irish men wrongly convicted for the bombings, and regularly described as suffering 'one of the worst miscarriages of justice' in British legal history.

In late 2020 an arrest was made in Belfast related to the Birmingham pub bombings themselves.

- Meanwhile in the Queen's Speech in May 2022, the government announced their *Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill* which [aims to grant immunity](#) to former soldiers involved in the 'Troubles' on the condition of them engaging with a reconciliation mechanism.



It is chiefly geared to protect British veterans from prosecutions, amidst a wider push to insulate the British army from accountability for war crimes committed abroad, including through the Overseas Operations Act 2020.

Further leaks from Prevent review confirm turn away from 'safeguarding' model, expansion of Prevent duty to immigration staff

- Since the killing of David Amess MP in October 2021, a series of leaks and speculation about the long-delayed Shawcross review have offered a strong indication as to the recommendations that will be made in the final review report.
- These include:
 - A return to targeting Muslims predominantly/exclusively under the programme, dropping the emphasis on 'far right extremism'
 - Increasing the role and influence of MI5 and security services in the Prevent process, and minimising the public sector/civilian involvement (previously included as part of 'multi-agency' collaboration)
 - A stripped back focus on 'radicalisation leading to terrorism'
 - Blaming Muslim organisations for undermining Prevent, and freezing them out of collaboration
- Among the [latest articles to report](#) on the review, *The Telegraph* has confirmed another plank of Shawcross' recommendations - namely a turn away from the 'safeguarding' model of Prevent which has been part of the programme since 2011, and had served to legitimise its expansion into education and healthcare.

Quoting from a copy of the report seen by the paper, it states that:

"Prevent is a crucial pillar of the UK's counter-terrorism architecture, yet it has increasingly come to be seen as synonymous with safeguarding (i.e. an emphasis on protecting those referred into Prevent from harm and addressing their personal vulnerabilities).

"Prevent too often bestows a status of victimhood on all who come into contact with it, confusing practitioners and officials as to Prevent's fundamental purpose."

Additionally, according to the piece the Shawcross review is going to recommend extending the Prevent duty to immigration officials and job centre staff.

- The turn away from safeguarding comes as part of the broader shift towards Prevent assuming a posture as an overtly security-oriented programme, and dropping the welfarist veneer that it has been operating under in recent years.
- According to the article the review, which has been held up by legal and political concerns within the Home Office, was due to be released 'within a few weeks'.



As of time of writing a publishing a month has passed without the review being launched.

Increased counter-terror policing operation in lead up to Queen's funeral

- In lead up to the Queen's funeral on 19th September, [it was reported](#) by CAGE that a number of men previously convicted of non-violent offences under the Terrorism Act were visited unannounced or contacted by SO15 counter-terror police, probing them about their plans regarding the Queen's funeral.

Others were told to avoid the funeral or central London altogether.

- The individuals concerned were under 'notification requirements' to report with/accept monitoring by police, as stipulated as part of their convictions under the Terrorism Act - but exercising such requirements arbitrarily and with regards to public events is troubling, and amounts to police harassment.
- Furthermore, following the funeral itself [it was revealed that](#) 'more than 800 incidents and concerns' were reported to counter-terror police by the public, with 100 of the leads being 'actively pursued' by officers - as part of London police's 'largest ever operation'.
- The official response following the death of the Queen was a flagrant attempt at marshalling and projecting mass consent for the formalities and institutions of the British state - from the ubiquitous media coverage to the stifling ideological rigidity imposed across society.

It is unsurprising then to see this reflected in trigger-happy reporting by the public.

Increasing number of British soldiers referred to Prevent for far-right concerns

- There are growing concerns about far-right activity within the British armed forces amidst a [rise in referrals to Prevent](#) for 'far-right extremism', with '*Neo-nazis, white nationalists and anti-Muslim radicals [making] up the largest known group of extremists in the British army, navy and Royal Air Force.*'
- These reports follow an inquiry by the Parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee into 'far-right extremism' published this summer, which [noted with concern](#) the lack of policies within the armed forces regarding personnel's membership of groups - enabling far-right recruitment - and of MI5 being under-resourced in their work on the far-right.
- This is further indication of the mismatched and divided stances within the security field with regards to the far-right, with 'establishment' figures and forces remaining invested in targeting 'far-right extremism' - alongside 'Islamist extremism' - while



Shawcross and rightwing thinktanks like Policy Exchange push for an exclusive focus on Muslims.

Other

British government continue military assistance to Nigerian security forces despite abuses and corruption admission

- The investigative journalism outfit *Declassified* reported that British financial support and training for Nigerian security forces continues [despite private admissions](#) of 'chronic corruption' and abuses committed by the forces.

This includes major abuses carried out in the context of 'counter-terror' operations, with which Nigeria is a significant partner to Britain.

- These admissions were noted in a secret report commissioned after the Lekki Toll Gate massacre, when Nigerian forces opened fire on protestors against the SARS (Special Anti-Robbery Squad) unit in 2020.
- According to *Declassified*, this support continues based on the assessment that British media coverage of abuses by Nigerian forces would be minimal, and of 'Nigeria being the "third biggest supplier of oil to the UK" and having a "long history" of cooperation on counter-terrorism.'
- *Declassified* also note how similar British assistance has been extended to the neighbouring state of Cameroon, while in July this year Britain [reaffirmed security counter-terror and counter-insurgency](#) ties with the fellow West African state of Ghana.

After uncertainty, Britain attends new pan-Europe body in sign of re-establishing links with European Union members

- Liz Truss attended and spoke at the [inaugural meeting of the European Political Community](#) - an initiative spearheaded by French President Emmanuel Macron - in early October.
- In [Truss' speech](#) at the meeting she made it clear how her attendance should not be seen as a softening of Britain's stance towards the EU, and stressed that the priorities for the body should include strengthening an anti-Russia alliance and developing "European energy independence" by "dramatically accelerating our own energy production".



- Intended as a body to augment the work of the EU alongside non-EU states, Britain's attendance at the European Political Community can be seen as government recognition of the need to re-establish closer relations with former EU allies in light of growing crises at home, rather than relying solely on Britain's relationship to the US.

Liz Truss mentions that Britain considering embassy move from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, following in US' footsteps

- At a UN summit in New York, Liz Truss told Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid that she was [considering moving Britain's embassy](#) in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, following up on a pledge she made during her leadership contest.
- Such a move would legitimise Israeli claims on Jerusalem, which is considered 'disputed' under international law, and drop any remaining pretence of British neutrality between Israel and Palestine with regards to a supposed 'two state solution' which Britain ostensibly supports.
- If Britain follows through with this pledge it would be following in the footsteps of the US, which moved its embassy to Jerusalem in 2018 under the tenure of Donald Trump.