

UK Briefing: December 2024

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Home Office unveils 'youth diversion orders' to deal with youth radicalisation, opening the door for expansion of Prevent

- In mid-December the Home Office [released plans for their new approach to tackling youth radicalisation](#), amid growing concern within police circles about the rising figures of minors arrested for terrorism charges - largely for non-violent, online offences.

These plans are separate from the Home Office's 'rapid review' of extremism announced after the summer riots, and have been informed by [recommendations into the issue of youth radicalisation by Jonathan Hall KC](#), the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, who cautioned against full-scale prosecutions of youth for terror offences.

- The centrepiece of the Home Office's plans are 'youth diversion orders', which would offer alternative pathways to criminal prosecution for young people facing terror charges where there is no real prospect of an attack or clear ideology present.

However, in place of prosecution these orders would grant greater scope for police and Prevent intervention at an earlier stage than before, by *'enabling the police to intervene earlier, working with partner agencies, before a young person's activity risks escalating to the level at which a prosecution becomes necessary.'*

As [stated by experts quoted in the Guardian](#), this may *'lead to youngsters being compelled to take part in Prevent, which until now has been voluntary'*.

- The Home Office also announced that they would be conducting an *'end-to-end review of Prevent thresholds, and updating policy and guidance, including on repeat referrals, to ensure they reflect the full range of threats we see today'* - potentially widening the funnel for referrals - while also expanding the scope of Channel deradicalisation packages to include *'cyber skills, family interventions, or practical mentoring'*.
- These new changes to Prevent would be overseen by a new permanent commissioner to review Prevent's effectiveness - as opposed to being overseen by the Commissioner for Countering Extremism, which following the Shawcross review have been allocated a greater role in the implementation of Prevent.

- In another piece [the Guardian mentioned](#) that ‘a decision is yet to be made on the [Commission for Countering Extremism]’s future’, and it is possible that a commissioner more ideologically amenable to Labour may be chosen to replace current commissioner Robin Simcox.
- This speaks to the underlying tensions between the approach to Prevent taken by the previous government and under the Shawcross review, and the approach characteristic of the Labour Party.

Sara Khan publishes another report in attempt to shape new government’s approach to counter-extremism

- Sara Khan, former Commissioner for Countering Extremism, published a report titled [Societal Threats and Declining Democratic Resilience: The New Extremism Landscape](#) through the thinktank and consultancy Crest Advisory.

The report reviews existing polls and data on attitudes relating to extremism, conspiratorial thinking and social polarisation, and calls for a new strategy on countering extremism in the long-term in a more joined-up, integrated fashion by the government.

- The report described the proliferation of extremist narratives in society, their impact on democracy, and the government’s lack of a ‘dedicated strategy to address the mainstreaming of extremist ideologies’.

The report recommends the creation of a centralised directorate based in the Cabinet Office to shift the way that Whitehall addresses questions of extremism, social cohesion and democratic decline.

- It also recommends that the government confirm a definition of extremism, reform Prevent to focus on extremism-leading-to-terrorism, and proposes an early-intervention system for dealing with individuals who exhibit susceptibility to extremism in a manner that is unsuitable for Prevent.

These chime with the government’s move towards youth diversion orders described above, though [Sara Khan was quoted in the media](#) saying that the government’s announcements were in themselves insufficient.

- The report poses these changes as necessarily separate and distinct from Prevent.

Instead it promotes an idea more akin to the 2015 Counter Extremism Strategy of a broad-ranging, interlocking approach to counter-extremism and social cohesion - rather than centralising all counter-extremism within Prevent proper.

- These are themes that are in line with those regularly promoted and published by Khan, including during her term as head of the Commission of Countering Extremism.

By the latter part of her term, following the entry of Boris Johnson's administration, Khan complained that her recommendations [had been ignored by the government](#), and following the defeat of the Conservative Party last summer [she criticised the former government](#) for its failures to deal with 'extremism'.

She is likely to find a more sympathetic ear under the current Labour government.

- Crest Advisory, who published the report, is closely linked to police forces and government, being run by many former senior government staffers and commissioned for work by a range of police forces and agencies - including by Sara Khan herself, when she was Commissioner for Countering Extremism.

Incoming President Trump's senior counter-terrorism advisor causes spat with British government over citizen repatriation demand

- [In early January Sebastian Gorka](#), Donald Trump's nominee as senior director for counterterrorism, stated that countries seeking to cement their relationship with the US under Trump's administration should honour their responsibilities to repatriate citizens held in prison camps in North East Syria under suspicion of being ISIS members.

He explicitly pointed out the UK in this regard, which has been noted internationally for its unwillingness to repatriate citizens from the camps.

- Gorka later [rowed back his statement](#) following backlash from the government and the opposition Conservatives, and claimed that he would not force any government to take such action.

Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation Jonathan Hall KC, however, [suggested that the government should consider repatriation](#) from the camps, stating that it could be *'quite a pragmatic decision in the overall interests of national security to bring someone back.'*

- Coverage of the incident centred largely on the [scenario of repatriating Shamima Begum](#), who travelled to Syria as a schoolgirl and was stripped of her citizenship, to Britain.

Despite challenging the stripping in court, Begum has lost her cases and appeals against the government and appears to have no clear legal avenues left available