

UK Briefing: September & October 2024

Reporting period: 1st September - 31st October 2024

September

Starmer takes hard line on Iran following counter-attack, pledges to never end arms sales to Israel

- The British government took a hard stance against Iran following its missile strikes on Israel in early October, issuing immediate condemnation.
- Ministers also mentioned that [RAF jets were prepared for usage](#) against Iran's attacks, but were apparently not used in the end.
- And in [Starmer's address to the House of Commons](#) on October 7th he stated that 'We support Israel's right to defend herself against Iran's aggression in line with international law.'
- During the Parliamentary discussion to mark the anniversary of the Al Aqsa Flood operation, Starmer affirmed that he would [never end arms sales to Israel](#), as that would deprive them of 'defensive arms'.
- In opposition Labour were very vocal about seeking to proscribe Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps - something [sought after by Israel](#) - including through the development of a new proscription mechanism separate from the Terrorism Act.

Since coming to power they haven't made further comments on the issue, but are considering their options. In response to a direct query about proscribing them on October 7th Starmer [somewhat evaded the question](#).

At order of White House, Britain concludes negotiations over Chagos Islands - retaining Diego Garcia military base while handing rest to Mauritius

- [Britain has concluded negotiations](#) over the Chagos Islands, with a deal to hand it to Mauritius - whilst still retaining a 99 year ("initial period") control of the UK-US military base in Diego Garcia.

- The negotiations began under the previous government, but were concluded now - pending a treaty - [at the behest of the Biden White House](#), who told Labour after the General Election that they risked the 'special relationship' if they didn't close the deal quickly.
- Apparently, the US were concerned that Mauritius would take the case to the International Court of Justice and take control of the islands including the base, which was used as a CIA blacksite during the War on Terror, and is crucial in the architecture of America and Britain's military encirclement of China.

October

Palestinian student wins appeal against visa revocation, with judge defending right to support lawful resistance

- Palestinian-Jordanian student Dana Abu Qamar, student at Manchester University, [won her appeal against the previous government's decision](#) to strip her visa on the basis of her presence in Britain being 'not conducive to the public good'.

The move came following interviews with her taken immediately after the Al Aqsa Flood operation, in which she praised Palestinian resistance.

- The initial visa stripping move was issued by then-Immigration Minister Robert Jenrick, whose office personally intervened in the case, amidst a major crackdown on expressions of support with Palestine and Palestinian resistance after October 7th.

Various agencies were involved in the decision, with the Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU), the National Community Tensions Team (NCTT), and Homeland Security Analysis and Insight teams assessing her statements, their impact, and whether her visa should be revoked.

- The ruling was emphatic that Dana 'was not an extremist' and that the government has 'failed to discharge the burden upon her to demonstrate that [Dana's] presence in the UK is not conducive to the public good', appearing to dismiss avenues for appeal.
- Her case was won based on her successfully arguing that her statements in support of Palestinian resistance were support for popular resistance within the confines of International Humanitarian Law - as opposed to the targeting of civilians, or support for Hamas or any other proscribed groups specifically.

Head of Counter Terrorism Policing sheds light on scale of counter-terrorism operations since the war on Gaza

- To mark one year since the Al Aqsa Flood operation, the head of Counter Terrorism Policing Matt Jukes [published a post](#) reflecting on counter-terror operations over the last year, which provided some insight into the scale of repression carried out against Palestine solidarity activity.
- In it, he mentioned that there had been:
 - 'Over 80' arrests for terrorism offences linked to the war, with 'roughly half' relating to protest activity and half for online offences;
 - A 15% increase in intelligence submissions in the year since October 7th compared to the year prior;
 - A 7% increase in Prevent referrals compared to the year prior;
 - Over 4,600 referrals for 'harmful content' online, with nearly a quarter of these being processed as being UK-linked and terrorism-related.
- Given the pattern of police activity witnessed against Palestine solidarity over the last year it is safe to assume, with a high degree of confidence though not conclusively, that a large majority of these submissions and referrals would relate to Gaza, and specifically to pro-Palestine activity.
- These reflections came shortly after the [latest release from the Home Office](#) on the use of counter-terrorism powers in the year to June 2024, which noted the highest rate of arrests since 2018-19, with 242 arrests for terrorism-related activity. It also showed October-December 2023 as being the quarter with the highest rate of terror arrests in the nine quarters leading up to June 2024.
- Of the 75 out of the 242 arrestees charged thus far, the most frequent charges included:
 - Membership of a proscribed organisation: 19
 - Dissemination of terrorist publications: 11
 - Preparation for terrorist acts: 10
 - Collection of information useful for an act of terrorism: 9
 - Encouragement of terrorism: 4
 - Offences relating to notification: 4

Starmer makes “war against people smugglers” central to government’s EU ‘reset’, while taking lessons from counter-terrorism

- In his [opening speech at INTERPOL's](#) General Assembly in Glasgow, Keir Starmer expanded on Labour’s manifesto promise of combating ‘smuggling gangs’ with counter-terrorism-inspired powers - stating that “People-smuggling should be viewed as a global security threat similar to terrorism” while declaring that “we can win this war against the people smugglers”.
- These plans included £150 million investment in the government’s new cross-agency Border Security Command, which will be utilised towards new technology and
- capabilities for the National Crime Agency - which will also receive £58 million - creating a new specialist Intelligence Source Unit which will ‘cohere intelligence flows from key police forces’ for tackling Organised Immigration Crime, and pledging to grant further powers to these agencies in future legislation.
- Starmer spoke approvingly of the track record of counter-terror powers throughout, underscoring his aim of deepening securitisation through the border regime. He also indicated his attempt to harmonise the work of various agencies, pledging to “[end] the fragmentation between policing, Border Force and our intelligence agencies”, and also a placing greater emphasis on cross-border collaboration and intelligence sharing, including with Europe via Europol.
- The speech also noted the new government’s [‘reset’ with the EU](#) - which is one that has centred on increasing collaboration over policing borders, defence and national security.
- While contributing to the expansion of securitisation and border policies across the EU as it lurches increasingly to the right, this formed part of Labour’s foreign policy ‘balancing’ with Europe in preparation for a Trump presidency and a loss of US support.

Southport attacker charged under terror laws, reigniting ‘cover up’ accusations

- Axel Rudakubana, who carried out the stabbing murder in Southport which precipitated the August riots, [has been charged under the Terrorism Act](#) for

possessing the Al Qaeda manual, as well as being charged for producing ricin.

- Despite the terror charges, the attack is not being considered a terrorist attack by prosecutors as of time of writing.
- The revelation sparked accusations of a 'cover up' over the delay in announcing the terror charges, reviving the 'two tier policing' grievance that catalysed the riots.
- These accusations were stirred by Conservative leadership candidates [Kemi Badenoch](#) and Robert Jenrick who demanded to know whether the state was withholding information from the public about the case.
- The government claims it has [only become aware of the charges](#) itself in the weeks prior.