

IIICAGE

Witness | Empower | Justice



UK briefing: **August**

2023



August 9th – September 13th
2023

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

WWW.CAGE.NGO

Counter-terrorism

Security Minister commits to further crackdowns on 'pro-Khalistan extremism' during India visit

- During a meeting with India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in early August, Security Minister Tom Tugendhat [announced £95,000](#) to 'enhance the UK's capability to tackle Pro-Khalistan Extremism' - i.e. Sikhs campaigning for a separate Sikh state, known as Khalistan.
- This adds on to deepening UK-India counter-terrorism collaboration in recent years, especially pertaining to Khalistan supporters in Britain.

During his meeting with Indian Prime Minister Modi in April 2022, Boris Johnson announced that the UK would be [setting up an anti-extremism taskforce](#) directed at Khalistan supporters, while the India-UK Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism in London later that year also [committed to furthering transnational collaboration](#) on counter-terrorism.

Following an [attack on the Indian High Commission](#) in London earlier this year by pro-Khalistan protestors, the British government [increased security](#) at the building after protest by the Indian government - including their move to [reduce security at the British Embassy](#) in Delhi in response.

- This closer collaboration comes amidst Britain's attempts to forge a free trade agreement with India – with security integration serving as a means of appeasing the Indian government during the process.

Home Secretary update on Prevent review includes vocal defence of far-right ideologues

- Home Secretary Suella Braverman [delivered an update to Parliament six months](#) on from the publication of the Shawcross review of Prevent, in which she gave a progress update on delivery of its recommendations while also making some politicised interventions.
- Among them were an attack on the Research Information and Communications Unit (RICU), which [earlier this year was found](#) to have produced a report on texts used by far-right nationalists, which was heavily criticised by the right-wing press.

Among the list was a text by former Henry Jackson Society associate director Douglas Murray - infamous for his statement that "conditions for Muslims in Europe must be made harder across the board" - whom Braverman directly defended in her speech as expressing 'mainstream, insightful and perfectly decent political views'.

- The speech also condemned the idea of 'blasphemy laws' supposedly being enforced by Muslims defending their faith - a talking point promoted by head of the Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) Robin Simcox, and which Braverman [recently committed to tackling through policy](#).
- In the update, Braverman also mentioned that the CCE would be in charge of a new Standards and Compliance Unit for Prevent - reflecting the way that the CCE under Simcox [has been transformed](#) from an arms-reach body into a internal thinktank for the Home Office, and a conduit for hard-right thinktanks in the security field.

National Security

Allegations of Parliamentary aide serving as 'spy' for China used to legitimise new national security powers

- News that a [parliamentary aide was arrested](#), along with another man, for espionage-related offences for allegedly acting a 'spy' for China has ignited calls within Parliament and the security establishment for a more hawkish stance towards China and Chinese 'spying' in Britain.
- The aide, whose name is being withheld from most reporting, had previously worked with current Cabinet ministers as part of the China Research Group of Conservative MPs, was arrested back in March, and has put out a statement [rejecting the allegations](#).
- While the story is still unravelling and it is too soon to conclude whether or not the allegations are true, there are clear political incentives behind leaking the story.

Despite the individuals being arrested back in March, the story was leaked only now - mere weeks after the British government adopted a softer, more pragmatic approach towards cooperation with the Chinese government, in a de-escalation of relations that has angered hawkish elements of the Conservative Party - and potentially the security services who have taken a harder line too.

- It is possible that the release of the story was calculated to push the government into a rowback on their de-escalation. It is perhaps telling that anecdotes reported in the press to support the allegations against the individual include the mere fact that he [advocated a more pragmatic approach to China engagement](#), despite

taking an otherwise firmly anti-China position.

- The story has also been used to generate support for increasing the use of national security powers, including those in the recently-passed National Security Act.

There [have been suggestions to place China](#) on the 'enhanced tier' of threat level for foreign powers, and make use of the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme introduced by the Act, for example.


- It was also reported alongside the story that [MI5 intervention had led to the Conservative Party dropping](#) election candidates, after being advised that they may be 'spies' for China - indicating the extent to which the security establishment are actively intervening in civilian politics, and the growing culture of suspicion being engendered around supposed 'spies'.

Allegations against Bulgarian nationals acting as 'spies' for Russia

- Another story about supposed foreign spies in Britain was published in August, this time centering on [three Bulgarian nationals who had been arrested](#) on suspicion of spying for Russia, as part of a wider sting operation.
- The individuals, Orlin Roussev, Biser Dzhambazov and Katrin Ivanova, were arrested in February, and have been charged with possessing false identity documents - including multiple passports - "with improper intention".

They are also accused of having posed as journalists in order to 'carry out surveillance operations' in London, Germany and Montenegro.

National Security

- 
- Details on the case remain scant, though as with the China 'spy' story there is reason to suspect that this story may be being used to instil a culture of suspicion, justify the use of draconian surveillance powers introduced by the recently-passed National Security Act - and/or serve as a public deterrent.
 - Discussing the case, [a former MI6 intelligence officer](#) has questioned how much evidence the authorities had managed to find against the three, describing the charge against them as "the equivalent of speeding in a 30mph zone".
 - The trial date of the three has yet to be arranged.