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Counter-terrorism

Government sets up taskforce to block or deport overseas speakers and preachers as part of anti-Palestinian crackdown

- The government has [announced the formation](#) of a cross-departmental taskforce to which foreign national 'hate preachers and extremists' will be automatically referred in order to initiate action against them including visa refusal/cancellation for, among other things 'preaching racism, incitement, or using intimidation or violence to undermine the democratic process'.

It also stated that a Prevent referral pathway will be established for foreign nationals 'who are sowing division and spreading hate in communities', which could lead to their expulsion from the country.

UK organisation seeking to sponsor visas for 'dangerous individuals' risk having their visa sponsorship licenses revoked.

- These powers would operate below any criminal threshold and therefore no change in law, instead drawing upon subjective notions of 'spreading hate'.

They also represent a qualitative development in the interconnection between counter-extremism powers, including Prevent, with border powers.

- The move is clearly tied to the mounting repression of Palestine solidarity.

It follows from a commitment made by Rishi Sunak in his [speech and policy announcement](#) in early March condemning the role of 'extremists' in 'hijacking' pro-Palestine demonstrations, as well as [moves](#)

[initiated immediately](#) after October 7th to expel foreign students and workers for 'glorifying' the Al Aqsa Flood operation.

- The threat to revoke visa sponsorship licenses is designed to deter institutions, such as universities or mosques, from inviting individuals that can be seen as 'extremist' by the deeply subjective standards of the British government - including for speaking on Palestine.
- Most troubling, the government press release mentions that information on so-called hate preachers 'will be gathered using...open-source intelligence expertise' - supposedly granting authoritative status to rightwing thinktanks and social media accounts who routinely smear individuals as 'extremists'.

Inquest into 2020 Reading attacks adds on to criticism of intelligence agencies

- An inquest into a knife attack which left three dead in 2020 [concluded that the attacks](#) could have been 'probably avoided' if not for the failures of police and intelligence agencies to respond to concerns about the attacker.
- Khairi Saadallah, a Libyan refugee, carried out the fatal attack in Reading in June 2020.

Prior to that his behaviour had been noted in 'dozens of intelligence reports', including violent tendencies and threats to blow himself up, and had served jail time during which he interacted with members of the proscribed group Al Muhajiroun.

He was referred to Prevent four times but was never taken on, and was [triaged by MI5 four times](#) as well, without further action being taken.

National Security

- In response to the inquest, [Counter-Terrorism Policing stated](#) that they will 'fully review and reflect on the conclusions from the Judge Coroner and ensure we do all we can to strengthen our efforts to keep our communities and our country safe.'
- This inquest comes shortly after the families and loved ones of those killed in the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing [sued MI5 for its failures](#) to take steps which could have prevented the attacks.

with intelligence authorities in Hong Kong.

[Eight further people were arrested](#) as part of the operation, but were released without charge, while the 3 in question have been subject to onerous bail conditions, including 'a 10pm to 5am curfew, reporting weekly to their local police station, not travelling internationally and informing police of devices used to access the internet.'

- The cases are ongoing.

First prosecutions under new National Security Act underway

- The National Security Act 2023 was passed into law last year, and constituted the development of a new stream of criminal law mirroring, and expanding on, the extensive body of counter-terror laws built up since 2000.

The past month has seen the first prosecutions under the Act, in two separate cases.

This includes 5 men being [prosecuted over allegedly planning an arson](#) attack on a Ukraine-linked commercial warehouse in London, with 2 of them being charged for 'conducting hostile activity in the UK in order to benefit a foreign state', specifically Russia. The charges for the 2 also relate to [allegedly assisting/benefitting from the Wagner mercenary group](#), which is proscribed under the Terrorism Act 2000.

- A few weeks later, 3 men were charged for 'assisting a foreign intelligence service...and also with foreign interference', allegedly in connection