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## UK briefing: **March**

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# Counter-terrorism

## Britain firmly backing Israel with diplomatic and military cover in escalation against Iran

- Britain has continued to back Israel firmly in recent escalatory action against Iran, providing diplomatic and military cover. This is despite sharing the US' concern for an uncontrollable expansion of the war in its other theatres beyond Gaza.
- After Israel bombed an Iranian embassy compound in Syria in early April, in violation of international law, Britain alongside the US and France [opposed a UN Security Council](#) resolution condemning the strike.

In the intervening period, the US, UK and allies [had sought to deter Iran](#) from taking action against Israel by requesting regional states and Iran's allies to convince it against responding, while the UK also [rejected calls to stop arming Israel](#).

- But in light of the persistent failure to condemn Israel's actions against it, Iran responded to Israel with a [major drone and missile strike](#) on the 13/14th of April.

Britain's [RAF was directly involved in defending Israel](#) from the attack, deployed to shoot down Iran's drones alongside military support from the US and Jordan. This action, seemingly conducted without full knowledge of even the government Cabinet, was [backed by the opposition Labour party](#).

- Britain's response to Iran's counter-offensive placed the blame squarely on Iran, [condemning the attacks](#) as 'reckless' and as indication that Iran is 'intent on sowing chaos in its own backyard'.

It also [issued joint sanctions](#) alongside the US against Iranian military officials, and attempted to limit its industrial ability to manufacture drones.

- Despite this, Foreign Minister David Cameron did [resist direct requests from the Israeli government to proscribe](#) Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) under terror laws, arguing that doing so would preclude any possibility of communication

with the unit.

There has been growing pressure within Britain to proscribe the military body, including from [government ministers](#), the [Labour Party](#) and the [Commission for Countering Extremism](#).

- There have been other occasions where the Home Office and the Foreign Office have been split on matters of proscribing state actors - given the implications this would have on aid provisions and negotiations.

In 2022 a push by then-Home Secretary [Priti Patel to proscribe Yemen's governing Houthi/Ansar Allah movement](#) was opposed by the Foreign Office, for example.

## Survivors of 2017 Manchester Arena bombing sue MI5 over failings to prevent attack

- In a first-of-its-kind legal claim over 250 people, comprising victims and loved ones of those caught up in the 2017 Manchester Area bombing, [have submitted a legal complaint against MI5](#) to the Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT).
- The complaint to the IPT argues that negligence on the part of MI5 agents, which saw them fail to take steps which could have prevented the attack, breached their right to life under the Human Rights Act.
- Formed as part of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, the Investigatory Powers Tribunal regulates the work of intelligence agencies, police and covert activity undertaken by them, and can rule on unlawful intrusion by these agencies, and breaches of human rights law.

It can make remedial orders and compensation, but not issue criminal sanctions against officers.

- Last year, the final report from the public inquiry into the bombings was stinging in its assessment of MI5's failures to prevent the Manchester Arena attack, with the [inquiry chair stating](#) that MI5 'intelligence could have led to suicide bomber Salman Abedi being followed to a car where he stored his explosives' - but was not acted upon.

# Counter-terrorism

## Khan Review on 'freedom-restricting harassment' compromises yet another business pitch for enterprising security advocates

- Former lead Commissioner for Countering Extremism and current advisor for minister Michael Gove, Sara Khan, issued a new report on the role of extremists in undermining social cohesion.

[The 'Khan Review'](#) looks at the supposed phenomenon of 'freedom-restricting harassment' (FRH) and appeals for greater government intervention to police this in the name of defending democracy.

- The report defines FRH as 'when people experience or witness threatening, intimidatory or abusive harassment online and/or offline which is intended to make people or institutions censor or self-censor out of fear. This may or may not be part of a persistent pattern of behaviour.'

Examples given of FRH in the report are almost all criminal acts in their own rights, and include 'acts of doxing, inciting hatred and violence against individuals and their families, sending death and rape threats, and other forms of threatening, intimidatory or abusive behaviour.'

FRH is framed as creating social conditions in which forms of extremism can flourish.

- The report makes frequent references to issues of 'intra-faith harassment' and blasphemy protests, referring to parent and pupil protests in the northern town of Batley against a schoolteacher who showed cartoons of the Prophet (saw) from the notorious French newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in a class on blasphemy.

These rather niche topics have been a focus of attention of certain sections of the security field over the last year, including current Commissioner for Countering Extremism Robin Simcox.

- As part of its efforts to 'efforts to 'marginalise and isolate extremist and other malign actors to prevent the mainstreaming of extremist ideologies', the reviews recommendations

include establishing a number of departmental units - including a communications unit to 'support local authorities and respond to dangerous and harmful conspiracy theories and disinformation', and a Cohesion and Conflict Unit for the education sector.

Others include a recommendations for legislation that 'restricts the ability for protests to occur immediately outside primary and secondary schools', and for all police forces to have a 'dedicated safety officer who specialises in harassment and malicious communication legislation...each safety officer having a comprehensive understanding of apostate and intra-faith hatred, and the theological narratives employed by perpetrators that incite hatred and cause harassment.'

- On face value the Khan Review offers little, and mainly focuses on various behaviours that are already prosecutable under criminal law or otherwise being addressed by government policy.

It is the latest in a series of reports in which Sara Khan has sought to define and elicit state intervention against the many supposed manifestations of 'extremism' in a manner which legitimises the greater scrutiny of social life for Muslims, among others.

Her recent track record includes her creation and promotion of 'hateful extremism', which ultimately informed the new definition of 'extremism' [introduced by the government](#) in March as part of a blacklist of organisations such as CAGE.

An initiative like this dovetails with efforts to marginalise and isolate groups further, by recasting their activity as 'undermining social cohesion'.

- There is a degree of transparent opportunism in this behaviour - the expansion of these anti-extremism policies, and bodies to manage them, would create new funding and employment opportunities for Khan and fellow securitisation advocates - such as the Commission for Countering Extremism which she once led.

But it also fits into her long-term personalised grievance with Muslim organisations and campaigns which have long criticised figures like her for backing Islamophobic counter-terror laws - a legitimate criticism that she has [regularly sought to depict as examples](#) 'extremist bullying' that must be cracked down on by the government.

- It is not yet clear what the government response will be to the Review, which is due for discussion on Parliament [at the end of April](#).