

Britain begins bombing in Iraq

UK Conservatives pledge further attacks on democratic rights

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On Tuesday afternoon, British Royal Air Force (RAF) warplanes began bombing positions of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS or ISIL) forces in north-eastern Iraq. Media accounts said two GR4 Tornado aircraft interrupted a surveillance flight to support Kurdish Peshmerga fighters who are fighting ISIS. A second series of bombings by the RAF took place overnight.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) said the warplanes, which flew to Iraq from the RAF's base in Akrotiri, Cyprus, destroyed an armed pickup truck and transport vehicle west of Baghdad. According to the MoD, a high-precision Brimstone missile, which costs £105,000 each, was used to destroy the vehicle. The MoD said that five Brimstone missiles had been used so far in strikes, along with one Paveway missile, costing £22,000.

The attacks came four days after the British parliament voted by a heavy majority in favour of UK involvement in military strikes against ISIS in Iraq, being led by the US and several Arab states. The Tornado attack was the sixth fully-armed sortie since parliament's authorisation of the attacks four days previously. Britain now joins the fighter plane bombing operations being carried out by other European nations, Belgium, Denmark and France, as well as Australia.

Tuesday's strikes coincided with a major speech by Conservative Party Home Secretary Theresa May, at its annual conference, which confirms how closely the ongoing assault on democratic rights is tied to Britain's escalating policy of militarism.

May announced that if the Conservatives are returned to power in the 2015 general election, a new government would fully implement the

Communications Data Bill, dubbed the "snoopers charter". Two years ago, the Tories, due to public opposition and blockage of the legislation by its Liberal Democrat coalition partners, had to shelve plans to enable law enforcement agencies to legally intercept *all communications and voice calls* made by the British population of over 64 million people.

May stated, "For years the police and security services have had access to communications data—that is, the 'who, where, when and how' of a communication *but not its content.*" [emphasis added]

While the bill legally sanctioning mass spying against the population is yet to be passed, in July parliament rushed through the Data Retention and Investigative Powers Act (DRIP), which includes key elements of the snoopers charter. DRIP requires Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and mobile operators to store customer metadata for 12 months at a time, in order that they can be freely accessed by UK law-enforcement agencies. New clauses are included expanding the government's ability to directly intercept phone calls and digital communications (i.e., emails, texts).

In what amounted to a political conspiracy, the Conservative and Liberals stitched up a backroom deal with the opposition Labour Party to rubber stamp legislation with the gravest implications for civil liberties. In only a few hours, an overwhelming majority of MPs voted in favour of the new bill.

As with the raft of anti-democratic legislation currently being prepared, the government claimed the surveillance powers available to the state in the DRIP legislation were required to target jihadist forces operating in Syria.

While May stressed the necessity to equip the state

with vast new authoritarian powers, she of course made no reference to the revelations released by US whistleblower Edward Snowden more than a year ago. Snowden revealed that the UK's Government Communication Headquarters were already in alliance with the US National Security Agency, illegally intercepting the electronic communications of all British citizens.

The aim of the snooper's charter is to put this unprecedented mass surveillance on a legal footing.

The escalation in the assault on democratic rights will begin by the end of November, with a new "Counter-Terrorism Bill," May said. "We are working with other European countries to disrupt and prevent travel to the [Middle East] region. And when we know people are planning to travel to Syria and Iraq, I can strip them of their British passports."

Stating, "We will toughen up these powers further" she added, "When the police suspect somebody they encounter at the border, they will be able to seize their passport, prevent travel and give themselves time to investigate the suspect."

The anti-democratic legislation introduced since the early 2000s, by governments of every political stripe in the name of the "war on terror", is ultimately aimed at cracking down on growing social opposition to imperialist war and rising levels of social inequality. This is why so-called "extremists" are being increasingly designated as an all-embracing main threat, supplanting the previous "terrorist" bogeyman.

In her speech, May said, "[T]he Home Office will soon, for the first time, assume responsibility for a new counter-extremism strategy that goes beyond terrorism."

Its "implementation will be the responsibility of the whole of government, the rest of the public sector, and wider civil society." The government has "only ever been focused on the hard end of the extremism spectrum", therefore the new strategy "will aim to undermine and eliminate extremism in all its forms—neo-Nazism *and other forms of extremism as well as Islamist extremism—and it will aim to build up society to identify extremism ...*" [emphasis added]

May continued, "And our policy doesn't just focus on violent extremism, it deals with non-violent extremism too."

The Tories are to legislate new "Extremism

Disruption Orders" and new "banning orders for extremist groups that fall short of the existing laws relating to terrorism. I want to see new civil powers to target extremists who stay just within the law but still spread poisonous hatred," said May.

The *Guardian* revealed that a Conservative briefing note made clear that such banning orders can include denying access to the airwaves and to the Internet, and "would be targeted not just at so-called hate preachers but also those who sought to 'disrupt the democratic process' and 'undermine democracy'."

The branding as "extremists" all those who can be deemed in any way opposed to the government's right-wing anti-working class policies has been in preparation since at least last year. In December 2013, the government published a report entitled "Prime Minister's Task Force on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism." The task force defined "extremism" in the broadest terms possible. It stated extremism is "vocal or active opposition to *fundamental British values*, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas. *There is a range of extremist individuals and organisations, including Islamists, the far right and others,*" [emphasis added].



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