

Cameron announces plans to remove British passports from suspected terrorists

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18 November 2014

Prime Minister David Cameron has outlined further draconian “anti-terror” legislation.

Under the guise of cracking down on British “jihadists” fighting in Syria and elsewhere, the Conservative-led coalition government is to strip British citizens of their right to leave and return to the UK. This includes under-18-year-olds.

Cameron made his announcement in Australia on the eve of the G20 summit of world leaders. Outlining plans for another “counter-terrorism bill”, he promised to give police new powers “at ports to seize passports, to stop suspects travelling and to stop British nationals returning to the UK unless they do so on our terms.”

Presently, only the home secretary—using the royal prerogative—can prevent British citizens from travelling. Twenty-five people have had their passports confiscated since April 2013.

The new legislation will enable police to seize passports at ports for up to 30 days, if a senior officer has “reasonable suspicion” to believe travel is for terror-related activities. The same person’s passport can be seized multiple times.

New rules will be put in place requiring airlines to provide details of passenger lists or be banned from landing in the UK. Currently, some 10 percent of airline arrivals from Europe to the UK do not post passenger lists in real time, including most German airlines.

Home Secretary Theresa May will have the power to cancel passports and impose a “temporary exclusion” order for two years, to prevent a citizen returning to Britain if there is “reasonable suspicion of involvement in terrorist activity”. The order could be extended at the end of that period.

Any return to the UK will be dependent on the individual first being vetted overseas by the security services and agreeing to an escort home by UK authorities. They will have to agree that they could face

prosecution on return, and will be placed on a terrorism prevention and investigation measure (TPIM), subject to strict bail-like conditions that include police monitoring and a “deradicalisation” course.

Anyone attempting to return in secret will face five years imprisonment.

Cameron outlined the measures in a 20-minute speech to the Canberra parliament in which he praised the shared values of “freedom” and “democracy” as the “bedrock” of British and Australian society.

His assertion was framed as part of increasing imperialist provocations against Russia and China, who were the target of much of the discussions at the G20.

Cameron claimed that it was necessary to stand against an “incipient creeping threat to our values” from “those who say that we will be outcompeted and outgunned by countries that believe there is a shortcut to success, a new model of authoritarian capitalism that is unencumbered by the values and restrictions we impose on ourselves. In particular, an approach that is free from the accountability of real democracy and the rule of law.”

In fact, it is the British and Australian governments that are dispensing with democracy and the “rule of law”. The fact that Cameron chose to outline the measures in Canberra, not Westminster, is indicative of this approach. The legislation has been approved behind closed doors between the Conservative leader and his Liberal Democrat coalition partners and is expected to become law in January.

The plans to effectively strip selected Britons of their citizenship are an unprecedented breach of international laws, to which the UK is a signatory, which prevents a person from being made stateless. By deeming the exclusion order as “temporary” the government claims suspects will not be stateless as they will still have the right to return, although on grounds dictated by UK authorities.

Human rights organisations have described such assertions as bogus as it will mean individuals being without travel documents for an extended period. Shami Chakrabarti, for Liberty, a human rights advocacy organization, said, “Dumping suspect citizens like toxic waste, abdicating your responsibilities to the international community, is a very strange way of promoting the rule of law.”

The Islamic “counter-extremism” think tank, the Quilliam Foundation, said the planned bill was a breach of international citizenship laws. “We should not develop legislation that assumes individuals are guilty until proven innocent,” a spokesperson said.

The government claims the moves are necessary to deal with 500 Britons thought to have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join the bloody civil wars. Some 23 Britons are estimated to have died in the fighting, with an average age of 23.5 years.

In his speech, Cameron denied that the rise of Islamic extremism had anything to do with western foreign policy. Yet the fact remains that British actions in the Middle East, and the indiscriminate targeting of Muslim’s in the UK under current “anti-terror” measures, have indeed fuelled Islamic extremism. Moreover, just one year ago, the British government—along with the US—was casting the opposition to Syria’s Bashar Assad as a legitimate popular uprising that must be supported by all means, including with western military intervention.

The western powers were covertly helping arm the Syrian opposition and by extension, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Britain’s supposed allies in the “war on terror” include Saudi Arabia and Qatar, two of the major financial and political backers for ISIS.

The fact that the British government is not proposing any measures against ISIS’ backers in the Gulf States makes clear that the proposed legislation has nothing to do with the fight against terrorism. Once again, the threat of “jihadism” is being used to severely curtail democratic rights.

Claiming that the problem is an “extremist narrative” that must be “rooted out,” Cameron outlined new measures to further erode free speech by censoring anything deemed to be “extremist material.”

“We must ban extremist preachers from our country, we must root out extremism from our schools, universities and prisons,” he said.

“We must not allow the Internet to be an ungoverned space,” he went on, citing plans for the UK’s major Internet service providers (ISPs) to “strengthen” filters

blocking material deemed to be “extremist.” This includes adding a “public reporting button.” BT and Sky have confirmed that they are working with the government to this end.

The Metropolitan Police have established a Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit, to remove “terror” related material. According to reports, it has removed 34,000 items considered to fall into this category in the last year.

Last month, May pledged that the Conservative manifesto for the 2015 general election will include a commitment to introduce “extremism disruption orders.”

Current legislation only enabled action against “extremists” advocating violence, May said. The proposed disruption orders would apply to anyone deemed to “spread hate” based on grounds of gender, race or religion, but who is not in breach of existing laws.

The orders would also apply to those undertaking “harmful activities” for the “purpose of overthrowing democracy.”

They would enable police to apply for a court order restricting the activities of anyone deemed involved in “harmful activities”, the definition of which includes the risk of “harassment, alarm or distress” or which constitutes a “threat to the functioning of democracy.”

May said that “extremism” covered those who consider “a woman’s intellect as ‘deficient’,” and who denounce “people on the basis of their religious beliefs.”

According to the *Guardian*, a successful order would include a ban on appearing on TV, radio, or a public forum and publishing on the Internet. It would impose “a requirement to submit to the police in advance any proposed publication on the web, social media or in print. Taking part in public protests or speaking at any public event would also be banned.”



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