

British government extends censorship of online activity

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One year on from the June 2017 attack by Islamist terrorists at London Bridge, Conservative Home Secretary Sajid Javid used the anniversary to announce new authoritarian and anti-democratic “counter-terrorism” powers.

The measures incorporate “the lessons learnt from the attacks in 2017 and our responses to them,” he said. One of the key lessons learnt, he said, was that the authorities could “do better” in sharing information more widely and locally.

The WSWs has noted the intense collusion between British security services and Islamist terror groups. What is clear from the evidence that emerged in the aftermath of last year’s terror attacks is that the reason they were not prevented from their brutal assault was not due to “intelligence” failures.

Rather, there is evidence that the British security services were entirely aware of the activity of the terror cell who carried out the London bridge attack. In the case of the suicide bombing at Manchester Arena, British intelligence knew the bomber and his immediate relatives as members of a Libyan Islamist group they backed to depose the Gaddafi regime in Tripoli.

The real target of Javid’s measures are the democratic rights of working people.

In order to share information, the home secretary announced that local authorities, community police forces and probation officers will be allowed—for the first time—to see declassified intelligence about terror suspects in a pilot scheme to be run initially in London, the West Midlands and Manchester.

Javid declared these new and intrusive measures—whereby the British state accrues ever more dictatorial domestic and international powers—would be used to tackle the dangers presented simultaneously by Islamic terrorism, far-right terrorism and the Russian

state.

“The threat to the UK today remains at severe—meaning an attack is highly likely” Javid announced ominously in the speech. The terror attacks in Manchester and at London Bridge, the slaying of Labour MP Jo Cox during the 2016 Brexit referendum, together with the alleged nerve gas attack by Russian actors upon Sergei and Yulia Skripal, were meshed together in order to stampede public opinion behind the further erosion of democratic rights.

Immediately after telling the public they cannot be protected from an attack by terrorists, Javid revealed, “Our security and intelligence agencies are, right now, handling over 500 live operations, they have 3,000 ‘subjects of interest.’ And there are a further 20,000 people who have previously been investigated, so they may still pose a threat.”

The personal information held by MI5 on 20,000 British “suspected” citizens is to be declassified and shared with local authorities, police “and others.”

About the thousands of additional suspects, Javid said, “This is not about people who are the hardened attack planners, out there plotting or being active right now,” before adding, “That will remain predominantly the preserve of the intelligence services and the specialist policing.”

Who are these 20,000 people? What exactly are they meant to have done? Why they are they being targeted? Upon whose say so? Upon what evidence? Exactly where and when are declassified details about the 20,000, and the personal information held on them, to be shared with local authorities, police “and others”?

In addition to creating a new layer of state surveillance, the government expects to increase their cooperation even further with the private sector. As is de rigueur ministerial custom, Javid fawned over big

business and their role in censoring the Internet, stating, “As someone with a private sector background myself, I understand that government cannot deal with these kinds of challenges alone. I’m committed to improving how we work with businesses across a range of issues.”

Consequently, the role and responsibilities of technology companies to police the Internet and social media will increase even further. The giant tech corporations will be granted greater responsibility to tackle cases of whatever is deemed as “extremist” online activity, either by the state or increasingly by the self-imposed censorship of the technology corporations.

Javid also called for greater cooperation with small businesses to identify what he described as “worrying buying-patterns.” In addition to increasing the powers of the state and big business to monitor the online activities of all, the government is recruiting small businesses, such as car and van hire companies and various shops, to pitch in and report any assorted petty suspicions they may have.

The response from government for more teachers, nurses and ambulance crews are met with a constant refrain of “there is no money.” Nevertheless, there is an open spigot of funding for the security services to employ vast numbers of spooks to spy on the British public.

Javid said, “In the 2015 Spending Review, this government committed to spending more than £2 billion on counter-terrorism each year. We’re giving counter-terrorism policing a £50 million increase in funding this year—to over three quarters of a billion pounds. And we’re recruiting over 1,900 additional staff across the security and intelligence agencies to improve our response still further.”

Javid also used the opportunity to reaffirm the government’s support for the reactionary and widely despised “Prevent” programme, which criminalises student’s opposition to militarism and makes teachers and lecturers akin to spies in their day-to-day employment. MI5 will apparently warn teachers and police about those it deems suspected “child militants.”

Under the changes proposed by the home secretary, the offence of possessing information likely to be useful to a terrorist—the parameters of which have been deliberately left open—would be extended to apply to material viewed online three or more times. The

maximum penalty for this offence would be increased from 10 to 15 years in prison.

Certain material freely available to view online will be reclassified as illegal on government say so. Anyone viewing it can be punished under the crude and arbitrary “three strikes & you’re out” policy.

The scope to extend these measures beyond what the government currently deems subversive and politically dangerous is wide open to future redefinition.

In October 2017, MI5 head Andrew Parker grossly exaggerated the threat posed by Islamist terrorism when he claimed that threats were “at the highest tempo I have seen in my 34-year career.” Likewise, the military/intelligence complex and the government are exploiting the actions of a handful of known Islamist extremists and right-wing thugs to strengthen the state in anticipation of an eruption of the class struggle.

The press release issued by the government to accompany Javid’s speech stated, “Responding to the recommendations of MI5 and the counter-terrorism police Operational Improvement Review into the 2017 terrorist attacks,” “new multi-agency approaches—initially in London, Manchester and the West Midlands—involve MI5 and the police using and sharing information more widely, working with partners such as local authorities to improve our understanding of those at risk of involvement in terrorism *and enable a wider range of interventions*” (emphasis added).

The measures were first trialled months ago and have already received the backing of the Labour Party, with shadow home secretary Dianne Abbott declaring in favour, as well as Labour mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham.



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