

Journalist Richard Medhurst arrested under Britain's Terrorism Act

Laura Tiernan
20 August 2024

Independent journalist Richard Medhurst was arrested by British police under Section 12 of the Terrorism Act (2000) Thursday August 15. He was seized at London's Heathrow Airport. Medhurst is known for his journalism opposing US, British and Israeli war crimes in Gaza and across the Middle East, and has more than one million followers on social media.

In a video posted Monday night to X (since viewed 2.6 million times) Medhurst revealed that six police officers were waiting for him at the entrance to the aircraft when it landed at Heathrow. He was held for nearly 24 hours, including in solitary confinement, was questioned by police, and had his electronic equipment seized.

Medhurst's video describes police state methods against anti-war journalists in Britain. He was prevented from calling family or friends to inform them of his whereabouts, and police declared that any discussion with his lawyers would be subject to audio surveillance—a clear breach of lawyer-client privilege.

He explained: “They arrested me—not detained, they arrested me—under Section 12 of the Terrorism Act of 2000 and accused me of allegedly, ‘expressing an opinion or belief that is supportive of a proscribed organization’, but wouldn’t explain what this meant.”

Medhurst is the first journalist to be arrested under Section 12. Its draconian provisions, amended in 2019, mean a person can be jailed for up to 14 years for merely “express[ing] an opinion or belief that is supportive of a proscribed organisation” and in doing so “is reckless as to whether a person to whom the expression is directed will be encouraged to support a proscribed organisation.”

Introduced by Tony Blair's Labour government, the Act is a legal dragnet. In Medhurst's case, it appears that commentary defending the right of Palestinians

under international law to resist foreign military occupation and genocide is being defined as support for terrorism.

Hamas is among the organisations proscribed as terrorist by the UK government. While its military wing was proscribed in 2001, Hamas was banned in its entirety in 2021, aimed at criminalising support for the Palestinian people. The political wing of Hamas won elections held in Gaza in 2006 and the organisation also oversees charitable work.

Medhurst has denounced the accusations against him: “I categorically and utterly reject all the accusations by the police. I am not a terrorist. I have no criminal record. Prior to this incident, I’d never been detained in my entire life. I’m a product of the diplomatic community, and I’m raised to be anti-war. Both of my parents won Nobel Peace Prizes for their work as United Nations peacekeepers. They had a tremendous effect on my worldview and outlook and instilled in me the importance of diplomacy, international law and peace.”

Medhurst's mother is Syrian and his father British. He was born in Syria and his parents were assigned to diplomatic postings in Lebanon, Syria, India and Pakistan. He speaks four languages fluently: English, Arabic, French, and German.

In 2019, Medhurst began hosting regular broadcasts discussing history, US politics, international relations and the Middle East, which he has described as being “rooted in an anti-imperialist viewpoint”. He told an interviewer the following year, “I think one of the reasons people gravitate towards my channel is due to its explicit nature. I don’t have time to sugarcoat war crimes, murder and corruption.”

Medhurst campaigned for the release of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, reporting on his extradition

case in London. Now he has been targeted by the same forces seeking to outlaw anti-war journalism and the truth. His YouTube channel was demonetised last year, with video content exposing Israel's attacks on the Palestinians deleted.

The persecution of Medhurst under the Terrorism Act is grotesque. Just four days ago, he posted a video on X showing the aftermath of an Israeli airstrike in Gaza that killed newborn twins and their mother. Their father had left the apartment to collect the twins' birth certificates, and returned to find them dead. As Medhurst explained, 115 babies born in Gaza since last October have been murdered by Israel, and 2,100 children under the age of two. This is state-sponsored terrorism, armed and financed by the US and Britain.

As NATO escalates its proxy war in Ukraine, and seizes on the Gaza genocide to pursue a regional war targeting Lebanon, Yemen, Syria and Iran, domestic state repression is being intensified.

On August 9, the FBI raided the upstate New York home of Scott Ritter, the former US Marine Corps intelligence officer and United Nations weapons inspector. He told reporters: "I'm being targeted because I have made an effort to try and improve relations between the United States and Russia, try to bring about arms control, try to bring about peace." A vocal critic of NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine, his passport was revoked by the State Department at John F. Kennedy airport in June as he was about to leave to attend a conference in Russia.

In Britain, several independent journalists and anti-war activists have been detained in the past 18 months under counter-terrorism laws. They include Craig Murray, *Grayzone's* Kit Klarenberg, and French publisher Ernest Moret. Dozens more pro-Palestinian activists have faced pre-dawn raids, detention, and interrogation under anti-terror laws.

Medhurst explained in his video statement, "despite having been released unconditionally, I do not feel that my bail is truly unconditional. I'm effectively in limbo, not knowing if I will be charged in three months or if I will go to prison."

He concluded, "We cannot call ourselves a democracy as long as reporters are dragged off of planes and detained and treated like murderers. I am disgusted that I am being politically persecuted in my own country."

Labour is presiding over this ramped-up state repression. Over the weekend, Home Secretary Yvette Cooper briefed the media on plans to crack down on "extremist ideologies". She told the *Guardian*, "I have directed the Home Office to conduct a rapid analytical sprint on extremism, to map and monitor extremist trends, to understand the evidence about what works to disrupt and divert people away from extremist views, and to identify any gaps in existing policy which need to be addressed to crack down on those pushing harmful and hateful beliefs and violence."



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact