

THE 9/11 COMPLEX

*The political economy of
“counter-terrorism”*

Azfar Shafi



'Counter-terrorism' is a set of policies, an ideology, a political project and, increasingly, an industry. Understanding and confronting the underlying political economy of counter-terrorism will be critical to any strategies to address police, state violence and the security industry.

As Hilal al-Jedda fled to Britain in 1992, seeking asylum from Saddam Hussein's government in Iraq, he would not have detected the tectonic plates of world politics shifting underfoot – nor guessed that one day he would be caught in their convulsions.

Over the following decades, Iraq was to become the theatre on which a new post-Cold War era would play out. Ushered in by the first Gulf War – which ended the year before al-Jedda arrived in Britain – it reached its devastating apogee with the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Bracketed by these twin brutalities was a series of political and security realignments – global, regional and domestic – which would come violently to shape the lives of al-Jedda, and others like him.

The post-Cold War world still turned, as before, on the exploitation of the Global South. Decades after formal independence, states of the South found their fragile sovereignty shattered by political, economic and military policies enforced by the North. IMF-imposed structural adjustment policies (SAPs) embedded a global neoliberal order to enrich the North, while the creation of regional bodies like the European Union (EU) enshrined their political and economic dominance. The Cold War's victorious side needed mechanisms for both maintaining a global hierarchy of states, while containing the human fallout within the South.

The frameworks of 'national security' and 'countering terrorism'⁸⁴ helped serve this role. They facilitated the construction of international security apparatuses to consolidate state power, principally in the North as well as the creation of transnational policing arrangements to monitor and manage their respective populations.

In Britain, as elsewhere in Europe, this process took the form of a war on the rights of asylum seekers and migrants that would lead eventually into a domestic war against 'Islamist terrorism' under the 'Global War on Terror' (GWOT) in the wake of September 11, 2001. The figure of the 'Third World' asylum seeker blurred almost seamlessly into that of the 'terrorist', and the police powers for monitoring and controlling both largely overlapped.

For al-Jedda, this new political climate would see him twice deprived of his British citizenship by ministerial fiat. This was enabled by a series of laws passed by the British government in the name of protecting national security and countering terrorism – laws that have led to both spectacular violence, from dawn raids to citizenship revocation, and many quiet violations of dignity upon the population.

Recent organising to defund and/or abolish the militarised police has been a very welcome development, but with few exceptions, it has yet to tackle the question of 'counter-terror' policing. This is despite the growth of modern 'counter-terror' policing and surveillance being a key means through which coercive state powers have been transformed – indeed, the way through which what remains of the welfare state has been remade into the security state.

For this reason, organisers countering security policies experienced silent unease at the widely welcomed news from Minneapolis City Council following the 2020 Black Lives Matter (BLM) uprisings. The City Council passed a resolution committed to replacing the city's police force, but its proposed 'community-led public safety system'⁸⁵ had disquieting echoes of the 'counter-extremism' surveillance programmes that have proliferated the world over – and which, far from representing a retreat from the logic of policing, signal its qualitative expansion.

Part of the difficulty in tackling counter-terrorism policies is that resistance has often remained in the legal realm – presenting them as discrete violations of rights or protocols to be combated through the courts – or that opposition extends merely insofar as policies are racist and/or Islamophobic.

Neither approaches are without merit, but neither is sufficient. Connecting counter-terrorism to the question of policing at large is a vital step in advancing struggles against police and state violence. It compels us to broaden our understanding of policing, into a space where the boundaries between society and security grow hazy. It also forces us to confront the limits of anti-state violence strategies rooted in frameworks of legalism or moralism that fail to address either the politics or the underlying political economy of counter-terrorism.

'Counter-terrorism' is a set of policies, an ideology, a political project and, increasingly, an industry. It has been generated by the dynamics among states within the global system; through the machinations of different political parties in governments and their respective agendas; and through an expanding network of operators and power blocs seeking to find a niche within the security industry.

This essay traces the development of the modern security state in Britain, maps the political economy of counter-terrorism and offers possibilities for organising strategies against counter-terror and security policies.

The counter-terror complex

Hilal al-Jedda was naturalised as a British citizen in 2000, but only seven years later was deprived of his citizenship – something made possible by an amendment to the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act (2006), which was introduced as part of the government's anti-terror crackdown following the July 2005 London bombings. Home Secretary Jacqui Smith made the deprivation order while al-Jedda was interned by British and US occupation forces during a return visit to Iraq. He was detained in Iraq for over three years, but never charged and reported physical abuse during his internment.

The removal of his citizenship was temporarily overturned by the Supreme Court – but that didn't stop the British government depriving him of his citizenship a second time in 2013. This was subsequently legitimised by an amendment to the Immigration Act (2014), which enshrined the government's ability to render British citizens stateless through a deprivation where they are theoretically eligible to claim citizenship elsewhere.

In order to recover his citizenship between the two deprivation orders, al-Jedda from his new home in Turkey had to wrestle with the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC) – extraordinary courts which permit secret evidence and opaque legal mechanisms, introduced in 1997 for the purposes of handling 'national security' cases.



“Khadra” a nom du plume, in a portrait session in France, Seine-Saint-Denis, France in January 2020. She works as a public servant, which she says prohibits her from speaking in public or she risks her job. These pics (she designed the outfit for portrait) signify to the veiling of her rights , and the fear she cannot publicly speak out. They were part of an exhibition TNI supported I exist: European stories of Islamophobia. Credit: © Tanya Habjouqa / NOOR / IG: @habjouqa / Twitter: @thabjouqa

Al-Jedda’s case illustrates just a few of the policies introduced in the name of ‘counter-terrorism’, ‘counter-extremism’, and the overarching framework of ‘national security’ – of which there are now dozens on the books – that have served to strengthen the organs of state violence. These have expanded powers available for policing and immigration control, as well as disruption powers that allow for greater coercive control of groups and individuals.

Today, even viewing certain content online or possession of certain documents can be prosecuted as ‘terrorism’ – as illustrated by the case of the Welsh Muslim woman *Umm Ahmed*, jailed for possession of magazines on her phone, even though the judge stated that she posed no threat nor had any intent to commit violence.⁸⁶ Those unfortunate enough to be convicted of terrorism offences can be liable to lengthy prison sentences – over and above equivalent offences under non-terror law. Once inside, they may be sifted into extremist segregation wings for maximum control and upon release can be subjected to extensive monitoring and restrictions on their movement, as well as potentially limitless police sweeps of their homes.⁸⁷

The ambit of counter-terrorism extends beyond the criminal sphere. Passengers at ports can be subjected to suspicionless ‘Schedule 7’ examinations – superpowered stop and search examinations – often arbitrarily, sometimes spurred by surveillance from the UK’s sprawling intelligence-gathering architecture. Such an encounter can set in motion an escalating set of counter-terrorism interventions, leading up to recurrent police harassment, passport seizures and more.

The citizenship-deprivation powers used against al-Jedda, for example, do not require guilt of any offence to be proven in order to be exercised.

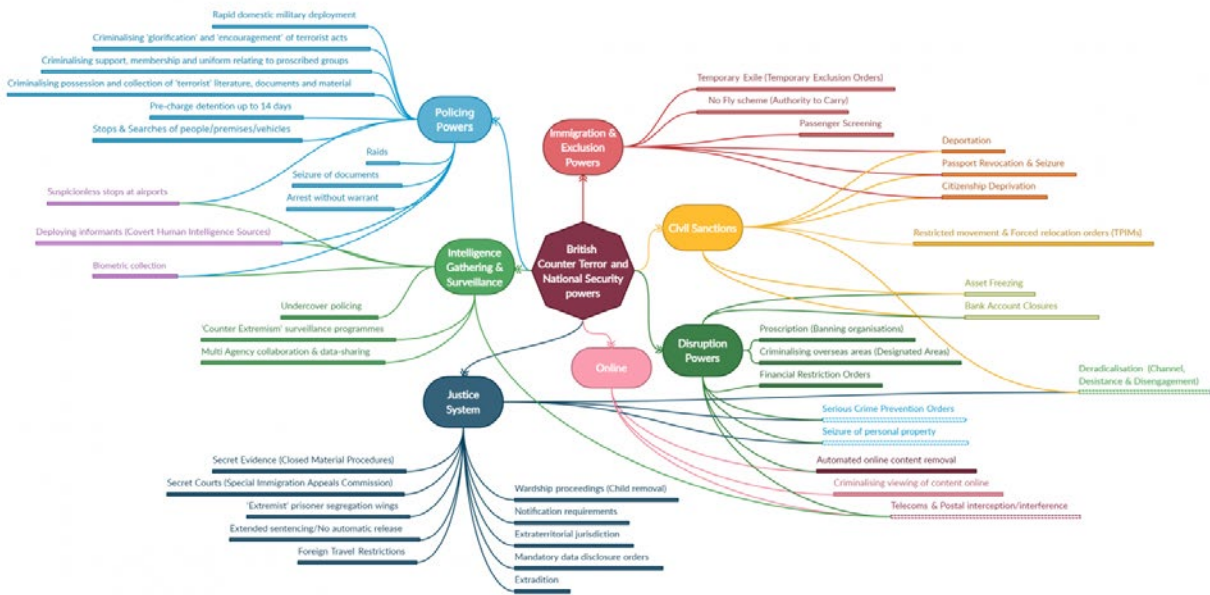
British counter-terrorism today

The legislative backbone of Britain’s vast counter-terror complex is the Terrorism Act (2000), which consolidated powers under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (1974) and its successors.

In 2020 the budget for counter-terror policing alone in Britain was £906 million⁸⁸ out of an overall national policing budget of £15.2 billion while the government’s 2021 Spending Review announced funding for a multimillion National Counter-Terrorism Operations Centre.⁸⁹ The 2018 Counter-Terrorism Strategy committed to invest £1.4 billion in the security and intelligence agencies, in addition to £2 billion investment in the anti-terror capabilities of the Special Forces as part of a 30% real terms spending increase on CT, alongside £500 million to ‘protect UK citizens from terrorist threats’.⁹⁰

Evidently unconstrained by any concerns of resource scarcity, the counter-terror complex has grown to historically unprecedented levels in its scope, reach and capabilities: indeed in 2021, British counter-terror laws can prosecute ‘terror offences’ carried out in space.⁹¹

FIGURE 1 maps the powers available to the British state and its agencies in the name of ‘countering terrorism’ and/or preserving ‘national security’.



[Figure 1: Powers available for the purposes of counter-terrorism and national security in Britain (excluding those granted through international treaties)⁹²]

The huge investment in counter-terrorism is at odds with its miserable performance in terms of the stated goals: catching terrorists. Based on government statistics up to December 2020, 87.4% of the 4,869 arrests under the broad category of ‘terrorist-related activity’ prosecuted under terrorism legislation were not ultimately convicted of any terror-related offences.⁹³ Since 2015, between 89% and 95%⁹⁴ of individuals tipped off by the public or police each year to the ‘Prevent’ surveillance programme have been deemed ‘false positives’.

Worse, several acts of actual violence have been carried out under the nose of policing and security agencies by individuals known to them : a policy failure by any measure. These include the Manchester Arena bomber Salman Abedi, the Westminster attacker Khalid Masood and the attempted Parsons Green bomber Ahmed Hassan.⁹⁵

Yet, arguing against counter-terror policy merely on the basis of efficacy, or lack thereof, is a politically fraught exercise. It can serve to naturalise what is an inherently political category – the ‘terror offence’ – as well as blurring how much of counter-terrorism operates outside the ‘criminal space’. Moreover, the security framework effectively operates on an unfalsifiable logic – that ‘security’ policies are the only real guarantee of safety, and where attacks or the failure to ensure public safety serve to highlight the need for further security policies, which can expand infinitely.

The refrain repeated by successive government ministers, with almost rhythmic frequency, of the need for more counter-terror laws to fill another unforeseen loophole, and extend the reach of state agencies ever further, illustrates the resilience of this logic.

Rather than engaging on the same discursive terrain as the state, or arguing on the basis of poor or bad application of policies, it is more worthwhile for opponents to analyse the politics and political economy that drives security policies.

The political project of counter-terrorism

Put simply, the project of modern British counter-terrorism has been to securitise and police the contradictions thrown up by successive governments’ domestic policy orientation and imperialist ambitions.

It does so by marshalling a complex of policing, surveillance and ideological apparatus that allow for a set of politics to be recast as ‘extreme’ or ‘terrorist’, for sections of the population to be rendered ‘threats’ – and for both to be subjected to an expanding array of disciplinary, coercive and punitive powers.

Through this process the many real fractures and contradictions generated by British politics are decoupled from the state and projected onto ideas, individuals and groups. In this way, the growth of counter-terrorism is inseparable from the contemporary regimes of capitalism and globalisation that it helps govern.

1990s: Post-Cold War security consensus emerges

During the 1990s, the leadership of the G7 and the newly-formed EU (from the earlier European Economic Community (EEC) established a political consensus on the key domestic ‘security threats’ they faced in a post-Soviet world. Chief among these were refugees and dissidents fleeing from states of the Global South which had been wracked by years of neoliberal ‘modernisation’, and the violent social and political dislocations these processes produced.⁹⁶

Britain – a key player in both groupings – used this security framework to reorganise its policing arrangements on two fronts. First, it provided the context against which it could fortify its borders against asylum seekers, principally flowing in from countries across Africa and Asia. An increasingly brazen assault on the rights of migrants and asylum seekers came to define British politics through the 1990s to the present. Hilal al-Jedda received his British citizenship in 2000, shortly before the

Labour government pulled up the ladder on new asylum seekers from Iraq entirely – predominantly Iraqi Kurds seeking asylum from the very government which Britain would join the US coalition against as part of the GWOT.

Second, the British state deployed counter-terror policing against foreign dissidents at home in order to demonstrate political loyalty to its allies abroad: police batons held aloft with one hand, olive branches in the other. Algerian, Egyptian, Kurdish and Tamil migrant communities in particular were subject to this repression, which was later enhanced by a rash of counter-terror laws.⁹⁷

Across Europe, these political realignments towards securitisation were expressed through an increasingly entangled relationship between migration control and countering ‘terrorism’ that would swallow the continent up in racial turmoil, and laid the groundwork for today’s mass securitisation.

9/11 and the Global War on Terror

From 2001, the GWOT ushered in global tolerance of permissiveness towards the exercise of state violence – directed most often, though by no means exclusively, at Muslim populations – as well as an international framework of securitisation in which countries worldwide were implicated. Britain and many other countries massively expanded their capacity for policing, surveillance and expulsion during this time.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) – al-Jedda’s initial destination after fleeing Iraq – became a key node in the US’ global complex of torture and detention in the run-up to and during the GWOT.⁹⁸ Today, it is also home to projects like the Global Counterterrorism Forum’s *Hedayah Center* for countering violent extremism, as well as spearheading attempts to brand and ban its rival, the Muslim Brotherhood, as ‘terrorists’ internationally.

Al-Jedda’s next stop, Pakistan, would serve as the launchpad for the GWOT’s first salvo: the assault on Afghanistan. It was also instrumental in facilitating the US’ broader imperialist strategies in Asia in subsequent years, readily sacrificing sovereignty in order to serve US interests.⁹⁹

Britain, Al-Jedda’s onetime home, played a leading role in the destruction of his homeland in 2003, before subjecting al-Jedda himself to sweeping new powers granted to insulate itself from the backlash. It was while he was being interned by British and US occupying forces in Iraq that al-Jedda was first stripped of his citizenship.

In this way, al-Jedda was subjected to both fronts of Britain’s part in the GWOT: international and domestic. Wherever he travelled he would remain under the security umbrella cast by the GWOT, and potentially at its mercy.

Late 2000s: Politics of austerity and authoritarianism

The decade following the 2007/08 global financial crisis was marked by an acceleration of ultra-nationalist tendencies across Europe and beyond, often held together by politics of virulent Islamophobia, xenophobia and hardline monoculturalism.

That lingering nexus between Muslims, asylum seekers, migrants and a supposed existential *threat to the nation* that animated counter-terrorism policy in the 1990s coalesced into a tighter political programme.

Britain itself embraced this new political realignment with its change of leadership in 2010, after which a series of Conservative-led governments took the opportunity to further ratchet up the counter-terrorism complex to new heights. These post-2010 governments married the work of 'counter-terrorism' to more tightly managed nationalist frameworks of 'British Values' and 'muscular liberalism' – in contrast to the supposed leniency of state 'multiculturalism'.

It was under the first of these governments that Home Secretary Theresa May (later Prime Minister) pushed through her flagship Immigration Act (2014), and the creation of a 'hostile environment' for migrants, asylum seekers and, by extension, foreigners living in the UK. It was an amendment hastily appended to this law that legitimised the enhanced citizenship-deprivation powers that were used against al-Jedda. Indeed, his case was repeatedly invoked during parliamentary debates on the amendment¹⁰⁰.

2016 to the present

The years since 2016 have seen a further unravelling of the political consensus, with hard-right tendencies surging to state power worldwide, ongoing instability wherever the GWOT was waged and broader geopolitical polarisation.

In this context, British counter-terrorism has reached its logical conclusion, by overextending, and ideologically collapsing in on itself. The British state is increasingly justifying its counter-terrorism policy to target a far-right that it has itself helped conjure into being, and all manner of politics are being ritually denounced as 'extremist', from the direct-action environmental organisation Extinction Rebellion and BLM demonstrations¹⁰¹ to the proliferation of right-wing COVID-19 conspiracies.¹⁰²

In a telling indication of political priorities, in November 2020 a Europe still reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic published a pan-EU joint approach to countering terrorism, at the behest of France and Austria. The approach included a commitment to strengthening deportation powers to tackle 'extremists', and restriction of public funding for groups deemed to have violated 'the democratic order and values of EU Member States' – a thinly veiled reference to Muslim organisations.¹⁰³

Counter-terrorism powers have proved no more successful in tackling acts of political violence¹⁰⁴ than they have in their secondary aim of stemming domestic discontent – not that that will stop such powers from being deployed as a blunt tool to contain and police the situation.

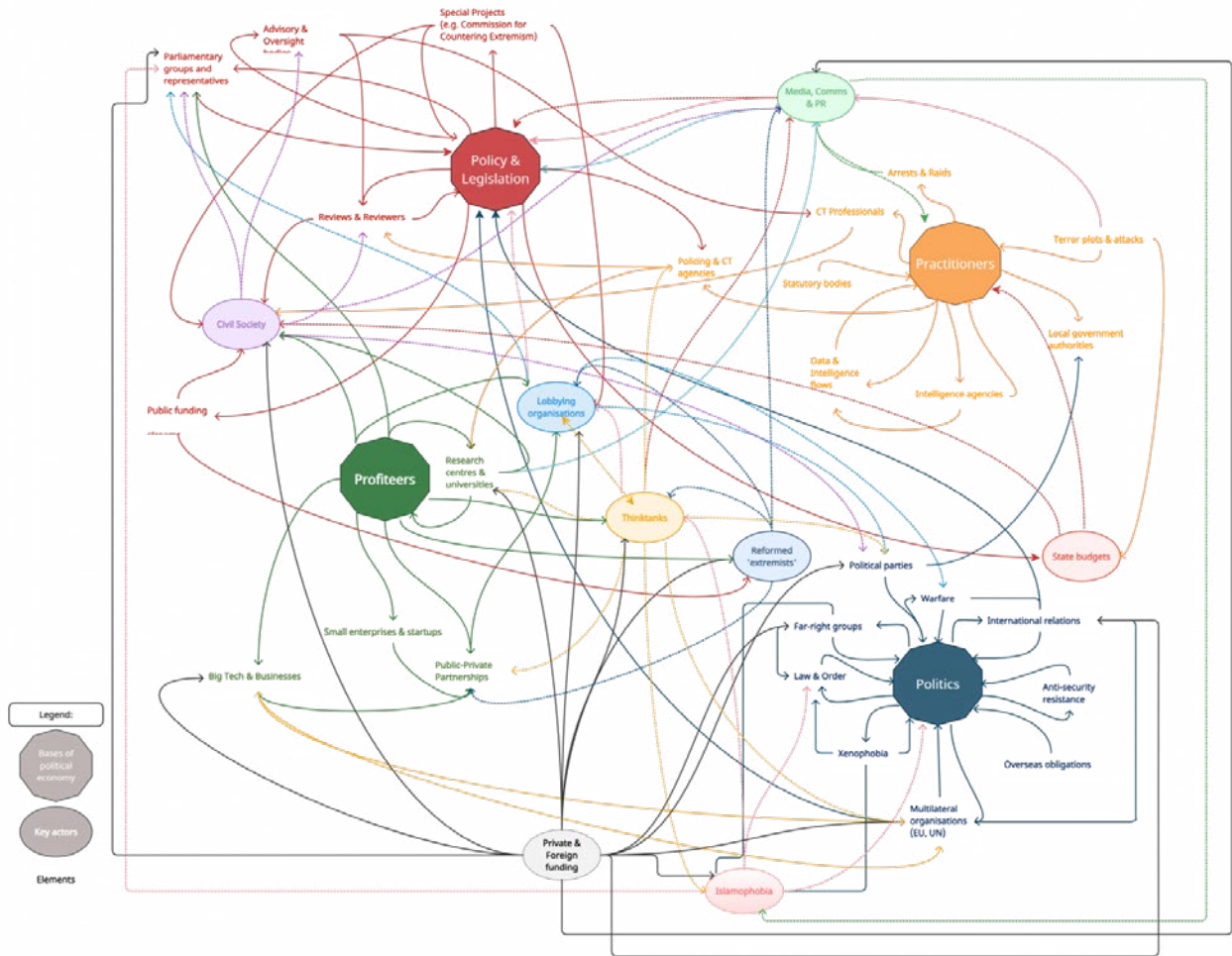
National security and counter-terrorism are not only a means of amassing state power, but increasingly the language spoken by the state: with counter-terrorism being incorporated into social provision and political programmes, from funding streams for civil society to anti-domestic violence strategies.¹⁰⁵ Programmes under the banner of 'Countering Violent Extremism', for example Britain's 'Prevent' strategy, have conscripted vast swathes of the public into 'counter-terror' work by demanding they identify 'extremists'. It is through this that national security policies have trickled down to domestic politics: what began as strategies ostensibly to police the 'fringes' of British society have poisoned the heart of political life.

In this way, national security has increasingly become the means through which politics are managed, filtered and controlled: acting as a buffer against democratic politics from below, and serving as justification for an expanding array of powers from above. Alongside this, it has allowed for the consolidation of shadowy 'securocrats' at the very centre of state power, with an array of thinktanks, lobbies and agencies clustered around the hallways of the powerful.

Political Economy of securitisation

Over the last decade, counter-terrorism policies have increasingly moved into the realm of private industry and public-private collaboration, with counter-terrorism work being outsourced to third-party actors alongside a ballooning array of state agencies. It is they who, through a mix of private lobbying and public advocacy, attempt to move their own agendas and secure their own material interests through the burgeoning counter-terrorism industry – in turn generating a self-reinforcing drive towards further securitisation, surveillance and profit.

FIGURE 2: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SECURITISATION



Counter-terrorism in Britain is driven by the mutually reinforcing relationship between organs and processes of securitisation policy and legislation, politics, profiteers, and practitioners.

Policy and legislation include the architecture and policy framework in which counter-terrorism is practised and produced. Practitioners are the various departments managing and overseeing the implementation of policy – including police and intelligence agencies. Politics involves the evolving set of forces shaping national and transnational politics, while profiteers include the various operators that provide – sell – goods and services and for the purposes of counter-terrorism.

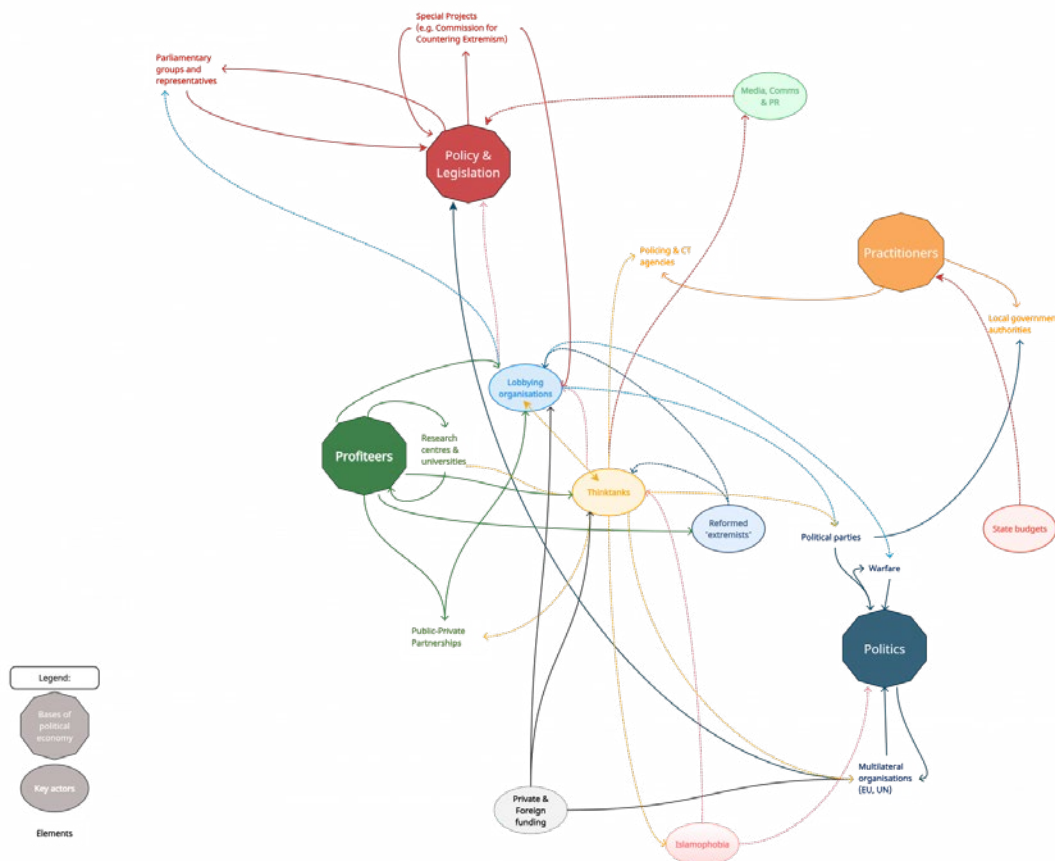
These are mediated by a range of ‘nodes’ such as the media, communications and public relations (PR), lobby organisations and thinktanks, and various sources of funding – all of which are central to amplifying and reproducing securitisation discursively, ideologically and institutionally.

A range of other actors – from academic research clusters, policy advisory bodies to far-right pressure groups – are embedded within this web of relationships, generating their own pressure on the organs of securitisation, or being pressured by them in turn.

Some of these relationships include more ‘traditional’ forms of lobbying and patronage politics, as practised by thinktanks and lobby organisations. Others, such as the expanding footprint of tech and social media companies, reflect more plainly profit-driven motives.

The turn towards public-private collaboration for counter-terrorism purposes since 2010 – particularly in the context of tackling ‘terrorism’ and ‘extremism’ online – has facilitated the penetration of tech companies and start-ups into the security field. Major players include the ‘counter-extremism’ enterprise Institute for Strategic Dialogue, which has partnerships with governments in no fewer than ten countries including Britain, and has collaborated closely with major social media companies like Facebook, Twitter and Google.¹⁰⁶

FIGURE 3 POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THINKTANKS AND LOBBIES



The Henry Jackson Society (HJS) is one example of the coterie of pro-securitisation thinktanks. Set up in 2005, its political council has featured luminaries such as past and present British Home Secretaries Amber Rudd and Priti Patel, alongside a number of former Labour Secretaries of State, including Margaret Beckett and Ben Bradshaw.¹⁰⁷ Undergoing an ideological lurch to the right towards the end of the 2000s, it was able to consolidate various tendencies of neoconservatism, militarism, virulent Islamophobia and aggressive Zionism and convert them into policies and proposals for the new Conservative governments of the decade.

Staff have regularly passed through the HJS as part of the revolving door between various pro-security organisations and political advocacy work, while senior members have been placed in high-ranking positions over the past decade. Former HJS director William Shawcross served as head of the Charity Commission between 2012 and 2018 – during which time it oversaw an unprecedented crackdown on Muslim and pro-Palestine advocacy,¹⁰⁸ and made interventions in favour of curtailing the powers of the charity sector. He has most recently been appointed to oversee an ‘independent’ government review of the Prevent programme.

Moreover, the head of the Extremism Analysis Unit, one of the state’s counter-terror departments, disclosed that analysis provided by the HJS and its side-project, Student Rights, shaped analyses that the Unit provided to counter-terror practitioners in order to inform their own work.¹⁰⁹ Groups like the HJS form part of the regular inside-track of media coverage and ‘expertise’ on issues of national security.

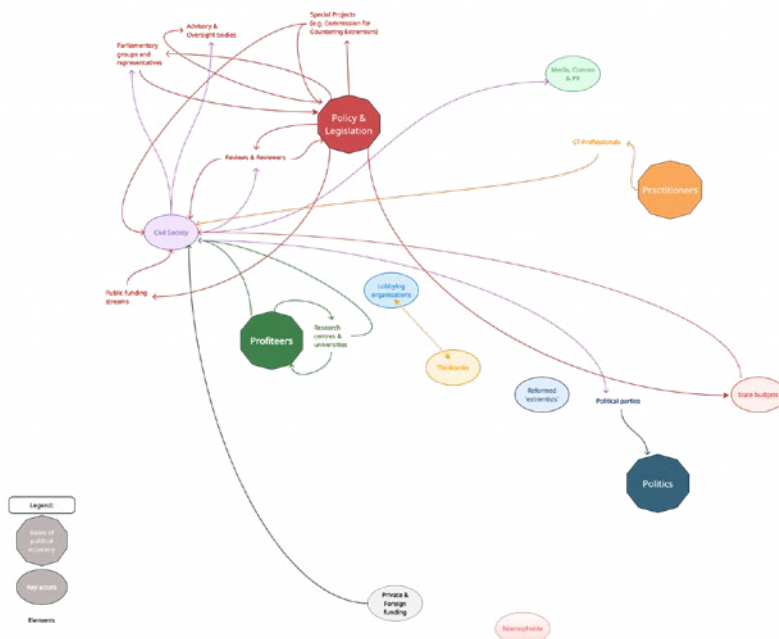
It is through these dynamics and relationships that the ideological underpinnings of the counter-terror complex – namely, Islamophobia and xenophobia – are made material. They are laundered through media and state apparatus and made to seem like ‘common sense’, consolidated through the legal frameworks governing them, and enforced by statutory institutions, presided over by the likes of HJS alumni.

Civil Society

‘Civil Society’ occupies an exaggerated role in the imaginary of ‘progressive’ politics. With the state’s transformation under neoliberalism, civil society has regularly been held up as the engine of social change in place of the state.

While some organisations and advocacy groups have certainly played an important role in limiting the excesses of the British counter-terrorism complex over the past 20 years, others have helped advance securitised and repressive state counter-terrorism policies.

FIGURE 4 POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CIVIL SOCIETY



This should be of no surprise, since far from being insulated from the vagaries of private or corporate power, or of 'formal' politics, civil society can just as easily be a conduit for them.

Even among those actively engaged with counter-terrorism, there are various degrees of complicity between civil society organisations (CSOs)– defined here as including charities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community associations and grassroots groups and networks – and the counter-terrorism regime. These range from dependency to patronage to active support for counter-terror policy.

These are shaped both by the political disposition of particular organisations, as well as by the shifting mode of engagement between government and civil society since 2000. This shift has been particularly noticeable in the case of Muslim-led organisations, but has gradually come to define most state–civil society relations.

The Labour governments of the 2000s pursued a twin strategy of courting so-called 'moderate' Muslim organisations while isolating 'extremist' ones. This allowed them to co-opt and contain Muslim communities' political engagement, and channel it into 'safe' forms of civic and spiritual engagement while tempering the thorny questions regarding British foreign policy. The Conservative-led Coalition government from 2010 took a harder line on the terms of engagement with Muslim organisations, vocally denouncing former collaborators – who were to be frozen out of future consultations, joining the fate of their 'extremist' counterparts.¹¹⁰ In doing so it subordinated them to a more tightly defined political project, and was even less tolerant of ideological difference than its predecessor.

The shifts in policy from 2010 onwards coincided with the onset of austerity and intensified neoliberal restructuring under the Coalition government. It also saw moves towards greater state management of the 'third sector' of civil society, with 'gagging laws' restricting charity campaigning near election periods, and the growing politicisation of the state's charity regulator – including by recruiting it explicitly into the work of 'countering extremism'.

These three processes worked in tandem, with the denial of funding under austerity generating a new dynamic of dependency between CSOs and government which was ripe for political abuse, alongside a drive to ideologically discipline organisations, and expanding powers of sanction to keep them in line.¹¹¹

In 2015, the new Conservative government produced its first Counter Extremism Strategy followed by an Integrated Communities strategy, which placed greater emphasis on the role of civil society in the work of 'countering extremism'. It is through these that the government has begun on the active construction of a 'civil society' that is in tune with its aims.

As a result, even CSOs that otherwise share little in common with the agenda of 'counter-terrorism' have found themselves compelled into taking counter-terrorism funding in order to continue their work. Those CSOs that maintain a critical line on 'counter-terrorism' are frequently the target of innuendo-filled smears and attacks of being 'extremist' themselves.

The cumulative impact is that civil society is being progressively absorbed into the machinations of the security state, and is less able to act as a defence against state abuse and overreach.

Counter-securitisation strategies

Counter-terror policies cannot be decoupled from the issue of policing because they are a weathervane for its eventual trajectory: in Britain, counter-terrorism forms part of the long historical arc of state violence that is entwined with migration control and policing.

Tackling the counter-terror complex necessarily means taking on consolidated power blocs, well-monied interest groups, and a state able and willing to exercise all manner of coercive instruments in its defence – not least, counter-terror policy itself.

Reframing the struggle against ‘counter-terrorism’ as part and parcel of the wider struggle against state violence requires a reconsideration of strategies, including the tactical repertoire and political programme of anti-securitisation campaigns.

Tactical repertoire

The tactical arsenal of counter-securitisation organising has often hinged on legislative demands, resting on a mix of media-intensive advocacy campaigns, the defence of legal rights and agitation for greater transparency/oversight through reviews and inquiries.

These have at times amounted to important interventions – certainly enough to provoke the ire of the Conservative Johnson government, now seeking to curtail legal rights – but the lesson of the last 20 years of counter-terrorism underscores the relative impotence of this as an overall strategy in the face of an expanding security state.

Rights-based organising seeks recourse from institutions of the state to adjudicate over violence that is, in the final instance, produced by the state. Despite crucial individual campaign wins, legal rights by design cannot ultimately be the main means to transcend the matrix of domination that characterises the relationship between the security state and its population.

Furthermore, such campaigns often require choosing politically uncomplicated cases of ‘good citizens’ as the subjects of advocacy in order to elicit public sympathy. In doing so, they often inadvertently mirror the state strategy of differentiating between ‘worthy’ and ‘unworthy’ subjects, who under national security powers are made vulnerable to all manner of exclusion and coercion, like Hilal al-Jedda.

Recovering solidarity in an age of national security – particularly with those deemed supposedly beyond the pale of support – is a vital, and difficult, component of any campaign against securitisation that seeks to build a political base that can advance popular sovereignty.

Mapping out the political economy of counter-terrorism can help demystify the relations, institutions and circuits through which counter-terrorism policy is produced. It can also help draw us away from disempowering and over-determinist notions of counter-terrorism policy as being driven by unstoppable laws of nature, and throws light onto where effective organising efforts can be directed.

Taking lessons from the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel is useful in illustrating how to build popular pressure through campaigns that disrupt the networks of power, private actors and influence that shape such issues.

Private companies seeking to profit from securitisation should be subjected to mass public pressure; CSOs buying-in to 'counter-extremism' work should robustly confronted: the aim should be to confront and repel the encroachment of counter-terrorism into all areas of social life.

Political programme

Perhaps the single biggest limitation of traditional civil society, NGO-based and legalistic organising is that, in being forced to guard against a barrage of attacks, it can only offer an endless defence of the present, and is unable to articulate a political vision for the future.

In developing struggles against the security state, our political programmes should not just reactively oppose individual laws but also advance a vision for a post-security society, similar to the approach taken by abolitionist campaigns.

It is a symptom of deep political decay that 'counter-terror' and 'national security' policies have gradually come to fill the space in British politics vacated by democratic and social welfare programmes, however partial and inadequate they were. Social problems are being addressed as security issues, and the projection of political force has prevailed over any semblance of popular sovereignty. The conscription of vast swathes of the public into 'counter-terror' work – for example through the Prevent surveillance programme¹¹² – has also 'socialised' national security.

The atmosphere of mutual suspicion that this generates serves as the cultural project of this instability, replacing the sense of collectivism of earlier generations, and going even further than the cult of individualism fostered under neoliberalism. This is the antithesis of the solidarity that is needed to build an emancipatory political project, and must be overcome through the course of struggle.

There have been recent attempts to develop a wide-ranging agenda that goes beyond simple opposition to counter-terrorism policies, including the reports *Leaving the War on Terror A Progressive Alternative to Counter-Terrorism Policy*¹¹³ by Ruth Blakeley, Ben Hayes, Nisha Kapoor and colleagues, and *Beyond PREVENT: A Real Alternative To Securitised Policies*¹¹⁴ by CAGE. Further efforts to build and expand on such programmes are very much needed and welcome.

It is only through doing so that we can resolve the congealed mass of political contradictions that the counter-terrorism complex seeks to silence and criminalise: the real issue of widespread disaffection, disenfranchisement; the ruinous nature of capitalism, and the devastation wreaked by imperialism.

Challenging the security state must be an exercise in world-making, and a curative to the distress that characterises the one in which we now live.

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Notes

- 84 The author believes that the constellation of terms surrounding counter-terrorism - including 'terrorism', 'extremism', 'radicalisation' and 'national security' – are politicised, often deeply racialised and only serve to legitimise the exercise of state power. They are used in this piece critically – hence the quotation marks.
- 85 Reuter, 2020. Minneapolis City Council resolves to replace police with community-led model. [online] Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-minneapolis-police-protests-reform-idUSKBN23J2W5>
- 86 CAGE. 2015. Exclusive interview with Umm Ahmed: the true face of counter terrorism. [online] Available at <https://www.cage.ngo/exclusive-interview-umm-ahmed-true-face-counter-terrorism>
- 87 See Counter-terrorism Act 2008 Part 4 s.56A for potentially unlimited entry and searches of home for individuals under post-custodial notification requirements. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/28/contents>; Swinford, S. (2017). Dangerous extremists locked up in Britain's first 'Jihadi jail' to stop them radicalising other inmates. The Telegraph.
- 88 Home Office News Team, 2020. Factsheet: Police Funding Settlement 2020-2. [online] Available at: <https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/22/factsheet-police-funding-settlement-2020-21>
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