



## The UK's 'Prevent' program: Creating a fascist police-state

By Richard Bardon and Allen Douglas

The government of the United Kingdom holds up its "Prevent" program as the world standard in "community-based" deradicalisation and counterterrorism. This is despite Prevent having not just missed but *wilfully ignored* known extremists and terrorists. The revelation early this year that Prevent has meanwhile been targeting anti-war groups and non-violent political activists, helps unmask it for what it really is: a draconian 1984-style surveillance program designed to quash all forms of dissent, and to foster radicalisation and *incite* terrorism as a pretext for the creation of a police state, not only in Britain but, as the UK government itself brags, in "Countries across Europe and beyond [that] have developed preventative programs inspired by the Prevent model."<sup>1</sup>

Briefly grabbing headlines at the time, but soon lost amongst coverage of the COVID-19 crisis, in mid-January a "Counter-Terrorism Policing" document was leaked to media which listed groups to be watched for signs of "extremism" under Prevent. As reported 17 January by socialist newspaper *Morning Star*, "The left-wing and environmental groups listed include the Communist Party of Britain (CPB), Stop the War, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT), Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), Extinction Rebellion (XR) and Greenpeace." The Stop the War Coalition (StWC)—founded in September 2001 by anti-war politicians including Labour's Jeremy Corbyn (who was its chairman in 2011-15) in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA, to oppose the rush towards what became the so-called Global War On Terror—said in a statement the following day, "Stop the War's totally groundless inclusion alongside violent neo-Nazi organisations for example reinforces the concern we have long expressed about the Prevent initiative that it would be used more widely against groups critical of government policy. We will be taking urgent steps to ensure the removal of all reference to [StWC] and other progressive organisations from this and other Prevent and anti-terrorism documents."

It is of course unacceptable that StWC is included on the Home Office's "counter-terror" list; but its focus on merely having itself and other "progressive" groups removed from that list misses the point. Prevent was created by the UK's intelligence services and the Blair Labour government in early 2003 in the full knowledge that the illegal invasion of Iraq, which they had been preparing for many months and were then in the process of launching,<sup>2</sup> would both spark mass anti-war protests and "radicalise" various sectors of the British public, the Muslim



Sir David Omand GCB (l.) founded Prevent in 2003. Sir Charles Farr CMG, OBE (r.), "the man most closely associated with 'Big Brother Britain'", oversaw its expansion in 2007-15. Photos: Chatham House; screenshot

community in particular. With Prevent now under official review after more than a decade of increasingly damning criticism, including in multiple reviews by UN Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights, the time is ripe for the whole apparatus to be exposed as the fraud it is, and dismantled.

### GCHQ/MI5/MI6's 'CONTEST'

Prevent was founded in secret under Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair as one of "four P's" (the others being Pursue, Protect and Prepare), or "strands", of the government's Counter-Terrorism Strategy, or "CONTEST" as it abbreviated, whose existence was not made public until over three years later. CONTEST was the brainchild of Sir David Omand,<sup>3</sup> the UK's first Security and Intelligence Coordinator in the Cabinet Office in 2002-05 and a former director (in 1996-97) of the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), the UK's mammoth electronic spying agency. Before that he was Deputy Undersecretary of State Policy at the Ministry of Defence, in which capacity he helped gin up support for NATO's intervention in the Bosnian War which culminated in the illegal bombing of Serbia in 1995. In a 2015 [interview](#) for *Strife*, the publication of the Department of War Studies at King's College, London where he is a visiting professor, Omand called this a "defining experience" of his career. For his services to militarism abroad and mass surveillance at home, in 2004 the queen invested Omand a Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath, the highest honour to which a British civil servant can aspire.

At the beginning of 2007 responsibility for CONTEST was transferred from Cabinet to a new organisation within the Home Office, the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT). Its architect and inaugural director, Sir Charles Blandford Farr CMG, OBE, was another key figure in Britain's metamorphosis into a police state. A career Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) spook since the mid-1980s, Farr was described in the 22 April 2012 London *Times* as "Whitehall's most important and influential spy, the man most closely associated with 'Big Brother Britain'", and was credited with being personally responsible for the 2012 Draft Communications Data Bill—the original "Snoopers' Charter"—which proposed to authorise GCHQ to monitor the communications of everyone in Britain. According to the *Times* he also "personally oversaw the introduction of the coalition's rebranded regime

1. "Factsheet: Prevent and Channel", Home Office, 5 Nov. 2019.

2. The infamous "[Downing Street memo](#)", written 23 July 2002 by PM Tony Blair's private secretary Matthew Rycroft and leaked to the press in May 2005, proves conclusively that the Blair cabinet knew there was no legal basis upon which to invade Iraq, but that it and its allies in the USA's George W. Bush Administration were determined to proceed regardless. In 2015-18 Rycroft was UK ambassador to the UN, where he was a key figure in the Anglo-American regime-change war on Syria. On 23 March 2020 he became Permanent Secretary of the Home Office, the department responsible for Prevent.

3. See "[Eroding Trust: The UK's Prevent Counter-Extremism Strategy in Health and Education](#)", Open Society Justice Initiative, Oct. 2016.



GCHQ's headquarters, a.k.a. "The Doughnut", in Cheltenham, England. US National Security Agency (NSA) whistleblower Edward Snowden proved in 2013 that GCHQ can and does monitor all UK phone and internet traffic; and former NSA Technical Director William Binney testified to the UK Parliament in 2016 that GCHQ unquestionably had the capacity to monitor all 3,000-odd individuals on MI5's watchlist in real time. Between this and MI5's own surveillance, it is not possible that so many known extremists could simply "slip through the net". Photo: Wikipedia

of control orders to detain terror suspects without charge". Farr continued as director of the OSCT until November 2015, after which he was chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) in the Cabinet Office, the UK's peak inter-agency intelligence coordination and oversight body, until his death in February 2019. Soon after its transfer to the OSCT, Prevent was expanded markedly in the wake of the 7 July 2005 ("7/7") suicide bombings in London, as it would be after each home-grown terrorist attack in which it failed to live up to its name despite the perpetrators having been referred to the program and/or already well known to the Security Service (MI5) and police. In his authoritative 2006 exposé *The London Bombings: An Independent Inquiry*, Dr Nafeez Ahmed, an investigative journalist, international security scholar, and official contributor to the US 9/11 Commission and Britain's 7/7 Coroner's Inquest, described 7/7 mastermind Haroon Rashid Aswat as "a 'double agent' working for MI6 as an informant on al-Qaeda operations, while still being an active al-Qaeda operative".

The most dramatic expansion of Prevent, spurred by the 2013 murder of British Army soldier Lee Rigby in south-east London, came with the passage of the *Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (CTS Act)* in February 2015, which for the first time imposed a statutory "Prevent duty" on all workers in the UK public sector to "have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism". As British independent journalist Dan Glazebrook has reported, in December 2013 it emerged that one of Rigby's killers, Michael Adebolajo, had been on the radar of both MI5 and MI6 for over 10 years; was known to have been in contact with senior al-Qaeda leaders; and had been targeted by MI5 for recruitment "just a few weeks before Rigby's murder". As Dr Ahmed explained when the *CTS Act* was passed,<sup>4</sup> the "Prevent duty" mandates professionals such as teachers, university lecturers, and even nurses and doctors to "prevent extremism in their institutions ... by monitoring nursery children, school children, students, patients, and so on for signs of being at risk to radicalisation". Any individual "identified as extreme, or being 'at risk' of extremism" (emphasis added) is referred to

4. "Preventing dissent: Britain's new police state will radicalise us all", *Insurge Intelligence*, 14 Feb. 2015.

"Channel", the wing of Prevent that designs and implements its active intervention programs, for further assessment. Any public-sector worker who does not report to Prevent someone who later gets into trouble, may be prosecuted, sacked, or subject to other sanctions.

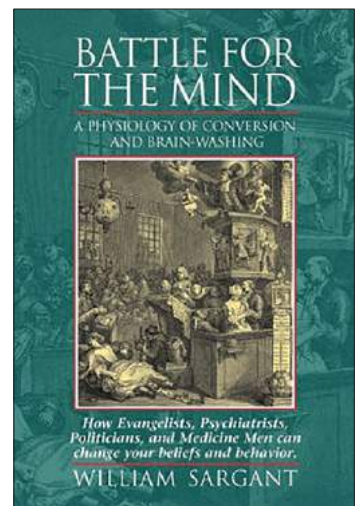
Already in 2011, Ahmed recalled, the UK government had changed its Prevent strategy "to focus not just on terrorism, but 'also non-violent extremism, which can create an atmosphere conducive to terrorism and can popularise views which terrorists exploit'." But its overly broad definition of extremism as "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", he pointed out, "could include a range of views held widely across British society, categorised as ideas that 'terrorists exploit' (especially scepticism towards British foreign policy)", and had for that reason been criticised by then-Greater Manchester Police chief Sir Peter Fahy as being "so vague it had turned police into 'thought police'". Former London Metropolitan Police and British Army counterterrorism intelligence officer Charles Shoebridge forecast, correctly, that it would likely lead to "workers erring on the side of caution and submitting reports on any adult or child expressing views not only that the worker himself considers 'extreme', but also that he considers anyone else might consider 'extreme' too. This could therefore conceivably include almost any expression of opinion not considered mainstream ... [in relation to] almost any aspect of political or religious discourse." The only UK public-sector agencies exempt from the Prevent duty are *MI5 and MI6 themselves*—because, in the words of former senior London police officer Des Thomas, who was deputy head of Scotland Yard's Criminal Investigation Department (CID), such an exemption is a "get out of jail card" for MI5 and MI6 handlers whose "informants" inside terrorist groups have "managed to perpetrate a 7/7 [style] atrocity".

### Tavistock's central role

At the centre of the design and implementation of Prevent for at least the last decade has been the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, which specialises in amplifying the trauma of such atrocities to induce a "paradigm shift" at a societal level.

Tavistock bills itself as a benign "independent, multi-disciplinary social science institute", and claims to have been established in 1947. By that name, perhaps; but in truth it has been the premier psychological warfare unit of the British Crown since its foundation as the Tavistock

Tavistock psychiatrist Dr William Sargant's 1957 book on brainwashing. He wrote: "Various types of belief can be implanted in many people, after brain function has been sufficiently disturbed by accidentally or deliberately induced fear, anger or excitement. Of the results caused by such disturbances, the most common one is temporarily impaired judgment and heightened suggestibility. Its various group manifestations are sometimes classed under the heading of 'herd instinct', and appear most spectacularly in wartime, during severe epidemics, and in all similar periods of common danger, which increase anxiety and so individual suggestibility"



Clinic in 1920, to further the study of “shell shock” and related neuroses caused by the trauma of World War I. The basis of Tavistock’s methods, as laid out in the 1957 book *Battle for the Mind: A physiology of conversion and brain-washing* by Dr William Sargant, a pioneer in the study of shell shock, is that extreme stress and fear can be used to artificially create neurotic states of mind, which may be programmed as desired. Tavistock’s “theory of turbulence”, which holds that whole societies may be driven into a similar state by repeated terrorist shocks, was confirmed in experiments by MI6 and the Special Air Service (SAS) during their 1950s “counter-insurgency” operations in Malaya and Kenya. And where no suitable terrorists arise organically, Tavistock has also developed the methods needed to *manufacture* them, by creating damaged personalities via physical and psychological torture who can then be shaped into programmed killers akin to so-called “Manchurian candidates”—no mere pop-culture cliché, but in fact based on the most sinister elements of the Tavistock/US Central Intelligence Agency-run Project MK Ultra “mind-control” program of the 1960s. The classic example of such a programmed assassin is Martin Bryant, who killed 35 people in Port Arthur, Tasmania on 28-29 April 1996 in Australia’s worst ever mass shooting. A joint investigation in 1996-97 by the Citizens Party (then Citizens Electoral Council) and the US-based *Executive Intelligence Review* magazine<sup>5</sup> revealed that Bryant’s psychiatric treatment since early childhood had been personally overseen by top Tavistock psychiatrist Dr Eric Cunningham Dax, a close associate of Sargant’s who had moved to Australia in 1952.

Tavistock states in the introduction of its July 2018 manual *Prevent Delivery: A Guide for Effective Practice* that it has been engaged in extensive “applied research and evaluation ... in the area of Preventing Violent Extremism (Prevent) on a national and local level since 2009”. Commissioned by the OSCT, the guide is aimed at all those “interested in delivering projects with a Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) focus, or who may already be doing so”. A slew of papers and articles on Tavistock’s website, with titles such as “Evaluating PREVENT Projects and Programmes: Guidelines for Local Authorities and their Partners” (2009); “Developing guidance and training on evaluating ‘PREVENT’” (2010); and “A Peer Review of the Prevent Programme” (2011), make clear that Tavistock has literally written the book on Prevent for every layer of the UK’s government and public institutions.

### Case studies in ‘deradicalisation’: Prevent’s terrorists

As noted above, and documented in detail in the Citizens Party’s June 2017 pamphlet *Stop MI5/MI6-run terrorism!*, the common thread that runs through the series of terror attacks in the UK since 7/7 is that each of the perpetrators was well known to MI5 and MI6, and in many cases were *actual agents of one or both intelligence services*. Moreover, several of these terrorists had become known to MI5 because they had *been referred to the OSCT via Prevent*; some had taken part in deradicalisation programs through Prevent’s “Channel” subset; and some were the subjects of active investigations and even *under surveillance by MI5* when they committed their atrocities.

**Salman Abedi**, the Manchester-born terrorist of Libyan descent who killed 22 people in his 22 May 2017 suicide bombing at Manchester Arena, *had been*

*repeatedly referred to Prevent over more than five years*. As the 26 May 2017 London *Telegraph* reported, one community leader had reported Abedi in 2015 “because he thought he was involved in extremism and terrorism”, while two of Abedi’s friends separately telephoned the police counter-terrorism hotline in 2012 and again in 2016 because they “were worried that ‘he was supporting terrorism’ and had expressed the view that ‘being a suicide bomber was ok’”. Abedi had also been banned from south Manchester’s Didsbury Mosque “after he had confronted the Imam who was delivering an anti-extremist sermon”, for which he was reported to Prevent yet again. When Abedi was identified as the Manchester bomber, the authorities claimed that whilst he had long been known to MI5, he was only a “former subject of interest”. It soon emerged however that not only Salman Abedi but his father Ramadan and younger brother Hashem—who on 17 March this year was convicted of having helped plan the Manchester Arena attack and build the bomb—were members of a proscribed terrorist gang called the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). The 30 July 2018 *Daily Mail* revealed that both Ramadan and Salman Abedi, along with an untold number of other Manchester-based Libyan exiles, had fought with the LIFG in NATO’s 2011 regime-change “revolution” in which Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi was deposed and murdered. The *Mail* also revealed that in 2014 the Abedi brothers were among 110 British citizens rescued from Libya by the Royal Navy, having once again travelled there with MI6’s blessing.



Salman Abedi. Photo: Greater Manchester Police

**Khuram Butt**, ringleader of the 3 June 2017 vehicular and stabbing attack on London Bridge, was well known to MI5, having been “the principal subject of an MI5 priority investigation for almost two years” at the time of his attack, according to David Anderson QC’s December 2017 “independent assessment” of counterterrorism procedures. A member of al-Muhajiroun, the outlawed extremist group responsible for 7/7 (but which had operated freely in Britain under the “covenant of security”<sup>6</sup> with MI5 until that attack), Butt had appeared alongside the group’s infamous leader Anjem Choudary in



Khuram Butt. Photo: Screenshot

6. The “covenant of security” was an arrangement by which various “Islamic” terrorist groups were allowed to operate freely from Britain so long as they conducted no attacks there. As the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) summarised the covenant in a 25 July 2005 Briefing Paper titled “Security, Terrorism and the UK”: “By the mid-1990s the UK’s intelligence agencies and the police were well aware that London was increasingly being used as a base by individuals involved in promoting, funding and planning terrorism in the Middle East and elsewhere. However, these individuals were not viewed as a threat to the UK’s national security, and so they were left to continue their activities with relative impunity”. The practice was so notorious that Britain became known as “Londonistan”, and more than a dozen governments protested to British authorities about it, to no avail. This was no mere opportunism on Britain’s part, however: As the Citizens Party has documented, the network of mosques through which Choudary, al-Qaeda recruiter Abu Hamza al-Masri and others were allowed to operate from the 1980s onward was financed and staffed with extremist clerics by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, through a program sponsored by Prince Charles, who also happens to be the royal patron of all three intelligence agencies. The covenant was formally rescinded after 7/7, but continues in practice, as the Abedi case illustrates.

5. A. Douglas and M. Sharp, “Mass Murder in Australia: Tavistock’s Martin Bryant”, *Executive Intelligence Review*, 16 May 1997.

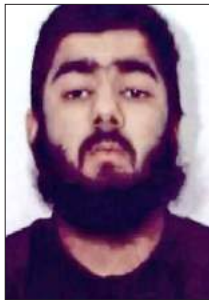
a January 2016 TV documentary called *The Jihadis Next Door*. The 28 May 2019 *Guardian*, citing testimony to the London Bridge inquest from the Acting Detective Chief Inspector of the Metropolitan Police's counter-terrorism command, reported that in September 2015 Butt's own brother-in-law had reported him to an "anti-terrorism hotline"—i.e. to Prevent—after he defended ISIS for burning a captured Jordanian pilot alive on video.<sup>7</sup> And the plot thickens further given the revelation in the 6 June 2017 *Times* that Saad Butt, Khuram's older brother, had "received funding from police as part of his involvement in the Prevent program" for an unspecified period beginning in 2009, at the same time that Khuram "was on a radicalisation path that would lead to the worst atrocity in London in more than a decade". The 18 February 2018 *Sunday Times* revealed that Butt "was under surveillance on the night of the atrocity", and that MI5 officers had looked on as Butt and his two accomplices loaded their hired van, including with 14 plastic jerry cans reportedly rigged as petrol bombs, and done nothing.

**Ahmed Hassan**, the then 18-year-old who exploded a homemade firebomb on a train at Parsons Green station in London on 15 September 2017, was referred to Prevent almost immediately upon his arrival in the UK from Iraq as an orphaned refugee two years earlier by the immigration officials who processed his asylum application, after he told them he had been "groomed by ISIS and 'trained to kill'", the 24 January 2019 *Financial Times* reported. Yahoo News had reported in September 2017 that the Surrey County Council (which was responsible for his foster care) had reported him again to Prevent just months before the bombing, and referred him to Channel, the most intensive wing of Prevent; and later still, according to the *FT*, "[Hassan's] foster carers reported that he was going missing, but this was not considered noteworthy by the police who were reporting to Channel." Even the generally pathetic House of Commons Intelligence and Security Committee felt compelled to complain in a 2011 review of Prevent: "The litany of errors that resulted in Hassan's attack-planning passing unnoticed, despite his participation in the Channel program, highlights deep-rooted issues in the Prevent strand of counter-terrorism strategy." It also denounced the Home Office's response to its queries as "weak, lacking in clarity and unacceptable in light of the seriousness of the failings".

The latest Prevent alumnus to slip the net was **Usman Khan**, another Choudary disciple, who stabbed two people to death and injured three more on 29 November 2019 near London Bridge. Convicted in 2012 of a large-scale bombing plot, Khan's early release from prison was made mandatory by a change to sentencing laws; but the lax parole conditions that allowed him to commit his attack, he secured by participating in a post-release rehabilitation/deradicalisation scheme called the Disturbance and Disengagement Program (DDP), which the 30 November 2019 *Telegraph* reported was "launched in



Ahmed Hassan. Photo: London Metropolitan Police



Usman Khan. Photo: London Metropolitan Police



A floral tribute to the victims of the 22 May 2017 Manchester Arena bombing. RICU pre-designs such emotionally satisfying but politically impotent displays of grief and solidarity to divert public anger from the authorities' failure to prevent attacks. Photo: AFP/Jon Super

2016 as an arm of Prevent, [and] is also used for jihadists returning from conflict zones". The authorities claim to have been fooled by a long-term pretence on Khan's part of having abandoned extremism; however the 4 December 2019 *Telegraph* reported that in fact he was "upgraded to a 'high-risk' category A prisoner ... [after he] put staff in danger" during a number of violent incidents early in his jail term. The classification is reserved for the most dangerous offenders, requiring a constant watch and an armed police escort when moved from prison. *Khan retained this rating at the time he was paroled*; and according to the Ministry of Justice, the police and probation officers responsible for supervising him should have received a full report, including that he was thought likely to commit further acts of terrorism given the chance. Yet he was allowed to travel unsupervised to London.

### RICU and 'mind control'

Nasty enough in its own right, Prevent has also given birth to the perhaps even more insidious Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU), which is also run from the OSTC. "RICU officials dislike the word propaganda: they prefer the term strategic communications", investigative journalists Ian Cobain, Rob Evans and Mona Mahmood reported 3 May 2016 in the *Guardian*, but propaganda is what it does. Established by Charles Farr shortly after CONTEST was moved to the OSCT, in its early years RICU's job, as Farr described a House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee hearing in February 2009, was twofold: to advise government and officialdom, including the police and military, "about how they may wish to characterise the threat we face and describe the response that we are making"; and to "[challenge] propaganda ... from al-Qaeda and associated groups".

In pursuit of the latter, Cobain et al. reported, RICU "hired linguists, psychologists and anthropologists as well as counter-terrorism strategists, digital media experts, filmmakers and marketing consultants. It has three divisions: a monitoring and coordination team to watch and study digital and traditional media; an insight and analysis team to research audience reactions; and a domestic and international campaigns team to deliver the covert propaganda." Much of the domestic propagandising was outsourced to a London-based firm called Breakthrough Media (later rebranded as the Zinc Network), which produced "masses of digital material—films, Twitter feeds, Facebook profiles, YouTube clips, online radio content and websites", targeted almost exclusively at the Muslim community, "to

7. "Red flags raised at London Bridge inquest: Was terrorist ringleader an agent of MI5?", *AAS*, 5 June 2019.

help the British government ‘promote a reconciled British Muslim identity’ while keeping its involvement hidden”—thereby avoiding the inevitable and justified outrage that the UK government had set itself up as the arbiter of who is and is not a “good” Muslim.

Were that not bad enough, Cobain revealed in a 22 May 2019 [article](#) for Middle East Eye that RICU had expanded its role into the “Prepare” strand of CONTEST, and was running Tavistockian covert propaganda campaigns and social-engineering programs to *orchestrate public reactions to terrorist incidents before they happen*, in order to divert anger from the authorities who unaccountably let all the terrorists slip through the net. “Hashtags are carefully tested before attacks happen, Instagram images selected, and ‘impromptu’ street posters are printed”, wrote Cobain. “In operations that contingency planners term ‘controlled spontaneity’, politicians’ statements, vigils and inter-faith events are also negotiated and planned in readiness for any terrorist attack.” These campaigns, he wrote, had been deployed “during every UK terrorist incident in recent years”. A senior contingency planner involved in the project described RICU’s methods frankly to Cobain as “an attempt at ‘mind control’.” Cobain reported separately that as of May 2019 RICU was conducting similar operations throughout the EU via the European Commission’s Terrorism and Radicalisation Unit (notably in France), and in Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Kenya, Lebanon, Jordan, Pakistan, Finland, Bangladesh and Indonesia, among others. Melbourne University researcher Shakira Hussein reported in the 9-15 June 2018 *Saturday Paper* that RICU front Breakthrough/Zinc is also active in Australia, running covert propaganda campaigns—again targeted mainly at Muslims—for the Department of Home Affairs.

### Outrage against Prevent—including from the UN

Virtually nobody in the UK who has had anything to do with Prevent does not either hate or fear it, and it is not hard to see why. An open letter published by the *Guardian* on 11 February 2016, signed by 380 academics, Muslim community activists, lawyers, politicians and others laid out the impact of the *CTS Act* and its “Prevent duty” in the year since its introduction. “[It] is undermining the very ethos and relationships of mutual trust and openness that are fundamental to education and our public services while endangering other legal rights and protections”, they wrote. “It is eroding civil liberties and deepening discrimination against Muslims. Last year the Metropolitan police reported that hate crimes against Muslims were up 70 per cent.” After noting that Prevent had even then “narrowed the space for political dissent” by targeting environmentalists, Palestinian rights campaigners and anti-austerity activists, they continued: “Prevent is not making anyone safer. ... It is the embodiment of the ‘radicalisation’ of our supposedly liberal democratic governments themselves.” The letter concluded with a call that the *CTS Act* be repealed.

That those sentiments are justified is borne out in a 2016 report by UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Maina Kiai. (This followed his earlier, January 2013 visit to the UK, and demonstrated that the sweeping violations of human rights had gotten even worse in the meantime.) “In my 2013 report”, he wrote, “I expressed concern that the definition of ‘domestic extremism’ was too



Then-UN Special Rapporteur Dr Maina Kiai (l.) sounded the alarm on Prevent in 2016. Current Special Rapporteur Fionnuala Ní Aoláin (r.) has called for the program to be scrapped. Photo: flickr/Maina Kiai; UN OHCHR

broad .... [and] I do not believe enough has been done to alleviate this concern. ... Students, activists, and members of faith-based organisations related countless anecdotes of the [Prevent] program being implemented in a way that translates simply into crude racial, ideological, cultural and religious profiling.... The spectre of Big Brother is so large, in fact, that I was informed that some families are afraid of even discussing the negative effects of terrorism in their own homes, fearing that their children would talk about it at school and have their intentions misconstrued. It appears that Prevent is having the opposite of its intended effect ... [and] could end up promoting extremism, rather than countering it.”

Instead of tightening its definition of extremism, in 2018 the Home Office widened it further—so much so that it could now mean almost anything. As Cambridge University academic Julian Hargreaves [reported](#) 18 December 2018 in *The Conversation*, “Previously, the Home Office relied on four categories of concern: ‘Islamist extremism’, ‘right-wing extremism’, ‘other extremism’ and ‘unspecified’. Now a new category has been created: ‘mixed, unstable, or unclear ideology’.” All of which led current UN Special Rapporteur Fionnuala Ní Aoláin to condemn Prevent once again in a report published 4 March this year. The negative impact of forcing teachers, social workers and medical professionals into the role of informant “cannot be overstated”, Ms Ní Aoláin said; and any program that does so is unethical, counter-productive and should be scrapped.

The statutory independent review of Prevent mandated by the February 2019 *Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act* is a chance to do exactly that. The review was supposed to report this August; however its original Chairman, Lord Alexander Carlile, was stood down in December following a legal challenge by human rights charity Rights Watch UK on the basis that he had declared his “considered and strong support” for Prevent in the past, and had been a member of a Home Office board tasked with “driving delivery” of the program, and therefore the government had failed its own code on public appointments in selecting him. Only on 27 April did the government launch a recruitment drive for a new Chair, whom it does not intend to appoint until June; and it is reportedly moving to have the reporting deadline extended by an unspecified period. Instead of merely trying to get themselves out from under, StWC and the other targeted groups would do better to campaign hard for the appointment of a truly independent reviewer who will expose Prevent’s dirty secrets without fear or favour.