

## **CREATING TERRORIST SUSPECTS: The 'War on Terror' at Home**

The 'War on Terror' promotes a racist culture of suspicion towards migrant and Muslim communities. It generates and manipulates public fears to justify a perpetual state of war.

'Terrorist suspects' are created by several means:

- by redefining terrorism in broader ways, blurring any distinction between anti-government protest and organized violence against civilians;
- by placing entire communities under suspicion of associating with such 'terrorism';
- by using 'intelligence' obtained by torturing detainees abroad;
- by waging psychological warfare through disinformation and mass-media scares about 'al Qaeda cells';
- by using anti-terror powers to detain people (especially refugees) for suspected activities which could just as well be handled under other laws.

The 'War on Terror' at home started long before the 11th September attacks. The Terrorism Act 2000 had already extended the definition of terrorism to include simply 'the threat' of 'serious damage to property', in ways 'designed to influence the government' for a 'political cause'.

Organizations could be banned on the basis that their activities in other countries fit the broadened definition of terrorism. It extended police powers to detain 'suspects' incommunicado. In effect, that law created new crimes of association. It stigmatized a wide range of legitimate political activity as 'terrorism'.

Since the Home Office banned 21 organizations under the Terrorism Act 2000, free speech has been attacked and activists have been criminalised. In 2002 campaigners for Kurdish rights were prosecuted for 'terrorist' links, e.g. on grounds that they had held placards listing several banned organizations. In reality they had been among 6000 demonstrators ridiculing the ban on various organizations, e.g. by wearing T-shirts which said 'I am the PKK' (Kurdistan Workers Party). Distributors of the Turkish-language magazine *Vatan* were harassed since 2000; in December 2002 they were arrested on grounds that they were promoting and financing a banned organization by selling the magazine.

After the 11 September attacks, the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (ATCSA) 2001 granted further powers of detention and surveillance. It even imposed duties on everyone to inform the authorities of any 'suspected terrorist' activities. Under this law, Muslim charities had their bank accounts temporarily frozen under suspicion of financing terrorism abroad.

The ATCSA 2001 also authorized the internment of non-UK citizens – in circumstances where the Home Secretary had a suspicion of 'terrorist' links but inadequate evidence for a prosecution, and where the person could not be safely returned to their own country. Under those powers, several foreign nationals were interned for an indefinite period. Internment breached the right to liberty guaranteed by Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

After a three-year protest campaign, those powers were replaced by 'control orders', which impose punishment without trial. In the name of preventing future hypothetical activities, the Home Secretary can restrict anyone's liberty of movement or association. UK citizens can now also be politically controlled in this way.

Ordinary criminal law provides more than adequate powers for the police to protect the public, but that law is not adequate for the 'war on terror'. It has anti-democratic aims, namely:

- To intimidate migrant communities, especially refugees, against taking part in political activities – and to isolate such communities.
- To deter support here for internal resistance against oppressive regimes abroad from which refugees have fled.
- To protect foreign regimes which are supported by the UK government.
- To give governments unlimited access to information on political activities.
- To help the authorities to harass or prosecute activists.
- To substitute ‘counter-terrorism’ for politics.

We are meant to distrust others as ‘terrorist suspects’ and to accept new state powers as our benign protector. Attacks on civil liberties are not simply a means but also a fundamental purpose of this ‘war on terror’. Recent legislation grants powers for a police state, at least on paper. Such powers will be implemented even more –unless we oppose them and exercise the rights which they would take away from us.

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Campaign Against Criminalising Communities (CAMPACC), [www.campacc.org.uk](http://www.campacc.org.uk)

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## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. To oppose all laws based on a pretext of counter-terrorism.
2. To campaign for the repeal of such laws: the Terrorism Act 2000, the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (ACTSA) 2001, and the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005.
3. To oppose any measures which could criminalise mere association with a political organisation, or which involve detention without charge, or restrictions on freedom of speech, association or publication.
4. To work in close association with affected communities and build the broadest possible alliance for civil liberties, human rights and universal values.
5. To demand that everyone must be treated as innocent until proven guilty, that the right of habeas corpus be restored, and that there should be no punishment without trial (e.g. ‘control orders’).
6. To defend the democratic freedom to dissent and to resist oppression, nationally and internationally.
7. To oppose crimes against humanity, regardless of who (or what government) commits them.