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## Reasserting freedom? Response to the prevent agenda by the UK coalition government

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### Abstract

In the UK the New Labour government under Tony Blair bought into the 'War on Terror' declared by George Bush Junior in 2001 the consequences for the general public was a significant loss of civil liberties that was supposedly justified by the enhanced degree of risk. In opposition the Conservatives argued that this loss was unacceptable and that on a sliding scale of freedom and security, freedom should always take priority as the fundamental political principle. In power from 2010 alongside their Liberal Democrat partners, they sought to return what had been lost, and to rebalance the scales. One of the central means of achieving this has been to increase surveillance rather than employ more direct alternatives. This essay aims to evaluate in theory and practice how effective this attempt has been. Is the UK now both safer and freer?

### Keywords

prevent, freedom, government, coalition, reasserting, uk, response, agenda

### Disciplines

Business

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# Reasserting Freedom? Response to the Prevent Agenda by the UK Coalition Government

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## Abstract

*In the UK the New Labour government under Tony Blair bought into the 'War on Terror' declared by George Bush Junior in 2001 the consequences for the general public was a significant loss of civil liberties that was supposedly justified by the enhanced degree of risk. In opposition the Conservatives argued that this loss was unacceptable and that on a sliding scale of freedom and security, freedom should always take priority as the fundamental political principle. In power from 2010 alongside their Liberal Democrat partners, they sought to return what had been lost, and to rebalance the scales. One of the central means of achieving this has been to increase surveillance rather than employ more direct alternatives. This essay aims to evaluate in theory and practice how effective this attempt has been. Is the UK now both safer and freer?*

**Keywords:** Freedom; Surveillance; Security; Terrorism.

## Introduction

From a progressive perspective the New Labour UK government did much that was worthy of criticism. However, it is perhaps surprising that the Coalition government headed by David Cameron should find common ground with critics on the left on such an important issue as the attempts New Labour made to tackle terrorism. The Prevent agenda, along with other measures introduced by New Labour, has had quite severe implications for civil liberties and rectifying this was identified by the Coalition as a policy priority. Nick Clegg, Deputy Prime Minister, signalled this in a speech in London at the start of 2011, where he said:

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If you ask people whether they are happy with the control order regime that departs very significantly from the very basic rules of British justice and has proved to be ineffective in practice as many controlees have absconded – I think everybody will say “no – clearly something is wrong. Clearly something needs to be improved” (Clegg quoted by Newman, 2011).

Hence the basis of the New Labour approach to tackling terrorism was regarded as both unjust and ineffective by the in-coming government and as such it required urgent attention.

While we would accept the dual points raised by the Coalition, averring that the measures were ill-conceived and unfit for purpose, the actions that have followed this critique have largely confirmed the distance between progressive thinking and the current UK government. On issues such as national identity and the operation of the market, the coalition is just as muddled and incoherent as the New Right governments between 1979 and 1997. Not only are they riven by neo-liberal and neo-conservative tensions but they also have to bear the weight of the ‘liberal’ conscience hidden away somewhere in the Liberal Democrat ranks. In exploring the Coalition response to the Prevent agenda we argue that it is incoherent but also in certain respects dishonest. The freedom it offers is more about perception than reality and the impact on civil liberties might be far more dangerous than even New Labour’s approach.

## The Development of the Prevent Agenda

The social and political environment during the 1980s and 1990s was a key factor in shaping the counter-terror policies of the New Labour government. The riots of the 1980s and the apparent failure of multiculturalism helped to focus the threat of terror away from the traditional domestic Irish ‘problem’, towards a more global and ill-defined Islamist insurgency. There was also an important change in the language of the community agenda from social cohesion to community cohesion. The difference may be seen by some as semantics, but it is an important distinction and marks a change in policy focus. It also reflects important changes in British ‘race’ relations. The riots of 1981, and the subsequent Scarman report, highlighted the differences between diverse ethnic communities in Britain. Central to all this was the importance of faith, especially Islam, in creating difference. Muslim culture became ‘problematised’ largely by the media in response to events like 9/11 (Hussain & Bagguley, 2005; Bagguley & Hussain, 2008).

Solomos (2003) talks about the post Scarman era and the ‘enemy within’, referring to the rioters as a deviant element in society. The priority for government in the 1980s shifted from addressing ‘racial’ disadvantage to maintaining civil order and security. Even though the Scarman report clearly flagged up the need to tackle inequality between different groups it was difficult for the Thatcher government with its New Right, small government agenda to respond in an effective manner by, for example, introducing worthwhile programs to counter violent extremism. This would have required decisive intervention to tackle ‘racial’ disadvantage, running counter to the policy of reducing state interference in society, and therefore was never going to be part of a serious policy shift for Thatcher’s government. We can see clear similarities between the discourse of that period with the debates currently taking place following the riots of 2001 and more recently of August 2011.

The official account of the roots of the riots of the 1980s became firmly located in a neoliberal, authoritarian world view. ‘Race’ riots were not symptomatic of disadvantage and injustice, but were the actions of deviant outsiders – ‘the enemy within’. This set the stage for the responses to terrorist threats from Al-Qaeda and other militant Islamic groups. According to Jessop et al. (1988) this notion of a dualism in society started to emerge in the 1980s, of the law abiding national citizen versus the disenfranchised, non-productive parasite. Writers such as John Lea have illustrated the lineage of such ideas, for example, the way in which policing was refocused to control ‘the dangerous classes’ of which minority ethnic groups were a key component (Lea, 2000). We clearly see from the public responses of David Cameron to the August 2011 riots, that

this is still the abiding view in the current government. The 1990s then became characterised by the protection of British national identity and the growth of Islamophobia, and demonization of the Muslim population. One of the key events of recent years was that of 9/11 and the destruction of the twin towers, this set in train the so called 'War on Terror'. The effect of this 'War on Terror' and the subsequent rhetoric was that it cast Western powers as international law enforcers and all non-western powers/states as potential criminals. Some commentators would also argue that the 'War on Terror' was actually a vehicle for the neo-Conservatives to usher in the New American Century (Roy, 2004; Eagleton, 2007). This had been their objective since the 1980s and signals a return to more traditional, territorial, form of imperialism to reinforce the cultural and economic forms practised by the US in the post-war period (Janowski, 2004).

The Blair Labour Government came to power in 1997. Its much Heralded 'Third Way' agenda was always a nebulous idea based on an ill-defined 'pragmatism' and a purported rejection of ideological constraints. However, the policy process remains an inherently political one despite repeated appeals to 'evidence-based' policy-making (Pawson, 2006). Policy thus became whatever the Government wanted it to be at any one time, freeing it from the ties of 'Old Labour'. This enabled them to pick and mix policies across the spectrum of political discourse, from tough neo-conservatism embodied in the counter terror legislation through to neo-liberal ideas on private sector involvement in public welfare (Clarke, 2004). The whole 'citizenship' agenda had compliance and control at its heart, and the demonization of anyone who, through choice or lack of choice to do otherwise, did not participate in paid work.

The Labour government continued the focus on community cohesion and national values under its 'citizenship' agenda. The idea that social cohesion and harmony were dependent on limiting the numbers of immigrants of certain groups, persisted as a fundamental political and popular belief (Schuster & Solomos, 2004), a belief Labour historically placed at the centre of 'race relations', balancing such policies against their anti-discriminatory legislation (Layton-Henry, 1992). Thus social policy around citizenship and immigration policy has subsequently become interwoven with counter terrorist policy. This is demonstrated in the way that policy responses to terrorism influence other areas of policy having nothing to do with terrorism or violent extremism (Huysmans & Buonfino, 2008; also see on this point ICJ, 2009). An example of how measures designed to tackle serious terrorist threats become part and parcel of 'normal' policing can be seen in the way 'stop and search' became a feature of policing more broadly under New Labour, and more recently the responses of the police to student protests and the 'Occupy' demonstrations.

During its time in office, New Labour introduced five major pieces of counter-terror legislation: the Terrorism Act 2000 (HM Government, 2000a); the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act, 2001 (HM Government, 2001); the Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2005 (HM Government, 2005); the Terrorism Act, 2006 (HM Government, 2006); and the Counter-Terrorism Act, 2008 (HM Government, 2008). It also passed some more wide-ranging legislation, such as the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act, 1998 (HM Government, 1998) as well as legislation that, while not aimed explicitly at countering terrorism, nevertheless had a significant impact on the powers available to the police and security services, such as the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act, 2000 (HM Government, 2000b). This as a whole resulted in critics accusing the Government of increasingly eroding civil liberties. The legislation covers a wide range of powers, much of which were introduced as reactive, rather than proactive, measures to external events.

The Terrorism Act, (2000) (HM Government, 2000a), widened the definition of terrorism to apply to domestic terrorism and included, "any political, religious or ideological" cause that uses or threatens violence against people or property; creates new offences of inciting terrorism; enhances police powers, including stop and search and pre-charge detention for 7 days; outlaws terrorist groups (including Al-Qaeda). The Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act, (2001) (HM Government, 2001), initially enabled the Home Secretary to indefinitely detain foreign nationals without charge, if they were suspected of terrorism – a system subsequently replaced with control orders after a House of Lords ruling. It also gave government the power to freeze the bank accounts and assets of suspected terrorists. The Prevention of Terrorism Act, (2005) (HM Government, 2005), introduced control orders,

which allowed the government to restrict the activities of individuals it suspected of “involvement in terrorist related activity”, but for whom there was not sufficient evidence to charge. The Terrorism Act, (2006) (HM Government, 2006), extended the pre-charge detention period from 14 to 28 days and introduced a prohibition on the “glorification” of terrorism. Finally, the Counter-Terrorism Act (HM Government, 2008), enabled post-charge questioning of terrorist suspects; it allowed the taking of fingerprints and DNA samples from individuals subject to control orders; and amended the definition of terrorism by inserting a ‘racial’ clause.

## **Big Society, Nationalism and Assimilation**

In the run up to the 2010 election the Conservative Party was keen to promote the idea of a ‘Big Society’ as a way of promoting social cohesion and replacing State control with community empowerment. This rhetoric has been central to the way the Coalition Government has countered critics to the cuts in State intervention and welfare funding. During most of the New Labour period in office the Conservatives had been a particularly ineffective electoral force. Not only were they unable to regain the initiative on the centre-right of British politics, but they could not find a leader with the right ingredients to lead them out of the doldrums. Finally, with the arrival of David Cameron they sought to appeal to constituencies beyond their traditional borders, framed as a new compassionate Conservatism with an interest in diversity amongst other things. The target was what they termed ‘The Broken Society’, a society in which civic virtues had been lost and in which ‘social justice’ was largely absent. The establishment of a Centre for Social Justice under the Stewardship of Ian Duncan Smith in 2007 was part of the drive to reclaim ownership of centre-right politics. By definition this agenda was far more domestic in emphasis than New Labour’s approach under Tony Blair.

Many of the ideas of the ‘Big Society’ were clearly not unique, with echoes of Blair’s responsible citizenship agenda. However, there are important differences. Blair’s agenda was very much about duty, responsibility and people contributing through paid work. In return they were awarded opportunities to succeed through access to education and employment (Williams, 1999). The old class consciousness debates of Old Labour were replaced by a new discourse which saw responsible citizenship being rewarded by equality of opportunity, based not on collective notions of ‘class’ but on group-based characteristics of gender, ‘race’, age, sexuality etc. interpreted through an individualistic lens. Levitas (2005) describes this shift as SID (social integrationist discourse). This sees cohesion and growth as being a function of paid employment, whereas unemployment typifies social exclusion. The main focus therefore, of the citizenship agenda revolved around people engaging in paid work, the implication being that the unemployed were irresponsible parasites.

For its part, the ‘Big Society’ debate is more about a retrenchment of State intervention in many aspects of welfare and community life. It is about placing responsibility and power into the hands of communities. The role of the State thus becomes diminished, not only directly by the relinquishing of functions to the private or voluntary sector, but also indirectly by the promotion of greater social cohesion and the reduction in the need for State intervention in areas like crime prevention. Thus the core of the agenda is reducing the reach and scope of central government and revivifying active citizenship through voluntarism and increasing the share of welfare provision shouldered by the third sector. According to Evans (2011), there are three main aims in the development of the ‘Big Society’. These are public service reform, the promotion of active citizens and lastly, the creation of a new accountability and transparency in government (Evans, 2011). In terms of counter terror, the first of these connects with the aim of reducing the size and scope of government and the second with the promotion of an illusory empowerment of citizens. One of the key vehicles for empowering citizens created by New Labour was the Human Rights Act 2000 which gave individuals protection against any undue encroachment on liberties and rights by the British state. In threatening to repeal this legislation the Coalition demonstrate further contradiction and inconsistency in their defence of freedom. Third and finally, the release of the Macdonald Report (2011) on the Prevent Agenda suggests at least a partial commitment by the Coalition Government to openness and transparency.

The Big Society has provoked a huge amount of debate and discussion, and the narrative around 'Big Society' has at times been confused and contradictory. Cynics have suggested that its principal objective is to reduce expenditure on public services, lower taxes for the privileged and redistribute the burden of caring and responsibility onto the poorest sections of society (Wyler, 2011). However, commentators from inside the Conservative party, led by Jesse Norman (2010), argue that this narrow focus on voluntarism as practical politics ignores the philosophical origins and objectives of the Big Society project. Claiming a faux legitimacy, he cites the work of Edmund Burke as a key influence and points to the importance of the reinforcing role of 'community' in public policy.

A major problem for the Coalition Government has been the global financial crisis and the need to reduce the size of the UK budget deficit. Reducing the size of the public sector and the 'Big Society' agenda have conveniently been promoted as a necessary part of the process of deficit reduction. The Coalition Government's agenda of savagely cutting the size of the public sector combined with its apparent war on public sector wages and pensions have some poignant echoes of Thatcher's agenda of brutally curbing the power of the Trades Unions and her war against the miners. Ken Livingstone in a recent TV interview made this point, but also made the additional point that Mrs Thatcher had more foresight, in that she predicted that the cuts and policies she was to embark on would cause public unrest. She recruited more police in anticipation of this, the Coalition Government is cutting policing. Sure enough August 2011 saw rioting in the streets of many UK cities, although the Government deny that political and financial factors were the primary cause, which directly contradicts the findings of research into the causes of the riots commissioned by *The Guardian* and the London School of Economics (*The Guardian*, 2011b). These studies found that the rioters in every area involved cited a deep seated antipathy towards the police as a major cause, 59% of the rioters were unemployed and half of those interviewed were black. Rioters also cited a sense of injustice as being a major motivation, articulated as either lack of jobs and opportunities or as a more intangible 'social' exclusion in terms of how they are regarded in society.

Since the Coalition Government was elected, the swingeing cuts and backlash to them has meant that there has in effect been a retreat from the global agenda. Indeed the war in Afghanistan looks to be rapidly fizzling into a retreat, and the temporary incursion into Middle Eastern affairs, (Libya in particular), is receiving little attention. There has instead been a reaffirmation of British national identity and 'Britishness' putting a greater emphasis on the importance of domestic policy. David Cameron is very keen on expressing the view that 'we are all in it together', that we all need to 'pull together' as one and that there is this notion of the responsible and acceptable citizen. Reaffirming British national identity has become a process of assimilation, the riots of August 2011 are claimed to have nothing to do with 'race', inequality or difference; instead they were due to deviant minority elements in society seizing opportunities to loot, steal and disrupt the lives of the respectable majority.

It is beyond the scope of this article to evaluate the potential or otherwise of the Big Society for improving the delivery of social welfare, what we can say with some justification is that the Big Society represents a movement away from the global and back towards domestic priorities. Part of this retreat from the global has occasioned fairly recent debates about nationalism and national identity throughout Europe (Dueland, 2011). The veto on the strengthening of the Lisbon Treaty to ensure greater fiscal discipline across the member states of the EU clearly underlines this shift towards protecting British interests and identity. Despite the importance attributed to diversity in opposition, Cameron (2011) used a speech in Europe to question the validity of 'multiculturalism'. The tone of this speech harked back to the assimilationism of the 1970s, whereby black and minority ethnic groups were expected to eschew their cultural and lingual origins and embrace 'Britishness'. In some ways this did not deviate so significantly from what New Labour had done, with policy measures such as citizenship tests. However, the Conservatives have gone much further than Labour in actually challenging one of the central planks of diversity. By accident or design Cameron's speech in Munich about the failure of multiculturalism happened to coincide with an English Defence League (EDL) rally back in Britain, which meant people inevitably made connections between Cameron's beliefs and those of the EDL (Doward, 2011). Commentators recalled Margaret Thatcher talking about the fears of the indigenous 'white' population being

‘swamped’ by immigrants, which coincided with activities by the National Front (Layton-Henry, 1986). Some saw obvious parallels with the Cameron/EDL incident.

To summarise, the arrival of the Coalition Government spelled the end of New Labour as a governing force, and a move back towards domestic policy priorities. This can be underlined by the desire to redefine nationalism as assimilationism, that where relevant black and minority ethnic communities must eschew their traditional cultural values and languages and embrace a sense of ‘Britishness’. Indeed, according to Husband and Alam (2011), there has been a widespread European retreat from multiculturalism and a movement towards assimilationism and nationalism. What it means to be British, and how British culture should be defined is something that is frequently brushed over by its various advocates. More particularly though, just as the Third Way was seen to be vague, ambiguous and at times paradoxical, so too is the Big Society programme of the Conservative-led Coalition. In order to demonstrate this, we will use anti-terror policy as a case study.

Almost as soon as they were elected, the Coalition Government targeted the counter-terror measures introduced by New Labour for revision and repeal. The primary reason posited for this was the serious attack on civil liberties they represented. In many ways, those on the left and centre-left would agree with the charge that New Labour had exaggerated the terrorist threat and used this to undermine ancient rights that had taken centuries to enshrine in legislation (McLaughlin, 2005). However, the intentions and actions of the Coalition Government are worth examining in more detail, not least because we believe that anti-terror reforms show the limitations to the Big Society agenda.

There are two threads to our critique. The first relates to one of the central planks of the Big Society, the place of community. The Prevent strategy put into place by New Labour employed a multi-agency approach to community engagement, which would at first sight reflect Big Society principles. Not only did it emphasise the importance of community, but it arguably aimed to integrate BME communities more closely into wider British society (Newburn, 1998). Although this was not framed explicitly as assimilation it certainly worked along those lines. However, in cutting funding so drastically to local authorities the lifeblood of Prevent has been cut off and therefore its continuation is doubtful.<sup>2</sup>

The second thread is perhaps the more important because it forms the basis of the Coalition response to New Labour’s anti-terror policy framework. A vague notion of liberty was, as stated above, the main concern of the Coalition in unpicking what their predecessors had done (Directgov, 2010). Yet the reforms, also as noted above, have perhaps been more about the perception of freedom than freedom as a reality. Although instruments like control orders have been dismissed as unacceptable impositions on freedom, the Coalition alternative is to intensify surveillance. In a sense all this does is shift the location of the civil liberties argument to an earlier stage in the counter terror process, and one which is less controversial because it is less conspicuous. However, in light of the phone hacking scandals that have beset News International and the public reaction to them, this may be an optimistic appraisal on the part of the Government (see The Leveson Inquiry, 2011).

Consequently, we would argue that the anti-terror approach adopted by the Coalition Government demonstrates not only the paradoxical nature of the Big Society agenda, but also, for the same reason, that it has natural limits. It is not a coherent, comprehensive political philosophy that provides a practical blueprint for government policy-making. Because the Coalition is constructed of a New Right with natural fault-lines around freedom and tradition and Liberal Democrat partners who lack sympathy for most Conservative inclinations, it would perhaps be more surprising if there were greater consistency and coherence.

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<sup>2</sup> One of the authors was involved in a research grant bid to evaluate the programmes put into place by a council in one of the largest and most diverse cities in the UK, but before a decision could be reached the project was withdrawn due to a lack of resources. As a result the money invested was essentially wasted as the programme was ended with no evaluation of its impact. This means that a community-based initiative with integrationist objectives has been virtually brought to a close due to the Coalition’s determination to reduce public expenditure.

## The Coalition Policy response to counter-terrorism

The Government published its response to the previous government's Prevent strategy on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2011 (for commentary see, e.g. Staniforth, 2011). According to Hasan (2011) the final document represents a neo-conservative victory over the liberal element of the Coalition. The new Prevent strategy is based on neo-conservative, US ideas about radicalisation, that people start off disillusioned and angry, then become politicised and radicalised and then turn those radical beliefs to violence. However, evidence suggests that the route to terrorism is not consistent with this conveyor belt theory. A study in 2008 by MI5 concludes no typical pattern of how violent extremism had developed in the hundreds of terrorists they examined. In addition, Sageman (2008) analysed 500 terrorist biographies and also concluded that there was no such linear progression of extremist activity. The new Prevent agenda has ignored this, and indeed has virtually ignored evidence that foreign policy is a driver behind radicalisation. Commenting on the inquiry into the invasion of Iraq by the Chilcot committee in July 2010, Eliza Manningham-Buller (Director General of MI5), observed that the invasion had radicalised a new generation of young British Muslims. Stella Rimington (former head of MI5) further supported this view, "...if what we're looking at is groups of disaffected young men born in this country who turn to terrorism, then I think to ignore the effect of the war in Iraq is misleading" (Hasan 2011). In a study by Mythen, Walklate & Khan (2009) of the Muslim community the important factors in the radicalisation of young people revolved around several key factors: firstly having a voice in terms of political representation, and being listened to properly; secondly, recognising the problems of British foreign and military policy in Muslim countries; thirdly, tackling ethnic inequalities; and lastly confronting the criminal injustices suffered by Muslim minority groups (Mythen, Walklate & Khan, 2009).

The language and discourse in Lord Ken Macdonald's Review of Counter-Terrorism and Security Powers (2011) is very interesting. The introduction to the review report sets the agenda as being to ascertain whether it would be possible to roll back counter-terror measures imposed over the past few decades. It also raises the idea that the balance of freedom versus security has moved too far in the direction of security, at the expense of personal freedom. Interestingly, Lord Macdonald also comments that the primary duty of the State is the protection of citizens; however, but did not spend much time considering the question of the need for the protection of citizens from State incursion on their freedom (although at least he raised the issue).

The report then proceeds to put forward proposals to inject greater 'freedom' and 'liberty' by, for example, removing curfews for suspects and removing the ability of police to detain suspects for prolonged periods without charge. Yet part of the rationale and justification for this is that these measures are ineffectual, and it is far more beneficial to allow suspects to mix with other potential terrorists, while under covert surveillance. Indeed, according to Pantazis & Pemberton (2009), some groups and individuals within the Muslim community have been specifically targeted for surveillance. One particular feature of demonstrations and riots since the Coalition Government was elected has been the use of social media and technology to communicate and coordinate activities. David Cameron has publicly said that this is something he intends to address through disruption of things like Blackberry messenger, with the help of MI5, the police and mobile phone networks. This sanctioning of 'hacking' into people's private messages is ironic given the furore of over the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal.

Telephony, the internet and physical surveillance are all explicitly mentioned in the Coalition's review of the Prevent strategy. Indeed The UK is already home to around five million CCTV cameras, which amounts to around 20% of the world's total. The average London commuter already has their image captured several hundred times a day as they travel to work and UK motorists can expect even greater surveillance once a new system designed to recognise number plates comes into operation. However, that is not the limit to surveillance in the UK, there is a worldwide move to enlist the assistance of telecommunications providers to monitor people's telephone calls, internet activity and emails. Modern Western nations are all undergoing a radical transformation in the use of surveillance. More and more institutions across the public and private sectors are using new technology to gather data and monitor different types of people. These institutions include retailers, local government, employers, the military etc. They use a wide variety of techniques, ranging from databases, espionage, military

satellites, internet monitoring, CCTV, to DNA testing. The growth of surveillance in all spheres of life has led to the conclusion that Western nations now qualify as ‘surveillance societies’, because of the centrality of surveillance to institutional practices (Murakami Wood, 2009).

The official responses to the recent rioting of August 2011, and the concern about the use of social media such as Twitter and Blackberry messenger, reinforce this message that ‘freedom’ in rolling back these measures is in fact an illusion. The Government are in effect replacing one series of visible counter-terror measures with invisible and covert measures. In the light of the phone hacking scandal involving the *News of the World* which has tainted the media, police and politicians alike, we can see how very real this policy has become. The irony of the development of this strand of policy though is that the Government explicitly states that the reform of the Prevent agenda is about freeing up civil liberties and freedoms. Many commentators would argue that in fact surveillance is the polar opposite of democracy and surveillance is a real threat to civil liberties (Haggerty & Samatas, 2010). Indeed some would go so far as to argue that surveillance curtails personal freedoms, inhibits democracy and ultimately leads to totalitarianism (Haggerty, 2009; Rule, 2007).

The use of State surveillance is anti-democratic for a number of reasons. If democracy is about fairness and the equitable operation of participatory decision making then it is more than just a system for making decisions. It is also the mechanism by which citizens relate to each other. A vital aspect of democracy is that the State should be accountable to their citizens and should also include open discussion between competing views and freedom of association. Therefore, accountability and transparency are of paramount importance, as is access to information (Haggerty & Samatas, 2010). This growth of a surveillance society is seen by some as a slippery slope, the argument being that many fascist governments and totalitarian states use massive state conducted surveillance as a tool of state repression. The Government would perhaps be wise at this point to look at the recent fate of the Mubarak and Gaddafi regimes in the so called ‘Arab Spring’. Furthermore Tilly (2005) argues that surveillance can corrode the interpersonal trust required for democratic governance to work effectively (Tilly, 2005).

Of course we recognise that it is necessary to have some police surveillance as the nature of policing has changed. However, the State clearly discriminates in terms of who they subject to surveillance and monitoring; this was never more apparent than in the appearance of CCTV cameras in a predominantly Muslim area in Birmingham. In this case 40 covert cameras were concealed; some believed to be hidden in trees and walls, in Sparkbrook Birmingham. The project was halted after intervention by the *Guardian* newspaper in June 2010, after it was revealed that this was a counter-terrorism initiative (Lewis, 2010)

One of the elements of the whole counter-terrorist agenda has been the drive to involve community groups, schools and universities in identifying potential terrorists is an integral part of the ‘surveillance society’. Community groups have been particularly critical of the expectation that they would become drawn into ‘spying’ on their communities, because much of the work they do with disadvantaged and disaffected people relies upon the trust they have built up over many years. If they now start monitoring and reporting local residents, that trust will break down. In addition, one of the main problems for community groups, schools and universities has been a lack of any clear guidance as to what to look for when identifying these individuals and what exactly constitutes a potential ‘terrorist threat’. According to *The Guardian* (*The Guardian*, 2011a) the resulting review of the expansion of community surveillance (which was a component of the broader review of the Prevent strategy) has deliberately created an imprecise and unclear picture and although identification of extremist groups has been scaled down, at its heart the review amounts to an ‘illiberal intolerance of ideas that amounts to a new curtailment of freedom of speech’. Community groups are not only under threat from the potential loss of trust from their residents, the very fabric of their existence may be threatened. If funding is awarded to community groups based on their display of ‘British’ values (and ‘Bulldog’ zeal to find the enemy within) then we risk losing groups which reach out to minority ethnic and cultural groups because of their diverse nature.

Moving away from surveillance, the other strand to the review of counter-terrorism, by Lord Macdonald, expresses the intention to use deportation as a more widespread tool. This is

consistent with the nationalistic agenda of the respectable 'Big Society', ejecting the deviant outsiders. This rejection of multiculturalism and the move toward assimilation and integration has been a very public thread of David Cameron's response to the recent riots.

## Conclusion

The response of the Coalition Government to the Prevent agenda has been ideologically confused and inconsistent. They purport to be interested in engaging communities as partners in the development of social and public policies, and, in promoting policies that encourage greater integration into the British cultural mainstream. Multiculturalism has failed according to David Cameron and the time has come for greater 'community cohesion'. However, in the savage attack that has been launched on public expenditure the elements of the Prevent Strategy that might have, at least in theory, fulfilled these related objectives have been undermined. From our point of view this is less about the reality or validity of the measures themselves and more about the inconsistency at the heart of the Big Society project.

As one might expect with a Coalition Government led by the Conservatives the strongest criticism of the Prevent agenda was directed at its implications for freedom and liberty, but they are implementing policies which will take away freedom and liberty. Indeed, we would argue that much of their response is simply *undemocratic*. The very recent debates about the future of the Human Rights Act have been very revealing in demonstrating the divide within the Coalition between the true liberals who support freedom and democracy and the neo-Conservatives who want to remove access to rights in order to control and exclude certain sections of the population. Indeed the response to the Prevent agenda is completely at odds with one of the aims of the Big Society, to give more democratic rights to voters and increase transparency and accountability of government.

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