

Ten years on from 9/11, research calls for counter-terrorist policing to be held accountable

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A decade after the global tragedy of 9/11, a groundbreaking pan-European research project led by the University of Birmingham is calling for increased accountability and tougher legal restrictions on surveillance and detection technologies.

In the culmination of a three-year collaborative research project, known as DETECTER, researchers from the University of Birmingham argue that even the use of covert technologies should take into account individual freedoms and be covered by strict legal restrictions. In a series of recommendations on how to conduct preventive policing while protecting the privacy of civilians, the researchers insist the public have a right to know what surveillance is being used.

The research recommendations, which are expected to inform European government policy in this area, include:

- The need for a detection technology must be supported by concrete evidence and compared with the degree of intrusion to ensure the least invasive outcome of individuals' privacy
- Every detection technology used in secret should be regulated by statute law
- Governments should ensure that individuals operating data mining programmes can be held accountable

Project co-ordinator Professor Tom Sorell, Director of the University of Birmingham's Centre for the Study of Global Ethics, explains:

"The project makes recommendations on the development and use of surveillance technologies in fighting terrorism. The technologies in question range from CCTV cameras and body scanners to internet monitoring, data mining and data-sharing involved in tracking and identifying suspects.

"We have identified many ethical problems and potential human rights violations in relation to these technologies and have therefore made these recommendations to create a new, open and accountable climate for the operation of detection technologies, whilst recognising the importance of maintaining preventive as well as reactive policing in counter-terrorism."

The introduction of preventive policing and the development of surveillance and detection technologies seeking to identify terrorists before they strike have led to a loss of personal privacy and increased inconvenience, according to DETECTER researchers. It is now common practice to remove our shoes for X-ray before boarding a plane and our liquid allowance has been severely restricted. Controversial and what DETECTER believes to be excessively intrusive body x-ray scanners have also been phased into airports.

The recommendations will be presented today (Wednesday 7 September) during a one-day international conference, '9/11 Ten Years On' at the University of Birmingham's European office in Brussels. Speakers will include three MEPs and Sir David Pepper, ex-head of GCHQ, the UK government's signal intelligence establishment.

Professor Sorell adds:

"This conference will bring DETECTER to the heart of European decision-making and makes good its promise of making clear recommendations for policy and legislative reform. We will be offering advice on how to take counter-terrorism measures that protect both the security of European citizens and their human rights."

For more information, please contact project co-ordinator, Professor Tom Sorell via 0121 414 8443 or t.sorell@bham.ac.uk (<mailto:t.sorell@bham.ac.uk>), or please visit www.detector.eu (<http://www.detector.eu>).

Notes to Editors

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