

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, it is clear that a lot of things have changed in its aftermath including our approach to policing and the invasion of our human rights, according to new research from the University of Birmingham.

Not only was there a vast physical loss of lives immediately following the attacks, in the succeeding decade we have also witnessed a loss of personal privacy with the introduction of preventative policing and the development of surveillance and other detection technologies seeking to fight terrorists before they strike. It is now common practice to remove our shoes before stepping on a plane, our liquid allowance has been severely restricted and controversial body x-ray scanners are slowly being phased into airports to name a few of the new detection technologies introduced to air travel in a post-9/11 world.

In the culmination of a three-year collaborative research project, known as DETECTER, researchers from the University of Birmingham are calling for increased accountability and more stringent legislation of surveillance technologies in a series of recommendations of how to conduct preventative policing whilst protecting the privacy of civilians, suggesting the public have a right to know what surveillance is happening.

The research recommendations 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 a 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 that police maintain a continuous rather than a reactive focus to counter-terrorism."

The recommendations will be presented during a one-day international conference, 'Detector Technologies, Terrorism, Ethics and Human Rights' which is taking place on Thursday 7 September at the University of Birmingham's European office in Brussels.

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"