

Debate Ammunition: The National Security (State Threats...

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DEBATE AMMUNITION

The National Security (State Threats) Bill:

A Threat to Information Itself

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Topic

Why the National Security (State Threats) Bill's sweeping new designation power threatens journalists, bloggers and researchers: restricting information in this way damages democracy itself.

The video that this Debate Ammunition supports is available [here](#).

The Core Argument

This bill gives the Home Secretary a new power to designate any organisation a state threat, modelled on terrorist proscription, and makes it an offence, carrying up to fourteen years in prison, to support or benefit from a designated body.

Because obtaining information from a designated body counts in the bill as a material

benefit, journalists, bloggers and researchers who report facts sourced from such an organisation risk prosecution, even where no other source of that information exists.

Restricting the flow of information in this way is not a narrow national security measure. It damages the public good that information provides, undermines the informed consent that democratic government depends upon, and leaves the field open to rumour and unaccountable power.

Key Statistics

Statistic

Figure

Maximum prison sentence for supporting or benefiting from a designated body

14 years

General reasonable excuse defence included in the bill for those affected

None

Source of Gaza casualty figures relied upon since 2023 that could become illegal to report if the supplying body were designated

Hamas-supplied data

The Argument Structure

Step 1 — What the bill actually does:

The bill gives the Home Secretary the power to designate a body as a state threat, a system modelled on terrorist proscription law.

Once a body is designated, supporting it or benefiting from it becomes a criminal

offence carrying a maximum sentence of fourteen years, and the bill defines securing information from a designated body as a material benefit.

Step 2 — The Gaza casualty data problem:

If a body such as Hamas were designated as a state threat, reporting casualty figures supplied by that organisation could become a criminal act. Yet that data is what journalists have relied upon since 2023 to report what is happening in Gaza, because there is no other source. Lawyers are concerned because the bill contains no general reasonable excuse defence, so a journalist reporting in good faith has no statutory protection.

Step 3 — Journalism has always needed contacts on every side:

Reporters have always had to speak to every side of a conflict to understand it properly, and back channels persisted even when the IRA was proscribed in the UK.

Information from one side alone can create a dangerously misleading picture, so understanding a conflict often requires speaking to people who work for the side we do not like. This bill risks turning that necessary contact into a crime.

Step 4 — Information is a public good, not a threat to be managed:

Information explains why conflicts happen, helps the public judge government policy, and allows competing claims to be tested.

Restricting it restricts understanding, and journalists who cannot test official claims will produce fewer facts, leaving public opinion to form on weaker foundations.

That is why Parliament should amend this bill before it reaches Royal Assent, rather than allow rushed, broadly worded legislation to criminalise the flow of information itself.

Their Argument → Your Rebuttal

They Say

Your Response

The bill is only aimed at genuine hostile state actors, such as the Iranian-backed

organisations named as its target, not at journalists.

The bill's reach extends far beyond spies and terrorists to any body the Home Secretary designates, and organisations such as Hamas could plausibly be designated under it.

Independent reviewers have already warned that the drafting is too broad, and that journalists may end up relying on prosecutorial discretion rather than any statutory protection to avoid prosecution.

A power this wide, with no general reasonable excuse defence attached, cannot be relied upon to stop only at the actors ministers currently have in mind.

Ministers have promised that legitimate journalism will be protected, so there is nothing for reporters to worry about.

Those protections exist only in the explanatory support notes accompanying the bill, not in its operative text, and that means no court is required to rely on them when deciding a case.

A promise made outside the law itself is not a legal defence. Anyone charged would be relying on the discretion of a prosecutor rather than a right written into statute, and that is a poor substitute for a proper reasonable excuse defence.

Given the genuine and growing threat from hostile states, fast-tracking this legislation is a proportionate response.

There is a genuine need for effective protection against hostile state activity, and that is not in dispute.

But fast legislation receives less scrutiny than it needs, and broad wording is much harder to correct once it has become law. Important safeguards in this bill have simply not been properly debated because of the pace at which it has been pushed through.

Security and informed democracy should reinforce each other rather than being treated as opposites, and a bill rushed through without full scrutiny achieves neither goal well.

If a designated body's data cannot be trusted, journalists reporting it are not providing

reliable information anyway, so little is lost by banning it.

In conflict zones such as Gaza, journalists are often not choosing between reliable and unreliable sources. They are choosing between the only data available and no data at all.

Organisations including the United Nations have themselves relied on figures originating from parties to a conflict when no independent alternative exists, and it remains unclear whether reporting a UN figure that in turn originated from a designated body would itself become an offence.

Removing imperfect information does not produce better information. It produces silence, and silence is filled by rumour and speculation rather than by understanding.

The One-Liners

“This bill makes information itself the offence.”

“You cannot report a war you are forbidden from investigating.”

“A law with no reasonable excuse defence asks journalists to gamble fourteen years of their life on a minister's discretion.”

“Security and informed democracy should reinforce each other, not be pitted against one another.”

“When protections live only in the notes and not in the bill itself, no court has to honour them.”

Questions to Ask

If reporting a casualty figure becomes a fourteen-year offence, who decides which information the public is allowed to know?

Why does the bill contain no general reasonable excuse defence when ministers say journalism will be protected?

What happens to public understanding of a conflict once journalists are too frightened of prosecution to contact every side of it?

If broadly worded legislation like this is fast-tracked into law, who reviews it afterwards, given that its safeguards were never properly debated?

Further Reading

Post

Date

What it covers

[Silencing dissent destroys democracy](#)

28 Sep 2025

Sets out why free speech and the right to disagree are foundational to democracy, and warns against the authoritarian pattern of relabelling dissent as extremism.

[Is the BBC suffering a far-right attack?](#)

13 Nov 2025

Argues that truth-making institutions and a free press are a public good essential to democracy, and that attacks on them are attacks on accountability itself.

[The spying we need worry about](#)

18 Dec 2024

Discusses confirmed state surveillance of journalists aimed at uncovering their sources, and why that undermines the fourth estate's role in holding power to account.

[Nigel Farage wants to abolish the UK Human Rights Act of 1998](#)

28 Aug 2025

Explains the legal protection for freedom of expression and press freedom that this bill puts under strain, and what is at stake if such rights are eroded.

[Fascism, Trump, Reform, and the silencing of dissent](#)

2 Oct 2025

Traces the pattern of redefining critics and dissenters as security threats in both the US and UK, directly relevant to how this bill's designation power could be used.

[Treating direct action as terrorism is a dangerous](#)

30 Jul 2025

Covers an earlier instance of proscription powers being used against protest, and the anti-democratic risks of stretching terrorism law beyond its proper scope.