

Former British diplomat and Julian Assange supporter Craig Murray detained under UK terror laws



London, October 19 (RHC)-- On the morning of October 16th, counter-terror police in Glasgow Airport detained journalist, whistleblower, human rights campaigner, and former British diplomat Craig Murray upon his return from Iceland. After grilling him intensively about his political beliefs, officers seized Murray's phone and laptop.

Murray, a proud Scottish nationalist, flew back to Glasgow after several days in Reykjavik, where he attended a popular Palestine solidarity event, and also met with high-ranking representatives of the Assange Campaign, which raises awareness about the plight of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. Once his travel documents were processed at passport control, the officer informed him he would be detained for questioning. They then led him to a small backroom to be grilled by three nameless British counter-terror agents.

Murray told The Grayzone that British police warned him he would be committing a criminal offense and would be prosecuted if he refused to answer questions, answered untruthfully, deliberately withheld information, or refused to provide passcodes for his electronic devices. After his phone and laptop were seized for analysis, the interrogation began.

"First, they grilled me about the private Assange Campaign meeting," Murray told The Grayzone. "You might think they would ask who was there, but they didn't," he said, adding: "My guess is they somehow knew already."

Instead, "all the questions were financial," Murray says. According to the former British ambassador, officers wanted to know "whether I get money for my contributions to the Campaign, if I get paid by WikiLeaks, Don't Extradite Assange, even Julian's family."

"The answer each time was 'no,'" Murray says, explaining: "My sources of income and where my money comes from were of particular interest to the officers."

The one-time diplomat's popular personal blog was also of interest to the officers, who reportedly demanded Murray tell them whether anyone else had access to it or could publish content on the platform, and if anyone other than himself authored any of its posts.

Strangely, Murray said he was not asked about a single article published on his website. Equally puzzling, he remarked, were the questions about the Palestine solidarity event he attended.

Officers apparently wanted to know why Murray had attended in the first place — "a strange question to ask of someone attending a protest," he told The Grayzone. Nonetheless, he made it clear that he had gone because he was friends with one of the speakers, a former Icelandic interior minister.

Police reportedly also demanded details on the content of various speakers' addresses at the event — information which Murray says he could not offer as he doesn't speak Icelandic. When asked if he planned to attend any similar pro-Palestine events in Britain, he told them, "probably."

"The weirdest question was: 'How do I judge whether to share a platform with someone or not?'" Murray says, adding: "I do so based on who's organizing the event."

In this particular case, Murray continued, "it was [the] Palestine Solidarity Committee, so I was confident I was in safe hands." Still, it struck the former ambassador as a bizarre line of questioning.

"My lawyer has never heard of such a question being asked during interrogations before," Murray said, adding that "they speculate police have a surveillance photo of me in the proximity of someone they consider a 'terrorist.'"

"I've no idea who that could be," the outspoken human rights campaigner admitted. But, as he quickly observed: "If you attend a rally where 200,000 people are present, you can't know who everyone is!"

Murray has since consulted with lawyers, who informed him that according to Section 7 of the 2000 Terrorism Act — the draconian legislation under which he was subjected to the intensive questioning — he would be legally entitled to consult a lawyer if the interrogation lasted longer than an hour.

Once the hour of questioning was up, the officers sent him on his way, but failed to return his phone or laptop. "I'm used to the idea of British and American spies having my computers," Murray said.

On a trip to Germany at the end of 2022, two laptops belonging to Murray were stolen in separate locations. The second laptop happened to have been a locally-bought replacement for the first. He believes the thefts were "probably" carried out by "security services," an interpretation reinforced by the fact the first laptop was stored in a bag containing a large sum of cash, along with vital heart medicine. The culprits inexplicably ignored the former, while pocketing the latter.

When probed by counter-terror cops about the contents of his laptop, Murray says he openly disclosed that device contained copies of leaked private emails of Stewart McDonald, a hawkish, deep state-connected Scottish National Party.

But "I'm not worried about any content on there," he explained, so "it's not a problem they have it." "I told the officers I pitied whichever poor bastard has to wade through McDonald's emails," he joked.

"Interestingly," Murray notes, "one of them volunteered in response that the contents of seized digital devices are sifted electronically, rather than an individual going over the whole contents."

"Presumably, algorithms run by keyword searches do the legwork, and whatever that throws up is studied and shared with different agencies," he speculates.

Murray's lawyers are now looking into the stop, with an eye on whether his interrogators told him the truth before his questioning began.

This April, British counter-terror police detained the French publisher and political activist Ernest Moret, who had led large protests in Paris against the neoliberal reforms of President Emmanuel Macron. Moret was detained under the same powers as Murray, then arrested when he refused to hand over passcodes to his electronic devices. He was ultimately held in British custody for almost 24 hours.

In July, a damning report by Britain's terror legislation watchdog concluded the officers who detained Moret had made "exaggerated and overbearing" threats when they claimed that he would never again be able to travel overseas if he didn't disclose information, as he'd be listed as a terrorist in international intelligence databases. The report also found police grilled him illegitimately regarding legally privileged conversations he had with his lawyer during the interrogation.

Schedule 7 is "powerful" and "must therefore be exercised with due care," the reviewer said, before ultimately comparing police's usage of the legislation to interrogate Moret to "using a sledgehammer to crack a nut":

"This was an investigation into public order for which counter-terrorism powers were never intended to be used," the report noted, concluding "the rights of free expression and protest are too important in a democracy to allow individuals to be investigated for potential terrorism merely because they may have been involved in protests that have turned violent."

But when it comes to carrying out political detentions, the legislation in question is not the only one in British officers' arsenal.

Absent from the report was any reference to Schedule 3, Section 4 of Britain's 2019 Counter-Terrorism and Border Act, which was used to authorize the detention of this journalist at London's Luton Airport this May. The provision grants authorities sweeping powers to delve into the personal and professional affairs of dissidents. According to Murray, British counter-terror cops appear to have approached him using "the same playbook" they employed with me.

Under the 2019 Counter-Terrorism and Border Act, which has been harshly criticized by the UN, an individual can be said to be serving "hostile" foreign powers without even knowing or intending to — or the powers in question being aware they are. This Orwellian precept was reinforced by London's new National Security Act, which was passed in July 2023.

Anyone who has agitated the British national security state and plans on traveling to the UK may want to be careful what they keep on their devices. As one of Ernest Moret's interrogators boasted to him, Britain is "the only country where authorities can download and keep information from private devices" forever.

<https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/internacionales/336833-former-british-diplomat-and-julian-assange-supporter-craig-murray-detained-under-uk-terror-laws>



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