

New measures proposed to fight terrorism

7 June 2007

In a statement to Parliament today, the Home Secretary called for new measures to fight the 'unprecedented threat' of terrorism.

Saying that it is 'the duty of the Home Secretary to ensure that our response to terrorism provides the best possible protection', Home Secretary John Reid today called on Parliament to pass new 'effective and proportionate' legislation to help anti-terror units protect the public.

Dr Reid called for consultation and discussion on a slate of new measures to stop terror groups from committing violent acts in the UK.

Much has been done, but there's still work to do

Already, Dr Reid pointed out, the government has increased spending on counter-terrorism to more than £2b a year, and security services have never been better resourced.

MI5 has doubled its staff since 2001, police have been given powers to hold terror suspects for 28 days, and the new Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism centralises responsibility for managing the government's counter-terrorism strategy.

Now, in order for counter-terror specialists to work at their fullest capacity they need new legislation, he said.

Strong anti-terror laws send 'a signal to those who want to plot terror and turn people towards violent extremism that their actions will not be tolerated.'

'This,' he said, 'is a threat that's continually evolving, so it's crucial that our response evolves with it to include legislation which is effective and proportionate, to provide the maximum possible security and liberty for the law-abiding majority.'

He called for cross-party consensus on these national security issues as the discussion goes forward on how best to protect the public from terror groups.

New counter-terrorism bill

In that spirit, he said, the government plans to bring forward a new counter-terrorism bill later this year.

'I want to ensure that there is extensive consultation before any legislation is introduced,' he said. Today's announcement, he added, is only part of that process.

While previous counter-terrorism legislation was often fast-tracked through Parliament because of immediate threats to the public, in this case 'we have an opportunity here to do things differently.'

So while today's announcement is designed to outline the direction the government would like to take, further consultation and input will be sought before a full bill is introduced, he said.

Dr Reid said he was committed to discussing the issue with interested organisations, including police, the judiciary, civil liberties groups and communities. In addition, he has also asked Lord Carlile, the independent reviewer of counter-terrorism legislation, write a report on the government's proposals.

He called it the 'most comprehensive approach' the government has ever used.

Actions to be considered

The Home Secretary listed a number of actions that could be taken.

These include:

- **longer pre-charge detention** - the government has made it clear that it believes it is right to hold suspects beyond 28 days, but the Home Secretary said he wants, if possible, to build a broad agreement on the issue before action is taken
- **enhanced sentences** - when terror suspects are charged with general offences, the government believes sentences should be longer than in non-terror cases
- **intercept as evidence** - a review will be conducted into the potential ramifications of allowing intercept to be used in terrorism court cases
- **stop and question** - the government is conducting an internal consultation on the possibility of enhancing police powers to allow them to stop and question people about their activities, but the matter is at a very early stage

The greatest threat we face

'I believe that terrorism remains the greatest threat that this country faces,' Dr Reid said. It is important that our legislation continues to evolve to meet that threat.

'But I also firmly believe that any legislation to deal with terrorism should be taken forward with the full support of this house where possible.'