
Statement on Security

25 July 2007

The Prime Minister has made a statement on security to MPs in Parliament. He said that the Government's priority is "a Britain strong in security, robust in our resolve, resilient in response".

Read the statement

On June 29th and 30th the professionalism, the vigilance and the courage of our police and our security and emergency services thwarted a conspiracy to murder and maim British citizens.

Britain - led by London and Glasgow - stood firm in the face of threats. And our calmness and steadfastness sent a powerful message across the world that we will not yield to terrorism nor ever be intimidated by it.

These events were the 15th attempted terrorist plot on British soil since 2001.

As previously set out, the police and security services are currently having to contend with around 30 known plots, and monitor over 200 groupings or networks and around 2,000 individuals.

And I think the whole House will agree that our country - and all countries - have to confront a generation long challenge to defeat Al Qaeda inspired terrorist violence.

In recognition of this continuing long-term threat, we have created a new National Security Committee to oversee the new Office for Security and Counter Terrorism.

And following the first two meetings of the National Security Committee I want to report on changes we now recommend.

First, let me confirm to the House that in future we will publish a national security strategy, and that the first will be published and presented in the autumn to Parliament for debate and decision in this House.

And at the time of the spending review we will announce a single security budget.

In line with the Butler Report we will separate the position of Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee from policy adviser to the government. And so the sole responsibilities of the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee will be to provide Ministers with assessments which have been formulated independently of the political process and to improve across government the effectiveness of intelligence analysis.

Today also I am publishing the Intelligence and Security Committee report on rendition.

And the Government is consulting on how in future the ISC should be appointed and should report to Parliament - with, where possible, hearings in public, a strengthened capacity for investigations, reports subject to more parliamentary debate and greater transparency over appointments to the committee.

To strengthen the counter terrorist capability of the police and security

services, we have since September 11th doubled our overall investment to more than £2 billion a year. Dedicated anti-terrorist resources have also doubled. Even in advance of the spending review settlement the security service will, by 2008, be twice the size it was in 2001.

The protection and resilience of our major infrastructure and crowded places requires continuous vigilance. I can confirm that over 900 shopping centres, sports stadiums and venues where people congregate have been assessed by counter terrorism security advisers and over 10,000 premises given updated security advice ---- and that the police will continue high visibility patrols.

The Counter Terrorism Bill will include a new power allowing the Secretary of State to ensure additional protection for key utility sites. And we have asked My Noble Friend Lord West to oversee over this summer a further overview of how best we protect crowded places and our buildings and national infrastructure - roads, railways, tunnels, bridges, water systems and utilities.

Since 1997, the Government has given the police new resources and Parliament has provided new legal powers to arrest and try terrorists. And thanks to the hard work, dedication and commitment of the men and women in the police, security and intelligence services and prosecuting authorities, this year alone in nine cases a total of 30 individuals have been convicted. And the forthcoming Counter Terrorism Bill will propose additional penalties for terrorists charged with other criminal offences.

Mr Speaker, our first line of defence against terrorism is overseas at other countries' ports and airports where people embark on journeys to our country, and from where embassies issue visas.

And to protect us in routes and places where there is the greatest threat of harm I believe that we now need to accelerate our plans ---- completing the move from old and ineffective paper based systems to real time monitoring, which will allow us to act immediately and in a coordinated way across immigration, police, and intelligence.

The way forward is electronic screening of all passengers as they check in and out of our country at ports and airports - so that terrorist suspects can be identified and stopped before they board planes, trains and boats to the United Kingdom.

After a review of counter terrorism screening, and as part of the overall spending settlement for security to be set out in the autumn, the Home Secretary will enhance the existing E-Borders programme to incorporate all passenger information to help track and intercept terrorists and criminals as well as illegal immigrants.

While new biometric visas are already in place for immigrants from high-risk countries, I can confirm that within nine months, from March next year, we will extend biometric visas to all visa applicants.

And from 2009 we will introduce a new, enhanced system of electronic exit control linking the checking of passports to checking against the warnings index.

The second line of defence is at our borders where biometrics - not just fingerprints but iris recognition - are already in use. To strengthen the powers and surveillance capability of our border guards and security officers, we will now integrate the vital work of the Border and Immigration Agency, Customs and UK Visas overseas and at the main points of entry to the UK and establish a unified border force.

I have asked the Cabinet Secretary to report back by October on the stages ahead in implementation and whether there is a case for going further while ensuring value for money. But as a result of our announcement today the first change people will see is that, starting from next month when arriving in Britain, they will be met at the border - either sea port or airport - by a highly visible, uniformed presence ---- as over the next period we move, for the first time, to one single primary checkpoint for both passport control and customs.

But this, our second line of defence, has also to be complemented by a third line of defence ---- ID security within our own borders. While for UK citizens the first biometric ID cards will start during 2009, from the end of 2008 any foreign nationals coming to the UK for more than six months will be required to have a biometric ID. Such an identity scheme will help prevent people already in the country using multiple identities for terrorist, criminal or other purposes.

In the identification of potential terrorist suspects, there should be maximum cooperation internationally with maximum possible use made of alerts and watch-lists.

While Lord West's review has found no systematic failings in our procedures for checking potential suspects, it has highlighted the importance of enhancing existing cooperation to share more information between police and immigration services and internationally across countries:

- within the EU to enable British law enforcement authorities to access immigration information on existing EU databases;
- bilaterally with other member states to mutually exchange information;
- and joining up criminal records databases throughout the EU so that our authorities can quickly identify individuals charged with crimes, no matter where in Europe they are convicted.

And at a cost of £5 million we will link the UK watchlist to the Interpol database of lost and stolen documents.

In addition to the nine foreign nationals recently deported under immigration powers on grounds of national security, a further 21 foreign nationals are currently subject to deportation proceedings on national security grounds. On the same grounds we are preventing 124 individuals from coming to our country and refusing to admit another 52 for glorifying terrorism or other unacceptable behaviour. Overall 4000 foreign prisoners are likely to be deported this year.

Having agreed repatriation arrangements for foreign terrorist suspects with Jordan, Libya, Lebanon and Algeria we will now press ahead to sign more agreements.

Mr Speaker, liberty is the first and founding value of our country and security is the first duty of government. The British way is that every measure we take to enhance security is complimented by additional protections against any arbitrary treatment and in defence of the liberties of the individual. So we want to consult widely and seek all party consensus on how we treat intercept evidence and new provisions for pre-charge detention and post-charge questioning.

The independent and cross party review into the use of intercept as evidence in court will be led by the Right Honourable Sir John Chilcot, with the Right Honourable and Noble Lord Archer of Sandwell, the Rt Hon and Noble Lord Hurd, and the Rt Hon Member for Berwick-Upon-Tweed.

While it is already a criminal offence to seek training for terrorism overseas or in this country, we will consult on tightening up bail conditions and in particular the restriction of travel in any cases where people are suspected of complicity with terrorism.

We have in place a regime which allows pre-charge detention up to 28 days. There is already general agreement that the circumstances in which the police will need to go beyond even 14 days will be rare and will be subject to special procedures, both of judicial oversight and of parliamentary accountability.

There is also, I detect, a growing weight of opinion - including from Lord Carlile the independent reviewer of anti-terrorism legislation - that there may be some circumstances in which detention beyond 28 days could be necessary ---- in circumstances where the police have to intervene early to avert an attack, where there may be huge quantities of material evidence to be analysed, and where there is a need for assistance from other countries.

The 2005 case cited in previous debates involved investigation of some 60 mobiles, 268 computers, and 920 DVDs. However, the airline investigation last August involved 200 mobile phones, 400 computers, 8000 CDs, DVDs and disks containing 6000 gigabytes of data, searching nearly 70 premises, with enquiries across three continents. Another involved 3000 statements, examining 6000 documents, with over 8000 exhibits and enquiries across 9 countries. During the recent period six people had to be held for 27 or 28 days.

While one of the proposals we are bringing forward - with broad support - to allow post charge questioning for the explicit purpose of securing evidence in a terrorism trial - will reduce the risk that we need to go beyond 28 days, the Home Affairs Select Committee concluded that this step will not eliminate the risks entirely.

It is right to explore whether a consensus can be built on the most measured way to deal with this remaining risk.

I hope the House will agree that we should not return to the previous proposal rejected by the House. But I also hope that the House will agree that there has to be a maximum limit --- set by Parliament.

We put four options for consultation.

One proposal we cite in the consultation document from Liberty - and we are grateful to them for engaging so constructively in the debate - is that if the risk materialises we should declare an emergency under the Civil Contingencies Act and allow for a period beyond the 28 day limit, for up a further 30 days.

But this would require the declaration of a state of emergency.

We are also proposing for consultation - and this would not require a state of emergency - an extension of the current limit for up to 28 days more or a lesser period --- but only if, in addition to the requirement that a judge must approve every single seven day extension, the case is itself is notified to Parliament and subject to a timely report to Parliament of all circumstances, with the option of a later parliamentary debate.

This means that any extension would not only be:

- subject to a specific case being made by the Director of Public Prosecutions;
- subject every seven days up to the agreed limit to the approval of a High Court Judge;

- subject to the regular report of the independent reviewer with an annual debate in Parliament;
- but also be subject in each and every instance to a specific parliamentary notification procedure, to a further statement to Parliament on the individual case, a review on the specific case by the independent reviewer and with the provision for this House to scrutinise and debate the report and all the circumstances.

But Mr Speaker more important even than consensus here in this house is the consensus we will seek in all the communities across this country.

Since the attacks of July 7th 2005 communities in Britain and across the world have come together in a common front against terrorism and against the propaganda that fuels it. And this requires not just the security measures I have outlined but that we work with all communities and all countries through debate, discussion, dialogue and education as we tackle at root the evils that risk driving people, particularly vulnerable young people, into the hands of violent extremists.

Here schools, colleges, universities, civil society, faith groups -- indeed every institution in our country --- have a part to play.

Last week President Sarkozy of France and I agreed to propose the formation of a joint working group with Germany and others to share our experiences and develop ways to expose and defeat terrorism.

We will report later this year on this work but we can make a start today.

Over the next three years we will provide an additional £70 million to support local authorities and community groups in improving the capacity of local communities to resist violent extremism. This will include developing leadership programmes for young people, strengthening the capacity of women's groups, and local projects to build citizenship.

There are perhaps as many as 1000 madrassas in Britain, educating between 50,000 and 100,000 young people in after school classes. In Bradford an agreement was reached to include citizenship education in their curriculum and we will now offer to work with other communities on similar programmes.

We will also support a new skills qualification in citizenship and community cohesion for faith leaders, sponsor English speaking imams, propose interfaith bodies in every community in the country to build greater understanding, and update guidance to universities before the autumn on how they can do more to protect the safety and security of vulnerable young people. I can also confirm funding for a BBC Arabic channel and an editorially independent Farsi TV channel for the people of Iran. And following further discussion the Government will report back to Parliament on further measures that will isolate extremists who preach and practice terrorism.

Mr Speaker, our priority as a government is a Britain strong in security, robust in our resolve, resilient in response, so that as a nation we both defeat terrorism and isolate violent extremism, wherever we confront it and whatever its source.

And I hope that in doing so and all-party consensus that will extend into every community of our country is possible - to create a stronger, safer, more cohesive Britain.

I commend this statement to the House