

Statement on National Security

28 October 2007

Gordon Brown has revealed details of new security measures in a statement to Parliament today.

PM outlines security measures

Read the PM's statement

Mr Speaker, in advance of the National Security Strategy which will be published in the next few weeks - and following the statement by the head of MI5 about the potential threat from UK-based terrorists - I want to update the House, as I promised in July, on the measures we are taking at home - following the incidents on June 29th and 30th - both to root out terrorism and to strengthen the resilience of communities to resist extremist influence ----- measures that to succeed will require not just military and security resources but more policing and intelligence, and an enhanced effort to win hearts and minds.

And let me first of all thank the police, the security services and the armed forces for their vigilance, their service and their courage in facing up to the terrorist threat.

Mr Speaker, the terrorist attacks in June revolved around an attempted bomb attack on a London venue where hundreds congregated and a vehicle bomb attack on Glasgow airport. The conclusions today of the review by the Noble Lord West on the protection of strategic infrastructure, stations, ports and airports - and of other crowded places - identifies a need to step up physical protection against possible vehicle bomb attacks. This will include, where judged necessary, improved security at railway stations - focusing first on those of our 250 busiest stations most at risk - and at airport terminals, ports and over one hundred sensitive installations.

The report proposes the installation of robust physical barriers as protection against vehicle bomb attacks, the nomination of vehicle exclusion zones to keep all but authorised vehicles at a safe distance, and making buildings blast resistant.

While no major failures in our protective security have been identified, companies responsible for crowded places will now be given updated and more detailed advice on how they can improve their resilience against attack, both by better physical protection and greater vigilance in identifying suspicious behaviour.

New guidance will be sent to thousands of cinemas, theatres, restaurants, hotels, sporting venues and commercial centres, and all hospitals, schools and places of worship - and this will include advice on training staff to be more vigilant

Up to 160 counter-terrorism advisers will train civilian staff to identify suspect activity and to ensure premises have secure emergency exits, CCTV footage used to best effect, and regular searches and evacuation drills. From now on, local authorities will be required as part of their performance framework to assess the measures they have taken to protect against terrorism.

We will now work with architects and planners to encourage them to

'design-in' protective security measures into new buildings, including safe areas, traffic control measures and the use of blast resistant materials -- and on this I am grateful for the recommendations of the Hon Member for Newark, whom I thank.

And following further work we will report back soon on what more we need to do to strengthen security to protect against the use of hazardous substances for terrorist purposes.

Mr Speaker, just as we are constantly vigilant to the ways in which we can tighten our security, so too we must ensure that the travelling public are able to go about their business in the normal way.

In the most sensitive locations, for example some large rail stations - and whilst doing everything to avoid inconvenience to passengers - we are planning additional screening of baggage and passenger searches.

But in the last few months at key airports there has already been additional investment in new screening capacity and we have been able to review the one-bag per passenger rule. The Transport Secretary is announcing today that as soon as we are confident that airports are able to handle additional baggage safely, these restrictions on hand baggage will be progressively lifted. Starting with several airports in the new year, we will work with airport operators to ensure all UK airports are in a position to allow passengers to fly with more than one item of hand luggage.

Mr Speaker the security budget - which is two and a half billion pounds this year - will rise to three and a half billion pounds in 2011.

Because of the terrorist threat, the size of the security service - which was under 2,000 in 2001 and is 3,300 now - will rise beyond 4,000, twice the size of 2001.

I can report that we have now constituted dedicated regional counter terrorism units - with in total more than 2000 police and support staff - responsible for overseeing investigations into those who recruit terrorists and promote hate.

From the Home Office budget, from now until 2011, an additional £240 million pounds will finance counter terrorism policing - focused as much on preventing the next generation of terrorists as pursuing current targets. And this will include additional funding for further training of our 3,500 neighbourhood police teams to deal with radicalisation in their local communities.

The scale of our international effort is such that around £400 million pounds over the next three years will be invested through the Foreign Office, DfID and the British Council to tackle radicalisation and promote understanding overseas. And the Government will report back on action overseas with other countries to counter extremism when we launch the National Security Strategy.

I can confirm £70 million pounds is being invested in community projects devoted to countering violent extremism.

So in total we are now investing nearly three times as much in security now compared with 6 years ago.

Mr Speaker, in line with the measured way we responded to the terrorist

incidents in June, we will only seek new powers that are essential to the fight against terrorism.

I can tell the House that in the forthcoming Counter Terrorism Bill - to be introduced shortly - there will be stronger sentences for terrorist-related offences and, where terrorists have served sentences, new powers for the police to continue to monitor their activities.

Asset freezing is an important tool in the fight against terrorists buying weapons or using money for terrorist purposes. Sophisticated evidence gathering of financial transactions can both deny terrorists finance and locate the sources of terrorists plots. Current legislation makes it difficult for us to take preventative action, so the new Bill will give us new powers to ensure we can use all available information to pursue those who finance terrorist attacks.

In addition to measures to process terrorist cases more efficiently and reduce the time between arrest and trial - including 14 new specially protected courtrooms - a single senior Judge has been nominated to manage all terrorism cases. And there will also be a single senior lead prosecutor in the Crown Prosecution Service responsible for cases relating to inciting violent extremism.

Mr Speaker, to ensure we protect our borders and detect possible terrorist suspects, members of the new UK Border Agency will have the power, from January next year, to detain people not just on suspicion of immigration offences or for customs crime but also for other criminal activity including terrorism. Powers are also being given to airline liaison officers to cancel visas where justified.

In line with my statement of July, there will be one single primary checkpoint for both passport control and customs; and the UK Border Agency - which will have 25,000 staff - will now apply controls at points of entry and exit on people and goods, into and out of the UK, as well as working throughout the world.

The new Agency will enable us to transfer intelligence from UK operations overseas to those making visa decisions, and to check biometrics taken from visa applicants against criminal and counter-terrorism records. Further details of the new Border Agency - which has been welcomed by the Association of Chief Police Officers - are published in the Cabinet Office report issued today.

This will go hand in hand with what is increasingly necessary - biometric visas for all applicants from March next year, biometric ID cards for foreign nationals introduced from the end of 2008, and a strengthening of the E-borders programme, with the contract to incorporate all passenger information awarded today.

Having agreed repatriation arrangements for foreign terrorist suspects with Jordan, Lebanon and Algeria, work is underway with a number of additional countries with a view to signing new agreements. In addition to the nine foreign nationals recently deported under immigration powers on grounds of national security, a further 24 foreign nationals are currently subject to deportation proceedings on national security grounds. And 4000 foreign prisoners are likely to be deported this year.

Mr Speaker, all faith communities in the UK make a huge contribution in all spheres of our national life and are integral to our success as a society. And as we found - listening to all communities in June - the vast majority

of people, of all faiths and backgrounds, condemn terrorists and their actions.

But the objective of Al Qaeda and related groups is to manipulate political and humanitarian issues in order to gain support for their agenda of murder and violence --- and to deliberately maim and kill fellow human beings, including innocent women and children. We must not allow anyone to use terrorist activities as a means to divide us or isolate those belonging to a particular faith or community.

And to deal with the challenge posed by this terrorist threat we have to do more, working with communities:

First to challenge extremist propaganda and support alternative voices;
Second, to disrupt the promoters of violent extremism by strengthening our institutions and supporting individuals who may be being targeted;
Third, to increase the capacity of communities to resist and reject violent extremism;
And fourth, to address issues of concern exploited by ideologues and where by emphasising our shared values across communities we can both celebrate and act upon what unites us.

This will be achieved not by one single programme or initiative and it won't be achieved overnight. This is a generational challenge which requires sustained work over the long term and by a range of actions in schools, colleges, universities, faith groups and youth clubs; by engaging young people through the media, culture, sport and arts; and by acting against extremist influences operating on the internet and in institutions including prisons, universities and some places of worship.

As part of intensifying measures to isolate extremism, a new unit bringing together police and security intelligence and research will identify, analyse and assess not just the inner circle of extremist groups but those at risk of falling under their influence -- and share their advice and insights.

Building on initial roadshows of mainstream Islamic scholarship around the country, which have attracted over 70,000 young people, and an internet site which has reached far more, we will sponsor at home and abroad, including for the first time in Pakistan, a series of national and local events to counter extremist propaganda. The next stage will draw upon the work commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council, Kings College and the Royal Society for Arts on how best to deal with radicalisation both at home and abroad.

One central issue is how to balance extremist views supporting terrorism which appear on the internet and media. The Home Secretary is inviting the largest global technology and internet companies to work together to ensure that our best technical expertise is galvanised to counter online incitement to hatred. I also welcome the decision by the Royal Television Society and Society of Newspaper Editors to hold a conference and regional debates on how to ensure accurate and balanced reporting of issues related to terrorism in the media.

To ensure charities are not exploited by extremists, a new unit in the Charity Commission will strengthen governance and accountability.

A specialist unit in the Prisons Service will be tasked with stopping extremists using prison networks to plot future activities. And because young people in the criminal justice system are especially vulnerable to extremist influences, we are making further funding available through the Youth Justice Board, the National Offenders Management Service and the

many voluntary agencies that work with young people in trouble to support young people who may be targeted for recruitment by extremist groups.

Following evidence that some of those involved in promoting violent extremism have made use of outdoor activity centres and sports facilities, we are working with Sport England to provide guidance for the sector to ensure that these facilities are not abused.

Backed up by a new website to share best practice, a new board of experts will advise local authorities, local councillors and local communities on tackling radicalization and those promoting hate.

We have had mosques in the UK for more than a hundred years, serving local communities well. And these communities tell me that mosques have a much wider role beyond their core spiritual purpose in providing services, educating young people and building cohesion - and the majority already work hard to reject violent extremism. As the newly constituted Mosques and Imams National Advisory Body recognises however, the governance of mosques could be strengthened to help serve communities better and challenge those who fuel hate.

Our consultations with Muslim communities emphasise the importance of the training of imams, including English language requirements --- and the Secretary for Communities will be announcing an independent review to examine with communities how to build the capacity of Islamic seminaries, learning from other faith communities as well as experience overseas.

In addition to updated advice for universities on how to deal with extremism on campus, the Secretary for Skills and the Higher Education Minister will later this month invite universities to lead a debate on how we maintain academic freedom whilst ensuring that extremists can never stifle debate or impose their views. And we will now consult also on how to support further education colleges.

And the Secretary of State for Culture is working with the museums, libraries and archives council to agree a common approach to deal with inflammatory and extremist material that some seek to distribute through public libraries, whilst also protecting freedom of speech.

We know that young people of school age can be exposed to extremist messages. The Secretary of State for Children will be convening a new forum of headteachers to advise on what more we can do together to protect young people and build bridges across communities.

To ensure young people have the opportunity to learn about diversity and faith in modern Britain, we will work in partnership with religious education teachers to promote the national framework for teaching religious education in schools including making sure children learn about all faiths.

An advisory group will work with local communities to promote the citizenship education classes run by mosque schools in Bradford and elsewhere.

And I can announce that one essential part of this will be to twin schools of different faiths with our new £2 million pound school linking programme, supported by a new national website and School Linking Network.

I am also announcing today a youth panel to advise the Government --- learning from youth projects like the Youth Debating Circles in Birmingham, Tag TV in Tower Hamlets, the 'Extreme News' educational website in Oldham and the Green Light Project's 'one stop' website in Dudley which all enable young people to debate and discuss issues of concern - as does the work of the Youth Parliament who have been running debates about the impact of terrorism on young people.

And we are sponsoring and encouraging a series of national and local mentoring programmes for young people:

- A Business In The Community Muslim mentoring programme linking 100 young people with professional mentors and role models;
- New leadership training sponsored by Common Purpose, the Karimia Institute, Crime Concern and Muslim Hands;
- And local youth leadership schemes in Blackburn, Waltham Forest, Leeds and in partnership with Tottenham Hotspur football club in Haringey.

After discussion with Muslim women, a new advisory group has been set up by the Secretary for Communities. This will advise on the access of women to mosques and their management committees.

Mr Speaker, it is by seeking to build on shared interests and shared values that we will isolate extremists and foster understanding across faiths. Following the recent remarkable letter by 138 Muslim scholars - from a diversity of traditions within Islam - which paid tribute to the common roots of Islam, Christianity and Judaism and called for deeper dialogue, we stand ready to support in Britain new facilities for multi-faith scholarship, research and dialogue. A green paper will be published to encourage interfaith groups to come together in every constituency of the country. I am also inviting the Higher Education Funding Council to investigate the idea of setting up in Britain a European Centre of Excellence for Islamic studies.

And in addition to joint work with the French and German governments on building an appreciation of Islamic and Muslim heritage across Europe, the Arts Council England, Tate Gallery, Victoria and Albert Museum and British Library will all be taking forward projects to promote greater understanding of the contribution of Islam to European history and culture.

And just as the British Council is connecting young people across the world through school twinning and volunteering exchanges, I am announcing that we will finance a rising number of young people from all communities to volunteer overseas.

Finally Mr Speaker, the intercept review will report in January, we believe a consensus now exists on post-charge questioning and the Home Secretary is beginning a new round of consultations with parties and communities on detailed proposals on pre-charge detention where we believe we can establish a cross-party consensus.

Mr Speaker, there is no greater priority than the safety and security of our people and building the strongest possible relationships across all faiths and communities --- and I believe it possible to build a stronger consensus that will both root out terrorist extremism and build more vibrant and cohesive communities.

And I commend this statement to the House.