

# CONTEST: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism

July 2011

# Introduction

1.01. This is the third published version of the United Kingdom's counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST. This new strategy reflects the changing terrorist threat and incorporates new Government policies on counter-terrorism.

1.02. The aim of CONTEST is to reduce the risk to the UK and its interests overseas from terrorism, so that people can go about their lives freely and with confidence.

## Strategic context

**I.03.** Last year, over 10,000 people were killed by terrorists around the world. But international law enforcement and military collaboration are changing the threats we face.

**I.04.** The leadership group of Al Qa'ida is now weaker than at any time since 9/11. It has played no role in recent political change in North Africa and the Middle East. Its ideology has been widely discredited and it has failed in all its objectives. Continued international pressure can further reduce its capability. But Al Qa'ida continues to pose a threat to our own security; and groups affiliated to Al Qa'ida – notably in Yemen and Somalia – have emerged over the past two years to be a substantial threat in their own right.

**I.05.** Al Qa'ida is responsible for only a small fraction of terrorist attacks. Other groups, independent from Al Qa'ida but broadly sympathetic to its aims, continue to emerge and to conduct attacks around the world.

**I.06.** We judge that four factors will continue to enable terrorist groups to grow and to survive: conflict and instability; aspects of modern technology; a pervasive ideology; and radicalisation.

**I.07.** The threats we face here reflect global trends. Al Qa'ida, groups affiliated to Al Qa'ida, other terrorist groups and lone terrorists have all tried to operate in this country. Some have planned attacks here which we have disrupted. Others have recruited people for attacks overseas, spread propaganda and raised funds.

1.08. The threat level in the UK from international terrorism has been SEVERE for much of the period, meaning that we judge a terrorist attack to be 'highly likely'. Threat levels continue to be set independently by JTAC.

1.09. For much of this period the greatest threat to the UK has come from terrorist groups based in Pakistan. British nationals (amongst hundreds of other Europeans) are training or operating in Pakistan and some intend to travel to Afghanistan. But over the past twelve months, the threat to UK interests from terrorists in Yemen and Somalia has significantly increased. People from the UK are also travelling to these countries to engage in terrorist related

activity; some are returning to the UK to plan and conduct terrorist operations.

1.10. Over the past two years the threat from Northern Ireland Related Terrorism (NIRT) has also grown: there were 40 terrorist attacks in Northern Ireland in 2010 and there have been 16 terrorist attacks in Northern Ireland up to 30 June 2011.<sup>1</sup> The threat from NIRT to Great Britain has increased.

1.11. Between January 2009 and December 2010 over 600 people were arrested for terrorist-related activity in the UK.<sup>2</sup> This is more than any other European country. 67 people have been prosecuted and 58 people convicted for terrorist-related offences.



Photo: Graham Bedingfield, West Midlands Police

1 Data supplied by Northern Ireland Office covering period up to 30 June 2011

2 This figure includes Northern Ireland related terrorism arrests in the Republic of Ireland.

# Our response

1.12. Our counter-terrorism strategy will continue to be organised around four workstreams, each comprising a number of key objectives

- **Pursue:** to stop terrorist attacks;
- **Prevent:** to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism;
- **Protect:** to strengthen our protection against a terrorist attack; and
- **Prepare:** to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack.

1.13. The Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) emphasises the need to tackle the root causes of instability. This approach is reflected in CONTEST. For terrorism we need to address not only the immediate threat of attacks but the longer term factors which enable terrorist groups to grow and flourish. Some of these

factors cannot be addressed within a counter-terrorism strategy and are much wider Government priorities. Coordination between CONTEST and other Government programmes is essential. Working closely with other countries will remain a priority.

1.14. CONTEST will reflect our fundamental values and, in particular, our commitment not only to protect the people of this country and our interests overseas but to do so in away that is consistent with and indeed advances our commitment to human rights and the rule of law. Our strategy will be proportionate to the risks we face and only engage in activity which is necessary to address those risks. It will be transparent: wherever possible and consistent with national security we will seek to make more information available in order to help the public to hold

the Government to account over its policy and spending decisions.

1.15. We recognise that success has been achieved through international collaboration. That will continue to be the case in future.

### *Pursue*

1.16. The purpose of *Pursue* is to stop terrorist attacks in this country and against our interest overseas. This means detecting and investigating threats at the earliest possible stage, disrupting terrorist activity before it can endanger the public and, wherever possible, prosecuting those responsible.

1.17. In 2011-2015 we want to:

- Continue to assess our counter-terrorism powers and ensure they are both effective and proportionate;
- Improve our ability to prosecute people for terrorist-related offences;
- Increase our capabilities to detect, investigate and disrupt terrorist threats;
- Ensure that judicial proceedings in this country can better handle

sensitive and secret material to serve the interests of both justice and national security; and

- Work with other countries and multilateral organisations to enable us to better tackle the threats we face at their source.

1.18. We have made a start with this work by reviewing some of the most controversial counter-terrorism and security powers which have been used in recent years. We have made significant changes – amending stop and search powers; reducing the length of time for which people can be held before charge for terrorist offences to 14 days; and replacing control orders with a package including Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures which provide security but also enable the collection of evidence which can lead to prosecution. This work will continue.

1.19. We are concerned that we continue to identify far more people engaged in terrorist activity in this country than we can successfully prosecute and convict. It therefore remains a high priority to improve prosecution rates further. We continue to consider

the possible use of intercept as evidence. But we will now be looking at other options.

1.20. We believe that close dialogue between the police, security and intelligence agencies is the basis of successful counter-terrorism work. We intend to maintain arrangements largely as they are. But we need to make some changes to the Police Counter Terrorism Network to improve its capability. And we are monitoring new arrangements put in place by the security and intelligence agencies last year to improve coordinated investigations of threats to this country from overseas. We are concerned that in some areas technology is eroding our capability to obtain intelligence about terrorist related activity; we are committed to addressing this in forthcoming legislation.

1.21. We believe that as a matter of principle foreign nationals who have been engaged in terrorist-related activity here should be deported, where they cannot be convicted or after they have served a sentence. But, given our human rights obligations, we will deport only where we are satisfied that those concerned will not be mistreated on their return. We will

continue to seek assurances in this regard from other governments to facilitate the deportation of more terrorist suspects in the future.

1.22. The objective of much of our counter-terrorism work overseas, as in this country, must be the detention and prosecution of people planning terrorist operations. But operations overseas are significantly complicated by legal issues. Some countries rarely prosecute or convict terrorists. The treatment of detainees held overseas following counter-terrorist operations has been the cause of considerable concern for many years. Attention has also been focused on the UK's involvement in their detention and alleged mistreatment. We have already committed to holding an inquiry into allegations of UK involvement in mistreatment. We have also published the guidance which now exists on these issues for intelligence officers and service personnel.

1.23. Success in counter-terrorism depends on international collaboration. We will support key allies in building their capacity to investigate and prosecute terrorists overseas.

1.24. Success in *Pursue* will mean that:

- At home, we are able to disrupt terrorist-related activity in the UK and prosecute or deport more of those responsible;
- Overseas, we have seized the opportunity we now have to reduce further the threat from Al Qa'ida, its affiliates and other terrorist organisations and we have disrupted attacks planned against this country; and
- Our counter-terrorism work is effective, proportionate and consistent with our commitment to human rights.

## **Prevent**

1.25. In June 2011 the Government published a review of recent *Prevent* related work and a new strategy for the next four years. This section of CONTEST reflects our conclusions.

1.26. We regard *Prevent* as a key part of CONTEST. We do not believe it is possible to resolve the threats we face simply by arresting and prosecuting more people. We believe that this is the view of our key allies around the world and that *Prevent*

needs to be an international effort as much as other parts of our counter-terrorism strategy. But we also want to make *Prevent* more effective. And in particular we intend to now change both its scope and its focus.

1.27. Like CONTEST as a whole *Prevent* will now address radicalisation to all forms of terrorism. We will prioritise according to the risks we face and at present the greatest risk to our security comes from terrorism associated with Al Qa'ida and like minded groups. We believe that *Prevent* work to date has not clearly recognised the way in which some terrorist ideologies draw on and make use of extremist ideas which are espoused and circulated by apparently non-violent organisations, very often operating within the law. We will not change the law – we remain committed to protecting the freedom of speech which many of those same extremists set out to undermine. But preventing radicalisation must mean challenging extremist ideas that are conducive to terrorism and also part of a terrorist narrative. Challenge may mean simply ensuring that extremist ideas are subject to open debate. But where people seek to enter this country from overseas to engage in

activity in support of extremist as well as terrorist groups we will also use the Home Secretary's powers to exclude them.

1.28. Having widened the scope of *Prevent* we also intend to narrow its focus. *Prevent* depends on a successful integration strategy, which establishes a stronger sense of common ground and shared values, which enables participation and the empowerment of all communities and which also provides social mobility. But integration alone will not deliver *Prevent* objectives. And *Prevent* must not – as it has in the past – assume control of funding for integration projects which have a purpose and value far wider than security and counter-terrorism. The Government will not securitise its integration work: that would be neither effective, proportionate nor necessary.

1.29. Our objectives will be to:

- Respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat we face from those who promote it;
- Prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support; and

- Work with a wide range of sectors (including education, criminal justice, faith, charities, the internet and health) where there are risks of radicalisation which we need to address.

1.30. Across all our *Prevent* work we will increase the monitoring and evaluation of projects. Counter-terrorism in general must provide value for money. *Prevent* in particular must not waste public funds on projects irrelevant to its objectives. Nor will we fund or work with extremist groups; we will carefully evaluate the credibility of those we support.

1.31. In all our *Prevent* work we must be clear about our purpose and our methods. The great majority of people in this country find terrorism repugnant and will never support it. Work to challenge ideology should not try to change majority opinion because it does not need changing. Our purpose is to reach the much smaller number of people who are vulnerable to radicalisation. We must mobilise and empower communities not give the impression that they need to be convinced terrorism is wrong.

1.32. Success in *Prevent* will mean that:

- There is a reduction in support for terrorism of all kinds in this country and in states overseas whose security most impacts on our own;
- There is more effective challenge to those extremists whose views are shared by terrorist organisations and used by terrorists to legitimise violence; and
- There is more challenge to and isolation of extremists and terrorists operating on the internet.

## *Protect*

1.33. The purpose of *Protect* is to strengthen our protection against a terrorist attack in the UK or against our interests overseas and so reduce our vulnerability. Our priorities are informed by an annual National Risk Assessment, a version of which we publish, which assesses the threats we face and the vulnerabilities we have.

1.34. We believe that significant progress has been made with our

*Protect* related work in the past few years, notably in securing the Critical National Infrastructure, in assessing and managing down the risks to crowded places and in safeguarding hazardous materials which may be used by terrorists in an attack.

1.35. But much more remains to be done. We will devote more resources to border security, improving both the technology for identifying who enters and leaves this country and the coordination of our law enforcement response. We have announced the creation of a Border Command in the new National Crime Agency, intended to address the multiple chains of command across different organisations which operate at the border at present. We have already responded to recent threats to aviation security with new scanning technology, watchlisting and a no-fly procedure, intended to enable us to stop people boarding an aircraft bound for or leaving the UK who may intend to destroy it. We are working to address issues regarding cargo security.

1.36. We have received the report from the Coroner following the inquest into the 7 July 2005 London

bombings. Our reply to that report will be published shortly; the recommendations of the Coroner touch on issues regarding *Pursue*, *Protect* and *Prepare*.

1.37. From 2011-2015 our *Protect* objectives will be to:

- Strengthen UK border security;
- Reduce the vulnerability of the transport network;
- Increase the resilience of the UK's infrastructure; and

- Improve protective security for crowded places.

1.38. We recognise that in all these areas our *Protect* work is becoming more complex. In many areas our own protective security depends on effective security measures in third countries. Aviation security must be an international endeavour or it will not succeed; the security of the UK border depends on international collaboration. Moreover, we also depend on close relationships with the private sector, who own much of the infrastructure and the systems that need to be



protected. We will continue to be as transparent as we can in sharing our understanding of the threats we face and wherever possible will collaborate in the development of security solutions.

1.39. Success in *Protect* will mean that:

- We know where and how we are vulnerable to terrorist attack and have reduced those vulnerabilities to an acceptable and a proportionate level;
- We share our priorities with the private sector and the international community and, wherever possible, we act together to address them; and
- The disruptive effect and costs of our protective security work are proportionate to the risks we face.

## Prepare

1.40. The purpose of our *Prepare* work is to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack where that attack cannot be stopped. This includes work to bring a terrorist attack to an end and to increase our resilience so we can recover from

its aftermath. An effective and efficient response will save lives, reduce harm and aid recovery.

1.41. We believe that it is right to build resilience in a coordinated way to all kinds of threats and hazards. This 'generic' approach makes best use of our resources and avoids needless duplication. Evidence suggests that generic resilience capabilities at a local level have improved in some areas in the past few years but we must do more to improve aspects of our response, including in particular communications between emergency services and to the public during a civil emergency. There remain wider issues to resolve regarding what is known as 'interoperability' between the emergency services. We are also concerned that there is not yet sufficiently regular or comprehensive testing of all our emergency response plans.

1.42. The Coroner's report following the inquest into the 7 July 2005 London bombings made seven recommendations regarding the emergency response to those attacks. The recommendations also relate to information sharing between emergency services and

incident training. Our response will address these issues.

1.43. Although generic resilience capabilities offer a sound basis for work to respond to a terrorist incident, there are types of terrorist attack which require a more specialised response. In the past two years considerable resources have been devoted to developing more effective responses to an attack of the kind that took place in Mumbai between 26-29 November 2008. Significant changes have been made to police firearms resources and tactics, and

to the multi agency response that such incidents would require. We intend to continue this work.

1.44. We also intend to do more to address the highest impact terrorist risks set out in the National Risk Assessment. These include the risk of a terrorist attack which makes use of unconventional weapons, including biological, radiological, chemical or even nuclear materials. We emphasise that there is a low probability of these attacks. But their impact is so high that we judge preparations must be made for them. As in so many



Photo: Fife Constabulary

other areas of this strategy those preparations must wherever possible be coordinated with our allies overseas. A considerable amount of work has already been completed, in particular by the police, in developing a response in these areas.

1.45. Over the next four years we will therefore:

- Continue to build generic capabilities to respond to and recover from a wide range of terrorist and other civil emergencies;
- Improve preparedness for the highest impact risks in the National Risk Assessment;
- Improve the ability of the emergency services to work together during a terrorist attack; and
- Enhance communications and information sharing for terrorist attacks.

1.46. Testing and exercising are vital to our resilience and preparedness. We have a National Counter Terrorism Exercise Programme. We will maintain this and Ministers

will participate in it. We will also place great emphasis on learning and absorbing the lessons from these exercises and will expect participating agencies to do this quickly and comprehensively. We will monitor their progress.

1.47. Success in *Prepare* will mean that:

- Our planning for the consequences of all civil emergencies provides us with the capabilities to respond to and recover from the most likely kinds of terrorist attacks in this country;
- We have in place additional capabilities to manage ongoing terrorist attacks wherever required; and
- We have in place additional capabilities to respond to the highest impact risks.

### London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games

1.48. The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games will be the biggest sporting event in our history, involving 14,700 athletes from 205 countries at over 30 venues. There will be over 10 million spectators.

The Government has guaranteed to the International Olympic Committee to take all financial, planning and operational measures necessary to ensure the safety of the Games.

**1.49.** Terrorism poses the greatest security threat to the Games. Experience indicates that global sporting events provide an attractive and high-profile target for terrorist groups.

**1.50.** We have conducted an audit and review of Games security planning and we are satisfied that

appropriate arrangements have been and are being put in place. The UK has an excellent track record for safely and securely hosting major events. The sheer scale of London 2012 poses significant policing and security challenges.

**1.51.** Our attention will be increasingly focused on assuring the Games security strategy and in establishing that we have the right capabilities in place, that our plans are sufficient to address the challenges, and that security and safety are coordinated with the wider Games operation. We will



Photo: Copyright Olympic Delivery Authority

focus on testing and exercising, coordinating with the wider National Counter Terrorism Exercise Programme which is already in place.

## Implementation

**1.52.** This section describes how we will ensure the accountability of this strategy, implement it effectively and monitor its progress.

**1.53.** The National Security Council chaired by the Prime Minister, will have oversight of CONTEST and take regular reports on its progress. The Home Secretary will continue to be the lead Minister for domestic counter-terrorism work.

**1.54.** Implementation requires close cooperation and coordination in this country. We expect departments, agencies and the police to work closely together to a common set of objectives, with transparency and openness. They will be assessed accordingly. We will seek dialogue with the private sector, voluntary organisations, community groups and the general public. Our success will continue to depend on the quality of our international engagement with our close allies and with multilateral organisations.

**1.55.** We will continue to invest in a cross-government effort to coordinate science and technology in support of CONTEST. Our forthcoming White Paper will set out how we intend to use investment in defence and security technology and equipment to protect the UK against threats to our national interests, terrorism included.

**1.56.** The Spending Review 2010 set the budgets for each Government department from 2011/12 - 2014/15. The resources allocated to departments reflected the priorities in the SDSR. We have allocated funding to maintain and (as we have explained in this strategy) in some cases to enhance counter-terrorism capabilities, while still delivering efficiency savings.

**1.57.** We will assess the progress of CONTEST against a set of performance indicators, complemented by deeper evaluation of specific programmes. Evaluation will be supported by wider research and horizon scanning, vital if we are to remain ahead of new or changing threats and vulnerabilities. We are committed to publishing data where security classification allows. We

will publish an annual report on our counter-terrorism work.

## Conclusion

1.58. International counter-terrorism work since 9/11 has made considerable progress in reducing the threats we face. Al Qa'ida is now significantly weaker than it has been for ten years. There are significant opportunities for us and our allies to make further progress in the next few months and years.

1.59. But we recognise that the overall terrorist threat we face continues to be significant. The agencies and the police continue to disrupt terrorist-related activity here. The numbers of people arrested and then convicted for terrorist offences remains high.

1.60. The continued threat is reflected through this strategy. We are determined to maintain the capabilities we need to meet our aim – to reduce the risk to the UK and our interests overseas from terrorism so that people can go about their lives freely and with confidence.

1.61. But we are also determined to have a strategy that is not only more effective but also more proportionate, that is better focused and more precise, which uses powers selectively, carefully and in a way that is as sparing as possible. These themes and this language – also runs through this strategy – in *Pursue*, *Prevent* and *Protect* and *Prepare* and are reflected in its founding principles.

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