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# The U.K.'s Counter-Terrorist Strategy

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## THE U.K.'S COUNTER-TERRORIST STRATEGY

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### I. THE THREAT

1. The most serious terrorist threat to the United Kingdom comes from al Qaeda and its affiliates. As we have already seen in recent attacks and attempted attacks, affiliated groups like AQ in the Arabian Peninsula are increasingly potent and the threat they pose is not limited to their own region.
2. We assess that the threat is, and will continue to be, driven by a number of strategic factors, including conflict and instability, technology, ideology, and radicalisation. We continue therefore to work on upstream conflict prevention, to challenge the ideology overseas and online.
3. Over 230 people have been convicted of terrorist related offences and over a dozen attempted terrorist plots in the U.K. have been disrupted

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since 2001. Officially, the international terrorist threat is assessed as “severe,” meaning an attack is considered to be “highly likely.” Again, it’s an indication of the threat we have faced that it has only been below that level for five months since it was first made public in 2006.

4. Sadly, the threat of terrorism is not new to the U.K. and we have seen that, despite the peace process, there remains serious residual terrorist activity in Northern Ireland. In 2010, responding to an escalation of attacks by terrorist groups connected to Northern Ireland, we raised the threat level and reinforced our support to the Police Service of Northern Ireland. We have also reinforced its presence in Northern Ireland, working in collaboration with the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.
5. This article focuses on the response to AQ and other international terrorism. The wider mechanism for tackling the threat from residual terrorist groups linked to Northern Ireland is clear. That is through a well established and publicly supported peace process.

## II. THE RESPONSE

6. The U.K. Government’s strategy for addressing the international terrorist threat is known as **CONTEST**. Its aim is to “reduce the risk to the U.K. and its interests overseas from international terrorism, so that people can go about their lives freely and with confidence.”
7. Across Government, CT activity is divided into four categories:
  - Pursue: the work of the law enforcement, intelligence and judicial authorities to disrupt attacks and detain terrorists,
  - Prevent: our counter-radicalisation effort,
  - Protect: our work to protect against terrorist attack, and
  - Prepare: where an attack cannot be stopped, to mitigate its impact.

*A. Pursue*

8. Considerable effort and resources have been devoted to building the U.K.'s CT disruption capacity since 9/11. The number of police dedicated to counterterrorism work has grown by over seventy percent and the Security Service (MI5) has doubled in size. We have also regionalised our effort so our CT capability is more evenly spread around the country, rather than concentrated solely in London.
9. We have also toughened our counterterrorism laws, for example, outlawing the glorification of terrorism and some acts contributing to terrorism like providing terrorist training. In strengthening our laws against terrorism we are mindful of the impact on civil liberties and the new Coalition Government, elected in May last year, has therefore reviewed the powers it felt had begun to erode traditional civil liberties. This will lead to a much more targeted use of intrusive powers like 'no-suspicion stop and search' and surveillance.
10. International co-operation is also hugely important to the U.K. counter-terrorist effort, not least the very close intelligence relationship with the USA, our joint activity overseas in Afghanistan and Iraq but also our co-operation with countries like Pakistan.

*B. Prevent*

11. Our counter-radicalisation strategy—Prevent—is the newest part of CONTEST and was devised in the aftermath of the attacks on the 7th July 2005, when four young British born Muslims killed over fifty people on the London Underground.
12. It is built upon the recognition that we cannot arrest or disrupt our way out of this problem; that we must address the underlying causes and ideology, as well as the symptoms.
13. As well as action to increase the resilience of British Muslim communities and help vulnerable individuals, we are working with institutions where extremists may operate—prisons and universities—so staff are informed of the potential

for radicalisation and better able to respond.

14. In common with *Pursue*, there's an important overseas dimension. Our Foreign Office and International Development Department work hard to address the ideology and drivers of radicalisation, particularly in places from which large numbers have immigrated to the U.K.
15. It is fair to say that aspects of Prevent have been criticised, for example, with some saying it stigmatises Muslim people, while others have claimed it has led to preferential treatment. The new Coalition Government has therefore indicated that, while the U.K.'s CT strategy will retain a preventative element, the strategy needs improving. More broadly, the Prime Minister David Cameron, has made clear his view that the U.K. needs to more robustly address the Islamist ideology underpinning the threat.
16. The review has not yet been finalised but to answer the criticisms above it will probably be expanded to include other forms of extremism, such as far right extremism. In addition, it is likely to lead to a clearer distinction between work that is aimed at improving community integration and work that is aimed at tackling potential radicalisation.

### C. *Protect and Prepare*

17. The last two pillars of CONTEST are known as 'Protect' and 'Prepare.' These are vital areas of work aimed at making the U.K. more resistant to, and better able to recover from, terrorist attack.
18. For example, the U.K. responded to the attempt on Northwest Flight 253 over Detroit with enhanced work on watch listing, explosives research, scanning technology and data sharing. Following Mumbai we have improved the U.K.'s ability to respond to such an attack with exercises for police and other emergency responders.
19. More broadly, we have created a network of 250 Counterterrorism Security Advisors who provide protective security advice, for example, to sports stadia, shopping malls, bars, pubs and nightclubs.

*D. CBRN*

20. Last year we also reviewed the counter terrorist CBRN work we had undertaken since 9/11 and, as a result, published a new strategy for addressing the threat from Chemical, Biological, Radiological or Nuclear materials.

## III. CHALLENGES

21. As we saw with the cargo bomb attempt, the threat continues to evolve, requiring governments and law enforcement to adapt. Realities on the ground as well as changing technology present new challenges. How, for example, can radicalising material online, hosted in different countries with differing legal regimes, be addressed.
22. In addition, the U.K. is facing a tough financial situation, putting even greater onus on to ensure that our interventions, for example in Prevent, are known to be working.

## IV. CONCLUSION

23. The U.K. has faced a terrorist threat for a number of years. But the AQ related threat is substantially different and has required significant changes to our approach.
24. Through our four pronged strategy, increased resources and better coordination the U.K. has improved its response to the threat. We have made improvements but, of course, we know the threat continues to evolve and that we can never be complacent.