Mottram, R. (2008) 'Protecting the citizen in the twentieth-first century' in Hennessy, P. (ed), *The New Protective State: Government, Intelligence and Terrorism*, London: Continuum Publishing (p46 –51)

A further, substantial stimulus towards fundamental reform was provided by the al-Qaeda attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001, and the resulting new calculus of threat that they ushered in of terrorists with the goal of causing casualties on a massive scale, undeterred by the fear of alienating the public or their own supporters - that is, a scale of terrorist challenge and, importantly, of consequence going well beyond that which the UK had experienced in 30 years of Irish terrorism. Since 2003 the British Government has been implementing a long-term strategy for countering international terrorism and the extremism that lies behind it. During this period the threat has changed in character. The terrorist attacks in London on 7 July 2005 brought home the risk of suicide attacks by British citizens, and the potential scale of the attacks we face and their domestic and international impact were shown by the alleged airline bomb plot in August 2006.

Following those attacks the Government has worked with others to step up and deepen the counter-terrorism effort. Both before and after 7 July additional resources have been provided. The threat posed has both domestic and international elements, with a complex interaction between them. The response, too, needs to be broad-ranging and coherent. This has prompted a public articulation of the strategy[1] and measures to strengthen still further the capacity across government to develop and deliver the plans and programmes necessary to achieve the strategy. The Home Office is the lead department for domestic counter-terrorism. At the same time, an effective counter-terrorism strategy against the type of threat we now face needs to engage the whole of government. The collective support to ministers - and the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary as Chairman of the key committees - has therefore been strengthened as one part of the government response.

The threat from international terrorism, whether in the UK or overseas, is, of course, not new. In the UK's case, our most recent experience was the long-running troubles in Northern Ireland which led to a variety of terrorist attacks.

The Islamist terrorist threat does, however, have a number of important characteristics[2] which make framing and implementing a response particularly difficult:

- It is genuinely international, affecting a wide variety of targets in many countries. Attacks are perpetrated by individuals from the countries concerned and sometimes by outsiders. British citizens involved in terrorist activities have links with terrorist facilitators here and overseas. In this and other respects (e.g. use of the internet) it is an example of 'globalization'.

- The threat comes from a variety of group networks and individuals, in a mix of relationships.

- The terrorists intend to cause mass casualties.

- The people involved are driven by particularly violent and extremist beliefs.

We face considerable uncertainty in sizing the threat in terms of its overseas dimension, the composition and scale of the home-grown threat, and the links between them. The changing nature of known home-grown extremist and terrorist-related activity can be assessed based on intelligence, but our intelligence agencies cannot confidently assess the total scale of the threat, including activity of which they are unaware. Our understanding of the overseas-based threat and links between it and UK citizens is similarly cloudy and depends upon close liaison with overseas governments. It follows that sizing our response is also intrinsically very difficult.

The range and diversity of the threat, and the balance between the external and the home-grown elements in different countries, obviously will impact on how the threat is perceived, described and most effectively countered. Because it has both international and domestic elements, both international and domestic policy need to be brought to bear. For the UK as for other countries, action against the al-Qaeda leadership and the prevention of the creation of further opportunities for terrorist 'safe space' and the development of terrorist infrastructure are of key importance. At the same time, terrorism perpetrated by British citizens is simply a crime and is most appropriately dealt with – wherever possible – by arrest and prosecution. Inevitably our perspective on how best to tackle terrorism has been shaped by our experience of tackling Irish terrorism.

What government seeks to achieve

The aim of government policy, whether in countering international terrorism or responding to a range of other contingencies, is 'to reduce the risk, so that people can go about their daily lives freely and with confidence'. The Government is not promising to eliminate risk: it is seeking to find, with partners and with the public, proportionate responses.

In the counter-terrorist context, the Government's response has been framed in terms of four interlinked goals and policies, laws and programmes to give effect to them:

1. Preventing terrorism by tackling the factors which influence individuals to become extremists and potentially to move on to terrorist action itself.

2. Pursuing terrorists and those who sponsor them.

3. Protecting the public, key national services and British interests overseas.

4. Preparing for the consequences of a terrorist attack.

Two of these four 'P's seek to tackle and reduce the threat, and two to mitigate the consequences of any attack. Frameworks of this broad kind can be seen in a number of countries. In the UK's case the 'Protect' strand benefits from the lessons of dealing with 30 years of Irish terrorism. The 'Prepare' strand is part of a wider reform of our capacity for handling civil contingencies, as I shall go on to discuss. The 'Pursue' strand depends upon effective co-operation between our intelligence agencies and between them and overseas partners. It requires effective co-operation between the Security Service and the police. In both these dimensions the UK has a strong track record in comparison with other countries. It is the 'Prevent' strand which is perhaps the most challenging, in terms of action required domestically and internationally, particularly in the light of the evolution of the domestic terrorist threat from UK citizens.

The 'Prevent' element of the Government's counter-terrorism strategy identifies three principal strands of effort whose breadth illustrates the extent of the challenge:[3]

1. Tackling disadvantage and supporting reform – addressing structural problems in the UK and overseas that may contribute to radicalization, such as inequalities and discrimination.

2. Deterring those who facilitate terrorism and those who encourage others to become terrorists - changing the environment in which seeking to turn others towards extremism and terrorist violence can operate.

3. Engaging in the battle of ideas - challenging the ideologies that extremists believe can justify the use of violence, primarily by helping Muslims who wish to dispute these ideas to do so.

Each strand links to profound and difficult issues about what drives individuals towards extremism, and what drives those so 'radicalized' to become terrorists. The first strand is a huge task with uncertain payback in counter-terrorist terms. In the UK those drawn to terrorism are not themselves particularly disadvantaged, whether in educational or employment terms, although the impact of perceived discrimination affecting them or others in encouraging alienation is difficult to judge. The second strand has raised difficult issues with a variety of Muslim and other communities in framing legislation which protects the human rights of individuals while meeting the clear security threat. And the third involves two-way dialogue – and facilitating such communication by others – both domestically and internationally to uncertain effect.

In a number of 'Western' countries, the need to engage more effectively in the 'battle of ideas' has increasingly been recognized. Al-Qaeda's message (the single narrative) has proved effective in indoctrinating potential supporters and motivating violent activity to the extent necessary to sustain a terrorist campaign. The response needs to recognize that the target audience vulnerable to an extremist or terrorism-related message has many different components receiving information through a variety of channels both here and abroad. We need therefore to segment our approach and to ensure that the Government's aims and policies and the realities of life in this country are clearly presented both in the UK and in those overseas countries and media channels which impact on attitudes here. The simplicity of the single narrative needs to be countered by a clear, readily understandable response.

In framing the approach to the 'battle of ideas', both the media and community engagement are of key importance. Al-Qaeda has chosen to frame its essentially political message in religious terms. But this is not in reality an argument about religion, and the response should not be framed in such terms. Similarly community engagement needs to embrace a variety of voices likely to be an influence to different members of our society and, as Amartya Sen has argued[4], avoid divisions based on a single dominant system of classification, whether in terms of religion, community, civilization, etc. Our interest is in developing and emphasizing the multiple links and loyalties in our society.

Underpinning the four-'P' structure of what we are seeking to achieve, there is recognition of what might in sense be the fifth 'P' that successful delivery depends upon *partnerships* between all parts of government, the public, private and voluntary sectors, and everyone in the UK as individuals and as members of communities.

Notes

[1] *Countering International Terrorism: the United Kingdoms Strategy* (London: Stationery Office, CM 6888, 2006).

[2] For a somewhat more extended discussion see CM 6888, paras 25-40.

[3] See CMM 6888, paras 6 and 47-63.

[4] A.Sen, *Identity and Violence* (London: Allen Lane, 2006).