Contest: UK Strategy for Countering Terrorism 2023

Holly Lynch (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will make a statement on Contest, the United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering Terrorism 2023.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman): …

Contest has a clear mission: to reduce the risk from terrorism to the United Kingdom, our citizens and our interests overseas, so that people can go about their lives freely and with confidence. The terrorism threat level, set independently by the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre, has not changed, but the threat from terrorism is enduring and evolving. Despite a prevalence of lower-sophistication attacks in the UK, the threat we see today and in the coming years is more diverse, dynamic and complex: a domestic terrorist threat that is less predictable, harder to detect and harder to investigate; a persistent and evolving threat from Islamist terrorist groups overseas; and an operating environment in which accelerating advances in technology provide both opportunity for, and risk to, our counter-terrorism efforts.

It is within that context that we judge that the risk from terrorism is once again rising. By far the biggest terrorist threat comes from Islamist terrorism. It accounts for 67% of attacks since 2018, and about three quarters of MI5’s caseload. The remainder of the UK terrorist threat is largely driven by extreme right-wing terrorism, which accounts for approximately 22% of attacks since 2018 and about a quarter of the MI5 caseload. Our counter-terrorism response will be even more agile in the face of an evolving threat—more integrated, so that we can bring the right interventions to bear at the right time to reduce risk, and more aligned with our international allies, to ensure that we continue to deliver together against that common threat.

Through this updated strategy, we will place greater focus on using all the levers of the state to identify and intervene against terrorists. We will build critical partnerships with the private sector and international allies to keep the public safe, and we will harness the opportunities presented by new technology. There is no greater duty for this Government than to keep the British people safe, and I will not
rest in delivering that mission.

**Holly Lynch:** The Contest update has very much been a sobering reminder of the threats we face. Our agencies, to which we are so grateful, have prevented 39 late-stage terror attacks in the past six years. The majority of them, as we have heard, were Islamist-motivated, with extreme right-wing terrorism making up the remainder. However, we are concerned by certain omissions from the update, and the disparity between the threats outlined and the responses proposed.

On artificial intelligence, the update recognises the challenge, saying that “terrorists are likely to exploit the technology”.

We have called for new offences criminalising the training of chatbots to radicalise individuals, but concrete measures are woefully lacking in the update, so how are the Government going to tackle that? The update says that the threat from Daesh and al-Qaeda is on an “upward trajectory”, so can the Home Secretary tell us how we are working urgently with international partners to mitigate that risk?

The desperate situation in prisons is laid bare. With four of the nine terrorist attacks in the UK since 2018 perpetrated by serving or recently released prisoners, we are told individuals may develop “a terrorist mindset…during their time in prison.” Not only are we failing to de-radicalise people in prison, but people are being radicalised in prison, and failures to manage those prisoners on release are putting the public at risk. Can the Home Secretary tell the House how many terrorist prisoners are due to be released in the next 12 months, and whether every one of them has been engaged in intensive de-radicalisation programmes and assessed for terrorism prevention and investigation measures?

Finally, perhaps the most glaring omission is on state threats, despite the fact that the director general of MI5 made it clear in his annual threat update in November that Iran is “the state actor which most frequently crosses into terrorism.” In February, our agencies said that they had to disrupt 15 attempted kidnap and assassination attempts here in the UK. Remarkably, the report makes no reference to the resources, the approach or the powers necessary to respond to that form of terrorism. The Home Secretary knows that we have advocated for proscription powers on multiple occasions, so why do the Government continue to reject those proposals and why have they not finally proscribed the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps?

**Suella Braverman:** … Since March 2017, our agencies and law enforcement have disrupted 39 late-stage terrorist plots in the UK … These have included the targeting of public figures such as Members of Parliament, specific communities and events such as Pride, and public locations such as iconic sites in London. … Foundation-model AIs undoubtedly hold vast potential, and they are crucial to the UK’s mission to become a science and tech superpower, but there are still many unknowns with this class of technology and many other forms of emerging technology that pose significant, but not yet fully understood, public safety and national security risks. I am particularly concerned about the rapid development and public deployment of generative large-language models like ChatGPT, and we are alert to the exponential pace of their development, the emergent capabilities which make the exact risks difficult to anticipate or control, and the relative ease with which safeguards can be overwritten. …

**Simon Fell (Conservative):** One of the most effective ways to disrupt, identify and reduce the terrorist threat is to bring together the disparate and disjointed data sources that exist to link organised crime group activity to terrorists. Will my right hon. and learned Friend detail how the Contest strategy will help make that happen?

**Suella Braverman:** … there is huge interaction—a blurring of the lines, if you like—between terrorist organisations and groups, hostile state actors and serious organised crime groups, acting on a transnational basis with sophisticated and well-resourced networks and a heightened level of elusiveness. That is exactly why our
Contest strategy has been refreshed to realign our priorities, resources, technological capabilities and co-ordination across agencies to properly respond in a swift and robust way to these emerging threats. ...

Stuart C McDonald (SNP): ... The strategy’s commitment to engage across the tech sector is welcome but, like the shadow Minister, I was surprised by its very limited reference to the use of artificial intelligence for radicalisation and instruction. The Windsor castle crossbow attacker is a perfect example of someone being radicalised in that way. Does the Home Secretary believe that legislation is required, and what concrete steps are being taken to address the use of AI in that way?

What extra funding will support the refreshed strategy, especially given the reports that later this year a significant number of convicted terrorists will complete their sentences, which will require the most careful management? ...

Suella Braverman: ... We are absolutely committed to ensuring that victims of terrorism get the full compensation to which they are entitled, in line with schemes administered by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority. ... The truth is that no amount of compensation can ever make up for the ordeal suffered by victims of terror. That is why it is right that survivors get all the support they need, in whatever form it may be required, through the publicly funded CICA ...

Theresa Villiers (Conservative): ... It would be helpful if the Home Secretary told us whether it will get the big tech companies to do more to prevent terrorists from exploiting their platforms ...

Suella Braverman: The technological aspect of terrorism is very real. Our enemies are using more and more sophisticated tools against us for hostile purposes. ... A huge amount of investment and operational capability has been put into mitigating and dealing with that threat, most notably in the form of the counter-terrorism operations centre—a new collaboration centre ...

Diana Johnson (Labour): ... This week, a survey of 130 survivors of 11 major terrorist incidents found that more than two thirds felt that the compensation scheme overseen by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority was unfair and unreasonable. ...

Suella Braverman: ... there are no words and there is no amount of money that can adequately reflect the pain and suffering experienced by victims of terrorism. That is why it is absolutely right that we provide victims of terrorism with full compensation and the fullest support possible and available to enable them to

Kevan Jones (Labour): ... The Intelligence and Security Committee report last year on right-wing terrorism found that 30% of disrupted plots were from right-wing terrorism, and that they mainly involved young people who aimed to join either the armed forces or the police. We made recommendations on tightening up the vetting of police officers and proscribing membership of right-wing organisations for members of the armed forces. Will the Home Secretary update the House on what progress has been made on those two issues?

Suella Braverman: ... The director general of MI5, in his annual update, referred to the ideologies that are emerging and increasing in activity, and the independent review of Prevent focused on work that can be better done. It is absolutely right that we take robust action. ...

James Wild (Conservative): ... Is my right hon. and learned Friend confident that the updated strategy will ensure that technology companies do far more to prevent their services being used by those who wish us harm and to co-operate with our security and law enforcement services ...?

Suella Braverman: ... I refer him to the extensive sections on page 21 onwards and in other parts of the strategy that talk about the technological aspects, how it is emerging and our actions and response. Notably, our world-leading counter-terrorism operations centre, newly established, will bring together the right data, technology and expertise to investigate and disrupt these types of threats.
Khalid Mahmood (Labour): … One of the key things missing from the strategy is the use of covert human intelligence sources—the people who used to be known as informants to the police. Increasing numbers of people caught under this network are people with mental health issues. Will the Home Secretary provide a detailed account of how many CHISs are used, what the results are and how many of those reported are people suffering with their mental health?

Suella Braverman: I cannot get into details that relate to operational independence and decisions made by the agencies in live investigations, but what I would say is that I expect all agencies and law enforcement organisations to use the full breadth of powers that we have afforded them.

Stuart Hosie (SNP): In the Government’s response to the Intelligence and Security Committee’s “Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism” report… they said that “our counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST, remains threat agnostic so that rather than targeting specific ideologies, our tools, powers and overall CT approach can adapt to changing threats while also ensuring our approach is still able to identify and assess what are inherently ideological threats.” Can I simply ask her to confirm that nothing she has said today and nothing that has been published changes the underlying philosophical basis of how the Contest strategy operates?

Suella Braverman: As the Contest strategy refresh makes clear, a broad range of ideologies and narratives draw people into supporting terrorism. That includes, as I have said, Islamist terrorism, which is by far the largest proportion of MI5’s case load, but there is also an increasing threat from extreme right-wing terrorism that we must confront, eliminate and do everything in our power to stop. Wherever it comes from, and however people are radicalised into extremist and violent behaviour, it is unacceptable, and we take a robust approach, ultimately, to keeping the British people safe. …

Alex Davies-Jones (Labour): … the Government’s update acknowledges that when it comes to AI, “terrorists are likely to exploit the technology to create and amplify radicalising content, propaganda and instructional materials, and to plan and commit attacks.” However, there are no concrete plans in the update to address those growing risks. Beyond pointing to the Government’s own Online Safety Bill, which has been delayed yet again and watered down, and other than the rhetoric we have heard today from the Secretary of State, what are the Government actually doing? …

Suella Braverman: … we are realising the full potential of our newly established, world-leading counter-terrorism operations centre. … We are also ensuring a broader range of expertise from non-law enforcement interventions to mitigate the evolving terrorist threat. We are maintaining our investment in the critical threat assessment capabilities through the world-class joint terrorism analysis centre. …

Luke Pollard (Labour Co-op): The new Contest counter-terrorism strategy mentions that incel threats “could meet the threshold of terrorist intent or action”. … Incel violence currently largely falls out of the scope of all the Prevent strategy tactics. Does the Home Secretary agree that it is now time to develop a cross-Government incel strategy, so that we can not only prevent people from going down that path towards violent misogyny, but help rescue those who are doing so? …

Suella Braverman: … Incel culture is not strictly within the Contest apparatus, but it does need work. I readily accept that it is a violent trend and a radicalising influence that is promoting a culture that is totally at odds with the free, safe and democratic society that we all love and want to cherish. …

Martin Docherty-Hughes (SNP): In June, the national security adviser to the Canadian Government—a key Five Eyes member—listed Russia, China and Iran as key state actors that pose a threat to Canadian life. They then added India to that list due to the rise of Hindu nationalist activity specifically targeting Canadian Sikhs. Is that anywhere in the
Home Secretary’s thinking on extremism? If not, why not?

**Suella Braverman:** … We are actor-agnostic, but we note where these threats are emerging based on a casework analysis, as confirmed by MI5 and other agencies. The predominant threats relate to Islamist terrorism, but of course it is right that there are robust law-enforcement responses for any kind of violence or extremism that meets the criminal threshold. …

**Margaret Ferrier (Independent):** The rapid proliferation of end-to-end encryption and anonymous messaging services allows terrorist groups to communicate freely without the risk of detection or identification. Of course, personal privacy must be upheld for ordinary citizens, so how are the Government looking to work with tech experts to find alternative ways of accessing the communications of members of such groups?

**Suella Braverman:** This is something that really does concern me. The proposed roll-out of end-to-end encryption without enabling lawful access or without safeguards will pose a danger not just to national security, but to children and to all our people. It is vital that the technology companies work with us to roll out the available technology—I am confident that it exists—to enable and protect privacy rights, but at the same time to enable law enforcement access and interventions to take place so that we can safeguard children online, prevent radicalisation online and prevent criminality online.

To read the full transcript see
https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-07-19/debates/68108A8C-0DCD-4E7F-A10A-BD376F3504F4/ContestUKStrategyForCounteringTerrorism2023

The CONTEST update, referred to above, can be read at

The Intelligence and Security Committee report referred to above can be read at

The Government response to the Intelligence and Security Committee report, referred to above, can be read at

The MI5 annual update referred to above can be read at

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**House of Commons Written Answer**

**Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill**

**David Lammy (Labour)** [194123] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department has received any legal advice on the compatibility of the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill with the UK’s obligations under UN Security Council resolution 2334.

**David Rutley:** The Foreign Secretary has received advice from officials, including legal advice, on the bill. It is a longstanding convention for governments of all parties not to comment on the contents of government legal advice. The Government’s position on the bill was set out by my RHF the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities during the debate on the second reading of the bill on 3 July. The bill does four things: it honours a manifesto promise to which this Government recommitted in the last Queen’s speech; it affirms the important principle that UK foreign policy is a matter for the UK Government; it
ensures that local authorities concentrate on serving their residents, not directing resources inefficiently; and, critically, it provides protection for minority communities, especially the Jewish community, against campaigns that harm community cohesion and fuel antisemitism.

UN Security Council Resolution 2334, referred to above, can be read at [https://www.un.org/webcast/pdfs/SRES2334-2016.pdf](https://www.un.org/webcast/pdfs/SRES2334-2016.pdf)


Israel

Also see Commons written answer 194123 “Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill” that is included in the Home Affairs section above.

House of Commons Written Answers

**Carbon Capture and Storage: Israel**

**John Howell (Conservative)** [194177] To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has had discussions with his Israeli counterpart on Israeli research grants for carbon capture projects; and whether his Department is providing grants for businesses engaging with carbon capture projects in the UK on a similar basis to those in Israel.

**Graham Stuart:** The UK Government is committed to convene and lead international engagement on CCUS through engaging in multilateral fora and fostering bilateral relationships to collaborate and share lessons on CCUS. Domestically, in March 2023 we announced up to £20 billion funding for early deployment of CCUS across all sectors. This includes the £1 billion Carbon Capture Usage and Storage (CCUS) Infrastructure Fund, supporting the ambition for CCUS in four industrial clusters by 2030 at the latest. This follows previous UK Government investment into CCUS between 2004 and 2021 the UK Government has invested over £346 million into CCUS Research, Development and Deployment (RD&D). This funding has ensured the UK remains at the forefront of CCUS Research and Innovation, developing the skills, knowledge, and technology to allow the UK to deploy CCUS domestically and export our expertise around the world.

[https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-07-14/194177](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-07-14/194177)

**West Bank: Development Aid**

**Nicola Richards (Conservative)** [193797] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of potential (a) bomb factories, (b) mines, (c) military equipment and (d) improvised explosive devices in Jenin.

**David Rutley:** The UK is actively monitoring the security situation in Jenin. We unequivocally condemn the use and possession of indiscriminate weapons by militant groups in Jenin, including improvised explosive devices (IEDs), which could harm civilians. The UK supports the Palestinian Authority's security jurisdiction in
area 'A' of the West Bank, as agreed through the Oslo Accords. We call on the Palestinian Authority and government of Israel to cooperate in securing the safety and protection of civilians across the West Bank.

https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-07-12/193797

Department for Business and Trade

Updated Trade and Investment Factsheet: Israel

Updated Trade and Investment Factsheet: Occupied Palestinian Territories

Other Relevant Information

Tell Mama

A Decade of Anti-Muslim Hate

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

** Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3475

Scottish Government Legislative Consent Memorandum

House of Commons written answer 194123
https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-07-11/193365

Education (Non-religious Philosophical Convictions) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3186

Holocaust Memorial Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3421

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3325
** Online Safety Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3137
Report Stage, House of Lords

Nakba Commemoration Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3461

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3217

Private Burial Grounds and Cemeteries Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3188

Same Sex Marriage (Church of England)
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3438

Schools Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3156

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill

Universal Credit (Removal of Two Child Limit) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3163

Universal Jurisdiction (Extension)
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3454

Scottish Parliament

Charities (Regulation and Administration) (Scotland) Bill

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

Consultations ** new or updated today

** closes today
Charities tax compliance (closing date 20 July 2023)
Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill (closing date not specified – no later than 14 September 2023 but may be earlier)

A Human Rights Bill for Scotland (closing date 5 October 2023)

The future of population and migration statistics in England and Wales (closing date 26 October 2023)
https://consultations.ons.gov.uk/ons/futureofpopulationandmigrationstatistics/

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438