

speech

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DEMOS

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Security, freedom and the protection of our values

Speech by Rt Hon John Reid MP, Home Secretary

This is my 96th day as Home Secretary.

Already, thanks to the hard work and dedication of my civil servants we have come a long way in a short period of time. Not only have we admitted and identified some of the problems within the home office but we have published practical plans with milestones to improve our performance.

With endurance and an ongoing commitment to the unglamorous work of good governance I believe we have a route map to increased competence and public confidence in three key areas.

- Transformation of the Home Office;
- Restructuring of our Immigration and Nationality Department; and,
- Rebalancing of the Criminal Justice System.

Now we have a little precious time to give some thought to the overarching challenges that face us as a nation.

Protecting the public is the primary objective

One other issue was not substantially dealt with by those three publications but has been at the core of my thought, business and time at the Home Office. The core purpose of the Home Office is the protection of the public. So it is to the topic of national security that I want to spend the majority of my time on today.

A difficult task

The provision of security is a major task facing government in this age of uncertainty in both domestic and international affairs. Even in relatively recent times, for most ordinary people the word “security” has changed in everyday meaning from being the desirable objective of financial comfort in old age or the formal description of military power, to being one of the highest concerns for daily living. We now live in a world where insecurity is a phenomenon that crosses the economic and social, the domestic and foreign, the psychological and physical, the individual and collective.

This generation has seen massive global changes. Up until two decades ago the Cold War froze the world into a static state in which:

- Borders were inviolable;
- Ethnic tensions suppressed;
- Religious extremism ruthlessly put down;
- States were not allowed to fail;
- Migration was minimal.

But we now confront a torrent of challenges following on from the thawing of the Cold War. Porous borders, failed states, civil wars and ethnic tensions are all resurgent.

Globalisation means that decisions taken on the other side of the world now affect every local community in the UK. Jobs now change overnight in their skills requirements creating huge challenges if we are to re-skill our workforce to keep pace and provide the sort of security of employment that people once took for granted.

With the end of the Cold War has also come mass migration on a hitherto unprecedented scale bringing with it big benefits but huge challenges as well.

There is greater potential to create wealth and expand opportunities for individuals and national communities, but the volume and speed of movements can also carry insecurity into the heart of our communities.

Indeed, in my view, mass migration and the management of immigration is now the greatest challenge facing all European governments.

As I said on Sunday

We have to get away from the notion that anyone who wants to talk about immigration is somehow a racist. People recognise that migrants can bring great skills to the UK but they also want to be assured that immigration will be properly managed and our public services and benefits systems protected from abuse.

We need to have a mature discussion about all this, properly informed by independent advice on the impact of migration on our jobs market and on local communities to stop this becoming a party political football.

And we need to work internationally with our European neighbours to strengthen the external borders of the European Union and share information on those who may threaten our security. As I have already found, European politicians like Nicholas Sarkozy understand the importance of managing this issue. It's a Europe wide problem.

Practical initiatives like those taken forward by David Blunkett and Nicholas Sarkozy to close the Sangatte camp and improve border screening at the channel ports have helped immensely.

And now we have laid out our own next steps for dealing with this issue and rebuilding confidence in an immigration system which is fair and effective and trusted.

There have been improvement and changes

Turning now to the more traditionally defined matter of the national of our nation. We have dramatically changed the way we approach national security in this country. Previous Home Secretaries have led innovation and change. In particular:

- Jack Straw's lead in protecting the Critical National Infrastructure from electronic attack and putting our anti-terrorism legislation on a permanent basis through the Terrorism Act 2000
- David Blunkett's work in the aftermath of 9/11 on Counter Terrorism and Civil Contingencies including the Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act measures passed within months of the attack
- Charles Clarks advances with Memorandum of Understanding for Deportations with Assurances and the introduction of control orders.

And increases in funding

The government has more than doubled the resources available for counter-terrorism work in the UK from around £900 million to almost £2 billion. In December, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that a further £85 million would be given, and last month an additional £39 million was made available. In financial terms, MI5 have got what that they have asked for. By 2008 MI5 personnel will have doubled from pre 9/11 levels.

I want to build on the work of my predecessors and the resources provided by the Chancellor. So in recent weeks I have announced to the House of Commons our next steps in developing the CONTEST strategy as well as a revised approach to threat and response levels. We have also responded to the Intelligence and Security Committee's report.

Closer Co-ordination

Effective co-ordination is essential and there is now closer co-ordination. There is a chain of command. There is a Permanent Secretary for Intelligence, Security and Resilience, Sir Richard Mottram, who sits at the centre in the Cabinet Office and is answerable to the Prime Minister and to me. He ensures that the intelligence community has a clear strategy and system for prioritising collection

and analytical effort and that the resources provided for the intelligence agencies are used appropriately.

He also chairs the JIC, which provides a cross-community view on issues to senior officials and to ministers. In addition JTAC, the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre, brings together counterterrorism specialists from the intelligence agencies, the police, and government departments to produce assessments on terrorism, a model that is being looked at by other countries. We have gone a considerable way towards achieving coordination.

We keep such matters under review, and the events of 7/7 showed the importance of good co-ordination. I am prepared to look into whatever may need to be done as are the services.

However as Demos yourselves have pointed out National security is not a task the government can do alone. You are right when you say we need to join forces. Effective security now relies on the participation of a much wider range of actors – from governments and public bodies, to companies and people. Security cannot be outsourced by governments, but networks of public and private organisations have a joint role in guaranteeing local, national and international security. It is only by joining forces that we will develop an effective response to today's global security threats. So closer coordination is a continuing item on our agenda.

But we must go further

Tony Blair said last week “if it is correct that the challenge of rapid change is enormous the response has to be fundamental also”.

Unsurprisingly I agree with him. Because our adversaries are unconstrained – the international terrorist are ruthless in their misuse of our freedoms to harm us.

They try to turn to their advantage our society's great strengths like our free media, ease of access to travel and goods – to turn them into our weaknesses. They endeavour to drain our morale and resources by misrepresenting every mistake or overreaction as if it is our primary or real purpose. Some fight for their right to asylum in the UK from repressive regimes not to spread liberty but to plan and plot for more repressive regimes. Some come as students yet freely express contempt for the intellectual freedoms that have been the bedrock of our academic institutions. Some claim to detest usury but fund their plots through fraud, corruption and organized crime.

Since 2000 we have radically reformed our anti-terror legislation and introduced four new terrorism acts, almost 1000 people have been arrested for terrorism related offences, of which 154 have been charged and 60 terrorist suspects await trial. Since 7/7 4 significant terrorist plots have been successfully disrupted.

Yet in spite of these successes we remain unable to adapt our institutions and legal orthodoxy as fast as we need to. This is the area that puts us at risk in national security terms. There have been several contributory factors to this including party political point scoring by the Conservative and Liberal opposition during the passage of key anti-terrorism measures through to repeated challenges under the Human Rights Act which I continue to contest.

As the Prime minister said only last week ““The nature of organized crime or social breakdown in parts of our communities, not to say the threat of global terrorism bent on mass slaughter, means traditional civil liberty arguments are not so much wrong , as just made for another age”.

The European Convention, for example, drawn up by British lawyers in the aftermath of the second world war, was shaped inevitably by that war and by what was happening across the Iron Curtain. From the struggle to defeat fascism and stand up to Stalinism came an understandable focus on protecting the individual from the overweening power of the fascist state. So protections from unlawful detention, from forced labour, from torture, from punishment without trial came centre stage. And rightly so given what had gone before.

And over time, as the totalitarian shadow retreated from Europe, those rights became a reality for more and more of the 300 million or so living within its borders. Indeed, they became an essential pre-requisite for a country to be considered a member of the European family.

But now we are faced by a new challenge -perhaps greater than any faced in the last fifty years, to this new consensus around the core values of a free society.

And the challenge is this. What happens when the threat to our nation and hence to all of us as individuals, comes not from a fascist state but from what might be called fascist individuals. Individuals who are unconstrained by any of the international conventions, laws agreements or standards, and have therefore, unconstrained intent.

Individuals who can network courtesy of new technology and access modern chemical, biological and other means of mass destruction, and who have therefore unconstrained capability.

Individuals, who would misuse our basic rights and freedoms but, if they had their way, would want to create a society which would deny all of the basic individual rights which we now take for granted. As the Taliban have shown in practice and Al Qaeda espouse globally, the society they want would have no place for freedom of expression, thought or religion. No respect for private life or the rights of women. No compunction about unlawful killing or detention.

The biggest achievement of democratic socialism is not just a legal framework for human rights but the fact that real power and opportunity is now exercised by the many not the few in a way that our forefathers could not have imagined.

Education, job opportunity, the chance to travel, new forms of entertainment, women's rights are the successes of our open tolerant democratic state run by the rule of law.

What I fear is what happens when this progress is contested by others who do not share our world view. Some of whom do not want to see women educated or accessing the courts at all. Many of whom come from far beyond our shores and have no real connection with our nation – beyond a desire to attack it.

At a time when a single terrorist could cause irreparable damage on a hitherto unknown scale to our society and our confidence in the entire state I find myself in a situation where, in dealing with foreign national terrorist suspects:

- we can't always prosecute individuals due to the difficulties in obtaining sufficiently cogent admissible evidence for a criminal trial;
- often we can't deport them, even if they have no proper basis for claiming asylum here, due to concerns about the treatment they might receive in their home country;
- and we can't detain them pending deportation if deportation is not a realistic prospect due to concerns about their treatment on return, as to do so discriminates against them.

This presents me or any home Secretary charged with the task of protecting the public from international terrorism in a very difficult position.

I believe in our values. I have no doubt they are shared by the vast majority of people throughout our country, from all social, religious or ethnic backgrounds.

But I have no doubt that it these very values which are the target of the terrorists.

We need to understand the depth and magnitude of that threat – all us, each of us across the whole political, media, legal and public spectrum. I believe that the majority of the public do indeed get the seriousness of the threat.

But when I see

- The opposition among our politicians to the measures which the police and security agencies say are necessary to combat this threat to our community and values.
- The Chahal Judgement by European Judges that we ought to be prohibited from weighing the security of our millions of our own

- people if a suspected terrorist remains here when trying to deport
- so many of our commentators give more prominence to the views of Islamist terrorists rather than democratically elected Muslim politicians like Premier Maliki or President Karzai

When I see and hear all of these things then I sometimes feel that so many people who should be foremost in recognizing the serious nature of the threat just don't get it. We cannot afford any misunderstanding, in any quarter about the nature and scope of the threat which we are facing.

Conclusion

Charles Darwin, wrote 'it is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change'. That is why we need to see national security in a new context and all of us – politicians, businesses, lawyers and citizens need to evolve our thinking for the 21st century.

Moreover, the end of the Cold War is accompanied by the reach and impact of organised crime and international terrorism. As we continue that debate in respect of terrorism there should not be an inch of complacency in any of our thinking. I understand that we're fully pre-occupied thinking about events in the Middle East, Iraq and Afghanistan. But never for one moment forget we now live in a world where there is a seamless web that runs through foreign and domestic events. None of us should be anything other than vigilant and that vigilance is the price for securing our freedoms. So let us be in no doubt:

There is not one inch of room for complacency that is why I am emphasising today:

- We are probably in the most sustained period of severe threat since the end of World War II;
- While I am confident that the Security Services and Police will deliver 100% effort and 100% dedication, they can never guarantee 100% success; and,
- Our security forces and the apparatus of the state provide a very necessary condition for defeating terrorism but can never be sufficient to do so on their own. Our common security will only be assured by a common effort from all sections of society.
- Sometimes we may have to modify some of our own freedoms in the short term in order to prevent their misuse by those who oppose our fundamental values and would destroy all of our freedoms

It is up to each and all of us to ask the questions: what price security? At what cost preservation of freedom? What values are at stake? And what is the cost of making the wrong choices?

This is not an abstract discussion. It is one which touches upon the preservation of the values and freedoms I look forward to that debate with you.

