



HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

Joint Committee on Human Rights

Uncorrected oral evidence: Transnational repression in the UK, HC 681

Wednesday 21 May 2025

1.20 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Alton of Liverpool (The Chair); Lord Dholakia; Tom Gordon; Afzal Khan; Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon; Lord Murray of Blidworth; Alex Sobel; Peter Swallow; Sir Desmond Swayne.

Questions 49 - 75

Witnesses

I: Commander Dominic Murphy, Counter Terrorism Command, Metropolitan Police.

II: Dan Jarvis MP, Minister for Security, Home Office; Andrew Scurry, Director, Homeland Security Group, Home Office; Grace Lucas, Deputy Director, Home Office.

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Examination of witness

Commander Murphy.

Q49 The Chair: Welcome to the 20th meeting of the Joint Committee on Human Rights in this Session of Parliament. For those who are joining us today online and are unsure of our remit, let me reiterate that our mandate is to look at human rights issues in the context of how violations may affect United Kingdom citizens and residents.

Last week, we published our findings and the recommendations of our inquiry into the role of UK citizens in the genocide that took 5,000 Yazidi lives, as well as the lives of other minorities, and the failure to bring any of those responsible to justice for atrocity crimes. The report also looked at the position of British children born in the camps in Syria and their potential risk of radicalisation and recruitment.

Earlier this week, we published our extensive report into the Mental Health Bill, legislation now being considered by the House of Commons. For those who are interested, both of those reports are available on our website.

Today, we return to our inquiry on transnational repression. Today's hearing is the final session of the committee's inquiry. Some of the extensive written evidence that we have received has been published, with more to follow. Today will give us an opportunity to question senior members of the police and the Government on the evidence that the committee has received during the course of this inquiry. The session will also provide an opportunity for the committee to ask questions about the Defending Democracy Taskforce's review into transnational repression in the UK, which concluded recently.

We have had over 180 submissions to this inquiry, a large majority from people with personal experiences of transnational repression—over 1,400 pages, all of which have been carefully examined. We place as high a premium on written evidence as we do on oral evidence, all of which will be taken into consideration when we come to write our report. Some of that evidence is deeply disturbing. As a committee, we were grateful to Sir Keir Starmer, the Prime Minister, for recently referring to the importance of this inquiry in informing the development of government policy on what is a cutting-edge human rights issue.

To help us today, we have Commander Dominic Murphy, who is the head of counterterrorism policing at the Metropolitan Police. He took up his current post as commander of the Met's Counter Terrorism Command in February 2023. He has over 30 years of policing experience, 18 of which have been in CT. He provides CT, counter-state threats and war crimes capabilities for London as well as nationally and internationally. He has led the UK's counter-state threats mission for six years, having been one of the senior investigating officers leading the investigations into the Novichok poisonings in Salisbury. He continues to provide strategic oversight of three of the resulting investigations and is the lead corporate

witness for CT policing evidence to the public inquiry.

Later today, we will hear from the Security Minister, Dan Jarvis, Member of Parliament; Andrew Scurry, the director at Homeland Security; and Grace Lucas, a deputy director at the Home Office. I will introduce each of them properly when we reach that point in our proceedings.

Let me turn now to the first question that I would like to put to Commander Murphy. After that, I will turn to my colleague from the House of Commons. Six Members of the Commons and six Members of the House of Lords are members of this committee; that is why it is an unusual Joint Committee. My first question is: have you seen a recent increase in the number of crimes reported to the police that are related to transnational repression?

Commander Murphy: Thank you very much for the question and for the opportunity to come and talk to you about such an important issue. I believe that you called it a knife-edge issue. This is very much a pertinent issue for national security policing across the country—one of the most pertinent that we deal with.

The answer to your question, broadly, is yes. We have seen threats to our national security, from a policing perspective, grow fivefold, largely since 2018. Although we predicted increased demand after Salisbury, the reality is that that growth has been much larger than we initially expected. We are now seeing more than 20% of our overall workload being cases of counter-state threats and, in some cases, war crimes—although they are much less—while the rest of our workload, of course, is counterterrorism. Those three missions are the core missions that we deliver for the country.

Within each of those missions—state threats in particular—that 20% has seen a variety of types of investigations across the whole spectrum of state threat inquiries that you would expect to see. Alongside our intelligence partners, we have seen espionage and information operations, which we are trying to disrupt and defend the UK from. We have also increasingly seen threat-to-life operations—more than 20 in the past few years from Iran alone, as you will have heard from the director-general of MI5. It is a substantial increase in demand—one that is presenting resource challenges. My role is to ensure that those resources are pivoted from other work to ensure that those high-threat-to-life operations are policed as part of our response.

The Chair: We were disturbed to hear from one of our witnesses—a pro-democracy advocate who was left dying after he was physically attacked—who talked to us about the situation in Iran,. We also discussed the case, which I know you will not be able to refer to individually today, of an Iranian journalist who was left bleeding on the streets of London after agents attacked him. The seriousness of the issues that you are addressing and which we are discussing are not lost on us, so thank you, Commander.

Q50 **Afzal Khan:** Commander, as there is no specific offence of transnational repression, how are you planning to collect data on the number of instances of transnational repression taking place in the UK?

Commander Murphy: Thank you for the question; it is an extremely pertinent one. In respect of transnational repression, as you know, this is the term and definition—it is an open definition at this time—that describes criminal offences or activities carried out on behalf of foreign states against individuals here in the UK. That can be physical and online.

What we are doing at the moment, in trying to understand the growth I was just talking about and the increase in demand, is largely three things. The first is that, in counterterrorism policing, we are a network with regional counterterrorism units based in local forces. We are working with our counterterrorism colleagues across the country. We now have dedicated resources in each counterterrorism unit in the country, whose role it is to pick up on local issues that might relate to transnational repression or broader threats from states as they might exist in that region.

We have dedicated officers and staff, locally deployed, who can work to understand the strategic challenges that we face from transnational repression and state threats; they report that back to the centre. That information comes into counterterrorism policing headquarters here in London, and we collate it so that we can start to understand that.

The second phase is the benefit of the counterterrorism system we have here in the UK: that local basis within regions means that we are directly connected to local policing, neighbourhood policing and our communities. We are working hard to establish those relationships, which work so well in counterterrorism and have over many years been nurtured into a relationship that is very close. We have lots of independent advisory groups in each region but, clearly, we work closely with local authorities, education, health and others in our Prevent portfolio in counterterrorism. Those relationships help sustain us, moving forward, to understand new threats: transnational repression and/or state threats. That is our connection to local policing.

What we have done more recently is provide three separate training products that can be provided to local policing through the College of Policing. They are online products. We have been trying to get them to you, with some IT challenges; we will continue to try to do that. Those products have now been picked up by around 80,000 police officers in the country. They help us ensure that front-line officers and staff in policing more broadly have increased knowledge and awareness of transnational repression and state threats so that when they see, for example, harassment being reported, they understand that that might be more than normal criminal harassment and that there may be an international element where that might be being directed by a state. That is two of the three things.

The third is working closely with government partners so that we can understand the international landscape we are currently operating in. That is a core part of—excuse my language—trying to get up stream of the problem, by which I mean getting ahead of the problem by seeing what is happening overseas and seeing how that might inform and shape our engagement with local policing communities and our CT colleagues.

Afzal Khan: As a supplementary to that, what criteria would need to be met for a crime to be classed as an incident of transnational repression?

Commander Murphy: In essence, it is according to the government definition, although that is not so much a definition as it is guidance on what we say transnational repression is: an activity that appears to be directed by a foreign state towards an individual here, either physically or online. However, it contains the broad spectrum of all criminal offences here in the UK. Frequently, activity that might not reach a criminal threshold may still be transnational repression.

Some of the work that we are doing with our local colleagues is about trying to understand that. It is a bit of a blind spot that we are very alive to and concerned about because, for example, we would not want somebody to be harassed online from overseas, where it is not a criminal offence because it has not reached a criminal threshold but, none the less, we believe that the activity might be transnational repression. That might inform how we respond to it or inform a community, an individual or our colleagues on how to look out for that material.

It is not so much a criteria for transnational repression beyond the definition; it is much more about, once an offence is committed, our local police officers and our partners in local authorities, education, health and others being alive to the fact that, although a crime might have been committed, there may be other reasons, such as those that might fit within the definition of transnational repression.

The Chair: That is helpful to the inquiry, Commander; the issue of definitions is something that we are giving a lot of attention to. We will move on in a little while to look at underreporting and the nature of what does and does not constitute transnational repression but, for now, my colleague has a supplementary on the answer you have just given.

Q51 **Lord Murray of Blidworth:** We have heard from other evidence sessions about the abuse of international criminal justice processes—for instance, Interpol red notices or falsely reporting passports as stolen. In the criteria for recording incidents of transnational repression, is there a mechanism in the current system to record those sorts of incidents?

Commander Murphy: I should say that the current system is what I would describe as developing. We absolutely focus on threats projected into the UK from overseas, so our focus is very much on crimes committed here. That does limit to some extent the influence that we can have outside of the United Kingdom, of course. Some countries will use

their own judicial processes—whatever standard they might be—in order to influence individuals and groups of people here in the UK.

That is something to which we are extremely alive. It is something that is part of our discussions with all of our CT policing colleagues around the country so that, when our dedicated points of contact in each of our CTUs are engaging with their local forces, we are alive to the fact that things that have a huge impact on an individual or a group here can be happening overseas. We need to make sure that we are capturing that, so that we can see that trend then work with government and international partners to understand how we respond to it. Of course, at the heart of that are individuals who have a tremendous impact on their personal lives. Some of them are unable to travel or, in some cases, to make contact with their family; their families will be too concerned to speak to them because, of course, in that country, they are very concerned.

At the heart of all of this, I suppose, is the fact that the individuals who are reporting this activity to us are victims. We know that there are probably many more out there; it is one of the reasons why we are doing that work. I feel that I have answered your question, but I am not sure.

The Chair: You have; I know that it links directly to a point that Sir Desmond wants to raise with you.

Q52 **Sir Desmond Swayne:** We are informed that there is a significant level of underreporting by victims for any number of reasons, not least that they would attract more attention to themselves, their friends and their loved ones back in their home countries. How do we overcome that reticence? Are police forces proactively seeking to reach out to communities that are particularly vulnerable to transnational repression? Can you describe how we can get a handle on the level that is taking place, given the reluctance to report?

Commander Murphy: You have hit on one of the things that I think is a difficult balance in this work. We want communities to be alert but not afraid; there is a balance in how much we communicate with communities as groups. We risk causing significant fear for something that, from what we understand—at the moment, at least—remains relatively rare. I say that with caution, given your first point.

We are alive to underreporting. There are a few different considerations that we need to have. The first among them is how we make sure that people have confidence in the policing response they would receive if they were to call the police in the first place. That is in two ways. First, it is about ensuring that they are protected as well as they can be so that, by reporting to us, they are not increasing the risk to themselves, their families or others; we are very alive to this. This is so that, when they do make that report to us, they see a response from us that makes sense and understands and appreciates the unusual nature of the transnational repression attached to the harassment or crime that they are reporting.

It is a difficult question to answer: how do you know the scale of underreporting if it is underreported? It is absolutely the challenge that we face. The way that we are trying to do that is by raising awareness, but proportionately, with our partners in local authorities, in education, in health and, more importantly, in policing. I genuinely believe that the best way for us to do this is to make sure that we stay in the close relationship that we have today with neighbourhood policing; and to make sure that the neighbourhood policing officers and staff, who know their communities well and are connected to their communities, can begin to see this trend and understand it.

Our education of front-line police officers and police staff is also helping. We are trying to raise the awareness of those staff in control rooms who answer 999 calls, take crime reports, work on front desks in police stations all over the country or are in community teams, so that they can think more broadly than the crime that is being reported. That is how we will help give people more confidence.

I would just say one other thing, though. Some of the recent examples with Iran International, demonstrating that we will take proactive and positive action to keep people safe—and that we can do so in a way that does not compromise either an organisation, a group or individuals—is one of the ways we will continue to try to raise confidence in communities.

Q53 Peter Swallow: What are some of the challenges faced by the police in investigating crimes related to transnational repression? Of course, that encompasses the traditional form of transnational repression, which we all understand, but also those that are more difficult to detect and document—as we have been speaking about—such as digital surveillance, spyware and the coercion of family members.

Commander Murphy: Can I mention your last point first? The online world is challenging for policing more broadly, as I am sure you are aware. It is something that we need to do very carefully. We have a number of ways in which communities can reach out to us. We have had great success in terrorism in doing that; we now need to translate that success into having people report activity or conduct online to us early, in order to allow us the best opportunity to capture the evidence of that activity.

As I say, with our internet referral unit, in counterterrorism, that works very well, but we need to make sure that we can apply that in the best possible way to state threats without—as you have heard me say—the worry of raising trust and confidence issues with the public and/or community concerns.

There are a number of challenges around operating in this environment, not necessarily specific to transnational repression but more broadly in the state threats arena. How do we provide evidence to satisfy a court that a foreign state is involved in that act? It requires us to work very closely internationally. It requires us to catch up and keep up with the

digital challenges that exist; the pace and scale of change in that area is challenging for all of policing.

None of this happens in national security or counterterrorism without those extremely close relationships with government and the United Kingdom intelligence community. Those challenges, I am afraid, are not easy to manage—particularly the online environment, but also that connection to an individual or entity overseas that we can say is definitely part of a state. That is a very challenging thing to do.

You probably heard at the weekend that we have charged individuals as a result of continuing threats by the Iranian Government towards Iran International. As you have seen in our media lines, when we can draw that connection to a foreign state, we will call it out. In that case, we have made it clear that the National Security Act charges are connected to Iran.

Finally, our new National Security Act and several other pieces of legislation are providing us with a whole new set of tools to try to manage the threat and to reduce the challenge that we face in investigating and responding to these calls. We have used that Act—there have been 10 charges—and it is driving a number of other investigative activities in border protection and other areas. I hope that that answers your question.

Peter Swallow: On the powers under that Act, are you finding them equally effective in tackling all forms of transnational repression, or are there any gaps in the kinds of actions that they can be used to tackle?

Commander Murphy: You will have heard the Home Secretary's speech yesterday. Jonathan Hall is the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation and state threat legislation; we provide information to him in order for him to file his reports. I am struck by how proscription might be added to the National Security Act in some way to help us, but I find that the National Security Act powers are of significant support and assistance to us in working with our partners to face the threat from states, whether that is transnational repression or broader threats from states.

The Chair: It is interesting to look at the distinction between actors and states as well. Speaking for myself and some of my colleagues around this table, who have been sanctioned by countries like Iran, I know about the chilling effect that that can have. Of course, threats are then made to people's families as well for being involved in the democratic process and challenging a theocracy like Iran. These are live issues for not just the public at large but Members of Parliament, too.

Q54 **Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon:** Following on from Dr Swallow's question, how have additional powers given to the police in counterterrorism and border security through the National Security Act improved the police's ability to tackle state threats?

Commander Murphy: They definitely have. I was involved in the Litvinenko investigation and subsequently had a leadership role in the

Salisbury investigation. In those investigations, we were relying on the Terrorism Act, which has ultimately been a significant game-changer in my time in counterterrorism, and on the Official Secrets Acts from a long time ago—quite historical legislation.

In the intervening period, with the introduction of the National Security Act, we have seen our ability to apply policing powers, either at the border or in our investigations, greatly improve as a result. This does mean, though, that some of that 20% increase in demand—that fivefold increase in demand over recent years—is informed because we suddenly now have a suite of new powers allowing us to use policing powers to disrupt activity.

Over the years of doing this—I have more than 20 years in counterterrorism—we frequently used Achilles heel crimes and/or other diplomatic means to manage the threat posed by foreign states here in the United Kingdom. These included asking a PNG or somebody to leave the country; that was a persona non grata-type activity. It was not a policing power, you understand—it was absolutely a government power. However, now, we have a suite of criminal offences that are powerful, which help us to manage those threats. We need to apply them very carefully, clearly, so we are rightly subjected to scrutiny; the public inquiry on Salisbury is a good example of reflecting on how we respond and use our powers advisedly in those processes.

I can say with confidence that, in my time, we are in one of the best positions we have ever been in to have powers to help us respond. It is not so much that we lack powers; we lack the ability to give people the confidence to report to us, which goes to the previous question.

Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon: While I was listening to you speak, I wondered about the number of officers you have working in border forces to help you deliver and continue to do your work. Do you think that you have enough within the policing that helps you carry out your work?

Commander Murphy: It is always a challenging question to ask a senior police officer whether they would like any more police officers. In answer to your question, counterterrorism policing is responsible for border policing around the country. We constantly review the demand in the border area; we have recently done exactly that and reset the balance on some of our resource.

However, this is a challenge, as we come into a spending review, that the Government are very alive to. We now have a large and not-reducing counterterrorism threat and demand picture, and we are now seeing state threats growing at a significant rate. It is much more limited but I should say that we also have the commitment to more crimes legislation here in order to provide the UK with investigative capability to do that.

As the commander of city policing in London across the Contest strategy, I have the ability to have 2,400-ish officers and staff. My challenge is to

pivot those officers and staff to where the greatest challenge currently lies, where I can have the greatest effect on public safety. On occasion, at the moment, it is about ensuring that we have the right resources in our state threats mission to respond accordingly to the threats that we face.

- Q55 **The Chair:** It is interesting that, in your replies to Baroness Lawrence and earlier, you seemed content with the legislation dealing with terror. Only yesterday, Dame Sara Khan, who will be known to you because of the work that she has done on extremism, said that she agrees with the view that the anti-terror legislation is pretty good and adequate, but not so when it comes to extremism. She argued that the threshold is often not reached when threats have been made—on the internet, certainly, but also in kind through the incitements—that fall short of violence but nevertheless attack individuals or their beliefs and the positions that they take. How do you respond to that?

Commander Murphy: That hits on one of the most significant challenges that we face today. Southport brought that into sharp relief; it was the most appalling incident. It rightly causes us, the Government and everybody else, to reflect on the definition of extremism and how we might apply legislation intended for people with a clear ideology where they are in fact violence-fixated individuals but do not have that clear ideology.

In policing, we have acknowledged—although there is yet to be a public inquiry—that Southport is one of those incidents that causes us to reflect on those definitions, on how we apply the legislation and on our policy on those extremism definitions. It is about understanding, if they are not an extremist and they are not going to be in Prevent, how we can make sure that the threat from them is managed none the less. It is absolutely something that we are alive to and managing.

I do not have a strong view at the moment on what new legislation might help that process but I do think that there is something for us to do with our statutory partners locally—as well as with charities, other groups and community groups—to understand the scale of the challenge that we face.

The Chair: You reference Southport in particular. Within minutes of those shocking terrible events, a lie had spread that it was the work of a migrant, then a lie was spread that they were part of a particular religious group in this country. That is still believed by a vast majority of people in this country, even though it was a pack of lies. Whether you need legislative powers or not, we certainly need a rather more coherent, comprehensive approach. However, before I get on to a hobby-horse here—I am supposed to be moderating the discussion, not adding to it—let me bring in Mr Sobel.

- Q56 **Alex Sobel:** Earlier in the inquiry, we heard compelling evidence from Chloe Cheung, who is here from Hong Kong. She is under considerable threat from Hong Kong and China—far more than we are as MPs. She told

us that the police advised her to call 101 if there was an incident; this seems to have been reiterated in the Home Office guidance published just last week, on 14 May. What are the operational benefits of keeping the reporting of transnational repression to the usual mechanisms of 101 and 999 over creating a dedicated reporting line?

Commander Murphy: As I am sure you will imagine, I am not able to go into an individual case, but anybody who reports activity to us will get protective security advice—particularly those who are reporting what we might term offences that might relate to TNR or threats to them from overseas. That protective security advice can vary and is not usually just to call 101 or dial 999.

However, one of our factors is ensuring that people understand how to contact us when they feel that there is something they are concerned about and they want to report to us—101—or where they feel that there is an imminent or immediate threat that they face, with 999. We are fortunate in this country that the public understand 999 and 101 as a mechanism.

When we introduced the anti-terrorism hotline many years ago, it took a long time for the anti-terrorist branch hotline to be embedded in people's thinking. Even now, although it is used quite regularly—by the way, it is being used by people to report state threat activity and, on occasion, TNR as well—we still see the majority of our reports from the public coming into counterterrorism through the 999 system, local policing, community officers and regional counterterrorism units. The reason why we have taken the decision—it is largely a policing decision—to stick to 999 and 101 is that it is so widely understood.

The challenge, coming back to a few of our earlier conversations, is that we need to make sure that communities or those who have concerns know that that is how they can get in touch with us and report it; and know that, when they do report it, the officer or staff member taking the phone call or crime report or responding from a neighbourhood team understands that, although that is a harassment offence, it might actually be a lot bigger. It is about them seeing those triggers.

London—Jonathan Hall reflects on London—might be slightly ahead of the country in some of these areas now. This is simply to do with the fact that we structure ourselves here slightly differently. I have counterterrorism officers from Protect and Prevent in every BCU in London. Those relationships are very local, so we see a bit more of this where people have reported a crime and the officer has taken the decision that this does not feel right—that it feels like it could be state-sponsored, or at least transnational, repression—and flags it to us much earlier.

Q57 **Alex Sobel:** I take on board the comparison to counterterrorism, but I would say that transnational repression is different because its victims understand transnational repression more than a member of the public who may or may not have witnessed suspected attempts at terrorism or

developing terrorism; I think that there is a much higher level of knowledge within that community. Do you have confidence that all transnational repression-related cases will be adequately triaged and referred to counterterrorism policing across the country, not just in the Met?

Commander Murphy: I have confidence that we are much further forward than we were and that we are heading in the right direction. Do I have absolute confidence that every police officer or staff member in the country could be alive to it and report it in that way? We have more to do in that respect; that is part of our training programme and part of reaching out through the dedicated officers and staff who are now based in each region.

We have also transformed our response to counter-state threats and continue to do so. There is more work to do but that work is definitely in train. We are not sitting passively and waiting. We are pushing forward and trying to ensure that we have the best possible coverage.

The Chair: Dr Swallow has a supplementary for you but, in parenthesis, we heard evidence earlier on in our inquiry of discrepancies between different police forces. You will be glad to know that the Met came out with top marks; it is probably because you are ahead of the game because of the nature of London. However, whether you are able to spread your best practice is at the heart of what Mr Sobel asked; perhaps you might reflect on that after today and wonder how that might be done.

Peter Swallow: That is exactly the point I wanted to raise as the Member of Parliament for Bracknell, where we have a large Hong Kong community. It is really important for diaspora communities from various nations across the country to feel that their local police force gets it in the way that the Met does. I know that you will not want to go into which police forces are doing better work on this than others, but I emphasise that need to spread best practice across the police forces across the country.

Commander Murphy: Yes. Just to reassure you, I saw nothing but 100% commitment from chief constables around the country on understanding the scale of this challenge; it really is a challenge. For lots of different reasons, policing is going through a number of challenges at the moment. This is one of them that we will, of course, continue to work on.

On the strength of our CTUs, I am seeing a sea-change in how policing more broadly—certainly our counterterrorism colleagues around the country—responds to these threats. I have confidence that we will see the improvement you mentioned.

The Chair: We are certainly concerned, even after the initial incidents have been reported. One of the people who have given evidence to our inquiry has had a bounty placed on her head for a million Hong Kong

dollars; they are one of 10 such people in the United Kingdom. We have had examples of people who have given evidence to other committees in Parliament and then subsequently been followed, with threats and intimidation left hanging in the air over them. This is totally unacceptable in a parliamentary democracy; I know that we share that view.

Q58 Lord Murray of Blidworth: I want to ask some questions about the guidance and training for police forces in this area. We have heard about all the new legislation that has come through. How do you intend to roll out training modules on foreign interference to the relevant police officers?

Commander Murphy: We have been successful at doing that so far; we are currently going through a review of the product that is out there. For the past year to 18 months, we have had three products available to front-line policing. The College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council's lead for community policing have been extremely helpful in making sure that there is knowledge of that online training product. There are three of them; one relates to foreign interference.

I appreciate that this is not a subject for this committee, perhaps, but another product concerns how we make sure both that officers and staff understand the need to protect the information they are given and that victims report to them, so that we can ensure that they are further protected from interference from foreign states as a result of reporting to us. It is an information security and personal security product, for foreign influence and personnel security.

Then there is a product on the National Security Act, the context behind it, how it can apply and what it means to officers and staff around the country. It has been picked up as a result of the College of Policing's support and viewed around 80,000 times across the country; that is not enough, in my view.

Lord Murray of Blidworth: Sorry—you said "viewed". Presumably it is online platform training.

Commander Murphy: Yes. It is called College Learn. It is a College of Policing product where a large amount of procedural legislative updates and other training are delivered through that online product; every force can reach into that product. Some of it is made mandatory.

Lord Murray of Blidworth: That was my next question. Do all officers have access to that training, although it is not mandatory for all officers?

Commander Murphy: They all have access to it. In some areas, such as CT policing, it is mandatory because we want all of our CT policing colleagues to have this at the forefront of their minds. However, in some forces, there is an awful lot of mandatory training and it would be quite challenging to make this one mandatory.

Our role is to make sure that we are getting that training out much more broadly and widely. We are now considering how we might roll it out to

local authority colleagues in education and health so that we increase the base knowledge that exists in all of our partners in terms of how they might respond.

Lord Murray of Blidworth: From a counterterrorism policing aspect, you would anticipate that all counterterrorism officers would have done the training. How widely do you think the training would go outside the counterterrorism policing? What percentage of officers would complete it?

Commander Murphy: It is hard to do that at the moment, I am afraid, but I will happily come back to you with that information once we are able. As you can imagine, we have to reach out to the college to understand some of that detail. We are refreshing the product at the moment, which gives us a further opportunity to go back out to police forces and reassert the importance of this as a training product.

Lord Murray of Blidworth: I can see why that would be necessary because, of course, most of the National Security Act has been commenced only in the past 12 months. The whole Act is helpful in counterterrorism terms, but the Section 13 offence is particularly pertinent to transnational repression; for those watching, that creates an offence of preventing “malign activity carried out for, or on behalf of, or intended to benefit, a foreign power”. Clearly, the elements of that offence are complicated and require some training. Are you satisfied that that offence is adequately covered in the present training, or is that something you will reflect in the new training?

Commander Murphy: For city policing, that is something we are covering in detail, because we now have a team that delivers a national counter-state threat service across the country. We are expanding how that operates around the United Kingdom.

Specific offences such as the one in the National Security Act that you referred to are absolutely part of that; we report to government on this. The Defending Democracy Taskforce has been significantly helpful in ensuring that the training product and the awareness of the National Security Act support our activity in making sure that that awareness is broad across policing and our partners.

Lord Murray of Blidworth: The foreign influence registration scheme is another fundamental part of the National Security Act’s architecture; that has been switched on as of last month, I think, with Russia and Iran put in the enhanced tier. To what extent have you rolled out any training to your officers in relation to that development?

Commander Murphy: Foreign influence training is one of the products that has gone out. It references the FIRS—sorry, I am using terrible language for the foreign influence registration scheme. However, as we understand how to apply the FIRS legislation and use it in an enforcement sense, if it is necessary to do so, it helps us collect that information. The importance of the College Learn product is that we can

adapt it so that we can see trends in activity and in reporting and we can update that product as it as it moves forward.

- Q59 **Lord Dholakia:** I want to follow up on the question that the Chair asked earlier on about the chilling effect of what really happens not only to people who are individually targeted but to people beyond that who live in smaller communities or specific areas. What do the police do in relation to the community people who are involved in such an exercise?

Commander Murphy: That is absolutely true. Policing's role, ultimately, is to keep people safe. This is our primary function: to stop them being the victims of crime and to ensure that we are preserving their human rights in the process of doing so.

When activity that has a dreadful effect on individuals and their standard of life—you mentioned a couple of examples earlier—takes place, our primary focus is how we can give them confidence that we are providing support to them, whether that is through protective security support, investigating the crime that they report or working through our community contacts with neighbourhood policing and others, in order to give them reassurance about the support that they will receive when they call the police. Those are the ways in which we are doing it.

As I say, here in London, I am very lucky because I have based in every BCU CT police officers who have those close, intimate relationships with independent advisory groups and community policing contacts. So we can reach directly into communities and understand the community tensions that might exist, including if we see those change.

Some of our recent investigations, such as our partnership in policing the threats to Iran International—it very much has been a partnership with Iran International, the Government and lots of other individuals—have helped us understand the impact that that might broadly have on the Iranian community here in London or nationally. We use our local policing contacts to reach into that community to provide both reassurance and a two-way communication so that we understand how concerned they are.

The Chair: Thank you very much; that is extremely reassuring. I know that I speak for the whole committee in thanking you, Commander Murphy, for coming here today and sharing your expertise and knowledge with us. As we have all agreed, this is a hugely important issue. As we take forward the recommendations and our conclusions, we will share them with you. After having spent this past hour or so with us, if anything else that you feel you would like to add to your evidence comes to your mind subsequently, please feel free to drop us a line and we will include that, too. On that note, thank you very much indeed for being here. I shall suspend the committee before the Minister arrives in about 10 minutes' time, when we will resume our proceedings.

Examination of witnesses

Dan Jarvis, Andrew Scurry and Grace Lucas.

Q60 The Chair: Welcome back to the Joint Committee on Human Rights. For those who have just joined us, this is the 20th meeting in this session, and it is part of our inquiry into transnational repression. We are particularly pleased to have with us today Mr Dan Jarvis, Member of Parliament, who is the Minister for Security at the Home Office. We have Andrew Scurry, director at Homeland Security Group at the Home Office, and Grace Lucas, deputy director at the Home Office, so quite a high-powered team. We are very glad to have you.

We have just been listening to a senior official, an officer from the Metropolitan Police, who has set the scene extremely well. That was a public session, so some of those watching online will have heard the arguments, but we want to delve deeper, if we may.

For those who may be unfamiliar with our committee, it is made up of six Members of the House of Commons and six Members of the House of Lords, hence a Joint Committee. Its mandate is to look at human rights as they are affected in this country, either by outside agencies or players or where human rights are compromised for other reasons within the United Kingdom, how that sits comfortably with our Human Rights Act, with the European Convention and all the other treaties and conventions that this country is a signatory to.

It has a broad remit, and we have been running a number of inquiries simultaneously. This one is coming to a conclusion. We think that this will be our last oral session. We have had about 1,400 pages of submissions, lots of places have been mentioned on the long arm—the long reach—of authoritarian regimes stretching into the United Kingdom, which has given us pause and also cause for concern.

Let me briefly introduce our witnesses who will delve deeper into these questions. Mr Jarvis, MBE, is Minister of State for Security at the Home Office. He was appointed Minister on 6 July 2024, first entering Parliament as the Member of Parliament for Barnsley Central in 2011 and was elected as the member for Barnsley North in July 2024. Mr Jarvis served in various shadow Front-Bench roles between 2011 and 2015 before serving on the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy between 2017 and 2019. His ministerial responsibilities include counterterrorism and extremism, state threats, cybersecurity and crime, serious and organised crime, oversight of the National Crime Agency, anti-corruption, and economic crime.

Grace Lucas is deputy director at the Home Office Legal Advisers. She is in the Government Legal Department and serves the legal team that advises the Homeland Security Group in the Home Office, which covers counterterrorism and state threats, economic crime, investigatory powers and cyber. She qualified as a solicitor in the great city of Liverpool, working in criminal defence. She joined the Royal Air Force in 2006 as a legal officer, where she served for 10 years before a role in wider government, advising on national security, cyber and international law

before moving to the Home Office Legal Advisers in 2021.

Mr Andrew Scurry is director of the Homeland Security Group at the Home Office. He joined the Civil Service over 20 years ago and has worked in a variety of roles in government departments, including in the Treasury, the Department for Transport, and the Home Office, as well as in operational agencies. He has led teams that passed key pieces of legislation, including the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act of 2015, the Investigatory Powers Act of 2016, and the National Security Act of 2023, and is currently director of the Homeland Security Group in the Home Office, where he has responsibility for the Defending Democracy Taskforce, alongside a range of other policies.

We are very pleased to have the three of you with us. We are also well aware that these are very topical current issues—both before Parliament and within your department—and that the Prime Minister has himself referred to the importance of investigating the whole issue of transnational repression and is carefully following the work of this committee, and we are grateful to him for that.

Let me begin, Minister, and some of these may be questions that you want to direct to colleagues. How prevalent is transnational repression in the United Kingdom? What are the human rights impacts of transnational repression for people living here?

Dan Jarvis: Thank you. It is a privilege to appear in front of your committee today. With your permission, I will perhaps make a short opening statement, which I think will respond to the questions that you have asked and set the wider context for the evidence that we will give today. I am very grateful to the committee for the work in this area. I am very pleased to be here today to set out the Government's approach to tackling this threat.

Transnational repression, TNR, is an important matter impacting on the UK's national security and the human rights of those who are affected. As such, it is critical that our response is robust in keeping people safe from foreign states that may wish to do them harm. I should say from the outset that I do not underestimate the significance of this issue. I hope that today's session will demonstrate the seriousness with which we approach our response to TNR.

I will endeavour to be as open and transparent as possible in responding to your questions. However, as I hope the committee will appreciate, the sensitive nature of this subject and the imperative to protect those who are at risk will place some limits on the detail that we are able to provide publicly.

TNR is a relatively new phrase, but it is not a new problem. It is a term to describe certain foreign-state-directed crimes against individuals. This activity can take place physically or online, with examples including intimidation, surveillance, harassment, forced or coerced return, abduction and even assassination at the most serious end of the scale. It

is also a worrying element of the growing and diversifying nature of state-directed threats, which I have warned of on many occasions.

As chair of the Defending Democracy Taskforce, I have overseen the TNR review since entering government. This review represents a comprehensive system-wide deep dive focused on building an understanding of the scale, nature, and impact of TNR domestically. I would like to set out my appreciation to the range of partners—government departments, the police, and the intelligence services and those directly affected by TNR—for their support in bringing this review together.

The review charts the tools and system-wide safeguards in place to robustly counter this threat, spanning policy, legislation, and operations. Classification permitting, I look forward to getting into the detail of these over the course of this session.

The TNR review is clear that the UK maintains a hard operating environment for those states wishing to conduct TNR, but it makes a number of recommendations to strengthen the UK's response even further. The recommendations include better co-ordination across government, improving awareness and understanding of TNR, proactively seeking to prevent TNR by removing perpetrator capabilities, better support and guidance to those who are at risk, ensuring relevant operational teams are suitably equipped and trained to respond to cases of TNR, and close work with key international partners to counter TNR. Work to implement these recommendations is already under way.

As committee members may have seen, I issued a Ministerial Statement last week, accompanied by new TNR guidance that is now available on GOV.UK. This guidance is a key deliverable from the review, and it provides practical safety advice for individuals who believe they may be at risk of transnational repression, both physically and online. Gaining a true and complete sense of the scale of TNR in the UK is not straightforward. Distinguishing between activity that is state directed and therefore TNR or conducted by individuals who act of their own accord in support of a foreign state only adds to this complexity. The impact on individuals is no less serious, but how these threats are best tackled can be different. Reporting incidents to the police is, therefore, absolutely essential for us to continue to build our intelligence and evidence base. However, our understanding of the issue and the effectiveness of our response is continuously improving.

On 4 March I announced a new package of training for front-line police officers and their staff to increase their awareness of foreign state threats. This was another direct recommendation of the TNR review and something that the review team facilitated. As I believe Commander Dominic Murphy will have told you in his evidence, this training will improve law enforcement's ability to detect and investigate incidents that may be state directed.

This Government will continue to ensure that the systems in place to detect, deter and disrupt transnational repression are robust and keeping people safe. Where we become aware of individual victims of TNR, we work closely with counterterrorism policing and lead government departments to ensure that appropriate protective measures are in place based on the threat.

I am also aware that the public perception of these issues matters enormously. In my recent Statement I encouraged people to exercise alertness but not to live in fear of foreign states: be alert but not afraid. Overinflating the risk would only serve the interests of our adversaries, instilling fear and stifling democratic freedoms.

Let me end by reiterating that any attempt by a foreign state to intimidate, harass or harm individuals in the UK will not be tolerated, irrespective of the perpetrating country. I look forward to your questions today and to receiving your recommendations in due course.

Q61 The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. That was a very helpful scene-setting introduction to the hearing today. Before we turn to my colleague Lord Dholakia, given that there has been a continuing review while indeed this inquiry has been undertaken and the level of concern that the Home Office places on this issue, we were slightly surprised in the written evidence from the Home Office to the inquiry to read that transnational repression does not affect large numbers of people across the UK. Maybe it is those words, "large numbers".

No one said that it necessarily has to be large numbers. Could you unpack that statement a little bit more for us? The seriousness that in your introductory comments you attached to the nature of transnational repression has certainly left us in no doubt about your own personal view. Is that the same as the view as the Home Office?

Dan Jarvis: Perhaps I might say a few words and then hand over to Andrew Scurry, on the basis that he has been involved with the process for longer than me. Clearly the current Government inherited a process, which we had supported in opposition, to conduct this work, so it would be very useful to get his perspective. In terms of your point about seriousness and scale, hopefully I was able to convey in my opening remarks about the serious nature of the threat that undoubtedly we face. The Home Secretary, the Prime Minister and I and the Foreign Secretary are absolutely clear that activity that amounts to transnational repression is utterly unacceptable, and we will not stand for it.

On your point about scale, the review looked in great depth at this and it found that TNR in the UK tends to be—in the phraseology that we have used—"targeted and specific". Perpetrating states particularly focus on individuals whom they perceive to be threats: local critics, dissidents or activists opposed to their regime. While the overall scale is not considered to be large, we are aware of a number of targeted and specific incidents.

Also, quite an important point of consideration is how we both emphasise the importance and the seriousness with which we take these issues while at the same time seek not to raise alarm among not least diaspora communities around the country. It is my point about being aware but not afraid.

The Chair: And striking the right balance?

Dan Jarvis: Precisely, striking the right balance.

Andrew Scurry: The Minister has set it out well. TNR is a direct threat to our national security when it is perpetrated by foreign states infringing on the rights and freedoms of people in the UK. That is a direct threat to our national security, and we take it extremely seriously.

However, as the Minister said, the review looked in great depth at the prevalence of TNR and, as you heard from Commander Murphy as well, we found that it is happening against a number of people in the UK but it tends to be targeted and specific against those whom authoritarian states fear the most, frankly: the people who are vocal dissidents, democracy activists and so on. We did not see it being targeted wholesale against whole wide communities.

Nevertheless, the fact that those particularly high-profile individuals are targeted has that ability to spread fear much more widely among communities. That is the real challenge in tackling this problem. We have to address it and have to address it extremely seriously, but we have to do so in a way that does not do the job of the authoritarian state and cause people to have this fear of exercising their democratic rights and freedoms because they are afraid of the consequences. That is one of the challenges with calibrating the response to TNR.

Q62 **Lord Dholakia:** Minister, your opening statement was helpful. We understand not having a robust approach to people who are targeted but, going beyond that, there is a chilling effect on the communities of people living in smaller areas and in specific areas in the country. What are the Government doing to counteract such action and such a chilling effect on individuals in those communities?

Dan Jarvis: Thank you. That is a good question. Mindful of the points that we have made about the scale, it is important to consider that these activities can have a chilling effect on particular communities in different parts of the country. Therefore, it is important—and the review looked at this in some detail—that we ensure that the response from the Government and from law enforcement colleagues is both proportionate and effective. We need to work closely with those communities that feel particularly vulnerable, and it is important that we take every opportunity to provide reassurance and to guarantee that those individuals can seek to enjoy the democratic freedoms that everybody else in this country seeks to enjoy. We take these matters incredibly seriously.

As a Minister, I will look for opportunities to engage with individuals, with communities, with civic society and with a range of different

organisations. But it is probably worth me reiterating the point that we will seek to do that proportionately because the one thing that I do not want to do is risk inadvertently spreading further fear and risk in those communities. We do engage. We work closely with colleagues in law enforcement. I am always keen to listen to those people who have been affected individually and to talk to them and their communities, but we will seek to do that in a way that does not enlarge the level of risk and level of threat that is faced around the country.

Q63 Lord Murray of Blidworth: Before I ask my question, I should say by way of a declaration of interest that I know Mr Scurry from my time as a Minister in the Home Office.

I want to ask some questions on the definition of transnational repression. We all know what transnational repression is, but it is quite hard to define. The recent review of transnational repression policy concluded that the Government should describe TNR rather than define it. I wonder, Minister, whether you might like to explain why that decision was taken.

Dan Jarvis: I hope that you will know from your time as a Minister the rigour with which we attach to these kinds of issues. The review spent a lot of time looking specifically at this issue of definition and consulted widely. It is true to say that there is no universally agreed definition of TNR. As I say, the review considered this in some depth.

We have recommended that the UK recognises TNR as a term used to describe, rather than define, certain foreign-state-directed crimes against individuals ranging from threat to life to online harassment. We think the National Security Act of 2023 has already given us the powers to address this activity. Unlike other definitions used, our description is deliberately broad because it seeks to capture the total issue and provide maximum flexibility to address this as an evolving threat.

This is a conversation that, as you would expect, we have had with our international allies, but we are quite well advanced internationally in terms of the work that we have been doing recently.

It is also important to make the point that we want to ensure that our description provides a clear narrative when engaging with the public. These are potentially quite difficult and complicated matters. We have taken the view that we want to ensure that our messaging and the narrative to the public is as clear and as understandable as possible.

We have considered it thoroughly. Of course we keep it under review, not least were there to be a change in the nature of the threat. But we are confident that the conclusions that we have drawn and the description that we have arrived at manages the threat most effectively.

Lord Murray of Blidworth: Thank you. We know that the FBI has a definition that it applies, which has been praised by Jonathan Hall, the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation. It is quite concise. It is simply: "When foreign governments reach beyond their borders to

intimidate, silence, coerce, harass or harm members of their diaspora and exile communities". As you said, Minister, careful consideration has been given to not having a definition for the reasons you have set out.

Would having a more formal definition help with gathering data and understanding patterns of transnational repression with more clarity?

Dan Jarvis: Good question. Of course, we always listen carefully to what Mr Hall has to say.

It would be worth hearing from Mr Scurry, not least because he has been involved for longer than I have and has also been involved in some of the international work that we have done with key allies, including the US.

Andrew Scurry: Yes, absolutely. The FBI definition is not far off where we have ended up in our own. As the Minister said, we were conscious not to limit the definition too much. Many people talk about it being targeted at diaspora groups, for example. That would of course ignore British journalists and British lawyers and other such groups who might be targeted. People often talk about how it is about silencing dissent. Sometimes it is. Sometimes it can be other reasons, such as seeking revenge on individuals or seeking to coerce and threaten those who remain in the perpetrating state. As I say, we felt it was best to give ourselves the widest possible description of the threat.

We are looking still with the police—and this was one of the recommendations of the review—at how best to gather data and more information, and indeed intelligence, about the threat. The review recommends that as a key step going forward. We have not finished that work. It is an important, ongoing task to try to build up a much better picture of TNR, where it is manifesting and how it is manifesting in the UK so that we can of course design policies and operations to counter it most effectively.

The Chair: Thank you. You will find some of the written evidence that we have received of value to you when you come to look at our report. The Eritrean community, for instance, has said to us that it is not about the targeting of specific individuals but about a much broader problem, targeting a whole community. Anyway, we will share that with you in due course. Let us go to Dr Swallow.

Q64 **Peter Swallow:** Thank you. Minister, in your opening remarks, you referred to those directly affected by transnational repression and how they played a role in the Defending Democracy Taskforce review. I wanted to ask for some more details on that and how the Government ensured that a wide range of voices was included in the review process. Did the Government consult with political activists, journalists, lawyers, and academics who have experienced transnational repression, a wide variety of diaspora groups, and those who have been subjected to different forms of transnational repression in both digital and physical forms?

Dan Jarvis: Thank you for your question. I will invite Mr Scurry to say a few words in a moment about the nature of the consultation but let me first emphasise how seriously we take the impact that this will have on the victims of TNR.

In opposition, I was the shadow Victims Minister. In government, as well as having responsibility for TNR, I also have particular responsibility for the victims of terrorism. I spend quite a lot of time engaging with people who have been victims of either transnational repression or some other form of the most serious criminality. I completely understand and empathise with the terrible impact and effect that this can have on people's lives, and we take that seriously.

While, clearly, I did not initiate the review—it was initiated by the previous Government—from opposition, we were always clear about the need to ensure the widest possible consultation and the widest range of voices that would feed into the process, including, of course, those people who have direct, lived experience of TNR. That was always an important principle for me.

It would be useful, though, to hear from Mr Scurry because he has been involved with the process from the outset and so he will have a bit more detail about precisely who was consulted.

Andrew Scurry: Thank you. Yes, in short answer to your question, the review did engage with a number of victims of TNR from different backgrounds. Some of those individuals were happy to make public that they had engaged with the review and, indeed, with government Ministers. Some others specifically asked the review not to publicise their engagement with the Government for reasons that you will understand and so I am afraid I am not able to give a full list of who we engaged with for that reason, but I can assure you we did engage with victims of TNR.

We also engaged with broader community leaders from groups that consider themselves at risk from TNR. We engaged with civil society organisations and NGOs. We engaged with academics. We engaged with our international partners, as the Minister said, and we engaged widely across Government, including with government departments, such as the Foreign Office, and also with the intelligence agencies and the police.

Q65 **Sir Desmond Swayne:** Given that most of the offences, if they are reported at all and if they meet the criminal threshold, will be common-law offences or perhaps one or two other statutory offences and given that we have no offence of transnational repression, how sure are you that we can get a handle on the level of the problem that we are experiencing and, therefore, be able to measure the impact of the Government's strategy on it?

Dan Jarvis: Sir Desmond, that is a good challenge. We work closely with law enforcement. I have not yet had the opportunity to look at the transcript of your previous session with Commander Murphy from the

Metropolitan Police, but clearly there will be close engagement between us as Government and with law enforcement agencies, not just counterterrorism police in London.

It is important that our front-line police officers are aware of these kinds of activities and that was precisely why I made the point earlier on about the announcement that I made a couple of months ago with regard to training for front-line police officers. I have recently written to all chief constables to encourage them to ensure that that training is conducted locally. Ultimately that is a judgment for them, and the police are operationally independent, but that awareness among bobbies on the beat is important.

You raise a good point. I do not know whether Andrew has anything to add to that.

Andrew Scurry: Thanks. In regard to the legislation, it is an important point that many of these offences will be either common law or ordinary criminal statute and we specifically recognised that when we were developing the National Security Act. While we did not call it transnational repression at the time, we did recognise this threat and specifically thought about how we can design powers in the National Security Act to clamp down on this sort of activity.

The main thing we did there was to design the aggravating factor that is in the National Security Act, and this essentially says that any criminal offence at all that is at the direction or with the intention to benefit a foreign state can receive from the sentencing judge a higher sentence than would otherwise be given because it is aggravated by that foreign influence.

That is how we tried to capture the fact that this activity can be across a wide range of criminality, whether it is assault, stalking or harassment. All these crimes or any type of crime that is directed by a foreign state and therefore constitutes the description of transnational repression can receive that commensurately higher sentence.

Sir Desmond Swayne: That is in line with what the commander said. He stressed very much the importance of training and getting police officers to recognise when an ordinary offence would be a transnational offence and to report it accordingly.

I wondered if there is a need to get police forces to reach out to vulnerable communities and get them to be more proactive in reporting crimes that they would otherwise be disinclined to do for fear of drawing greater attention to themselves or to their loved ones back in the jurisdictions from which those crimes emanate?

Andrew Scurry: Yes, absolutely. As Dominic Murphy said to you, the key link here is to neighbourhood policing. The real benefit of having the structure we do of counterterrorism policing and dealing with state threats is that link into the local. Regular neighbourhood policing can be

engaging with communities that may be at risk of transnational repression and can provide them with assurance, guidance, and a mechanism for reporting such threats as and when they arise.

However, it is quite important that the Government do not overly securitise their relationship with particular communities. The entire relationship and discussion with particular communities cannot solely revolve around security. We have very much heard that from our Five Eyes partners as well and we are quite conscious of it.

The Chair: Thank you, Sir Desmond. We will turn now to Alex Sobel, Member of Parliament, who is looking forward to what might be a future threat involving transnational repression. Then we will hear from Lord Murray again.

Q66 **Alex Sobel:** Thank you, Lord Alton. From the evidence received, there is at least a high level of suspicion that foreign states are starting to use AI in transnational repression. What dangers are posed by AI in relation to transnational repression and what are the Government doing to help counter the use of AI or the potential use of AI in transnational repression? Are the Government using AI to combat transnational oppression considering the future threats?

Dan Jarvis: Let me offer a few general thoughts by way of response to that. Clearly, as you know well, technology offers all sorts of extraordinary opportunities that we need to absolutely exploit for the betterment of our country and our economy, but at the same time it also provides an accelerant and an enabler for a range of different hostile forces to seek to conduct their activity in a way that we definitely do not want to see.

Let me emphasise the point about how seriously we take the threat from any country. The heads of both MI5 and MI6 have spoken about the growing threats that we face from state-based threats. The Director-General of MI5 previously confirmed that MI5 encounters day by day a range of different state or state-backed organisations, including those that originate from Russia, China, and Iran. We take that threat incredibly seriously and we work with other government departments and with colleagues right across law enforcement to ensure that our response to that threat, which is evolving at a rapid rate, is as technologically advanced as possibly.

We should be under no doubt that some of our adversaries are able to leverage extraordinary technological capability. We are mindful of that, and we will make sure that we have all the right resources in the right places to counter the nature of that particular threat that we face. I do not know whether Mr Scurry wants to add anything to that.

Andrew Scurry: It is a fair point and one that we have been conscious of across the range of state threats. Already, the cyber and online nature of some types of transnational oppression poses a challenge. You are absolutely right that AI can accelerate that and pose an even greater

threat. We have been doing work, including through the Pall Mall Process, looking to counter the use of spyware and offensive cyber capabilities by states where there is not a solid legal framework for doing that.

We have ensured that the Online Safety Act includes as a priority offence the foreign interference offence that is in the National Security Act and that criminalises interference with convention rights in the UK. That requires internet service providers to have policies in place to tackle foreign interference specifically. But I recognise that, as you say in your question, that AI threat does not just apply to the internet service providers operating in the UK. You are absolutely right. We need to work out how to counter that.

Dan Jarvis: If I may add one point, the nature of the threat as you have described it helpfully is not a threat that the UK faces alone. This threat is faced by our allies around the world. That is why we place a lot of emphasis on the work that we are doing, co-operating with our partners and our international allies, not least in the Five Eyes Alliance as well, because we will be much better placed to counter the threats that you have articulated if we are working collaboratively with our international partners.

Alex Sobel: Mr Scurry, could you explain the Pall Mall Process?

Andrew Scurry: The Pall Mall Process is a multinational grouping of countries. We have come together under our leadership and that of the French to try to counter the spread of offensive cyber capabilities—what people might term spyware—and to ensure that, for example, there are controls around the export of these technologies to countries that might not have proper legal safeguards in place.

Of course, these can be entirely legitimate tools for use by law enforcement or intelligence agencies to counter national security threats with the proper legal processes and safeguards. The Pall Mall Process tries to ensure that those high-end tools are not used by states that might not have those safeguards in place.

The Chair: Thank you. Minister, it is worth saying that the whole committee from all sides is interested in how artificial intelligence can compromise human rights. Just as we have worked collaboratively with your department—and we have found that constructive, I might add—on transnational repression, I hope that maybe if we do decide to delve deeper into AI and its impact on human rights, there will be an opportunity to interact with you on that issue, too.

Q67 **Lord Murray of Blidworth:** I want to build on some of the questions we have had about the National Security Act. The various provisions in relation to the foreign influence registration scheme have been brought into force and the Government have placed Russia and Iran on the enhanced tier. What consideration did the Government give to transnational repression when deciding what countries to place on the enhanced tier?

Dan Jarvis: As a former Home Office Minister, you will know the constant activity that takes place in the Home Office looking to see whether the existing legislative arrangements are fit for purpose. Part of the process of the review was a significant look at whether the existing legal frameworks were proportionate and appropriate to counter the nature of the threat.

Let me use this as an opportunity to pay tribute to the work that was done in the previous Parliament by the previous Government on the implementation of the National Security Act 2023. We should be absolutely clear that this is a landmark piece of legislation which, day by day, provides significant operational benefit. We, as a Government, are feeling the benefits of that legislative change that took place in the previous Parliament.

There was significant debate in the context of the review about whether that provided the necessary proportionate protections that were required. The clear judgment was that the existing legislative framework with the National Security Act did provide sufficient existing legal provisions necessary to respond to TNR.

You asked specifically about the foreign influence registration scheme, about which there has been much debate. Again, this product came from the previous Parliament and the previous Government, and we think it will be an incredibly useful tool for shining a light on some of the activity that has been taking place in our country, about which we clearly would be right to be concerned.

There has been an ongoing debate about precisely which countries will be placed on the enhanced tier of FIRS. As you will be aware, I have already made an announcement to Parliament that both Iran and Russia will be listed on the enhanced tier of FIRS, but no decision has been made about any other countries.

Of course, we consider these matters in the round and, clearly, the ongoing risks and the threat that we know that we face from TNR is part of the decision-making process when we decide whether we require further legislation or whether we require further countries to be listed on the enhanced tier of FIRS. I do not know whether Andrew wants to add anything to that.

Andrew Scurry: Thanks, Minister. I have a slight clarification. FIRS is not quite in force yet. We still have to have the debate and vote in the Lords, which I believe is scheduled for the beginning of June. I am sure your Lordships will be voting in favour, following this session. The scheme is then planned to come into effect on 1 July. The Security Minister made an announcement to that effect last month, I believe. That was to clarify that.

Yes, FIRS could be useful for tackling transnational oppression, both tiers of the scheme. FIRS has a political tier, which applies to all states and applies to any political influencing activity that an individual may carry

out on behalf of that foreign state, which could well apply in a number of these cases.

Then, of course, as the Minister said, for Russia and Iran, it is a broader requirement for registration of any activity taken on behalf of any part of the Russian or the Iranian states, which again provides useful transparency benefits if that activity is happening but a five-year prison sentence is attached to failing to declare that to the Home Office, which provides an useful additional disruptive tool for the police and MI5 that they do not currently have.

Lord Murray of Blidworth: Thank you very much, Minister. Thank you, Mr Scurry. I am delighted that the National Security Act is operating as we intended it to. I am glad that it is having that effect.

When it comes into force following the approval Motion, I doubt there will be a vote but there will be an approval Motion and many cries of "Content". To what extent and what measures will be taken to ensure relevant individuals sign up on the register both at the lower tier or the political influence tier and on the enhanced tier?

Dan Jarvis: A programme of work is under way to raise awareness of the scheme and a number of initiatives, and a number of outreach opportunities are taking place at the moment to make sure that relevant stakeholders are aware of the requirement. We take that seriously and we have a requirement, and an onus to make sure that people are aware of the new responsibilities that will be placed upon them. I know that we have recently had engagement with the higher education sector and there are a range of other opportunities that will be organised as we move forward. Is there any further detail you want to add to that?

Andrew Scurry: That is right. We have done a range of outreach already, as the Minister says, particularly focused on those sectors and bodies that we think might be likely to be caught; for example, public relations agencies, consultancies, charities, the higher education sector, as the Minister says, and a range of others. We have further awareness-raising planned.

We also though put in place both a three-month notice period that the scheme will be going live, which is current, and also a three-month grace period after the scheme goes live for people to declare existing relationships. We feel like we have provided sufficient flexibility for people to register those arrangements but, clearly, as the Minister says, we have an onus to ensure that people are aware of their requirement to register.

There is also a power within the scheme for the Secretary of State to issue an information notice to someone. If the Secretary of State becomes aware for whatever reason that an individual may be required to register but has not registered, they can issue an information notice asking the individual to provide more information about their arrangement with a foreign state rather than necessarily jumping straight to the criminal action.

Dan Jarvis: It is also important for us to say that this has been carefully designed not to be onerous on these organisations. We do not envisage that this process will require a huge amount of resource and time and so we have been careful to strike the right balance between ensuring that we do not take too much time as part of the registration process while at the same time capturing the information that we think that we need.

The Chair: Thank you. Mr Scurry. Notwithstanding your encouragement for us to vote for the listing of Russia and Iran, which those of us who have been sanctioned by them will be happy to do, we are surprised not to see China on that list given that some of us are also sanctioned by them, including members of this committee. We are surprised that more has not been said about that. Perhaps you will take that away to reflect on subsequently.

Why do they do this? It is to have a chilling effect. It is to try to close down debate. I know that is the point that my colleague Mr Tom Gordon wants to go to now and after that we will hear from Baroness Lawrence.

Q68 **Tom Gordon:** Thank you, Chair. We have heard evidence about SLAPPs being increasingly used to silence dissent and criticism. What steps have the Government taken to ensure that SLAPPs are not used as a means of transnational repression?

Dan Jarvis: Good question. Do you want to say anything about that before I start?

Andrew Scurry: We are well aware that this has been an area of concern. The Government have passed legislation against SLAPPs under the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act, but I know ongoing work is looking at how we can more broadly tackle this problem in other parts of Government as well. I do not know if Grace wants to say more.

Grace Lucas: Yes. The provision in the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act is limited to economic crime and I believe MoJ is due to bring that into force in the not-too-distant future.

There is also the taskforce that this Government have picked up from the previous Government, and I know there have been announcements on what that taskforce is looking at. MoJ leads on this and so I do not want to speak on its behalf, but we will be looking at the comparators in the EU directive, for example, which has been produced on this area.

Tom Gordon: If I can follow up on that and then put the second question to you, Minister: will the Government commit to taking further action on SLAPP cases that are not related to economic crime, as has been outlined?

Dan Jarvis: There is a cross-departmental element to this and so I would probably get myself in a lot of trouble if I made commitments.

Tom Gordon: That is fine by me.

Dan Jarvis: It is fine by you but less fine by my department. It is an entirely reasonable challenge. I hope you understand that because of the involvement of another government department, rather than give you a commitment today, I am happy to write back to the committee with further clarification in response to your reasonable question.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. We are grateful for that. Lord Murray wanted to come in with a supplementary.

Lord Murray of Blidworth: No, Mr Gordon has dealt with the issue. Thank you.

The Chair: You are happy now. Let us go now to Baroness Lawrence.

Q69 **Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon:** Thank you, Chair. Why has the transnational repression review concluded that the usual reporting mechanisms of 101 and 999 should be used, rather than creating a dedicated reporting line, as Australia and the United States have done?

Dan Jarvis: Thank you, Baroness Lawrence. It is a good question. I can categorically assure you that we have spent a lot of time considering this and I am entirely confident that we have reached the right outcome following much deliberation, but I will ask Andrew to talk you through the process and explain why we got to where we got to with it.

Andrew Scurry: As the Minister says, we did look at this closely and did consult with our international allies as well but, as you heard from Commander Murphy, in consultation with the police it was decided that the best mechanism was to use the existing well-known, well-understood routes.

He outlined a number of reasons for that earlier. One is of course that it is well known, and people know how to do that. The second is that it allows the police to triage cases rather than the public triaging the cases, if you see what I mean. The police can work out and understand which is the most serious case and where they should best deploy their resources.

The other aspect of course is that, in an emergency it allows police resources to be deployed straight away, 24/7. If someone is at imminent physical threat, for example, we have that provision in the 999 service, which of course could be replicated in a dedicated hotline but would be much more challenging and would require a whole extra layer of resourcing and a whole extra mechanism to be set up that would have to play across the country, which 999 already does.

Instead, we concluded, and the police did as well, that the much better route is to use the existing mechanisms but upskill the 999 call handlers and ensure that they undertake the training that the Minister talked about earlier and also upskill all of the front-line police officers who are likely to be the first people encountering these incidents, so that they recognise where there could be an element of foreign-directed threat as well and can therefore respond accordingly.

Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon: I have a follow-up question. We have heard that when contacting the police, many victims of transnational repression are told to stop speaking out to ensure their safety. Is that an adequate response to offer to transnational repression victims and how do the Government plan to ensure that victims are given more specialised advice?

Dan Jarvis: I am concerned to hear that and would be grateful if you could provide more information, because I would personally be keen to take a look at it.

We work closely with the police to discuss these matters. I made points earlier on about how seriously we take the impact that this activity has on victims. We will want to ensure that people feel that where they are raising a concern—and sometimes it is a significant concern that they are raising—it is treated with the appropriate level of seriousness. That is the level of response that I require from the police. If there are cases where that has not been the case, clearly, we want to look at those cases.

It reinforces the point that Andrew has made and that I made previously about the front-line training that the police will do. I am completely confident that our response about routing these referrals through 101 or 999 is the right response and that that is the right way to organise this. But it depends on ensuring that both those front-line police officers and also, critically, the 999 and 101 call handlers have the requisite training. That is why I raised this with chief constables recently to ensure that that activity is taking place right around the country.

Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon: That is important around the training because, if officers are not trained in the right way, they have no idea who they are calling. They need to have that information so that victims do not feel that when they call and talk about their problem, they are not able to deal with it, and they feel as if they have been victimised again by not being able to get the information that they need.

Dan Jarvis: That is absolutely right. I completely agree with that. I also agree with the point that Andrew made about the importance of 999. If somebody is raising concerns about a set of circumstances that provides an immediate danger, absolutely, it is right that that is channelled through 999 so an immediate police response can be triggered.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Following up on the question that was put to you by Baroness Lawrence, you invited us to share with you any evidence that we have had. We have had oral and written evidence about people who are concerned about compromising their own safety by speaking to the police. We will happily share that in confidence with you if we may. We can separate it from the main body of the evidence that we have received. We will share that with you and, if you are able to then respond further, it would be appreciated by Baroness Lawrence and by the rest of us, too.

Dan Jarvis: Of course.

Q70 Peter Swallow: Minister, you mentioned in your opening remarks that the Government have recently released guidance on what to do if you think you are the victim of transnational repression, which I welcome. It is an important step. We have also talked today about the fact that transnational repression looks different in different communities and when perpetrated by different states. I wondered whether the Government had considered tailoring advice specifically to the state allegedly perpetrating the attack.

Dan Jarvis: Thank you. You are right. We published guidance alongside the written ministerial statement last week. On your specific point about tailoring the guidance to particular communities, yes, we have considered that, but I will let Andrew give you a more definitive response.

Andrew Scurry: Yes, we have considered that, and we also considered the seemingly quite simple thing of providing the guidance in different languages, but we decided that it was better to have broader guidance that has broader applicability to anyone who might think they are at risk of transnational repression.

The guidance is practical guidance. It is the sorts of things that probably you as MPs and Peers are used to following yourselves, around the cybersecurity of your phones and your devices, the security of your social media and also things like your physical security—not advertising your home address, for example. We believe that broadly applicable guidance is the right guidance to put on GOV.UK as a publicly available site.

When we become aware of specific threats to individuals, we and the police and the National Protective Security Authority provide more tailored and more specific guidance to individuals based on the threat they face. That will differ depending on the threat they face and the state that it is coming from and will be quite tailored to them.

In terms of, as I say, the broader guidance for people who might consider themselves at threat, we thought that it was better to have that practical, general advice on GOV.UK.

Peter Swallow: Is that specific guidance also conveyed to and through local authorities where particular diaspora communities live?

Andrew Scurry: At the moment, we are providing the guidance generally on the internet on the GOV.UK page. As we move forward, the police and neighbourhood policing and indeed local authorities providing that guidance and outreach to communities in the regular engagement they have with particular communities will be an important step, and indeed they may well be able to provide more tailored guidance depending on the circumstances.

Q71 Afzal Khan: Minister, what efforts have been undertaken to raise awareness and understanding of this issue across UK society as a whole and within vulnerable groups or sectors?

Dan Jarvis: Thank you. A good question. Let me, before inviting Mr Scurry to come in, emphasise the point that I made earlier about having to ensure that an appropriate level of awareness about this activity, while at the same time not seeking to overinflate concerns that people might have about it.

One thing above all that I do not want to do is the work of those hostile states. I need to strike the right balance between ensuring an appropriate level of awareness both in those individuals and communities who may be targeted and affected and in the support systems that are in place so that they can provide an appropriate response, while at the same time ensuring that I do not create a chilling effect on those individuals and those communities whom we want to live their lives in freedom unaffected by this activity.

I do not know whether Andrew wants to add anything on the point around awareness.

Andrew Scurry: Yes. One recommendation of the transnational oppression review is that we should undertake more targeted engagement with particular groups such as lawyers and journalists who might be at risk, not just focused on diaspora communities, for example, but also those professional bodies who may be at risk here and ensure that we provide them with the appropriate guidance and advice.

We also, clearly, have not stopped here in our engagement. The Minister will shortly meet with a range of civil society organisations to discuss the UK's approach to TNR and look at what more they feel is needed. We as a Government continue to engage with TNR victims and that activity will continue.

Afzal Khan: I have a supplementary. What assurance can you give to those communities that may feel vulnerable that the threat coming, whether it is from friend or foe, will be treated equally for their protection?

Dan Jarvis: I can give those communities and those individuals a categorical assurance of the serious nature that we apply to these matters. The Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, the Foreign Secretary, and I take these things seriously. This activity undermines our sovereignty. It is antidemocratic. It is illegal and completely unacceptable.

That is precisely why we have taken time to ensure that the work that we have done on this review gives us across Government the best possible understanding of the nature and the scale of the threat, and ensures that we are appropriately organised and that we have marshalled our resources accordingly so that, where this activity rears its ugly head, we are best placed to respond to it. I can give you a categorical assurance that we take these matters seriously.

Q72 **The Chair:** That is greatly appreciated. Thank you, Minister. Can we take

you on to red notices? Perhaps for the benefit of members of the public who are watching our proceedings, remind us of what red notices are. Are sufficient safeguards in place in the UK to prevent politically motivated red notices being used as a tool of repression against people here? What steps are you taking to ensure that politically motivated red notices do not impact immigration and asylum applications?

I know that my colleague Lord Murray would like to come in with a supplementary on this and then we will turn after that to Mr Gordon.

Dan Jarvis: I will hand over to Mr Scurry for that one.

Andrew Scurry: Interpol red notices ask for the arrest of an individual, as you know. I believe Interpol has provided quite extensive evidence to the committee about that and so I will not talk for that, but we do have a number of safeguards in place, first in Interpol, which it will have talked about, including through its notices and diffusion taskforce, which seeks to ensure that notices are not permitted if they are politically motivated, for example. UK legislation, including the Extradition Act, then has a number of safeguards to ensure that individuals' human rights are respected within that process.

We have also been doing quite a bit practically to ensure that there is no abuse. For example, we fund two individuals who are seconded to Interpol's notices and diffusion taskforce, and we think that is an effective way of helping to ensure that Interpol's processes and safeguards are properly adhered to. I do not know if Grace wants to say anything on the legal framework.

Grace Lucas: I will add on the Extradition Act because I know the role of the Secretary of State versus the judge was mentioned in previous evidence. Having been through the 2011 review of the Extradition Act and the changes that were brought in that, it was clear that the reasons for those changes was so that a judge could rightly consider human rights considerations. They also have the right to throw a case out for abuse of process. We are happy that the Extradition Act provides those safeguards and that judges are best placed to consider those issues.

Dan Jarvis: It is probably also worth me making the point that Interpol is a valued partner organisation with which we seek to work closely. It has, from memory, 196 member countries. I attended its general assembly in Glasgow last year. It is important to make the point that the overwhelming majority of Interpol member countries work positively together to prevent and investigate crime and help keep the public safe, but if the committee has specific concerns, of course we would be happy to look at them.

The Chair: If you would like to write to us about the impact on immigration and asylum applications, it would be helpful as well. That is an internal question for the Home Office as well.

Q73 **Lord Murray of Blidworth:** I have two questions if I may, rather greedily. The first is in relation to Interpol red notices. We have heard

evidence that one concern of people who are subject to transnational repression is that they do not know whether they are the subject of a red notice until they travel. Could we provide a checking service for people who may be affected in this way so that we could inquire of Interpol as the United Kingdom as to whether somebody is the subject of a red notice, so that they know that they are at risk of being stopped and arrested were they to travel? That is my first question.

Secondly, we have also heard of a form of transnational repression that takes the form of the state concerned reporting that person's passport as stolen so that, when they travel, they are then arrested for travelling on a stolen passport. I wonder what steps could be taken to address that.

Dan Jarvis: Do you want to take the first one?

Andrew Scurry: Yes. I understand the concern, but I can see some challenges with such a mechanism. For example, it would tip off a genuine criminal that they are at risk of arrest. We would have to take that suggestion away and consider it further.

The Chair: Would you write to us on that, please?

Andrew Scurry: Yes, absolutely. On stolen passports, we have had some of these concerns raised with the Home Office previously. We have facilitated, for example, travel documents for some individuals where it is appropriate to do so. I have not previously been made aware of it being used to try to almost catch someone at the border. Again, I will go away and look into that one and write to you if I may.

The Chair: That is helpful. Thank you.

Q74 **Tom Gordon:** Thank you. What have the UK Government learned from other countries' legislative and policy responses to transnational repression?

Dan Jarvis: I have a couple of points of reflection and then I will hand over. Let me again emphasise the point about international collaboration. We do not face these challenges uniquely and, therefore, it is important that we engage with our partners, and we take every opportunity, at both political and official level, to do that.

As I said previously, a lot of time was given to considering the legislative framework in this particular area. We are completely content that the National Security Act provides an appropriate legislative response. I have had positive feedback from partner nations internationally that are looking carefully at that legislation and the impact of it.

We want to engage. We are engaging. While of course we will look at legislative arrangements in other countries, we are content we have the right approach here at the moment. Do you want to add to that?

Andrew Scurry: Yes. We had extensive engagement, particularly with the United States and Australia in developing the National Security Act

and looked to build on a lot of the legislation they already had but also looked at where we could improve and go further than them.

We subsequently have used the Five Eyes partnership that we have to become exemplars of best practice. The Canadians recently passed a whole swathe of new legislation that was closely modelled on our National Security Act. We absolutely are all helping and learning from each other in developing our legislation.

Dan Jarvis: To add to your point, it is worth emphasising that Canada will take the presidency of the G7 this year. As committee members will be aware, Canada has a significant interest in the issue of TNR and has already been clear that, as part of its presidency of the G7, this will be a priority issue. We look forward to collaborating closely with Canada and other G7 members on these issues.

Q75 The Chair: Thank you. That is a helpful note on which to almost come to the end of our proceedings.

Minister, I would like to ask you—building on what Mr Gordon has asked—about co-operation between different government departments within the United Kingdom, not least in shaping our policies on issues like trade and foreign affairs. Although they are outside the scope of the Home Office, how do we feed into that process by looking at a country's track record on transnational repression? How do you share the information that you have with other departments? What mechanisms are currently in place to ensure effective co-ordination between the Home Office, the FCDO, Business and Trade, intelligence agencies and law enforcement in identifying, responding to, and preventing incidents of transnational repression? How is the effectiveness of that co-ordination evaluated?

Dan Jarvis: Thank you for that question, which I feel possibly lends itself more to an awayday than a response to your committee in this forum.

I was struck, Chair, by your earlier point, which I did not have the opportunity to respond to, about artificial intelligence and the work that you are going to do in this particular area, which is important. I am pleased that you are doing that. I was struck, as you mentioned it, that it chimes with a number of strands of work that we are looking at through the Defending Democracy Taskforce.

On your point about cross-government co-operation, over many years, it is not unreasonable to say, there have been certain challenges in terms of ensuring that Government are as joined up as they possibly can be. In the previous Parliament and the previous Government, the Defending Democracy Taskforce was set up. The taskforce has recently had its mandate refreshed by the Prime Minister, and it provides that fulcrum point that draws together all the relevant bits of the machinery of Government, and all the other relevant stakeholders.

The Home Secretary has tasked me to chair the taskforce and to ensure it does precisely what you have asked about. While I suspect there are

always areas where we might be able to work more effectively, I can give you an assurance that through the taskforce we do our absolute best to discuss these matters in a secure forum, working closely with all of Government, and, critically, then ensure that the response is properly weighted right across Government and that we have a cross-government response that all the different government departments have brought into and agreed. That is the mechanism by which we seek to ensure that our response is as effective as possible.

You asked a good point at the end about evaluation. The truth of the matter is, as the chair, it is probably not for me to seek to evaluate how effective it is and, clearly, we will want to look carefully at any recommendations this committee finds both in terms of the work that you are doing here and in other areas.

The point about evaluation is well made and I need to reflect on it further, but I can give you an assurance that that mechanism with the refreshed mandate from the Prime Minister is in place. We have met four times over the past couple of months, and we will continue to ensure that that is the right place to join up the effort and ensure that our response is as effective as it possibly can be.

The Chair: Minister, thank you very much for that. Short of an awayday, I can assure you that my colleagues will have their eagle eye on evaluation as the months and years proceed. For today, we are extremely grateful to you, to Mr Scurry and to Ms Lucas as well for your contributions to our committee's proceedings. You have been candid. You have been thorough. You have engaged with us constructively and we appreciate that. Minister, thank you for coming today. Let me now close the proceedings.