



Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Countering extremism, HC 428

Tuesday 24 November 2015

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 24 November 2015

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Keith Vaz (Chair); Victoria Atkins, James Berry, Mr David Burrowes, Nusrat Ghani, Mr Rani Jayawardena, Tim Loughton, Stuart C. McDonald, Mr Chuka Umunna, Mr David Winnick.

Questions 383 - 501

Examination of Witnesses

Witness: **Mark Rowley QPM**, Assistant Commissioner for Specialist Operations, Metropolitan Police, gave evidence.

Q383 Chair: Could I call the Committee to order and refer all those present to the Register of Members' Interests? We are meeting slightly earlier because we are very keen to hear from the Assistant Commissioner for Specialist Operations on the current threat and other issues concerning counter-terrorism. Thank you very much for coming today.

Mark Rowley: Good afternoon.

Chair: Good afternoon. Can I begin by, on behalf of the Committee, commending all the work that has been done by your team? We know these are very difficult and stressful times, especially after what has happened in Paris, and we want you to pass on our thanks to them for the work that they do on a 24-hour basis.

Mark Rowley: Thank you.

Chair: You must be very pleased with the Prime Minister's announcement yesterday that counter-terrorism will be getting an increase in its budget. He referred to a figure of £1.9 billion. Do you know how much of that is going to go specifically to the Metropolitan Police?

Mark Rowley: I don't know the answer to that question at the moment. I know that counter-terrorism has been protected and there has been some growth in it. The 7,000 or so police officers and staff that we co-ordinate from Scotland Yard who are based around the country doing investigations, protection and other work is where we start from. How much that is going to grow or change I am not yet clear.

Q384 Chair: Do you know when you will be told? You will be seeking to recruit more people. He has talked about more people coming into the service. Do you know roughly when you will be told? At the moment your budget is £564 million, we were told by Mike Penning. We were told in November it is to be protected. Do you have any indication when this might be?

Mark Rowley: I expect to hear over the next few days but I do not have an exact date at the moment. Clearly there is a counter-terrorism machine. The security and intelligence agencies have been awarded a significant uplift, which entirely makes sense. We need more insight on the growing counter-terrorism problems and we need something proportionate alongside that because of the contribution we make in investigation, prosecution and working with communities.

Q385 Chair: Of course, it is not just about the counter-terrorism budget when you are dealing with the aftermath of something like Paris; it is also the policing budget. Were you the senior officer who wrote to the Home Office and said that to cut the policing budget would reduce very significantly the abilities of the service to respond to a Paris-style attack? Was it your letter?

Mark Rowley: I wrote to the Home Office on the back of the meetings of last weekend with an initial take on the impact of Paris and how it might change some of our thinking and some of our assumptions. That was a restricted letter and it had some operational detail in it. I am very disappointed it has been leaked publicly. I am not going to talk about the detail of that but I don't mind talking about more broadly and generally the relevance of policing budgets to counter-terrorism.

Chair: Of course. Please tell us that.

Mark Rowley: While we have this ring-fenced budget for counter-terrorism, it is not a separate machine. It depends very heavily on local policing resources and I would highlight it in two respects. We depend very heavily on the specialist resources that are sat within local police forces—firearms would be a particularly obvious example—whether that is about supporting armed surveillance or some of our interventions and arrests that require armed support or if we ended up in a situation as awful as we saw in Paris where the armed response capability would be critical. The strength of that specialist ability funded as part of mainstream is critical and you will see from comments that the Commissioner and I and others have already made that we think that that armed capability is probably going to need to get stronger.

Secondly, one looks more broadly at the wider policing capability, all the way through to local neighbourhood offices who are part of our overall resilience and are critical for the trust and confidence of communities and the flow of information. So the scale of the budget is important. I am sure there are always going to be more efficiencies that we can make in policing but dramatic cuts that undermine those capabilities would be a concern to me.

Q386 Chair: Thank you for being so very open and transparent with the Committee. So you are concerned that reductions in the budget would affect the effectiveness of local forces?

Mark Rowley: I think the tipping point will vary. You will have heard the Commissioner say in respect of London we think we can see scope for 10% more efficiencies but substantially beyond that we are concerned about the impact that would have. That 10% number would probably vary across the country based on different forces but I stand by the principle that dramatically above that would be challenging.

Q387 Chair: If it is 20% it would have passed the tipping point?

Mark Rowley: It certainly would in my view.

Q388 Chair: Your former colleague, Kevin Hurley, who you will remember from counter-terrorism command, who is now the police and crime commissioner for Surrey, said that in his view, and this is his direct quote, “If the cuts went through at 20% the people would be massacred. The first responding police would also be massacred”. These are his words not mine. They are very dramatic statements by a police and crime commissioner but someone with experience in counter-terrorism.

Mark Rowley: I am not sure about the scale and nature of the experience in counter-terrorism. I think we need to be careful about some calm and measured debate. There have also been some comments about firearms capability, tactics, weapons, the amount of ammunition, and those are issues that are perfectly proper for the police to be scrutinised upon but it is not something we should be talking about publicly. We have worked very hard since Mumbai in 2008, recognising the threat, for example, of a marauding terrorist firearms attack and we have developed our capability. If people want to discuss those sorts of issues and whether we are equipped to deal with such a threat, I am happy to do so in detail in private rather than doing it here, but some people are making some very extreme comments that I think are unhelpful.

Q389 Chair: Thank you. Let us move on to some actual figures. I think we were given the figure by the Prime Minister yesterday that seven major plots had been foiled by the CT command over the last year. Is that right?

Mark Rowley: That is right.

Q390 Chair: At the moment there are 4,000 home-grown terror suspects in the United Kingdom. Is that right?

Mark Rowley: Several thousand. An exact number is not the point but several thousand.

Q391 Chair: The third figure we were given is that at the moment there are 300 people who are on a watch list.

Mark Rowley: I don’t recognise that number. Out of those thousands people who are of varying degrees of concern, we are constantly prioritising our operations. Every week there is a prioritisation meeting with the police and the security service together deciding which operations need the most attention. How high operations are on that list depends on how much attention they get, but a long way down we have to try to pay some attention to them even if we can’t have a full operational coverage on them.

Q392 Chair: The final figure I want to put to you is that only three people at the moment are subject to anti-terrorism curfews and control measures. Is that an accurate figure?

Mark Rowley: We don't generally talk about the number of people on TPIMs, if that is the issue you are referring to, but there are several on them.

Q393 Chair: What we saw in Paris, and indeed in Belgium, was a lot of activity after the event where following the tragedies that occurred there, the police and security services raided a number of properties and managed to find a number of weapons. As far as we are aware, Brussels is still under lockdown at this moment. Is there more that can be done now to prevent such attacks or is it the case that we have to wait for them to happen before having to raid the properties and arrest those who we might suspect are involved in this kind of activity?

Mark Rowley: In terms of what is going on in France at the moment, after the attack some names have come out to the police about those involved, so it is not surprising they have got new leads to chase down, new associates and suspects, and they are trying to make arrests and working with colleagues in Belgium. We have got officers over there offering support to them and looking to harvest any information that may have relevance to us. Clearly, the ambition is to prevent attacks, which is the thrust of your question. We have been making arrests today over the last year or so that are approaching twice what they would have been three or four years ago.

I put those in two broad baskets for simple purposes. A third of those arrests are using counter-terrorism powers. We are prosecuting people for a plot or having terrorist training or disseminating material, so those are the people more advanced in the development of their terrorist intentions. The other two thirds are more disruptive. We are using crime powers, we are prosecuting them for fraud, sexual offending, anything that we can use to disrupt their conduct. These are people who are extremists who are generally migrating towards terrorism and rather than waiting to the last minute, anything we can do to disrupt them is important. Part of our success to date—and success can never be 100% guaranteed—is casting the net broad, going for those involved in plotting but also those on the periphery, and constantly trying to disrupt them, doing everything we can do to keep them on the back foot, which makes it hard for them to find their feet and plan the sort of acts that we saw in Paris.

Q394 Chair: Finally from me on this point, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the man who was involved in Paris, came back to France via Greece on a French passport. We are hearing from the Greek Ambassador later. How are we tracking those who return from Syria who may not fly in and therefore we get them under the PNR but who come in with groups of migrants from either the Mediterranean, from North Africa into Italy, or from Turkey into Greece? That is apparently what he did. How would we track a British citizen who had travelled to Syria and come back through that route?

Mark Rowley: As we have spoken about publicly, there are well over 700 British people who have travelled to Syria: a little under half have come back, a little under half are still there and the remainder have been killed while out there. Every one of those who have come back gets attention from ourselves and the security services. We look at them individually. Some of them are subject to prosecutions. We will prosecute anybody we can if we can prove they have been involved in terrorism. Proving what somebody did in Syria

is not straightforward from the UK but we will prosecute anybody we can. We will already probably have done warrants on the addresses of them and associates to look for any evidence they fled. We will look for every opportunity to prosecute them, we will monitor them as much as necessary and they will go into the prioritisation process about the ongoing risk that they pose.

Q395 Chair: But how do you know they have come back if they come back with a wave of migrants from Greece? They are not on the Schengen information system so they are not flagged up, rather like this man who came back to France through Greece, having fought in Syria. How would we track them coming back?

Mark Rowley: No port system is perfect but people come through ports, they come through on passports, they come through in details, whether they are coming through Dover or Heathrow, and we do spot most if not all of them. Clearly people get into the country illegally. It is not impossible to do that.

Q396 Chair: But you know 400 have come back.

Mark Rowley: A bit less than that, but yes.

Q397 Mr Umunna: I wanted to cover three issues. Can I start off with the use of the so-called shoot to kill powers by police officers, which I think is quite unhelpful?

Mark Rowley: I agree.

Mr Umunna: It gives the impression that somehow you have carte blanche and clear discretion to act without reference to a legal framework. Just for the record, in what conditions can officers use lethal force? What is the legal framework you have to use?

Mark Rowley: The starting point for a police officer is to use the least force necessary to protect themselves or others from harm, and that is set out in the law, the concept of reasonable force. If it requires the use of firearms, so somebody is about to kill somebody with a knife or a gun, and there is no other way of intervening, the officer shoots to incapacitate that person immediately. Usually, almost every time, that is about shooting for the body because the only way to incapacitate somebody straight away is to shoot them to the body and the trauma that causes will usually incapacitate them and stop them doing what they are about to do. As soon as they are incapacitated, the officer will stop shooting and will rush forward and give first aid. Of course, if you get shot in your major organs there is a high likelihood you are going to die but it is not certain. But I think it is important to distinguish the officer's intent and his or her duty. They are shooting to stop somebody, to incapacitate them, from causing serious harm or death to somebody else. The outcome may be death but that is not the starting point.

Q398 Mr Umunna: Presumably there is a need for imminence, that there is no other way of stopping them at that actual moment?

Mark Rowley: Absolutely, yes. If it is going to happen tomorrow then there are things we could do.

Q399 Mr Umunna: I represent a borough where the tragic shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes occurred in July 2005. Clearly, mistakes were made and that is probably an understatement. What assurances can you give the public that the lessons have been learned from that such that when lethal force is used by other officers in the future we do not see a repeat of the same mistakes? I think people will agree it is vital that you have those powers when there is an imminent threat but they want to know that they will be used properly.

Mark Rowley: Those were extraordinary times and it led to a really tragic mistake of mistaken identity. I am not an expert in the detail of the case but you have a man who is mistaken for a suicide bomber getting on to the Tube and the officers acted with that belief that tragically turned out to be incorrect. There were many changes made to police surveillance practices, the way counter-terrorism worked in several regards on the back of that. You can never 100% rule out mistakes but there have been an awful lot of changes put in place to try to avoid such a mistake happening again.

Q400 Mr Umunna: The threat level is set at severe at present. Since the Paris attacks happened, have you become aware of any new plots or efforts to commit atrocities in the UK coming out of the events in Paris?

Mark Rowley: It would be wrong for me to talk about ongoing detail of operations and what we do and don't know. You can understand that. The threat level remains at severe; the longhand version of that is an attack is highly likely. I think it is easy for people to get complacent about it, given it has been at that level for over a year. An attack is highly likely is a dramatic statement in and of its own right. What has come out of Paris and the ongoing situation in Belgium and northern Europe is evidence of a network of determined attacks in northern Europe. You would be expecting us and the security services to be working flat out to look for any possible links and connections of that network to anything in the UK. I can give you 100% assurance we are doing that but it would be wrong to discuss the detail of what we are or are not finding.

Q401 Mr Umunna: Let me move on. I will ask about the final issue, which is resources. When you speak to your counterparts who hold the same national lead position in other countries, in particular France, is your sense that they have more or less resources at their disposal compared to you to deal with the terrorist threats we face in the UK?

Mark Rowley: Sometimes it is less resource, sometimes it is similar. I think the distinction that we have here is from an accident of history really. The fact that the police and the security services have been in collaboration for 40 years, in dealing with modern terrorism, with what emanated out of Northern Ireland and then with Al-Qaeda and now what we face with ISIL and other groups, gives a maturity to our working practices and our legislation and our systems. That means that the police and security services here work closer together, are more joined up and have been able to maintain and develop capabilities in a way that very few countries can compare with. That is not critical of any other country because of their ability and determination. It is simply a product of our history that we have had to learn a lot of lessons over those 40 years, which gives us a good opportunity but you can't be complacent because the threat is continually changing.

Q402 Mr Umunna: My final question is a very straight one, which the public would want a straight answer to. Do you currently have the resources at your disposal to keep them safe from this terrorist threat?

Mark Rowley: If you want a binary answer to that, I don't think I can give a yes or no answer. In the spending review process we have been canvassing with Government about how with more operations, more investigations, increased threat over what has been and will be a sustained period, we need the resources and specialist capabilities, especially around technology, to grow to meet that. You have seen the announcement that the security and intelligence agencies have had substantial growth in resources, which entirely makes sense. They absolutely need that and we need something proportionate alongside that so that we can fulfil our part of the CT machinery. We need more to keep pace with it, would be my answer.

Q403 Mr Umunna: If you need more, that means that you currently don't have enough, logically it would follow.

Mark Rowley: No, because the workload slowly builds. The threat has built over the last 18 months particularly. We would see it building in the future. The police part of the process is very long because investigations that start today can finally come to prosecution in two years' time, so that workload is building and it is within the system. We are managing it at the moment with a degree of stretch. We need to be able to continue to grow alongside that with the security and intelligence agencies.

Q404 Mr Umunna: How would you define "more"? How much more do you need?

Mark Rowley: We have had frank conversations with Government. I don't think it helps that debate if I get into percentage conversations here now.

Q405 James Berry: In addition to my declarations, I worked as a barrister for both the Met Police and the Surrey Police when Mr Rowley was there, before my election.

Mr Rowley, it is right, isn't that, in addition to a robust legal framework and a framework in the College of Policing guidance around the use of firearms that the statistics for the last accounting year up to March 2014 show that there were 14,864 firearm deployments, yet the police discharged their firearms in just two of those operations?

Mark Rowley: Those numbers sound about right and the Met tends to be part to around a third to a half of those incidents.

Q406 James Berry: That is a testament to the fact that we have the most professional armed police officers in the world.

Mark Rowley: I think the professionalism of our officers is outstanding. To be going out on so many incidents, regularly drawing weapons, often pointing them confronting dangerous people, and to be so careful and cautious and so reluctant to pull the trigger unless absolutely necessary is fantastic. I think it is important to put on the record that the training since 2008 for them to confront a marauding terrorist violent attack is entirely different from what we have seen before. Being trained to confront armed robbers and gang members is nowhere near of the same order as confronting terrorists who have had paramilitary training and may possess automatic weapons. The threat to the officers who

go forward in those situations is immense. I think the fact that they are so determined to maintain that capability, to do the training, and are ready and prepared to do that on behalf of society is fantastic.

Q407 Mr Winnick: Assistant Commissioner, while every effort obviously is made by the police to try to stop terrorist attacks, presumably one of the most essential things is to stop the indoctrination of those who could be vulnerable to terrorist propaganda. How confident are you that enough is being done in schools and local communities generally to deal with the hatemongers and, to use an expression, the fellow travellers of terrorism?

Mark Rowley: I think if you had asked me that question a year ago I would have been a little more bleak than I would be now. There is a tipping point; the threat has become more public because of what is on the internet and what is in the papers and the Prevent duty that Parliament brought in earlier this year has made a difference. I see a big difference in the willingness of schools, local authorities and health authorities to collaborate on preventing extremists from radicalising young people. We are now getting referred to our collective case management several hundred cases a month of individuals who are of concern to a community member or a teacher or a social worker. That enables us to jointly assess whether there is a real problem there and, if there is, try to work out who is the malign influence and how do we deal with them and how do we protect this vulnerable person from being drawn further into extremism.

Q408 Mr Winnick: The argument about policing is not only, of course, that the police deal with all the usual aspects of criminality but to a large extent it is said it is the eyes and ears in the local community who can pick up terrorist dangers.

Mark Rowley: Absolutely.

Mr Winnick: Do you feel that reducing the number of police officers would have an effect in dealing with terrorism?

Mark Rowley: I don't think you can do it black and white in absolute numbers, but you need a sufficient, strong, credible local community policing presence there, and there may be different ways of delivering that, to maintain that relationship and trust which means you secure information. Also, when police have to take contentious actions, such as the arrests today we are making across the country—many of them using counter-terrorism powers—that will land very badly in some communities if you do not already have strong relationships to wrap around it when you have to take that action. That relationship to help explain what we are doing and also seek more information is critical.

Q409 Mr Winnick: The Met, I am sure, like other police forces, including in my region, the West Midlands, would accept and fully agree that the police should be representative of the community at large.

Mark Rowley: Yes.

Mr Winnick: I am sure you would agree, no matter, for example, how many Muslim police officers there were, it would not in itself prevent terrorism and no one has suggested that. But as far as the Met is concerned, do you have any figures on how many police officers of all ranks belong to the Muslim faith even if they are not believers?

Mark Rowley: I can't pull that number off the top of my head. Our minority number at the moment has risen to 16%, which is much better than it has ever been but still nowhere near good enough. Our latest cohort of recruits for the first time ever is up to 30% black and minority ethnics, which is fantastic. It would make a big difference if we were able to keep recruiting to keep redressing the balance by bringing in a more balanced cohort of recruits that is closer to reflecting London, but recruiting is likely to slow down quite dramatically, as you will understand.

Q410 Mr Burrowes: You mentioned that nearly 400 UK citizens have returned from Syria. How would you characterise the risk to public safety from those?

Mark Rowley: We have a banding structure where we look at the individuals and what we know they have been involved with, who their associates are and what the evidence is about what they have come back to do. To start off with you have to do quite a lot of monitoring of them to understand that risk and in due course they may go into more preventative and deradicalisation type initiatives or they may be part of big operations investigations and many of them have been prosecuted and gone to prison.

Q411 Mr Burrowes: Can you say the numbers in the different categories in terms of risk?

Mark Rowley: I don't have those numbers to hand, no.

Q412 Mr Burrowes: Within those 400, how would you describe those that you would seek to punish and those you would seek to rehabilitate?

Mark Rowley: I don't punish, I investigate.

Mr Burrowes: Sorry, those you think should be punished.

Mark Rowley: Anybody we can prove has committed a serious crime should go through the system and be dealt with by the courts, and that is what happens. If we intercept people who are trying to go and join terrorists and fight overseas they still tend to get imprisonment. If they have gone and fought and in one case been involved in beheadings and all sorts of ghastly acts, they get far more dramatic sentences, but it is for the courts to decide. With anybody we can prove, that is what we do.

Q413 Mr Burrowes: Just take a step back then. Of that 400, would you prefer, with the appropriate legislation, for those who Chris Phillips, the former head of the National Counter Terrorism Security Office, referred to as "gap year jihadis" to be made subject to permanent exclusion orders, in terms of the fact that they do not get back here? Would you prefer that some of those 400 would not be able to get back into this country?

Mark Rowley: It is instinctively appealing, isn't it, to be able to say to terrorists, "You are not welcome back"? Instinctively that is great. When they turn up at Calais and we say to the French, "You can keep this British terrorist", it is going to undermine international co-operation on terrorism. So, while it is appealing to say, "You are not welcome back", I don't think it is practical, which is why there is a UN treaty about creating stateless individuals.

Q414 Mr Burrowes: So you are not supporting temporary exclusion orders of two years?

Mark Rowley: That is temporary. That is different. Managing the return and having a grip about it is what temporary exclusion orders do and of course you would want to do that. I don't think it is tenable to stop a sole British national coming back to this country and to say, "We are going to leave this person who is a threat to public safety to somebody else to sort out in France or Germany or Turkey or Greece".

Q415 Mr Burrowes: With rehabilitation, do you want these returning jihadists to go into deradicalisation courses?

Mark Rowley: There is the criminal law process, in terms of what can we prove people have been involved with, but regardless of whether we can prove something or if someone is convicted, if programmes can develop that are more sharp-edged deradicalisation programmes to help bring them back and bring them into a more sensible place in their beliefs, that has to be to the good. Channel is a very good programme that has been established by the Home Office. It is focused more on counter-radicalisation, which is earlier in the escalation.

Q416 Mr Burrowes: How many have started these deradicalisation courses?

Mark Rowley: The Home Office could give you the detailed numbers on Channel. There is some deradicalisation and some counter-radicalisation work done within the Offender Management Service. The Home Office is looking at a wider set of programmes to be able to tackle this growing cohort of people.

Q417 Mr Burrowes: Are there sufficient resources for those courses?

Mark Rowley: The Home Office has looked at those resources as part of the defence spending review and—

Q418 Mr Burrowes: Could you give your assessment of resources?

Mark Rowley: They have been funding the Channel programme to date and the Home Office is best placed to answer because they are looking at what funds they need to do more on that.

Chair: We have the Minister coming in next.

Q419 Tim Loughton: Mr Rowley, coming back to a comment you made to Mr Winnick's question about the Prevent strategy, that strategy has been slightly contentious and we have had evidence from people who have criticised it. You said that since the Prevent duty came in you have had a much better relationship and dialogue with schools. Do you think that is because the Prevent strategy has become a duty and therefore it is incumbent upon them, or are you seeing a greater willingness in the light of heightened terrorist threats for schools to engage with you?

Mark Rowley: I think it is both, the push and the pull. People have become more aware of the threats and the risks and we have been more engaging with schools and saying, "We

need your help” because it is public information and partners’ information that will often make the difference in finding the aspiring terrorist. There have been all those positive factors and I think the piece of legislation has pushed people a bit further and has forced those like schools to go through training programmes with teachers and really think about what they need to look out for and it has generated, as I say, several hundred referrals a month across the country.

Q420 Tim Loughton: Are police the best placed to advise on that strategy, particularly given the shortage of some Muslim officers within the Met and elsewhere, or are you using specialist personnel, not necessarily front-line officers, who may be more empathetic to difficult schools, difficult relationships in order to pass on that message? It is a sensitive error and we have heard from charities and others who have been commissioned by the Government to do a lot of that work rather than the police.

Mark Rowley: In terms of the sensitivity, I think a lot of the criticism comes from lobby groups, some of whom are almost apologists for terrorism. We have to be careful about how much credence we give some of that challenge. While there is “politics” going on there, we see very strong relationships with communities. The police role is not to lead Prevent but we do have a unique place because we are the only agency that can link between national security operations and local partnerships and local communities. That is the space we operate in. We are not experts in counter-radicalisation and the safeguarding interventions that other agencies will make but we can hold the ring in the middle, which means that when somebody has a concern about a 16-year-old, we can triage that very quickly. If that 16-year-old is actually associating with dangerous terrorists it may need to go into an investigation, but if they are not then we can work in a partnership and it is probably down to others to help deal with their vulnerability. So I think we probably have a unique role.

Q421 Mr Umunna: Can I ask you on the use of lethal force? In an ideal world of course one would rather ensure that the accused are put through a proper judicial procedure and subject to the rule of law, but in the real world that is often not possible. There has been some discussion in relation to Mohammed Emwazi, who was killed by a drone strike in November, that somehow it may have been possible to arrest him in Raqqa and bring him to justice. Is there any official context or line of communication that you have with people in Raqqa that would have enabled him to have been arrested and brought over here and brought to justice?

Mark Rowley: I have no idea of how you would ever have done that. We have worked extraordinarily hard doing an investigation from a distance to make him prosecutable if he ever surfaced anywhere where he could be arrested, but he was in a lawless, ungoverned space and I could not see any prospect of him coming out of there.

Q422 Chair: Thank you. I think that is very clear. Finally, are you surprised at the number of partners that you now have in the fight against terrorism? The online activist group Anonymous has gone in support of the Metropolitan Police and unveiled the fact that they have taken down thousands of Daesh Twitter accounts and suppressed 10,000 Daesh social media pages. Are you surprised? Do you welcome the support of this group in trying to help us deal with these cyber attacks?

Mark Rowley: I don't think I subscribe to that old adage that my enemy's enemy is my friend but if they do some damage to ISIS I am not going to complain about it.

Q423 Chair: So you are glad they are there to help but you would prefer them just to stick to taking down Daesh's Twitter accounts?

Mark Rowley: I would prefer they stuck to the law generally.

Q424 Chair: But what they are doing is presumably exposing a number of people who have Twitter accounts that—

Mark Rowley: I would prefer they stuck to the law generally.

Q425 Chair: Okay. Going back to what you said about the border checks, a British citizen returning, with a similar situation to what happened in Paris—we are not part of the Schengen information system—how would you alert Schengen countries where you had a British citizen who is known to the security services or the counter-terrorism command? You want to warn them that if they return after going to Syria that you want to know about it. We are not part of the Schengen information system, we are not part of Prüm because the Home Secretary opted out last year. How would you be able to tell colleagues about this?

Mark Rowley: We and the security services have been working with the Home Office over the past year in sharing more information across Europe about people of concern and there is more data being shared now. I can't immediately explain how that is done but we are doing that. I do see an increased appetite across Europe and you can simply see, from the awful events of Paris and the links to Belgium and what else is going on in northern Europe and our determination to see if there are links in the UK, the greater need to do it and that is why we have been doing it for many months.

Q426 Chair: Last Wednesday two men, Trevor Brooks and Simon Keeler, were discovered on Hungary's border by Romanian police officers. One of them, Trevor Brooks, had a travel ban and both men were on watch lists but they managed to leave our country and they were on their way to Syria. How did they leave our country in the first place if they were on a watch list and they had a Home Office travel ban?

Mark Rowley: I presume they did not leave on their own documents. We have had some people that we tracked a year or so ago who were arrested trying to leave the country in the back of a lorry. You think of people coming into the country on the back of a lorry but we actually discovered people trying to leave it on the back of a lorry. They might have used false documents. So there will be other ways they have tried to do that. We are constantly looking at our prioritisation list of operations and if we get any sense of information that anybody who is a high risk is trying to leave the country, of course we will monitor that. We can't monitor the whole list though.

Q427 Chair: For policing reasons, not for political reasons because you are here as a police officer, would you like to be part of the Schengen information system so that if a British citizen returning to this country from Syria is flagged up by EU colleagues, you were notified when they enter Greece or Italy?

Mark Rowley: I don't really care about the political and treaty vehicle, but in terms of is there a need for more information exchange across Europe, whether that is about names or biometrics, I think there would be a lot of benefit to us if we increased the amount of information we have access to.

Q428 Chair: Thank you. Just to be clear at the end, what you have told this Committee is that you were the author of the letter that went to the Home Office. You were not prepared to discuss the details but generally on the point of policing budgets, you believe that anything above 10% would have a risk factor in the ability of local police to assist in the counter-terrorism work that you do?

Mark Rowley: You phrased that slightly more precisely than I did.

Chair: That is why I am trying to put it to you so there is no misunderstanding.

Mark Rowley: I am not going to talk about the detail of the letter; that is a private communication with the Government.

Chair: No, I understand that.

Mark Rowley: In terms of resources, counter-terrorism policing needs a proportionate uplift to the security and intelligence agencies. Local police forces make a big contribution with firearms officers and neighbourhood police officers, for example. While there will be more efficiencies—and in the context of London the Commissioner said probably of the order of 10%—if there are dramatic cuts I worry that that will undermine their ability to do their role in counter-terrorism. I am not going to try to guess whether that number is 5% in X shire or 20% in Y shire, but I am concerned that dramatic cuts will undermine part of our counter-terrorism effort.

Chair: Mr Rowley, thank you very much for coming in. We know you are extremely busy. You have to go to Manchester to see the police and crime commissioners. Thank you for coming in.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Rt Hon John Hayes MP**, Minister for Security, and **Charles Farr**, Director General, Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism, Home Office, gave evidence.

Q429 Chair: Good afternoon. Minister, I welcome you to this Committee on your first appearance as Minister for Security. As you know, in the last Parliament the Committee felt very strongly that combining immigration and security did not allow sufficient focus on the work of the Security Minister and we are glad that the Prime Minister accepted our recommendation. Mr Farr, you return now quite openly as the Director General for Intelligence at the Home Office. Welcome back.

Minister, we have heard some disturbing evidence from Mark Rowley generally on the issue of police budgets in which he has told this Committee that a reduction in police budgets above a certain percentage—and he talked about the 10% in savings and efficiencies that the Commissioner had talked about—would undermine the ability for the

counter-terrorism command to do its job effectively following the Paris outrage. Have you seen Mr Rowley's letter to the Home Secretary?

Mr Hayes: I heard his evidence. By means of modern technology, I was able to see it as he was giving it.

Chair: You were not snooping on us then?

Mr Hayes: I wanted to make sure I was best informed, because I know how important this Committee is under your distinguished chairmanship. It is a delight to be here, as you know.

I think the two things I would say about that are these. In dealing with terrorism—and your own reports, which I have studied at some length, make this point very fully, and I refer to your counter-terrorism 17th report to the session 2013-14—one needs to build capacity across the whole of communities. You make the point and I entirely agree with it—indeed it is reflected by Government policy—that the police alone can't do this job. It has to be done by all of us, it has to be built from the bottom up, particularly through public sector bodies but actually through others. The second point I would make is that the high level means by which we counter terrorism is often through communications, as you know, the interception of communications through the security services and so on. So, while it is absolutely true that the police are an important component in this battle, they are not the only component.

Q430 Chair: Indeed. We understand that and we are very grateful for your kind comments and the fact that somebody at the Home Office does read our reports so carefully. You will know that we have talked about the wider implications of these matters before, but Mr Rowley is the head of counter-terrorism. He is the top guy dealing with counter-terrorism and he has written to the Home Office. Although he welcomed the £1.9 billion that is coming his way—not all of it but part of it—and he was very pleased with that, he did say that reductions in the policing budget would have an effect. I know this for myself. I went to visit the NCA last week and their budgets are being cut. So it is various agencies working together. Do you take on board the point that after Paris any reduction in the policing budget is going to be a problem but if it is over about 10% it is going to cause problems for Mr Rowley? Are you aware of that?

Mr Hayes: I do not need to lecture this Committee and would not seek to do so on the allocation of police resources and the allocation of those resources needs to be sufficiently dynamic to take account of the event post Paris. You are absolutely right because the underpinning assumption of what you just said, Chairman, is that we need to review what we do in the light of Paris in operational terms. That is certainly true and we are doing that. It would be remiss not to. You are also right, Chairman, in acknowledging that the police are an important part of that and of course we work very closely with Mark Rowley in those efforts. It would be impertinent and probably extremely unwise for me to anticipate the police grant settlement, so I won't do that, but I will say that, as you will know, we have put an extra 1,900 people into the security services. We are boosting the funding for the work they do. Clearly the work they do relates to what the police do and, as Mark Rowley said in the evidence he gave just now, one of the things that marks out our experience compared with others is the police working relationship they enjoy with those other services.

Q431 Chair: You do not know what is going to be said tomorrow? You have not been told whether or not there are going to be further cuts to the policing budget?

Mr Hayes: It would be impertinent for me to comment on that.

Q432 Chair: Well, we don't want you to be impertinent at all. Let us move to what has changed since Paris. As a result of what has happened there in that tragedy, and we have seen what is happening in other parts of the European Union—Brussels is still locked down, lots of changes have been made to policing in respect of France and other countries—has much changed in the security climate here in this country?

Mr Hayes: Our threat level has not changed, as you will know, Chairman, but the threat level was already severe. As a result of that, of course we need to understand what that means in practice. It means that an attack in the United Kingdom is likely. In addition to that, we have further evidence, and you will be familiar with it as a Committee, from the director of MI5 that seven terrorist plots have been foiled in the last year alone. Moreover, what Paris represents, following Tunisia, is the danger of those marauding with automatic weapons who are entirely careless of the lives they take. This was a random attack on a variety of targets based on both the will and the means, automatic weapons, to do maximum damage. You are absolutely right, Chairman, to say in the light of that we are looking closely at our response, we are looking closely at our strategy and policy to see if it is fit to deal with those dynamics.

Q433 Chair: But, Minister, shouldn't we have done this even before Paris? It sounds as if this has only happened because of Paris. Surely the threat has been with us for some time and we should have been looking at this issue prior to Paris rather than now.

Mr Hayes: There are three points about that, Chairman. The first is that we were, of course. You will remember that we ran Exercise Strong Tower earlier this year. That was an exercise in London involving the whole range of bodies and agencies, including the police and the army but also the other emergency services, on the assumption that a terrorist attack could take place on a number of places simultaneously on an organised basis. Of course we have been looking at that very closely.

The second thing to say is, however, the characteristic of particularly ISIL is one of extraordinary adaptability. If you step back far enough, one of the things about terrorists was that they acted quite slowly and reasonably predictably. You may feel that is an irony but I think you as experts on this subject understand what I mean. There is now an immense amount of flexibility and adaptability on the part of these terrorists and that obliges us to not only match it but to leapfrog it with our own adaptability and flexibility, our responsiveness. The third and final point is that this is about comparing and contrasting our work with partner countries. You will know that the relationship between Belgium and France was critical to that attack and it was clearly planned from outside of France in part. While we have a sea border so our circumstances are rather different, it would be naive to assume that we should not do that kind of cross-border work with other countries to build shared competence.

Q434 Chair: Indeed. On that point, let us go to specific issues. We are not part of Prüm, are we?

Mr Hayes: No.

Chair: We are not part of the Schengen information system?

Mr Hayes: No.

Chair: How is it that we are going to stop a British citizen who has gone to—sorry, you are having a conversation with Mr Farr.

Mr Hayes: No, we are just comparing notes in a kind of convivial way.

Q435 Chair: Excellent. You have put me right off my question now. How is it that we could stop a British citizen who has gone to fight in Syria returning to the United Kingdom if we are not part of these systems that will allow European Union colleagues, like the Greek Government, to flag up the arrival of people who have gone to fight there but are returning to this country to initiate a terrorist attack? How would we be able to stop them?

Mr Hayes: I note your own thoughts on this, which I have read just this morning where you talked about the end of passport-free travel.

Q436 Chair: How would we stop them coming back?

Mr Hayes: Let me tell you. By a multi-layered approach. We need checks in our country on these Syrian returnees, and we have them; we need checks at Calais, which is the main point of entry, and we have them; but those two layers are not sufficient. You have to build a multi-layered approach with greater levels of scrutiny across Europe, particularly southern Europe, and we are working to do that.

Q437 Chair: Yes, we understand all that but how would you be able to tell the Greeks and the French that someone had entered their territory who was a bad person who we needed to be notified of. Layers are fine but how would we actually know if a British jihadist was returning via Greece, pretending to be a migrant, if we are not part of the Schengen information system and not part of Prüm?

Mr Hayes: Well, because while it is true that we are not part of Schengen that does not mean that we do not have close relations with these countries. Indeed the Home Secretary was—

Q438 Chair: Yes, but we are not part of the database. I am sure the Home Secretary has very close relations with the home office ministers in other countries, and you have too with security ministers, but if it is not on the computer how do we stop them? You talked about people leaving the country, we have control of our borders. Last week Trevor Brooks and Simon Keeler were discovered at Hungary's border by Romanian police officers. Mr Brooks was subject to a Home Office travel ban and both were on watch lists. How do we allow these people to leave?

Mr Hayes: I can tell, Chairman, that even my silky persuasiveness has not been sufficient so maybe Charles will be able to do a better job than me.

Charles Farr: As you rightly say, we are not part of Schengen. We are collaborating and using the Schengen information system, which is the key portal system for the exchange of the data in the way that you are proposing. We, as a country, receive information on people that we load on to our own systems here so that when they come across our border, as you know, we send a response back to the country nominating that individual and we do the opposite ourselves.

Q439 Chair: Mr Farr, how do we know when a British jihadist is returning from Syria across the Greek border, in exactly the same way as one of the Paris bombers had done? We will hear later from the Greek Ambassador on why this was not flagged up, but we would not even get our British citizens on that, would we, because we are not part of Schengen and the Home Secretary opted out of Prüm?

Charles Farr: I am sorry, my point is that we would because although we are not part of Schengen in its broadest sense, we are part of the Schengen information system that is the bit of Schengen, the border control system, that enables one country to share a name with another country requesting that country to alert us when the person crosses the border. We do do that and we share a great number of names with the Schengen information system and we receive alerts, as they are called, back to us when those people—

Q440 Chair: So there is no problem about a returning jihadist being picked up on the computer system of the Greek Government?

Charles Farr: There are always difficulties about tracking people's movements, but we participate in the Schengen information system, which is the part of Schengen that enables countries subscribing to it to track movements. I would say, if I may add, that of course this is also why the Government have pressed continuously for what we call intra-European passenger name records to be both generated and shared. I think our Government vision of this is very much that we subscribe to SIS II, as we call it, the Schengen information system in its second iteration, and we have intra-European PNR, and it is a combination of the two that maximises our chances of detecting known people moving back.

Q441 Chair: We have no question on that. We support what the Government have done with PNR and you have worked very hard. Other countries have tried to stop this happening. Should we have opted into Prüm?

Charles Farr: I can't comment on that.

Q442 Chair: Minister, should we have opted, should we now opt into Prüm?

Mr Hayes: I would say two things about that.

Chair: Just on Prüm, not about two or three things or layered things. Should we opt into Prüm now?

Mr Hayes: I will give you a very straight answer to that question. Post Paris the conversations we are having in Europe are focusing on exactly the sort of things you have raised.

Q443 Chair: Should we opt into Prüm?

Mr Hayes: That is a decision the Government would have to take as a whole. We are not going to make policy on the hoof, Chairman, however much you might encourage me to do so. It is your job to encourage me and it is my job not to.

Q444 Chair: With the greatest respect, Minister, it is your job to be open and transparent with this Committee. I have received a letter from the Home Secretary today saying how pleased she is with the work that this Committee is doing and you started with very flattering comments about this Committee. So I am not asking you to make policy. What is your view? Should we be part of Prüm?

Mr Hayes: I think there is an argument for looking again at all of those arrangements and that is precisely what we are doing.

Chair: Excellent.

Q445 Tim Loughton: Minister, just for the sake of clarity, before your convivial conversation with Mr Farr just now you seemed to suggest that we were not part of the Schengen information system, we are not part of Schengen.

Mr Hayes: The Schengen agreement.

Tim Loughton: No. You were asked the question about not being part of the Schengen information system and you appeared to agree that we are not. We are. You know that?

Mr Hayes: We are.

Q446 Tim Loughton: Can I come back to Prüm then? Without you wanting to give your view, perhaps you will give a dispassionate view of what might be the advantages to the UK of being part of Prüm practically?

Mr Hayes: Post Paris there is a new need for a greater level of co-operation across Europe. We would freely acknowledge that and it obliges a reconsideration of exactly what shape that co-operation should take. The discussions that are taking place in Europe have focused on some of the things that have already been covered, and I won't go over them again. We have got passenger name records, aviation security, firearms and so on, as you would expect. But all of those things—

Q447 Tim Loughton: Specifically, what would be the advantages if we were part of that?

Mr Hayes: That is something I would want to reflect on before I gave a firm answer.

Q448 Tim Loughton: Can I come on to the airport security situation? The day after the Paris attacks a French national was apprehended at Gatwick airport armed with a knife and an air rifle. What assessment has there been about the robustness of security at points of entry, starting with airports?

Mr Hayes: We have taken a fresh look at that. Of course, we have been looking at it for a considerable time. I would not want to give the impression to the Committee that this is something entirely new. As a result particularly of the events in Egypt, we looked closely at aviation security pre-Paris, particularly around things like baggage handling, which was perceived as a principal weakness. I have visited airports to take a close look at the technology in place and the skills of the people involved in our airports. There are issues about skills, protocol and equipment, but I think our biggest area of concern and further work in the airports is at the point of embarkation. We are doing further work on regular routes to places across the world where we are not necessarily yet satisfied that measures are in place to protect the interests of British citizens. We have initiated that post the Egypt event.

Q449 Tim Loughton: Can I bring you closer to home? Gatwick airport is one of the closest international airports to my constituency. In my constituency I have the oldest airport in the country, the 10th busiest in terms of touchdowns in the country. I also have the closest cross-channel port to London. I have noticed no change in security measures post Egypt, pre or post Paris. Are we exposed on fronts like that and what are we going to do about it?

Mr Hayes: I think you are right to say that in the smaller airports and the smaller ports there is a significant challenge. That is not to ignore the challenges in Heathrow, Gatwick and elsewhere. But you are absolutely right to say that we do need to refresh our thinking about those points of entry for goods and people. It is almost true that the more you strengthen the protections you put in place at the principal points of entry, the more you displace the malevolent attention of those who seek to do us harm to those other places. So we have initiated a fresh review, a fresh piece of work on smaller airports and smaller ports because we share your concerns.

Q450 Tim Loughton: Should the people who run the airport and the port in my constituency be well aware of this and participating in it?

Mr Hayes: The people who run your airport will be part of the work we are doing.

Q451 Tim Loughton: Do you think they know that, because I don't think they do?

Mr Hayes: It is not for me to say what communications we have had with your airport. I do not want to go down that road.

Q452 Chair: How long is this review going to last? Bearing in mind that the security threat is severe and the Prime Minister made a very important statement on airport security, we are now having a review. How long is that going to last?

Mr Hayes: This is urgent work.

Q453 Chair: Is it going to be ready tomorrow?

Mr Hayes: We are constantly reviewing these things but in specific respect of the question raised by Mr Loughton, it is urgent work.

Q454 Chair: Urgent work meaning? When will it report back? Obviously this is urgent: severe attacks are going on all over the world; 32,000 people died last year from terrorist attacks.

Mr Hayes: There is work ongoing already.

Q455 Chair: How long will it take? What is urgent in the definition of the Minister for Security?

Mr Hayes: When we say we are reviewing these things, Chairman, I do not think we are going to have a long study and then produce a report and a series of further recommendations. I mean we are reviewing them in the sense that we are looking at them on a day-to-day basis in operational terms to explore what is happening and what should be and how those two things can be brought together.

Q456 Chair: Is it a spot check rather than a review?

Mr Hayes: It is rather more than a spot check but it is a spot check. We are spot checking all of those circumstances, but it is not just a spot check. It is about a serious reconsideration of the points of vulnerability that Mr Loughton and others have raised.

Chair: Indeed. Thank you.

Q457 Mr Jayawardena: Minister, you may have read in *The Sunday Times* a short line towards the end of an article that said, “There is little or no initial security screening for most migrants when they arrive in Europe to claim asylum”. I am sure you are as concerned as I am to hear that as a result of that sources close to the investigations being undertaken indicate that there could be so-called Islamic State terrorists posing as refugees. What steps can be taken by European nations to strengthen those borders and identify people before they enter Europe?

Mr Hayes: As you will know, a number of countries in Europe already set about strengthening those borders for exactly the reasons you have given. I talked about a multi-layered approach. It is absolutely right that we focus on what happens when people arrive at Calais and here but that is not enough alone. The discussions that have taken place in the days since Paris, urgent discussions if I may describe them as such, have among other things put new emphasis on the need to strengthen those external borders. We certainly need to be checking people at that point of entry. If we simply do it at our end of the process it will not be enough.

Q458 Mr Jayawardena: The British authorities believed that at least one of the Paris assailants was in Syria at the time of the attack, as a result of the discrepancies in the various systems that exist. Do you believe that the fact that the authorities were unable to keep track of the whereabouts of some very dangerous people may have undermined the Schengen agreement permanently?

Mr Hayes: It would be grandstanding of me to make some comment about the Schengen agreement on behalf of the whole of Europe. Although I would be delighted to speak on the whole of Europe in personal terms, I am not sure I could do it ministerially. I think it does raise questions about some of the assumptions that have prevailed up until now and I think every European country would say that.

Q459 Mr Jayawardena: Minister, you have said there is a new need for greater co-operation across Europe. It almost sounds like the James Bond film “Spectre” where they are trying to ensure co-operation across the world. Would you agree that there is a need for co-operation but it does not necessarily have to involve international bodies and it can be bilateral agreements between different nations, as we have done for many years with many of our allies?

Mr Hayes: You are not the first person to compare me to James Bond. To answer your question specifically, of course it is true that there will be bilateral agreements where there are particular connections between nations. Calais is a perfect example of that. We have had a particular set of priorities vis-à-vis Calais and that is why we have co-operated so closely with the French to strengthen security around Calais. You are well aware of this, Chairman, because your Committee has drawn attention to it previously. But in addition to that, there is a need for a pan-European focus on both the issues of border security that you have raised already in this session but also some of the other issues. I would be surprised if you did not raise firearms. It is absolutely right that we look at firearms, for example.

Chair: Yes, and we are moving on to other questions so if you could keep your reply very brief to Mr Jayawardena.

Mr Hayes: Yes.

Chair: Are you done, Mr Jayawardena?

Mr Jayawardena: Yes, thank you, Chair. The Minister’s answer has been very helpful.

Chair: Right, I am sure.

Q460 James Berry: Minister, my basic research shows that you are indeed correct that the Government is reconsidering whether to essentially reverse its opt-out of the Prüm convention because a decision is going to be made by 31 December, so it is actually quite imminent, the decision on whether we should join the Prüm convention.

What I want to ask you is about mobile armed response vehicles. I understand that the police have their firearms officers ready to be deployed in stations and other facilities, but they also have mobile armed response vehicles that are patrolling London and other cities all the time so that they can respond quickly to a firearms or terror incident. The Metropolitan Police Commissioner has increased or is in the process of increasing mobile ARVs by a third as we speak. Would you encourage police forces elsewhere in the country who have more limited resources on the armed officers front to do the same?

Mr Hayes: I talked earlier about Strong Tower and at the heart of that is, as you all know, a contemporate policy, which is essentially the point at which we engage the armed services in an emergency. What we tested on that occasion was exactly that, the co-operation between police and armed services where an armed attack takes place in a number of places and you need extra resources. You will also know that the Prime Minister has committed to 10,000 people to Operation Tempora in his recent comments. It is about responding quickly to an emergency, but you are right, it is also about having people available to do that. If you think of the terrorist incidents we have seen recently, a

quick response is incredibly important and a quick armed response is partly about police and partly about armed services in exactly the way you describe.

Q461 James Berry: Whereas the Met Commissioner may be increasing our armed response vehicle capability here in London, there is no sense in which the police have been caught on the back foot here because they have been training for a marauding terrorist attack since the Mumbai atrocities a number of years ago, haven't they?

Mr Hayes: Yes, exactly. In 2014 there were 15 ISIL-related attacks around the world. We have talked about Paris and I have talked briefly about Egypt but, of course, a lot of what we are doing is based not just on those two. As the Chairman indicated earlier, this is something we have been looking at for a considerable time. As Mark Rowley said earlier, our long experience of Irish terrorism has both honed our skills but it has also brought about an unprecedented level of co-operation between police and armed services.

Q462 Stuart C. McDonald: Sticking to the firearms theme, the Metropolitan Police have said that the range of weaponry used in Paris was a serious cause for concern. I understand that the Government is urgently reviewing how we respond to firearms attacks. Can you tell us a little bit more about the scope of that review? Is it about numbers? Is it about the weapons that the police would have available? Is it about procedures?

Mr Hayes: Well, there are several things. You will know that a small and diminishing proportion of total police recorded crime involves firearms. It is something like 0.2%, so historically firearms have not been—of course, they are always significant—a huge problem in this country. The number of crimes involving firearms has actually fallen, as I suggested. However, as I also said earlier, what Paris shows us is what can be done if people have access to automatic weapons and the intent of causing maximum damage. To that end, we are looking again at the import of firearms, which seems to me to be fundamentally important. We are looking at how we can identify existing firearms and how they can be put out of action. This is being done both here but also on a Europe-wide basis. The discussions that took place a couple of days ago with the Home Secretary focused on this across Europe, how weapons can be disarmed in that way. It is also, I think, how we respond to a firearm attack, so it is a several point answer but I think they are all relevant.

Q463 Stuart C. McDonald: In terms of the response, how are you undertaking that review? Who is undertaking this review and, given the urgency of the situation, when will it report?

Mr Hayes: Again, I think a risk of talking about a review is that it is something rather like a Select Committee report, which is something that takes time to put together and then time for deliberation and then time to report. This is an ongoing consideration on a day by day basis. I don't know if you want to build on that, Charles.

Charles Farr: Yes. Over the past six months, in particular since the earlier attacks in France, the Charlie Hebdo attacks, we have been looking with the police at whether the capabilities we have and the capacity we have is sufficient to deal with the nature of the current threat. After the latest Paris attacks we have done another bit of work, actually coinciding with the very tail end of the SDSR spending round considerations, to consider

those same things again. We have already given a report back to the Home Secretary and to the Minister for Security on that issue.

Q464 Stuart C. McDonald: Mr Farr, could you tell us a little bit about what work has been undertaken along with French and Belgian counterparts to identify and pursue those who are responsible for the attacks in Paris?

Mr Hayes: Well, some of that is obviously operational and the Chairman will be very familiar with the parameters of what I can say and what I cannot say. What I will say is this. Immediately the attacks in Paris happened, we offered and gave a high level of support at security service level and police level as well as the political discussions that took place between Ministers, which established both with Belgium and France the will to co-operate. We have operationally been working very closely with the authorities in those countries.

Q465 Stuart C. McDonald: Minister, the Home Secretary said in her statement one of the most concerning aspects of this is obviously that it was a very co-ordinated plot involving several individuals who were known to authorities. Is there any provisional view as to how this was not detected beforehand? Is it down to individual authorities? Is it because of international co-operation and the failures in that?

Mr Hayes: Stuart, if I might say so, in the fullness of time, and it will not be a long time, you will have the chance to vote for a piece of legislation that strengthens our ability to intercept communications. Actually, it confirms our ability to do so because we already do so routinely, building the access to oversight, which is another thing you have called for previously, Chairman, in your Select Committee report. When you do that, you will be giving the necessary powers to those who are missioned to anticipate these events. Much of the circumstance post Paris has been our response to what happened, but as you imply in your very clever question, this is about trying to get ahead of the game and anticipate those things. That is largely, not wholly but largely, done through intercepting communications. I will not say more than that operationally, but I think you will be able to reflect on what I have just said.

Q466 Victoria Atkins: Following on from the issue of firearms, of course, terrorists do not operate by themselves. There is very often involvement of organised crime gangs, particularly with the importation of firearms. Are there any efforts that you can help us with to find out if people are importing drugs they may well be importing firearms alongside that? Is there anything you can help us with on that?

Mr Hayes: When the Home Secretary appeared at the European Justice and Home Affairs Council on Friday she made exactly the point you have just made, Victoria. Essentially, this is about firearms smuggling, as you suggest. We need to disrupt the networks that are involved on that. We certainly need to ensure there is no link between terrorists and organised criminals. There is not much evidence that there is, by the way, in terms of firearms, but that does not mean to say that will always be the case. Where people see an opportunity in smuggling weapons we need to again, I have to say, on a pan-national basis try to disrupt those networks because they are by their nature intrinsically pan-national. There is not much evidence that the source of weaponry used in the earlier attacks in Paris

or these recent ones are widely available in the United Kingdom, but nonetheless your point is apposite that if we do not get ahead of this that may not always be the case.

Q467 Chair: You are satisfied that those who are there to protect us have the same kind of weapons, automatic weapons, as those who come to attack us, the equivalent of a Kalashnikov, Mr Farr?

Charles Farr: Yes, I am completely satisfied and earlier, three or four years ago, we made a major effort to increase the capability and capacity specifically in terms of firearms of the police, both counter-terrorist policing and armed response vehicles generally.

Chair: In Paris they used Kalashnikovs, which are automatic weapons.

Charles Farr: Yes, that is correct, yes.

Chair: Whereas some of the forces here just have single bullet weapons.

Charles Farr: There is a variety of weaponry available and I think and believe that we are satisfied it is effective in response to what we saw in Paris.

Q468 Mr Winnick: Mr Farr, there is obviously concern, first and foremost, in France after the atrocities that those who carried out the attacks were known to the French authorities. How far are the security authorities satisfied that with those who are considered to be a danger—it is argued that there are some 4,000 home-grown terror suspects in this country; perhaps you will comment on that—identification has occurred and whatever steps can be taken to try to protect us from what they intend will take place?

Charles Farr: I do not think it is unusual in recent history in this country and in other European countries for attacks to be conducted or attempted by people who in one context or another have been previously known to the police. We saw it here. We have seen it previously in France. We have seen it in Germany and in other European countries. I do not think it should be a surprise in this case.

Many more people here and overseas are known to the police and to the service than can be monitored in a way that might stop them conducting an attack, and that point I think has been made by Andrew Parker and by many other people. That is partly a question of resource—however big you are you cannot be big enough to put surveillance on 4,000 people—and it is partly a question, as the Minister said earlier, of capability. Many people that have appeared before this Committee have reflected on the issues we have about capability since the Snowden exposure and the intention of the IP Bill, as the Minister has said, is to restore some of the capability that has been lost.

Q469 Mr Winnick: Of course, in 7/7 certainly the ringleader of the mass murders was known and identified at the time. Is that not so, Mr Farr?

Charles Farr: Well, I think that has been in various reports, yes. That has been the subject of various reports, yes, it is true.

Mr Winnick: What does that mean, subject to various reports?

Charles Farr: Well, the ISC did a very long report on 7/7—

Q470 Mr Winnick: Was he known as a suspect to the British security authorities at the time?

Charles Farr: Yes, I think it has been a matter of public record in the ISC report into 7/7 and other reports that that was the case.

Q471 Mr Winnick: Yes. I mentioned the figure that is said to be 4,000 possible terror suspects in Britain. Do you have any comments on that?

Charles Farr: I do not recognise the figure and I do not think we use that figure.

Q472 Mr Winnick: Do you have any sort of figure that you would give the Committee?

Charles Farr: The figures that I think are being shared most widely are the figures about the numbers of people of interest to the security service who have been to Syria and Iraq and the numbers who have come back. I suspect you have already had that. It is between 750 and 800 who have gone since the conflict began and about 50% of those have returned. Those are the really important numbers for us. Not all those people, I would emphasise—because I think it has been misreported—have joined ISIL. That is a smaller subset of that group but, of course, a percentage certainly have.

Q473 Mr Winnick: Mr Farr, you are not saying, as I understand it, that they are the only suspects?

Charles Farr: No.

Q474 Mr Winnick: Clearly, apart from the figure that you have given of those who have been to Syria and come back and possibly are a danger as far as terrorism is concerned there are others?

Charles Farr: Yes.

Q475 Mr Winnick: The figure of 4,000 does not ring any bells?

Charles Farr: We do not use a figure of 4,000 or 3,500. What we do do, or the security service and police do, is prioritise very carefully among a large number those who are seen to pose the most significant threat and it is that prioritised number that is the focus for Ministers' attention and our attention as well and, of course, most of all for the attention of the police and security service.

Mr Hayes: If I might say so, David, the other thing that you are very aware of, I know, is that in addition to people who are known to the services or the police there is a real risk of people inspired to do very serious things. ISIL's intention is to inspire people that we do not know about or may not know about to murder and maim their neighbours. I talked about the dynamism of the threat we face earlier. This is a significant change. The use of modern media means people can be radicalised in their homes and encouraged to do very bad things indeed, and that number is a very hard number to gauge.

Q476 Nusrat Ghani: Mr Farr, if the 4,000 figure is not one that you are aware of, you will tend to use the figure of around 750 people that you believe may have travelled overseas and returned?

Charles Farr: We do not use routinely the figure of 4,000. We do not think it is particularly helpful. I do not think the security service routinely use it. We use numbers. I have quoted one lot of numbers, which is simply Syria travellers and returnees. There are other numbers that we would use, particularly of people who are high priority and who we really need to worry about here and now.

Q477 Nusrat Ghani: How do you identify the 750? Is there a set criteria for you to identify those?

Charles Farr: Of the people who have travelled to Syria and Iraq?

Nusrat Ghani: Yes.

Charles Farr: They are identified from a very wide range of sources. Some, of course, have been reported by their families as missing and have subsequently proven to be in Syria and Iraq. Some of them are tracked through border data of the kind that we spoke about earlier. Some are the subject of agency reporting either by our own agencies or others, allied agencies around Europe. Some are the subject of police reporting. A full spectrum of sources enables us to produce that sort of number.

Q478 Nusrat Ghani: There is a spectrum of sources and a criteria that helps you identify the number, even though, as the Minister said, there are many other people involved in encouraging people to be involved in extremism activities. Is there a way that you can draw a thread between those 750 that could help us understand what encourages them to go overseas or encourages them here to be engaged in terrorism activities?

Mr Hayes: We do know what that looks like and we know what radicalisation looks like because we now have quite a long history of studying these matters in some detail. We know the kind of methods that are used to radicalise these people. It is a series of elements. These people can be groomed and in that sense it is not unlike the grooming performed by sexual predators. They can be encouraged by propaganda, which is usually delivered through modern media. They can often be very vulnerable people for one reason or another who are, therefore, susceptible to that kind of messaging. We do know what some of the elements look like. These things are not an exact science, but we certainly know many of the signs that lead to the radicalisation that encourages people to in the end travel to Syria or take other extreme steps.

Q479 Nusrat Ghani: How are their experiences being used to help the Prevent strategy go forward? Are their experiences being collated and may help us to create a counter narrative as well?

Mr Hayes: You will know that our CONTEST policy includes the Prevent strategy, and the Prevent strategy is about identifying those people. Our Channel policy is about trying to deradicalise those people. Prevent itself is about training multi-agencies. You know the Prevent duty applies to schools, hospitals, prisons, local authorities and so on and so forth. It specifically says that sources of radicalisation should be identified and then action

should be taken to deal with that. We do know what it looks like. We do have a policy for dealing with it and we have stepped that up by making it a legal duty.

Q480 Nusrat Ghani: The 750 that have possibly returned, they are living their lives, going about their daily business, they are not—

Charles Farr: Sorry, the 750 that have travelled, about 50% of those we think have returned. Some, of course, have been killed out there; I should say that again. I think the Minister has put on record the figure of about 70 people who have been killed in Syria and Iraq, British persons.

Of the people who have returned, I think there have been a number of trends over time. In the early days of the conflict, people by and large went to Syria either for humanitarian reasons or to try to remove Assad. Of course, they did not go intending to join a terrorist organisation or thinking that that was going to be the outcome. As time has moved on and the opposition has changed shape, so the motivation of people travelling to Syria has changed. Now people are not travelling so much to try to remove Assad as to join ISIL, which is a very different proposition. It follows that I do not think some of the people who returned from Syria and Iraq in the early phase of the conflict pose a particular threat to us. People returning now who have travelled more recently specifically with the intention of joining ISIL are in a very different category.

Q481 Mr Umunna: Just going back to the figures—because I think it is quite important and you will notice among the Committee members a lot of interest in this—what figure do you currently use, Minister, for the number of UK nationals you estimate to currently be in Syria, Iraq, fighting for Daesh?

Mr Hayes: We believe that about half the people that have been have returned, so we would estimate in approximate terms 350.

Q482 Mr Umunna: But taking out the 70 who have been killed, around 300 probably?

Mr Hayes: Yes, that is why I said approximately because obviously you are asking for up to the minute information and that is impossible to give. We know from the variety of sources that Charles has mentioned how many have been and roughly how many have come back. We know around 70 have been killed.

Q483 Mr Umunna: In respect of the ones who return, I am presuming the way in which, Mr Farr, you detailed you assess the numbers going out, you use the same method of assessing the numbers that come back in by reference to the family, et cetera?

Charles Farr: Yes.

Q484 Mr Umunna: Take, for example, the situation where the family have notified you that the individual has returned. How do you go about deradicalising the individual concerned? Also, how do you judge whether or not you need to put them through some kind of legal process in respect of what they may or may not have done?

Mr Hayes: I will comment first, if you like, Charles. The Channel programme is voluntary, as you know, so if someone is identified as being referred to Channel—and they could be referred by a variety of agencies, not just the police, rather following on from the question that the Chairman asked me earlier. They can be referred by a number of public bodies, by the community, by their faith group, by their family. In the end it is a voluntary programme and that is a deradicalisation programme of the kind you describe.

In addition, for Syrian returnees, I think we would want to take a very close look at their subsequent contacts, their subsequent behaviour, their subsequent activities, because while you are right in saying—David Winnick made the point—that these are not the only people of interest, they are certainly of interest.

Q485 Mr Umunna: Yes, you are right, clearly, in suggesting what should happen, but who does that? What is the process?

Mr Hayes: Well, that is where Charles is going to describe it in some detail.

Charles Farr: In short, when someone returns from Syria and Iraq, the initial focus of activity must be by the police and, where appropriate, by the security service to determine whether they pose a threat. We do not really get involved in any sort of deradicalisation until that process has at least advanced some way. Where it is clear that that person does pose a threat, then they become the subject of an investigation with the objective, of course, of prosecution and conviction where appropriate. Where it is apparent after a period of time, to be determined by the police and security service rather than by us, that that person does not pose a threat, we then may consider whether they should be approached for a Prevent-style intervention, for want of a better phrase.

Q486 Mr Umunna: Just before I ask one final question, Chair, have either of you spoken to and had an interaction with somebody who has come back from Syria or Iraq in those circumstances? Have you spoken to any of the returnees yourselves?

Mr Hayes: I have spoken to the people they have spoken to and I have seen them onscreen, as it were, seen them speaking, seen them articulate what they feel, and so on and so forth. We have both had that kind of direct engagement.

What I would just say, though, through you, Chairman, is some of the people who come back, of course, come back disillusioned. Some of the people go with one view of what they might be going to experience and come back with a very different view of that reality, which is why we were slightly cautious about the numbers and why you have to go through the process that Charles has identified to see whether deradicalisation is necessary.

Mr Umunna: Now, Minister, can I ask you my final question?

Chair: Sorry, Mr Umunna, Mr Farr wanted to just—

Charles Farr: I do not really have anything to add. The answer to your question is yes, we are speaking to people all the time who have come back from Syria and Iraq. The only qualification I would put on that is, of course, that we do not want people to be speaking where an investigation is under way. It could compromise things.

Mr Umunna: No. If I was the policymaker I would want to speak to some of these individuals.

Charles Farr: Yes, absolutely.

Q487 Mr Umunna: My final question was going back to a comment that the Minister made about the so-called, often referred to, lone wolf attackers who have been inspired by what they have seen on social media and elsewhere by Daesh and others who have those kinds of objectives. The Minister said it is very hard to identify these people. Does the Government have a specific strategy and plan specifically to deal with these lone wolf attackers, as they have been referred to by others?

Mr Hayes: Yes, there are three things about that.

Chair: We do not need the whole strategy, just is there a strategy.

Mr Hayes: No, I am not going to talk about the whole strategy. Clearly, part of the response to a lone wolf attack is part of what we do with the police and the security services and the other things we talked about earlier. Yes, we do rehearse and we do develop our thinking about how we would deal with that kind of attack.

Of course, in terms of your fundamental point, how do we try to counter all of that, we do that through the work of RICU, which you are very familiar with, and we do it through the Prevent strategy, which is part of CONTEST. We are trying to stop these people being inspired and we have a strategy for dealing with them if they are inspired and then take that kind of action.

Chair: Thank you very much. We just need to move on. We have a number of colleagues who want a quick supplementary, starting with David Winnick.

Q488 Mr Winnick: This 4,000 that I mentioned, Mr Farr, we did not get the figure from nowhere. It was given to us only last week by the Metropolitan Police chief. I am just wondering if there is any co-ordination. He gave us this particular figure and I asked you this question today.

Charles Farr: I can only repeat what I have said. We do not use the figure of 4,000.

Chair: Sorry, that figure was given by the Commissioner.

Charles Farr: I repeat, we do not use that number inside my Department, nor do we use it with our Ministers.

Q489 Mr Winnick: Chair, it is a bit odd. Given your role in security and the evidence given to us by the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, one would have thought you would agree on the figure, however accurate or otherwise as it may be.

Charles Farr: I cannot speak for the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, I am afraid.

Mr Winnick: No. A lack of co-ordination, perhaps, would be the response of some of us.

Q490 Chair: What are you saying in response to Mr Winnick, that you do not accept the figure given by the Commissioner to the Select Committee?

Charles Farr: I am saying that for many years, and I have worked on this for a long time, we have not tried to put a maximum figure of any kind on the number of people in this country who are of interest to the security service. It prompts all sorts of questions about criteria, thresholds, what you are counting in, what you are counting out, how it develops over time, and we—and I think I speak for the security service on this as well—have, therefore, avoided putting a figure on that.

Mr Winnick: Get your act together would be my response.

Mr Hayes: Mr Farr enjoys my complete support in all such matters.

Chair: I am sure. We were not trying to get rid of him, Minister, we were just asking him questions. We are all great fans of Mr Farr.

Mr Winnick: Shall we take a vote on that?

Q491 Mr Burrowes: In terms of the figures that are agreed, Mark Rowley spoke about 400 who have returned from Iraq and Syria. Let's put to one side those who are subject to investigation and prosecution. How many would you say are in need of deradicalisation?

Charles Farr: Well, we do look at those numbers in absolute detail.

Mr Burrowes: Absolutely, so how many?

Charles Farr: I do not have the figures in front of me for you.

Mr Burrowes: Could you let us know that?

Charles Farr: Yes.

Mr Hayes: Yes, I am more than happy, David, to provide those figures through the Chairman to the Committee.

Q492 Mr Burrowes: Do you know how many have voluntarily taken part in the deradicalisation programme?

Charles Farr: We have certainly all of that data, yes.

Mr Burrowes: You will know that and let the Committee know that information as well.

Chair: If you could write to us with that information, that would be extremely helpful.

Q493 Mr Burrowes: Yes. A final point is for those that are not voluntarily taking part in this programme, if there is a group of people who you have assessed need deradicalising, what do we do about them?

Charles Farr: I think there limited options for us if someone refuses to participate in a deradicalisation programme operated by us or sponsored by the Government, but there are

community-based programmes. Some of those are extremely effective and community-based organisations certainly have reached out to people who may not want to touch a programme that is run and associated with Government.

Q494 Mr Burrowes: Does that lead to some security operations for those that are out there who are not subject to any voluntary or other community-based deradicalisation?

Charles Farr: There may be but it depends what their activities were. It entirely depends on the risk that they are judged to be posing.

Chair: Thank you. Nusrat Ghani has a quick supplementary.

Q495 Nusrat Ghani: Mr Farr, you mentioned that some people might have travelled out to Syria for humanitarian purposes earlier on. Minister, you mentioned that some people perhaps went to Syria without fully expecting the horror they were going to face. My question is: there is a section of people that you believe that are returning from Syria and were never radicalised, are not extremists and are reformed. What assurances do you have that these are not sleeper cells or people that are radicalised and are just keeping quiet until they are needed by Daesh?

Mr Hayes: That is why we look at these matters very closely and it is why the police and security service work together to take a look at those people, what they do when they get back, and do the sort of analysis that then leads us to the conclusion that we should take further steps or not. It is certainly true that some of the early travellers were going for the purposes that Charles has set out and we know that from that analysis that was done. We also know that some of the people are disillusioned by what they see there. That is a detailed piece of work that takes place and it would be surprising if we did not focus on Syrian returnees.

Q496 Chair: Minister, we know from evidence we have received over a number of years—and you have read the reports very carefully and we are grateful for that—that a lot of the radicalisation happens online.

Mr Hayes: Yes.

Chair: Are you grateful for the support that you received from online activist groups that seek to take down the Twitter accounts of Daesh supporters and for having suppressed 10,000 pages of social media work by Daesh? Are you grateful for what has happened?

Mr Hayes: Many pages of the kind you describe are taken down every day, as you suggest. The volume is, again as you suggest, immense. There is a lot of work done by all kinds of organisations to that effect, but the challenge grows all the time.

Chair: So you are grateful for the support you have received?

Mr Hayes: I am grateful for any of those who are engaged in the battle against this kind of wickedness.

Q497 Chair: Excellent. Just a couple of final questions: the Interpol I-Checkit programme, which I am sure you are familiar with, are we engaging fully with the Interpol I-Checkit programme?

Mr Hayes: Yes, we are engaged and we are as part of the current discussions that are taking place across Europe considering what further steps could be taken to cement that engagement. I think that is fair, isn't it?

Q498 Chair: Mr Farr, there were concerns expressed that we were not engaged fully with the Interpol I-Checkit programme.

Charles Farr: We work very, very closely with Interpol, in particular on the lost and stolen passport database, which is connected to our border system so that we have real-time access to that database when people are crossing the border. There are a range of other Interpol databases. Some of those duplicate databases in Europol and some of them simply duplicate the Schengen Information System that we spoke about at the very beginning. We do not participate in all of them because it is not cost effective to do so. There are databases that are more productive than others.

Q499 Chair: Mr Hayes, I mentioned previously—you saw the evidence—two British citizens, Trevor Brooks and Simon Keeler, who were caught on the border between Hungary and Romania by Romanian police. It seems that they were subject to a Home Office travel ban. Does it concern you that someone who has been subject to a travel ban should be able to leave the United Kingdom and end up on the border of another country?

Mr Hayes: If it did not concern me I would not be doing my job.

Q500 Chair: What are we going to do to stop this happening?

Mr Hayes: Chairman, stopping it happening is what we are constantly engaged in trying to do. You are right that the business of travel across Europe and more widely—we talked about Syrian travel—is a key part of trying to keep us safe and we are constantly looking at what more could be done to deal with that.

Q501 Chair: Very finally, what is your message to the British people as the Minister for Security? Is the security of this country safe in your hands and your team?

Mr Hayes: This is my message. Both as Minister and as Government we are certain, we are determined, we are committed and we are fearless, and nobody is more certain, determined, committed and fearless than me when somebody threatens this country.

Chair: Minister, thank you very much for coming. Mr Farr, if you could write to us with the other information we would be grateful.