

Written evidence submitted by Henry Jackson Society (COR0018)

About the Author

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About The Henry Jackson Society

The Henry Jackson Society (HJS) is a London-based think-tank founded on the global promotion of the rule of law, liberal democracy, and civil rights.

About the Centre for the Response to Radicalisation and Terrorism (CRT)

CRT couples high-quality, in-depth research with targeted and impactful policy recommendations, in order to combat the threat of violent and non-violent extremism in the United Kingdom and beyond.

Summary

- Pandemics and terrorism are high-impact events that affect large sections of British society. Lessons can be learned from police efforts to thwart terrorist plots, particularly with respect to transparency, public accountability, and improvements to systems and processes.
- The police face particular risks in dealing with pandemics, including deliberate infection and the targeting by terrorists of high-casualty areas such as hospitals and parks. Because of this, the police's resources will need to be broken down into high-risk areas and those that are lower-priority, such as policing social functions.
- It is imperative that public support and education are bolstered through purposeful campaigns that educate the public, boost morale, and allow members of the community to assist the police and other emergency service workers wherever possible.
- A framework for sharing data regarding pandemics such as COVID-19, such as the Five Eyes (FVEY) intelligence alliance, can be created, to follow similar frameworks for data-sharing on counter-terrorism.

Evidence

1. Pandemics and terrorism are high-impact events that risk affecting large sections of the British population in a short period of time. As such, both pandemic preparation and counter-terrorism operations require concentrated efforts from the police, fire, and other emergency services to prevent, prepare, and respond to threats. Once a high-impact event has occurred, the priority is containing the threat and ensuring that civilian populations are protected.
 - a. There are similarities between the Government's Coronavirus Action plan,¹ published in March 2020, and the Counter-Terrorism Strategy (CONTEST),² made publicly available in 2006, with revisions followed in 2009, 2011, and 2018. The former is divided into four phases (Contain, Delay, Research, and Mitigate) and so is the latter (Prevent, Pursue, Protect, and Prepare).

¹ 'Coronavirus: action plan', HM Government (2020). Available at: www.assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/869827/Coronavirus_action_plan_-_a_guide_to_what_you_can_expect_across_the_UK.pdf.

² Home Office., 'Counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST) 2018', HM Government (2018). Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-terrorism-strategy-contest-2018.

- b. CONTEST has been amended three times and a review into the effectiveness of one of its branches, Prevent, was instigated in August 2019 with the appointment of an Independent Reviewer for Prevent. Over the years, numerous reviews on CONTEST have been initiated by branches of the police department and other emergency services, where members of the research and the civilian population have been asked to submit feedback. Accordingly, both the Coronavirus Action plan and any required involvement of the police and other emergency services could benefit from similar measures of review and feedback in order to improve and reflect on the provision of services and their effectiveness in preparing for emergency situations.
- i. Similar to counter-terrorism operations, pandemic response plans can benefit from feedback on improvements that can be made by the police and the emergency services, and resources needed in these areas. Exercise Cygnus, the three-day dry run for a pandemic carried out in October 2016, for example, tested how NHS hospitals and other services would cope in the event of a major flu outbreak with a similar mortality rate to Covid-19. The report on Cygnus's findings were deemed too sensitive by Whitehall officials to be made public.³
 - ii. The disruption that COVID-19 has caused to ordinary members of the British public illustrates that this is the 'new normal'. Such exercises must be conducted regularly and involve various members of the public, as they have for counter-terrorism exercises.
 - iii. It is important that reports regarding pandemic preparation responses are made publicly available. This can follow a similar format to reviews of counter-terrorism operations, such as the independent assessment of MI5 and police by Lord Anderson following the London and Manchester bombings, which examined the improvements that could be made to existing systems and processes.⁴
2. A framework for sharing data regarding pandemics such as COVID-19, such as the Five Eyes (FVEY) intelligence alliance, can be created, to follow similar frameworks for data-sharing on counter-terrorism.
- a. Therefore, there should be regular updates on the role of the police and health services, as well as border control, in containing disease within the UK's borders. Information should also be shared between countries, as has historically been the case with regards to intelligence sharing between countries on data in the counter-terrorism realm including individuals on no-fly lists, for example.
 - b. As time passes and more data becomes available on COVID-19, such as individuals who have immunity, that data should be shared between alliance countries and stored in a confidential way. Here, again, border control can rely on a foundation laid by counter-terrorism efforts and ensure that those individuals who travel to high-risk areas are contained.
 - c. A clear difference between pandemics and counter-terrorism is the timing of mass casualties. While deaths from a terrorist attack are immediate, the death toll from a

³ Gardner, B. & Nuki, P., 'Exclusive: Ministers were warned that the NHS could not cope with a pandemic three years ago but 'terrifying' results were kept secret', *The Telegraph*, 28 March 2020, available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/03/28/exclusive-ministers-warned-nhs-could-not-cope-pandemic-three/.

⁴ Anderson, D., 'Attacks in London and Manchester', Brick Court Chambers (2017). Available at: www.assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664682/Attacks_in_London_and_Manchester_Open_Report.pdf.

pandemic is more diffuse. More people have died in the United States from COVID-19 than did as a result of the September 11 2001 attacks.⁵ This number is likely to continue to rise in the coming weeks and months. It is therefore essential that government departments, including the Home Office, continue to focus on public health approaches, as they prioritised counter-terrorism following the 7/7 London bombings.⁶

- d. Like terrorism, pandemics and public health issues will continue to demand resources as they evolve. Most important will be a focus on the 'Research' strand of the Government's Coronavirus Action plan, which may follow a model of the 'Prevent' arm of CONTEST, in that these pillars feed into the resulting mitigation, preparation, and protection measures.
3. There are various risks that can occur when police officers and other emergency services are responding to a pandemic, which can result in them being unable to work at any given time. These include:
- a. Illness from the pandemic, either thorough transmission or through deliberate infection. Unfortunately, there have been a number of incidents in the UK where civilians have attempted to cough on officers and infect them with the virus,⁷ and a number of videos circulating online where malicious actors have advised civilians to infect public institutions in order to add stress to those operating at maximum capacity.⁸
 - b. Being too overstretched to police lower-order offences, such as civilians not listening to government-issued guidance and continuing to socialise in large numbers, or having to devote resources to minor threats. In the days following government announcements regarding changes to police powers, police phone lines were inundated with calls from the public,⁹ and reports have been made of 'over-policing' public gatherings and social events, including with the use of technology such as drones.¹⁰
 - c. The 'double threat' of a terrorist attack occurring during the pandemic. This could take the form of bio-terrorism, as was the case with Anthrax threats that followed the 9/11 attacks in the United States, or white powder contents that have been sent to MPs on many occasions.¹¹ More crucial is the risk, recently outlined by a Department of Homeland Security memo, that attacks will increase in public spaces such as hospitals and parks.¹² Such an risk has already occurred in Kansas City, Missouri, where a man under federal investigation in a potential domestic terrorism case was shot and killed after plotting an attack on a hospital.¹³

⁵ Villeneuve, M & Hinnant, L., 'New York City Coronavirus Deaths Now Outnumber 9/11 Ground Zero Toll', *Time*, 07 April 2020, available at: www.time.com/5816810/nyc-coronavirus-deaths-outnumber-9-11/.

⁶ The Centre for Radicalisation and Terrorism, 'Understanding CONTEST: The Foundation and The Future', The Henry Jackson Society (2017). Available at: <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/publications/understanding-contest-the-foundation-and-the-future/>.

⁷ 'Coronavirus: Man jailed for police officer cough assault', *BBC News Online*, 07 April 2020, available at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-52203774.

⁸ 'Extremist groups encourage members to spread coronavirus to police, Jews FBI alert', *abc7news*, 23 March 2020, available at: www.abc7news.com/neo-nazis-encourage-members-to-spread-covid-19-fbi-alert/6038813/.

⁹ Dodd, V., 'Police leaders say enforcing UK lockdown may be impossible', *The Guardian*, 24 March 2020, available at: www.theguardian.com/global/2020/mar/24/police-leaders-say-enforcing-uk-lockdown-may-be-impossible.

¹⁰ Bienkov, A., 'UK police officers are using drones to 'lockdown shame' people for walking their dogs in remote areas during the coronavirus outbreak', *Business Insider*, 27 March 2020, available at: www.businessinsider.com/coronavirus-uk-police-are-using-drones-to-lockdown-shame-walkers-2020-3?r=US&IR=T.

¹¹ See, for example: Morris, S. 'Anthrax hoaxer who sent white powder to female MPs jailed', *The Guardian*, 28 November 2019, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/nov/28/anthrax-hoaxer-who-sent-white-powder-to-15-female-mps-jailed>

¹² Mallin, A. & Margolin, J., 'Homeland security warns terrorists may exploit COVID-19 pandemic', *abcnews*, 24 March 2020, available at: www.abcnews.go.com/Politics/homeland-security-warns-terrorists-exploit-covid-19-pandemic/story?id=69770582.

¹³ Perez, E. & Shortell, D., 'Man under investigation for plotting an attack at a hospital believed to be treating Covid-19 patients was killed during and FBI investigation', *CNN Online*, 26 March 2020, available at: www.edition.cnn.com/2020/03/25/us/missouri-man-killed-fbi-

4. Trade-offs made by the police are likely to be the following, with the resulting impact:
 - a. Like counter-terrorism, police should focus on high-impact and high-risk targets first, including the use of artificial intelligence, surveillance, and plain-clothes police officers to target protected areas such as hospitals and parks, which may be at threat.
 - b. Illnesses that may result from the pandemic have to be monitored, and those purposefully spreading disease to police officers arrested. The case has been made in the United States, for instance, to prosecute those purposefully spreading the disease under federal counter-terrorism laws.¹⁴
 - c. Police and other emergency workers should be given the appropriate protection wear, such as masks and gloves, to continue to police areas.
 - d. More resources for high-impact targets can be filled in with army personnel. For low-impact and low-priority cases, such as community policing and law and order, personnel can be divided by geographic remit and neighbourhood and community policing should also be employed, as it is with safeguarding against petty criminals.

5. While policing can and should continue, it is imperative that public support and education are bolstered, as with counter-terrorism efforts, given that it is impossible for police to be everywhere all the time.
 - a. The Home Office's campaigns created to educate the public after terrorist attacks have been enormously effective, particularly 'See it, say it, sorted' which encourages the public to speak up and assist the police forces when suspicious activity is taking place. The campaigns surrounding COVID-19 – whether in public spaces, traditional broadcast, and online regarding educating individuals on washing their hands and staying at home – have been effective.
 - b. It is important that the Home Office continues to engage with disinformation (the creation of 'facts' that are not true) and misinformation (the sharing of 'facts' that are not true). This has been evidenced, for example, with a recent Home Office tweet correcting a Sky News interpretation on polling numbers regarding public support for police responses to COVID-19.
 - c. Disinformation campaigns are rife online. As more individuals remain online and turn to the internet to consume their news, the Home Office must continue to work with its partners in the online space to ensure that health misinformation is removed¹⁵ immediately, and that conspiracy theories focusing on the origin of COVID-19 and encouraging members of the public to commit acts of violence as reprisals for COVID-19 are tackled right away. Any campaigns showing this material should either be removed, moderated, or alternative campaigns with factual information should be run alongside them. Here, much can be learned from lessons in countering terrorist propaganda.
 - d. Like policing offline, a role can be made for civilians in monitoring and flagging harmful information online, as is the case with the National Digital Exploitation Service, within the Met's Counter Terrorism Command.¹⁶ Either a parallel system can be created where

[investigation/index.html](#).

¹⁴ The Deputy Attorney General, 'Department of Justice Enforcement Actions Related to COVID-19', U.S. Department of Justice (2020). Available at: www.politico.com/f/?id=00000171-128a-d911-aff1-becb9b530000.

¹⁵ Hern, A., 'YouTube moves to limit spread of false coronavirus 5G theory', *The Guardian*, 05 April 2020, available at www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/05/youtube-to-suppress-content-spreading-coronavirus-5g-conspiracy-theory.

¹⁶ 'Identifying and removing terrorist content', *Counter Terror Business*, 25 January 2019, available at: www.counterterrorbusiness.com/features/identifying-and-removing-terrorist-content.

members of the public report information that is being maliciously spread to foster violence, or the reporting of actors who are spreading such material online.

6. The British public has been affected by the virus, impacting the public's health, finances, and sense of social community. Because of this, it is important to raise morale. Following terrorist attacks, several campaigns have been effective in doing this, particularly the 'Keep Calm and Carry on Campaign', where resilience was built within the public. Initiatives such as clapping for the NHS and other health workers have helped create a sense of unity, and online campaigns should continue to focus on coming together during a time of crisis to help people maintain their solidarity.

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