Understanding CONTEST: 
The Foundation and The Future

Introduction

CONTEST, the UK’s counter-terrorism strategy, was made publicly available in 2006, and revisions followed in 2009 and 2011. It is split into four work streams – Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare.

In light of the recent attacks in Westminster, Manchester, London Bridge and Finsbury Park, this research briefing provides a short and contextual summary of each of the four Ps within the CONTEST strategy. By doing so it illustrates concerns within the strategy that can, and should, be considered by the UK government as it works to counter extremism, radicalism and terrorism in the years to come.
1. Prevent

1.1 Background

Prevent is the UK’s counter-radicalisation strategy, which seeks to safeguard vulnerable individuals who are at risk of being drawn into extremism. As of 2015, a statutory duty was placed on public bodies – including schools, universities, hospitals, prisons and local authorities (LAs) – to deliver Prevent. This includes training staff to understand and identify radicalisation, and to ensure that public venues and resources are not used as a platform for hosting extremist speakers or for disseminating extremist content.

Prevent was first created as a strand of the wider CONTEST strategy in 2003.¹ It was further developed and updated when CONTEST was publicly launched in 2006, following the 7/7 London bombings. At that stage in its evolution, the delivery of Prevent was the responsibility of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

The Office of Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT) subsequently amended Prevent to provide a more comprehensive understanding of, and approach to, the process of radicalisation. However, in the 2009 review of CONTEST, it was recognised that the preventative element of the strategy was the least developed of the four strands.

In 2011, following the coalition government’s review of Prevent, tackling extremist ideology was made a core part of the overall counter-radicalisation strategy. The review acknowledged that, initially, Prevent delivery had conflated the promotion of integration with the needs of counter-terrorism.² The revised Prevent duty then identified working with public sector institutions where there was a risk of radicalisation as a key area of work.

1.2 The Evolution of Prevent

Following the killing of Lee Rigby in 2013, the Prime Minister’s Taskforce on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism was established. The Taskforce found that greater disruption of extremists was needed, and that extremism had to be effectively challenged in civic and public spaces.

On 23 March 2015, Home Secretary Theresa May announced the establishment of a new Extremism Analysis Unit to inform the government’s counter-extremism strategy. As part of a wider counter-entryism plan, the strategy would also inform which individuals and organisations the UK government and public sector should not engage with.

2015 saw the UK government define extremism more clearly. The Counter-Extremism Strategy of October 2015 defined extremism as:

The vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also regard calls for the death of members of our armed forces as extremist.³

³ Counter-Extremism Strategy, HM Government, October 2015.
In February 2015, Prevent was further refined as part of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act. From 1 July 2015, delivery of the Prevent duty became a legal requirement upon public bodies in the UK, making them subject to a statutory duty to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. This applied, and currently applies, to local authorities, prisons, schools, universities and NHS Trusts.

Compliance by the relevant institutions requires training staff in understanding radicalisation and being able to identify vulnerability to radicalisation and extremism, as well as providing staff with a process for raising concerns about individuals potentially vulnerable to being drawn into radicalisation.

Once referred to Prevent, the case of an individual of sufficient concern would be assessed by a Channel panel consisting of police, social services and local community resources. Individuals could then be offered mentorship as well as other forms of support and guidance, which - as it currently stands - the individual may accept on a voluntary basis.¹

The 2009 CONTEST review noted that Prevent received far less in the way of resources than other strands of CONTEST. Following the May 2017 attack in Manchester, the former independent reviewer of terror legislation David Anderson QC confirmed that Prevent still receives only 1% of the total counter-terrorism budget of £3 billion.² It is therefore apparent that in the 8 year period between the 2009 review and the May 2017 attack in Manchester, Prevent was still receiving less in budgetary resources than other strands within the counter-terrorism strategy.

Over the period 2015–2016, approximately 7,500 individuals were referred to Prevent. However, of those individuals, further action at the Channel level was only taken in 10% of cases.³ According to the most recently available figures, in 2015 around 70% of those referred to Channel were linked to Islamist extremism, while 15% of Channel referrals concerned far-right extremism.⁴

Although extensive and comprehensive information about Prevent’s success rate is not publicly available, one concrete example of Prevent’s impact is that in 2015 alone, the scheme stopped more than 150 individuals in the UK from travelling to Syria.⁵

From the outset, Prevent met with hostility, and the campaign to discredit and undermine the strategy intensified as moves to make Prevent a statutory duty as part of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act solidified. Prevent has faced opposition from a number of quarters, including extremist groups, Muslim community organisations and civil liberties campaigns, as well as some in the public sector tasked with its delivery. Moreover, a concerted campaign of misinformation and mistrust about Prevent has been advanced by a number of organisations. At varying times this alliance against Prevent has included the Muslim Council of Britain, Cage, Mend, Prevent Watch, the Islamic Human Rights Commission, the Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK, and Stand Up to Racism. The campaign against Prevent has also

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¹ Channel is a multi-agency safeguarding programme which operates throughout England and Wales. In Scotland, the equivalent programme is known as Prevent Professional Concerns. It provides tailored support to people who have been identified as at risk of being drawn into terrorism. For more, see ‘Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill’ Factsheet, HM Government, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/548532/CTS_Bill_-_Factsheet_8_-_Channel.pdf, last visited: 20 June 2017.


³ It is important to stress that although the review was published in 2009, the reference in question was discussing historical limitations stemming from the original construction of CONTEST in 2003. In particular, it states “In 2003, this part of CONTEST was the least developed. The intelligence and analytic picture was incomplete; resources in most countries, including the UK, were devoted to investigative work, in order to protect the immediate threat to life, rather than to understanding the factors driving radicalisation.” The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering International Terrorism, HM Government (March 2009), pp. 83-84. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/576469/Counterterrorism%20Strategy%20Film.pdf


received support from elements within a number of prominent unions, including the National Union of Teachers, the National Union of Students and the University and College Union.1

Allegations against Prevent have ranged from accusations of McCarthyism, spying and the stifling of free speech, through to racism, Islamophobia and the criminalisation of devout Islamic practices. In reality, the emphasis in Prevent is not on spying, but rather on trained public sector professionals being able to identify individuals who are vulnerable to being drawn into extremist activity. Nor is the Muslim community specifically targeted: in some parts of Britain, the number of individuals referred to Prevent in relation to far-right extremism was greater than for Islamist extremism.2 Far from Islamic practices being criminalised, the means by which a Channel panel assesses vulnerability makes no reference to religion, but rather to a number of extremist attitudes applicable to a wide range of radical ideologies.3

While acknowledging the extent to which there is a public lack of confidence in Prevent, the former independent reviewer of counter-terror legislation David Anderson QC has also suggested that Prevent suffers from a widespread problem of perception. On balance, David Anderson stated that it was his instinct that there is enough good in Prevent for it to be worth working with.4

Both David Cameron’s and Theresa May’s governments proposed additional measures to deal directly with the growth of extremism. In May 2015, the new Conservative government announced a forthcoming Extremism Bill to introduce measures on combating non-violent extremism.5 In October 2015, the government launched its Counter-Extremism Strategy reiterating the introduction of measures outlined as part of the proposed Extremism Bill. However, with the Bill not having been put before the previous Parliament, in May 2016 the Queen’s Speech again announced forthcoming legislation in this area, this time with a Counter-Extremism and Safeguarding Bill.6 Most recently, in May 2017, Theresa May pledged to establish a Commission for Countering Extremism.7

The 2015 Extremism Bill included proposals for the following measures:

- **Banning Orders** - a new power to allow the Home Secretary to ban extremist organisations.
- **Extremism Disruption Orders** - a new power to allow law enforcement to stop individuals engaging in extremism.
- **Closure Orders** - a new power for law enforcement and local authorities to close premises used for the promotion of extremism.
- **Broadcasting** - strengthening the ability of Office of Communications (Ofcom) to take measures against channels broadcasting extremism.
- **Employment Checks** - enabling employers to check whether individuals are extremist and particularly to block them from working with children.

The 2016 Counter-Extremism and Safeguarding Bill built on the previous proposals, and put forward the following suggested powers:

- A new civil order regime to restrict extremist activity.
- Safeguarding children from extremist adults by creating means for intervention in unregulated education settings.

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2 Ben Wallace MP, 31 October 2016, documented in House of Commons Hansard.


• New powers for Ofcom to protect viewers watching online material streamed from outside the European Union (EU).
• Consultation on powers for government to intervene where councils fail to tackle extremism.
• Consideration of further measures to address Dame Louise Casey’s review on integration.18

Both of these proposed Bills, as well as the Prevent strategy, prompted criticism from the Home Affairs Select Committee, the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the independent reviewer of counter-terror legislation. In particular, concerns about proposed counter-extremism measures have focussed around issues of civil liberties relating to freedom of belief and expression. David Anderson QC has also raised questions about some of the powers and offences outlined in the proposed Extremism Bills, voicing concern about the use of civil orders rather than the creation of additional criminal offences that could be overseen by the justice system and trial by jury.19

As with counter-terrorism laws, concern over the proposed measures for countering extremism have led to suggestions that before devising new legislation, policymakers should ascertain whether existing powers are being used fully or implemented effectively. With regard to disrupting those who promote extremism, consideration should be given to whether existing legislation on unlawful speech – primarily hate speech, incitement to violence and the glorification of terrorism – could be better used to target extremists.

1.3 Recent Developments

It is not believed that any of those involved in perpetrating attacks in the UK in 2017 were ever referred to Prevent. In the case of the Manchester Arena bomber Salman Abedi, concerns have been raised about whether a failure occurred with relation to Prevent. During Abedi’s time attending school and university, it is not believed he was ever referred to a Channel panel. Following the attack, figures at Abedi’s local Didsbury Mosque have said that they observed concerning behaviour from the young man.20 However, there are competing claims about whether or not members of the community registered these concerns with the authorities.21

Following the London Bridge attacks, questions have also been raised about Khuram Butt, who was openly associated with a known extremist circle ideologically aligned with the proscribed organisation Al-Muhajiroun. Not only is it disturbing that Butt was employed by Transport for London (TFL) in 2016,22 but it has also been asked why the extremist group Al-Muhajiroun and its preachers (with which Butt was associated) were permitted to operate so freely and openly in the UK. It has also been suggested that the Westminster Bridge attacker Khalid Masood may have come into contact with Al-Muhajiroun during the period he lived in Luton, between 2011 and 2012. Following that attack, Prime Minister Theresa May confirmed that Masood was once investigated by MI5 as a peripheral figure in a terror investigation.

Details of the radicalisation process of those involved in the attacks is still coming light. In the case of Khuram Butt, it has been reported that his radicalisation was partly linked to watching YouTube videos of the extremist American preacher Ahmad Musa Jibril.23 Similarly, videos of Abu Haleema, a preacher in Butt’s extremist circle in London, are still available on YouTube. As such, concerns have been raised about whether sufficient powers exist to ensure extremist content online can be dealt with. Whether there

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are sufficient measures in place to counter the kind of extremist circle of which Khuram Butt was a member, and whether existing laws are being used to full effect, remains open to question. Theoretically, the kind of extremism disruption orders proposed by David Cameron’s government could have been applicable to this kind of case. However, these orders are one of several counter-extremism measures developed by the previous Conservative government that were never brought into law.
2. Pursue

2.1 Background

The purpose of Pursue is to stop terrorist attacks by detecting, prosecuting and otherwise disrupting those who plot to carry out attacks against the UK or its interests overseas. Several recommendations within the Pursue section of CONTEST were updated by the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act of 2015.

Pursue encompasses important counter-terrorism and security powers, including but not limited to:

- **Stop and search powers**, part of Section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000, which were repealed and replaced by stop and search *only in response* to specific intelligence or information about a suspected terror attack.
- The use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) powers by local authorities. Such surveillance to investigate low-level offences ended in 2011, and applications were to be approved by a magistrate.

Pursue also stresses the ability for the UK to work with other countries and multilateral organisations to understand terrorist threats at their source.  

2.2. The Evolution of Pursue

The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 permanently reduced the pre-charge detention period to a maximum of 14 days by amending the Terrorism Act. This period can be temporarily increased to 28 days in exceptional circumstances.  

Since 2011, control orders have been repealed and replaced by “less intrusive” mechanisms, including Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures (TPIMs) to target individuals who could not be prosecuted or deported. Restrictions upon TPIMs subjects in 2012 included overnight residence at a specified address, enforced curfews of up to ten hours, GPS tagging, reporting requirements and restrictions on travel, movement, association, communication, finances, work and study.  

TPIMs last for one year and are extendable for another year, to a maximum of two years. They can only be extended if new evidence of terrorism-related activity emerges after the original measure was imposed. The government concluded that in the event of a very serious threat that cannot be managed by any other means, more stringent measures may be required. TPIMs can only be imposed by the Home Secretary with prior permission from the High Court, and the Home Office revealed that six people were subject to TPIMs in 2016: five of whom were British citizens. Moreover, the Home Office revealed that the revival of TPIMs coincided with the return of British jihadist fighters to the United Kingdom from Syria and Iraq, including those who fought for Islamic State (IS). At the same time, it is believed that TPIMs

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27 Except in urgent cases.
29 Travis, A., 'Six people are subject to TPIMs, Home Office reveals'.

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are not effective as an investigation measure because of the subjects’ awareness that they are under scrutiny.*

Moreover, Schedule 1 of the 2015 Counter-Terrorism and Security Act made a provision for the seizure and temporary retention of travel documents where a person is suspected of intending to leave the UK in connection with terrorism-related activity.

Pursue also aims at improving the ability to prosecute and deport people for terrorist-related offences. The UK government has devised a system of bilateral agreements known as deportations with assurances (DWAs), aimed at guaranteeing the safety and fair treatment of convicted or suspected terrorists deported from Britain (introduced in 2003). Since then, treaties have been signed with Algeria, Jordan, Ethiopia, Libya, Lebanon and Morocco – all of the countries have all given assurances that they will not use torture if they receive terror suspects from the UK. However, during the period of time from 2005 until 2015 the UK deported only 12 individuals. In comparison, France deported more than 100 individuals.** Despite considerable efforts, only a few people engaged in terrorism have been deported from the UK using assurances negotiated with other states to ensure that their rights are respected on their return to their country of origin.

Pursue highlights the issue of managing terrorism-related offenders. Following concerns over radicalisation in prisons and “Muslim prison gangs”, in 2016 the government announced plans to hold dangerous extremists in separate prison units.*** Moreover, former Justice Secretary Liz Truss also set out plans for the removal of extremist books from prison libraries, and the stronger vetting of prison chaplains.**** Figures have suggested authorities are managing more than 1,000 prisoners identified as extremist or vulnerable to extremism at any one time. At the same time, reports highlight serious concerns about radicalisation in lower-security prisons, which have been the “hardest hit” by staff cuts in recent years.

2.3. Recent Developments

It is of concern that in some areas of Pursue, technology is eroding the capability of law enforcement officials to obtain intelligence about terrorist-related activity. The issue of regulating cyberspace recently raised by Prime Minister Theresa May in her speech following the London Bridge terrorist attack should be highlighted as a matter of concern, and a further discussion with regard to the prosecution and sentencing of individuals who post extremist content online would be crucial with regard to tackling terrorism-related offences.

Furthermore, following terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom since the beginning of 2017, interest in policy regarding prosecution, particularly the prosecution of British citizens, is likely to increase. Pursue underlines that more people engaged in terrorist-related activity are being identified in the UK than the country can successfully prosecute and convict. It is known that Youssef Zaghba, one of the London Bridge attackers, was put on an EU-wide database (Schengen Information System) for attempting to travel to Syria from Italy, but was not prosecuted upon his return to the UK. A more detailed examination of how law enforcement officials in the UK monitor individuals placed on an international “watch list” is needed.

Following the attacks in 2017, there will be heightened interest of non-prosecution actions such as deportation and proscription that are intended to serve as deterrents to terrorism and violent

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radicalisation. Similar to prosecution, intelligence sharing is likely to face greater scrutiny, given criticism of confidentiality between the UK and the United States that became evident in the wake of the terrorist attack in Manchester in 2017.

One of the Pursue goals in 2011 indicated an emphasis on increasing intelligence coverage of people engaged in terrorism-related activity. The Investigatory Powers Act passed in November 2016 granted UK intelligence agencies a comprehensive range of tools to gather intelligence. It makes provision about the interception of communications and the acquisition and retention of communications data, bulk personal datasets and other information. It also sets out certain obligations of internet service providers with regard to managing electronic protection. While many predicted that this law would fundamentally change the face of surveillance in the UK, recent terrorist attacks demonstrate that expanded surveillance powers might not be effective without proper in-depth analysis by qualified staff. There is, therefore, a need for more analysts with defence intelligence backgrounds to provide more detailed examinations of radicalised individuals on the watch list.

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3. Protect

3.1 Background

The Protect section of CONTEST was designed to “strengthen our protection against a terrorist attack in the U.K. or against [British] interests overseas and so reduce ... vulnerability”. A central aspect of Protect is securing critical national infrastructure, managing the risks of crowded places, reducing the vulnerability of the transport network, and safeguarding the country from the entry of hazardous materials, and weapons of mass destruction above all, to prevent their use in terrorist atrocities.

When created, in the shadow of the 7 July 2005 terrorist attack in London, Protect aimed to improve “generic resilience capabilities at a local level”. A review in 2011 found that “communications between emergency services and to the public during a civil emergency” remained an area of concern, and that there was “not yet sufficiently regular or comprehensive testing of all our emergency response plans”. In the wake of the November 2008 urban siege in Mumbai (and in preparation for the 2012 London Olympics), the 2011 review added an intention to develop specific tactics to deter and react to such an eventuality.

It was also a key mission of Protect to secure the UK’s border by shoring up capacities to identify those entering and leaving the country, and to coordinate this information with law enforcement agencies. This involved the addition of technology such as screening at airports and the creation of watch lists and no-fly lists. Measures to interdict the movement of dangerous non-human cargos was a component of Protect’s mission to bolster aviation security, but it received fewer resources up to 2011. Protect recognised a need to work with other states and the private sector to achieve security on airlines.

3.2 The Evolution of Protect

The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015) increased powers and capacities under Protect (and Prevent) to improve the UK’s “protective security to stop a terrorist attack”. The Strategic Defence and Security Review of 2015 pledged to strengthen Protect even further, to secure the country internally and with partners abroad, in the face of Islamic State’s wave of terrorist attacks.

Border security forms one of the key aspects of Protect, and involves the increase of border detection systems for individuals and consignments (weapons, explosives, drugs) that threaten national security. By 2015, this meant a focus on disrupting the flow of fighters to combat zones and managing them upon return, a threat that had developed since 2011, most clearly in Syria and Iraq.

The 2015 review noted the expansion of the no-fly lists to and from the UK, and a more determined focus on the exit and entry checks for shipping goods, notably an investment in radiological and nuclear screening equipment. Additionally, there was the production of ever-more sophisticated aviation security, such as explosives-detection devices and security scanners.

The security of British trains has been increased by new transport police tactics to deter crime and terrorism, such as posting armed guards on the London Underground and disseminating cyber security

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* ibid, p.11.
information throughout the rail network. The policing of the Channel Tunnel, also a Protect duty, has been reviewed.

Increasing the resilience of critical infrastructure was noted in 2015 to include the guarding against floods, cyberattack and terrorism, specifically at “civil nuclear and some military sites, policing at airports and policing of the strategic road and rail network”.

The June 2015 attack on largely British tourists in the resort town of Sousse in Tunisia added emphasis to Protect’s mission of securing densely populated civilian areas, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) coordinated across government and the private sector to:

- strengthen security in key locations overseas. This includes understanding local capability to protect key sites and respond rapidly and effectively to attacks; and working collaboratively with host countries to reduce the risk. This may include the provision of training, mentoring or equipment. Some of this work is progressing in partnership with the US and European countries.

### 3.3 Recent Developments

The four terrorist attacks in the UK between March and June 2017 each directly impacted on areas of Protect’s mandate: to reduce the vulnerability of public spaces, to improve security for events that bring together large crowds in cities, and to strengthen border security to prevent the infiltration and return of dangerous individuals.

The 22 March 2017 attack by Khalid Masood at Westminster Bridge and outside Parliament struck at the heart of the capital city, against a key piece of infrastructure where large crowds are routine. The 22 May 2017 suicide bombing by Salman Abedi in a crowd at the Manchester Arena as they exited a concert underlined a blind spot in the security regimen that already applies to events such as this, which should have prevented or deterred Abedi from getting explosives inside the concert hall itself. The 3 June 2017 London Bridge attack by Khuram Butt, Rachid Redouane and Youssef Zaghba elucidated some of the same issues about urban vulnerability as had been seen in the Masood attack. But the most significant Prevent issue arising out of this case was the ability of Zaghba to enter the United Kingdom, despite having been taken into custody by Italian authorities more than a year before the atrocity as he attempted to join Islamic State in Syria. That Zaghba said, “I am going to be a terrorist,” and this information was forwarded to London, only emphasised the concerns.

The Masood attack, and particularly that by Abedi, demonstrate potential vulnerabilities in civilian-centric public spaces, often referred to as “soft targets”. Though the location of Masood’s attack raises questions, it was low-tech attack against a soft target, which is the most difficult of attacks to combat. Abedi’s attack offers more scope for questions about hardening of public spaces. This has two main components: fortifying these areas, and preparing the human terrain to deal with crises. In addition, the attack against the Finsbury Park Mosque underscores the importance of ensuring that potential points of attack – such as churches, mosques and synagogues – are afforded adequate protection.

One means of fortifying soft targets – schools, hospitals, churches, shopping malls, places of worship and tourist attractions – is to install physical security barriers or perimeters. This makes it impossible to approach structures in a vehicle at high speed. This can be done in an aesthetic manner, to erode some
of the likely resistance from those not only within the organisations but also in adjacent and nearby ones. A full, secured perimeter allows a second layer of security to be added in the form of armed personnel to police the boundary and react to events, and to administer a system of selective accessibility for persons and devices, with the use of identification papers and metal detectors.

A full perimeter will, of course, not be applicable to all settings, merely those where mass accessibility is unnecessary. But the addition of barriers between roads and pavements on Waterloo, Westminster and Lambeth bridges in the wake of the 3 June terrorist attack is demonstrative of the kind of approach to hardening public spaces that might be taken.  

While physical fortification is necessary, the actual people involved in a situation will always have the most capacity to alter the course of events. As such, the upskilling of the relevant populations in crisis response is another track that can be taken. This would take the form of training in how to physically react once a crisis ensues, and in psychologically preparing for the possibility. While it is necessary not to adopt a fatalistic approach that accepts terrorism in Western cities as the new normal, it is also necessary that those working in at-risk areas are not unprepared for the reality that, for some time to come, Western states will be dealing with the kind of events witnessed this year. It is crucial to find an appropriate balance between normality and vigilance that decreases the impact of terrorism while increasing the resilience of organisations and communities.

For instance, components of the Protect duty are carried out by the military, and details about Operation TEMPERER - the most visible such policy - were leaked in 2015. The plan envisioned up to 5,000 troops being deployed to execute the Protect mandate of guarding key infrastructures during an ongoing terrorist attack, while MI5 conducted the manhunt for the suspects. Operation TEMPERER was temporarily put into action after the Manchester attack, with about 1,000 troops deployed to free up armed police for counter-terrorism duties. Though the Special Air Service (SAS) was deployed to offer advice after the London Bridge attack, it was deemed unnecessary to invoke Operation TEMPERER again.

The possibility of insider threats is also a key consideration: a low-probability, high-impact event. As mentioned above, people are the most important part of any system, and should they choose to work against their publicly expressed interests and allegiances, this would pose a serious risk. The need for serious counter-intelligence practices continues to be an area of concern in many corporations and governments.

Protect’s ability to execute its mission is somewhat reliant on foreign governments, particularly their airport screening systems, which can differ by quality and practice, creating synchronicity problems. The difficulties with the transport network and border security have been highlighted by the apparent mistake made by the British government in its handling of the warnings from Italy about Zaghba. The reality is that, whatever the technical details of this case, which are as yet unclear, the problem is political one, related to the allocation of resources, legal regime and state-to-state relations. Intelligence sharing between

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governments may sometimes fail because intelligence agencies simply do not wish to divulge secrets – especially without in-kind compensation – for fear it will expose methods and sources.

Thus, much intelligence that is shared within the European system is incomplete and out of date. For example, the specific watch list that Zaghba was added to – the Schengen Information System – has 8,000 names in it. By contrast, France’s own list of radicals has 10,000 names. The real problem remains developing valuable domestic intelligence.

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4. Prepare

4.1 Background

Prepare conjures up images of pre-emptive efforts. To some extent that is correct, because this strand of the CONTEST strategy is about building up resilience so that the effect of any terrorist attack is less than it otherwise would be. Yet Prepare it is also about setting in place reactive procedures. Crucially, it governs the government’s strategy for how to respond to a terrorist attack that is ongoing. As the CONTEST strategy makes clear, “The purpose of Prepare work is to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack where that attack cannot be stopped.”

The initial motivation for the Prepare strand was the Coroner’s report into the 2005 7/7 bombings, which made seven recommendations relating to information sharing between the emergency services. Prepare was also shaped by the recommendations of the National Security Strategy and the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), which outline the kinds of threats for which the UK must be prepared.

The Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS), based within the Cabinet Office, was charged with playing a central role in coordinating Prepare across multiple government departments. Responsibility for general resilience lies with some government departments (such as resilient telecommunications, which is a Cabinet Office responsibility), while specific responsibility lies with others (mass casualties is a Department of Health responsibility; preparing for chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear incidents is a Home Office responsibility).

4.2 The Evolution of Prepare

Prepare is made up of several components. The first is emergency response during an attack. While responding to terrorist attacks was always a part of Prepare, it took on much greater urgency following the 2008 Mumbai attacks. These attacks prompted significant changes in armed response, including the establishment of a greater police firearms capacity in major cities, the provision of higher-calibre weapons and improved training to police responders, and greater police–MoD cooperation. In addition, Mumbai prompted additional investment in specialist police, fire and ambulance teams to ensure that systems were in place to deal with mass casualty events while a marauding gun attack was ongoing.

The second area of Prepare concerns improved preparedness for chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) attacks. Owing to fears of biological agents and radiological devices being used in an attack, the government has steadily built up stockpiles of antibiotics and vaccines, and improved detection capabilities so that unconventional attacks can be quickly identified.

The third area involves interoperable telecommunications systems. The government has taken steps to ensure that emergency services, including the police, are provided with interoperable communications systems. This is centred on the creation of a High Integrity Telecommunications System (HITS), which enables multiple agencies to use military communications satellites at a time of crisis. Crucially, the

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Association of Chief Police Officers (Terrorism and Allied Matters) (ACPO TAM) has been responsible for ensuring seamless communication between different police forces.

Finally, the Home Office has instigated more frequent training and tests of existing capabilities under the auspices of the National Counter Terrorist Exercise Programme. Three major tests are conducted each year, usually featuring a different kind of attack, and located in a different region in the UK in order to ensure national capability. These exercises include the participation of ministers, coordinated through the COBR, the government’s crisis-management organisation based within the Cabinet Office.

### 4.3 Recent Developments

The execution of four individual attacks within as many months marks a turning point for Prepare. For more than a decade, the emergency services have preparing for mass-casualty events, and the police have been contemplating the need to deploy firearms officers on the streets in order to neutralise an ongoing threat. Those preparations have now been stress tested in real-world situations, rather than exercises. In the coming months, the extent to which Prepare set in place sufficient capabilities will need to be reassessed.

For instance, the effectiveness of police response should be reviewed after the London Bridge attack. The police earned well-deserved plaudits for responding and neutralising the threat within eight minutes. However, questions should be asked. For instance: would the police have been able to respond as effectively had the attackers been armed with guns? What portion of London’s response capability was consumed by the London Bridge attack? Had a second simultaneous attack broken out in a separate part of the city, would additional resources have been available?

A similar after-action review will need to be held to determine the adequacy of the response of the emergency services. To what extent were hospital staff prepared for the effects of the Manchester Arena suicide bombing? Was mass-casualty and mass-fatality planning – conducted ahead of time by the Department of Health and the Home Office – sufficient? Reviews of both the police and emergency services should not be intended to criticise, but to assess. The continued success of Prepare depends upon continually improving response capabilities.

In addition, the recent attacks show that terrorist tactics have continually adjusted in order to evade and surmount defences. In the era of IS, a major shift has taken place – away from multi-conspirator plots involving spectacular attacks to less-complex operations that are dependent upon unsophisticated weapons such as vehicles and knives. This evolution can be attributed to the increasingly adept nature of the UK’s intelligence agencies, which have become more proficient in disrupting large-scale plots, and interdicting the return of would-be attackers who have received training from overseas.

Just as the authorities’ preparedness has needed to evolve, so too will the terrorist threat evolve in future, manifesting itself in unprecedented iterations. For instance, the effective police response at London Bridge may discourage attackers from targeting highly populated urban areas, shifting their focus to locations where the presence of armed police is less common and the response times of emergency services longer. Accordingly, a key challenge for the National Counter-Terrorism Exercise Programme will be expanding its list of potential scenarios, and undertaking exercises against threats that are currently deemed less likely.
5. Key Challenges: CONTEST in the post-2017 era

CONTEST has evolved since its initial public release in 2006. However, it must continue to evolve following the four terrorist attacks perpetrated in 2017.

The following must be given due consideration:

1. **Existing legislation regarding terrorism and extremism must be used more effectively.**

   Criminal proceedings against those who engage in hate speech and the glorification of violence should encompass non-violent extremists and the groups that glorify and promote such behaviour. The government should make greater use of the 2016 Investigatory Powers Act, which sets out obligations for internet service providers with regard to managing electronic systems and the interception of communications.

2. **Steps must be taken to reiterate that Prevent is not discriminatory.**

   The government’s counter-extremism policy must be based on confidence and trust. Accordingly, every effort must be made to tackle those who deliberately misrepresent the Prevent strategy as targeting a particular religion or demographic. In addition, greater focus must be placed on protecting at-risk and vulnerable people from being drawn to extremist ideologies, a responsibility of civil society as well as government authorities.

3. **The definition of “extremism” contained within the 2015 Counter-Extremism Strategy must be supplemented.**

   The 2015 definition of extremism was kept purposely vague to enable authorities to deploy aspects of the CONTEST strategy - such as Prevent - in a wide range of cases. However, steps must now be taken to reference explicit ideologies which inspire and encourage acts of violence, such as Islamic extremism. Safeguarding young and vulnerable individuals from extremist rhetoric requires increased awareness of specific ideologies amongst frontline workers and practitioners working with those at risk.

4. **Public spaces at risk of a terror threat must be made more resilient – including steps to protect public buildings from fast approach by vehicles.**

   Hardening “soft targets” - a process already carried out on bridges in central London following the Westminster and London Bridge attacks – should be extended. Steps must be taken to protect public spaces such as squares and parks, as well as likely gathering points such as schools and places of worship.

5. **Intelligence gathering, sharing and analysis regarding extremism must be improved, particularly data analysis.**

   The majority of security threats have travelled, or attempted to travel, abroad to engage in terrorism-related activity. The government should seek to collect and store personal data records of all passengers flying in and out of Europe, including those with European passports. This can only be achieved by making the sharing of passenger information a mandatory requirement, and taking steps to retain the UK’s access to such intelligence sharing beyond its departure from the European Union.
6. **Deportation should form a much more central part of the government’s strategy.**

The ability to prosecute and deport people, particularly British citizens, for terrorism-related offences must be improved, with the assistance of temporary exclusion orders. These would allow authorities to engage and track individuals, and make it unlawful for such individuals to return to the UK without first engaging with the relevant authorities.
CRT:
The Centre for the Response to Radicalisation and Terrorism (CRT) is unique in addressing violent and non-violent extremism. By coupling high-quality, in-depth research with targeted and impactful policy recommendations, we aim to combat the threat of Islamism in our society.

Nikita Malik | Tom Wilson | Kyle Orton | Julia Rushchenko

CRT can be contacted by phone on: 020 7340 4520 or email at:
ross.cypher-burley@henryjacksonsociety.org

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