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UK'S STRATEGY TO COMBAT TERRORISM

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The United Kingdom (UK), which has been dealing with ethno-nationalist terrorism by the IRA for decades, has reworked its counter-terrorism strategy since the attack in the US on September 11, 2001. The UK government has put in place extensive measures and revised its contingency plans, while rethinking security across the board to identify vulnerabilities and tighten existing protection of vital installations.

Domestic Measures

Unlike the US, which has created a new department to look after Homeland Security, the UK has continued its "network" approach under the purview of the Home Secretary, although the Defence Ministry has been brought in to augment the security service and the police. The work of ensuring UK security is co-ordinated by ministerial committees, viz the War Cabinet and the Civil Contingencies Committee. There is inter-agency cooperation between the different agencies responsible and also co-operation between the local and national governments.

The government has stepped up protection of key and critical infrastructure facilities, particularly civil nuclear facilities, where security arrangements protecting sensitive areas have been extended and reinforced. Aviation security measures have been tightened both in the air and on the ground. Screening of both passengers and luggage has been intensified. Cockpit doors of aircraft have been strengthened and are locked when airborne. The UK has also joined other G8 members in raising the standards of aviation security in their countries.

Legislation has been strengthened to deal with terrorism and homeland security. New offences like aiding and abetting the overseas use or development of WMD or the development of such weapons and related training have been identified. Laws have been extended to cover hoaxes and the use of nuclear, chemical and biological substances. In targeting terrorist funding, the UK has actively enacted legislation to monitor accounts, freeze assets (through Terrorism Act 2000), seize cash and secure the disclosure of information. Steps to deter and prevent abuses of immigration and asylum procedures have been introduced, e.g. allowing extended detention of those suspected of being involved in international terrorism but who cannot immediately be repatriated.

Crisis Management

A new Civil Contingencies Secretariat has been set up and a plan drawn up to enhance preparedness for any contingency. In June 2002, Sir David Omand was appointed to the new post of Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator and Permanent Secretary to the Cabinet Office to co-ordinate security, intelligence and consequence-management. The

UK government is also preparing a regulatory framework for dealing with all forms of civil challenges to UK society, under the Civil Contingencies Bill. There has been interoperability exercise and testing to ensure that communications between the emergency services such as the military, hospital and civil defence services can work together in times of a crisis. Medical preparedness has been co-ordinated with suppliers of essential pharmaceuticals and equipment.

The Armed Forces have been brought in to augment the police in enforcing security in various areas, such as airports. The Armed Forces reserves have been asked to provide homeland defence and security in support of civil authorities. The UK's air defence arrangement has been primed to respond to threats from renegade civil aircraft. Similar measures are in place at sea, to deal with renegade shipping. More importantly, a New Chapter to the 1998 Strategic Defence Review has identified specific tasks for the UK Armed Forces, viz in preventing terrorism, deterring terrorist groups or states that support them, disrupting terrorist activities and network, and also destroying them.

International Measures

Given the need to prevent trans-national terrorism from reaching the UK, effective action has to begin at the international level. The UK's counter-terrorism agenda is now integrated into its foreign and security policy and the government is committed to counter-terrorism co-operation worldwide. This includes the effort to build and maintain strong international consensus against terrorism. The UK government was able to work with many Muslim governments around the world to condemn the September 11 attacks. There has been intelligence co-operation between the UK Security and Intelligence Community with their counterparts around the world, to identify and disrupt terrorist activities. The UK has also been working closely with its traditional security ally, the US in fighting international terrorism.

As part of UK's counter-terrorism policy the UK government has been working with and assisting foreign governments in training, bomb disposal, aviation security, hostage negotiation and crisis management skills. In addition, the UK is also helping other countries draw up their own counter-terrorism legislation and regulatory framework to disrupt terrorist funding. The UK has also been active in working with the United Nations to achieve effective action against terrorism, such as pushing for the compliance of member states with Security Council Resolution 1371. The UK is helping to build global counter-terrorism capacity by working with states to analyse their assistance needs and provide sources of advice. The UK has also been lobbying UN member states to ratify the International Conventions and Protocols relating to terrorism, and through the UN, engaged states that have supported terrorism in the past (such as Libya and Sudan).

Under the EU Framework, UK has been discussing cross border issues, and working on a European arrest warrant to speed up extradition procedures and ensure that terrorists cannot escape justice by fleeing to another EU state. In the G8, the attention have been to reduce the spread of WMD in the former Soviet Union, by contributing up to US\$750 million over ten years to a G8 initiative. The UK has also joined its G7 and EU partners in a concerted effort to target, disrupt and close down sources of terrorist financing. The UK also supports the Financial Task Force's Special Recommendations on terrorist financing agreed in October 2001.

An Evaluation.

Though the UK's approach to counter terrorism is well honed by years of dealing with the IRA terrorist threat, the phenomenon of trans-national terrorism posed a different

challenge that required a different approach. It has taken the war on terror beyond the domestic realm of the UK to the international arena, such as taking part in the US-led war against terrorism in Afghanistan.

The extensive measures taken by the UK to deal with terrorism and ‘homeland security’ are in many ways similar to those of the US as outlined in the US National Strategy on Homeland Security. Though different in organisational structure (not having a new agency to deal with ‘Homeland Security’), it is by no means less effective. Instead of a “supra-national” organisation to deal with homeland security, a Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator and Permanent Secretary to the Cabinet Office oversee co-ordination between different government departments.

The UK government is beginning to pay more attention to the social, economic and political conditions that provide a breeding ground for terrorist organization. It is also promoting awareness and understanding of different cultures and religions within the UK. Though a new structure such as the Civil Contingencies Secretariat is in place, this has yet to translate into effective contingency planning. Whether and how effectively it will work in the event of a contingency remains to be seen. A second area of concern is in intelligence gathering and analysis. There is great dependence on technology to gather intelligence while human intelligence is lacking. Only human analysis can effectively prevent or thwart a terrorist act from taking place. Overall, the UK government has done a credible job of raising its security alertness without being alarmist about the threat of trans-national terrorism.