

Home Secretary Sajid Javid writes for the Guardian: "The...

Our response to terrorism is balanced, not Orwellian

Sajid Javid



Last year, the UK witnessed a series of sickening terrorist acts which claimed the lives of 36 people and changed the lives of many more. In recent weeks the nation has come together to remember those who paid the ultimate price, and I have seen first-hand the heartache people are going through. Attending the memorial service for the victims of the London Bridge attack, it was clear to me that the people of Britain will not allow these vile terrorists to change our way of life.

Their actions will not undermine the freedoms on which this country is built on - but neither will this government as we respond to them. Our updated counter-terrorism strategy sets out how we will deal with the unprecedented challenge we face, and today the counter-terrorism and border security bill will be debated in parliament for the first time.

This important piece of legislation will allow the police and MI5 to disrupt threats earlier, and ensure our laws reflect modern use of the internet. It will change existing laws to better manage terrorist offenders and permit more effective investigations. It will also give police more powers to investigate hostile state activity in the wake of the Salisbury attack.

These changes will make us safer - but there was no blank cheque when we went about deciding what these new powers would be. The bill is the product of a carefully considered process. We have built safeguards and oversight into this legislation so that the public can have confidence in its proportionate use.

We did not just seek the views of the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and MI5 when drafting the bill. We discussed our proposals with the current and former independent reviewers of terrorism legislation - whose job it is ensure that our terrorism legislation is effective, proportionate and serves the public interest.

They provided robust challenge - indeed there were times when we did not agree - but their comments and recommendations have shaped and will continue to shape our response.

Since introducing the bill last week, critics have already wrongfully accused the legislation of criminalising thought, describing it as a "blind expansion of power". This could not be further from the truth. Our proposals will be debated and scrutinised as they pass through parliament. This process is a key pillar of Britain's democracy that terrorists seek to undermine. I totally reject any attempt to simplify today's debate into one of security versus liberty.

This is not a binary choice we need to make. The fact of the matter is there can be no liberty without security. People cannot feel free to live their lives as they wish without feeling safe and secure. The balance lies in making sure that in protecting our freedom and way of life, we don't undermine it. I love this country and the liberal, tolerant, pluralistic society we are. And I will fight to protect it.

Our police and intelligence officers are hardworking, committed people keeping us safe so that we don't have to worry. Over the past five years, they have foiled as many as 25 Islamist-linked plots. And right now our security agencies are handling more than 500 live operations and have 3,000 "subjects of interest". That is why we are giving counter-terrorism policing a £50m increase in funding this year - to more than £750m.

As well as sufficient funding, I am committed to providing our people with the powers they need to do their jobs effectively. But I want people to know that these powers do not and will not go unchecked.

Our bill will be subject to full parliamentary debate as well as ongoing scrutiny by the intelligence and security and home affairs select committees, and indeed the courts. The independent reviewer of terrorism legislation not only examines our laws but also their application. The investigatory powers commissioner, the inspectorates of constabulary and prisons, the biometrics commissioner and a series of other independent bodies hold government, the police and the intelligence community to account. And we listen to them.

The counter-terrorism and border security bill is not part of a sinister strategy to create an Orwellian state. It is simply part of my desire to allow the public to live their lives safe in the knowledge that the police have the powers they need to protect us. I look forward to making this case as the bill passes through parliament.

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