

Speech: Home Secretary speech on keeping our country safe

It's a pleasure to be here in New Scotland Yard, the home of Counterterrorism Policing, with such a distinguished audience.

And to be introduced by our outstanding head of CT Policing.

Now, if anyone here is watching 'The Looming Tower', a TV drama about siloed US security agencies not talking to each other about potential threats, you might worry that's how it works here.

But if that was ever true there and then, it's certainly not true here and now in the UK.

Every week Neil and I sit down with the Director General of MI5 and we go through all of the high-priority investigations.

Making sure the top threats are prioritised and coordinated.

Since becoming Home Secretary a year ago, it's been a huge privilege to be trusted with daily decisions that directly affect the security of our citizens.

Some of them can mean the difference between life and death.

So, it's a responsibility I take very seriously.

Being ultimately responsible for the security of more than 65 million people has meant me personally signing several thousand warrants, day and night.

Giving the green light to operational decisions.

All the while proactively reforming many policies across the board.

It puts a lot of other Westminster issues in perspective.

Most of my previous jobs were focused on unleashing what you might call the positive parts of human nature – such as enterprise, creativity, charity...

But for those virtues to flourish, we also need to constrain the darker side – violence, exploitation, injustice.

Tough decisions must be made to maintain our security.

And nobody in government knows that better than the Prime Minister.

Someone who has done more than anyone – both as our leader and as Home Secretary – to keep this country safe.

Someone who has remained resolute in the face of terror attacks, cyber

onslaughts and the use of a nerve agent on British soil.

And I'd like to pay tribute to her today for her tireless commitment to our national security.

The first duty of government is of course to protect its citizens

That is why I want to talk today about how we are doing just that – protecting our citizens from individuals, organisations and even states that wish to do us harm.

Security underpins everything – our liberty, and our prosperity.

That spectrum of security goes all the way from Stop and Search on our streets, to supporting our soldiers on operations.

From intervening early to stop a young person from carrying a knife or to prevent the risk of radicalisation.

Fundamentally, security underpins the unity of our society and our values.

And that, of course, is what motivates our enemies.

Those that challenge us – whether it's the twisted ideology of religious or political extremism, or the cold calculation of state actors, they do so because they detest our values.

They seek to sow division between us because they see our strength in unity.

They fear that strength, and that drives their hatred.

For some, this can be very close to home.

For Muslims, it is painful to see how the religion of our parents and grandparents is so often misunderstood and misrepresented... twisted by extremists on all sides so that they can sow the seeds of division and violence.

But we are better and bigger than that.

We are, and will always remain, an open, fair, and tolerant society.

Those are our values.

And we will not allow hatred, intolerance, and violence to destroy them.

This country is under the protection of the finest police, security, intelligence, and armed forces in the world, many of them working right here in New Scotland Yard.

Your excellent work, hand-in-glove with MI5, does more to keep us safe than most of the public will ever know.

That's the way it should be.

Each and every day, our security services fight against terror – from large international terrorist groups, to radicalised individuals.

In the past two years, they have foiled 19 major terrorist attacks – 14 of them Islamist, and 5 of them motivated by extreme right-wing ideologies.

But those are just the headline figures.

For each attack prevented, there are dozens more that never have the chance to begin in the first place.

And despite this impressive work, the tempo of terrorist activity is increasing.

The London Bridge inquest is a chance to reflect on the 2017 attacks in the UK.

To remember the victims of terrorism, and the loved ones that they leave behind.

And to examine publicly the systems we have put in place to protect the UK.

To help us do just that, I can announce that I've appointed Jonathan Hall QC as the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation and I'm delighted he's joined us here today.

It's clear that the threat from beyond our shores is also increasing.

More than 250 dead in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday.

Worshipers slaughtered in mosques in Christchurch.

A journalist shot dead by dissident republicans in Northern Ireland.

And Al-Qaeda are regaining their strength.

Old threats return as new ones emerge.

In our ever more interconnected world, these threats are not constrained by national borders.

Globalisation and the indiscriminate nature of terror means that we are all potential victims.

Although the London Bridge attacks took place in the heart of our capital, more of the victims were foreign nationals than UK citizens.

In fact, more UK citizens were murdered in the recent bombings in Sri Lanka.

When it comes to security, no country is truly an island.

We have seen how quickly dangerous ideologies, from Islamism to extreme populism and nationalism, can sweep across countries and continents.

Daesh's so-called Caliphate has now been defeated on the ground, but the poisonous ideology remains.

In fact, of all the terrorist plots thwarted by the UK and our Western allies last year, 80% were planned by people inspired by the ideology of Daesh, but who had never actually been in contact with the so-called Caliphate.

And just as its fighters were drawn from every corner of the world, including too many Brits, we have taken an international response to this menace.

Now, many of these fighters have been captured but some may wish to return home.

It is a challenge that dozens of our allies face.

The police and security services have worked tirelessly to identify those intending to travel overseas to join Daesh.

They have seized passports at the border and prevented them from leaving the country.

And – along with concerned friends, families and public-sector colleagues, the police have directed hundreds of at-risk individuals to support from our Prevent programmes to move them away from terrorism.

We did not stop everyone, as the case of Shamima Begum shows.

But the systems we have put in place, they starved Daesh of many more British recruits.

Of course, our action against Daesh does not stop at the border.

We have been a leading member of a coalition of nations that has taken action to strike against Daesh, eroding their strength in the region, their threat to the region, and their threat to the wider world.

That included the targeting of Mohammed Emwazi, the figurehead of their evil execution squad.

And we are working with our international partners on efforts to prosecute fighters where they are captured.

It is only right that those nations that have suffered most under Daesh have the chance to bring them to justice.

But the difficulty in prosecuting Emwazi's alleged collaborators – El Shafee Elsheikh and Alexandra Kotey – shows just how hard this can be.

And it shows how I must remain single-minded in using all the powers at my disposal to protect this country.

When we assess that someone poses a real threat, we will work to stop them from returning.

Sometimes to do that I have to deprive people of their British nationality.

I continue to do so, to keep this country safe.

But I understand these decisions raise questions and they raise concerns.

I first learned of the full parameters of the power in my previous role, when the then Home Secretary – she explained it to me.

It was at that moment that I had the worrying realisation that, given my heritage, that power in theory could be applied to me.

But I want to reassure anyone with the same thoughts that they have nothing to fear.

Deprivation is never a step that is taken lightly.

Those that say otherwise are only seeking to divide our society.

Decisions are made following incredibly careful consideration of advice from the security services, counterterrorism policing and specialist legal and security officials at the Home Office.

There is a statutory right of appeal.

And the power can only be applied when depriving an individual would be conducive to the public good.

Deprivation should never be the first choice of action.

But when some of the world's most dangerous people have the right to return to these shores...

I will do everything I can to prevent that.

Of those who have returned, we have already prosecuted over 40 returnees for offences committed overseas, or as a result of counter-terrorism investigations.

But we do have to remember that young British children traumatised by their experiences in Daesh-held territories are victims too.

So, we offer support to those who do return to the UK, and we are considering what more we can do to help them.

I want to make sure this challenging situation can't be repeated.

So, under the new Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act, we introduced a power where, if necessary to protect the public from terrorism, I can designate a region anywhere in the world and make it an offence for British nationals to be there.

Today I can announce that I've asked my officials to work closely with CT policing and intelligence agencies to urgently review the case for exercising

this power in relation to Syria, with a particular focus on Idlib and the North East.

So, anyone who is in these areas without a legitimate reason should be on notice.

I can also see that there may be a case in the future for considering designating parts of West Africa.

But wherever this power is applied, I am determined it will not inhibit the delivery of essential humanitarian aid.

From terrorism, to crime, to hostile state activity, we are facing international problems, that require an international response.

My job title might be Home Secretary.

But much of the threat we face at home comes from abroad.

So, since taking this job I've travelled to Europe, Asia, the US and beyond to discuss global security issues with my counterparts.

Wherever I have travelled, I have been welcomed with open arms and proposals of cooperation.

It's not just my winning personality.

We are fortunate to be citizens of a country that is an intelligence and security superpower.

After the United States, we are probably the largest contributor to the international system of defence and intelligence that keeps the world safe.

There are other nations of similar size and similar resources. But what sets us apart is teamwork.

More than any other country on Earth, the UK has a coherent, connected approach to intelligence and security.

And when threats do appear, the world turns to the UK for leadership, support, and action.

As these threats become more global we rely on an international system of defence, policing, security and intelligence.

A safety net that is based upon cooperation, and unity.

These structures rely upon free, democratic nations to pool information, coordinate law enforcement, and surrender suspected criminals across borders.

Our European partners are, of course, key to this.

They share the same values. They encounter the same challenges. They face the same enemies.

There is no doubt that Europol, the European Arrest Warrant, the Schengen Information System and other channels of cooperation have helped to keep our citizens – and those of other EU countries – safe.

We have kept track of dangerous individuals. We've prevented crime. We've frozen assets. And we have protected our citizens.

Whatever the outcome of Brexit, we want this collaboration to continue.

To that end, we are joined today by the Parliamentary State Secretary at the German Interior Ministry, Professor Gunter Krings.

Welcome Gunter and I look forward to our meeting later today.

Following my recent discussions with Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, we have reaffirmed our shared commitment to working together to protect citizens.

Specifically, in the event of a no-deal Brexit we have agreed to intensify cooperation and swiftly conclude any necessary bilateral security arrangements.

You see, whatever the outcome of EU Exit, the UK will still have the capacity and the capability to protect itself.

Yes, a comprehensive and legally binding partnership on security is still our preferred option

But we have also worked hard to prepare for a no-deal scenario.

And I have directed my department to make full use of the extra time we now have until October to do even more. Contingency plans are already in place to move police and judicial cooperation onto tried and tested non-EU mechanisms, such as Interpol.

And we are building up other international capabilities.

Last year I attended the Five Eyes summit in Australia.

And in two months' time I am pleased to say that we will host the next summit in Manchester.

There we will take forward an agenda with our allies on emerging threats – from drones to cyber, and many of the issues that I've talked about today.

As the only European member of the world's foremost intelligence alliance, the UK is the hub of a truly global intelligence and security network.

Nothing will change this.

We have developed an overseas strand to our world-leading counter terrorism strategy CONTEST.

We can ban terror organisations in the UK if they pose a threat anywhere in

the world, which is why I recently proscribed Hizballah.

And with 50 UK liaison officers providing expertise around the world, CT police are a great example of what we can offer the rest of the world.

For example, in January, they were doing crucial work in Nairobi within hours of that horrific hotel attack.

So, one certainty of Brexit is that it will not change the fact that we are one of the key global players in keeping people safe.

But we know not all countries are as constructive in their approach.

The conclusion of the Cold War was not the end of state-on-state threats that many had actually predicted.

Salisbury was a sharp reminder of that.

We continue to face direct threats from a range of state actors who wish to challenge our status, undermine our democracy, and divide our society.

These range from espionage, to subversion, and sabotage, to disinformation, coercion and even attempted assassination.

The risks posed to the UK from hostile states have both grown and diversified.

Our country and our allies face a range of new and distinct threats, especially as foreign companies become increasingly engaged in our telecommunications infrastructure.

We've already seen some of our closest intelligence partners – such as the US and Australia – set out their decisions on access to their networks.

These are countries we must continue to co-ordinate closely with.

I share some of their concerns and am certainly taking them into account as this government makes a final decision on 5G.

Not all hostile state activity in this space is at the cutting edge of technology. Not all our work.

In February we created a new power allowing police to stop people at UK ports and borders to determine if they are involved in hostile state activity.

We also used existing immigration powers in dozens of cases and continue to do so to harden our defences against this activity and I will not hesitate to do so in the future.

My message is clear – the UK is open to the world, but if you seek to do us harm, you are not welcome.

But we do need to go further.

Since the Salisbury attack, the Home Office has been reviewing the laws we have around hostile state activity.

I believe that there are some real gaps in our current legislation.

We have to ensure that we have the necessary powers to meet current and evolving threats to the UK, both domestically and overseas.

Getting this right and having the right powers and resources in place for countering hostile states must be a post-Brexit priority.

So, I can announce today that we are preparing the way for an Espionage Bill.

This will bring together new and modernised powers, giving our security services the legal authority they need to tackle this threat.

The areas this work will consider includes whether we follow allies in adopting a form of foreign agent registration and how we update our Official Secrets Acts for the 21st century.

I have also asked my officials to consider the case for updating treason laws.

Our definition of terrorism is probably broad enough to cover those who betray our country by supporting terror abroad.

But if updating the old offence of treason would help us to counter hostile state activity, then there is merit in considering that too.

The threats against us are many and varied.

But that is no reason to be fearful.

We are citizens of one of the safest countries in the world and a genuine intelligence and security superpower.

We have robust legislation.

We have international reach.

World-class police and intelligence services.

We take what we have, and we build on it – constantly improving our systems, our processes, and our capabilities.

It is one of the things I think makes us exceptional.

The United Kingdom has a combination of strength and unity that sets us apart from our friends and enemies alike.

Those enemies range from entire states, to lone individuals.

They seek to humiliate us.

To destroy our democracy and to undermine our values.

To sow the seeds of division.

But they all have one thing in common.

They know, deep down, that they cannot beat us.

Because from every challenge we have emerged stronger.

Determined.

Unafraid.

And, most importantly of all, united.

Thank you very much.