



# INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT



## PRESS NOTICE

### *The 2017 Attacks: What needs to change?*

#### *Westminster, Manchester Arena, London Bridge, Finsbury Park, Parsons Green*

The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament today published its report on the terrorist attacks which took place in the UK last year. The Chairman of the Committee, the Rt. Hon. Dominic Grieve QC, MP said:

“During 2017, the United Kingdom suffered five serious terrorist attacks at Westminster, Manchester Arena, London Bridge, Finsbury Park and Parsons Green. Thirty-six lives were lost, with many more injured, and our thoughts remain with the victims and their families. We recognise, and want to pay tribute to, the many exceptional acts carried out by members of the public and of the frontline services in response to the attacks.

“Immediately afterwards, MI5 and Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) launched internal reviews: we commend MI5 and the police for taking the initiative in conducting what we have found to be thorough examinations. Nevertheless, we regarded it as essential to ascertain for ourselves whether mistakes were made, and to ensure that all changes and improvements required have been identified. We have therefore reviewed their conclusions, considered the primary material - including highly classified documents, investigation records and other intelligence reports, and held multiple evidence sessions with MI5, Counter Terrorism Policing, the Home Secretary and the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism. We have considered each attack in depth, with the exception of the Parsons Green attack: despite multiple requests the Home Office failed to provide full evidence in sufficient time for it to be included in this inquiry. This is unacceptable: from what we have seen to date, there were fundamental failings in the handling of this case by the Home Office, the police and Surrey County Council. This litany of errors will require a separate comprehensive review, to which the Home Office must be directly answerable.

“In relation to the four remaining attacks, we have considered the actions of MI5 and CTP in relation to 12 cross-cutting issues which we consider to have played a part in the actions of two or more of those who perpetrated the attacks. In each case we have considered what changes need to be made. To take two issues - the use of explosives and the actions of Communications Service Providers - as examples:

- In relation to explosives, we found that the system for regulating and reporting purchases of the ingredients used to make explosives was hopelessly out of date in dealing with the threat posed and this facilitated the perpetrators in acquiring the materials they required. Whilst the Committee welcomes the changes that have subsequently been made to the system, and the Government’s intention to improve co-operation and information sharing between retailers and law enforcement, this should have been done sooner and must now be kept under review.
- In relation to Communications Service Providers, four years ago this Committee was the first to draw attention to the failure of Communications Service Providers to stop their systems being used as a safe haven for extremists and terrorists. Yet we have seen that appeals to these companies’ sense of corporate and social responsibility have not resulted in them making the changes required - and again these loopholes were used by the perpetrators of the 2017 attacks. In this report we recommend that pressure is instead put on the CSPs by the business community, following the example of companies such as Unilever. We strongly consider that action which affects the CSPs’ profits will hit home harder than an

appeal to them to ‘do the right thing’ and could force them to take action on this crucial issue – Government efforts should now be directed towards the business community, to encourage them to use the leverage they have with the CSPs.

“Several of the other cross-cutting issues are illustrated when considering the case of Salman Abedi, the perpetrator of the attack on Manchester Arena:

- we have seen that he visited an extremist contact in prison on more than one occasion, however no follow-up action was taken by either MI5 or CTP. In our opinion, known extremist prisoners should not be able to maintain links with those vulnerable to extremism and we have therefore recommended that the Approved Visitors Scheme is extended to all extremist prisoners.
- we have also seen issues around travel arise in the case of Abedi and other perpetrators: MI5 decided not to place travel monitoring or travel restrictions on Salman Abedi which allowed him to return undetected to the UK in the days immediately before he carried out his attack. MI5 have since admitted that given the information they had on Abedi, they should have done so, and they have now revisited their policies in this respect.
- the case also highlights deficiencies in MI5’s system for monitoring individuals of interest not currently under active investigation (and - in the case of another of the perpetrators - the system for monitoring those seen in the peripheries of more than one investigation). Abedi had in fact been flagged for review, but MI5’s systems moved too slowly and the review had not happened prior to him launching his attack. The question of how ‘Closed’ or ‘Peripheral’ Subjects of Interest are managed is a crucial issue which has been the subject of previous recommendations by the Committee: planned improvements must now be prioritised.
- we also note in relation to Salman Abedi that, despite being known to MI5 from 2014, he was not at any point considered for a referral to the Prevent programme. This failure to use the Prevent programme is, similarly, not a new issue and we would have expected lessons already to have been learned.
- There is one further issue which caused us serious concern in relation to Salman Abedi, but which we cannot comment on publicly due to the highly sensitive security aspects. This is contained in the classified report sent to the Prime Minister, for her to take action.

What we can say is that there were a number of failures in the handling of Salman Abedi’s case and while it is impossible to say whether these would have prevented the devastating attack on 22 May, we have concluded that, as a result of the failings, potential opportunities to prevent it were missed.

“In conclusion, we note that both MI5 and CTP have been thorough in their desire to learn from past mistakes. We also know and acknowledge the determination with which they approach their work, which we regard as impressive. However, it has been striking how many of the issues which arose in relation to the 2017 terrorist attacks had been previously raised by this Committee in our Reports on the 7/7 attacks and on the killing of Fusilier Lee Rigby. We have previously made recommendations in all of these areas, yet the Government failed to act on them. The lessons from last year’s tragic events must now result in real action.”

The Committee also published its Annual Report for 2017/18 today. The report provides an overview of the Committee’s work, the intelligence community’s budgets, administration and policies, and an examination of the strikes conducted against sites in Syria in April this year.

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

1. The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (ISC) is a statutory committee of Parliament that has responsibility for oversight of the UK intelligence community. The Committee was originally established by the Intelligence Services Act 1994, and has since been reformed by the Justice and Security Act 2013.
2. The ISC oversees the intelligence and security activities of the UK, including the policies, expenditure, administration and operations of the Security Service (MI5), the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) and the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ). The Committee also scrutinises the work of other parts of the UK intelligence community, including the Joint Intelligence Organisation and the National Security Secretariat in the Cabinet Office; Defence Intelligence in the Ministry of Defence; and the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism in the Home Office.
3. The Committee consists of nine members drawn from both Houses of Parliament. The Chair is elected by its members. The Members of the Committee are subject to Section 1(1)(b) of the Official Secrets Act 1989 and are routinely given access to highly classified material in carrying out their duties.
4. The Committee's membership is as follows:
  - The Rt Hon. Dominic Grieve QC MP (Chair)
  - The Rt Hon. Richard Benyon MP
  - The Rt Hon. Ian Blackford MP
  - The Rt Hon. Caroline Flint MP
  - The Rt Hon. David Hanson MP
  - The Rt Hon. the Lord Janvrin GCB GCVO QSO
  - The Rt Hon Kevan Jones MP
  - The Most Hon. the Marquess of Lothian QC PC
  - The Rt Hon. Keith Simpson MP
5. The Committee sets its own agenda and work programme. It takes evidence from Government Ministers, the Heads of the Intelligence Agencies, officials from the intelligence community, and other witnesses as required. The Committee produces an Annual Report on the discharge of its functions and may also produce Special Reports on specific investigations or issues.