



# INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT



## PRESS NOTICE

The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament published its Report on Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism today. The Chairman of the ISC, the Rt Hon. Dr Julian Lewis MP, said:

*“MI5 assumed responsibility for tackling Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism in 2020, and it is now assessed alongside the Islamist terror threat, and forms part of the overall UK Threat Level assessment. We considered it important to review how the transition in responsibility from Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) to MI5 has worked, and what MI5 is now doing to tackle this increasingly complex threat.*

*The threat from Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism is on an upward trajectory, populated by an increasing number of young people and driven by the internet. There are reports that groups and individuals have sought to co-opt the Covid-19 pandemic, using conspiracy theories and exploiting grievances to radicalise and recruit. While the full impact of the global pandemic has yet to be seen, we are assured that the Intelligence Community and the police have recognised the impact that events such as the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter protests may have had on the extremist beliefs of individuals and the possibility that this will lead to an increase in the threat.*

*However we were seriously concerned to find that MI5 have had to absorb responsibility for tackling Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism without any commensurate resources. They cannot be expected simply to absorb this new responsibility. MI5 must be given additional funding to enable it to tackle Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism without other areas of their work suffering as a consequence.”*

### The Committee’s key findings

#### ***The Threat***

- **A small minority at the extremist end of the right-wing movement engage in racially and politically motivated violence, which has increasingly morphed into terrorism.**
- **The number of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT) investigations, disruptions, and Self-Initiated Terrorist referrals all increased steadily since 2017.**
- **Of the 25 attacks prevented by the Intelligence Community and CTP between March 2017 and January 2020, eight (just under 30% of the total) were motivated by an ERWT ideology.**

#### ***Demographic and characteristics***

- **There has been a marked shift in the age, demographic and backgrounds of those associated with ERWT. The threat is now fragmented and complex, increasingly driven by the internet and characterised by a technologically aware demographic of predominantly young men, who are typically ‘Self-Initiated Terrorists’.**
- **Few belong to organised groups: they are difficult to identify and monitor. Their motivation can be highly individualistic, according to their particular personal circumstances, the nature of their grievances and perceptions of their own**

capabilities - determining how, why and when they may choose to attack is therefore particularly challenging.

- There are reports that groups and individuals have sought to co-opt the Covid-19 pandemic, using conspiracy theories and exploiting grievances to radicalise and recruit.

#### *Military and police*

- Individuals often seek to join the military, groups seek to recruit within the military, and military experience is a source of legitimacy among ERWT groups. It is something of an anomaly that the Armed Forces do not provide clear direction to Service personnel regarding membership of any organisation, let alone an extremist one.
- A similar risk exists from the insider threat in relation to the police, with issues around the current vetting processes for candidates applying to join the police - the lack of thorough background checks is a matter of concern.

#### *The online space*

- The online space is key. Self-Initiated Terrorists are now radicalised, and can radicalise others, online from the seclusion of their bedrooms. Videos of terrorist attacks, manifestos, propaganda and ideological literature can be found on a variety of platforms and at different levels of encryption - progressing from mainstream social media sites through to fringe networking sites, gaming sites, dedicated extremist websites and Secure Messaging Applications.
- Potential recruits can be channelled into 'echo chambers' isolated from opposing viewpoints - although not everyone will be guided through the ecosystem by a recruiter. Some find their own way through to the more extreme material.
- ERWT material online is more difficult to tackle than Islamist terrorism propaganda, partly due to concerns regarding freedom of speech (particularly in the US where material on US-owned platforms can go unchallenged owing to the US Constitution First Amendment). It poses a new challenge for the Intelligence Community: there is a long way to go when it comes to tackling what is largely an ungoverned space.

#### *CSPs and Encryption*

- Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists tend to be tech-savvy, and their conspiracy-theorist, anti-government outlook reinforces the idea that their internet use is being monitored. They therefore use encrypted platforms, Virtual Private Networks and 'dark net' sites: the Head of CTP told the Committee that "*end to end encryption is a disaster*". MI5 has called on Communications Service Providers (CSPs) to allow the intelligence Agencies to have exceptional access to encrypted messaging.
- The CSPs must ensure that this material cannot be viewed and shared in the first place. The ISC first identified this problem in 2014, but little progress has been made since. Whilst the major CSPs may be finally taking steps, the smaller organisations appear reluctant to do so.

#### *International*

- Technology and ease of communication mean that ERWT is a threat without borders. International co-operation is important in tackling ERWT, but the disparities in approach and legal thresholds make this challenging.

- **It is important to ensure that alternative arrangements are put in place to avoid potential loss of access to key capabilities.**

*Lack of resources*

- **ERWT and Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue Terrorism (LASIT) casework - around a fifth of all counter-terrorism investigations - can be undertaken only at the expense of other MI5 work. As a result MI5 has been unable to expand its work, as it had intended, in other areas. This situation is untenable. MI5 must be given additional funding to enable it to tackle Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism without other areas of its work suffering as a consequence.**

## 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 was reformed, and its powers reinforced, by the Justice and Security Act 2013.
2. The Committee oversees the intelligence and security activities of the Agencies, including the policies, expenditure, administration and operations of MI5 (the Security Service), MI6 (the Secret Intelligence Service or SIS) and GCHQ (the Government Communications Headquarters). The Committee also scrutinises the work of other parts of the Intelligence Community, including the Joint Intelligence Organisation (JIO) and the National Security Secretariat (NSS) in the Cabinet Office; Defence Intelligence (DI) in the Ministry of Defence; and Homeland Security Group (HSG) in the Home Office.
3. The Committee consists of nine members drawn from both Houses of Parliament. Members are appointed by the Houses of Parliament, having been nominated by the Prime Minister in consultation with the Leader of the Opposition. The Chair of the Committee 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 present Committee Members are<sup>1</sup>:
  - The Rt Hon. Dr Julian Lewis MP (Chair)
  - Maria Eagle MP
  - The Rt Hon. Sir John Hayes CBE MP
  - The Rt Hon. Stewart Hosie MP
  - The Rt Hon. Kevan Jones MP
  - Colonel The Rt Hon. Bob Stewart DSO MP
  - The Rt Hon. Theresa Villiers MP
  - Admiral The Rt Hon. Lord West of Spithead GCB DSC PC
  - The Rt Hon. Sir Jeremy Wright QC MP
5. The Committee sets its own agenda and work programme, taking evidence from Government Ministers, the Heads of the intelligence and security Agencies, senior officials, experts and academics as required. The Committee makes an Annual Report on the discharge of its functions and also produces Reports on specific issues.
6. The Reports can contain highly classified material, which would damage the operational capabilities of the intelligence Agencies if it were published. There is therefore a well-established and lengthy process to prepare the Committee's Reports ready for publication. The Report is checked to ensure that it is factually correct (i.e. that the facts and figures are up to date in what can be a fast-changing environment). The Intelligence Community may then, on behalf of the Prime Minister, request redaction of material in the Report if they consider that its publication would damage their work – for example, by revealing their targets, methods, sources or operational capabilities. The Committee requires the Intelligence Community to demonstrate clearly how publication of the material in question would be damaging since the Committee aims to ensure that only the minimum of text is redacted from a Report. Where the Committee rejects a request for material to be redacted, if the organisation considers that the material would cause serious damage to national security if published, then the Head of that organisation must appear before the Committee to argue the case. Once these stages have been completed, the

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<sup>1</sup> The Rt Hon. Dame Diana Johnson DBE MP and the Rt Hon. Mark Pritchard MP were members of the Committee during this Inquiry, but stepped down from the Committee in January 2022.

Report is sent to the Prime Minister to consider. Under the Justice and Security Act 2013 the Committee can only lay its Reports before Parliament once the Prime Minister has confirmed that there is no material in them which would prejudice the discharge of the functions of the Agencies or – where the Prime Minister considers that there is such material in the Report – once the Prime Minister has consulted the Committee and it has then excluded the relevant material from the Report.

7. The Committee believes that it is important that Parliament and the public should be able to see where information had to be redacted: redactions are clearly indicated in the Report by \*\*\*. This means that the published Report is the same as the classified version sent to the Prime Minister (albeit with redactions).