

CONTEST in 2024 (Counter Terror Expo keynote, Thurs 20 June 2024)

1. Prevent, Pursue, Protect, Prepare. The CONTEST framework invented by Sir David Omand in 2003 is sound and enduring.
2. I want to use the four pillars of CONTEST to look back over the 5 years that I have been IRTL, and to look ahead.
3. Whilst I see no reason to change the 4-pillars approach, we do see a shifting of emphasis between the pillars. In short, Prevent could be becoming a little more Pursue-y; and Pursue is certainly on the way to becoming a little more Prevent like.
4. In addition there is the pivot of time and resources towards state threats, in particular from Russia, China and Iran. I won't speak directly about the National Security Act today. But what I do want to consider is the role of states in terrorist organisations and the possibility of more links becoming apparent between state threats and terrorism.
5. I took over as terrorism Reviewer from Sir Max Hill in 2019, so two years after the repeated attacks of 2017.
6. During my time the terrorist events that led to the most profound changes were the attacks at Fishmongers Hall, at HMP Whitemoor, and Streatham High Street. These forced a rethink about the risk posed by released terrorists.
7. We are some way away from the attacks of 2017. The last multiple terrorist killing was in 2020 (at Reading). In recent years the number of terrorist murders has declined in GB and in NI. In GB, the last terrorist killings were Sir David Amess in Oct 2021, and Terence Carney in Hartlepool in Oct 2023. The second murder was done by Ahmed Alid in revenge for Gaza, illustrating the potential effect of the Israel/ Hamas war on Islamist terrorism. It's worth adding terrorism killings are only ever a fraction of the whole. In 2023 in London alone, 21 teenagers were killed but not by terrorists.
8. As Terrorism Reviewer, my main interaction is with the **Pursue** pillar. Under Pursue comes the law on banning organisations, police investigative powers, detention, offences, sentencing, offender management, and other hard interventions such as TPIMS and TEOs.
9. The focus of Pursue must be on pursuing those who would engage in violent attack or coercion, exemplified by bombings, shootings or stabbings.
10. So why do I say Pursue becoming more Prevent-y. The reality is that over the last 5 years counter-terrorism officials have had to confront an emerging trend of personal vulnerability within the terrorist cohort. This is a particular phenomenon of lone actors. Many Subjects of Interest are young and have

mental health problems or are neurodivergent. That's true of the people they arrest, of the charges laid by the Crown Prosecution Service, even of civil prevention measures.

11. If you go back to the year after 9/11, for the year ending Dec 2002, there were 3 arrests of children for terrorism related activity. Only once in that decade did it go as high as 10.
12. After 2014, there were more than 15 arrests of children in every year bar one.
13. In 2021 arrests reached 20 for only second time (first time was 2017).
14. In 2022 it was up to 32.
15. Now according to the latest statistics, for period ending March 2024 it was 40.
16. What does making Pursue more Prevent-y mean in concrete terms?
17. It means firstly, counter-terrorism police are constantly looking for non-traditional ways of dealing with child offenders. They are educating themselves like never before in safeguarding, and the powers of local authorities. Following my recommendation in my last annual report there is a serious focus on creating child diversion orders, to prevent people going down the criminal justice route without damage to public safety.
18. On the mental health front counter terrorism police now have access to a permanent group of advisers, known as the Clinical Consultancy Service, made up of police and mental health clinicians. The guiding insight is that for a mentally disordered offender, accessing mental health service may be a better way of managing risk than prosecution.
19. **Protect** covers some of the powers I review. These include break-glass stop and question powers, which would be activated if there was a bomber on the loose.
20. These are powers that are intended to target harden the UK, but then there is the literal target hardening envisaged in the Protection of Premises Bill also know as Martyn's Law. I was critical of the original plans which placed too many burdens on small venues for insufficient benefit, and I am pleased that changes have now been proposed.
21. The position of victims and survivors comes under **Prepare**. I still don't know the answer to the question asked by survivors and relatives ask. What can I do as a survivor to stop this happening again? I wish there was a practical and immediate answer, and I'm sorry that I don't have one.
22. That brings me to **Prevent**.
23. Prevent is not within my statutory remit.

24. For reasons that I agree with, in his independent review published last year Sir William Shawcross urged greater focus on the principal sources of actual terrorist harm in the real world. He delivered a timely reminder that Islamist Extremist Terrorism remains the greatest terrorist threat.
25. His view was that Prevent therefore should concentrate on the ideology or ideologies that foster Islamist Extremism. He also objected to the emphasis on safeguarding. It would also exclude incels, taking the view that they do not display any terrorist ideology.
26. According to this prescription, Prevent should track real world terrorist risk, and avoiding safeguarding. So whilst fulfilling a different function, Prevent would become more closely aligned to Pursue.
27. It is fair to say that children were not Sir William's focus. Personally, I think for children, a safeguarding aspect will inevitably remain in Prevent, and ideology may be less important than other factors. When we talk about children we are really talking about boys. So those other factors may include testosterone, lack of self-esteem, and the internet.
28. In my view boys' use of the internet, you might even say the internet's use of boys, is the most dynamic aspect affecting terrorism and extremism in GB.
29. It is only going to grow. No reason to believe that the internet, possibly supercharged with AI, is going to slow down anytime soon in its impact on young minds.
30. The Online Safety Act 2023 falls under Prevent. Among other things it is the UK's attempt to put a muzzle on the mad dog of online radicalisation.
31. Although it amounts to policing free speech, I can see no better alternative to democratically imposed standards and systems. I wish OFCOM every success in its gigantic task of becoming the UK's internet regulator.
32. My one criticism of the draft standards that OFCOM have put out to consultation, is that they have a blind spot about the particular risk of children being pulled down the online terrorist rabbit hole.
33. There is merit in placing greater obligations on providers to remove terrorism or priority harmful content for children, who are particularly susceptible, than for adults, who are better able to make up their own minds.
34. The Online Safety Act 2023 came too late for the great jump in Generative AI. Contemplate for a moment a godlike Anders Breivik or Brenton Tarrant chatbot autonomously dispensing his wisdom in the metaverse, and the influence that might have.
35. It doesn't seem sensible with the coming wave of LLMs to sit back and watch the dash for growth and market share and monetisation, and only then think about our response when terrorist harms proliferate.

36. I also hope that a figure will emerge who can help the public understand better how emerging online technologies are operating, what signing up to them means, how they make their money, what the advantages and risks of adopting these technologies are.
37. This is about us as consumers make informed decisions – and as members of the public being able to understand and debate proposals for new legislation.
38. It would be good to have eminent explainers like Professors Sir David Spiegelhalter in the world of statistics, or Sir Chris Whitty on pandemics.
39. Of course AI will provide investigative opportunities. Sentiment scanning. Machine learning to identify new tripwires based on databases of previous attacks. Advanced biometrics.
40. To be candid, I doubt that any democracy would ban an information technology that could save lives. The question is whether these technologies do save lives, or whether it is snake oil; and if they do, how they can be used transparently, without bias, subject to democratic oversight and susceptible of interrogation and challenge as far as possible. And without making us feel as if we are constantly watched or under suspicion.
41. Turning to states, the great lesson of the last 12 months – reminder, really – is that they have a lot to do with terrorism. Some of the most capable and dangerous terrorist organisations like Hezbollah and Hamas are capable and powerful because they have state support and backing. They have what Professor Dan Byman called “deadly connections”.
42. One advantage is that these connections allow states to harness deniable violence. We have seen this with another state-backed terrorist group, Wagner Group.
43. To muddy the picture, some non-state groups like Islamic State/ Da’esh have state-like aspirations. And where states such as Russia engage in sabotage across Europe, it is certainly foreseeable that terrorist groups, or individuals attracted by terrorist ideologies, will be used as cut-outs – perhaps aware, but perhaps not aware, of the strategic interests they are serving.
44. I expect the overlap between states and terrorism to come more into focus as more resources are being devoted to state threats. Just as with ERWT when it was adopted as a core CT mission, I expect that greater attention will lead to more discovery.
45. Where does this leave CONTEST?
46. Firstly, I don’t think it’s about changing the 4 Ps Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare. Nothing in the last 5 years suggests to me that a tried and trusted and respected formula needs to be discarded.

47. Secondly, whilst I'm not advocating that the internet should be a fifth pillar of CONTEST, I don't think you can overstate its significance to the threat. It is changing the nature of ideologies being used to justify violence. It is changing the cohort. It appears to have a disinhibiting effect whose consequences are not always confined to the online world.
48. Thirdly, there has been a shifting or rebalancing between the pillars. I think that's inevitable.
49. Finally, everyone in this room will appreciate the growing sensitivity to state threats. It will certainly affect the resources that can be devoted to counter-terrorism, but at least to some extent I also think it will affect our understanding of terrorism.

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