

Statement by David Anderson Q.C. on publication of his Report:
'Attacks in London and Manchester, March-June 2017,'

05 December 2017

**EMBARGOED FOR USE AFTER THE REPORT IS LAID IN PARLIAMENT BY THE HOME SECRETARY ON
TUESDAY 5 DECEMBER 2017**

Today the Home Secretary published the Report 'Attacks in London and Manchester, March-June 2017'. The report, written by David Anderson Q.C., assesses the quality of internal reviews conducted by MI5 and Counter-Terrorism Policing into their handling of the intelligence that was available to them prior to the the four attacks.

David Anderson said:

"The excellent recent record of MI5 and the police in defending the UK from terrorist attack came to a brutal end this year at Westminster, Manchester Arena, London Bridge and Finsbury Park.

"Despite elevated threat levels, the fundamentals are sound and the great majority of attacks continue to be thwarted. But the shock of these incidents has prompted intensive reflection and a commitment to significant change. In particular, MI5 and the police have identified the need to use data more effectively, to share knowledge more widely, to improve their own collaboration and to assess and investigate terrorist threats on a uniform basis, whatever the ideology that inspires them.

"No free society can offer immunity from terrorism, or any other kind of crime. But if properly implemented and supervised, the 126 recommendations in these internal reviews will strengthen the hand of the security services, without compromising the strong legal and ethical framework within which they work."

The Report

In summary:

- David Anderson's report, submitted to the Home Secretary on 2 November, contains his independent assessment of nine internal reviews conducted by MI5 and Counter-Terrorism Policing.
- The internal reviews are highly classified and extend to 1150 pages. They give a comprehensive account of the handling of intelligence prior to the attacks of March-June 2017 at Westminster, Manchester, London Bridge and Finsbury Park. They also set out ambitious plans for operational improvement.
- David Anderson spent seven weeks in total at MI5 and Scotland Yard, assisted by personnel from the intelligence oversight body IPCO and by an ex-officer of ASIO, the Australian equivalent of MI5. He attended meetings, reviewed drafts, challenged assumptions and influenced the recommendations. He concluded that the reviews were conducted in a careful and trustworthy manner, and that the recommendations taken as a whole will strengthen MI5 and the police in their ability to stop most terrorist attacks.

The Attacks

- MI5 and CT Policing thwarted 20 Islamist terrorist plots in the four years to the end of October 2017. Seven of these plots have already come to trial, resulting in 10 life sentences, and trial is awaited in the other 13. Another two plots have been thwarted since my report was submitted. But in a free society and against a worsening threat background, it is not realistic to expect everything to be stopped.
- Three of the six attackers were on MI5's radar, either as an active subject of interest (Khuram Butt - London Bridge) or as closed subjects of interest (Khalid Masood – Westminster; Salman Abedi - Manchester).
- The purpose of the internal reviews was to identify systemic improvements rather than to cast or apportion blame. But it is conceivable that the Manchester attack in particular might have been avoided had the cards fallen differently. While investigative actions in all cases were for the most part sound, learning points have emerged which should help avert future terrorist attacks.

The Future

- MI5 and CT Policing have pushed each other, and persuaded themselves, to contemplate significant change. Their 126 recommendations include commitments to further strengthen MI5-police collaboration, to improve data exploitation, to share intelligence-derived information more widely (including with neighbourhood policing) and to consistently assess and investigate all terrorist threats, regardless of their ideological label.
- David Anderson endorsed, so far as he felt qualified to do so, the conclusions and recommendations of the internal reviews, while recognising that a meaningful verdict on some of them would require greater operational expertise.
- He noted that some of the recommendations have implications for oversight, which will be provided by the new and more powerful Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO), provided for by the Investigatory Powers Act 2016.
- He concluded that while there could be no guarantees, *"in an increasingly high-volume business, where success and failure depend on tiny margins, there will almost certainly be future cases in which these recommendations will tip the balance in favour of the security forces"*.

Contact:

For more information about David's work and for a full copy of the Report please go to: www.brickcourt.co.uk or www.dagc.co.uk or contact his clerk kate.trott@brickcourt.co.uk. You can also follow David on Twitter: @bricksilk