

The Future of Britain's Counter-Terrorism Policy?

A RUSI Qatar Policy Dialogue

Transcript of Presentation by:

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Transcript

"I am delighted to have the opportunity to talk to such a distinguished audience. It is also an audience which represents some of the key allies of the United Kingdom – allies that are very important to the UK not least in helping to tackle the common threat of international terrorism.

Since 2006 William Hague, the Conservative Party's Shadow Foreign Secretary, has called for Britain to embark on the elevation of its links with many of the countries of the Middle East and Gulf. Not only diplomatically but in matters of culture, education, commerce and security, and that this should be pursued consistently over many years.

Most recently, in July, he said, 'it is strategically vital to strengthen Britain's links with many friendly Muslim nations, and not only for political reasons, since it is vital to make the most of opportunities to expand our trade and investment. It is this kind of all-round strengthening of our links with allies, as well as dealing with potential threats, that our co-ordinated national security is designed approach is designed to help us achieve'.

I certainly share this view. Since I became Shadow Security Minister almost two years ago, I have been critical of the current British Government for being complacent in its relations with and in the region, particularly the Gulf.

And I have said that GCC countries should be candidates for closer cooperation. It may be thought that our relations with the Gulf countries are pretty good, so where is the problem? All I can say is that Britain has failed to make the most of its historic ties with the countries of the region and it shows.

A Conservative Government would want to change this. So I hope that my talk to you this evening can help contribute to a strengthening of relations with your countries, and that it helps set the ground for excellent relations should the Conservative Party form the next Government after the UK's general election that must be held by June.

With that in mind, I would like to focus my remarks on one particular aspect of the relations between our countries which is a long-term challenge – countering terrorism – and how things might change with a Conservative Government.

The UK's Counter Terrorism Strategy

It is important to stress that the Conservative Party considers the UK's Counter Terrorism Strategy to be a good framework. It is a strategy that has been emulated by many other countries and international organisations and which provides a good basis for sharing best practice with partners and allies. A Conservative Government will keep this framework and build on it.

Where the Party has been critical of the current Government is in its implementation and delivery of the strategy, and should we enter office there will be some significant changes in approach. It is perhaps easiest if I go through each strand individually – though there are clearly interconnections and overlap between them – and outline the Conservative Party’s approach.

‘Pursue’

The ‘Pursue’ strand of the Strategy is, of course, concerned with disrupting terrorists and their operations.

At home the UK has developed an integrated police/intelligence approach for investigations and prosecutions. It is a model of best practice internationally. And it is one which we would continue and encourage others develop to develop.

But used in isolation, this model would not be effective. Al Qaeda poses a strategic threat to the international community. So ever closer intelligence co-operation, not only in sharing analysis but also sharing best practice when it comes to the development of intelligence structures and the professionalization of assessment work, is important on an international level. More can be done with partners in the Gulf.

Given that the membership and activities of terrorist networks are transnational – planning, execution and resourcing are functions that can each be undertaken in different countries but work to the same end – the model would also not be effective without operational liaison with police forces in other countries which will remain important. And as part of this the Conservative Party has said that allowing deportation of foreign nationals who pose a security threat will be a priority, subject to internationally acceptable standards.

There is another element to the ‘Pursue’ strand, and that is the military contribution to countering terrorism. Operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan are ongoing but we have been able to draw lessons from them, and as this audience will know the next stage of the strategy that will be pursued in Afghanistan is still being decided.

First, let me look at ongoing operations in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is of vital importance to the UK’s national security and success there will be the top priority for a Conservative Government. Afghanistan cannot again be allowed to become a base that is used by international terrorists to pose a strategic threat to the UK, its allies and partners.

It is true that Al Qaeda is mainly present in the tribal and border areas of Pakistan. Three quarters of attacks against the UK have had links to Pakistan, though the recent efforts of the Pakistani Government to tackle terrorists in these areas have been significant and welcome.

Some argue that because of the links between international terrorism and Pakistan NATO forces should leave Afghanistan or limit their operations there so that resources can be focussed elsewhere. But what would be the consequences if NATO forces left Afghanistan prematurely?

There is little doubt that the Taliban would quite quickly retake the country, providing a base for Al Qaeda. As the Taliban is a transnational Pashtun movement, with objectives on both sides of the Durand line, it would

also provide the Taliban in Pakistan with a large swathe of territory from which to attack Pakistan. It could gravely undermine the government of nuclear armed Pakistan.

What is required is a focussed counter insurgency effort aimed at protecting the Afghan population and building the capacity of indigenous and local security forces. I say a focussed effort because military operations must not continue indefinitely.

There are other worthy objectives, such as better education and improved human rights, but these are different from the military mission and will require socio-economic investment by the international community over the long-term.

Secondly, let me look at the lessons drawn from operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For various reasons, without very compelling justification there is likely to be public resistance in future to expeditionary operations by the UK's armed forces of the type and scale undertaken over the past few years.

Compelling justification is another matter: the UK would and should act where it can. But, as William Hague has said, 'operations must on the basis of agreed objectives, proper co-ordination with development assistance, every effort to provide the right equipment and an explanation of their mission from the highest levels of government at the very outset'.

I would add that when intervention operations of significant scale are unavoidable they must be tightly tied to achievable security goals first and foremost, rather than the achievement of wholesale societal reform which may well be exceptionally hard to achieve in the wake of fighting.

Short of major operations there will undoubtedly be an ongoing role for the UK armed forces to disrupt emerging threats abroad before they reach a level where the risk to the UK's territory or that of our allies and partners is direct.

Tensions potentially leading to fighting are not going to go away, however. There are many observable catalysers of conflict including such things as the effects of climate change. And unless we are going to allow the twenty first century to be a conflict ridden century we have to take conflict prevention more seriously than hitherto and develop techniques more successful than hitherto to ensure success.

For the military this is likely to mean an increased emphasis on defence diplomacy, security sector reform and in-country capacity building. That is one of the key reasons for the UK's presence in the Gulf: helping to prevent conflict through a contribution to regional stabilisation.

Alongside the military, civilians must also be able to operate effectively in dangerous environments. Traditionally in the UK it has been the MoD, the Foreign Office and Department for International Development which have contributed the bulk of the resources to conflict prevention and post conflict stabilisation and reconstruction.

In addition, wider resources in Whitehall like the Home Office can contribute policing expertise and assistance, the departments for Children, Schools and Families and Business, Innovation and Skills can help with education, and the Ministry of Justice can assist with judicial expertise. In other words, and as the new

Chief of the General Staff has said, non-military activities must be given much greater weight and be re-engineered as security instruments and properly integrated into strategy, not viewed as international versions of domestic welfare programmes.

‘Prevent’

I have already talked about operations in Afghanistan and why success there is so important.

Failure in Afghanistan would also have a radicalising effect worldwide, and this leads me on to the second strand of the UK’s counter terrorism strategy, ‘Prevent’. This strand aims to tackle the radicalisation of individuals and foster social cohesion.

Radicalisation is a challenge both domestically and internationally. And just as terrorist networks and plots are transnational in nature, so is radicalisation. As examples consider the protests in London in response to the Gaza crisis.

It is clear from these events that those who espouse extremist ideology are adept at creating and exploiting linkages between fundamentalist goals and local and international conditions.

I am not so naïve as to think that if all points of conflict in the Middle East were resolved current terrorism would cease. The narrative of extremism and terrorism finds grievances to latch on to. But longstanding conflicts such as Israel/Palestine cannot just be brushed aside and conflict resolution remains essential in its own moral right and as a strategy to reduce the attractions of terrorism.

But there is another aspect to preventing radicalisation, and that is confronting and challenging the actual ideology that is espoused by extremists – the ideology that can lead vulnerable individuals to terrorism.

At home, government should tackle extremism itself, not just extremism when it turns violent. The values of democracy – tolerance, freedom under the rule of law and so on – must be upheld and defended. While ultimately the battle for ideas will take place at the grass roots, government can set an example and encourage communities to be resilient and stand up to extremists by denying funding and facilities from public sources to extremist groups and by making its disapproval known. I should add that an effective strategy must tackle all forms of extremism, not just focus on one section of society.

Abroad, critics of close relationships with Muslim states say that they do not conform to all of our own democratic values, implying that we should downgrade them. But as William Hague has said, it is a vital part of understanding the world we will face in the coming decades to accept that we will not be possible to prescribe the form of government in all the countries with which we need friendly relations.

British governments will always argue that democracy and freedom are the soundest basis for national security and international peace for other countries as well as our own. But prescription is not the method.

A Conservative Government will recognise that countries making democratic reforms – and many Gulf States are – will do so at varying ways and speeds. What matters is to retain genuine popular support for the process and match rising expectations. The UK will certainly encourage such reforms in practical ways such as supporting higher education.

While a Conservative Government would support and encourage social, economic and political reform across the Middle East and other parts of the world, consistent with its policies at home, it will not engage with those whose aims and methods continue to be violent or with those who talk peaceful action in one political context and violence in another.

Here the Conservative Party disagrees with the current British Government's policy of engagement with the so called political wing of Hezbollah. Nor would it give Hamas status through government contact for as long as it espouses the bullet. It is not enough to be elected to be legitimate. Power has also to be exercised legitimately.

There is another dimension to this discussion of proxy groups, and that is Iran. Iran has made no secret of its desire to extend its influence – if not alter the balance of power – in the Gulf and wider Middle East, including through proxy and terrorist groups like Hezbollah and Hamas. It also has territorial disputes with a number of countries, and there is the added challenge of its nuclear programme about which I know many in this room are worried. We share this anxiety. It is a first priority to prevent Iran acquiring nuclear weapons.

A nuclear armed Iran could shatter the stability of the Middle East and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, both of which are already under serious strain. No one can afford to be complacent. It still remains to be seen, following the meeting between the P5+1 and Iran last week, how forthcoming and open to inspection and dialogue Iran will be.

The Conservative Party supports a diplomatic solution. The pressure placed on Iran should be multilateral, legitimate and peaceful, but unless it is intensified – together with more sanctions if Iran does not change course – the opportunity to change its policy may be lost. The Party is not advocating military action against Iran, but it would be unwise to take it off the table: it is a maxim that diplomacy has much greater credibility when backed up by a credible capacity and ultimately the will to use force.

'Protect' and 'Prepare'

The final strands of the counter terrorism I want to look at, briefly, are the 'Protect' and 'Prepare' strands. These are concerned with reducing the vulnerability of society to attacks through border security and protecting critical infrastructure, and by putting in place effective emergency response plans.

Here, again, the international dimension is very important.

The attacks in Mumbai last year demonstrated this in three respects. First, because that model of attack could be imitated elsewhere. So co-operation in investigation and intelligence in relation to emerging tactics is very important in understanding and responding to the changing nature of the threat. Governments should help each other to stay ahead of terrorists.

From a UK perspective, these strands are also very important given the country's dependence on international trade and resource flows – particularly in relation to essential commodities like energy supplies. Here I do not only mean assisting the protection of critical sites like oil installations, but also partnering with other countries to police supply lanes. Piracy on the high seas is the most obvious and growing challenge to us all and is one known in the Gulf.

Conclusion: the UK's presence in the Gulf

Let me conclude.

The Gulf is a region of great strategic importance to the UK. Up to 80 per cent of Europe's trade with the Far East and a substantial proportion of the world's oil and gas is shipped through local waters. Our interest in the stability of your region could hardly be more direct. We also have many citizens living and working here. Any conflict or change in balance of power is likely to have a significant impact on us.

Over the longer term, we would like to see and will help foster closer inter regional links designed to strengthen home grown stability. But the route should be partnership and cooperation: partnership in dealing with state sponsored threats and menaces like piracy on the high seas and cooperation in counterterrorism strategies.

I said at the start that a Conservative Government would embark on the elevation of its links with countries of the Middle East and Gulf. We look forward with enthusiasm to the opportunity to do so."

Biography:

Baroness Pauline Neville-Jones spent over thirty years as a career diplomat. During this time she served as both Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, and as Political Director of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in which capacity she led the British delegation to the Dayton negotiations on the Bosnia peace settlement. In January 2006, she was appointed to head the Conservative Party's National and International Security Policy Group. In July 2007, she was appointed Shadow Security Minister and National Security Adviser to the Leader of the Opposition.