Review of International Studies (2009), 35, 997–1009 Copyright © British International Studies Association
doi:10.1017/S0260210509990416

Tracking terrorist networks: problems of intelligence sharing within the UK intelligence community

ANTONY FIELD*

Abstract. The 7/7 terrorist attacks demonstrated that there were some clear deficiencies with the organisation of the United Kingdom's counter-terrorism intelligence community. In the aftermath of the attacks, there were moves to develop a more robust 'counter-terrorism network' in the United Kingdom that would facilitate better communication and intelligence sharing. While recent developments are to be welcomed, the reforms have not addressed some of the fundamental cultural, institutional and technological issues at the heart of the problem. The creation of an effective counter-terrorism network demands that information flows more freely through the intelligence community and that institutional boundaries are broken down. Until these obstacles have been overcome, the new counter-terrorism network will continue to be hampered by the same old problems of intelligence sharing.

Introduction

Since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the resources devoted to intelligence and counter-terrorism within the United Kingdom have increased exponentially. It is predicted that by the end of the decade, the total amount spent on counter-terrorism and intelligence across government will have more than tripled to £3.5 billion.[1] Much of the increased spending is accounted for by the Single Intelligence Account that funds the three main intelligence agencies (MI5, MI6 and GCHQ), which is expected to double to around £2.1 billion by 2010/11.[2] Alongside this there has been a major increase in counter-terrorism funding for the police that is set to rise to around £579 million by 2010/11.[3] However, while this increase in government spending on counter-terrorism is to be welcomed, simply using this money to hire more personnel is unlikely to deliver the desired results. Until some of the fundamental cultural, technological and organisational problems

* The author would like to thank the editors and the anonymous referees for their comments on an earlier draft of this article. Any errors, mistakes or omissions remain the responsibility of the author.

[1] Home Office, {http://nds.coi.gov.uk/content/detail.asp?NewsAreaID=2&ReleaseID=321050} accessed on 31 October 2008.
[2] Intelligence and Security Committee, *Annual Report 2006–2007* (HMSO, 2008), p. 6.
[3] Home Office, {http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-publications/publication-search/general/541114?view=Binary} accessed on 31 October 2008.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990416 Published online by Cambridge University Press

within the intelligence community have been addressed, the work of new recruits to will continue to be hampered by the same old problems.

Some of main drawbacks of the United Kingdom's intelligence machinery were demonstrated by the failure of the counter-terrorism community to identify and track the 7/7 bombers. This case showed that that the fragmented nature of the intelligence system was making it difficult for different agencies to integrate information and that a lack of communication was leading to intelligence opportunities being overlooked. In recent years, there have been some steps towards the development of a more effective counter-terrorism intelligence network, with creation of the 'Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre' (JTAC) and a number of regional counter-terrorism hubs. However, these reforms will be unlikely to deliver the desired results unless new working practices are put in place to encourage a culture of co-operation between different agencies. In order to create an effective national counter-terrorism network, there is a need to encourage new ways of operating, by removing institutional barriers to intelligence sharing, integrating information technology systems, and enhancing the joint tasking and coordination of intelligence assets. As the former UK Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator, David Omand, has argued, 'intelligence structures, processes, and co-ordinating mechanisms that may have worked for nations in the past have to be rethought against the new threat and how it might develop'.[4] Although such fundamental change presents a considerable challenge for the UK intelligence community it can no longer be avoided. Whereas intelligence sharing may have been considered a luxury in the past, it is now an essential requirement of an effective approach to tackling contemporary terrorist networks.

Intelligence failure and the 7/7 bombers

Some of the main shortcomings of the United Kingdom's intelligence architecture were demonstrated by the intelligence failures surrounding the 7/7 bombings. Following the 7/7 terrorist attacks, it was publicly stated that the intelligence agencies had received no advance warning of the plot. The Prime Minster, Tony Blair, told the House of Commons that there was 'no intelligence specific enough' that could have enabled the police and intelligence services to prevent the attacks.[5] Similarly, the Intelligence and Security Committee was led to believe that 'none of the individuals involved in the 7 July group had been identified (that is, named and listed) as potential terrorist threats prior to July'.[6] According to MI5, the perpetrators were simply 'not on the radar'.[7] However, while it may be true that was no specific intelligence regarding the 7/7 plot, it seems that some of those involved in the attacks had in fact come to the attention of the UK intelligence community before. In the years prior to the attacks, it appears that a number of

[4] David Omand, 'Reflections on Secret Intelligence', in P. Hennessy (ed.), *The New Protective State* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 122.
[5] Intelligence and Security Committee, *Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005*, (HMSO, 2006), p. 2.
[6] Ibid., 'Report into the London Terrorist Attacks', p. 13.
[7] MI5, {http://www.mi5.gov.uk/output/the-7-7-bombings-rumours-and-reality.html} accessed on 30 June 2009.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990416 Published online by Cambridge University Press

opportunities had been missed to develop the intelligence picture around the future suicide bombers.

Although their exact identities were not known at the time, some of the 7/7 bombers had previously been looked at by both the police and MI5. In 2003, two of the 7/7 suicide bombers, Shehzad Tanweer and Mohammad Siddique Khan, had been under limited surveillance as part of an operation investigating a terrorist cell in Crawley.[8] That same year a known terrorist suspect was identified making calls to a mobile phone registered to Siddique Khan.[9] In 2004, Khan was again monitored by intelligence agencies on at least four further occasions.[10] At one point, he was captured talking to Omar Khyam, who was at the centre of a plot to detonate a massive fertilizer bomb. Among the issues the two men discussed, were techniques of financial fraud and preparations for attending a training camp in Pakistan.[11] In light of the available intelligence, MI5 made a risk assessment of Khan, but it was decided that he was only a peripheral figure in the Crawley network.[12] In this context, he was considered to be a low intelligence priority in comparison to other suspects who had been actually been discussing terrorist attack planning.[13] At this point, MI5 decided to take no further action to develop intelligence regarding this supposed terrorist supporter. According to the Intelligence and Security Committee, it was judged that 'there was no reason to divert resources away from other higher priorities, which included investigations into attack planning against the UK'.[14] Similarly, the police made little attempt clarify the identities and intentions of Khan and his associates, instead deciding to 'await any further tasking' from MI5.[15]

This illustrates the first problem with the UK intelligence community – different institutional priorities and responsibilities encourage a disjointed and inconsistent approach to the investigation of terrorist suspects. It appears that Khan fell into the investigative gap between 'national security threats' and routine criminal activity. Significantly, the primary responsibility of MI5 is to gather intelligence on threats to national security and the organisation has no real interest in investigating lesser criminal offences, which is seen as a matter for the police. Apparently, the agency does not have enough manpower to pursue all of the significant investigative targets it has identified, never mind scrutinising individuals that are seemingly on the periphery of terrorist networks.[16] This has lead to a situation where MI5 has a relatively narrow focus on detecting and preventing specific terrorist attacks, rather than disrupting wider terrorist networks. According to a former member of the MI5, 'the threshold for such investigations is therefore high and the number of investigations necessarily limited'.[17] Conversely, the police are often unwilling to devote attention to complex counter-terrorism cases, as this may pull resources away from their primary task of community policing. As a

[8] Intelligence and Security Committee, 'Report into the London Terrorist Attacks', p. 14.
[9] Ibid., 'Could 7/7 Have Been Prevented?' (HMSO, 2009), p. 19.
[10] Ibid., pp. 59–61.
[11] *BBC News*, {http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6611803.stm} accessed on 31 October 2008.
[12] *Spectator* (5 May 2007).
[13] Intelligence and Security Committee, 'Could 7/7 Have Been Prevented?', p. 25.
[14] Ibid., 'Report into the London Terrorist Attacks', p. 14.
[15] Ibid., 'Could 7/7 Have Been Prevented?', p. 63.
[16] Ibid., 'Report into the London Terrorist Attacks', p. 7.
[17] Michael Herman, 'Counter-Terrorism, Information Technology and Intelligence Change', *Intelligence and National Security*, 18:4 (2003), p. 45.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990416 Published online by Cambridge University Press

consequence, those involved in lesser criminal activities in support of terrorist groups, such as fundraising and other kinds of fraud, may not always receive adequate investigative attention. Clearly, this state of affairs is highly risky with regards to the contemporary terrorist threat, as we know that relatively low-level terrorist group supporters can quickly make the transition to operational activity.

Once MI5 had ruled out the option to conduct further directed operations on Mohammad Siddique Khan, it appears that there was no real attempt to further develop the intelligence picture around him. The main intelligence collection methods of MI5 involve intrusive techniques, such as directed surveillance operations and the bugging of private property. By their nature such activities are expensive and man-power intensive. They can produce valuable intelligence, but it comes at a premium cost. As a consequence, MI5 is understandably reluctant to squander its limited resources on what it considers to be relatively low-level intelligence targets. In this light, it is perhaps understandable that the internal risk assessment process within MI5 determined that further surveillance of Khan could not be justified when there were other higher priority cases. However, it is unclear whether other forms of intelligence gathering were ever considered or pursued as alternatives.

This highlights the second problem with the UK intelligence architecture – it fosters a narrow approach to intelligence gathering that is driven by techniques as opposed to targets. Even without recourse to expensive surveillance resources, it may have been possible to glean additional information about Khan that would have led to a reassessment of his importance. Various kinds of desk research could have revealed important things about his international travel, contacts and wider network of associates. Community intelligence appears to have been a particularly under used resource, which is unfortunate as it was apparently well known among locals that Khan had been meeting regularly with other radicals.[18] In addition, it is also unclear to what extent MI5 liaised with any foreign intelligence services to gain additional information on Mohammad Siddique Khan. More than one *Al-Qaeda* operative under custody in a foreign country has alleged that Khan had been attending overseas training camps and associating with leading terrorist planners since as far back as 2001.[19] Whilst such information may not have yielded clear evidence of a terrorist plot, a more rounded development of the intelligence picture regarding Khan may have led to a reassessment of his importance.

Crucially, in the years before the 7/7 attacks, various pieces of intelligence regarding some of the future bombers were being circulated within the counter-terrorism community. On a number of occasions intelligence was shared between MI5 and the police regarding a group of unknown individuals, including Mohammad Siddique Khan.[20] However, the quality of this communication was often poor and there was no real depth to much of the information that was exchanged. In some cases limited amounts of information were provided without any broader context, making it difficult to assess the real level of risk posed by some individuals.[21] In other cases intelligence was simply not shared because it was

[18] *BBC News*, 'File on Four' (25 October 2005), {http://news.bbc.co.uk/media/avdb/news_web/audio/9012da680029cd0/bb/09012da680029ebf_16x9_bb.asx} accessed on 31 October 2008.
[19] *BBC News*, 'File on Four'.
[20] Intelligence and Security Committee, 'Could 7/7 Have Been Prevented?', pp. 62–3.
[21] Ibid., 'Could 7/7 Have Been Prevented?', p. 52.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990416 Published online by Cambridge University Press

not considered important enough.[22] Overall, no single agency had any real appreciation of the amount of information that existed within the intelligence community regarding Khan and his associates.

This demonstrates the third shortcoming of the United Kingdom's intelligence structure – institutional divisions serve as an impediment to effective intelligence sharing. Certainly, there are bound to be communication issues in any situation involving many different organisations. However, within the intelligence community these problems are exacerbated by the fact that each individual agency has their own separate IT systems and procedures for handling information. In a number of cases, attempts to develop intelligence seem to have been undermined by an inability to locate information stored in the myriad of different databases spread across the intelligence community. Crucial links were not made between individuals, phone numbers, locations and vehicles because intelligence analysts were unable to access information readily. On a number of occasions, different ways of spelling of the name 'Siddique' seem to have confounded intelligence enquiries.[23] It is likely that at least some of these problems could have been avoided if a more joined up intelligence system had been in place across the different agencies.

Ultimately, no intelligence agency or police force took ownership of Khan as a potential terrorist threat. As a result of surveillance operations, intelligence agencies had a photograph of his appearance, his car registration number and details of his home address. Yet despite these significant leads, there was no focused effort on identifying exactly who he was or precisely what he was involved in. If the police and MI5 had co-operated more closely and integrated their intelligence more effectively, then they may very well discovered additional useful intelligence or possibly even evidence of criminal behaviour. Therefore, although there was no intelligence failure in terms of failing to act on specific information regarding the 7/7 plot, there was certainly a broader failure of the counter-terrorism community to exploit intelligence. Clear opportunities were missed to develop the intelligence picture around a group of terrorist supporters that had known links to an operational terrorist cell.

Developing a national counter-terrorism network

Following the 7/7 terrorist attacks, there was a recognition within government that their established counter-terrorism strategy was not appropriate for dealing with the emerging terrorist threat. It became apparent that a 'fire-fighting' approach, based on tracking high-level targets and preventing large-scale attacks was unsuitable and left too much vulnerability to smaller scale operations.[24] There was a realisation that counter-terrorism agencies needed to take action against a much wider range of terrorist targets and intervene far earlier in the process of radicalisation, recruitment and attack planning. This would in turn necessitate improved intelligence activity at a local level and enhanced co-operation between

[22] Intelligence and Security Committee, 'Could 7/7 Have Been Prevented?', p. 57.
[23] Ibid., pp. 64–5.
[24] Peter Hennessy, 'From Secret State to Protective State', in Hennessy (ed.), *New Protective State*, p. 37.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990416 Published online by Cambridge University Press

individual counter-terrorism agencies. The Home Secretary, John Reid, observed that 'one of the lessons of 7/7 was that we needed more co-ordination'.[25] In line with this thinking, the government moved towards the creation of a national counter-terrorism network consisting of a number of 'regional counter-terrorism hubs'.[26] In 2008, the Home Office made clear that:

> an integrated and national operation network is being developed which includes, collectively, the Counter Terrorism Units (CTUs) and Counter Terrorist Intelligence Units (CTIUs) and the Metropolitan Police Service's Counter Terrorism Command, and which works in collaboration with the Security Service. This network brings Counter-Terrorism intelligence analysis and development functions together with investigations and operational activity. [27]

In support of this process, since 2005 MI5 has been expanding and accelerating its process of regionalisation across the United Kingdom.[28] This has lead to the creation of six regional MI5 stations in England covering the North East, North West, Midlands, East, South East, and Southern regions. In addition, there has been the launch of three new stations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.[29] Alongside the creation of the regional stations, there has also been the development of a 'Northern Operational Centre' to provide additional support for surveillance operations outside of London. By 2011, it is predicted that around one quarter of MI5 staff will be based outside of London.[30] The main focus of this expansion is to support the government's counter-terrorism strategy by working with regional partners to develop the local intelligence picture.

In parallel to the expansion of MI5, the police have taken steps to institute a 'national structure for counter terrorism policing'.[31] The Association of Chief Police Officers has stated that this comprises 'a structure that is built on the existing grass roots foundations of the police service' and which is 'interconnected and interoperable'.[32] In October 2006, the Metropolitan Police merged its previously separate Anti-Terrorist Branch and Special Branch into a unified 'Counter Terrorism Command', also known as 'Special Operations 15' (SO15). The creation of this organisation brought together available intelligence, investigative and operational resources under a combined structure.[33] On a day-to-day basis, the main responsibility of the Counter Terrorism Command is to collect intelligence on terrorist threats to London and to support the investigation of terrorist offences in other parts of United Kingdom.

In addition, a number of 'Counter Terrorism Units' (CTUs) have been set up across England with the purpose of providing 'co-ordination and specialist support

[25] John Reid, *Hansard* (11 July 2006), Column 1305.
[26] Jacqui Smith, 'Speech to the Institute for Public Policy Research Commission on National Security' (15 October 2008).
[27] Home Office, *From the Neighbourhood to the National: Policing our Communities Together* (HMSO, 2008), p. 71.
[28] Cabinet Office, *Government Response to the Intelligence and Security Committee's Annual Report 2005–2006* (HMSO, 2006), p. 6.
[29] Intelligence and Security Committee, *Annual Report 2006–2007*, p. 10.
[30] Jonathan Evans, 'Speech to the Society of Editors Conference' (5 November 2007).
[31] Tony McNulty, *Hansard* (22 February 2008), Column 2682W.
[32] Association of Chief Police Officers, *Police Reform Green Paper: The Future of Policing* (2008), p. 4.
[33] Metropolitan Police, {http://www.met.police.uk/so/counter_terrorism.htm} accessed on 31 October 2008.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990416 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to police across the country'.[34] At present, there are four Counter Terrorism Units located within England. They cover the North East region led by West Yorkshire Police, the North West region led by Greater Manchester Police, the West Midlands region led by the West Midlands Police, and the South East region led by Thames Valley Police. In other parts of the United Kingdom, there has been the creation of a 'Major Crime and Terrorism Investigation Unit' in Scotland and a 'Welsh Extremism and Counter Terrorism Unit' in Wales. The formation of the Counter Terrorism Units essentially saw the merging of Special Branch Officers from large police forces with additional personnel, including surveillance operatives, intelligence analysts, interpreters, forensic specialists and high-tech investigators. It is expected that once they are fully staffed, each CTU will have approximately 260 permanent members of staff.[35] The Counter Terrorism Units are charged with both reactive and a proactive role – investigating offences that have been committed whilst also gathering intelligence to prevent future terrorist attacks. Much of the operational work of the CTUs is 'self-generated' and comes as a result of their own leads and lines of inquiry, although they also act on information from partner agencies.[36]

At the force level, individual Special Branches still remain active. However, in terms of their counter-terrorism role, they have seen many of their analytical and specialist roles transferred to regional CTUs. Consequently, they are now more focused on gathering intelligence from local communities. To support this, there has been a significant expansion of dedicated 'Community Intelligence Officers'. These personnel operate at the Borough or Divisional level and have the responsibility of developing links to the local community, gathering relevant information and identifying potential intelligence sources.[37] In addition, there is an increased emphasis on the collection of counter-terrorism intelligence by all police officers under the auspices of project 'Rich Picture'.[38]

Alongside these structural reforms there has also been the creation a number of analytical 'fusion centres', with the aim of facilitating better co-operation and co-ordination between the different counter-terrorism agencies. Peter Gill has observed that such institutions 'combine the analytical resources of otherwise separate agencies on a targeted problem or person'.[39] Perhaps the most well-known example of a 'fusion centre' is the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC), which was created in June 2003 and brought together personnel from the intelligence agencies and the police, along with representatives from other relevant government departments. Bradley Bamford has described it as the 'most significant structural development within the intelligence community to date'.[40] More recently we have seen the expansion of fusion centres at a local level with the collocation of

[34] Association of Chief Police Officers, *National Counter Terrorism Policing Structure – Building Capability*, {http://www.sussex.police.uk/foi/UploadFolder/ACPOCT4PAGEA4.pdf} accessed on 31 October 2008.
[35] Tony McNulty, *Hansard* (28 February, 2008), Column 1840W.
[36] *BBC News*, 'Regional Anti-Terror Unit Formed', {http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/6516829.stm} accessed on 31 October 2008.
[37] *The Telegraph* (23 July 2007).
[38] Metropolitan Police, *Prevent Delivery Strategy* (24 July 2008), {http://www.mpa.gov.uk/committees/mpa/2008/080724/08.htm} accessed on 31 October 2008.
[39] Gill, 'Not Just Joining the Dots' (200), p. 37.
[40] Bradley Bamford, 'War against Terrorism', p. 744.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990416 Published online by Cambridge University Press

personnel from the new Counter Terrorism Units and the regional branches of MI5. In addition, there has been an increase in the number of GCHQ staff on secondment to other agencies, some of whom are embedded in counter-terrorism teams to provide specialist support for investigations.[41] As a result, the police and intelligence agencies are apparently now working closer together than ever before. Indeed, according to the Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police, it is no longer possible to tell 'who's the cop [. . .] who's the spook'.[42]

How successful have the reforms been?

The creation of a national structure for counter terrorism policing and the regionalisation of MI5 have apparently led to a significant improvement in the level of co-operation and co-ordination between counter-terrorism agencies. The Home Office Minister, Tony McNulty has claimed that 'the national structure has significantly increased the ability of the police to gather intelligence and evidence against terrorists and to disrupt them and their activities'.[43] Indeed, according to some observers there in no longer a lack of co-operation between the police and the intelligence services. The former head of the Counter Terrorism Command, Peter Clarke, has commented that: 'It is sometimes frustrating to hear and read the same tired old comments about MI5 and the police not working together. That is out of date. It is wrong, and is a lie that deserves to be well and truly nailed.'[44]

While the initiatives since 2005 should be welcomed, there are some indications that the development of a national counter-terrorism network has not been an unqualified success. Despite recent efforts, a number of terrorists have managed breach the United Kingdom's counter terrorism defences and conduct terrorist attacks. In the same way that counter-terrorism agencies failed to uncover the terrorist plots of the 'shoe bomber' Richard Reid, the 7/7 suicide bombers and the attempted 21/7 bombers, they have been similarly unable to disrupt a number of recent terrorist attacks. For example, it has come to light that MI5 had previously come across the members of the terrorist cell that conducted the attempted bombings of the 'Tiger Tiger' nightclub in London and Glasgow International Airport during 2007.[45] In a similar fashion, MI5 had some prior knowledge of Nicky Reilly, who attempted to detonate an improvised explosive device in an Essex restaurant during 2008.[46] Crucially, although information regarding these individuals seems to have been recorded on various databases, it appears that none of them had been the subject of further intelligence development.

Some commentators have suggested that a lack of resources can explain why intelligence agencies have not been able to disrupt every recent terrorist plot. In 2007, the Director General of MI5 stated that 'my main concern has been, and still is, we do not have enough people to do the job'.[47] In a similar manner, the Director of GCHQ has voiced concerns that 'we were spreading ourselves too thin

[41] *The Sunday Times* (2 December 2007).
[42] *BBC News*, {http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7137315.stm} accessed on 31 October 2008.
[43] Tony McNulty, *Hansard* (5 March 2008), Column 2682W.
[44] Peter Clarke, 'Speech at the Policy Exchange' (24 April 2007).
[45] *The Sunday Times* (8 July 2007).
[46] Ibid., (25 May 2008).
[47] Intelligence and Security Committee, Annual Report 2006–2007, p. 8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990416 Published online by Cambridge University Press

[. . .] we do not have enough CT resources'.[48] It is often argued that the reality of finite surveillance capabilities means that targets have to be prioritised and that it will never be possible to examine every potential suspect in detail. The current Director General of MI5, Jonathan Evans, has remarked that:

> There will be instances when individuals come to the notice of the Security Service or the police but then subsequently carry out acts of terrorism. This is inevitable. Every decision to investigate someone entails a decision not to investigate someone else. Knowing of somebody is not the same as knowing all about somebody. And it would be perverse for my Service to avoid knowing of somebody for fear of being held to blame if they later become involved in an attack. I think we should be very careful to bear this in mind when talking about so-called 'intelligence failures'.[49]

Whilst we should certainly be sympathetic to the resourcing issues faced by the intelligence agencies, it is important to recognise that there are additional challenges that also need to be addressed. The recent expansion of the intelligence agencies and the introduction of a new national counter-terrorism structure will not be successful unless the reforms are accompanied by a similar commitment to improved ways of working. Bradley Bamford argues that: 'To achieve greater effectiveness in identifying and disrupting international terrorist networks, the UK's current approach necessarily requires an unprecedented level of inter-agency co-operation and, most importantly, information sharing.'[50]

In many ways, these new inter-organisational networks demand a different approach to communication that makes traditional intelligence agencies somewhat uncomfortable. As Ronald Deibert has pointed out 'network intelligence is non-hierarchical, open and distributed rather than hierarchical, secretive and compartmentalized'.[51] This kind of unimpeded approach to communication presents a unique risk for intelligence agencies, as they have a clear duty to safeguard their information. Indeed, it is fair to say that the idea of an open and accessible network goes against many of the fundamental principles and practices of the intelligence world.

In reality, the creation of a national counter-terrorism network continues to be undermined by many of the same old problems associated with intelligence sharing. Beyond the rhetoric of joint working and co-operation, the traditional bureaucratic structures and the arcane practices of the intelligence community still hamper the development of effective intelligence networks. At the root of the problem is the division of the collection and analysis of intelligence between so many different agencies. This is not a new problem and has constantly plagued counter-terrorism co-operation since the days of fighting the Provisional IRA. As the former Assistant Commissioner for Special Operations, Andy Hayman, has succinctly remarked, 'the way that the counter-terrorism effort in Britain is organised is a mess'.[52] Unfortunately, creating formal channels of communication between different agencies under the guise of a 'counter-terrorism network' is not enough to solve the problem alone. Within some parts of the UK intelligence community

[48] Intelligence and Security Committee, Annual Report 2006–2007, p. 15.
[49] Security Service, {https://www.mi5.gov.uk/output/Page562.html} accessed on 31 October 2008.
[50] B. Bamford, 'The United Kingdom's "War Against Terrorism"', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 16:4 (2004), p. 750.
[51] Ronald Deibert, 'Deep Probe: The Evolution of Network Intelligence', *Intelligence and National Security*, 18:4 (2003), pp. 185–6.
[52] *The Times* (10 September 2008).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990416 Published online by Cambridge University Press

there still remains a cultural aversion to intelligence sharing, the absence of integrated IT systems, and a lack of operational co-ordination. Unless these areas are addressed, the new national counter-terrorism network is destined to under-perform and future intelligence failures are inevitable.

The first problem that confronts the developing a national counter-terrorism network is the dissemination of intelligence. In many cases, individual intelligence agencies feel unable to share intelligence due to concerns about security and secrecy.[53] Despite national guidelines, on a practical level intelligence agencies often have different standards surrounding the safeguarding and use of intelligence and this creates a certain degree of mistrust and misunderstanding between them. Richard J. Aldrich draws our attention to the persistence of 'highly compartmentalized national intelligence gathering'.[54] This is especially the case in terms of handling informants and running agents, where there are legitimate concerns about protecting the safety of assets. Although it is also applicable to surveillance operations and the interception of communications, where there is a reluctance to endanger ongoing efforts by revealing techniques and sources.

Such problems of dissemination have not been solved by recent reforms. Despite a closer working relationship between intelligence agencies and the police, the fundamentally different nature of their roles and responsibilities means there are often concerns about sharing operational intelligence. While the police are responsible for taking 'executive action' against terrorist suspects, by making arrests and conducting counter-terrorism investigations, the intelligence agencies are primarily focused on intelligence gathering and other forms of 'covert operational counter-terrorist activity'.[55] The fact that much police activity is overt and subject to legal scrutiny at trial, means that other intelligence agencies can sometimes be reluctant to share intelligence, for fear that that their activities will come to light and endanger future operations. As Richard J. Aldrich observes, 'source-protection is such a firmly established convention that it is unlikely to change'.[56] This means that important intelligence will not always make its way to an incident room or cross the desk of a local unit investigating a terrorist suspect. Ultimately, different organisational cultures and practices regarding the handling and use of intelligence continue to create significant barriers to effective intelligence sharing.

The second challenge faced by the development of a national counter-terrorism network is the integration of information. Separate agencies often hold important pieces of the intelligence jigsaw, but they are not always brought together in an effective way. In many instances, intelligence assessments are produced by individual agencies 'as per their own analytical interests and requirements' and are only really integrated at a strategic level by the Joint Intelligence Committee.[57] At a tactical level, it is often difficult for an intelligence analyst working in one organisation to search for relevant information in a different agency. Instead, they are reliant on making requests for information that may not always be processed

[53] Herman, 'Counter-Terrorism', pp. 46–7.
[54] R. J. Aldrich, 'Transatlantic Intelligence and Security Cooperation', *International Affairs*, 80:4 (2004), p. 732.
[55] HM Government, 'Countering International Terrorism', p. 17.
[56] Aldrich, 'Transatlantic Intelligence', p. 732.
[57] Philip Davies, 'Intelligence Culture and Intelligence Failure in Britain and the United States', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 17:3 (2004), pp. 502–3.

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in a timely or accurate manner. Unfortunately, sometimes intelligence agencies do not understand the importance of the information they hold or appreciate that it could be relevant to their partners. As a result, Peter Gill points out that 'information may just locate in voids where no agency has an immediate interest or adequate resources to analyse or otherwise deal with it'.[58]

The inaccessibility of data continues to undermine intelligence sharing between different counter-terrorism units. There are a myriad of different IT systems across the intelligence community that are either incompatible or unconnected to those in other agencies. The government has attempted to address some of these problems through the introduction of 'SCOPE' – an inter-agency IT system that supports intelligence sharing within the intelligence community. However, the second phase of the project entitled 'SCOPE 2', which would have seen a further development of the system and its roll out across other government departments, looks to have been either abandoned or significantly scaled back due to technical and financial problems.[59] There has been a similar lack of progress in harmonising policing intelligence systems.[60] In 2004, the Bichard Inquiry found major deficiencies with IT infrastructure of the police, observing that 'there is still no common IT system for managing criminal intelligence'.[61] In the realm of police counter-terrorism intelligence, the 'National Special Branch Intelligence System' is only capable of providing a vertical link between the police and MI5 and cannot facilitate horizontal intelligence sharing between individual police forces.[62] In an attempt to address some of these problems, the Government has been pursuing project 'IMPACT' and the development of a 'Police National Database' to facilitate improved intelligence sharing. However, many of the key features of this programme have still not been delivered and it is unclear whether the finished product will meet the actual needs of its users. Unfortunately, it appears that many of the individual databases and information stores held within the intelligence community will remain inaccessible beyond their immediate users.

The third obstacle in the way of developing an effective national counter-terrorism network is the joint-tasking and co-ordination of intelligence activity. Often, individual intelligence agencies have their own separate institutional priorities that are not necessarily compatible with those of their partners.[63] As a result, they can be reluctant to surrender their resources to common tasking process, meaning that intelligence operations are not always aligned. Michael Herman observes that 'vertical authority and prerogatives create tensions between immediate institutional interests and the broader common good; common interests compete with turf dominance'.[64] In particular, the maintenance of fairly rigid institutional boundaries between 'foreign' and 'domestic' intelligence agencies, and 'collection' and 'analysis' bodies, often frustrates the emergence of a co-ordinated intelligence response.[65] Consequently, we are sometimes left with a disjointed

[58] Peter Gill, 'Not Just Joining the Dots But Crossing the Borders and Bridging the Voids: Constructing Security Networks after 11 September 2001', *Policing and Society*, 16:1 (2006), p. 36.
[59] *The Guardian* (16 July 2008).
[60] Garry Hindle, 'Policing Terrorism in the UK', *Policing*, 1:1 (2007), p. 40.
[61] *The Bichard Inquiry Report* (HSMO: 2004), p. 118.
[62] Paddy Tomkins, *Evidence before the Select Committee on European Union* (27 October 2004).
[63] Gill, 'Not Just Joining the Dots', p. 40–4; Philip Davies, 'Intelligence Culture', p. 498.
[64] Herman, 'Counter-Terrorism', p. 45.
[65] Ibid., p. 45; Gill, 'Not Just Joining the Dots', p. 36.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990416 Published online by Cambridge University Press

approach, where intelligence assets are hoarded to purse the particular priorities of individual agencies.

The presence of divergent institutional priorities still poses a problem for the intelligence community as a whole. Garry Hindle argues that 'it is not merely a case of spending more, but introducing efficiencies and connectivity to raise capability – a massively more difficult proposition than increasing budgets'.[66] Perhaps the clearest example of such divergent priorities is that the main intelligence agencies are primarily concerned with combating national security threats, whereas the police service is expected to combat a much wider range of criminal activity. This can often lead to a conflict of interest between using resources to achieve criminal convictions, versus deploying assets to support covert intelligence activities. Within the police service itself, there are often competing priorities between individual police forces and the Counter Terrorism Command in London.[67] This situation is further aggravated by the fact that each of the intelligence agencies and police forces operate their own separate tasking and co-ordination process, which complicates the leverage of resources across the wider intelligence community. In addition, there are also problems of budgetary control and the funding of counter-terrorism activities. For example, despite central government funding, many national counter-terrorism operations still rely on the support of individual police forces and police authorities, who can often be reluctant to divert resources away from other local priorities.[68] Ultimately, this continued influence of different institutional priorities still presents a significant challenge for the implementation of a co-ordinated national counter-terrorism structure.

Conclusion

Without question, some significant progress has been made in recent years towards the development of a national counter-terrorism network in the United Kingdom. The creation of a number of specialist Counter Terrorism Units and the regionalisation of MI5 are major steps forward in this direction. Indeed, there is clear evidence of increased levels of intelligence sharing among some members of the counter-terrorism community, particularly in situations where a major terrorist threat has been identified. The successful conviction of a number of high-profile terrorist suspects demonstrates that the police and intelligence agencies are able to coalesce effectively around particularly dangerous targets. However, while these short-term surges in co-operation are encouraging, the level of intelligence sharing around peripheral targets within terrorist networks appears to be much less sustained. This has led to some notable problems in making accurate threat assessments regarding individual terrorist suspects.

Particularly at the operational level, some parts of the intelligence community continue to remain dislocated, with responsibilities split between many different agencies, including the police, MI5, MI6 and GCHQ. The often confusing nature

[66] Hindle, 'Policing Terrorism', p. 40.
[67] Ibid., p. 41.
[68] *The Times* (10 September 2008).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990416 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of the relationship between these separate agencies has meant that in some cases potential terrorist risks are not identified and managed appropriately. As illustrated by the intelligence failures surrounding the 7/7 suicide bombers, the various counter-terrorism intelligence agencies in the United Kingdom have sometimes been unable to capitalise on investigative leads and share intelligence effectively. Such failures are partly the result of limited resources, but they are also the consequence of the intelligence community's fractured organisational structure and disconnected way of working. This is a major problem, as the contemporary terrorist threat demands a holistic and joined-up counter-terrorism response, aimed not only at preventing specific terrorist attacks but also disrupting wider terrorist networks of recruiters, trainers and fund-raisers. In order to ensure that the new counter-terrorism structure achieves its potential, the reform of the intelligence community needs to go beyond simply expanding the number of staff working under traditional arrangements. Whilst some progress has been made in this regard, there are many areas that still require attention, including the development of joined-up IT resources, the creation of a shared 'corporate culture', and the agreement of collective goals between counter-terrorism agencies.[69] Without such crucial advances, problems of intelligence sharing will continue to undermine the effectiveness of the emerging national counter-terrorism network and the intelligence community will be destined to repeat the mistakes of the past.

[69] Herman, 'Counter-Terrorism', p. 51–2; Omand, 'Reflections', pp. 120–1.

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