

Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament

Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism

Chairman:
The Rt Hon. Dr Julian Lewis MP



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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.

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† in the Home Office.

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. 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. Its Inquiries tend to concentrate on current events and issues of concern, and therefore focus on operational‡ and policy matters, while its Annual Reports address administration and finance.

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

* Throughout the report, the term 'Intelligence Community' is used to refer to the seven organisations that the Committee oversees; the term 'Agencies' refers to MI5, SIS and GCHQ as a collective; and the term 'Departments' refers to the intelligence and security parts of the Ministry of Defence, Cabinet Office and the Home Office (DI, JIO, National Security Adviser (NSA), NSS and Homeland Security Group) as a collective, unless specified otherwise.

† From 1 April 2021, the Home Office moved to a new structure "based around missions and capabilities". Homeland Security Group (one of the new missions) comprises what was formerly known as the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT), along with three departments from the Serious Organised Crime Group (Economic Crime, Cyber Policy and the Serious Organised Crime Capability Team).

‡ The Committee oversees operations subject to the criteria set out in section 2 of the Justice and Security Act 2013.

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 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.

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).

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
IDEOLOGIES.....	3
‘Domestic Extremism’	4
‘Right-Wing Terrorism’.....	5
The importance of terminology	6
‘Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism’	7
HOW THE EXTREME RIGHT-WING TERRORISM THREAT HAS EVOLVED	9
History of the threat	9
ERWT in 2012 and 2019: A comparison	12
THE CURRENT THREAT LEVEL.....	15
The threat level	15
Number of incidents.....	16
Number of disruptions	16
The trajectory	17
How the ERWT threat could develop	17
The impact of recent events	19
EXTREME RIGHT-WING TERRORIST GROUPS	23
‘White Supremacist’ and ‘White Nationalist’ groups	23
‘Cultural Nationalist’ groups.....	24
‘Identitarian’ movement.....	24
Satanism.....	25
Virtual groups.....	25
Incels and Right-Wing Extremists: Shared grievances.....	26
SELF-INITIATED TERRORISTS	29
Mental health and developmental disorders	30
Drugs.....	32
A CHANGING DEMOGRAPHIC	33
THE MILITARY AND POLICE INSIDER THREAT.....	35
The military.....	35
The police.....	37
THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION.....	41
ERWT groups in Northern Europe.....	41
ERWT activity in Germany.....	42
The ERWT threat in other Northern European countries	44
ERWT activity in the US and Canada.....	45
Links to the UK.....	48
***	49
ERWT support from other nation states: Russia.....	50
Mixed Martial Arts.....	51

THE ONLINE SPACE	53
Categories of ERWT content online	53
Platforms hosting ERWT material	56
TARGETS.....	65
Ethnic and religious groups	65
LGBTQ+ community.....	65
Politicians and other public figures.....	66
National institutions and infrastructure.....	67
A CHANGE IN RESPONSE.....	69
The 2017 attacks	69
EXTREME RIGHT-WING TERRORISM STRATEGY (HOME OFFICE).....	73
CONTEST (Counter-Terrorism Strategy).....	73
Prevent strand.....	74
Pursue strand.....	75
Working with advocacy groups.....	75
EXTREME RIGHT-WING TERRORISM ACTION (MI5 AND CTP).....	77
The case for change	77
Threat assessments.....	82
Investigations	83
Counter-Terrorism Operations Centre.....	88
Resource implications	88
Behavioural Science Unit	90
GCHQ	92
SIS.....	93
PROSCRIPTION.....	95
Further legislation: Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Act	99
TACKLING EXTREME RIGHT-WING TERRORISM FINANCING	101
TACKLING EXTREME RIGHT-WING TERRORISM ONLINE.....	105
The Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism.....	107
Wider work with communication service providers	109
Why ERWT online is a new challenge	109
The Government ‘Online Harms’ legislation.....	110
INTERNATIONAL.....	115
Closer co-operation: International partners	115
The impact of Brexit	117
ANNEX A: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	121
ANNEX B: PREVENT	125
Prevent strand.....	125
The Counter-Extremism Strategy	128
ANNEX C: LIST OF WITNESSES.....	129

INTRODUCTION

While vast resources have been spent on the ‘war on terror’ fighting jihadist extremism since 9/11, another type of extremism has not received the same attention: right-wing extremism. Less prominent on the public and political agenda, it has killed more people in the United States since 9/11 than the Jihadist variant. The fact that until recently right-wing extremist attacks have been more frequent, yet less deadly on average than those committed by Jihadists, has contributed to a misconception of the size of the threat.

– Munich Security Report 2020

1. On 15 March 2019, Brenton Tarrant conducted a terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, killing 51 and injuring 49. Tarrant live-streamed the attack on Facebook and posted links to his ‘manifesto’ on 8chan, a Right-Wing Extremist-dominated site. In the first 24 hours after the attack, there were at least 1.5 million attempts to upload the video. Tarrant was inspired by international narratives, marking his weapons with the names of attackers and attacks from around the world – including reference to Darren Osborne’s racially motivated attack outside a mosque in Finsbury Park in London in June 2017.

2. In the wake of Darren Osborne’s attack, and the three other terrorist attacks suffered in the UK in 2017, MI5 and Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) had undertaken an overarching Operational Improvement Review (OIR) to identify improvements to the counter-terrorism machine. One of the key recommendations was that MI5 should take a bigger role in tackling what was at that time called ‘Domestic Extremism’ – a rather unhelpful catch-all term which covered a range of, in many instances, quite unrelated disruptive and violent activity, from right-wing and left-wing attacks to sabotage activity carried out by animal rights activists. At the time, David Anderson QC (later Lord Anderson), formerly the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, who oversaw the OIR, criticised the failure of MI5 to engage with the threat:

I detected a lingering attachment in parts of MI5 to the notion that XRW [Extreme Right-Wing] plotting does not engage their national security function in the same way as Islamist plotting does. Whatever the status of that position in the past, it can surely not survive the detonation by Anders Breivik of a bomb outside the Prime Minister’s office in Oslo, or the terrorist murder by Thomas Mair of Jo Cox MP.¹

3. In 2018, it was decided that MI5 would take over from CTP as lead for this threat, which would be termed ‘Right-Wing Terrorism’. Subsequently, in April 2020, MI5 took on full primacy for what has since been renamed ‘Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism’ (ERWT).

4. This transfer of responsibility marked a major change in approach. ERWT is now assessed using the same language and methodology as that used in relation to the Islamist terrorist threat, and is incorporated into the UK threat level assessment. The Committee therefore considered it important to review how the transition has worked – from areas such as the transfer of data to the recruitment of CHIS (or Covert Human Intelligence Sources) – and

¹ ‘Independent Assurance of the Police and MI5 Reviews of the London and Manchester Terror Attacks’ – Letter from David Anderson QC to the Home Secretary, 2 November 2017.

what the Government's strategy, and MI5 and CTP's operational approach, now is. It is also crucial to understand what the impact has been on the other areas of MI5's work as it has had to absorb this new area of work, and build its understanding of this increasingly complex and diverse threat.

5. Although the shape and profile of the Far-Right movement has evolved – from the ascendancy of Oswald Mosley in the 1930s to the formation of the National Front and the emergence of the British National Party (BNP) – as a belief system it encompasses a wide range of individuals and organisations whose political outlook is more extreme than those at the centre right of the political spectrum, primarily on issues such as race and immigration, many of whom espouse violence. There are of course a broad range of mainstream right-wing views which are not linked to any kind of extremist ideology, let alone terrorist intent. It is the small minority at the extremist end of the movement who have engaged in racially and politically motivated violence, which has increasingly morphed into terrorism, with attacks such as that by David Copeland in London in 1999 and the murder in 2016 of Jo Cox MP by former BNP member and neo-Nazi Thomas Mair.

6. ERWT is a fragmented and complex area – not least when it comes to the question of terminology which appears to be an ever-shifting landscape. The new ERWT threat is increasingly driven by the internet and characterised by a technologically aware demographic of predominantly young men, many of them still in their teens who are typically 'Self-Initiated Terrorists'. It is notable, and a matter of particular concern, that evidence points to a number of them having mental health issues. There are also indications that some have issues with drugs. Crucially, few of these individuals belong to organised groups, or indeed need to – they are radicalised, and can radicalise others, online from the seclusion of their bedrooms.

7. As with so many of today's security challenges, the Intelligence Community are reliant on the communication service providers (CSPs) taking action: while the Home Office is making some progress bringing the major CSPs on board when it comes to properly monitoring and removing terrorist content, a great deal is riding on the Online Safety Bill in forcing the smaller, but no less influential, organisations to focus on their responsibilities in this area.

8. In this, the UK is not alone. Our allies are facing the same challenges, as technology and ease of communication mean that ERWT is a threat without borders, and in most cases without affiliation, making it a significant challenge for the Intelligence Community.

IDEOLOGIES

9. The terminology used to describe Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT) is complex and subject to change, as the understanding of the threat and indeed the threat itself has evolved. In particular, the terms used by the Intelligence Community and Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) to describe this threat have evolved, as primacy for ERWT has transferred to MI5 from CTP. Even the term ‘ERWT’ was only adopted within Government during the course of our Inquiry.

10. ERWT is closely linked to a broader Far-Right movement – most of which does not directly engage in violence. There is a wide disparity of terminology and definitions across academia and the Government to describe the Far Right, Right-Wing Extremism and ERWT. For clarity, this Report has used the terms delineated below.

Terminology used in this Report

Far Right (FR)² is used as an umbrella term to encapsulate the entire movement which has a Far-Right political outlook in relation to matters such as culture, race, immigration and identity. Critically, this includes groups and individuals who hold that Western civilisations are under threat from ‘non-native’ people and ideas. The term encompasses individuals and movements including the quasi-democratic and populist, and extends from the British National Party through to the proscribed group National Action.

Extreme Right Wing (XRW) will be used to refer to Right-Wing Extremist groups and individuals within the Far Right who maintain active opposition to democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and respect for and tolerance of different faiths/beliefs.

Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT) describes the segment of the Far-Right movement involved in politically motivated violence. It is this that falls within the remit of Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) and MI5 – for example, the actions of Darren Osborne (the Finsbury Park mosque attacker).

Terrorism, as defined by Section 1 of the Terrorism Act 2000 (TACT), encapsulates the use or threat of action which is designed to influence the government or an international governmental organisation, or to intimidate the public or a section of the public, and which is used to advance a political, religious or ideological cause. Such actions include those that: involve serious violence against a person or serious damage to property; endanger another person’s life; create a serious risk to the health or safety of the public; or are designed to seriously interfere with or disrupt an electronic system.

Hate crime is defined as “*any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a personal characteristic. Hate crime can be motivated by disability, gender identity, race, religion or faith and sexual orientation*”.³

² The Far Right is also sometimes referred to as the ‘Radical Right’.

³ Home Office, *2010–2015 Government policy: Crime Prevention*, 8 May 2015.

Extremism is defined as “*the vocal or active opposition to [British] fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs*”. Calls for the death of members of the British Armed Forces are also considered extremist.⁴

‘Domestic Extremism’

11. Following the 2017 UK terror attacks,⁵ MI5 and CTP conducted an internal review (known as the Operational Improvement Review, or OIR), which was overseen by David Anderson QC (later Lord). As part of the review, Lord Anderson recommended that there should be a common approach for Islamist and non-Islamist terrorism (which includes ERWT), and that the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) should incorporate ERWT into its national threat assessments.⁶

12. The review also found that the terms ‘Domestic Extremism’ and ‘International Counter-Terrorism’, which were in use at that time, were “*manifestly deficient*” for several reasons, primarily because:

- ‘Domestic Extremism’ had been used to describe everything from proscribed Right-Wing Extremist organisations, such as National Action (which presents a real terrorist concern), to left-wing and ‘single-issue’ groups (such as animal rights activists), which rarely cause more than occasional public order concerns. The terminology did not, therefore, reflect that the most likely root of any terrorist concern in this category was ERWT.
- The terminology incorrectly implied that Islamist terrorism is always ‘international’ (even though a significant proportion of perpetrators are entirely ‘home-grown’) and that ERWT is always ‘domestic’, despite its clear transnational links.
- Describing non-Islamist activity as ‘extremism’ even when it is a threat to national security appeared to imply that it is taken less seriously than Islamist ‘terrorism’.

As a result of the OIR, JTAC undertook a review, in the autumn of 2018, of the categories that define terrorism.

13. Following the review it was decided in January 2019 that JTAC would cease using the terms ‘international’ and ‘domestic’ to identify different types of terrorism, and the following new definitions would now be used:

- *Islamist Terrorism (incorporating Sunni extremist terrorism and state-sponsored Shia terrorism);*

⁴ 2015 UK Counter-Extremism Strategy.

⁵ During 2017, the United Kingdom suffered five terrorist attacks: Westminster (March), Manchester (May), London Bridge (June), Finsbury Park (June) and Parsons Green (September).

⁶ The Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) is the UK’s centre for analysing intelligence on the threat from terrorism, and is responsible for setting the threat level. JTAC is a multi-agency body, with officers from across Whitehall, the military and the intelligence and law enforcement communities. It is based in Thames House (MI5’s headquarters), and the head of JTAC reports to the Director General of MI5.

- *Right Wing Terrorism (incorporating offences motivated by both so-called Far Right and Extreme Right Wing ideologies);*
- *Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue Terrorism (LASIT);*
- *Ethno-nationalist/Separatist Terrorism (including Sikh terrorism, Basque separatists); and*
- *Northern Ireland-Related Terrorism (NIRT).⁷*

‘Right-Wing Terrorism’

14. JTAC assesses that most individuals in this area are motivated by an ideology somewhere between the Far-Right and Extreme Right-Wing perspectives, with there being significant overlaps between the two. Whilst an extremist motivated by Extreme Right-Wing or Right-Wing ideologies may demonstrate many of the same beliefs as a terrorist, the key differential is that terrorists believe in, and potentially pursue, the use of terrorist violence to further that ideology. It is only those with a terrorist intent that are considered in this Report.

15. On 16 May 2019, JTAC, MI5 and CTP began using new terminology separating out the Right-Wing Extremist ideologies that might provide justification for what was (then termed) Right-Wing Terrorism, into three broad categories.⁸ The following are MI5 and CTP’s definition and categorisation of ideologies that potential terrorists might adopt: as with Islamist terrorism there is no suggestion that all those who hold these views or subscribe to these ideologies have terrorist intent – this categorisation process is used as a means of assessing those who might be potential terrorists:

- *‘Cultural Nationalism’ is a belief that ‘Western Culture’ is under threat from mass migration into Europe and from a lack of integration by certain ethnic and cultural groups. The ideology tends to focus on the rejection of cultural practices such as the wearing of the burqa or the perceived rise of the use of sharia law. In the UK this has been closely associated with anti-Islam groups.*
- *‘White Nationalism’ is a belief that mass migration from the ‘non-white’ world, and demographic change, poses an existential threat to the ‘White Race’ and ‘Western Culture’. Advocates for some sort of ‘White’ homeland, either through partition of already existing countries, or by the (if necessary forced) repatriation of ethnic minorities. Much of this rhetoric is present in the ‘Identitarian’ movement.⁹*
- *‘White Supremacism’ is a belief that the ‘White Race’ has certain inalienable physical and mental characteristics that makes it superior (with some variation) to other races. Often associated with conspiracy theories that explain the decline in ‘white’ political and social status over the last hundred years. This can also*

⁷ Written evidence – MI5 Quarterly Report, 1 January – 31 March 2019.

⁸ JTAC paper, 16 May 2019.

⁹ Identitarian groups such as Generation Identity stress the importance of protecting the ‘white race’, and advocate a ‘white homeland’ to be achieved by the ‘repatriation’ of people of colour. Brenton Tarrant, the Christchurch mosque attacker, named his ‘manifesto’ ‘The Great Replacement’ after a key theory advocated by Identitarians (among others), which maintains that white ‘natives’ in the West are being ‘replaced’ by non-white (usually Muslim) immigrants.

*encapsulate a belief in the spiritual superiority of the ‘White Race’, often describing racial differences in quasi-religious terms (such as the ‘Aryan soul’).*¹⁰

16. In January 2020, there was a further shift in the terminology used by the intelligence and security Agencies,¹¹ with Right-Wing Extremist ideologies brigaded slightly differently into the following categories:

- ‘White Supremacists’ and ‘White Nationalists’;
- ‘Cultural Nationalists’; and
- ‘Identitarians’.

(We consider how these terms compare internationally later in the Report.)

The importance of terminology

17. We questioned the efficacy and relevance of this plethora of categories and definitions, suggesting that this ‘alphabet soup’ of terminology was confusing, and whether it was relevant when it came to tackling the threat. MI5, CTP and the Home Office were, however, clear that having specific terminology which everyone recognised was essential. The Director General of MI5 explained:

*We are not sort of fetishising endless subdivisions of these categories for its own sake. It is because, to make good sophisticated judgements about risk, we need to think more clearly about this phenomenon than the subjects of interest themselves think about it ... one of the hardest pieces here is to differentiate between very aggressive violent rhetoric from many, many individuals and the much smaller number who will actually progress to plotting terrorism itself.*¹²

18. The Head of CTP was clear that “*defined language and defined ideology*” was essential when it came to being able to put an “*evidential case before the Crown Prosecution Services that gets over section 1 of TACT 2000*”¹³ and secure a conviction. He noted that after an attack “*you will see in the media we quite often say ‘we are open minded as to the motive’ and ‘counter-terrorism is supporting the local force’ and that is because the only way to determine it is by deep investigation and the thing we are looking for is ideology*”.¹⁴

19. Homeland Security Group also endorsed this detailed categorisation, noting that in the online space it was an essential tool when dealing with communication service providers who were “*looking for a degree of intellectual rigour*” in determining the differing levels of XRW and ERWT material online.¹⁵

20. When the Committee met the Home Secretary in May 2021, she acknowledged that this complex terminology was a “*challenging area*”, but that it was an important tool in

¹⁰ JTAC paper, 16 May 2019.

¹¹ MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 13 January 2020.

¹² Oral evidence – MI5, 28 April 2021.

¹³ Oral evidence – CTP, 28 April 2021.

¹⁴ Oral evidence – CTP, 29 April 2021.

¹⁵ Oral evidence – Home Office, 28 April 2021.

ensuring that “we are effectively, to put this very bluntly, going after the right types, the right individuals with the wrong motivations, the behaviours and the characteristics that are deeply concerning.”¹⁶

‘Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism’

21. If the terminology is necessary, then it has to be accurate. Towards the end of our Inquiry – which had until that point been using the then terminology of ‘Right-Wing Terrorism’ – we were told that there had been a further review of terminology in May 2021. This time, it was to examine whether the term ‘Right-Wing Terrorism’ was the correct one to use as there were concerns that it was stigmatising those who hold mainstream right-wing political views. The review was undertaken by the counter-terrorism (CT) community, including CTP, MI5, GCHQ, JTAC, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and officials in the Home Office, who:

*reviewed almost 40 options to identify credible alternatives that would primarily be operationally viable, accurate as a descriptor of the threat we face, and clearly understood by the general public.*¹⁷

22. The review considered that the terminology should be changed, recommending that ‘Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism’ should be used as the “umbrella term” covering the various sub-ideologies identified by JTAC (‘Cultural Nationalism’, ‘White Nationalism’ and ‘White Supremacism’). There would, however, be no changes to the way the threat would be evaluated – MI5 and CTP would still be looking at the same group of Subjects of Interest (SOIs). When we questioned why the change was felt to be necessary, the Home Office explained:

*This addition of ‘Extreme’ as a prefix to ‘Right-Wing Terrorism’ makes it clear that mainstream political views are not what operational organisations are interested in. Of all the prefixes the CT community assessed, ‘Extreme’ has the clearest negative connotations and best describes the activity in question.*¹⁸

A. It is clearly difficult to delineate precisely the ideologies that might motivate Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists; however, we recognise that MI5 and Counter Terrorism Policing must be able to differentiate between them, not least because of the evidential thresholds.

B. Nevertheless, there is a risk that the varying terminologies used to categorise potential terrorists may cause confusion, including, most worryingly, to risk conflation of ideology with intent. It is important to be clear that there is no suggestion that all those who subscribe to these ideologies have terrorist intent; this is simply a means to establish what might be motivating potential terrorists.

C. More broadly, we welcome the recent addition of the word ‘Extreme’ to the previous term ‘Right-Wing Terrorism’ – it allays any possibility of the stigmatisation of those holding mainstream right-wing views.

¹⁶ Oral evidence – Home Secretary, 20 May 2021.

¹⁷ Written evidence – Home Office, 8 June 2021.

¹⁸ Written evidence – Home Office, 8 June 2021.

HOW THE EXTREME RIGHT-WING TERRORISM THREAT HAS EVOLVED

History of the threat

23. The British Far Right can trace its roots back to the 1930s and the emergence of Sir Oswald Mosley and his party, the British Union of Fascists. Mosley went on to form the Union Movement, a collection of Far-Right organisations in 1948. The movement contested London elections in 1949, and had a single councillor elected in Cumbria in 1953. Mosley stood for election as a Member of Parliament in both the 1959 and 1966 General Elections but failed to be elected. While the Union Movement faded into obscurity in the 1970s, the National Front was created in 1967, and became a household name by the 1970s. It reached the peak of its popularity in 1979, when it stood candidates in 303 seats in the General Election, but underwent a swift decline in the 1980s.

24. The British National Party (BNP) was formed by John Tyndall, co-founder of the National Front, in 1982. During the 1980s and 1990s, the BNP placed little emphasis on contesting elections, in which it did poorly, focusing instead on street marches and rallies. A growing 'moderniser' faction was frustrated by Tyndall's leadership, and ousted him in 1999. The new leader, Nick Griffin, sought to broaden the BNP's electoral base by presenting a more 'moderate' image, targeting concerns about rising immigration rates and emphasising localised community campaigns. This resulted in increased electoral presence throughout the 2000s (at one stage it had two Members of the European Parliament). Concerns regarding financial mismanagement resulted in Griffin being removed from office in 2014.

25. In 1992, Combat 18 (C18), a White Supremacist and openly neo-Nazi group, was formed by Paul Sargent as a stewarding group to protect events being organised by the BNP from anti-fascists. Opposed to electoral politics, C18 split from the BNP in 1993 on ideological grounds. C18 took control of the Blood and Honour music scene, a neo-Nazi music promotion network and political group founded in the UK in 1987. The group had a close relationship with the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) based in West Belfast and with former members of the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF), the cover name of the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), a paramilitary organisation in Northern Ireland. In 1998, C18 was associated with a letter-bomb campaign in Denmark, with targets including a left-wing group and an opposing Extreme Right-Wing (XRW) member from the British C18 wing. This was believed to have been orchestrated by a prominent C18 member – Will Browning – in the UK through Thomas Nakaba, a Danish Right-Wing Extremist. Nabaka, who was jailed for the offence, implicated Will Browning at trial for orchestrating the letter-bomb campaign.

26. In 1999, Sargent (who had split from C18 in 1993 over allegations that he was an informant for MI5) and fellow C18 member Martin Cross were sentenced to life in prison for the murder of Christopher Castle (an associate of Paul Sargent, with whom he had been feuding). Will Browning took over leadership of C18, a role he still holds today. C18 remains notorious throughout Europe, and the brand has been adopted by a number of international White Supremacist organisations. C18 retains links to the Blood and Honour music scene, which is now banned in a number of countries: Germany outlawed it in 2000; Spain in 2011; Russia in 2012; and in 2019 the Canadian government placed it on its list of designated terror groups. Blood and Honour is not proscribed in the UK. When we asked the Head of Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) about this apparent anomaly, ***:

*the reality is that we have seen for many years a decline in numbers of people actually concerned in those Blood and Honour events, the kind of music festival scene that was inspiring or inciting some hatred but not necessarily a kind of ideological cause.*¹⁹

27. The 1990s also saw the emergence of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT). In 1999, David Copeland targeted black, Asian and LGBT people in Brixton, Brick Lane and Soho in a series of nail bombings.

David Copeland's bombing campaign

Between 17 and 30 April 1999, over three consecutive weekends, David Copeland, a 22-year-old neo-Nazi, was responsible for a series of nail bomb explosions in London. Copeland was a former member of the BNP and the National Socialist Movement, and claimed to take his inspiration from C18.

17 April – Copeland left a timed device comprising four-inch nails detonated by fireworks in Electric Avenue, Brixton, targeting the largely black community there.

24 April – A similar device was detonated in London's Brick Lane injuring several Muslims who were gathering outside a mosque for prayers.

30 April – A device exploded outside the Admiral Duncan public house in Soho, in the heart of London's LGBT community.

Copeland's bombing campaign killed three people, and injured 140 others. In 2000, Copeland was convicted of murder and given six consecutive life sentences.²⁰

28. National Action emerged online in late 2013 as a youth-orientated White Supremacist group following a National Socialist ideology. ***.²¹ National Action targeted its recruitment at university campuses, aiming for a different profile of recruit than that associated with traditional White Supremacist groups. It also actively attempted to recruit military personnel. CTP advises:

*National Action also ran several training camps in the UK, which focused on fitness, self-defence, propaganda and advice on how members could prepare for a race war. National Action also had a number of 'key associations' [i.e. links] globally. These were directly related to Right Wing Extremist activity and extended beyond online contact, involving travel and direct contact. In Europe, National Action held 'associations' with 12 countries, which included joint activity with other Right Wing Extremist groups, the hosting of training camps, and attendance at Far Right events. Beyond Europe, National Action were assessed to have associations with the Australian-based Antipodean Resistance, as well as having significant ties to the US-based Atomwaffen Division (AWD): the founding members of National Action and AWD were pictured together in the UK.*²²

¹⁹ Oral evidence – CTP, 28 April 2021.

²⁰ CTP summary of work on Domestic Extremism prior to the OIR [Operational Improvement Review] – Written evidence, CTP, 31 January 2020.

²¹ M15 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 13 December 2019.

²² Written evidence – CTP, 31 January 2020.

29. The threat posed by the group related to its targeted recruitment of predominantly young men, whom it sought to radicalise with a National Socialist ideology.

- In 2014, National Action member Garron Helm was convicted of an antisemitic tweet relating to the Jewish Labour MP Luciana Berger, receiving a four-week custodial sentence. This appeared to bring a new impetus to the group, with the group receiving worldwide attention within the XRW scene. Following his conviction, Helm was declared a hero, a martyr and a political prisoner within the movement.
- The attention on National Action intensified in January 2015 with the attempted murder of a Sikh dentist by Zak Davies, from Mold in North Wales, who was found to be in possession of National Action material in his home.
- 2016 saw the group increase its overt recruitment attempts, with a proactive leafleting campaign in town centres. National Action members photographed themselves performing the Hitler salute at the site of Buchenwald concentration camp, and the group's website showed a move to a more regional set-up with monthly updates from regions being posted.
- In 2016, National Action-linked social media accounts declared their support for the murder of Labour MP Jo Cox and made implied threats to other MPs. After this, a series of arrests targeted the leadership and members of the group and in December 2016, CTP put forward a national security case to the Home Office, leading to the proscription of National Action as a terrorist organisation under the Terrorism Act 2000.

30. In laying an order for National Action's proscription on 12 December 2016, the then Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, described the group as "*a racist, antisemitic and homophobic organisation which stirs up hatred, glorifies violence and promotes a vile ideology*".²³ National Action was the first XRW organisation to be proscribed in the UK since the now-defunct British Union of Fascists in the 1940s. (The issue of proscription is addressed in more detail later in this Report.)

31. Following its proscription, National Action came under further pressure in 2017 with 25 members arrested, including 18 arrested under Terrorism Act 2000 (TACT) offences. Among those arrested were individuals serving in the British Army. On 28 September 2017, an order was laid in Parliament adding National Socialist Anti-Capitalist Action (NS131) and Scottish Dawn to the existing National Action proscription as aliases of National Action.

²³ Home Office, 'National Action becomes first extreme right-wing group to be banned in UK', statement, 16 December 2016.

Jack Coulson²⁴

On 26 July 2016, 17 year-old National Action member Jack Coulson was arrested for posting material online to stir up racial hatred. Following his arrest a house search was carried out and a pipe bomb and XRW items were found in his bedroom.

Coulson was charged and at the conclusion of his trial in January 2017 he was found guilty under Section 4 of the Explosives Act, and not guilty under Section 5 TACT. He was sentenced to a three year Youth Rehabilitation Order.

At the time of his trial the Judge commented that Coulson was one of the most dangerous young men he had ever dealt with.

Coulson continued to demonstrate extreme views in his meetings with support workers. Prior to his involvement with Right Wing Extremism Coulson was known to police for minor antisocial behaviour and arson offences. At trial, it was disclosed Coulson was socially isolated and on the autistic spectrum.

At trial Coulson claimed to have self-radicalised online and he is now outspoken and fixated on his extreme views. Coulson makes statements apparently to shock or draw attention from others, and has made inflammatory comments online regarding the murder of MP Jo Cox.

ERWT in 2012 and 2019: A comparison

32. MI5 and CTP provided a comparison of the ERWT threat as it was assessed in 2012 and then in 2019:

<i>Key differences²⁵</i>	
<i>2012</i>	<i>2019</i>
<i>Police hold primacy for what is then termed ‘Domestic Extremism’. MI5 is not involved.²⁶</i>	<i>MI5 now have primacy for high priority investigations and leads regarding Extreme Right Wing Terrorism.</i>
<i>The Extreme Right Wing Terrorist threat is assessed to be LOW, indicating that an attack is ‘unlikely’.</i>	<i>The likelihood of an Extreme Right Wing Terrorist attack in the UK is assessed to be ‘a realistic possibility’.</i>
<i>It is assessed that Potential Lone Actors present a greater threat than Right Wing Terrorist groups.</i>	<i>It is assessed that lone actors present the greatest risk.</i>

²⁴ CTP summary of work on Domestic Extremism prior to the OIR – Written evidence, 31 January 2020.

²⁵ MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 20 March 2019.

²⁶ In the past, the role of policing in strategic public disorder intelligence traditionally sat within the local ‘Special Branch’. In 2010, the National Domestic Extremism Unit (NDEU) was formed, creating one national unit with the aim of fulfilling the requirement of Public Order and Domestic Extremism intelligence and reducing duplication between the existing units. In 2011, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) took over responsibility for ‘Domestic Extremism’ intelligence – initially as a temporary measure in the lead-up to the 2012 Olympic Games – with the unit being renamed the National Domestic Extremism & Disorder Intelligence Unit (NDEDIU) and then in 2016 being permanently subsumed into the Counter Terrorism Policing Operations Centre.

<p><i>There are common links between ERWT groups in the UK and Europe (primarily through the Blood and Honour Music scene).</i></p> <p><i>Wider co-operation is rare due to a lack of common ideologies.</i></p>	<p><i>There is increased interaction between a number of ERWT groups online, with an increase in branches of ERWT groups.</i></p>
<p><i>Recruitment and demographics</i></p>	
<p><i>2012</i></p>	<p><i>2019</i></p>
<p><i>Recruitment is mainly via initial contact with outward facing groups such as the British National Party (BNP) and the Blood and Honour music movement.</i></p> <p><i>It usually requires an element of ‘real-life’ contact.</i></p>	<p><i>The sharp increase in online material promoting Far Right ideology has amplified the radicalisation process.</i></p> <p><i>There is no longer a requirement for ‘real-life’ contact, or individuals to attend meetings or events in order to be recruited.</i></p>
<p><i>Members of ERWT groups typically reflect an older demographic, and there is often a strong prevalence of criminality amongst extremist elements.</i></p>	<p><i>It is assessed that ERWT groups are attracting a younger demographic. For example, National Action promoted itself as a youth movement and ***.</i></p>
<p><i>Influencing factors</i></p>	
<p><i>2012</i></p>	<p><i>2019</i></p>
<p><i>Reactions to external events (e.g. the 7/7 bombings in London and London riots of 2011) are muted.</i></p> <p><i>There is a lack of prominent charismatic leadership figures, contributing to a largely fragmented ERWT movement.</i></p>	<p><i>It is assessed that ERWT groups and individuals are more reactive to external events; in part driven by increased focus on anti-immigration policies globally, and the Islamist terrorist attacks of 2017.</i></p> <p><i>There remains an absence of prominent charismatic leadership – however, this is now less relevant owing to the increasing influence of online platforms.</i></p>

THE CURRENT THREAT LEVEL

The threat level

33. As previously noted, in July 2019, the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) expanded its threat level assessment to include Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT). The following year, MI5 reported:

Whilst we assess the ERWT threat to the UK is on a gradual upwards trajectory, we have not observed a significant increase in specific mobilisation or radicalisation during this reporting period, and ERWT investigations continue to constitute a significant minority of MI5's CT [counter-terrorism] casework.²⁷

34. As at 8 February 2021, the overall threat level to the UK from terrorism was lowered to SUBSTANTIAL, meaning an attack is likely.²⁸ In terms of ERWT, JTAC *** assesses that an ERWT attack in the UK is ***, with the online space continuing to be a ***.²⁹ Later that month, MI5 confirmed:

*The likelihood of a Right-Wing Terrorist (RWT) attack in the UK has not significantly changed *** and there has not been any substantial change in the ***.³⁰*

35. Homeland Security Group advises that the main ERWT threat comes from Self-Initiated Terrorists (S-ITs), whom they define as: “persons who mobilise to threaten or use violence without material support or personal direction from a terrorist organisation; but who may still be influenced or encouraged by the rhetoric or ideology of a group”.³¹ S-ITs (previously termed ‘Lone Actors’) are considered in more detail later in this Report.

JTAC Assessment: The Right Wing Terrorist Threat to the UK³²

A major driver of the ERWT threat is the online space, where sites dominated by Right Wing Extremists provide encouragement and guidance for terrorist attacks. As with Islamist terrorism, the online space provides a platform for individuals to self-radicalise and converse with like-minded individuals domestically and internationally.

*Real-world ERWT groups *** threat. The high profile disruptions of National Action members since the group's proscription in December 2016, and subsequent proscriptions of alternative names for the group, have likely dissuaded others from forming similar groups in the UK.*

²⁷ MI5 Quarterly Report, 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020.

²⁸ www.mi5.gov.uk/threat-levels

²⁹ JTAC paper, 8 February 2021.

³⁰ Written evidence – MI5, 24 February 2021.

³¹ Written evidence – Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT), 1 March 2021.

³² JTAC paper, 29 September 2020.

Number of incidents

36. MI5 advises that, as an isolated measurement, the official number of ERWT attacks has not increased significantly in recent years.³³ However, there have been a number of high-profile ERWT incidents and convictions in recent years. MI5 acknowledges the complexities in defining exactly what constitutes an ERWT offence:

*An act of terrorism ordinarily predicates violent action in support of an ideology, however the absence of an overarching ERWT narrative and the broad spectrum of views encompassed within the ERWT umbrella means that proving an ideological motivation for a particular action can be challenging.*³⁴

37. Nevertheless, since the proscription of National Action in 2016, there have been a string of arrests and convictions of individuals for ERWT offences, which have included membership of National Action, possession of material and encouraging terrorism:

- June 2016: Thomas Mair murdered Labour MP Jo Cox as she walked towards her constituency surgery.
- June 2017: Darren Osborne rammed a vehicle into a crowd outside a mosque near Finsbury Park, London, killing worshipper Makram Ali and injuring 12 others.
- June 2017: Ethan Stables arrested for planning a machete attack at a Gay Pride event in Barrow-in-Furness.
- June 2017: Jack Renshaw (a member of proscribed group National Action) charged with preparing acts of terrorism by plotting to kill Labour MP Rosie Cooper and a local police officer.
- March 2019: Vincent Fuller arrested (and subsequently charged) for attempted murder and racially aggravated assault.
- April 2019: Steven Bishop jailed for plotting to bomb a London mosque.
- October 2020: Cavan Medlock charged with preparing for an attack on Duncan Lewis Solicitors, ***.

Number of disruptions

38. MI5 advises that the number of incidents do not fully reflect the threat picture. Police-held data indicates that the number of ERWT investigations, disruptions and PREVENT referrals have all steadily increased since 2017. MI5 notes that, of the 25 attacks prevented by the Intelligence Community and Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) in the period between the attack on Westminster Bridge in March 2017 and 31 January 2020, eight (just under 30% of the total) were motivated by an ERWT ideology.³⁵

³³ MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 13 January 2020.

³⁴ MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 13 January 2020.

³⁵ 'ISC Briefing – An Introduction to the work of MI5', 20 February 2020.

39. The number of real-world organised ERWT groups in the UK remains low and the high-profile disruptions of National Action members since the group's proscription in December 2016, and subsequent proscriptions of aliases for the group, have probably dissuaded others from forming similar groups in the UK. More recently, the Government's proscription of Sonnenkrieg Division (SKD) in February 2020, and Feuerkrieg Division in July 2020, has strengthened the perception of the UK as a hostile operating environment for ERWT groups. JTAC assesses that *"it is unlikely that a RW terrorist group *** in the UK in the near future"*.³⁶ However, the online space has proved to be an effective platform for Extreme Right-Wing (XRW) individuals and groups to exert influence and recruit others – it is possibly irrelevant ***.

40. We asked if JTAC used specific criteria to determine if particular rhetoric reaches a specific benchmark for analysis in assessing the ERWT threat. They advised that setting a threshold could in fact limit their ability to develop a holistic understanding of the threat, and that it was important to analyse all data and information that contribute to radicalisation, recruitment and attack planning when assessing the ERWT threat: *"for instance, Darren Osborne was reportedly galvanised to conduct a ERWT attack by his interpretation of, and reaction to, mainstream media."*³⁷

The trajectory

41. MI5 advises that it is difficult to establish an accurate historical trajectory of the ERWT threat on the grounds that the recent increase in focus by HMG and heightened public awareness of the ERWT threat has contributed to an increase in referrals and investigations. However, the Director General of MI5 did observe that *"2016 felt like a bit of a turning point with the proscription of National Action and the death of Jo Cox MP."*³⁸

42. A further factor is that the ERWT threat may have been understated in the past – some incidents previously classified as racially motivated hate crimes might now be labelled as ERWT offences, based on evidence and a greater understanding of the threat and how it has evolved. MI5's own analysis acknowledges the need for:

*greater scrutiny of definitions and thresholds of the ERWT threat to ensure consensus and consistency of casework classification across agencies. This will ensure more accurate and reliable data to track the ERWT threat trajectory going forwards.*³⁹

How the ERWT threat could develop

43. The ERWT threat is on an upward trajectory, as demonstrated by the increasing number of convictions for ERWT offences. It is particularly worrying that the ERWT space is now populated by an increasing number of young people – the Director General of MI5 informed the Committee that a significant percentage of MI5's Subjects of Interest (SOIs) are under 24.⁴⁰ The demographic is considered later in this Report.

³⁶ JTAC paper, 29 September 2020.

³⁷ Written evidence – MI5, 26 May 2021.

³⁸ Oral evidence – MI5, 28 April 2021.

³⁹ MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 13 January 2020.

⁴⁰ Oral evidence – MI5, 28 April 2021.

44. The degree to which the rhetoric of non-violent Far-Right activists may overlap with, and act as a spur to motivate, more extreme and violent actors – and the difficulty this poses for law enforcement action – is also a factor in the development of the ERWT threat, as noted by the Commission for Countering Extremism:

Hateful extremists may share and propagate similar ideological worldviews as terrorists, but will not engage directly in violence or terrorism, and therefore fall short of counter-terrorism legislation. However, hateful extremists can still create a climate conducive to terrorism by radicalising, recruiting and propagating the same ideologies as terrorists, inciting hatred, and/or equivocating or legitimising violence against an ‘out-group,’ ...⁴¹

45. In January 2020, JTAC provided an assessment of how it saw the ERWT threat evolving:

- *It is likely that RW terrorists globally will aspire to carry out high-impact attacks that will have a similar resonance in the RW community to Brenton Tarrant’s Christchurch attack.*
- *Propaganda will continue to be distributed online, as well as propaganda that relates to mainstream issues. For a small minority of UK-based individuals ingesting such propaganda, real-world ERWT activity will be attractive.*
- *As more high-profile RW terrorists enter the Prisons Estate, there will likely be an increased threat from RW terrorists within prisons and following prison release in the medium to long-term future.⁴²*

46. More recently, in June 2021 Homeland Security Group provided a strategic overview of the factors that could act as a driver of the ERWT threat:

Our understanding of the future trajectory of the ERWT threat is aligned with views of operational partners and our international partners; the threat is likely to increase over the next five years, with economic decline caused by COVID-19 being a likely driver of increased threat.

Other common issues identified were the rise of identity politics and increasing support for minority groups (opposed by Right Wing Extremists) alongside a reduction in trust in the state and the mainstream institutions/news [outlets] by Right Wing Extremists, and the increasing prevalence and reach of conspiracy theories held by Right Wing Extremists.

Given that the current threat is predominantly from Self-Initiated Terrorists, not groups, individual ‘micro’ motivations (e.g. an individual’s employment status) are as likely to influence the threat as ‘macro’ ones (e.g. increasing levels of immigration into Europe).⁴³

⁴¹ Written evidence – Commission for Countering Extremism, 17 December 2020.

⁴² JTAC paper, 19 November 2020.

⁴³ Written evidence – Home Office, 8 June 2021.

The impact of recent events

47. More generally, MI5 noted that external events have had an impact on individuals' engagement with ERWT. MI5 explained:

The period immediately following MI5's adoption of full primacy in April 2020 was characterised by two phenomena which could have inflamed tensions amongst RWT SOI and led to increased violence: Firstly, COVID-19 (and linked conspiracy theories) constrained liberties and increased state interference in people's lives. Secondly, the death of George Floyd and the consequent focus on diversity and inclusion in public life (in particular the "Black Lives Matter" movement and public protests) also brought to prominence an agenda inimical to the mindset of many of our SOI.⁴⁴

48. ***, although there were associated concerns regarding ERWT:

We are mindful however that increased online activity during the period of lockdown provided individuals with increased opportunities to engage with online extremist material and with individuals online. There is a realistic possibility that this will have reinforced and further developed the extremist beliefs of some individuals, including those engaging with RWE.⁴⁵

49. In terms of Covid-19, as the virus spread across the globe in early 2020, a range of conspiracy theories and disinformation spread rapidly across the internet via mainstream and social media platforms – many of them linked to the XRW and the Far Right. A joint study by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) and the BBC on *Far-Right Exploitation of Covid-19*, undertaken between January and April 2020, revealed that there had been:

hundreds of thousands of far right posts around COVID-19 and millions of engagements with known disinformation sites with a marked increase in conversations within far right circles about so-called 'elites' including Bill Gates, George Soros, the Rothschilds and Jeff Bezos and false information about their role in the creation or spread of the virus. The conversations monitored by ISD researchers referenced the virus as a tool of social control, a purposeful plot to kill off certain populations, or a means to make money for those individuals and their institutions.⁴⁶

As Jacob Davey of the ISD told the Committee, the pandemic was seen as an opportunity by some of the most extreme groups and individuals, with evidence of some "suggesting that they could even use COVID as a bioweapon against minority communities".⁴⁷

50. A report published by the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee also found that ERWT groups and individuals sought to co-opt the pandemic, using some of these conspiracy theories to attempt to radicalise, recruit and inspire plots and attacks:

⁴⁴ Written evidence – MI5, 24 February 2021.

⁴⁵ Written evidence – MI5, 24 February 2021.

⁴⁶ ISD and BBC Click Investigation, *Far-Right Exploitation of Covid-19*, 12 May 2020.

⁴⁷ Oral evidence – Jacob Davey, ISD, 16 December 2020.

Extreme Right Wing groups have reframed a long-standing racialized and misogynistic narrative – the perceived threat of cultural annihilation and the elimination of the ethno-cultural identities of European people – in light of COVID-19. Anti-migrant, antisemitic, anti-Asian, racist and xenophobic tropes have been at the forefront of COVID-19 related conspiracies and another that claims ‘infected’ migrants were ‘imported’ to decimate white populations.⁴⁸

51. This concern was echoed by the Australian intelligence community which has publicly expressed concern that the XRW are exploiting the pandemic to increase their influence. The Australian broadcaster ABC News reported in June 2020 that an assessment delivered by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) had stated that Right-Wing Extremists now accounted for around a third of all its domestic investigations, and that Right-Wing Extremist rhetoric was potentially reaching a new audience who were increasingly socially isolated and spending more time online. ABC quoted an ASIO threat assessment sent to security professionals, which warned:

COVID-19 restrictions are being exploited by Extreme Right-Wing narratives that paint the state as oppressive, and globalisation and democracy as flawed and failing ... We assess the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced an extreme right-wing belief in the inevitability of societal collapse and a “race war”.⁴⁹

52. On 9 December 2020, the Australian Minister for Home Affairs subsequently announced that he had requested the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS) to undertake an Inquiry into matters relating to extremist movements and radicalism in Australia. He asked that the Inquiry should focus in particular on the motivations, objectives and capacity for violence of extremist groups, including, but not limited to, Islamist and Far Right-Wing Extremist groups, and how these have changed during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Inquiry would also address, inter alia, the role and influence of radical and extremist groups which currently fall short of the legislative threshold for proscription, as well as the role of social media.⁵⁰ The Inquiry is still ongoing at the time of writing this Report.

53. The potential of the pandemic to galvanise the XRW was a focus of the external experts who gave evidence to this Inquiry. Jacob Davey from the ISD observed:

If I were to characterise Far Right extremism, particularly for our online monitoring in the UK over the past year, we would say that it’s particularly grown. This is correlated quite clearly with the Covid 19 pandemic. So in March of this year we saw a surge of Far Right activity across social media platforms with membership of groups increasing by as much as 100 per cent, discussion of key topics increasingly similarly ... On the more sort of extreme and egregious side, we saw sort of a number of accelerationist communities discussing how Covid represented an opportunity for attacks

⁴⁸ UN Security Council, ‘Member States Concerned by the Growing and Increasingly Transnational Threat of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism’, Counter Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), Trends Alert, July 2020.

⁴⁹ ABC, ‘ASIO briefing warns that the far-right is exploiting coronavirus to recruit new members’, 11 June 2020.

⁵⁰ Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, Current Inquiries, Inquiry into extremist movements and radicalism in Australia, 9 December 2020, www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary/business/committees/joint/intelligence_and_security

*and also individuals suggesting that they could even use Covid as a bioweapon against minority communities.*⁵¹

Nick Lowles, Chief Executive of Hope Not Hate, warned that the financial consequences of Covid-19 also posed a risk:

*I think the other factor is the kind of economic consequences of Covid, which, you know, we've only in a way started to kind of experience, we don't know how that's going to play out, but obviously economic stress adds to the equation as well and I think in the sense of, you know, economic stress in itself isn't going to drive people to terrorism, but it creates a bigger pool. If people are angry, resentful, feeling that their world's even further away, you know, they're more open to alternative ideas.*⁵²

54. MI5 reports that it *** in Covid-19-related conspiracy theories.⁵³ These are notably prolific among Right-Wing Extremist and terrorist communities:

*Although these conspiracy theories vary, common themes include anti-government narratives and blaming certain groups for creating and/or spreading the virus.*⁵⁴

Interest in *** Covid-19 is likely to continue among terrorists from across the ideological spectrum. However, we question whether highly sophisticated methodologies (e.g. modifying the virus) are beyond the capability of UK attack planners.

55. In October 2020, JTAC assessed that it was a “*realistic possibility*” that the Covid-19 pandemic would increase the risk of terrorism over the next six months; and that several factors, such as economic recession and a lack of socio-economic security, terrorist engagement with wider community grievances around the effects of the pandemic, and global instability, were all possible drivers for this.⁵⁵ In November 2020, the JTAC ‘Future Outlook’ assessment surmised:

- *It is likely that future [Covid-19] national and local lockdowns will be incorporated into ERWT narratives. Additionally there is a realistic possibility that the wider social, political and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic will directly increase the threat from ERWT over the next 12 months.*
- *It is highly likely that RW terrorists will continue to interpret events within their particular ideological framework. Future events, such as ***, could galvanise a RW terrorist into action.*⁵⁶

⁵¹ Oral evidence – Jacob Davey, ISD, 16 December 2020.

⁵² Oral evidence – Nick Lowles, Hope Not Hate, 16 December 2020.

⁵³ Written evidence – MI5 Quarterly Report, 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020.

⁵⁴ JTAC paper, 8 October 2020.

⁵⁵ JTAC paper, 8 October 2020.

⁵⁶ JTAC paper, 19 November 2020.

56. When we spoke to the Director General of MI5 in April 2021, he was rather more sanguine regarding the particular ERWT threat posed by Covid-19. He observed that ***.⁵⁷ MI5 acknowledged, however, that:

increased online activity during the period of lockdown provided individuals with increased opportunities to engage with online extremist material and with individuals online. There is a realistic possibility that this will have reinforced and further developed the extremist beliefs of some individuals, including those engaged with RWE [Right-Wing Extremism].⁵⁸

57. The Home Secretary confirmed that she was alive to the threat posed by the pandemic as a result of “*the nation being locked down, locked up, etcetera, too many people at home on the internet, you know, and not seeing other people. We’ve touched on mental health. All those types of factors blended together of course could act as triggers and I think we should just be very mindful of that.*”⁵⁹ In June 2021, the Home Office forecast that the ERWT threat would increase in the foreseeable future, with the ramifications of Covid-19 as a catalyst:

our understanding of the future trajectory of the ERWT threat is aligned with the views of operational partners and our international partners; the threat is likely to increase over the next five years, with economic decline caused by COVID-19 being a likely driver of increased threat.⁶⁰

D. It is not surprising that there are reports that Extreme Right-Wing Terrorist groups and individuals have sought to co-opt the Covid-19 pandemic, using conspiracy theories and exploiting community grievances to attempt to radicalise, recruit and inspire plots and attacks. The full impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has yet to be seen – but 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.

⁵⁷ Oral evidence – MI5, 28 April 2021.

⁵⁸ Written evidence – MI5, 24 February 2021.

⁵⁹ Oral evidence – Home Secretary, 20 May 2021.

⁶⁰ Written evidence – Home Office, 8 June 2021.

EXTREME RIGHT-WING TERRORIST GROUPS

58. MI5 assesses that, while individuals present the greatest Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT) threat, there remains “*a significant, albeit smaller risk from organised online and offline groups in the UK*”.⁶¹ As previously mentioned, according to an MI5 paper from early 2020,⁶² there are broadly three key ideologies driving ERWT groups (although individuals and groups may subscribe to ideological tenets and ideas from multiple categories):

- ‘White Supremacist’ and ‘White Nationalist’;
- ‘Cultural Nationalist’; and
- ‘Identitarian’ movement.

‘White Supremacist’ and ‘White Nationalist’ groups

59. The majority of ERWT groups in the UK that endorse violence in service of their ideology are assessed to have White Supremacist and White Nationalist views (previously referred to under the category of the ‘Extreme Right Wing’ or XRW).

60. ‘White Nationalism’ is a belief that mass migration from the ‘non-white’ world poses an existential threat to the so-called ‘white race’ and ‘Western culture’, with a resulting desire to create an all-white state. ‘White Supremacism’ is the belief that the Caucasian race is superior to all others in either a physical or spiritual sense. However, groups motivated by each ideology can still vary significantly in terms of motivating factors, and may additionally incorporate a variety of individual grievances, such as antisemitism or anti-government sentiment.

61. Across these two categories, there are *** organised groups with an overtly violent ideology – for example, National Action, Sonnenkrieg Division (SKD) and System Resistance Network, which have all now been proscribed by the Government. National Action was banned in 2016, and SKD (assessed to have been inspired by the neo-Nazi Atomwaffen Division) in February 2020, with System Resistance Network being recognised as an alias of National Action at the same time. The issue of proscription is covered later in this Report.

62. In July 2018, JTAC assessed that *** with the ability and intent to conduct terrorist attacks:

*The wider XRW movement ***; however, we assess that they remain focused on the so-called upcoming ‘race war’ for which they are preparing and ***.*⁶³

⁶¹ MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 13 January 2020.

⁶² MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 13 January 2020.

⁶³ JTAC paper, 1 July 2018.

‘Cultural Nationalist’ groups

63. JTAC has defined ‘Cultural Nationalism’ as:

A belief that ‘Western Culture’ is under threat from mass migration into Europe and from a lack of integration by certain ethnic and cultural groups. The ideology tends to focus on the rejection of cultural practices such as the wearing of the burqa or the perceived rise of the use of sharia law. In the UK this has been associated with anti-Islam activist groups.⁶⁴

64. MI5 notes that, although ‘Cultural Nationalism’ is the least explicitly violent of the three ideologies:

[We] assess the inspired threat from ‘Cultural Nationalist’ ideologies may be further reaching than ‘White Supremacists’ or ‘White Nationalist’ ideologies, owing to the mainstreaming of many of the ‘Cultural Nationalist’ principles into conventional media reporting. This increases the prospective audience for ‘Cultural Nationalist’ grievances and agendas to a far greater number than those of ‘White Supremacist’ and ‘White Nationalist’ ideologies, who are largely restricted to the online space.⁶⁵

65. The Director General of MI5 explained the pervasiveness of ‘Cultural Nationalism’ across the ERWT spectrum, noting that there have been a number of examples of Self-Initiated Terrorist attacks linked to ‘Cultural Nationalist’ narratives:

*If it were the case that, for the sake of argument, the ‘White Supremacist’ strand of this was consistently the most dangerous, ***. But if you look at the particular instances where Right Wing Extremists have mounted attacks in this country – Thomas Mair against Jo Cox in 2016, and then Darren Osborne outside Finsbury Park Mosque in 2017, and then Vincent Fuller, the man who stabbed the Bulgarian individual in 2019 – in no case was any of those three assailants a confirmed ‘White Supremacist’ individual. They were more, if you will, ‘Cultural Nationalists’, each with very strong anti-Islam sentiment in their make up, and so it is difficult, because the violence is not distributed in the same way that the sort of extremity of some of the ideological views are distributed.⁶⁶*

‘Identitarian’ movement

66. In the past five years, there has been a significant growth in the profile and influence of the ‘Identitarian’ movement (which includes groups such as Generation Identity in Europe, and spin-off group the Identitarian Movement in the UK). According to MI5, ‘Identitarian’ groups seek to normalise a combination of ‘White Nationalist’ and ‘Cultural Nationalist’ principles behind an intellectual façade, in order to be seen as a viable alternative for those who do not want to associate themselves with the negative connotations of ‘White Nationalist’ and ‘White Supremacist’ groups. The ‘Identitarian’ movement – which actively distances

⁶⁴ JTAC paper, 16 May 2019.

⁶⁵ MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 13 January 2020.

⁶⁶ Oral evidence – MI5, 28 April 2021.

itself from violent ideology – has been very successful in attracting a youth movement of highly educated, middle-class members, and has been branded ‘hipster fascists’ because of its predominantly middle-class, student membership.

67. It is currently assessed that these groups ***. However, there is a possibility that ‘Identitarian’ concepts – such as the ‘Great Replacement theory’, which argues that white European populations are being deliberately replaced at an ethnic and cultural level through migration and the growth of minority communities,⁶⁷ and as can be seen throughout the ‘manifesto’ of Christchurch attacker Brenton Tarrant – will be ***.⁶⁸

Satanism

68. In addition to these three ideologies, there are also newer movements which have influenced organised groups: for example, the influence of Satanism in White Supremacist and White Nationalist groups. This can be seen in the influence of groups such as the Order of the Nine Angles (O9A): an international Nazi-Satanist group, which is believed to have been established in the UK in the 1960s and has influenced the ideology of some of the most extreme UK ERWT groups, including the Sonnenkrieg Division.⁶⁹ (The group encourages its members to participate in extreme violence, sexual assault and murder, and also promotes infiltrating and subverting other organisations such as the police and the military.)

69. Nick Lowles, Chief Executive of Hope Not Hate, pointed to the O9A as wielding notable influence across the extremist sphere:

I think the other thing that we’ve seen in the last few years is that in some of these very small groups, National Action and some of the spin-off groups, not only a kind of anti-women misogyny narrative but aggressively so, and about sexual violence, and this is particularly these very small pro-terrorist groups, that have [been] influenced by the Order of the Nine Angles, the Nazi satanic group, who not only glorify sexual violence but use it as a weapon, and set up channels like Rapewaffen and stuff, things we would never have seen 20 or 30 years ago, so I think that’s a really key thing amongst the young – we’re talking about influence on teenagers.⁷⁰

70. When we asked MI5 about O9A, it told the Committee that Satanist groups “***”, although it did recognise that “*an interest in satanic rituals may increase a propensity for violence, and that investigations involving individuals with an interest in the occult are more likely to present *** issues.*”⁷¹

Virtual groups

71. ERWT ‘groups’ may also exist in a virtual sense, and this is increasingly the way in which communities will organise to promote their ideology and recruit. Virtual groups can

⁶⁷ Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner, ‘*The Great Replacement: The Violent Consequences of Mainstreamed Extremism*’, Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), 2019.

⁶⁸ MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 13 January 2020.

⁶⁹ Hope Not Hate, *State of Hate 2020*, 2020.

⁷⁰ Oral evidence – Nick Lowles, Hope Not Hate, 16 December 2020.

⁷¹ MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 13 January 2020.

comprise members from different countries who discuss ERWT propaganda and promote terrorist activity and rhetoric (such as conducting attacks against Muslims).

72. Many ‘real-life’ groups are evolving to become more virtual, increasingly using online communications rather than offline meetings among members, and some groups will start and continue entirely in the online world. MI5 is realistic about the challenges this presents:

*We are mindful that the implications of this shift are uncertain at present, however any shift from the offline to the online space *** in terms of coverage and ***.*⁷²

The online challenge is addressed later in the Report.

Incels and Right-Wing Extremists: Shared grievances

73. Jacob Davey at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) highlighted to the Committee the significant overlap between the growing online misogynist communities (sometimes called the ‘manosphere’) and Right-Wing Extremist ideologies.⁷³ The manosphere includes the Incel movement – an abbreviation of the term ‘Involuntary Celibate’.

74. The Cambridge Dictionary defines Incels as a group of people on the internet who are unable to find sexual partners despite wanting them, and who express hate towards people whom they blame for this. When we asked MI5 about the Incel movement in the UK, it advised:

- *Most Involuntary Celibates (Incels) are non-violent or criminal and their activity would not meet MI5 terrorism thresholds (“the use or threat of action, both in and outside of the UK, designed to influence any international government organisation or to intimidate the public. It must also be for the purpose of advancing political, religious, racial, or ideological cause.”).*⁷⁴
- *When Incel activity does meet terrorism thresholds, MI5 recommend that it should be categorised as a type of Single Issue Terrorism (SIT).*⁷⁵

75. MI5 pointed to the attack carried out by Elliot Rodger in the US in 2014 as an example of Incel terrorism, since it was aimed at societal change:

For example, in May 2014 Elliot Rodger killed six and injured 14 before killing himself, in a firearm attack at multiple locations in Isla Vista, California. Rodger identified as an Incel, and left a 137-page manifesto detailing not only his vengeful motivations, ‘to punish everyone who is sexually active’, but also his ideological motivations to bring about his ‘second phase’ of ‘War on Women’. Rodger articulated aspirations for an ‘Incel Rebellion’ that would bring about a future world where women would be forced to have sex with Incels. Rodger is a classifiable Incel terrorist, targeting men and women in pursuit of societal change. His attack and

⁷² MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 13 January 2020.

⁷³ Oral evidence – Jacob Davey, ISD, 16 December 2020.

⁷⁴ cps.gov.uk/crime-info/terrorism

⁷⁵ MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 5 August 2020.

*manifesto language are commonly referenced and revered by the more extreme sub-sections of the Incel community.*⁷⁶

76. MI5 acknowledges that there is a growing synergy between Incel and ERWT ideologies:

**** Incel and white supremacist narratives can have many cross-cutting features, including tendencies towards a victimhood mindset, misogyny, and conspiratorial thinking (blaming of target-sets such as women, feminists, liberals, the Jewish community). Overlaps of Incel and right-wing grievances are therefore not unexpected, *** when assessing the nature and level of threat posed by a given individual ... due to the diverse nature of the Incel movement, we recommend that Incel references *** should not be treated automatically as SIT, but recognised as a potential terrorist motivation and assessed case by case against [terrorism] thresholds ...*⁷⁷

However, the Director General of MI5 cautioned against putting too much emphasis on the links between Incel terrorist activity and ERWT:

*It is not, as things stand, something we are seeing a huge crossover [with ERWT] into this territory but there is a crossover. It has cropped up from time to time but in slightly odd ways and I think we would struggle to give you any sense of a strategic trend here.*⁷⁸

⁷⁶ MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 5 August 2020.

⁷⁷ MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 5 August 2020.

⁷⁸ Oral evidence – MI5, 28 April 2021.

SELF-INITIATED TERRORISTS

77. Organisations within the Intelligence Community (including MI5, Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) and the Home Office) have previously referred to the threat from ‘Potential Lone Actors’ (PLAs). Across Islamist terrorism, Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT) and left-wing, anarchist and single-issue terrorism (LASIT), the terrorist threat has emanated primarily from PLAs. In September 2020, the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) assessed that this trend was likely to continue, and that any future attack in the UK would most likely be conducted by a PLA.⁷⁹

78. However, a review commissioned by the Counter Terrorism Senior Responsible Officer⁸⁰ into the counter-terrorism approach to PLAs determined that the term itself was misleading, perpetuating unhelpful assumptions – in particular that terrorists who plan and carry out these types of attacks “*do so on their own, isolated from society and those around them, and are unknowable and unstoppable as a result, despite evidence that in up to 80% of cases Lone Actors broadcast their intent to carry out an attack*”.⁸¹

79. The review suggested that the term ‘Self-Initiated Terrorists’ (S-ITs) be adopted instead, defined as:

*persons who mobilise to threaten or use violence, without material support or personal direction from a terrorist organisation; but who may still be influenced or encouraged by the rhetoric or ideology of a group.*⁸²

The review noted that inspired,⁸³ but self-initiated, terrorism can be conducted by groups as well as single individuals. The term Self-Initiated Terrorist was subsequently adopted by the counter-terrorism community in November 2020.⁸⁴ Homeland Security Group told the Committee that this clear definition will allow all organisations involved (including academia and partners) to improve data collection, understanding of the problem and allocation of resources.

80. JTAC advises that there are a number of factors that might influence why, where, when and how S-ITs decide to conduct attacks – and that these might vary from their particular personal circumstances to the nature of their grievances and perceptions of their own capabilities. What is clear is that the growth of the S-IT phenomenon has resulted in the UK threat becoming more fragmented. S-ITs’ motivations for conducting attacks can be highly individualistic and driven by personal circumstances, rather than by wider shifts in the global terrorism landscape.⁸⁵ S-ITs are also not subject to the same inhibitors as organised groups, which are subject to: internal conflict; a lack of unifying ideologies leading to factionalism; and scrutiny by the authorities.

⁷⁹ JTAC paper, 29 September 2020.

⁸⁰ The Director General for Homeland Security Group also holds the post of Counter Terrorism Senior Responsible Officer.

⁸¹ Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT), ‘Submission to the ISC: Lone Actor Review Terminology’, 1 March 2021.

⁸² OSCT, ‘Submission to the ISC: Lone Actor Review Terminology’, 1 March 2021.

⁸³ JTAC currently uses the terms ‘inspired’, ‘directed’ and ‘enabled’ to denote the strength of the command and control relationship between a terrorist actor and a terrorist group. ‘Inspired’ attacks are perpetrated by individuals with no operational links to terrorist groups, but motivated to act by a group’s ideology or propaganda. ‘Directed’ attacks are initiated by leadership of a terrorist group, training and deploying operatives to carry out attacks. ‘Enabled’ attacks are carried out by individuals assisted by terrorist groups [source: OSCT written advice, 1 March 2021].

⁸⁴ The CT community includes, but is not limited to, CTP, MI5, OSCT, GCHQ and JTAC.

⁸⁵ JTAC paper, 29 September 2020.

81. MI5 advises that the increase in ERWT online material enables S-ITs to:

*Self-radicalise online with no real world or direct communication with an organised group; ***. The variety of [E]RWT material online enables [S-ITs] to quickly form a hybrid of [E]RWT ideologies, rather than having to adhere to a strictly defined set of principles. While a lack of ideological consensus amongst members can prevent groups from moving to violent action, [S-ITs] have no such constraints, requiring neither the sanction nor involvement of others. For this reason [S-ITs], especially those who Radicalise online, can move from theoretical inspiration to real world action in a short space of time.⁸⁶ ***.⁸⁷*

82. The Head of CTP noted that, looking at terrorism across the board and regardless of ideology:

[it] has become much more in that self-initiating space, their being incited and inspired, rather than directed and trained and enabled, and that is harder to spot. It doesn't matter whether we are talking about Right Wing, Left Wing, Single Issue or Islamist.⁸⁸

*****: Failed ERWT attack ***⁸⁹**

***⁹⁰

E. The terrorist threat – regardless of ideology – is increasingly posed by Self-Initiated Terrorists, those who are incited or inspired rather than directed. Self-Initiated Terrorists are difficult to identify, and pose a significant number of challenges in terms of detection and monitoring. Their motivation can be highly individualistic and determining how, why and when they may choose to attack is particularly difficult for MI5 and Counter Terrorism Policing. An innovative approach will be needed to counter the fragmented and complex threat posed by these disparate groups and individuals.

Mental health and developmental disorders

83. MI5 acknowledges that mental health issues can be a factor when retrospectively attempting to assess an individual's motivation for conducting a terrorist attack. It is often not possible to determine the extent to which an attack was motivated exclusively by an extremist ideology, or was exacerbated by complex mental health issues. This is a particular problem when it comes to S-ITs who may have had no prior engagement with terrorist organisations, or indeed expressed any intention of carrying out a terrorist act. The Director General of MI5 pointed to the mass stabbing in a Glasgow hotel in June 2020 by Badreddin Abdalla Adam as an example of an attack that it transpired had, in fact, been prompted by a row with a fellow asylum seeker over noise:

⁸⁶ MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 13 January 2020.

⁸⁷ MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 13 January 2020.

⁸⁸ Oral evidence – CTP, 28 April 2021.

⁸⁹ This section is sub judice as at Monday 22 November 2021.

⁹⁰ On 16 March 2019, Vincent Fuller, a White Supremacist, stabbed Dimitar Mihaylov in Stanwell, Surrey. He received an 18-year jail term on 10 September 2019.

*you will recall an episode in Glasgow where a man stabbed a number of other people in a hotel that was being used for asylum seekers and, again, for the first few hours it was not clear to Police Scotland colleagues, or to ourselves, what really we were dealing with here: was this, as it turned out, a desperate man in some form of deranged state, or was this an ideological attack?*⁹¹

84. Reporting shows that a number of those convicted of ERWT offences have the developmental disorders Asperger's or autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Jonathan Hall QC, the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, recently announced that he understood that the incidents of autism and referrals to the Prevent programme were “*staggeringly high*” and that “*it is as if a social problem has been unearthed and fallen into the lap of counter-terrorism professionals*”.⁹²

85. It transpires that ASD with regard to ERWT is the subject of debate across the medical profession. The Head of CTP told the Committee that the issue of ASD was something of a “*contested space*” in this area:

*So not all medics agree with my [CTP] people's assertion that the people that they are dealing with might have complex psychological needs. So it is not just the fact that we are very early on this; some people won't see it. So we are seeing what we think are younger people, particularly with Asperger's and autism, on that spectrum, but, you know, it is not agreed by any stretch of the imagination. So you are right to flag that more work needs to be done in this area. We are doing that work. It is very early days.*⁹³

86. This was borne out by Homeland Security Group, who, with particular regard to the Prevent programme, observed:

Anecdotally, if you asked any of my Prevent coordinators across the country, they would say they are seeing a link between autism and some of the right wing casework; any mental health professional would say those people are not really qualified to say that, which is an entirely legitimate observation but it is something I get very regularly from my folks on the ground.

*In prison, where obviously the opportunity to look more carefully at the mental health conditions that affect any prisoner is easier it is a more controlled environment a study we have done has shown about a five times higher than normal prevalence of autism amongst those [Extreme] Right Wing prisoners, but even that I caveat because the numbers in that sample are so low that any mental health professional worth their salt would say that is just not enough to make a judgment on. So it is something we are looking at very carefully. It is really really difficult, but it is very much on all of our minds.*⁹⁴

⁹¹ Oral evidence – MI5, 29 April 2021.

⁹² ‘Staggeringly high number of people with autism on UK Prevent scheme’, *The Guardian*, 7 July 2021.

⁹³ Oral evidence – CTP, 29 April 2021.

⁹⁴ Oral evidence – Home Office, 28 April 2021.

F. Without an agreed understanding of the links between Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism and the developmental disorders Asperger's and autism spectrum disorder (ASD), it is difficult to see how this problem can be tackled effectively. It is imperative that more is done to establish a cohesive and joined-up effort across the agencies, organisations and medical professionals involved in this area.

Drugs

87. A number of commentators have pointed to a correlation between drug abuse and terrorist activity. When we asked MI5 about this issue with specific reference to ERWT, MI5 observed that there was evidence of drug use by subjects of interest across both ERWT and Islamist terrorists – and sometimes that drug use might provide an alternative route to prosecution, as might other forms of low-level crime – but the Director General said:

*I think our casework over the years would not support such a strong version of that conclusion. ***.⁹⁵*

⁹⁵ Oral evidence – MI5, 29 April 2021.

A CHANGING DEMOGRAPHIC

88. MI5 has observed a shift in the age, demographic and backgrounds of those associated with Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT) – moving from predominantly male members, often with criminal backgrounds, to individuals with no criminal background, who are often well educated, technically sophisticated and increasingly under the age of 18. MI5 attributes some of this to an increasingly pessimistic narrative regarding the prospects of the UK’s young generation which, it argues, serves to enhance anxiety and a victim culture, both of which ERWT ideologies are quick to exploit. MI5’s assessment is that:

while a wider sense of disillusionment amongst many young people is unlikely to change in the short to medium future, the number of young people who fall victim to ERWT radicalisation is likely to increase, increasing the overall threat.⁹⁶

89. However, MI5 investigations indicate that rhetoric in the online space does not necessarily translate into real-world action, as in the case *** *“their claims were intended to bolster their status rather than indicating genuine intent”*.⁹⁷ Homeland Security Group pointed to the term ‘edgy boi’ as having particular significance in the Extreme Right-Wing (XRW) space, since it denotes an individual who espouses views which are broadly considered on the margins of acceptable speech or hate speech.⁹⁸ They drew an analogy between this behaviour and:

punks in the 70s ... this is the kind of thing they are doing now, taking on some of the Nazi iconography, the sense that within particularly the school system they are constrained in what they can say and do. These are deliberately extreme positions in order to shock and the existence of internet communities, which allows effectively an echo chamber where you can find other people to encourage you in those views, allows that to come out more.⁹⁹

90. MI5 advises that a significant percentage of ERWT Subjects of Interest are under 24 (the equivalent proportion in relation to Islamist terrorism is much lower), a development that Jacob Davey at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) pointed to as *“movements which are by youth, for youth”*.¹⁰⁰ However, there are always exceptions to what appears to be a ‘baked-in’ trend. The last three successful ERWT attacks in the UK were carried out by older males who did not demonstrate high levels of technological awareness.¹⁰¹ Only one of the attackers, Vincent Fuller, stated his intent in the online space to carry out a terrorist attack – and then only less than 24 hours before the attack.

91. Women make up a very small proportion of ERWT *** they typically play a role ***. Due to the fractured nature of Right-Wing Extremist ideologies, there are significant differences in the way women are treated in these movements. For example, in White Nationalist and

⁹⁶ MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 13 January 2020.

⁹⁷ ***

⁹⁸ Written evidence – Home Office, 27 May 2021.

⁹⁹ Oral evidence – Home Office, 29 April 2021.

¹⁰⁰ Oral evidence – Jacob Davey, ISD, 16 December 2020.

¹⁰¹ Stanwell stabbing, March 2019 (Vincent Fuller, aged 50); Finsbury Park mosque attack, June 2017 (Darren Osborne, aged 47) and murder of Jo Cox, June 2016 (Thomas Mair, aged 52).

White Supremacist communities, white women's role as mothers is seen as key to the aim of creating a white majority.

92. JTAC assesses, however, that the accessibility of the online space, coupled with the growing trend towards low-sophistication attacks, will lower barriers to terrorist attacks regardless of gender, and in relation to XRW-affiliated women ***.¹⁰² Homeland Security Group confirmed that the statistics show that ERWT is “*heavily skewed towards men*” with CTP confirming that from their policing statistics the data showed that 93% of the people they are dealing with in the ERWT space are male.¹⁰³

93. The Head of Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) told the Committee that in “*criminological terms that [it] is not unusual*” to see a higher percentage of men in the ERWT space as “*violence [is] a peculiarly male obsession*” and that the “*actual violent acts are committed mostly by men*”.¹⁰⁴ The Director General for Homeland Security Group also said that they had started to see a couple of “*vocal female, significant female voices out there*”, and that there was potential for the proportion of women involved to grow, as has happened in “*other threat areas, so it is an important point for [HMG to be] looking at any potential trajectory and getting ahead*”.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² JTAC paper, 21 January 2021.

¹⁰³ Oral evidence – Home Office and CTP, 28 April 2021.

¹⁰⁴ Oral evidence – CTP, 28 April 2021.

¹⁰⁵ Oral evidence – Home Office, 28 April 2021.

THE MILITARY AND POLICE INSIDER THREAT

The military

94. Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists often display an interest in military culture, weaponry and the armed forces or law enforcement organisations – the Director General for MI5 noted that “*many of these people are absolutely fixated with weaponry*”.¹⁰⁶ This leads both to individuals seeking to join the military, and groups seeking to recruit within the military.

95. Internationally, Right-Wing Extremist recruitment within the armed forces has long been of particular concern in the US and Germany. As early as 2008, the US Department of Homeland Security identified the radicalisation of veterans by Right-Wing Extremist organisations as a key concern, recalling that the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 had been carried out by three former soldiers who had first met while serving in the US Army.¹⁰⁷ More recently, in 2019, the German authorities announced an investigation into 450 cases of suspected Right-Wing Extremism in their police and armed forces, after identifying dozens as members of the Reichsbürger, a neo-Nazi movement.¹⁰⁸ (The international movement is covered further in the next chapter.)

96. In October 2019, the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) assessed that military experience remained a source of legitimacy among ERWT groups, and that an individual with military experience, including potentially from the Armed Forces, would very likely be held in high regard in ERWT groups as a result of their perceived skill set.¹⁰⁹ We note that the Armed Forces Reserves may also hold appeal for potential Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists, since it requires less time commitment and enables individuals to pursue other employment.

97. In September 2017, four soldiers were arrested for membership of National Action, which had encouraged its members to prepare for a “*race war*” by joining the army or developing links with serving personnel to enhance their military capabilities.¹¹⁰

Case study: ERWT in the military

In April 2018, serving soldier Lance Corporal Mikko Vehvilainen of the Royal Anglian Regiment was jailed for possession of a banned CS gas canister. Police found dozens of weapons – including guns (for which he was licensed), knives and a crossbow – at two properties occupied by him in Powys, Wales. Vehvilainen was also found to be in possession of a copy of Anders Breivik’s ‘manifesto’. Another soldier serving in the Royal Anglians, Private Mark Barrett, was later acquitted of membership of National Action.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Oral evidence – MI5, 28 April 2021.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Far Right and very wrong: why White Nationalist terrorism is a global threat’, *The Economist*, 21 March 2019. While the Oklahoma City bombing was not a White Supremacist or Cultural Nationalist attack in a simple sense, the extreme anti-government conspiracy theories which motivated it were a major trope of the US Far Right at the time, and the perpetrators were known to have been directly influenced by White Supremacist groups and literature.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Far Right and very wrong: why White Nationalist terrorism is a global threat’, *The Economist*, 21 March 2019.

¹⁰⁹ JTAC paper, 3 October 2019.

¹¹⁰ Europol, ‘European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2018’.

¹¹¹ ‘Soldier Mikko Vehvilainen jailed for CS gas canister’, BBC News, 13 April 2018.

98. In May 2019, BuzzFeed News reported that internal guidance issued by the British Army to help officers spot Right-Wing Extremists had been leaked online, and was being circulated on UK Far-Right news and conspiracy websites. The guidance, ‘Extreme Indicators and Warnings’, listed a range of behaviours – in addition to indicators such as individuals engaging in discussions on an “*impending Race War*”, or endorsing the creation of ‘white only’ communities, officers are told to look out for individuals who “*involve colleagues in closed social media groups*” and “*actively seek out impressionable individuals to indoctrinate or recruit*”.¹¹²

99. In March 2020, it was reported that two Royal Navy sailors had been permitted to remain in the Royal Navy despite being named as members of Generation Identity:

*An undercover journalist said they were serving together at a naval base in Plymouth, where they believed fellow sailors held similar views. After his story was published in August, the Royal Navy promised an investigation but The Independent has learned they were not disciplined.*¹¹³

Nick Lowles of Hope Not Hate told the Committee that the organisation had been instrumental in identifying these two individuals:

*We [Hope Not Hate] had an issue a year ago with the Navy where we identified two very active Generation Identity people who were in the Navy, one of them who was on the Trident submarine. We raised with the authorities at the highest level via Ruth Smeeth, who was obviously then an MP, and, you know, one of them would boast online, as well as pushing out all this kind of, you know, stuff about the end of the west and everything like that would post stuff about how he was spreading stuff around his unit. The Navy didn’t take any action at all, even though they publicly said that they would.*¹¹⁴

100. We subsequently asked Defence Intelligence (DI) if members of the Armed Forces are allowed to be members of extreme organisations that are not proscribed – and indeed if there are any restrictions on the type of organisations that the military are permitted to join – and were told:

*MOD policies do not explicitly state which organisations a Service person may be a member of, nor do they place limits on the nature of organisations that a Service person may join. However, any extremist ideology is completely at odds with the values of our Armed Forces and MOD works closely with police and security partners to ensure that any activity or membership of concern is thoroughly investigated. The MOD routinely works with the Home Office to implement the Prevent programme across the Armed Forces, including training personnel to ensure that they are aware of what to do if they believe an individual is showing signs of radicalisation. In addition, Regular Service personnel are prohibited from engaging in political activity and this may have a bearing on some cases ...*¹¹⁵

¹¹² ‘The British Army’s Guide for Spotting “Extreme Right-Wing” Soldiers Has Leaked Online’, BuzzFeed News, 29 May 2019.

¹¹³ ‘Royal Navy allows members of white nationalist group to remain in service’, *The Independent*, 15 March 2020.

¹¹⁴ Oral evidence – Nick Lowles, Hope Not Hate, 16 December 2020.

¹¹⁵ Written evidence – DI, 26 May 2021.

101. DI told the Committee that its Counter Intelligence (CI) unit¹¹⁶ had set up an Insider Threat team in 2018, which works to understand and counter the threats to Ministry of Defence (MoD) establishments and current or former MoD personnel:

*This includes insider threats from personnel who may engage in [E]RWT. The team conducts searches for indicators of insider activity, and cases where significant indicators of risk are detected will be referred for investigative action. DI CI works continuously with Five Eyes partners to *** ***. DI CI also participates in joint training activities with ***, to refine techniques, tactics and procedures, and ensure working to common standards. MOD Prevent referrals for 2019 totalled 14, of which 13 were for [Extreme] right-wing concern. Referrals for 2020 to date total 7 of which 6 are for [Extreme] Right-Wing concern. The [Extreme] Right-Wing referrals relate to the views expressed by a small number of individuals, none of whom were members of proscribed right-wing organisations or involved in [E]RWT activity.¹¹⁷*

G. The fact that the Armed Forces do not provide clear direction to service personnel regarding membership of any organisation – let alone an extremist one – would appear to be something of an anomaly. It could be argued that this is a somewhat risky approach, given the sensitive roles of many service personnel.

The police

102. There is a similar risk from the ‘insider threat’ in relation to the police. The risk of radicalisation in general (and not just by the Far Right) was highlighted in a 2020 report published by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services on the contribution being made by the police to the Prevent programme. The report noted that “few staff we interviewed had considered the possibility that their staff could be vulnerable to radicalisation”.¹¹⁸

103. However, Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) told the Committee during this Inquiry that the police are aware of the potential for those within policing to be exposed to, and influenced by, Right-Wing Extremist ideologies, and that this risk could stem from officers and staff being exposed to influencing factors in their routine lives, or from enhanced exposure to extremist content due to their specialist roles. CTP notes that there are a number of measures in place to address these potential vulnerabilities:

- *Across policing there are mechanisms for officers and staff to discreetly report concerns about colleagues which would then be subject to further investigation;*
- *If employees become the subject of an ERWT investigation, it is expected that their employment would be identified through the course of the investigation. In such cases, CTP and MI5 would develop the intelligence, and where appropriate disrupt the threat; and*

¹¹⁶ The DI CI Insider Threat team works with MI5, SIS, GCHQ and the National Crime Agency.

¹¹⁷ Written evidence – DI, 30 November 2020.

¹¹⁸ Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, *Counter Terrorism Policing – An inspection of the police’s contribution to the government’s Prevent programme*, March 2020.

- *Existing vetting processes for policing, including enhanced levels of vetting for sensitive posts, offer a further level of assurance to identify any vulnerability.*¹¹⁹

104. This issue was brought into sharp focus in April 2021, when the media reported that Metropolitan Police officer Ben Hannam had been convicted of membership of National Action. Hannam was jailed for four years and four months – the first serving British police officer to be convicted of a terrorism offence. It had emerged during his trial that there were indications of his beliefs whilst he was still at school (he had apparently joined National Action in early 2016 whilst studying for his A-levels, and just two days before he applied to join the force had appeared in a neo-Nazi propaganda video). A teacher told the trial she had been unable to mark one essay submitted by Hannam – the first time this had happened in 20 years of teaching – because of “*concerning content*” and his “*intolerance towards Islam*”.¹²⁰ He was also spoken to after students at his diverse school reacted to ‘anti-immigration’ views he espoused during a debate. A Prevent referral was not made at the time. However, the police had not sought a reference from the school when Hannam applied to join the police.

105. When we questioned the Head of CTP about this, we were told that Hannam had undergone the same checks as other recruits applying for the police, and that their “*current vetting processes would not have picked up Hannam’s membership and interest in National Action*”.¹²¹

106. Hannam’s extremist activity had eventually been picked up through a data leak from a closed forum called Iron March.¹²² CTP explained that for the police to have picked up Hannam, without having detected that leak, at the point of entering the police, they would have needed to complete an extensive search of his internet activity and IP searches. We were told that this has not, to date, been done routinely for individuals joining the police, on the grounds that the resource and privacy implications are “*quite enormous*”. The police are now actively considering this additional measure, although the Head of CTP caveated that “*reality being ... people don’t like the idea that their whole internet history is going to be looked at as part of their application for a particular job*”.¹²³

107. When we asked the Home Secretary whether she was comfortable with that level of risk when it came to the police, she was clear that as far as she was concerned it was imperative that the vetting process for those entering the police was sufficiently rigorous:

*my line of questioning now around vetting is very much case by case, step by step, you know, what are the processes, and there are other individuals as well, not in relation to this example but others where I’m asking some pretty detailed questions because one of the areas where I need assurance right now is that it’s not just, you know, desk-based, paper-based tick-box but people are actually contacted and the right questions are being asked and they are asked consistently.*¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ Written evidence – CTP, 14 September 2020.

¹²⁰ ‘Ben Hannam: the neo-Nazi who joined the Metropolitan Police’, BBC News, 1 April 2021.

¹²¹ Oral evidence – CTP, 28 April 2021.

¹²² Iron March was a neo-Nazi website. It was launched in 2011 and ceased operating in 2017.

¹²³ Oral evidence – CTP, 28 April 2021.

¹²⁴ Oral evidence – Home Secretary, 20 May 2021.

H. There appears to be an issue around the current vetting processes for candidates applying to join the police – the lack of thorough background checks is a matter of concern. As the internet and the wider online sphere is the key driver of the Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism threat, it follows that online activity must be closely scrutinised when the police are assessing whether an individual is suitable to join its ranks.

THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

108. The Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) assesses that there are Extreme Right-Wing (XRW) links to the UK from the *** countries; ***, ***, ***, ***, *** and *** (although this is not an exhaustive list and it is likely that links to other countries and individuals exist). However, accurate international Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT) statistics are not available as differing thresholds for terrorism and hate crime mean that comparisons cannot be properly measured.¹²⁵

ERWT groups in Northern Europe

109. There are a number of Right-Wing Extremist and ERWT groups in northern Europe – some with links to the UK:

- *The Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) is active in Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Finland. NRM wishes to establish a Nordic National Socialist government by revolution or through the political system. It claims this is a struggle which will require bloodshed. Across the region, NRM has been linked to multiple murders, attack plots and the possession of weapons and explosive materials. In Finland, NRM is a proscribed group – however, members have re-formed as other groups, including: Towards Freedom, The Peoples Unity Association and the charitable body Finland Aid. *** In the UK, ***.*
- *Nordic Strength (NS) was formed in Sweden in August 2019 by the former NRM leader Klaus Lund. NS has broadly the same aims as NRM, but rejects its advocacy of using the political system to achieve its objectives, and has attracted the more violent members of NRM. ***.*
- *Sonnenkrieg Division (SKD) was originally a solely UK-based group, however through exploitation of the online space SKD ***. Since the arrest of UK-based SKD members, the group currently operates predominantly as an online entity with international members.*
- *Scrofa Division is a White Supremacist online store selling t-shirts and other merchandise. It was banned from Facebook in 2018 but as of 2019 was still active online.*
- *Soldiers of Odin (SoO) is a street movement formed in 2015 in response to the influx of refugees to Europe. The group has a small presence across Northern Europe and Canada, and operates as a street militia, patrolling towns in an attempt to ‘protect’ its white citizens from immigrants.*
- *Blood and Honour/Combat 18 (B&H/C18) is a RW music scene movement, founded in the early 1990s in the UK. In 2019 it was active in some northern European countries: ***, ***, ***, *** and ***. B&H/C18 are unlikely to be directly involved*

¹²⁵ JTAC paper, 6 September 2019.

*in attack planning in the UK. However, it is a realistic possibility that international elements of the groups are involved in violent activity.*¹²⁶

ERWT activity in Germany

110. A series of ERWT attacks in Germany in recent years point to a growing crisis: ERWT has moved from a conceptual threat to a clear and present danger. The German broadcaster Deutsche Welle (DW) reported on 10 February 2020 that, according to Germany's domestic security service, there were "*some 12,700 far-right extremists 'oriented towards violence'*".¹²⁷ The Right-Wing Extremist scene in Germany is composed of neo-Nazi elements, Komradschaften (comradeships), loose networks of Right-Wing Extremists from different sub-cultures and the so-called 'intellectual right'.¹²⁸ Germany's domestic intelligence agency (the BfV) has stated that the most radical Right-Wing Extremists in the country number 32,000 and that 13,000 of these are considered potentially violent.¹²⁹

111. In November 2020, it was reported that the German authorities had charged 12 alleged members of an ERWT cell with terror offences, including planning attacks on politicians, asylum-seekers and Muslims – it is notable that these individuals had apparently set up their own ERWT movement in order to carry out these attacks.¹³⁰

112. Germany's security services categorise crimes committed by Right-Wing Extremists as "*politically motivated right-wing crime*".¹³¹ This includes violence perpetrated against foreigners, Jews, Muslims, political opponents or representatives of the state. The authorities collect data pertaining to the victims of Far-Right violence in the country¹³² – as at 20 February 2020 the official death toll was 94, although critics accuse the authorities of not always categorising crimes as politically motivated, but instead attributing them to personal revenge or being motivated by other circumstances.

¹²⁶ ***

¹²⁷ 'Right-wing terror in Germany: a timeline', Deutsche Welle, 20 February 2020.

¹²⁸ Europol, 'Right-wing terrorism', European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2019.

¹²⁹ 'German spy agency puts part of far-right AfD under surveillance', *The Guardian*, 12 March 2020.

¹³⁰ 'Germany charges 12 in far-right terror plot', Deutsche Welle, 12 November 2020.

¹³¹ 'Right-wing terror in Germany: a timeline', Deutsche Welle, 20 February 2020.

¹³² This data has been collected since the reunification of Germany in 1990.

*Germany: A mounting number of attacks*¹³³

- **19 February 2020: Hanau shooting.** A gunman assassinated nine people in two shisha bars in Hanau. The suspect was found dead hours later in his home. A letter of confession was found, together with a video made by the suspect espousing a mix of bizarre ideologies, which are not consistent with any particular movement. While much of his hatred was directed toward Turkish and North African immigrants (whom he targeted at the shisha restaurants), he also referred to antisemitic and UFO-based conspiracy theories and expressed sympathy with the ‘Incel’ community.¹³⁴
- **1 December 2019: infiltration of the special forces.** DW reported that suspected neo-Nazis had been discovered in the ranks of Germany’s special forces.
- **9 October 2019: Halle Synagogue.** An armed lone attacker attempted to enter a synagogue in the city of Halle. Unable to gain access to the building, he killed a passerby before driving to a kebab shop where he killed a customer. He had written a ‘manifesto’ espousing antisemitic, racist and xenophobic views.
- **2 June 2019: murder of politician Walter Lübcke.** Lübcke was a German local politician in Hesse, and a member of the Christian Democratic Union party. He was assassinated at his home by neo-Nazi extremist Stephan Ernst.
- **22 July 2016: mass shooting at Munich shopping mall.** A shooter killed nine people before turning the gun on himself. Although it was not initially attributed to ERWT, the police later opened a further investigation and in 2019 announced that the killer held Right-Wing Extremist views.
- **2015 and 2016: attacks on refugee centres.** In 2016, the authorities registered 995 attacks on refugee centres. In 2015, an ERWT group naming itself Gruppe Freital carried out a number of attacks on refugees. (In 2018, eight members of the group were convicted of founding a terrorist organisation.)
- **1990–1993.** In the early 1990s, neo-Nazis set fire to multiple buildings housing asylum-seekers and foreigners. A total of 58 people were killed.

113. The threat is compounded by the growing influence of the Far Right and XRW in the political sphere. The Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party was founded in 2013 in response to the Eurozone bailout measures for Greece, and is currently the largest opposition party in the Bundestag, Germany’s lower house of parliament, with a significant presence in state parliaments, especially in the east.

114. On 12 March 2020, it was reported that Thomas Haldenwang, the Chief of Germany’s domestic intelligence agency (BfV), had placed elements of the AfD under formal surveillance:

His Agency has placed under formal surveillance the AfD’s most radical faction, Der Flügel (The Wing). While there are no formal membership lists, Der Flügel is estimated to have about 7,000 followers, making up a fifth of the AfD’s membership. Its influence in the party, however, goes beyond that, with its radically nationalist demands helping to shape the

¹³³ ‘Right-wing terror in Germany: a timeline’, Deutsche Welle, 20 February 2020.

¹³⁴ ‘Terror in Hanau: Right Response’, Hope Not Hate, 20 February 2020; ‘Germany mass shooting: Gunman was eugenicist, manifesto shows’, *Independent*, 20 February 2020.

Belgium

There are a number of ERWT and extremist groups active in Belgium – the majority under investigation are neo-Nazi.

Finland

The Finnish XRW scene draws heavily on ‘Cultural Nationalism’, with groups such as Soldiers of Odin (SoO) and NRM framed as a response to the influx of refugees in 2015.

Iceland

*NRM has a small presence in Iceland. In 2017, Australian national Brenton Tarrant (the Christchurch attacker) spent time in Iceland,***.*

ERWT activity in the US and Canada

116. In the US, ERWT has its roots in the ‘white terrorism’ perpetrated against African Americans during the 1860s–1870s, and later the anti-government ideology which motivated Timothy McVeigh’s 1995 bombing in Oklahoma City.

117. As at January 2020, ERWT attacks have killed an estimated 110 people in the US since 9/11 (compared with 107 people killed by Islamist terror attacks in the same period).¹³⁸ In many cases, these attacks have been conducted by lone individuals who take advantage of America’s permissive gun laws to fuel their attacks. ERWT is categorised as ‘Racially and Ethnically motivated violent Extremism’ in the US, which falls under the umbrella of ‘Domestic Terrorism’ – alongside all other terror incidents conducted by domestic attackers and motivated by domestic issues/organisations. ‘Domestic Terrorism’ is not a federal crime, and in most instances is dealt with by state police rather than federal law enforcement or intelligence services.¹³⁹ As a result, accurate statistics are not readily available on ERWT since some terrorist acts may have previously been described as hate crime or extremism.

118. Nevertheless, in the period 1 January 2019 to 26 September 2019 there were two ERWT attacks in the US, with a further six plots disrupted:¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ ‘Terrorism in America, Part IV: What is the threat to the United States today?’, New America Foundation, 2019.

¹³⁹ ‘How many attacks will it take until the white-supremacist threat is taken seriously?’, *The Atlantic*, 4 August 2019.

¹⁴⁰ ***

<i>Attacks</i>	
27 April 2019	Jon Earnest attacked the Chabad of Poway Synagogue in San Diego, California with an assault rifle, killing one and injuring three others. A few hours before the attack, a manifesto written by Earnest appeared on 8chan, an online message board system known to be used by Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists – in it he cited Brenton Tarrant (the Christchurch attacker) as a strong influence. Earnest held antisemitic and White Supremacist views, and was active in the ERWT online community.
3 August 2019	Patrick Crusius attacked a Walmart store in El Paso, Texas with an automatic weapon, killing 22 and injuring 26. US authorities investigated the attack as domestic violent extremism.
<i>Disrupted plots</i>	
June 2019	Ross Farca was arrested in California and charged with making criminal threats and possession and manufacturing of an illegal assault rifle. Farca allegedly posted an online threat to commit a mass shooting at a synagogue.
14 June 2019	Joshua Leff was arrested in Florida, US for posting threatening messages on BitChute ¹⁴¹ and Gab. Leff was understood to adhere to Right-Wing Extremist ideologies and was charged with intimidation, sending threatening messages and possession of a weapon by a convicted felon.
7 August 2019	Cesar Sayoc was sentenced to 20 years in prison for sending 16 packages containing explosives to public figures and politicians in 2018.
8 August 2019	Conor Climo was arrested in Las Vegas for threatening to attack Jewish sites and patrons at an LGBTQ bar. On searching his property, the authorities discovered weapons and explosives.
17 August 2019	James Reardon was arrested by police in Ohio for threatening to attack a Jewish community centre. Police stated that a search of Reardon’s home uncovered two semi-automatic rifles, an anti-tank gun, body armour and White Nationalist material.
21 September 2019	US Army soldier Jarratt William Smith was arrested by the FBI on suspicion of sharing bomb-making instructional material via social media. Smith also suggested using a vehicle-borne IED to attack a major news network and Democrat politicians. *** ¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ BitChute is a UK registered company, founded by British nationals and based in Andover. It was launched in February 2017 as a platform for content removed by other, bigger social media platforms.

¹⁴² ***

119. The El Paso attack on 3 August 2019 was the seventh highest mass casualty in American history, with 22 casualties. The attack appeared to have a particular resonance with the ERWT community and it is highly likely that Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists view this attack as ‘successful’:

*the large number of casualties resonates with the online [X]RW terrorist community. Online [X]RW terrorists refer to the El Paso shooter as “Saint Crusius” and “Saint Patrick”; a similar reaction was seen towards Brenton Tarrant, the perpetrator of the Christchurch attack.*¹⁴³

120. In addition to the attacks and attack-planning, we are advised that a large number of US nationals contribute to the promulgation of ERWT rhetoric online. Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists operating online in the US are also protected, in part, by the First Amendment of the US Constitution and Section 230 of the US Communications Decency Act. Posts and comments which would constitute a hate crime in the UK may be legal in the US. As a result, XRW online sites see considerable contributions from US-based activists. There are also a large number of XRW groups active across the US who are predominantly involved in street protests.

121. We are advised that the number of ERWT groups in the US is not known. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC),¹⁴⁴ there were 1,020 hate groups active in the US in 2018, with 148 listed as White Nationalist and 112 groups as neo-Nazi. However, not all the groups listed by SPLC would necessarily meet the terrorism thresholds in the UK.¹⁴⁵ Members of the Proud Boys, a right-wing nationalist extremist group, were arrested for their role in the attack on Congress in Washington, DC on 6 January 2021.¹⁴⁶ Whilst not banned in the US, the Proud Boys were designated as a ‘terrorist entity’ by the Canadian government on 3 February 2021: “Public Safety Minister Bill Blair said the decision was influenced by the group’s pivotal role in the 6 January riots at the Capitol in Washington, DC.”¹⁴⁷

122. In September 2019, it was assessed that the following are key international groups who have US and Canadian members and who incite or support the use of terrorist acts:

- Atomwaffen Division US (AWD-US) was officially founded in 2015 by members of the now defunct ‘Iron March’ forum. A US-based group, it took its influence from the UK group National Action (now proscribed) and was believed to have affiliated groups in ***, ***, ***, ***, and ***. In March 2020, AWD claimed to have disbanded in an audio statement made by James Mason.¹⁴⁸ The recording indicated that the group was disbanding following FBI scrutiny of its activity. According to open-source reporting, the group re-emerged as the National Socialist Order and has a new leadership structure.

¹⁴³ ***

¹⁴⁴ The Southern Law Poverty Center (SPLC) is an American non-profit legal advocacy organisation specialising in civil rights and public interest litigation.

¹⁴⁵ ***

¹⁴⁶ ‘Did the Proud Boys Help Coordinate the Capitol Riot? Yes, U.S. suggests’, *New York Times*, 5 February 2021, [nytimes.com/2021/02/05nyregion/proud-boys-capitol-riot-conspiracy.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/05nyregion/proud-boys-capitol-riot-conspiracy.html)

¹⁴⁷ ‘Proud Boys: Canada labels far-right group a terrorist entity’, BBC News, 3 February 2021, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-5592348

¹⁴⁸ James Mason is the author of *Siege*, a collection of writing which advocates the use of terrorist violence. *Siege* is covered in more detail later in this section.

- The Base, founded by US national Norman Spear, is a global White Supremacist/White Nationalist network launched with the aim of unifying Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists into a militia aiming to prepare and train for the coming ‘race war’. JTAC assesses that the international profile of the group means that ***.¹⁴⁹
- Northern Order (NO) is an AWD-aligned group based in Canada. A Canadian-based member, known as ‘Dark Foreigner’, creates and disseminates violent imagery for AWD and internationally AWD-aligned groups. It supports Siege culture and ‘accelerationism’.¹⁵⁰
- Feuerkrieg Division (FKD) was an international virtual White Supremacist group; it also had a presence in Europe and the Five Eyes. On 8 February 2020, it claimed to have ‘dissolved’, and in April 2020 Estonian police arrested a 13-year-old boy, identified only as ‘Commander’, who had allegedly created and led the FKD. JTAC assesses that:

***¹⁵¹

Links to the UK

123. Links have existed between ERWT groups and individuals in the UK, Europe and elsewhere for several years. The Director General of MI5 confirmed that “*the groups element of this is less influential on what we are seeing amongst our subjects than the individual links over the internet*”.¹⁵² Across the board, the most striking feature has been the increase in globally affiliated groups, and the growth of transnational and shared ideologies – this is likely due to ERWT groups’ increased use of the online space (which is explored in depth in the next chapter).¹⁵³

124. One of the most important influences has been the book *Siege*, a collection of newsletters and articles by American neo-Nazi James Mason,¹⁵⁴ a document Professor Matthew Feldman calls “*amongst the most dangerous Neo-Nazi texts currently available*”.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ ***

¹⁵⁰ ‘Accelerationism’ is an extreme Far-Right theory which centres on the idea that rebuilding a racially pure world order requires stoking chaos through mass attacks and taking up arms to ignite a race war.

¹⁵¹ ***

¹⁵² Oral evidence – MI5, 28 April 2021.

¹⁵³ ***

¹⁵⁴ Mason joined the American Nazi Party in 1966, aged 14, and later joined the terrorist group the National Socialist Liberation Front. After a period of dormancy in the 2000s, Mason emerged online again in July 2017, a move which galvanised neo-Nazis across the world.

¹⁵⁵ Written evidence – Professor Matthew Feldman, 23 October 2020.

The influence of ‘Siege culture’ and ‘accelerationism’

Propaganda is used prolifically amongst Right-Wing Extremists across the English-speaking world, where it is shared and adapted online, including by Right-Wing Extremists in the UK. JTAC advises that “*similar and almost identical propaganda material has been seen disseminating from groups in the UK, America and Australia*”.¹⁵⁶

Much of this propaganda is based on shared, transnational ideology, most notably that espoused by American White Supremacist James Mason in his book *Siege*, from which the terms ‘Siege culture’ and ‘accelerationism’ are derived.

A compilation of Mason’s ‘Siege’ newsletters written in the period 1980–1986, the book advocates the creation of autonomous terror cells to wage war against ‘the system’ through violent revolution and political terrorism. JTAC advises that it is one of the few pieces of Right-Wing Extremist literature providing inspiration for how White Supremacist groups, both domestically and internationally, should operate and strategically plan.¹⁵⁷ Rather bizarrely, *Siege* is freely available from Amazon and other online retailers.

Mason advocates a five-stage approach to establishing a fascist, white ethno-state, first detailed in the 1961 publication *This Time the World*, by George Lincoln Rockwell, former leader of the American Nazi Party and a major influence on Mason.

These five stages are:

1. making the masses aware of the National Socialist Movement;
2. using propaganda to ‘educate’ the masses on true National Socialism and the perceived problems caused by the Jewish people and ‘black’ population;
3. entering into the democratic political process;
4. coming to political power on a platform of ‘dealing with the Negro people’ through a policy of deportation; and
5. the extermination of any ‘traitors’ (most particularly the Jewish population).

‘Accelerationism’ is a concept adopted by Mason whereby certain acts of violence are positively viewed as contributing towards a ‘race war’ – for example, Brenton Tarrant’s terrorist attack in Christchurch in March 2019.

125. ***.¹⁵⁸

***.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ JTAC paper, 4 May 2019.

¹⁵⁷ JTAC paper, 4 September 2019.

¹⁵⁸ ***

¹⁵⁹ ***

126. ***¹⁶⁰ ***¹⁶¹

- ***
- ***
- ***
- ***¹⁶²

127. ***¹⁶³

I. There is no process in place to monitor those ‘G*’ individuals who have travelled overseas for Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism-related purposes and have returned to the UK – there is a strong possibility that these returning foreign fighters, some of whom may have fought ***, will have been further radicalised *** and developed connections with others who share their Extreme Right-Wing ideology.**

ERWT support from other nation states: Russia

128. Russia has a longstanding history of using proxy actors to exert political influence and cause social unrest, and it is highly likely that it perceives exerting influence via Far-Right groups as an effective way to exacerbate tensions in the West. MI5 advises that:

*Links between the Russian state and Right Wing Extremists ***. JSTAT [the Joint State Threat Assessment Team]¹⁶⁴ assesses that Russia *** Extreme Right-Wing groups *** *** several of these groups have pro-Russia sympathies. It is likely some UK-based individuals and groups with Extreme Right Wing views may ***.¹⁶⁵*

129. There is some, limited, evidence to suggest that there is Russian state support for some Far-Right/XRW groups in the UK, ***.¹⁶⁶ It is likely that this is a bid to fuel divisions and increase socio-political discord generally. In October 2019, three members of Britain First were detained by the police at Heathrow on their return from a working trip to Moscow. Whilst in Russia, they had met with Russian parliamentarians and the Britain First leader, Paul Golding, gave an interview on state-owned TV channel Rossiya 24. Paul Golding refused to give the police the pin codes for a number of his electronic devices,¹⁶⁷ and was subsequently charged and convicted of refusing to comply with a duty under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁰ ***

¹⁶¹ ***

¹⁶² ***

¹⁶³ ***

¹⁶⁴ The Joint State Threat Assessment Team (JSTAT) is a cross-departmental assessment organisation that provides analysis on state threats to the UK and UK interests. JSTAT assesses the national security threat imposed by activities such as espionage, assassination, interference in the UK’s democracy, threats to the UK’s security and the UK’s people and assets overseas.

¹⁶⁵ ISC Right-Wing Terrorism inquiry – Written evidence, MI5, 31 January 2020.

¹⁶⁶ Britain First is a Far Right political party formed in 2011 by former members of the British National Party (BNP). The organisation’s current leader is former BNP Councillor, Paul Golding.

¹⁶⁷ BBC News, 21 February 2020.

¹⁶⁸ Schedule 7 allows police to interrogate, search and detain an individual for up to six hours at a port in the UK. Its purpose is to determine whether an individual is involved in the commission, preparation or instigation of an act of terrorism.

130. ***.¹⁶⁹

The Russian Imperial Movement

In April 2020, the US State Department proscribed the Russian Imperial Movement (an ultra-nationalist paramilitary group based in St Petersburg which allegedly has links to White Supremacist organisations in the West) as an international terrorist organisation.¹⁷⁰

In September 2020, JSTAT assessed that there was currently ***.¹⁷¹

Mixed Martial Arts

131. Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) was flagged up to the Committee by Nick Lowles, Chief Executive of Hope Not Hate, as a potential recruiting ground by, and for, the Far Right:

*The one other angle which hasn't influenced the UK as much as it has in central Europe but it has the potential to is the whole MMA world, so the mixed martial arts now. The Far Right in central Europe and the US has heavily tried to kind of get into the MMA world, which is, I guess, typical, it's very male, it's fighting, masculine, and a number of MMA instructors/fighters from the US have come to Europe over the last few years and in Germany, Poland, the Far Right influence in these worlds, they set up fight clubs. You know, some of the most distressing videos online are, you know, Russian and Polish extremists fighting each other for some fun online. In National Action, in the pre-ban days, there were six MMA instructors involved in National Action. So this is a world, I think, that, you know, certainly we need to be aware of, because it's deliberately being targeted by the Far Right now, because it's people who like fighting.*¹⁷²

132. These concerns are borne out by recent media reporting in Germany. In September 2020, the German media carried reports of a police raid on a Right-Wing Extremist MMA tournament (which had been banned in 2019) organised in the grounds of a motorcycle club in Magdeburg, and that “Germany’s intelligence services have described the event as ‘the largest and most renowned European martial arts event for the right-wing extremist scene.’”¹⁷³ However, when we asked CTP and Homeland Security Group about the possible connection between ERWT and MMA in the UK, they advised that they had, to date, seen no evidence of links between ERWT and MMA.¹⁷⁴

J. Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) is a popular activity enjoyed by many people across the UK. The fact that this is an area currently being targeted by the Far Right in other countries, and that a number of MMA instructors were previously found to have been involved in National Action, suggests that MI5 and Counter Terrorism Policing should be alert to the potential for links in the future.

¹⁶⁹ Written evidence – MI5, 2 October 2020.

¹⁷⁰ ‘United States Designates Russian Imperial Movement and Leaders as Global Terrorists’, 7 April 2020, state.gov/united-states-designates-russian-imperial-movement-and-leaders-as-global-terrorists/

¹⁷¹ ***

¹⁷² Oral evidence – Nick Lowles, Hope Not Hate, 16 December 2020.

¹⁷³ ‘Germany: Police raid far-right martial arts tournament’, Die Welle, 27 September 2020.

¹⁷⁴ Oral evidence – CTP and Home Office, 28 April 2021.

THE ONLINE SPACE

133. Historically, a journey into Right-Wing Extremism entailed real-world contact with organised groups and individuals in person, often through street demonstrations or music festivals. The combined deterrent of a police presence and travel logistics, together with a reticence to be seen publicly associating with controversial groups, discouraged many would-be members.

134. The internet has removed these barriers. Individuals can be anonymous and conduct online research from the privacy of their own homes, while organised groups can disseminate propaganda and recruit new members online. This recruitment can start with an invitation to a closed chat room in an online gaming community, or with a link to a closed forum. This global accessibility means a growing number of people now have access to, and are exploring, ERWT content online.

135. Nick Lowles, Chief Executive of Hope Not Hate, said that the online space is “*much harder to track. Groups start up and close quite quickly*”,¹⁷⁵ and the Director General of MI5 acknowledges the particular challenges of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT) online:

**** the ERWT online environment, whose distinctive sub-cultures, complex ideologies and propensity for violent but empty rhetoric make it hard to distinguish which individuals actually pose a genuine terrorist threat and which do not.*¹⁷⁶

136. ERWT material online appears to be more difficult to tackle than Islamist terrorism propaganda, perhaps because of the wider lack of understanding of the ERWT threat, and concerns regarding freedom of speech (particularly in the US where material held on US-owned platforms can go unchallenged owing to the US Constitution’s First Amendment).¹⁷⁷ The Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) also noted in 2019 that some of the secure messaging apps (SMAs) ***.¹⁷⁸

Categories of ERWT content online

137. The Home Office’s Extremism Analysis Unit (EAU) and the Research and Information Communications Unit (RICU; part of Homeland Security Group) have built a categorisation framework¹⁷⁹ which divides the Extreme Right-Wing (XRW) material that can be found online into seven categories as follows.

Performative propaganda

138. This comprises videos, images and streams of terrorist attacks and attackers, which may be produced and uploaded by parties – including the attacker as well as bystanders – and

¹⁷⁵ Oral evidence – Nick Lowles, Hope Not Hate, 16 December 2020.

¹⁷⁶ Written evidence – MI5, 30 September 2020.

¹⁷⁷ The Constitution of the United States of America is the supreme law of the United States. The First Amendment provides that Congress makes no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting its free exercise. It protects freedom of speech, the press, assembly, and the right to petition the government for a redress of grievance.

¹⁷⁸ JTAC paper, 4 July 2019.

¹⁷⁹ ‘Framework for Understanding Right-Wing Terrorist and Extremist Activity Online’, EAU and RICU, 18 November 2020.

are often re-uploaded repeatedly after an incident's conclusion. Videos of ERWT attacks are primarily recorded by the perpetrator. This is a relatively new trend in ERWT, beginning when Brenton Tarrant live-streamed the Christchurch attack on Facebook. Videos produced by perpetrators are in many cases removed by communication service providers (CSPs), either via their own proactive detection technology, or following referrals from law enforcement. The EAU–RICU report advised that when videos are produced by bystanders, there are complications as to whether the footage can be taken down from social media platforms in the same way.

139. While videos of ERWT attacks are less accessible on mainstream platforms, they can be found on:

- Chatrooms and imageboards: Marginal social media sites popular with ERWT and XRW audiences are often poorly moderated and enable users to freely share this content. For example, in November 2020 the video of Brenton Tarrant's attack in Christchurch could still be found online.¹⁸⁰
- Alternative search engines: Using search engines that are not as regulated as Google makes it more likely that a user will find this content.
- Archives: Archive platforms often still carry videos of attacks: for example, ***. Users of popular ERWT sites will actively encourage each other to archive content, particularly if they consider that there is a possibility that it may be removed from the sites on the grounds that it contains terrorist material.

Attack 'manifestos'

140. Attack 'manifestos' have an important function for the ERWT community – their authorship by previous attackers showcases ideology and they are seen as inspirational for individuals who may be planning to launch their own attacks. The EAU–RICU report noted that these are not usually subject to concerted efforts at removal. In March 2021, for example, it was still possible to access Anders Breivik's 'manifesto' online.

Group-aligned ERWT propaganda

141. Group-aligned ERWT propaganda is easily accessible through standard search engines (e.g. Google), as well as through other platforms such as Telegram. The UK-based video-hosting site BitChute hosts a number of pieces of video propaganda aligned with proscribed ERWT groups (such as National Action). Whilst this propaganda is not available to view from a UK IP address, any individual subscribing to a Virtual Private Network (VPN) provider can access these videos quite easily.

¹⁸⁰ The video of Tarrant's attack could be found on ***, a message boarding site on the dark web.

Memes with ERWT connotations

142. These are memes¹⁸¹ which are doctored or appropriated images used to portray a terrorist narrative – by definition these will be widely shared and evolve in nature as users update and make edits. They serve a variety of functions, including:

- Increasing influence: Being a ‘meme-lord’, someone reputed for producing popular memes, is a mark of prestige.
- Group identification: Memes provide in-group identification and can be used to simulate a chain of responses among online communities on social media.
- Signposting: Memes can encourage signposting to other content by hosting a hashtag or link in the corner of the image.

Discourse that incites, promotes or glorifies terrorism

143. Discourse that incites, promotes or glorifies ERWT can be found on openly accessible online forums – threads focusing on Brenton Tarrant (often referring to him as a ‘Saint’) are posted regularly on 4chan and other spaces frequented by ERWT audiences.

Video content used to popularise Right-Wing Extremist narratives by influencers

144. This includes vloggers, interviews, documentaries or professional videos that mainstream extremist narratives:

- Vloggers: Hand-held vloggers cultivate an image of authenticity and an illusion of proximity between influencers and their audiences.
- Professional videos.
- Documentaries: Many videos are produced using common documentary features such as interviews, data visualisation of statistics and narration over stock video footage.

Online ideological literature

145. Individuals view, suggest and exchange ideological literature online:

- ‘Cultural Nationalists’ promote a somewhat generic ideology, which promotes a narrative of British culture being under attack from a range of foreign influences and trends, notably Islam, immigration, globalism and multiculturalism. They are also critical of what they view as domestic cultural and political elites.
- ‘White Nationalists’ and ‘White Supremacists’ have a more actively conspiratorial view than ‘Cultural Nationalists’ and believe the so called ‘indigenous’ white race is being destroyed by a global conspiracy. The glorification of Nazi Germany and

¹⁸¹ A meme is a virally transmitted image embellished with text, generally sharing pointed commentary on cultural symbols, social ideas or events.

the denial of Nazi war crimes form an important part of ideology and culture (for example, revisionist accounts of the Second World War, such as David Irving's *Hitler's War*).

146. The Home Office acknowledges, however, that whilst they are developing their understanding of the material online they do not at present have a granular understanding of the volume of this material or indeed which categories are the most widely accessed:

*I have to be frank, I am not confident that even a year from now we will be able to because the material moves quite quickly, the platforms on which people operate move quite quickly, and so our ability to keep track of this is quite difficult.*¹⁸²

The XRW space was described as particularly challenging because:

*So much of this material is rather more subtle, dog-whistle material, use of sarcasm, use of images which are not immediately obvious to individuals who are not within this milieu ... this is a much more sophisticated set of propaganda than we have experienced in the past. That is not to say that ISIL and AQ propaganda is not highly sophisticated; it is, but it is much more conventional than the material that sits here.*¹⁸³

Platforms hosting ERWT material

147. JTAC assesses that these categories of material can be found on a variety of platforms and at different levels of encryption.¹⁸⁴ These five types of platforms are addressed below, but the headlines are:

- XRW terrorists and extremists use an array of SMAs (i.e. encrypted apps) to communicate with like-minded individuals. It is highly likely that their reliance on SMAs will increase.
- Some SMAs ***.¹⁸⁵
- Propaganda and rhetoric posted on both mainstream and ERWT-specific social networking sites/fora could inspire a Self-Initiated Terrorist to commit a terrorist attack.
- Some ERWT-focused sites provide safe havens for violent, extremist rhetoric, which can further radicalise individuals and present networking opportunities for Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists.
- With a large proportion of UK ERWT members being young and computer literate, it is highly likely that a growing number of the community have at least rudimentary knowledge of the benefits of VPNs and there is an awareness in some ERWT circles of the potential use of the 'dark web'.

¹⁸² Oral evidence – Home Office, 28 April 2021.

¹⁸³ Oral evidence – Home Office, 28 April 2021.

¹⁸⁴ JTAC paper, 4 July 2019.

¹⁸⁵ A Subject of Interest (SOI) is someone (or something) who is, or has been, investigated because they are suspected of being a threat to national security.

- There is limited use of ***.

Mainstream social media sites

148. XRW terrorists and extremists use an array of social media sites, many of which are considered ‘mainstream’, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. For example:

- National Action issued a series of tweets in 2016 applauding the murder of Jo Cox MP.
- Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (also known as Tommy Robinson – co-founder and former leader of the English Defence League)¹⁸⁶ – developed a substantial following on Facebook prior to his lifetime ban in February 2019.

149. Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists use *** mainstream social networking sites to communicate, although there is evidence that they self-censor ***. The fact that they continue to use mainstream media applications, despite the restrictive measures introduced by such applications to withdraw content against guidelines, suggests that they view the benefits of reaching a wider audience as outweighing the risk of their accounts being suspended and the possibility of increased scrutiny by the authorities. The Home Office pointed to the commercial benefits of the mainstream applications as a particular draw for Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists:

If you are trying to monetise your activity, you cannot really do that on the little platforms because there are not enough people out there. You can do it on the bigger ones, so one of the conversations we are having a lot with the CSPs at the moment is, is this really what you want to see being used on your platforms for commercial gains by third parties, and I am quite hopeful of that over the next year.¹⁸⁷

The Government’s dialogue with the CSPs, and the measures it is taking with regard to tackling extremist and terrorist content online, can be found later in this Report.

‘Fringe’ social networking sites

150. There are a range of fringe social networking sites and online fora which are used primarily by Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists. These include: Gab, 8kun (formerly known as 8chan) and 4chan – all sites which offer something of a ‘safe haven’ for individuals and offer greater anonymity for users.

151. Brenton Tarrant, the Christchurch attacker, was a user of 8chan. The site was shut down in August 2019 by the service provider Cloudflare in the wake of the El Paso shooting. However, on 8 August 2019, *The Guardian* reported that this action had simply shifted users to other platforms:

¹⁸⁶ The English Defence League (EDL) is a Far-Right Islamophobic organisation in the UK. According to its mission statement: “The English Defence League has arisen from the English working class to act, lead and inspire it in the struggle against global Islamification” (www.englishdefenceleague.org.uk).

¹⁸⁷ Oral evidence – Home Office, 28 April 2021.

Former members of 8chan have scattered across the internet after the far-right site was shut down over the weekend, finding new homes in other right wing sites, on encrypted messaging services, and on major social media platforms ... Among the sites 8chan users appear to be relocating to is Gab, the forum frequented by the alleged shooter in the November 2018 Pittsburgh synagogue attack. In a statement released on Wednesday, Gab said it was adding more than 1,000 users a day as 'big tech bans people'.¹⁸⁸

152. The EAU notes that the culture of 4chan is not welcoming to people claiming to be involved in organised groups, viewing them as either:

government-led hoaxes designed to entrap people, or ineffective clusters of people playing games rather than taking action ... in contrast, 4chan and 8chan praise lone actor attackers such as Brenton Tarrant, perceived to be focused on causing chaos rather than associated with a specific group with an overt ideology.¹⁸⁹

Online fora and dedicated extremist websites

153. There are a number of dedicated extremist websites and online haunts, frequented by the most extreme elements of the Far Right, such as Stormfront and Fascist Forge. JTAC advises that these sites, along with the fringe social networking sites above, are key influencers, ***.

Secure messaging applications

154. Secure messaging applications (SMAs) are messaging applications which use encryption to keep messages secure. For example:

- Telegram, which includes features such as self-deleting messages (***). JTAC assesses that ***.¹⁹⁰
- Tutanota, which offers end-to-end encryption of emails (***).

155. They are used by ERWT groups and individuals to plan meetings, exchange media and propaganda and communicate with other like-minded individuals. This is all achieved in a space with more robust communications security than through social media sites. JTAC assesses that it is this enhanced security which is so ***. As ERWT groups in the UK, such as National Action and Sonnenkrieg Division (both now proscribed organisations), expand their links with ERWT individuals and groups based in ***, it is likely that their reliance on SMAs will increase. However, JTAC acknowledges that:

***¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ '8chan: Ex-users of far-right site flock to new homes across the internet', *The Guardian*, 9 August 2019.

¹⁸⁹ RICU, 'Atomwaffen Division and the evolution of the international White Supremacist movement', September 2020.

¹⁹⁰ JTAC paper, 4 July 2019.

¹⁹¹ JTAC paper, 4 July 2019.

Gaming platforms

156. Homeland Security Group noted: “*There is no question there is an over-representation of young people interested in Right Wing Extremism in the gaming space*”.¹⁹² Specific features of some gaming-related platforms facilitate online radicalisation by creating an environment in which radicalisation can occur. Gaming platforms are an alternative to the more traditional commercial messaging applications for terrorists to communicate online, and have been used to:

- recruit new followers;
- disseminate propaganda; and
- as a means of communication.

157. Many games have a built-in chat functionality, and there are also a number of third-party applications designed primarily for the gaming community with similar features to traditional SMAs – these include Steam, Twitch and Discord.

158. Discord is a freeware VOIP (Voice over IP) application and digital distribution platform, designed initially for the gaming community – accessed via a web browser or mobile app, it can be used to build private, invite-only groups. JTAC advises that:

*It is plausible that some RW terrorists began using Discord due to a background in online gaming. This is reflected in the common parlance of RW terrorists, where phrases such as ‘NPC’ (Non-Player Character) are used to refer to an individual who does not partake in enough RW terrorist activity. John Earnest, the San Diego shooter, made reference to getting a “high score” (by context, causing many deaths) in the letter he released prior to carrying out his attack. ***.¹⁹³*

159. *** there are three factors which might lead to more widespread use of gaming platforms:

- ***;
- ***; and
- ***.¹⁹⁴

160. Overall, the sheer volume of Right-Wing Extremist content in the online space and the lack of accountability of these organisations is a formidable challenge. The Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) observes that, whilst action is being taken by larger organisations such as Facebook, other smaller platforms such as BitChute continue to host and promote extremist content:

Some of the Far Right extremist content and support for terrorist causes found on BitChute include videos showing and/or advocating violence towards ethnic minorities, and racist rhetoric towards black and other

¹⁹² Oral evidence – Home Office, 28 April 2021.

¹⁹³ JTAC paper, 8 January 2020.

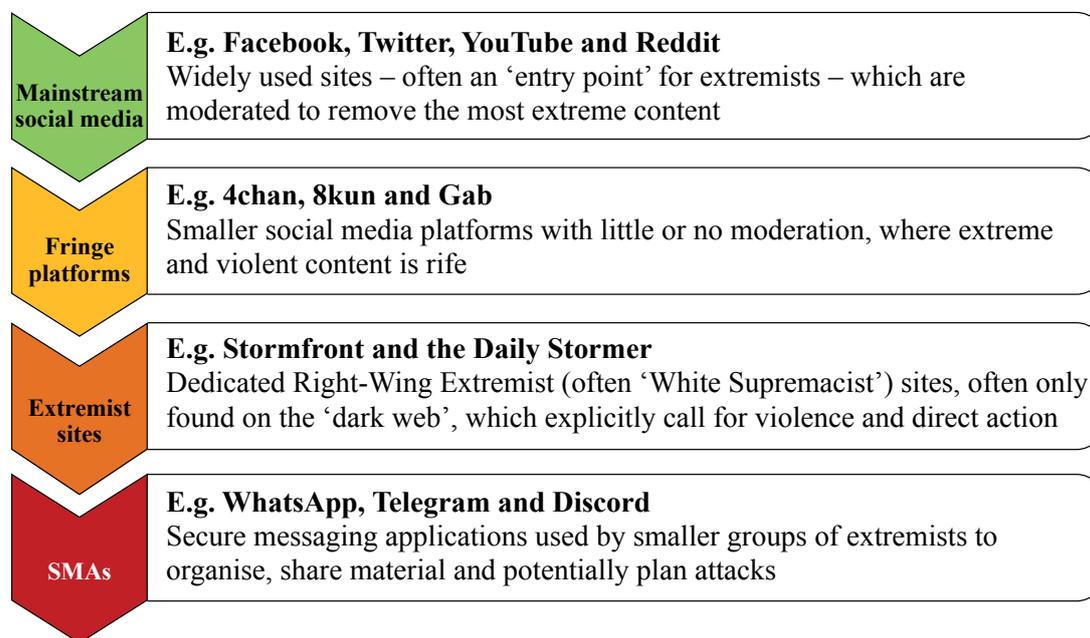
¹⁹⁴ ***

non-white communities. Videos have also included support for proscribed group National Action, celebration of British terrorist David Copeland and support for Australian terrorist Brenton Tarrant. BitChute have not faced any penalties for their content, despite the platform containing significant hateful and violent extremist content. While BitChute is known as a smaller platform, it tweeted of having 20 million unique visitors in April 2020 alone.¹⁹⁵

Progressing through the ecosystem

161. In terms of the different platforms, there is a clear ‘progression’. As the internet has grown, its use by the XRW has increased significantly. Extremists can now connect to potential new recruits via mainstream platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Reddit, before then encouraging them to move to using low- or zero-moderation fringe platforms such as 4chan, 8kun (formerly known as 8chan) and Gab where they will be exposed to more extreme content.¹⁹⁶ From there, they may also use encrypted apps (referred to by the Agencies as SMAs)¹⁹⁷ such as Telegram and Discord to coordinate and plan.¹⁹⁸ Once potential targets are channelled into small online ‘echo chambers’ on niche or private platforms, isolated from opposing viewpoints, it becomes much easier for recruiters to present them with violent material without fear of being banned by mainstream platforms or facing social censure.

162. However, not everyone will be guided through the online extremist ecosystem by an individual recruiter. Some will ‘self-radicalise’, gradually – or sometimes quickly – making their way through these stages to more extreme material as they seek out figures and ideologies that confirm their pre-existing biases.



¹⁹⁵ Written evidence – CCE, 17 December 2020.

¹⁹⁶ Mainstream social media platforms such as Twitter have terms of use which prohibit certain kinds of offensive content and hate speech, and they look to remove posts which violate these terms of use. However, there are a number of newer ‘fringe’ social media sites which market themselves as ‘free speech’ platforms, and therefore do not police the content posted there, even when it is explicitly extreme or violent.

¹⁹⁷ For example, secure messaging apps (SMAs) such as Telegram encrypt users’ data on mobile telephones by default, in a way that even the companies themselves cannot decrypt. This essentially places the data on those telephones beyond the reach of any law enforcement agencies, even where they have obtained a lawful court order for access.

¹⁹⁸ Munich Security Report 2020.

163. As well as providing an ecosystem that facilitates radicalisation, the online space can result in individuals, such as Anders Breivik and Brenton Tarrant, assuming ‘cult-like’ status:

- In July 2011, Anders Breivik carried out a mass shooting against the Workers Youth League (AUF), killing 69 people, and detonated an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) in central Oslo. He was convicted in 2012 of mass murder, causing a fatal explosion and terrorism.
- On 15 March 2019, Australian national Brenton Tarrant conducted a terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, killing 51 and injuring 49. Tarrant live-streamed the attack on Facebook and posted links to his ‘manifesto’ on 8chan, an XRW-dominated site. In the first 24 hours after the attack, it is known that there were at least 1.5 million attempts to upload the video. Tarrant was inspired by ERWT international narratives, marking his weapons with the names of attackers and attacks from around the world and including references to the Finsbury Park attack in his manifesto. Although he took inspiration from multiple sources, it is highly likely that he is not a member of any ERWT group.¹⁹⁹

164. In the intervening years since the attacks, Tarrant and Breivik have assumed ‘cult-like’ status, with aspiring Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists seeking to replicate elements of the attacks. JTAC advises that it is likely that if a UK-based individual active in the XRW online space planned to conduct an attack that received similar admiration to Tarrant’s, they would aspire to conduct a high-impact attack with a high number of fatalities, or ‘kill count’.²⁰⁰

Disrupting online activity: Feuerkrieg Division

165. The Feuerkrieg Division (FKD) was a predominantly online group made of international members who have coalesced in the online space.²⁰¹ ***, and the group was proscribed by the Home Secretary on 17 July 2020.

¹⁹⁹ JTAC paper, 6 September 2019.

²⁰⁰ JTAC paper, 21 October 2020.

²⁰¹ ‘ISC Right-Wing Terrorism Inquiry Background Evidence – The Threat’ – Written evidence, CTP and MI5, 31 January 2020.

Feuerkrieg Division (FKD)

- Whilst FKD was primarily an online group, ***.
- For example, a child subject to reporting restrictions and Paul Dunleavy, both FKD members who aspired to obtain firearms to conduct activity in support of their ERWT ideology, were both arrested under the Terrorism Act (TACT) 2000 in 2019. The child subject to reporting restrictions was sentenced in February 2021 to a two-year youth rehabilitation order after pleading guilty to ten counts of collecting information likely to be useful to those involved in acts of terrorism (S.58 TACT 2000) and one count of disseminating terrorist publications (S.2 TACT 2006). Paul Dunleavy was sentenced in November 2020 to five and a half years' imprisonment for the preparation of terrorist acts (S.5 TACT 2006),²⁰² and two years' imprisonment (to run concurrently) for nine counts of collecting information likely to be useful to those involved in acts of terrorism (S.58 TACT 2000).
- Another notable disruption is that of Luke Hunter, an FKD affiliate who created videos and propaganda for the group. Hunter had a huge online footprint in the Right-Wing Extremist space, administering his own website, hosting podcasts, creating propaganda and running a popular Telegram channel – all of which espoused extreme and violent views, frequently inciting ERWT-inspired attacks against perceived enemies. Luke Hunter was sentenced in December 2020 to four years and two months' imprisonment after pleading guilty to four counts of encouragement of terrorism (S.1 TACT 2006), three counts of disseminating terrorist publications (S.2 TACT 2006), and a single count of collecting information likely to be useful to those involved in acts of terrorism (S.58 TACT 2000).

166. JTAC assesses that external pressures (from law enforcement in the form of arrests for terrorism offences as well as the proscription of organisations such as FKD) has resulted in individuals active in the online space becoming increasingly cautious about joining established terrorist groups.²⁰³ It is also possible that reports of government online targeting of organisations has had an inhibiting effect – there have, for example, been media reports that RICU has infiltrated the Order of Nine Angles (ONA/O9A) movement: *“Whitehall sources said the RICU operation was set to build a case for banning ONA, which is considered to be the most extreme Far-Right Network in the world.”*²⁰⁴

K. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism online environment poses a new challenge for the Intelligence Community, and there is still a long way to go when it comes to tackling what is largely an ungoverned space. The Head of Counter Terrorism Policing told the Committee that *“the single biggest thing that keeps me awake at night is the proliferation of online and its ability to radicalise and incite people”*.²⁰⁵ The Director General of MI5 pointed to the particular challenge of determining Extreme Right-Wing activity online which could translate into ‘real-world’ terrorist activity:

²⁰² Section 5 of the 2006 Terrorism Act provides that an offence is committed if: a) a person intends to commit acts of terrorism, or b) a person intends to assist another to commit such acts; and c) a person engages in any conduct in preparation for giving effect to his intention. Acts of terrorism are defined as being anything constituting an action taken for the purposes of terrorism.

²⁰³ JTAC paper, 19 November 2020.

²⁰⁴ ‘Government propaganda unit is given secret mission to infiltrate neo-Nazis linked to murders and terror plots around the world’, *Mail on Sunday*, 3 January 2021.

²⁰⁵ Oral evidence – CTP, 28 April 2021.

*the activity itself is often just online espousal of violent views without any real world accompanying activity and so often we are monitoring something which is just online and nothing else, potentially for years on end, but it doesn't take much for an individual or a small group of individuals to change their direction and do something violent in the real world.*²⁰⁶

The measures being taken by the Intelligence Community and CTP to counter ERWT activity in the online space are covered later in this Report.

²⁰⁶ Oral evidence – MI5, 28 April 2021.

TARGETS

167. MI5 provided the Committee with information on the individuals and communities who are subject to what they term ‘grievance narratives’ or targeting activity, by Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT) groups and individuals.²⁰⁷

Ethnic and religious groups

168. Accelerated by the refugee crisis and recent Islamist terror attacks, Islamophobia has superseded general immigration as the key driver for the growth of the Far Right in the UK. ‘Cultural Nationalists’ commonly focus upon Islam, claiming it presents a threat to a so-called ‘White, Christian Europe’, and the Identitarian ‘Great Replacement theory’ alleges that mass migration of Muslims and the demographic growth of Islam present an existential threat to the West. However, anti-Muslim rhetoric is a consistent theme across all ideologies within the Far Right.

169. Antisemitism and Jewish conspiracy theories remain a key element of Far-Right rhetoric, and are particularly central to neo-Nazi and ‘White Supremacist’ narratives. Antisemitic narratives typically involve an alleged global conspiracy whereby Jews supposedly control Western governments to facilitate their own agendas.

170. ERWT grievances, particularly ‘White Supremacist’ narratives, centre upon the belief that the so-called ‘white race’ is superior to all others, and they target Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities.

171. In October 2020, the written evidence set out the threat level to six faith communities in the UK (the Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Sikh and Hindu communities) and it was assessed that Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists are more likely to target faith communities than terrorists of other ideologies and that the threat is greatest for Jewish and Muslim communities.

172. With regard to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, the written evidence noted:

- *The recent BLM protests and counter-protests are ***.*
- *It is likely that BLM protests would present a ***.*
- *There is a realistic possibility that UK-based RW individuals ***.*²⁰⁸

LGBTQ+ community

173. A number of ERWT grievance narratives advocate the defence of “so called ‘traditional values’, promoting the heterosexual cisgender family unit as the ‘cornerstone’ of some alleged ‘ideal’, claiming that LGBTQ+ communities present a threat to, and are at odds with, this vision”.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 27 June 2019.

²⁰⁸ ***

²⁰⁹ MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 27 June 2019.

174. ‘White Supremacist’ Ethan Stables announced online that he was planning to carry out an attack on an LGBTQ+ event at a pub in Cumbria.²¹⁰ Stables was convicted in February 2018 of preparation of terrorist acts (S.5 Terrorism Act 2006), as well as for making threats to kill and possession of explosives, and was later sentenced to an indefinite hospital order on 30 May 2018.

Politicians and other public figures

175. Many who adhere to Extreme Right-Wing (XRW) ideologies rail against the so-called ‘establishment.’ Anti-establishment narratives suggest the establishment is complicit in the so-called betrayal of the ‘white race’, presenting immigration policies as examples of the government sanctioning the demise of a ‘white’ cultural heritage. MI5 judges that:

*an increasing mainstreaming of these principles, coupled with a widespread crisis of authority, increases the ERWT threat to figures associated with the establishment, for example MPs.*²¹¹

176. This is a tangible threat in the UK, as borne out by the murder of Jo Cox MP by Thomas Mair in 2016, and the conviction of National Action member Jack Renshaw of plotting to murder Rosie Cooper MP. It is notable that a higher preponderance of female politicians are targeted by the Far Right, both here in the UK and across Europe. In July 2019, it was reported that the television news programme *Newsnight* had carried out a study in conjunction with the Institute for Strategic Dialogue looking at the nature of public commentary on prominent political figures across Europe which found that “*abuse of female politicians is rife online – and much of it is being directed by established Far-Right groups and figures. The investigation revealed evidence that female [political] figures receive proportionately more abuse than their male counterparts – and that a significant proportion of it takes the form of misogynistic and violent anti-female vitriol*”.²¹²

177. JTAC assesses that an attack which targets MPs is *** and that the primary threats come from Islamist terrorism and ERWT.²¹³ In December 2020, MI5 was ***.²¹⁴

178. There has been evidence of Far-Right ‘hackers’ using cyber attacks to release the personal information of their political opponents (a practice known as ‘doxxing’). In November 2018, a hacker known as ‘Johannes’ targeted a number of German public figures, politicians and online personalities (all of whom had voiced support for refugees or criticised the Far Right) and designed an ‘advent calendar’ whereby he released the personal details of a single individual each day, gradually building up to the release of details pertaining to Chancellor Angela Merkel and German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.²¹⁵ MI5 advised that ***.²¹⁶

²¹⁰ ***

²¹¹ MI5 Strategic Intelligence Group paper, 27 June 2019.

²¹² ‘A web of abuse: How the Far Right disproportionately targets female politicians’, BBC News, 15 July 2019.

²¹³ JTAC paper, 21 October 2021.

²¹⁴ JTAC paper, 14 December 2020.

²¹⁵ Julia Ebner, *Going Dark: the Secret Social Lives of Extremists*, 2020, pp.231–232.

²¹⁶ Oral evidence – MI5, 28 April 2021.

National institutions and infrastructure

The police

179. The police may be considered by some Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists to be part of the system they wish to change, and may justify their targeting of the police services on this basis:

- On 25 August 2018, a UK-based member of the ‘White Supremacist’ group Sonnenkrieg Division (SKD) distributed a poster on the social media website Gab urging sexual violence against female police officers.
- In September 2019, West Midlands Police was the subject of a ‘doxxing’ attack (the publishing online of personal identifiable information) by the Feuerkrieg Division (FKD) – this included posting the addresses of the district police headquarters, stations, learning facilities, offices and detainment centres on the FKD’s Telegram web portal.

180. In September 2020, written evidence noted that there had been *** UK police ***, and that *** other subsets of the population (such as politicians and minority groups).²¹⁷ Nonetheless, it remains *** Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists will target the police – as noted earlier in this Report – National Action member Jack Renshaw was arrested on 5 July 2017 for a plot to kill a named police officer as well as Rosie Cooper MP.²¹⁸

UK national infrastructure

181. In January 2020, conspiracy theories began to circulate alleging a connection between Covid-19 and the introduction of 5G masts, and it was reported that ERWT groups had started posting messages online encouraging their supporters to conduct attacks against 5G masts. Within some XRW circles, it is possible that national infrastructure is seen as a legitimate target in order to accelerate the fall of a modern Western state (and thereby instigate a ‘race war’ in order to create a fascist, white ethno-state).

182. In April 2020, a 5G mast in Birmingham was set alight in what is believed to have been an arson attack inspired by the 5G/Covid-19 conspiracy theory. Videos of the attack have been shared on multiple Right-Wing Extremist online groups supporting the action and calling for further attacks. It is unknown whether these attacks were terror related – ***. In September 2020, the threat assessment in relation to the electronic and broadcast communications sector ***.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ ***

²¹⁸ ***

²¹⁹ ***

A CHANGE IN RESPONSE

The 2017 attacks

183. There has been a notable change in approach to Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT) over the past five years – the proscription of National Action and the murder of Jo Cox MP in 2016 marked a change in the understanding of the threat. Then, in 2017, the United Kingdom suffered five serious terrorist attacks: at Westminster Bridge, Manchester Arena, London Bridge, Finsbury Park and Parsons Green, with 36 people killed and over 200 injured.

The Finsbury Park attack²²⁰

- On 19 June 2017, Darren Osborne drove a van into a group of men who were providing medical assistance to a man who had collapsed in the street outside an Islamic centre in Finsbury Park. One man was killed and ten people were injured.
- The post-attack investigation indicated that Osborne acted alone (and this was confirmed by Osborne himself during his interview with the police: “*I’m flying solo, mate*”). A hand-written note found in his vehicle, believed to have been written in the 48 hours before the event, provided evidence of an extremist mindset and hostility towards the Muslim community.
- Osborne had an extensive criminal history dating back to 1984, including 33 convictions for 102 offences ranging from assault to drugs and theft.
- Osborne had not been investigated by MI5 or Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) prior to launching his attack and was not known to be a member of, or have links to, any Right-Wing Extremist groups.

On 2 February 2018, Osborne was found guilty of murder and attempted murder with a terrorism connection and sentenced to life in prison, with a minimum term of 43 years.

Internal reviews and Lord Anderson’s report

184. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, MI5 and CTP launched a number of internal reviews in order to:

- identify what was known about the attackers and co-conspirators prior to each attack;
- review assessments, actions and decisions made prior to each attack in relation to intelligence held on the attackers and co-conspirators;
- identify and review contextual information that may have had a bearing on actions and decisions made; and
- identify learning points arising out of each case.²²¹

²²⁰ MI5 and CTP, *Counter Terrorism Policing Post-Attack Review – Finsbury Park*, October 2017.

²²¹ MI5 and CTP, *Operational Reviews Capping Document*, October 2017.

The then Home Secretary asked David Anderson QC (formerly the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, later Lord Anderson) to oversee the internal reviews in order to provide independent assurance of the robustness of the process. He was provided with access to the internal review work and produced his report in December 2017.²²²

185. Lord Anderson's published report recommended an increased role for MI5 and the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC). (CTP were responsible for what was at that time referred to as 'Domestic Extremism'.) In November 2017, Lord Anderson wrote to the Home Secretary regarding his findings – his letter analysed the handling of 'Domestic Extremism' at that time, and why a fresh approach was needed:

I was not impressed by the analysis of the threat from domestic extremism that was presented to me on behalf of CTP-NOC,²²³ and can well imagine that JTAC will be better equipped to do the job. The police themselves appear keen for JTAC to take over the assessment, though this may owe something to what is evidently a fractious relationship between CTP-NOC and the Extremism Analysis Unit in the Home Office.

The failure to produce a single coherent definition of domestic extremism – a concept that is currently being asked to serve too broad a range of purposes – has left CTP-NOC in something of a definitional cloud. But more than that, the international/domestic distinction is outdated, and the contrast in apparent seriousness between terrorism and extremism is just the sort of factor that – were it more widely known – would be grist to the mill of those who falsely allege state-sponsored Islamophobia and seek to attract fair-minded citizens to their cause.²²⁴

Operational Improvement Review (OIR)

186. In addition to the internal reviews, MI5 and CTP – supported by the wider Intelligence Community – established an Operational Improvement Review (OIR), which sought to identify and recommend improvements in counter-terrorism work. The OIR highlighted the need for a new approach to countering Domestic Extremism, which, it noted, covered a broad area of activity:

The term Domestic Extremism is used in the context of individuals, groups and events (including protests) linked to Extreme Right Wing, Extreme Left Wing, Animal Rights and Environmental causes, where there is a likelihood of significantly affecting community tension, or causing economic or reputational impact to the UK.²²⁵

²²² Attacks in London and Manchester – March–June 2017 – Independent Assessment of MI5 and Police Internal Reviews – David Anderson QC, 5 December 2017. The ISC undertook an Inquiry into the 2017 terror attacks, and published its Report *The 2017 Attacks: What needs to change?* in November 2018. The Committee's Inquiry did not specifically address the Finsbury Park terrorist attack and the associated issue of what was then termed 'Domestic Extremism'.

²²³ Counter Terrorism and Policing National Operations Centre.

²²⁴ 'Independent Assurance of the Police and MI5 Reviews of the London and Manchester Terror Attacks', Letter from David Anderson QC to the Home Secretary, 2 November 2017.

²²⁵ MI5 and CTP, *Operational Improvement Review*, October 2017 (Chapter 9 – Domestic Extremism).

The OIR observed that, at the time of publication in 2017, CTP was responsible for assessment of the Domestic Extremism threat, and that MI5 and JTAC were not involved:

The National Strategic Intelligence Team, situated in CTPHQ [CTP Headquarters] produces a yearly Strategic Assessment, from which DE Policing Priorities are drawn: Domestic Extremist Potential Lone Actors (PLAs) and National Action (a proscribed organisation designated as meeting the threshold of a terrorist organisation by the Home Secretary) feature in the top Tier of these priorities. Language, structure and content differ from ICT [International Counter-Terrorism, now known as Islamist terrorism] threat assessments and there is no consistency in the assessment process adopted.²²⁶

187. The OIR recommended that there should be an equivalence of processes in the assessment of terrorist threats – whether these emanated from Islamist extremism or from (what was then termed) Domestic Extremism. It was also quite specific that JTAC should play a role in the production of threat assessments.

Operational Improvement Review (OIR): Domestic Extremism²²⁷

- *There should be equivalence of processes in the assessment of terrorist threats – whether they flow from Islamist extremism or from other threats currently managed by CTP under Domestic Extremism structures.*
- *JTAC should be responsible for the production of national Threat Assessments of terrorist threats arising from Domestic Extremism work, employing common language, methodology and approach to that already used for Islamist extremist threats. A plan should be developed to put in place the necessary resource and processes to support this.*
- *CTP and MI5 should agree a formal process for greater MI5 involvement and visibility on the assessment of potential high-threat Domestic Extremism leads and investigations, as well as structure to enable decisions to be made on primacy for the highest level of Domestic Extremism investigations, where there is a potential terrorist threat.*

²²⁶ MI5 and CTP, *Operational Improvement Review*, October 2017 (Chapter 9 – Domestic Extremism).

²²⁷ MI5 and CTP, *Operational Improvement Review*, October 2017 (Chapter 9 – Domestic Extremism).

188. The OIR also listed nine specific recommendations regarding measures to be taken with regard to adopting a new approach to Domestic Extremism – these are listed below:

<i>Operational Improvement Review (OIR) – Recommendations²²⁸</i>
<i>9.1 The Home Office should consider whether the ICT and ‘Domestic Extremism’ labels are still fit for purpose and if not, in consultation with the CT community, should develop new ones.</i>
<i>9.2 JTAC should be responsible for the production of national Threat Assessments of terrorist threats arising from Domestic Extremism work, employing common language, methodology and approach to that already used for Islamist extremist threats. In order for JTAC to undertake this role, it would require additional resources, a clear policy framework and mechanisms for insight into relevant Police and MI5 investigations. The respective roles for JTAC, the Police and other partners, should be clarified in order to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the threat, reflecting current arrangements for ICT/Islamist extremism.</i>
<i>9.3 CTP and MI5 should also agree a formal process for greater MI5 involvement in the assessment of Red-graded IHM [Intelligence Handling Model] leads, and DE P1A [UK] and P1B [Overseas] priority investigations.²²⁹ A supporting formal governance structure should also be established to enable decisions to be made on primacy for the investigation of the highest level of Domestic Extremism cases, where a clear threat to national security is posed. This will allow greater MI5 exposure to the most serious DE threats and allow more effective resolution of these threats.</i>
<i>9.4 MI5 should be engaged in decision-making and resource allocation in all investigations relating to proscribed organisations such as National Action.</i>
<i>9.5 MI5 and CTP to consider how to improve international intelligence flows on DE, through multilateral [international] fora.</i>
<i>9.6 MI5 support should continue for DE post-attack investigations where appropriate, with consideration as to provision of specialist support capabilities.</i>
<i>9.7 CT policing to review existing post – DRR staffing formula and allocation within CT (I)US, with a view to re-establishing DE Thematic desks.</i>
<i>9.8 CTP and MI5 should review guidance to ensure consistency of process in application of IHM, recording of decisions and providing appropriate visibility of intelligence.</i>
<i>9.9 Consideration to be given to the resource impact on MI5 of accepting the above recommendations, as this would be new work.</i>

L. The Operational Improvement Review and its practical recommendations signalled a fundamental shift in the Government’s approach to what was then termed ‘Domestic Extremism’ – the subsequent transfer of lead responsibility from Counter Terrorism Policing to MI5 regarding what was by then recognised as a terrorist threat was a pragmatic and logical move.

²²⁸ MI5 and CTP, *Operational Improvement Review*, October 2017 (Chapter 9 – Domestic Extremism).

²²⁹ The investigative process is covered in detail later in this Report.

EXTREME RIGHT-WING TERRORISM STRATEGY (HOME OFFICE)

CONTEST (Counter-Terrorism Strategy)

189. In response to the 2017 terror attacks and the Operational Improvement Review (OIR), the Home Office released an updated Counter-Terrorism Strategy, CONTEST, in June 2018. CONTEST 2018 highlighted:

*the growing threat from extreme right-wing terrorism, noting that these groups, including neo-Nazis, seek to exploit any anxieties around globalisation, conflict and migration and that they share a racist view that minority communities are harming the interests of a native population.*²³⁰

190. A total of 31 departments and organisations contribute to the delivery of CONTEST.²³¹ The renamed Homeland Security Group (previously Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism, OSCT) in the Home Office is responsible for counter-terrorism strategy and policy design and works with the Intelligence Community, CTP and local, national and civil society partners to deliver policy objectives across the ‘4-Ps’:

- **Prevent** tackles intent, intervening to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism;
- **Pursue** tackles capability, that is, stopping terrorist attacks; and
- **Protect** and **Prepare** tackle impact, mitigating the effect of a potential terrorist attack.

Homeland Security Group also monitors the performance of the counter-terrorism system against the objectives set out in CONTEST.

191. Following the publication of the new CONTEST strategy, the UK counter-terrorism system increased their work on ERWT with a particular focus on understanding ERWT online behaviour and ERWT international links. Homeland Security Group advised the Committee that this work has been co-ordinated by the Counter-Terrorism Senior Responsible Official through the National Strategic Implementation Group for Counter Terrorism (NSIG CT), the strategic decision-making body for the counter-terrorism system across government.²³² As

²³⁰ Counter-Terrorism Strategy (CONTEST), June 2018.

²³¹ The Home Secretary has responsibility for CONTEST, and the Homeland Security Group (formerly termed the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism – OSCT) leads on supporting and developing CONTEST. The following 28 departments and organisations contribute to CONTEST: Cabinet Office; Centre for Protection of National Infrastructure; Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP); Crown Prosecution Service (CPS); Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl); Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS); Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS); Department for Education (DfE); Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC); Department for Transport (DfT); the devolved administrations; Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO); Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ); Government Office for Science (GO-Science); HM Treasury (HMT); Joint International Counter-Terrorism Unit (JICTU); Joint Overseas Protect and Prepare Team (JOPP); Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC); Local Authorities; Ministry of Defence (MoD); Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG); MI5; Ministry of Justice (MoJ); National Crime Agency (NCA); National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC); National Security Council (NSC); Northern Ireland Office (NIO); and Secret Intelligence Service (SIS).

²³² The National Strategic Implementation Group for Counter-Terrorism (NSIG CT) is the strategic decision-making body for the counter-terrorism system and represents over 20 departments, agencies and bodies. It also includes a sub-group which engages with the devolved administrations, local authorities and a wider membership of government departments.

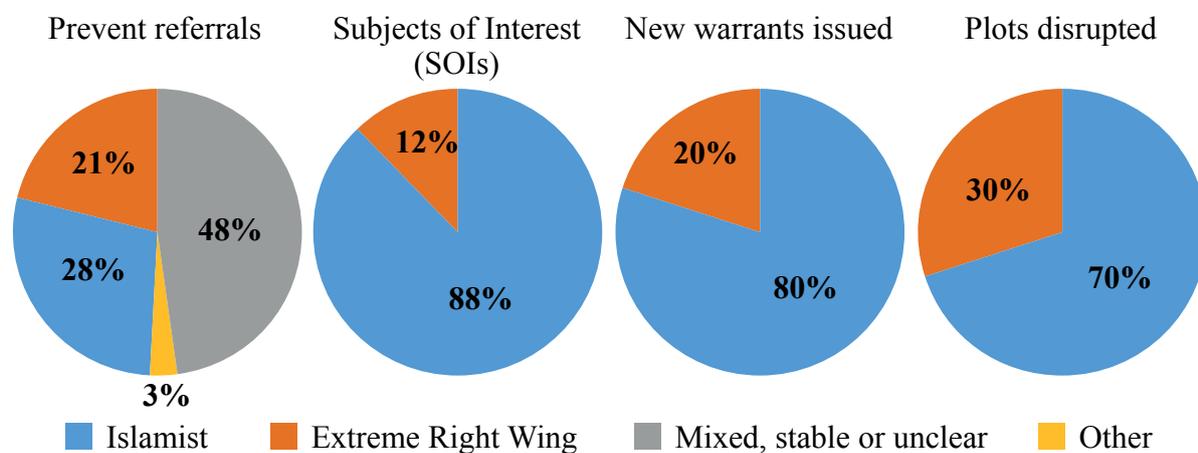
part of this drive, working groups have been established across the Intelligence Community and wider HMG on:

- Discovery and analysis;
- Online;
- Prevent;
- Human intelligence (HUMINT); and
- Prisons.

Prevent strand

192. The Prevent strand is, rightly, a matter for the Home Affairs Committee. The ISC primarily oversees the Pursue strand (which is covered in the next chapter), and is focused on the terrorist threat rather than extremism. Nevertheless, it was useful background for the Committee in this Inquiry to hear about the Extreme Right-Wing from those who manage the Prevent strand, and we have included that evidence as an Annex to this Report.

193. In the context of our Inquiry we do, however, note that there has been a significant increase in the number of individuals being referred to Prevent. Whilst there is no link between numbers of Prevent referrals, terrorism casework and warrant applications – each of which are entirely separate processes – it is nevertheless interesting to note the differences in ratios.²³³



M. The continuing rise in the number of referrals to Prevent for concerns around Extreme Right-Wing activity does not necessarily signal a similar increase in the Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism threat, rather it indicates a greater awareness of the potential risk and the greater focus being placed on this issue. We consider that the Home Affairs Committee may wish to examine how and why people are being referred to Prevent – and who is making these referrals.

²³³ These figures cover the following periods:
 – Prevent referrals covering period 2020–2021 (ending March 2021) – Oral evidence, Home Office, 29 April 2021
 – Number of SOIs (week commencing 26 April 2021) – Oral evidence, MI5, 28 April 2021
 – New warrants issued in 2020–2021 – Written evidence, MI5, 26 May 2021
 – Plots disrupted in 2016–2021 – Oral evidence, MI5, 29 April 2021.

Pursue strand

194. The objectives of the Pursue strand of CONTEST are to:

- A. *Detect and understand terrorist activity*
- B. *Investigate terrorist activity*
- C. *Disrupt terrorist investigations, including through prosecutions.*²³⁴

This work is primarily conducted by MI5, with CTP holding the executive action role, and oversight conducted by this Committee. Pursue activity is covered in the next chapter.

Working with advocacy groups

195. There are a number of advocacy groups involved in campaigning against racism and fascism. Nick Lowles, Chief Executive of Hope Not Hate, told the Committee that Hope Not Hate has informants inside a number of these Far-Right organisations, although when asked if it also followed that this meant his group had built links with the police he replied that “*we don’t have a particularly great relationship [with the police]”*, noting that “*with third party groups like ourselves and others, when they get hold of information it’s not that easy to put information into the system*’. He pointed to the example of:

*the Rosie Cooper [MP] plot where we had someone inside National Action after it was proscribed. That person learnt of a plot to kill a Labour MP which was days away from happening. Obviously it was our duty and we’ve got rules internally, and with our Board and with the Charity Commission and everything, we have these rules, but we had to go to the police with that, knowing that first of all someone was going to have to come out and give evidence but also and this is the situation with our relationship with the authorities. So Counter Terrorism then threatened to arrest us because we initially wouldn’t hand over the name of the person until we had an agreement he wouldn’t be prosecuted.*²³⁵

196. The Director General of MI5 advised that they might ***:

***²³⁶

When we asked the Home Secretary how often she met with advocacy groups, she said that whilst she herself did not: “*we [the Home Office] do as an organisation*”.²³⁷

N. Advocacy groups can play an important role, however we recognise that MI5 and Counter Terrorism Policing may be constrained in the way in which they are able to interact with them at an operational level, and we would encourage the Home Office to develop constructive relationships at a strategic level instead.

²³⁴ Counter-Terrorism Strategy (CONTEST), June 2018.

²³⁵ Oral evidence – Nick Lowles, Hope Not Hate, 16 December 2020.

²³⁶ Oral evidence – MI5, 29 April 2021.

²³⁷ Oral evidence – Home Secretary, 20 May 2021.

EXTREME RIGHT-WING TERRORISM ACTION (MI5 AND CTP)

The case for change

197. The change in responsibility from MI5 to Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) was significant, and we questioned where the impetus for the change had come from. The Director General of MI5 told us that it had been a natural move for MI5 and the police, and that:

MI5 hadn't in 2015 or 2016 been sort of pushing, because we weren't seeing deficiencies in what the police were doing, but as the threat increasingly crossed the line into national security, we felt there was a worthwhile question to ask there and indeed our police colleagues were not saying "We have got this taped, leave it to us", they were saying "We think we should have a conversation about our division of responsibilities here, it is different to what we are doing on Islamist extremism and, as this threat grows, that feels wrong to us". Then other voices, including Home Office colleagues and, for that matter, David Anderson, who was independently overseeing the Operational Improvement Review process, also had the same view that this was a conversation worth having to look at whether we should change our division of labour.²³⁸

198. In March 2018, MI5 told the Committee that “one of the shifts we are making is more of a shift for MI5, is to step into that Extreme Right-Wing work a bit more”.²³⁹ MI5 opened its first Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT) investigation in March 2018. Following a pilot phase, MI5 adopted a ‘split primacy’ model in November 2018. At this point, MI5 took operational primacy for the highest threat ERWT and left-wing, anarchist, single-issue terrorism (LASIT) investigations, with CTP retaining primacy for lower priority investigations, and Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) leading on providing assessments on the national threat picture. The MI5 Executive Board made the decision to move MI5 to full primacy in September 2019. This was enacted in phases across investigative sections and completed by 1 April 2020. MI5 began establishing which *** and the accesses required to facilitate the lawful acquisition of data, as well as transferring existing information on ERWT Subjects of Interest (SOIs) from police systems on to MI5 management systems to enable ***. MI5 also worked with CTP to review and further develop ***.²⁴⁰

199. MI5 subsequently wrote to the Committee on 31 January 2019, confirming that steps had been taken to implement new arrangements in countering what was still at that time being referred to as ‘Domestic Extremism Terrorism’ (DET):

JTAC, MI5 and CTPolice currently have a model for collaborative working on Islamist terrorism that works exceptionally well by harnessing the strengths of each organisation along with other partners. The overarching principle for the new arrangements is that, as far as possible, that same approach is applied to threats emanating from Domestic Extremism Terrorism (DET).

²³⁸ Oral evidence – MI5, 29 April 2021.

²³⁹ Oral evidence – MI5, 15 March 2018.

²⁴⁰ Written evidence – MI5, 31 January 2020.

*In mid-October [2018], JTAC launched its initial capability on DET, taking the lead for strategic-level national threat assessments through a *** team of analysts (in on-going partnership with CT Police).²⁴¹*

200. In June 2019, David Anderson QC (Lord Anderson) published an unclassified summary of the progress made by MI5 and CTP in implementing the recommendations of the Operational Improvement Review (OIR) and Post-Attack Reviews of 2017. The ‘Implementation Stocktake’ summarised progress made up to and including 31 January 2019 in a number of key areas, including ‘non-Islamist terrorism’, and identified a number of challenges. These are listed below, together with MI5’s response:

<i>2017 Terrorist Attacks – MI5 and CTP Reviews – Implementation Stocktake²⁴²</i>
<p><i>8.17. In keeping with the frank nature of my briefings, I was informed of a number of initial or continuing difficulties. Most of these were not however fundamental in nature, and there has been a healthy tendency to see teething problems as learning points rather than obstacles. For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>D. There was some initial reluctance to share information around the CT network which was resolved by negotiation.</i><i>E. It has been necessary to manage the inherent tension that exists between Police prioritisation of evidence-building in order to effect executive action and the intelligence agencies’ desire to build as full an intelligence picture as possible, particularly in relation to SOIs [Subjects of Interest] travelling overseas.</i><i>F. There was uncertainty, now resolved, as to who should conduct international liaison (e.g. with the FBI) and who should authorise or seek the authorisation of covert activity: as to the latter, it was concluded that MI5 would have primacy in the covert phase and the police in executive action.</i> <p>MI5 response:²⁴³</p> <p><i>“As outlined here, Lord Anderson has already detailed the mitigations and decisions on each of these issues.”</i></p>
<p><i>8.19. The changes have had a resource impact for MI5 (though not for CTP), particularly in terms of training. New growth funding has been made available to restore dedicated ‘DE’ desks in the regions, which existed previously but were phased out a few years ago.</i></p> <p>MI5 response:</p> <p><i>“MI5 continues to manage resources dynamically across ERWT, LASIT and International Terrorism based on threat and risk.”</i></p>

²⁴¹ Domestic Extremism Terrorism – Letter from Director General MI5 to the ISC Chairman, 31 January 2019.

²⁴² David Anderson QC, ‘2017 Terrorist Attacks – MI5 and CTP Reviews – Implementation Stocktake, Unclassified summary of conclusions’, 11 June 2019.

²⁴³ MI5 written evidence – 31 January 2020.

8.20. More fundamentally, MI5 identified to me two respects in which its still partial coverage of non-Islamist terrorism would leave it at a disadvantage:

- a) In the identification and stopping of attacks: having restricted itself to the most serious leads, MI5 will remain unsighted on the threat posed by those who register less prominently on the radar; and
- b) In the post-incident phase, where a more limited intelligence base may reduce the speed and effectiveness of its response.

MI5 response:

“The decision for MI5 to assume primacy of ERWT by April 2020 will help to address these issues. Over time, MI5 will be able to develop a better understanding of the full ERWT threat picture and a fuller intelligence base to rely upon during any post incident scenario, although MI5 notes that it will take some time until they achieve expertise comparable to that for Islamist terrorism.”

8.21. Finally, while MI5 would like its discovery tools to be “threat agnostic” and UKIC [UK Intelligence Community] wide, the task of adapting GCHQ’s techniques to the non-Islamist threat is for the future. The same is true as regards the use of MI6 liaison facilities with overseas agencies, though. MI5 – while unable to act as the UK’s sole interlocutor on non-Islamist terrorism – is starting to play a role in liaison with 5 Eyes and European counterparts.²⁴⁴

MI5 response:

*“MI5 has begun adapting MI5 Discovery tradecraft for ERWT, and have a number of capabilities active against both International Terrorism and ERWT SOI that are threat agnostic. ***. MI5 has also used existing relationships with the *** community to begin collaboration on *** tradecraft for the ERWT threat.”*

201. A number of the issues identified by Lord Anderson in his 2019 Stocktake have since been addressed. In September 2019, MI5 took the decision to move towards full primacy for ERWT, with information on SOIs being transferred from police systems to MI5 systems, so – in theory – it has a holistic view of the threat (rather than simply “restricting itself to the most serious leads”²⁴⁵ as it did in the early stages of transition). Subsequently, on 1 April 2020 MI5 assumed full primacy for ERWT and intelligence leads, with ERWT investigations managed in parity with Islamist terrorist investigations.

202. When we asked MI5 for an update on their recruitment of CHIS (Covert Human Intelligence Sources), which was highlighted as a priority in the original OIR, the Director General of MI5 told us that:

***²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ David Anderson QC, ‘2017 Terrorist Attacks – MI5 and CTP Reviews – Implementation Stocktake’, 11 June 2019.

²⁴⁵ David Anderson QC, ‘2017 Terrorist Attacks – MI5 and CTP Reviews – Implementation Stocktake’, 11 June 2019.

²⁴⁶ Oral evidence – MI5, 29 April 2021.

The Head of CTP was clear that CHIS play a central role in the investigation process, and that there were processes in place to ensure that MI5 and CTP were joined up when it came to handling CHIS:

So we provide exactly that same capability. What we have done over the years is the authorisation of the particular individual in the job that is important. So either Ken's people [MI5], senior people would be authorising the job, or mine will be, and then they will seek concurrency from each other, so we are not effectively treading on each other's toes or we are doing a joint operation on the same subject.

I have always described this as my kind of 'Judi Dench' moment in Skyfall: people get very obsessed with data and IT, but actually without Human Intelligence, we don't get good prosecutions. It is an absolutely vital capability. It saves lives all the time.²⁴⁷

203. However, issues identified by Lord Anderson have yet to be resolved – in particular, the matter of transferring historical records from CTP to MI5, and the requirement for MI5's discovery tools to be 'threat agnostic'. MI5 advised that progress is being made on the transfer of data: *"***. So the core elements of [the] police's pre-existing knowledge are now replicated within MI5 systems ... but there is still further work to do."*²⁴⁸

204. There is a tacit recognition that ERWT is a comparatively new area for MI5, and one that has evolved rapidly over the past five years. The Director General of MI5 acknowledged: *"We are also very aware that *** when our machine triages an Islamist-related lead, we can pretty rapidly have a pretty confident sense that we are seeing this with a high degree of fidelity."* However, he also pointed out that their international counterparts are in a similar situation: *"It is not that the UK is playing catch up here. Everyone is dealing with this emerging phenomenon and deepening their understanding as we go."*²⁴⁹ More broadly, MI5 concede that:

Identifying the boundaries of MI5's role in ERWT has proved challenging.
***²⁵⁰

205. CTP still holds the responsibility for investigating any other activity that does not meet the ERWT threshold but is of terrorism relevance, including in relation to violent public order issues.

²⁴⁷ Oral evidence – CTP, 29 April 2021.

²⁴⁸ Oral evidence – MI5, 29 April 2021.

²⁴⁹ Oral evidence – MI5, 29 April 2021.

²⁵⁰ Written evidence – MI5, 14 September 2020.

Key parts of CTP

Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) is an alliance of UK police forces working with UKIC to protect the public from terrorism. Around the UK, there are 11 regional counter-terrorism units (CTUs) and intelligence units. Officers and staff work in a range of specialist fields, such as investigations, digital exploitation, financial inquiries, community liaison and communications.

Within CTP, there are several organisations with key roles in relation to ERWT:

- The Counter Terrorism Policing Headquarters (CTPHQ) sits at the centre of the network that heads up policy and strategy, co-ordinates national programmes, and acts as a single point of contact and co-ordination for CTP.
- The National Operations Centre (NOC) is a part of CTPHQ – it is a central command comprising units that provide operational support to the national network.²⁵¹
- On 1 April 2020, a Strategic Intelligence and Briefing Unit was set up at the National Police Coordination Centre (NPoCC). These functions were previously based at CTPHQ.²⁵²

206. In consultation with the Strategic Intelligence and Briefing Unit, CTP has developed a ‘Terminology and Thresholds Matrix’ to ensure CTP is able to use its resources appropriately to identify and manage counter-terror related threats. The matrix was launched in September 2020, and sets out language and thresholds to delineate between the types of ideology and activity that formerly fell under the term ‘Domestic Extremism’. Crucially, it will allow CTP and National Police Coordination Centre (NPoCC) stakeholders to draw clear distinctions between what does and does not meet the threshold for relevance to CTP.²⁵³ The Head of CTP explained that the matrix “*assesses the ideological outcome against the activity, and that is the matrix which decides where on that threat matrix the target exists and therefore who needs to deal with it*”.²⁵⁴

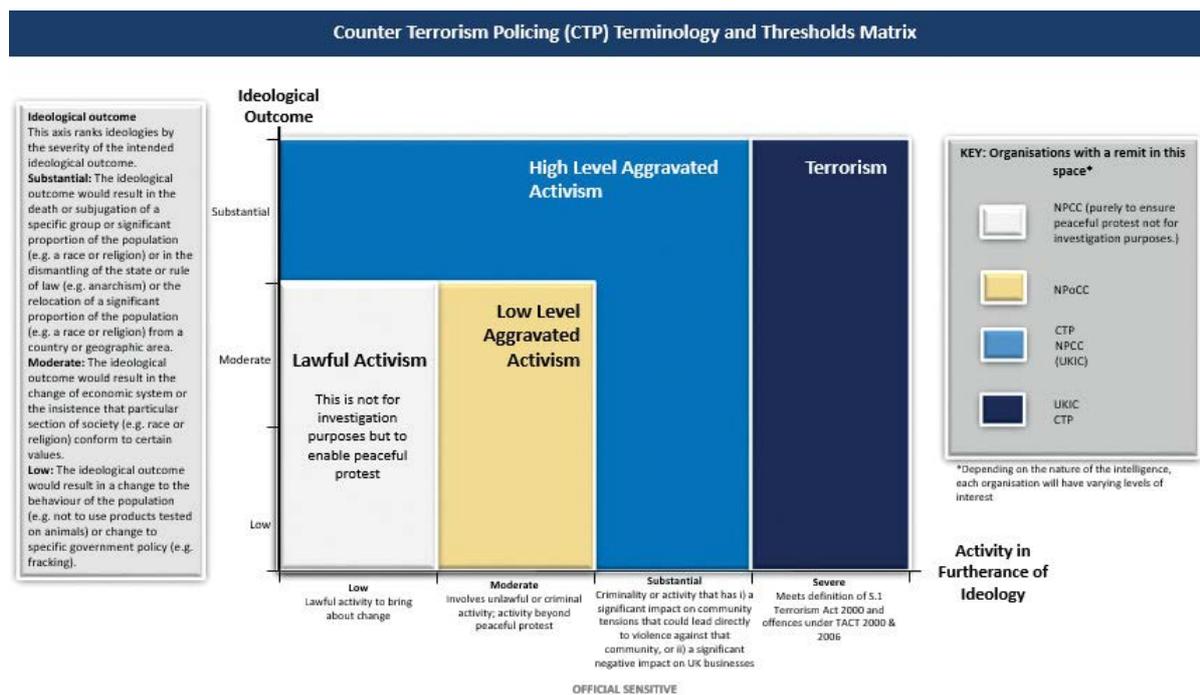
²⁵¹ www.counterterrorism.police.uk/our-network/

²⁵² As part of the transition, in April 2020 CTPHQ Intelligence ceased operating two specific functions:

- The National Joint Assessment Team (NJAT): the NJAT previously jointly assessed leads with CTP regional branches to ensure national consistency and delivery for ERWT. This has now been disbanded in order to ensure an agnostic approach to the Intelligence Handling Model (IHM), regardless of ideology. The IHM assessments are now undertaken by CTP and MI5 regional counterparts. (More information on the Intelligence Handling Model can be found later in this section.)
- The Potential Lone Actor Desk (PLAD): the PLAD consisted of a small team of officers, detectives and behavioural experts. The behavioural experts were a combination of research psychologists, clinical psychologists, and clinical psychiatrists with specialisms in autism spectrum disorders. This team assisted with providing lone actor assessments on SOIs featuring in leads and priority investigations. MI5 advised that the PLAD was not transferred to MI5 as the majority of their activity on ERWT focuses on Lone Actor detection.

²⁵³ Written evidence – CTP, 2 June 2021.

²⁵⁴ Oral evidence – CTP, 29 April 2021.



207. In addition, a joint ERWT Strategic Hub made up of CTP and MI5 is now being set up to co-ordinate the UK counter-terrorism strategic response to ERWT, engaging with partners across the counter-terrorism mission, within Whitehall and internationally, to progress strategic projects, investigate policy and build capability.

Threat assessments

208. JTAC analyses and assesses all intelligence relating to international terrorism, in the UK and overseas, and produces assessments of threats and other terrorist-related subjects for customers from a wide range of HMG departments and agencies. Following the OIR recommendation that JTAC should be responsible for the production of national Threat Assessments of terrorist threats arising from Domestic Extremism work, JTAC officially took on responsibility for producing assessments for ERWT in October 2018 (they had been producing occasional reports on ERWT prior to this date).

209. JTAC incorporates key international events into the analysis of the ERWT threat to the UK, with dedicated resource providing analysis on ERWT links to the UK from Europe and elsewhere.

210. JTAC also assesses the threat posed by ERWT to UK interests overseas, utilising similar analysis techniques to those applied to the Islamist terrorist threat overseas. An international attack or detention is defined as ERWT in those cases where there is a likely ERWT ideology, and the capability or intent to conduct an attack – however, it can on occasion be difficult to determine whether or not a particular incident is ERWT, as not all countries record right-wing violence and attacks as terrorism. JTAC will include non-violent right-wing extremist activity in its analysis where this rhetoric could inspire others to conduct an attack; however, this extremist activity is not deemed to be terrorism.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ Written evidence – MI5, 31 January 2020.

211. ERWT has also been incorporated into JTAC’s assessment of the UK National Threat Level, alongside Islamist terrorism, left-wing, anarchist and single-issue terrorism (LASIT) and Northern Ireland-related terrorism in mainland Britain (the NIRT threat level in Great Britain is assessed by MI5).

Investigations

212. MI5 is reliant on information collected either from its activities or provided to it by external sources, whether that is the public, police or partner agencies. MI5 describes an individual who is, or has been, investigated because they are a potential threat to national security as an ‘SOI’. In order to assess and manage intelligence, MI5 uses a formal triage process for incoming intelligence, a prioritisation system for ongoing investigations, and a higher-level review process to set strategic priorities.²⁵⁶

The ‘Receive’ stage

213. All information and intelligence entering MI5 or CTP comes through a single point of entry (SPOE). Processes are in place to receive and assess intelligence 24 hours a day and 365 days a year. On receipt, intelligence is assessed before either being rejected, or progressed as a ‘trace’ or a ‘lead’.

A **trace** is a request for a check across MI5 indices to determine potential links to extremist activity that does not immediately meet the potential for lead development.

A **lead** is the term to describe all intelligence or information that is not linked to an ongoing investigation that, following initial assessment, suggests involvement in activities of National Security (NS) concern.

214. Intelligence meeting the threshold for a lead is tested for links to existing investigations, and:

- if the lead is linked to an existing investigation then it is forwarded to the appropriate investigative team; or
- if the intelligence does not relate to an existing investigation, the lead is assessed for credibility and a new investigation is launched, if appropriate.

The ‘Assess’ stage – the Intelligence Handling Model

215. Management of all new counter-terrorism led intelligence and threat reporting not linked to ongoing counter-terrorism investigations received by both MI5 and the police is conducted through the ‘Intelligence Handling Model’ (IHM). This is a joint initiative between MI5 and the police and provides a single point of entry for intelligence and ensures new leads benefit, where appropriate, from co-ordinated MI5, GCHQ, JTAC and CTP tracing and expertise. This co-ordination is carried out by dedicated teams in MI5. The IHM provides a robust framework to ensure that finite, covert investigative resources are directed against

²⁵⁶ Written evidence – MI5, 31 January 2020.

the most credible new leads – and that leads lacking credibility are resolved in the most appropriate way, without significant covert investigative resource.

216. The IHM uses four key principles against which to assess leads: Risk, Credibility, Actionability and Proportionality. This is known as ‘the RCAP Framework’.

Risk:
<p>What is the likely impact if the information/intelligence is not addressed?</p> <p>What is the likelihood (directly correlated with credibility) of it taking place?</p> <p>What are the associated vulnerabilities?</p> <p>What is the imminence of any associated threat?</p>
Credibility:
<p>How reliable are the origins of the information/intelligence?</p> <p>What is the content and context of the information/intelligence?</p> <p>What is the intent and capability?</p> <p>Has the information/intelligence been corroborated (including adverse traces)?</p>
Actionability:
<p>Does the intelligence or information contain any details on which MI5/Police can take specific further actions, or exploit intelligence or investigative opportunities?</p>
Proportionality:
<p>Having considered the above factors, is it necessary and/or proportionate, both in terms of legal and statutory obligations and existing priorities and resource constraints, to investigate further?</p>

217. Using the RCAP Framework, the lead is allocated a traffic-light status, according to the nature of the reporting, and a band according to the credibility of the intelligence:

Risk assessment (traffic-light status)	
RED	***
AMBER	***
GREEN	***
BLUE	***
Credibility assessment (band)	
BAND 1 Some Credibility	***
BAND 2 Indeterminate Credibility	***
BAND 3 Lacking Credibility	***

The ‘Develop’ and ‘Decide’ stages

218. The next stages, after ‘Receive’ and ‘Assess’, are to develop the lead and to decide what action to take:

- Lead development is the process of identifying intelligence gaps and requirements, and the further research and actions necessary, to enable a more informed assessment of the lead. Leads should be developed where possible without the application of significant covert resource (such as surveillance or intercept). MI5 and the police endeavour to agree and deploy resources in accordance with the risk and credibility assessment. Each organisation is accountable for the deployment of its own resources.
- Decisions on what action is to be taken on a lead occur at each stage of the lead assessment process, beginning with the SPOE. The traffic light and band will be reviewed continually and amended where appropriate to ensure they accurately reflect the risk and credibility assessment.

MI5 and CTP will jointly agree on the actions taken on each national security lead. The decision is informed by the credibility assessment; however, at this point consideration is also given to whether any further actions are possible and the proportionality of any further investigation.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ Written evidence – MI5, 31 January 2020.

Investigation prioritisation process

219. Investigations are given a priority according to the level of risk they are judged to carry – this is known as the ‘P4 process’ (that is, Priority 1–4) and is described in the table below.

Category	Definition for counter-terrorism investigations	General resource allocation
Priority 1: Attack planning	Investigations into individuals or networks where there is credible and actionable intelligence of UK (P1A) or Overseas (P1B) attack planning. Includes post-incident investigation where threat of follow-up attacks is still possible.	***.
Priority 2: Heightened risk of extremist activity	Investigation into individuals or networks where there is involvement in activities that directly increase the likelihood of an attack taking place in the UK or against direct UK interests, but that is not assessed to be attack planning. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● *** ● *** ● *** ● *** ● *** ● *** 	***.
Priority 3: Extremist activity	Other extremist-related activity that indirectly increases the likelihood of an attack or contributes to building/supporting extremism in the UK: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● *** ● *** ● *** 	***.
Priority 4: Risk of re-engagement following disruption of involvement in extremist activity	Following disruptive action or pending planned disruptive action, threat ***: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ***^{258 259} ● *** 	***.

²⁵⁸ SOI – Subject of Interest.

²⁵⁹ TPIM – Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011.

220. Within most investigations, MI5 also prioritises the SOIs into tiers. The tier of an SOI within an investigation can change regularly as the investigation progresses.

Structures within the decision-making process

221. The Strategic Intelligence Group in MI5 is specifically designed to provide assessments which inform resource-allocation decisions and challenge the assumptions of investigators on an ongoing basis.

222. Each week the Head of counter-terrorism investigations holds a meeting to review intelligence developments with updates from operational teams, input from the police and the UK Intelligence Community (UKIC), and JTAC analysis. This produces the ‘grid’ – MI5’s 15 highest-risk investigations – and allocation of investigative resources. In addition, there is a formal system of review:

- Each week, the counter-terrorism senior management team reviews the weekly dashboard of wider investigative resourcing issues.
- The Deputy Director General approves the proposed use of intrusive investigation tools on each investigation, before they are sent through the warrant process to the Home Secretary.
- Each week, the Director General is briefed on the main developments and risks.
- Each week, the Assistant Commissioner, Specialist Operations (ACSO) is briefed on key developments in investigations. (A senior police investigator is included in the team on every major investigation, and if there is a risk to the public then an Executive Liaison Group is set up to enable MI5 and the police to agree how to manage that risk.)
- Every month, the Head of Counter-Terrorism agrees with UKIC and JTAC any strategic shifts required.
- Every quarter there is a thorough review of counter-terrorism casework, resulting in an internal report on the counter-terrorism threat picture, which informs a strategic review of investigations.

223. Operational decisions on intervention, including what form the executive action will take, are made by the Executive Liaison Group – a body comprising senior representatives of MI5 and CTP. When the Committee asked for a brief description of the handover process whereby an MI5 investigation is handed over to CTP for executive action, Director General MI5 explained:

We [MI5 and CTP] often use the metaphor of a car being driven, and for the first portion of the journey the driver is MI5 and the passenger seat is occupied by Neil’s teams [CTP]; then, at the right moment, the roles change and the police take on the driving role and MI5 remains in the passenger seat. The point of the metaphor, which may or may not work for you, is that both parties are present and have full visibility of everything throughout the process but there is clearly a need for there to be a structured conversation

*about when is the point when responsibility shifts and, clearly, MI5 holds no executive powers or responsibilities. That is what Neil's teams do, but they are present through the whole of the intelligence phase.*²⁶⁰

Counter-Terrorism Operations Centre

224. A national Counter-Terrorism Operations Centre (CTOC) in Empress State Building in West London is being created to bring together the London-based counter-terrorism elements of the Intelligence Community, Metropolitan Police Service and other partners. The business case for the CTOC was approved in March 2020 – however, as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, the decision was taken to delay entering into the full licence agreement in order to refresh the design of the building. A formal addendum to the business case was presented to HM Treasury in September 2020 in parallel with the UKIC and CTP Spending Review Bids.²⁶¹ The Home Secretary opened the first completed section of the CTOC on 28 June 2021.²⁶²

225. MI5 anticipates the CTOC will enable “*even closer*” MI5–CTP joint working and knowledge transfer, as well as delivering efficiencies enabling investigative teams to cope with increased overall volumes across the combined Islamist and ERWT threats. In addition to MI5 and CTP, the intelligence Agencies, and the criminal justice system, as well as other government agencies focused on tackling the threat from terrorism, will also have a presence in the building. The Head of CTP observed that a large component of Special Operations (SO15) Command are already based in the Empress Building and that the process of integrating the other Agencies and organisations to the CTOC is “*timelined between now and 2025*”.²⁶³

Resource implications

226. As of August 2020, there were *** investigative groups working on UK-based counter-terrorism, *** is fully devoted to ERWT and LASIT. This ratio can also be seen from the casework: in July 2020 ERWT and LASIT casework accounted for around under a fifth of all G Branch²⁶⁴ investigations (which had previously been managing, almost totally, exclusively Islamist terrorism investigations).²⁶⁵

227. MI5 advised that they have absorbed the increased investigative effort on ERWT from within their existing counter-terrorist investigative cadre, with ERWT and LASIT investigations being prioritised using the same system as used for Islamist terrorism, allowing collection and analysis resources to be moved dynamically between cases, allowing them to allocate the resource necessary to counter the highest-priority threats, regardless of the ideology of the threat.²⁶⁶

228. When we questioned the Home Secretary regarding prioritisation of ERWT, she advised that the balance of effort was kept under constant review and discussed at her weekly

²⁶⁰ Oral evidence – MI5, 29 April 2021.

²⁶¹ Written evidence – MI5, 30 September 2020.

²⁶² ‘First elements of new Counter Terrorism Operations Centre in London unveiled’ – Metropolitan Police (www.metpolice.uk), 28 June 2021.

²⁶³ Oral evidence – CTP, 29 April 2021.

²⁶⁴ G Branch is the division within MI5 which covers international counter-terrorism.

²⁶⁵ Written evidence – MI5, 30 September 2020.

²⁶⁶ MI5 have not provided separate figures for resourcing on ERWT and LASIT.

meetings at MI5, “just to get a sense check in terms of, you know, where the balance of threats are, the equities, are we resourced in the right way”.²⁶⁷

229. Nevertheless, in September 2020, MI5 acknowledged that taking on the new responsibility for ERWT/LASIT investigations did have an impact on the resource they are able to devote to other areas:

*Given that we prioritise work on the basis of risk, within G branch the impact of taking on ERWT/LASIT investigations has fallen primarily on the *** of our *** casework, with these investigations generally progressing more slowly and having less access to collection resources. We have not, as things stand, needed to adjust our thresholds for triage and the opening of investigations. Our ability to move investigative resource across to other growing threat areas *** has also been ***.*

*For particularly specialised collection resources (e.g. bespoke technical operations), which are in such demand that they are deployed only on the highest priority casework, the adoption of ERWT and LASIT will also have impacted on work against ***.²⁶⁸*

230. In terms of the impact of its work in countering ***, the Director General of MI5 further explained:

*As you know, we have for some years now held an ambition on widening our aperture on ***. The rise of Extreme Right Wing Terrorism has constrained our ability rapidly to grow what we would otherwise be doing on ***.²⁶⁹*

231. In contrast, the Head of CTP highlighted the tangible benefits to CTP in resource terms of the ‘threat agnostic’ approach, now that the ERWT threat is treated the same as the Islamist threat, as CTP no longer have to “set up completely separate teams to deal with the right-wing; we have actually brought them in. So we are more efficient, as well as more effective in this space.”²⁷⁰ He confirmed that “we have got the right amount of resource which is proportionate to the current threat but, over the past five years, I would say my professional judgement is it has grown”.²⁷¹ The Director General of MI5 told the Committee that:

*In the Spending review last autumn [2020] we did not bid for additional people capacity to deal with the Right Wing terrorist threat; *** because of the gains that we think will be secured once that facility [CTOC] is in existence.²⁷²*

However, this was caveated with the observation that a reduction in the volume of *** had been a key factor in enabling MI5 to absorb the increasing amount of work it is doing on ERWT terrorism investigations.²⁷³

²⁶⁷ Oral evidence – Home Secretary, 20 May 2021.

²⁶⁸ Written evidence – MI5, 30 September 2020.

²⁶⁹ Oral evidence – MI5, 29 April 2021.

²⁷⁰ Oral evidence – CTP, 29 April 2021.

²⁷¹ Oral evidence – CTP, 28 April 2021.

²⁷² Oral evidence – MI5, 29 April 2021.

²⁷³ Oral evidence – MI5, 29 April 2021.

232. We asked the Home Secretary for her views on the viability of this current arrangement whereby MI5's ability to take on primacy for ERWT without additional resources only appears to have been made possible by a (presumably unexpected) reduction in ***. Acknowledging that prioritising risks was a "constant discussion", the Home Secretary noted that "We [the Home Office] will do our best always in terms of my own advocacy with Her Majesty's Treasury, but of course much of this is not straight out of the Home Office, it comes out from the wider pot of funding for the Intelligence and Security community."²⁷⁴

O. MI5 have taken on responsibility for ERWT without the commensurate resources. Taking the month of July 2020 as an example, ERWT and LASIT casework accounted for around under a fifth of all counter-terrorism investigations: that casework can only be undertaken at the expense of other MI5 work. The impact has been seen on * casework, which is now progressed more slowly, and on MI5's inability to expand its work on other threat areas as it had intended. This situation is untenable. While MI5, rightly, allocates its resources on what it assesses to be the highest priority work based on its expert knowledge of the threat, we are concerned that MI5 has been expected simply to absorb this new responsibility. MI5 must be given additional funding to enable it to conduct these cases without other areas of work suffering as a consequence.**

Behavioural Science Unit

233. The Behavioural Science Unit (BSU) is a team of behavioural and social science specialists within MI5. Their specific role is to provide support and guidance to investigative desk officers and agent handlers to help them understand their SOIs better, as well as advice on a range of approaches to agent handling issues.

234. The Committee's *Report on the Intelligence Relating to the Murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby* highlighted the potential offered by the BSU in the counter-terrorism space, and made a specific recommendation that the unit should be integrated more thoroughly into investigations. More recently, the Committee's Inquiry into the 2017 Terror Attacks again raised the issue of the BSU and how, if at all, its role had developed in the intervening years. MI5 confirmed in 2018 that:

I think we have developed a BSU role since that time on the extent to which we use them [to assist with] CHIS, assessment of SOIs, and actions that we take about them, and, in relation to SOIs, assessment of the risk that potentially unstable people might represent. So they have been particularly acutely used since that time in the space of, you know, 'more vulnerable individuals' and the 'lone actors' sort of the space, so I think you would find the difference between 2013 and 2017, I guess is what we are looking at today, quite a marked shift in BSU integral involvement.

The one other very quick addendum I would suggest is that, in the Operational Improvement Review, in the work we are now doing to take our methodology one stage further, the BSU again is strongly woven through that. So behavioural science informs at its core the analytical work we are looking to use as we head forwards around data.

²⁷⁴ Oral evidence – Home Secretary, 20 May 2021.

*So we have got an incubator happening right now in Thames House, with GCHQ in place and other colleagues there, with behavioural science methodology very strongly sort of at the centre of that particular piece of work.*²⁷⁵

235. MI5 advised that the BSU has embedded its work on ERWT within established structures for triage and prioritisation alongside their work on Islamist extremism²⁷⁶ – it also has *** members of BSU staff working closely with ERWT operational teams doing *** in this area.²⁷⁷ The Director General of MI5 noted that the BSU has been looking at ERWT for some time, ***:

*the Behavioural Science Unit has been interested in this area for some years because, even before MI5 inherited operational responsibilities on Right Wing terrorism, it was an interesting area to do comparative research between different ideologies, different forms of extremism. So there is quite a reasonable level of BSU, Behavioural Science Unit, engagement in this subject ... we just don't have the same evidence base [as with the Islamist terrorist threat], because there has been less in the way of Right Wing terrorist attacks or plots. So we are building that evidence base all the time but ***. So the work is underway but it is constrained not by our wish to do the work but by the fact that there is less of it to study.*²⁷⁸

236. Once the evidence base does increase, it would be interesting to see if there is any evidence of links to drug abuse, or other traits, although we note that at present ***.

237. It is clear that the BSU is a vital capability and one that the Director General of MI5 advised is, ***, only brought in to the investigative process ***:

*our Behavioural Science Unit is ***, so we typically would not involve them at the initial stage of any individual lead thing but what we do use them on is two related pieces, one of which is *** they feed in a lot of expertise there; but the other and crucial thing they have done, which I think is where your question is going, is they have done properly grounded evidence based studies of the kinds of people who have progressed later to terrorism.*²⁷⁹

²⁷⁵ Oral evidence – MI5, 25 April 2018.

²⁷⁶ Two areas where the BSU's work on ERWT differs from that of Islamist extremism are: forward deploying *** with expertise in issues relating to young people in to investigative group working on ERWT threats; and *** on the diffuse ideological influences underpinning ERWT.

²⁷⁷ Written evidence – MI5, 26 May 2021.

²⁷⁸ Oral evidence – MI5, 29 April 2021.

²⁷⁹ Oral evidence – MI5, 29 April 2021.

The Role of the Behavioural Science Unit in ERWT casework

SOI 'A' was a *** who was referred to the BSU when he came to the attention of the authorities ***. This was reported to the police by a lecturer at his university. This information was shared with MI5 and a priority investigation was opened.

The investigation showed that 'A' held *** views and aligned himself with ***. At the time of the BSU's involvement, 'A' had ***. The BSU was asked to advise on:

*the nature of his Extreme Right Wing beliefs; how his *** may affect the way in which these beliefs manifest themselves; and any additional risk arising from the wider events in his life.*

The BSU discussed the case with the investigator and analysts working on the investigation, examined relevant documents, and provided an assessment that drew upon the BSU's knowledge of *** as well as our understanding of Extreme Right-Wing (XRW) beliefs.

This assessment provided the investigator with a series of hypotheses on the motivations underpinning the behaviour of 'A', as well as a series of indicators (or 'tripwires') that might be indicative of a deepening of his commitment to the XRW cause, or of mobilisation to violence.

This assessment by the BSU helped to: shape the investigator's understanding of the SOI by giving them a greater insight into the psychological impact of *** and how it would have impacted the manifestation of his extremist beliefs; and inform the strategy used by MI5 and the police as they brought the case to a successful disruption.²⁸⁰

P. It is clear that the Behavioural Science Unit (BSU) is making a vital contribution to promoting an informed understanding of the complexities of the Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT) threat. We are puzzled that MI5 does not appear to be taking active steps to ensure it has the capacity to be involved at the outset of all investigations. The BSU is clearly an essential capability, particularly when it comes to meeting the ERWT threat, and must be resourced appropriately.

GCHQ

238. In October 2018, MI5 requested support from GCHQ on ERWT work, and GCHQ redeployed some effort from *** in order to increase understanding of the ERWT threat online and provide tactical and strategic support to MI5. GCHQ has now established a new team *** focusing on the ERWT threat – this team will support MI5 in its highest-priority operations. In addition, the GCHQ counter-terrorism UK 'Discovery' team²⁸¹ based in Cheltenham – which identifies individuals *** – is applying this methodology to the ERWT target.

239. In addition to specific operational support, GCHQ has been engaged with MI5 and the Home Office more broadly; in September 2020 it reported that *** had recently authorised GCHQ's first low-level operation ***.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ Written evidence – MI5, 30 September 2020.

²⁸¹ The term 'Discovery' describes a series of tools and methods used to identify individuals who may pose a risk in a number of areas, including online.

²⁸² Written evidence – GCHQ, 30 September 2020.

SIS

240. SIS told the Committee that its Counter Terrorism Directorate (CTD) works closely with MI5, GCHQ and CTP, with many members of staff being co-located. In addition, SIS responds to MI5's prioritisation grid of investigations that fall outside the UK. However, in contrast to MI5 and GCHQ, SIS's work is structured differently, and SIS supports ERWT requirements as and when operationally necessary.²⁸³ MI5 observed that “[SIS] uses its global network in the way you might expect. When bits of threat pop up in other nations, or there needs to be some form of intervention, the network of SIS stations can be brought to bear.”²⁸⁴

²⁸³ Written evidence – SIS, 30 September 2020.

²⁸⁴ Oral evidence – MI5, 29 April 2021.

PROSCRIPTION

The Home Secretary's role

MI5: The Home Secretary holds ministerial responsibility for MI5, although this oversight of MI5 is limited to the service's overall strategic direction and funding since the Director General of MI5 has operational independence in terms of day-to-day decision-making.²⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the Home Secretary meets regularly with the Director General, who updates her on current priority operations, and she also authorises warrants for MI5 intrusive activity.²⁸⁶

The Home Secretary considers a large number of warrants – currently in the region of 4,000 applications a year, with approximately 170–190 new warrant applications per month, covering the full range of national security threats (including serious and organised crime, state threats, as well as terrorism).²⁸⁷ The Home Secretary confirmed that the majority of warrant applications cover:

*drugs, machine guns, just shocking, shocking things. Islamist [terrorism] is still I would say very high, worryingly high from my perspective, and Right-Wing is so blended and so mixed, it really is just in flux, because of the type of the cases that come up and the type of behaviours that people are showing.*²⁸⁸

MI5 advised that, in 2020–21, there were fewer than *** ERWT new warrants compared to *** issued with regard to Islamist terrorism (that is, approximately 1:4). However, MI5 caveat that “*warrant numbers in isolation are not by themselves an accurate barometer of the scope of our investigative/operational activities against a particular threat. One would also need to take account of other relevant factors such as the number of Subjects of Interest, the number of Leads being investigated, other capabilities we might deploy and the allocation of effort by spend. Also please note that some warrants cover more than one SOI, which will show up as just one authorisation in the above numbers.*”²⁸⁹

CTP: Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) is a collaboration of UK police forces working with the UK Intelligence Community to help protect the public and UK national security by preventing, deterring and investigating terrorist activity.²⁹⁰ The Home Secretary is accountable to Parliament for the national response to the counter-terrorism threat, and is legally accountable for national security and for the role that the police service plays within the delivery of any national response. She has reserved powers and legislative tools that

²⁸⁵ In this respect, MI5 is similar to the police. Unlike SIS and GCHQ, whose activities against overseas targets will more often carry political and diplomatic risk, the domestic operations of MI5 are usually less contentious – hence the lower level of ‘political’ approval.

²⁸⁶ There are strict limitations on what MI5 is allowed to do when investigating an individual, and MI5 must abide by legal constraints when considering any action. All action MI5 takes must be considered necessary and proportionate in light of what it knows at the time. For example, MI5 can only use ‘intrusive techniques’ (such as intercepting telephone communications, surveillance in a private space, or interference with property) against an individual if there is sufficient justification on national security grounds. In addition, a warrant must be obtained that authorises precisely what action will be taken. Such warrants are issued by the Secretary of State.

²⁸⁷ Written evidence – Home Office, 8 June 2021.

²⁸⁸ Oral evidence – Home Secretary, 20 May 2021.

²⁸⁹ Written evidence – MI5, 26 May 2021.

²⁹⁰ www.counterterrorism.police.uk

enable intervention and direction to all parties, if it is determined by the Home Secretary that such action is necessary to prevent or mitigate risk to the public of national security.²⁹¹

Homeland Security Group: Formerly known as the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT), Homeland Security Group has responsibility for the Government’s counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST), policy and legislation response to the threat of terrorism in the UK. That objective, as set out in the Home Office Departmental Plan,²⁹² is to:

- Implement the CONTEST Strategy to stop people becoming terrorists, or supporting terrorism, by safeguarding and supporting those vulnerable to radicalisation and enabling those who have already engaged in terrorism to disengage and rehabilitate;
- Stop terrorist attacks in this country and against UK interests overseas by disrupting those who wish to engage in terrorist activity;
- Strengthen protection against a terrorist attack by improving security and resilience across the UK’s public spaces, transport and infrastructure and reduce illicit access to the material needed for an attack, including at the border;
- Mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack to save lives, reduce harm and aid recovery by delivering a co-ordinated response across the emergency services and a strengthened response to evolving threats; and develop existing capabilities by further integrating across the national security community and developing wider partnerships across the public and private sector.

Homeland Security Group has no specialised resource dedicated to any ideologically specific threat. Staff, resources and tools work on counter-terrorism holistically, regardless of the ideology or group.²⁹³ The Director General for Homeland Security Group is also the Senior Responsible Officer for Counter-Terrorism (CT SRO).

The Home Secretary said that the decision had been taken to restructure the department as a result of the “*level of siloised working and the lack of integration across the entire department*”. She said the new set up was already reaping benefits in terms of promoting integration across the Department, and in the case of ERWT was proving particularly helpful in the online space when it came to determining “*who holds the pen in scrutiny of the online space, who will make the call effectively to a particular social media firm and then with the work of RICU [Research and Information Communications Unit of Homeland Security Group], for example, how does all that join up*”.²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ The relationship with Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) is overseen by the Security Minister through the quarterly chaired Ministerial Oversight Group. This is attended by the National Policing Lead for Counter-Terrorism (Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu) and senior officials and officers and covers the strategic risks and issues facing CTP. The Assistant Commissioner briefs the Home Secretary at the Weekly Security Meeting on operational matters. The Home Office is also responsible for the CTP budget, which is provided by direct grant, subject to negotiation at Spending Review and annual agreement on final budget.

²⁹² Home Office, *Home Office Single Departmental Plan*, 27 June 2019; www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-office-single-departmental-plan/home-office-singel-departmental-plan-3

²⁹³ On 1 April 2021, the Home Office restructured its Directorates based around missions and capabilities, with the new structure forming three vertical Director General-led “missions”. These are Homeland Security Group, Public Safety, and Migration and Borders. The Homeland Security Group mission is made up of Economic Crime, Cyber Policy, and Serious and Organised Crime – it also includes a new State Threats Directorate.

²⁹⁴ Oral evidence – Home Secretary, 20 May 2021.

241. Under the Terrorism Act 2000, the Home Secretary may proscribe an organisation if it is believed to be concerned in terrorism²⁹⁵ and it is proportionate to do so. For the purposes of the Act, this means that the organisation:

- (i) commits or participates in acts of terrorism;
- (ii) prepares for terrorism;
- (iii) promotes or encourages terrorism (including the unlawful glorification of terrorism); or
- (iv) is otherwise concerned in terrorism.

If the statutory test is met, the Home Secretary will consider whether to exercise her discretion to proscribe the organisation. Other factors, such as the nature and scale of an organisation's activities, the specific threat that is posed to the UK, the specific threat that is posed to British nationals overseas, the extent of the organisation's presence in the UK, and the need to support other members of the international community in the global fight against terrorism, will be considered when the Home Secretary exercises this discretion.²⁹⁶

242. Proscription has been heralded as an effective tool available to CTP and MI5 to disrupt the terrorist threat posed by a physical, real-world (as opposed to online) group, such as National Action. The following ERWT groups have been proscribed since 2016:

- National Action was the first Extreme Right-Wing (XRW) group to be proscribed in December 2016. Since National Action's proscription, 27 individuals have been arrested on suspicion of being a member of the group, 15 of whom have been charged with terrorism offences.
- In September 2017, Scottish Dawn and NS131 identified as aliases of National Action.
- In February 2020, System Resistance Network (SRN) was identified as an alias of National Action. Sonnenkrieg Division was also proscribed in the same month.
- July 2020 saw the proscription of Feuerkrieg Division.
- In April 2021, Atomwaffen Division (and National Socialist Order as its alias) was also proscribed.
- In July 2021, The Base (a predominantly US-based 'White Supremacist' organisation) was proscribed.

243. The recommendation to proscribe an organisation is made by the cross-Government Proscription Review Group (PRG),²⁹⁷ which monitors and reviews any groups that may potentially meet the threshold for proscription and provides advice to the Home Secretary on issues relating to the implementation of proscription.

²⁹⁵ "Terrorism" as defined in the Act means use or threat of action which: involves serious violence against a person; involves serious damage to property; endangers a person's life (other than that of the person committing the act); creates a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or section of the public, or; is designed seriously to interfere with or seriously to disrupt an electronic system – www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2

²⁹⁶ Proscription decisions in relation to Northern Ireland are a matter for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

²⁹⁷ The Government Proscription Review Group is managed by Homeland Security Group with a number of partners. The group meets routinely twice a year, but will meet more frequently if required.

244. However, proscription is not without its problems. Professor Matthew Feldman has argued that proscription has the effect of making Far-Right groups assume martyr-like status online, thereby enhancing their status.²⁹⁸ There is also concern that it simply drives these movements underground. In 2019, the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) assessed that, with regards to ***, “*while proscription provides increased opportunities for law enforcement, much activity is driven underground and can become more difficult to detect and disrupt*”.²⁹⁹

245. After National Action was proscribed in 2016, ***.³⁰⁰ Members have planned violent acts against MPs and the group has sought to recruit ***. *** while proscription has proved highly successful in deterring recruitment of new members and mitigating the threat presented by National Action as a cohesive entity, it continues to pose a risk:

****, National Action has an enduring influence in the Right-Wing Extremist community with many groups and individuals continuing to adopt their ethos and branding. A number of National Action members are scheduled for release in the coming months and years. ***.*³⁰¹

246. Homeland Security Group has also conceded that the efficacy of proscription when it comes to ERWT does have limitations:

*It is possible that the nature of ERWT online could make the application of this tool harder with few formal ERWT organisations and structures. Indeed, it is more difficult to keep up with UK constantly changing online groups and also to prove membership (if an individual is in a chatroom associated with a group of concern, does that mean that person is ‘a member’?). Membership of online groups is also spread throughout the UK and beyond.*³⁰²

They told the Committee that they keep the issue of proscription under review, acknowledging that it might not always be the most effective lever in the case of ERWT:

*Proscription is a tool geared towards groups and towards the terrorist threshold, so whether there are other tools that [are needed in] addition to [the] really powerful [tool] of... proscription in [the] future, we need to keep looking at that.*³⁰³

247. There is also a problem in that a number of groups will not meet the terrorist threshold, but nonetheless are able to create and circulate extremely harmful material, as highlighted by the Commission for Countering Extremism: “*Under current proscription offences National Action is proscribed, but other neo-Nazi groups who promote the same extremist ideology such as Combat 18, Order of Nine Angles and British National Socialist Movement are not.*”³⁰⁴

248. In evidence in January 2020, the Committee was told that: “*CTP is currently working with the Home Office to consider whether a review of the appropriateness and effectiveness*

²⁹⁸ Evidence given to the Home Affairs Select Committee – January 2017.

²⁹⁹ JTAC paper, 1 July 2019.

³⁰⁰ ***

³⁰¹ Written evidence – MI5, 13 December 2019.

³⁰² Written evidence – Homeland Security Group, 31 January 2020.

³⁰³ Oral evidence – Home Office, 29 April 2021.

³⁰⁴ Written evidence – Commission for Countering Extremism, 17 December 2020.

*of proscription is required – given the changing nature of ERWT groups it may be necessary to consider whether proscription in its current form requires changes.*³⁰⁵ However, when – as part of the process of producing this Report – we referenced this work, we were told that there was no standalone piece of work, merely ongoing work to keep the proscription regime under review as part of the “*routine maintenance of the statutory framework*” and that “*no fundamental review of its effectiveness is planned or being undertaken*”.³⁰⁶

249. Proscription can also support other disruptive activities, including:

- immigration disruptions;
- EU asset freezes; and
- messaging to deter fundraising and recruitment.

Although we note that, to date, none of the Home Office-led legal disruptive tools available to HMG in counter-terrorism (national security deportations/exclusions/deprivations, etc) has been used against XRW subjects of interest.

250. For her part, the Home Secretary was clear that proscription is a useful tool to have in her armoury, and that the proscription process in itself was a helpful exercise:

*It enables the system to understand so much more, not just about motives but the MO [modus operandi], the way in which organisations come together, sometimes looking at the parts of different organisations, have they franchised out, how they build new networks, and I think that’s quite helpful.*³⁰⁷

Q. Proscription has, to date, been an important disruptive tool in countering the influence and activities of bodies and organisations that seek to carry out terrorist activity. However, the ideologies driving Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism are complex, and in the case of, for example, neo-Nazi groups such as Order of Nine Angles, do not meet the terrorism threshold. We note that Counter Terrorism Policing and the Home Office are considering a possible review of the current proscription process – this is a welcome development.

Further legislation: Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Act

251. The Home Secretary advised the Committee that the introduction of this new legislation had been prompted by attacks at Fishmongers’ Hall³⁰⁸ and Streatham,³⁰⁹ following which “*we literally put the floodlights on a system and we sort of looked underneath and we could see lots of holes ... I’m not just speaking about the intelligence agencies and security agencies ... I’m speaking about the end to end process now in terms of sentencing, courts, probation.*”³¹⁰

³⁰⁵ Written evidence – Homeland Security Group, 31 January 2020.

³⁰⁶ Written evidence – Homeland Security Group, 22 October 2021.

³⁰⁷ Oral evidence – Home Secretary, 20 May 2021.

³⁰⁸ On 29 November 2019, Usman Khan stabbed five people, two fatally, at Fishmongers’ Hall in London. Khan had been released from prison on licence in 2018 after serving a sentence for terrorist offences.

³⁰⁹ On 2 February 2020, Sudesh Ammam stabbed three people in the street in Streatham, South London. He had been released from prison the previous month after serving half his sentence of three years and four months for terror offences.

³¹⁰ Oral evidence – Home Secretary, 20 May 2021.

She noted that it had been clear that there were a number of shortcomings when it came to sentencing:

*so we saw individuals being released from prison, not necessarily after receiving long firm sentences. Gaps in sentencing, I think they are well and truly acknowledged now, but also just the assessment process, the risk assessment process around individuals which, to speak candidly, was not as diligent or vigorous as it could have been, should have been, at that time.*³¹¹

252. The Act received Royal Assent on 29 April 2021. It will ensure that serious and dangerous terrorism offenders spend longer in custody and will improve the government's ability to monitor and manage the risk posed by terrorist offenders and individuals of terrorist concern outside of custody. Measures under the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Act:

- ensure that serious and dangerous terrorist offenders spend longer in custody, by introducing the Serious Terrorism Sentence for the most serious and dangerous terrorist offenders (with a minimum sentence of 14 years);
- remove the possibility of any early release from custody for serious and dangerous terrorist offenders, aged under and over 18, who receive an Extended Determinate Sentence;
- increase the maximum sentence that the court can impose for three terrorism offences (membership of a proscribed organisation, supporting a proscribed organisation and attending a place used for terrorist training) by offenders aged from 10 to 14 years; and
- improve the ability to manage and monitor terrorist offenders when they are released. Central to this will be extending the scope of the sentencing for offenders of particular concern by expanding the list of terrorist and terror-related offences that attract the sentence, and creating an equivalent sentence for offenders aged under 18.³¹²

³¹¹ Oral evidence – Home Secretary, 20 May 2021.

³¹² Written evidence – Home Office, 8 June 2021.

TACKLING EXTREME RIGHT-WING TERRORISM FINANCING

253. While ideology is the driver of the ERWT threat, the need to determine how it is being financed, and find effective ways to disrupt these funding mechanisms, is crucial.

254. The Joint Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce (JMLIT) is based in the National Crime Agency and led by the National Economic Crime Centre. Within the JMLIT, the Terrorist Finance Public–Private Threat Group (TF PPTG) is led by Homeland Security Group and brings together over 25 financial institutions, regulators, payment services, civil society, HMG and law enforcement partners to facilitate the exchange of terrorist finance information.³¹³

255. In December 2018, the TFEG published an alert on *Domestic Extremism Signs and Symbols*, with a focus on Far-Right extremism.³¹⁴ This alert – one of the aims of which was to raise awareness of this particular threat – was made available to over 300 financial institutions and issued in conjunction with the Counter Terror Policing (CTP) National Operations Centre (NOC):

Whilst holding extremist views is not a criminal offence in itself, the alert flags up individuals or groups that may adhere to extreme ideologies. Individuals and groups that adhere to or promote these views are assessed to be at increased risk of offending, either in the form of terrorist offences, politically-motivated violence, or hate crimes. The aim is that these indicators will act as a prompt to these financial institutions and help them make a more informed assessment as to whether the Suspicious Activity Reporting³¹⁵ threshold has been reached in a particular transaction of activity.³¹⁶

256. However, Tom Keatinge of the Centre for Financial Crime and Security Studies at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) expressed a degree of scepticism regarding this initiative, explaining to the Committee that:

By feeding information to banks, law enforcement in particular – and the government more widely in general – it is arguably outsourcing the tackling of extreme right financing to the private sector, taking advantage of the banking sectors’ sensitivity to ‘reputational risk’ which means they are likely to take action against customers (as provided for in their terms and conditions) at a much lower threshold [than] the government is required to meet in order to proscribe a group or designate an individual as “terrorist”.³¹⁷

³¹³ Law enforcement can also request tactical information through JMLIT’s vetted Banking and Insurance Sector Operations Groups (BSOG/ISOG). Similarly, Law Enforcement Agencies may make use of The Crime and Courts Act 2013 S.7 legal gateway, allowing organisations to disclose information to the National Crime Agency.

³¹⁴ Numbers that have particular significance include ‘88’ (representing the eighth letter of the alphabet: ‘HH, Heil Hitler’) and ‘1683’ (the date of the Battle of Vienna, viewed by the Extreme Right as marking the decline of the Ottoman Empire, and inscribed on the weapons used by Brenton Tarrant in the Christchurch shootings of March 2019).

³¹⁵ Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) are filed by financial organisations with the UK Financial Intelligence Unit at the National Crime Agency.

³¹⁶ Written evidence – Home office, 31 January 2020.

³¹⁷ Written evidence – Tom Keatinge, ‘The financing of the Extreme Right Wing’, 4 November 2020.

257. In addition to JMLIT, the National Terrorism Financial Investigations Unit (NTFIU) works with financial institutions and partners, such as PayPal, to counter the ERWT threat ***.³¹⁸

‘Britain First’

An Electoral Commission investigation was undertaken into British fascist group ‘Britain First’ and the finances of its senior leaders, Paul Golding and Jayda Fransen. ***.

In July 2019, Britain First was fined £44,200 after the Electoral Commission identified a number of offences:

- £11,000 for failing to keep accurate financial records of transactions in 2016;
- £7,700 for failing to file any quarterly donation reports in 2016, totalling £200,000 of undeclared donations;
- £5,500 for not having its 2016 accounts professionally audited; and
- £20,000 – the maximum possible – for failing to provide information sought by the Commission.

258. Tom Keatinge questioned the appropriateness of the Government’s approach, observing that the responses to terrorist funding have been designed to combat a threat that is group-based and jihadi-focused. By contrast, Extreme Right-Wing (XRW) sources of funding are:

Generally similar to the typical sources drawn upon by other lone and small cell actors: legitimate earnings, government benefits, petty crime and fraud. Online calls for donations are also common as a fundraising tool; and crowd-funding and social media are popular tools. Some variations exist too, for example fundraising via the sale of merchandise/group related paraphernalia, promoting exclusive online material behind paywalls and the holding of music concerts. Membership fees or ‘tithes’ are also paid to some groups to help defray their running costs – some groups reportedly charge an application fee.³¹⁹

259. When we questioned Homeland Security Group about this discrepancy, they agreed that there is a slight difference between Islamist and ERWT funding – HMG have developed the strategy and tools around the Islamist terrorist threat and, therefore, because of the “*different network nature*”, the way HMG applies those tools in the ERWT space is likely to be a “*less traditional usage of being able to track funding, because often this is very small amounts of money for very low sophistication type attack*”.³²⁰

260. CTP agreed, observing that they do not see the “*kind of money flows that they have seen in the past in the Islamist space*”, putting this down to ERWT being “*dominated by self-initiating terrorists who require very little financing to actually commit an offence*”.³²¹ This was borne out by the Home Secretary who confirmed that, with regard to the Islamist terror threat, “*you could find a network that is, you know, hundreds of people around the world.*

³¹⁸ Written evidence – CTP, 31 January 2020.

³¹⁹ Written evidence – Tom Keatinge, ‘The financing of the Extreme Right Wing’, 4 November 2020.

³²⁰ Oral evidence – Home Office, 29 April 2021.

³²¹ Oral evidence – CTP, 29 April 2021.

On the Right-Wing side you find it's just several purchasers from Amazon and that's about it or, you know, perhaps associations with one or two other people or just, you know, use of PayPal."³²²

R. The Government will need a new approach to tackle the financing of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT). It is one thing to take an agnostic approach and use shared methodology in assessing the Islamist terror threat and ERWT, however when it comes to the financing of this activity the reality is that the two are very different. Moreover, whilst it would appear that at present the financing of ERWT is low level and ad hoc, the reality is that this could change rapidly as the threat evolves.

³²² Oral evidence – Home Secretary, 20 May 2021.

TACKLING EXTREME RIGHT-WING TERRORISM ONLINE

261. It is clear that the plethora of online material, and the international nature of ERWT, pose significant challenges when it comes to disrupting the process of radicalisation and identifying potential attack planning. Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists tend to be tech-savvy and well aware of the security services' interest in their activities – arguably, even more so than their Islamist extremist counterparts.³²³ Their conspiracy-theorist, anti-government outlook tends to reinforce the idea that their internet use is being monitored, and they are often aware of what technical security measures they need to employ to avoid detection. This can include the use of encrypted platforms, Virtual Private Networks (which obscure the identity and location of the user) and 'dark net' sites.

262. The Head of Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) was clear that “*end to end encryption is a disaster*”³²⁴ and is having a detrimental effect on their ability to detect harmful material online. With more services offering end-to-end encryption of messaging, MI5 has called on communication service providers (CSPs) to allow intelligence agencies to have “*exceptional access*” to encrypted messaging.³²⁵ However, it is also important that the CSPs – the companies that host these platforms – take the necessary steps to ensure this material cannot be viewed and shared in the first place. This is proving to be something of a ‘work in progress’.

263. The Committee first identified the problem of the CSPs failing to remove Extremist material from their platforms in its 2014 *Report on the Intelligence Relating to the Murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby*. During the course of that Inquiry, the Committee were told by Google, Facebook and Apple, among others, that they did not routinely monitor the content on their systems and therefore were unable automatically to block Extremist material. They attributed their failure to review suspicious content to the volume of material on their systems. Instead, they told the Committee, they were largely reliant on user-generated reports – from private citizens, organisations and law enforcement authorities – which would then trigger them to remove illegal or offensive content.

264. The Committee expressed its concern at this lack of accountability:

*It is clear from the responses we received that the CSPs take different approaches to monitoring their networks. However, for the most part, action is only triggered when they are notified of offensive content (or content which breaches their guidelines) by others. In the case of communications between terrorists, user reporting is unlikely to happen, and therefore such content is unlikely to be discovered. This approach to reviewing content does not therefore help the intelligence and security Agencies to discover terrorist networks or plots.*³²⁶

While the Government was broadly supportive in its response to the Committee's recommendations in the Report – stating that “*we are also pushing CSPs to take stronger,*

³²³ ‘UK Far Right extremism: hate spreads from the fringe’, *Financial Times*, 8 May 2019.

³²⁴ Oral evidence – CTP, 29 April 2021.

³²⁵ ‘MI5 Chief asks tech firms for “exceptional access” to encrypted messages’, *The Guardian*, 25 February 2020.

³²⁶ *Report on the Intelligence Relating to the Murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby*, HC 795, 14 November 2014.

*faster and further action to combat the use of their services by terrorists, criminals and their supporters*³²⁷ – it failed to propose a substantive way forward.

265. By the time of the Committee’s Inquiry into the 2017 terror attacks,³²⁸ the Director General of MI5 was able to confirm to the Committee that some progress had been made in the intervening years, in that at least the CSPs were acknowledging they had a role to play: *“Companies are no longer overtly denying all responsibility for material they carry. They were doing that five years ago.”*³²⁹ However, the Committee once again found itself in familiar territory when it came to examining the issue of whether CSPs were taking active steps to ensure that law enforcement agencies were notified of any material that may have a national security element. It transpired that although the major CSPs were now developing algorithms that would detect harmful content automatically, as the Head of CTP told the Committee, the utility of this was somewhat negated by the fact that it prevented any onward reporting to law enforcement:

*the automation also means that it is kind of like a dump into your trash bin where it doesn’t go through any kind of human eye and, if it doesn’t go through any kind of human eye they cannot spot the fact that that might be something the police or Security Service might be interested in.*³³⁰

266. Homeland Security Group advised that, while the CSPs have the technical capacity to engage in this area, it is a *“much more sophisticated set of propaganda than we have experienced in the past”*, and that ERWT material was sometimes difficult for the CSPs to detect. The Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit (CTIRU) had a critical role to play in ensuring that the CSPs were proactively looking for this material on their platforms. The Head of CTP provided detail on the number of referrals the CTIRU were now making that were linked to ERWT, and how they were still developing a knowledge base which would help to inform decision-making with regard to whether online material breached Terrorism Act 2000 (TACT) thresholds:

I can give you some sense of perspective from the CTIRU point of view for 2020. Only six per cent of our total referrals in that year were in the Right Wing Extremism space. That amounts to 192 referrals with Right Wing material and, of the total referred, 58 of those breached TACT ... we are learning what this stuff means all of the time and we are trying to develop a library that we have spent three decades building up in the Islamist space and we are trying to develop that at pace now.

*By doing that we can go to social media sites, CSPs, who do want to cooperate with us, do want stuff taken down, or do want to assess whether it breaches their terms and conditions and say this is the material that we think is either illegal, in which case every respectable social media outfit I know wants it taken down, or it is a matter for you, but we are saying this stuff is inciteful and potentially egregious.*³³¹

³²⁷ Government Response to ISC report on Intelligence on the Murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby, Cm 9012, February 2015.

³²⁸ *The 2017 Attacks: What needs to change?*, HC 1694, 22 November 2018.

³²⁹ Oral evidence – MI5, 8 March 2015.

³³⁰ Oral evidence – CTP, 8 March 2018.

³³¹ Oral evidence – CTP, 28 April 2021.

The Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism

267. The Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) was founded in 2017 by Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube with the aim of preventing terrorists and violent extremists from exploiting digital platforms by fostering technical collaboration among member companies and sharing knowledge with smaller platforms.³³² It cites three strategic pillars as central to its mission: Prevent, Respond and Learn.

268. GIFCT points to three key initiatives launched by the forum:

- The GIFCT hash database was launched in 2017 by the founding member companies, and comprises a shared industry database of ‘hashes’ – unique digital ‘fingerprints’ – of known violent terrorist or violent extremist content associated with organisations listed on the UN Terrorist Sanctions list.
- URL sharing involves terrorist content being shared on one platform, with a link to content that is hosted on another platform. GIFCT began a programme in January 2019 to implement its own link sharing system – when a GIFCT company receives an indicator that the link leads to terrorist related content, the company now has a safe mechanism to share the URL links with the industry partner to whom the content belongs. This one-to-one sharing allows the notified platforms to review the link to decide if the content is violating its terms of service.
- The Content Incident Protocol (CIP) is a process by which GIFCT member companies become aware of, assess and act on potential content circulating online as a result of a real-world terrorist or extremist event, as well as the potential distribution of that content. In addition, all hashes of any video footage produced by the attacker(s) are shared in the GIFCT database.

269. The UK plays an active role in the GIFCT,³³³ and Homeland Security Group acts as the government representative (noting that it is important to be able to counter the ERWT online challenge through “*an international prism*”).³³⁴ They observed that “*we were really in at the birth of it [GIFCT] so we were part of the kind of policy driver that sought to encourage both other countries and the major players to take part in it*”.³³⁵

270. Homeland Security Group advised that, in the event of a UK terrorist attack, they will initiate a crisis response in the online space, collaborating with individual CSPs, the GIFCT and UK law enforcement, to ensure swift removal of any affiliated terrorist content, including attacker manifestos and live-streamed attack videos. Homeland Security Group pointed to the live-streaming of the Christchurch attack in 2019 as the catalyst for this change in approach by these companies, telling the Committee:

It has been unquestionably the most celebrated attack in the Right-Wing Extremist circles. The companies immediately saw, to be frank, that this

³³² The membership of GIFCT has since expanded to also include: Mailchimp, Discord, Instagram, Whatsapp, Pinterest, Amazon, Dropbox, Mega, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, Microsoft, Facebook.

³³³ The other governments represented on the GIFCT are: Canada, France, Ghana, Japan, New Zealand and the United States. The European Union is also represented (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs). The United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate has observer status. See www.gifct.org

³³⁴ Oral evidence – Home Office, 28 April 2021.

³³⁵ Oral evidence – Home Office, 29 April 2021.

*was extremely bad for them commercially and it was extremely bad more broadly. So we have worked with them for a new protocol which means that if they detect or we detect ... but more likely they will [see] material online which looks like live streaming of a terrorist attack, they will immediately take it down and we have seen that work now in practice. It needs to get more sophisticated because, again, technology will stay ahead of us in some areas but it is an important step forward and one I would have thought five years ago, without GIFCT, we would have really struggled to achieve.*³³⁶

271. Homeland Security Group pointed to the way that it, together with the CTIRU unit, was able to leverage the relationships it had built over the years with some of these CSPs in ensuring the Christchurch material was taken down. It was also supporting the CSPs to develop their capabilities:

*For instance, following the March 2019 Christchurch attack in New Zealand, during which the livestreamed attack video was disseminated across the internet at an unprecedented rate, OSCT [Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism] utilised established CSP relationships to ensure CTIRU referrals of online terrorist content were prioritised and swiftly reviewed for removal.*³³⁷

272. Whilst the GIFCT would certainly appear to have been a step in the right direction, there is still a lot more that the CSPs can and should be doing to tackle the online threat, as Homeland Security Group acknowledged:³³⁸

Homeland Security Group continues to work closely with the GIFCT and its individual members to press for a more robust, industrywide approach to tackling terrorism online. The Christchurch attack demonstrated that progress made since the GIFCT's establishment did not effectively translate into an expeditious or coordinated cross-industry response in the event of a terrorist attack.

The UK worked with international partners to press the GIFCT to establish itself as a formal NGO entity with a clear organisational structure and future work programme. One such is the establishment of a crisis response protocol, which has been established and was successfully triggered following the Halle attack in Germany. The UK now sits on the GIFCT's new Independent Advisory Board, the formal mechanism for Governments and Civil Society organisations to hold the GIFCT to account for tackling online terrorist content.

The UK is also pressing for the GIFCT to ensure its crisis protocol is further improved by including non GIFCT members and comprehensively tackling the viral dissemination of all terrorist content as well as livestreamed video content.

³³⁶ Oral evidence – Home Office, 28 April 2021.

³³⁷ Written evidence – Home Office, 30 September 2020.

³³⁸ Written evidence – Home Office, 30 September 2020.

Wider work with communication service providers

273. More broadly, HMG continues in its efforts to drive forward reform in what Homeland Security Group acknowledged is “*still an ungoverned space*”.³³⁹ HMG has consistently pressed CSPs to develop and utilise automated technology to proactively detect and remove terrorist content. The Head of CTP observed that the major CSPs were now looking to them for technical assistance, and told the Committee that “*we were approached by Facebook to help them develop their algorithm to be able to take this down*”.³⁴⁰ In addition, CTP advised that the Metropolitan Police are using police training footage to aid Facebook in developing tools to better detect live-streamed terrorist attacks.³⁴¹

274. Homeland Security Group has led work with CSPs on candidate security, focusing on tackling the online abuse received by candidates in the run up to the 12 December 2019 election, some of which was Extreme Right Wing in nature. They maintain that CSPs have improved their processes for referring and removing online abuse content where it is illegal or breaches CSPs’ Terms of Service. In this context, Homeland Security Group have worked with CSPs to ensure online threat to life or content inciting violence is clearly reported to the police and that platform trends are shared with HMG, in order to ensure that CSPs provide information for intelligence and evidence purposes (and that content is left up when needed for ongoing investigations).

275. The Home Office is currently looking to develop a technological solution to reduce the number of shares terrorist attack videos receive after they have been livestreamed. The solution would seek to improve current hash detection techniques used by industry, allowing CSPs to proactively identify more manipulated videos.

Why ERWT online is a new challenge

276. Whilst the approach to the assessment of the ERWT threat is notably ‘threat agnostic,’ the reality is that tackling ERWT online increasingly requires a different approach from how the Government has traditionally tackled Salafi-Jihadist online propaganda:

- In contrast to Daesh and Al-Qaeda, right-wing communities in the online sphere are increasingly fluid, with few formal organisations and structures. There are fewer ERWT proscribed groups and less group-aligned propaganda than in the Salafi-Jihadist space; and
- The style of content and the way in which it manifests (for example, within coded anonymised messaging), means that detecting, moderating and removing ERWT online content can be particularly difficult. This makes it more difficult for the Intelligence Community and law enforcement to help CSPs develop automated tools to effectively tackle ERWT content on their platforms.

277. Online ERWT content sits amidst a plethora of content that falls below illegal terrorist thresholds. In addition, a significant proportion of ERWT online content manifests on platforms that make moderation particularly challenging (for example, by ensuring the

³³⁹ Written evidence – Home Office, 30 September 2020.

³⁴⁰ Oral evidence – CTP, 29 April 2021.

³⁴¹ Written evidence – CTP, 31 January 2020.

anonymity of users) and/or are unwilling to collaborate with UK law enforcement requests to remove terrorist content. For example:

- Some platforms hosting ERWT content, such as Gab, 4chan and 8kun, are designed as so-called ‘free speech’ platforms, are U.S.-based and regard themselves as abiding by U.S. law and claim protection under the First Amendment. This means that UK engagement with such platforms is particularly challenging.
- The trajectory for the online space is one in which an increasing number of platforms evolve or emerge on principles of free speech and privacy – indeed, privacy is increasingly prioritised above security in the design of platforms.

278. With the emergence of many ‘free speech’ unmoderated platforms specifically aimed at the Extreme Right-Wing, the Government will also need to consider the levers that can be used to influence sites such as 8kun and BitChute. The Head of CTP explained that:

*other than with the top six major [CSPs] ... the stuff that the CTIRU takes down is a voluntary process. We [CTP] can only work in taking down extremist material because the companies actually co-operate with us ... there are many other providers ... Bitchute is an example ... that want nothing to do with law enforcement, will not co-operate and do not volunteer.*³⁴²

279. The importance of finding a solution to extremist content on free-speech platforms was underlined to the Committee by Nick Lowles:

*I think the major question here, and the other major question remaining is around bringing smaller platforms around the table, holding them to account, because if they can't be held to account and brought around the table, then we're just going to be playing whack-a-mole continually.*³⁴³

The Government ‘Online Harms’ legislation

280. Homeland Security Group advised the Committee that HMG has an active dialogue with the CSPs in terms of alerting them to terrorist exploitation of their platform(s). The CTIRU – a Metropolitan Police unit set up in 2010 to actively identify and assess online content, which is then referred to the CSPs for removal if it breaches UK terrorist legislation³⁴⁴ and platform terms of service – has succeeded in getting platforms to remove 310,000 pieces of terrorist online material since its inception in 2010.³⁴⁵

281. This does, however, appear to be a rather modest achievement when contrasted with action taken by Facebook just over a year later – in the period April–June 2020, Facebook reported that it had removed 8.7 million pieces of terrorist content, and that over 99% of

³⁴² Evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee – CTP, 23 September 2020.

³⁴³ Oral evidence – Nick Lowles, Hope Not Hate, 16 December 2020.

³⁴⁴ Counter-Terrorism Strategy (CONTEST) – June 2018.

³⁴⁵ CTP, ‘Together, we’re tackling online terrorism’, 19 December 2018, counterterrorism.police.uk/together-were-tackling-online-terrorism

this content had been found and flagged by Facebook before the content had been reported by users.³⁴⁶

282. It has been clear for some time that there needs to be a robust legislative framework in place to ensure CSPs are properly regulated when it comes to tackling online terrorist content and activity, as well as other areas such as child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA).

283. In April 2019, the Government launched a public consultation on the Online Harms White Paper, which set out to “*protect users online through the introduction of a new duty of care on companies and an independent regulator responsible for overseeing this framework*”.³⁴⁷ It announced that the Home Office would be jointly leading on this Online Harms work with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The consultation ran from 8 April 2019 to 1 July 2019, and included the prospect of new legislation:

The overarching principle of the regulation of online harms is to protect users’ rights online ... safeguards for freedom of expression have been built in throughout the framework. Reflecting the threat to national security, companies will be required to take particularly robust action to tackle terrorist content.

284. On 12 February 2020, the Government published its initial response to the consultation, noting that it was minded to make Ofcom the new Online Harms regulator, on the basis that it had existing expertise in the field, already had relationships with many of the major players in the online arena, and had received the endorsement of some of those organisations that had responded to the consultation.

285. In June 2020, Homeland Security Group provided an update to the Committee on their role in taking the Online Harms legislation forward:

*We have been working with DCMS (with whom we jointly lead on this legislation) to draft the full Government response to the White Paper. This will be published in the autumn, alongside interim codes of practice for terrorist and CSEA content and activity. These have been developed in conjunction with law enforcement and UKIC [UK Intelligence Community]. We are preparing to instruct Parliamentary Counsel to draft legislation to deliver this regulatory framework, which we hope to introduce to Parliament next year.*³⁴⁸

Homeland Security Group advised that their role in developing this legislation has in particular focused on the policy around Preventing Terrorist Use of the Internet (PTUI). They have also begun engagement with Ofcom (specifically on building its capability, and policy development).

³⁴⁶ HMG, Online Harms White Paper, Initial Consultation Response, 12 February 2020, www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper-initial-consultation-response

³⁴⁷ HMG, Online Harms White Paper, Initial Consultation Response, 12 February 2020, www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper-initial-consultation-response

³⁴⁸ *Homeland Security Group Quarterly Report*, 1 April 2020–30 June 2020.

286. On 15 December 2020, the Government duly published its full response to the consultation.³⁴⁹ It stated that:

- A new regulatory framework would be established with the introduction in 2021 of an Online Safety Bill. This would set out a general definition of harmful content and activity, with secondary legislation to cover priority categories of illegal offences – these would include terrorism. The legislation would also put duties on some platforms in relation to legal but harmful material (such as hate content).
- This new legislation would apply to those companies that hosted user-generated content in the UK, and facilitate public or private online interaction between service users, one or more of whom is based in the UK (it would not apply to internet service providers or the dark web, as the latter falls to the direct responsibility of law enforcement).
- It would include measures regarding senior management liability, with the Government reserving the right to introduce criminal sanctions for senior managers if they fail to comply (with the caveat, however, that this would not be introduced until at least two years after the regulatory framework comes into effect).

287. The White Paper also announced plans for sweeping new powers for Ofcom as the regulator, with Ofcom able to tackle non-compliance against any company anywhere in the world if it provides services to UK users. It would be able to impose:

- a fine of up to £18m, or 10% of global turnover (whichever is the higher);
- a Business Disruption measure, Level one: this would impose measures that make it less commercially viable to provide services to UK users; and
- a Business Disruption measure, Level two: Ofcom to obtain a court order to block a non-compliant company's services from being accessible in the UK.

Homeland Security Group confirmed that whilst they do not at present have any plans to second any Home Office staff to Ofcom, they have been brokering introductory meetings between Ofcom and law enforcement partners (including those responsible for tackling online terrorist content) with a view to helping Ofcom develop required expertise.³⁵⁰

288. It is not exactly clear as to whether Ofcom has the capability and expertise to exercise this ambitious new remit – or indeed how long it will take Ofcom to develop this required skill base. Homeland Security Group acknowledged that Ofcom will need to build their capability:

If Ofcom were sitting here now, they would say they don't have that capacity today. I would agree with that, which is one of the reasons why this will be implemented over time rather than immediately.

I think, conceptually, they are the right people to do this. That seems to be a broad sense, both within UK government, but most importantly within the CSPs. They will need to grow capability and they will need to grow

³⁴⁹ DCMS and the Home Office, *Online Harms White Paper: Full Government Response to the Consultation*, 15 December 2020.

³⁵⁰ Written evidence – Home office, 8 June 2021.

knowledge and the key thing that government is doing there is actually being clear within the legislation as to what their powers will be. So not today but, yes, by the time the [Online Harms] Bill is in.³⁵¹

289. On 12 May 2021, DCMS and the Home Office published the draft Online Safety Bill. Taking this legislation forward has obviously been a complex and lengthy process, as confirmed by the Home Secretary:

It's taken ages, it's taken a long time to get to where we are today. That will indicate that there's been a lot of work, a lot of integrated work across DCMS, other government departments, shared equities, but also competing issues as well.³⁵²

Interim Code of Practice on Terrorist Content and Activity Online

290. Pending introduction of the Online Safety Bill, the Government also published (in parallel with its full response to the consultation on the Online Harms White Paper) an Interim Code of Practice, noting that:

these voluntary and non-binding interim codes will help companies begin to implement the necessary changes and bridge the gap until Ofcom issues its statutory codes of practice.³⁵³

291. The Interim Code of Practice on terrorism comprises five specific principles, which require companies to seek the following:

- Principle 1: Identify and prevent terrorist content and activity;
- Principle 2: Minimise the potential for searches to return results linking to terrorist activity;
- Principle 3: Facilitate and participate in industry collaboration to tackle terrorist use of the internet;
- Principle 4: Implement effective user reporting, complaints and redress procedure; and
- Principle 5: Support investigation and prosecution of individuals for terrorist offences.³⁵⁴

292. We asked if the voluntary Interim Code of Practice was being adhered to by the CSPs – Homeland Security Group confirmed that:

By and large we are seeing, yes, they [the CSPs] have all found it helpful because it helps to encapsulate what we want. There was a fair degree of engagement with the CSPs beforehand. So at this point ... and it is quite

³⁵¹ Oral evidence – Home Office, 29 April 2021.

³⁵² Oral evidence – Home Secretary, 20 May 2021.

³⁵³ DCMS and the Home Office, *Online Harms White Paper: Full Government Response to the Consultation*, 15 December 2020.

³⁵⁴ DCMS and the Home Office, *Interim Code of Practice on Terrorist Content and Activity Online*, 15 December 2020.

*early, as you will appreciate, but at this point I wouldn't be calling out any individual companies, the companies with which we cooperate. The point has been made earlier about some of the smaller companies that we just don't have a relationship with, but the big ones are playing quite nicely in this space.*³⁵⁵

The Commission for Countering Extremism was less optimistic: “*it is hard not to be sceptical about what a voluntary code of practice would achieve in the long or short term, or that it would make any substantial difference to the growing and frightening threat of hateful extremism online*”.³⁵⁶

S. It appears that there are inherent difficulties with the voluntary Code of Practice, and indeed across the Online Safety Bill more widely. Whilst the major communication service providers – who are already on board with the Government’s drive to promote responsible behaviour – are adhering to the principles, it is the smaller organisations (many of which are particularly influential in the Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism space) who appear reluctant to step up. The emergence of many ‘free speech’ unmoderated platforms specifically aimed at the Extreme Right Wing are also a problem. It will be essential for Ofcom to develop the expertise and technical know-how as a matter of urgency if it is to be able to properly enforce mandatory Codes of Practice across the industry.

³⁵⁵ Oral evidence – Home Office, 29 April 2021.

³⁵⁶ Written evidence – Commission for Countering Extremism, 17 December 2020.

INTERNATIONAL

293. Recent Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT) incidents overseas, such as the attacks in Christchurch and El Paso, mean the issue is high on the agenda of the UK's closest counter-terrorism partners. MI5, Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) and GCHQ advised that they seek to work with international partners to increase and systematise data-sharing (in support of efforts such as ***) and to act in a joined-up way to combat right-wing material online and *** those communication service providers (CSPs) favoured by Extreme Right-Wing (XRW) actors. (For example, CTP's response to the emergence of National Action involved a collective effort with a number of countries to disrupt the spread of associated or similar groups. This included groups in Norway, the USA and Australia.)

Closer co-operation: International partners

294. MI5, CTP and GCHQ are working with international intelligence partners to share learning about the XRW threat. The priority has been to:

- gain an understanding of how the threat is manifesting in other countries;
- understand how partners are dealing with the threat; and
- where appropriate, agree international strategies to develop a strategic response to what is a new and growing threat.

295. In July 2020, MI5 took part in a virtual meeting of the *** working group on ERWT and left-wing, anarchist and single-issue terrorism (LASIT). MI5 told the Committee that it is apparent that experience of ERWT and LASIT varies – for example, in the United States, Article 1 of the Bill of Rights (Freedom of Speech) legitimises some activity that would be considered criminal in the UK – however, they say that:

*broadly speaking engagement has been productive and forward-leaning. In practice engagement has involved separate conferences [with international partners]; a number of bilateral exchanges with close intelligence partners (including, but not limited to, ***); and the sharing of intelligence assessments to ensure we build a common understanding and identify where links between [extreme] right-wing terrorists in different countries (or online) may be driving the threat.³⁵⁷*

**** – Liaison Collaboration³⁵⁸*

296. Since 2019, MI5 has been part of an ERWT-focused liaison working group (codenamed ***), in which domestic security, police and signals intelligence (SIGINT) organisations from the UK and liaison partners collaborate to share experiences in countering the ERWT threat and to work to understand each other's approaches and thresholds. We are told that the liaison group has enabled greater cross-partner co-operation on UK Intelligence Community (UKIC) ERWT investigations with an international focus and enabled joint operational responses

³⁵⁷ Written evidence – MI5 and CTP, 31 January 2020.

³⁵⁸ Written evidence – MI5, 23 November 2020.

to countering the ERWT threat, particularly in the online space. MI5 and CTP advised the Committee that they had recently taken joint chairpersonship of the liaison group.³⁵⁹

297. The liaison working group has commissioned a series of formal papers from *** in order to explore *** of the ERWT threat, noting common drivers, such as:

- ***;
- ***;
- ***;
- ***.

The consensus across attendees is that the threat from this area is increasing, and all parties acknowledged that a successful attack anywhere would galvanise other potential actors ***.

298. The liaison working group have also identified common interventions that may benefit from a future joint approach, including:

- increased counter-messaging and counter-violent extremism programmes;
- education initiatives ***;
- ***; and
- ***.

299. However, there are some challenges to this working arrangement. Within liaison countries, investigative thresholds, terminology and even the nature of the problem vary greatly, with – as already noted – the USA being a particular outlier in terms of what is acceptable under the First Amendment guaranteeing US citizens freedom of speech, and phenomena such as armed militias and sovereign citizens (those who reject the authority of the Federal government, which do not exist in the other liaison countries. Nevertheless, MI5 has noted that “*there is a clear commitment to learn from each other’s experience, to work towards a common language to describe the problem, and to build, where possible and appropriate, common solutions to common problems*”.³⁶⁰ These include exploring with liaison partners the possibility of ***³⁶¹ ***, and data sharing initiatives.³⁶²

Europol

300. CTP and MI5 are engaged with Europol³⁶³ Member States on ERWT, which has increasingly become part of their agenda over the last two years, with a recognition of the need to balance the right to demonstrate alongside the need to investigate threats to national security. However the scope and scale of this response appears to be dependent on the necessary resources being available. The need for an EU-wide Internet Referral Unit (IRU)

³⁵⁹ Oral evidence – 29 April 2021.

³⁶⁰ Written evidence – MI5, 23 November 2020.

³⁶¹ ***

³⁶² Written evidence – MI5, 26 May 2021.

³⁶³ Europol is the EU’s law enforcement agency, and supports Member States in preventing and combating all forms of serious international crime and terrorism.

is broadly recognised. However, the scope and scale of the response would be dependent on competing priorities.

301. CTP worked with Europol following the Christchurch and Halle attacks, to support the development of a Protocol for On Line Crisis Management, with an emphasis on a co-ordinated pan-Europe response to take down material from the online space, whilst recognising the importance of capturing investigative opportunities and evidential proof. The Head of CTP told the Committee in April 2021 that they had “*just got voted back unanimously as a third country on to the Europol CT working group*”.³⁶⁴

302. ***.³⁶⁵

303. ***.³⁶⁶

304. ***.³⁶⁷

T. International co-operation is key to tackling Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism, however the disparity in approach and legal thresholds for defining the threat makes this particularly challenging. MI5 and Counter Terrorism Policing are committed to exploring a possible joint approach with international liaison partners, although we note that the nature of the problem varies greatly across different countries.

The impact of Brexit

305. Many of the UK’s national security capabilities, including the sharing of data and intelligence, depend on a network of bilateral and multilateral partnerships with European equivalents in EU Member States. In January 2020, MI5 told the Committee that they were confident that:

*UK cooperation with European partners on national security issues will remain as strong as it has ever been. Brexit should therefore have no direct impact on bilateral partnerships, or ... non-EU based multilateral forums, such as the Counter Terrorism Group (CTG) ***.*³⁶⁸

306. MI5 has, nevertheless, identified some areas that have the potential to impact relationships with European partners and therefore its ability to share data and intelligence across the spectrum of threats, including ERWT. MI5 told the Committee that these three areas are:

- *Partnerships based on the premise that national security is a Member State responsibility only (where this is made clear under EU law). Maintaining strong Member State-based national security arrangements between sovereign states, supported by a wider UK/EU security partnership, has been critical ***.*

³⁶⁴ Oral evidence – CTP, 29 April 2021.

³⁶⁵ ***

³⁶⁶ Written evidence – MI5.

³⁶⁷ Oral evidence – MI5, 29 April 2021.

³⁶⁸ Written evidence – MI5, CTP, GCHQ and Home Office, 31 January 2020.

- *Securing a Data Adequacy agreement with the EU. MI5's capabilities ***. Securing a Data Adequacy agreement that enables the UK and EU to freely share personal data is essential ***.*
- *Access to important EU tools and measures. The UK is a significant contributor to the Schengen Information System II (SISII),³⁶⁹ Passenger Names Records (PNR),³⁷⁰ the EU Intelligence Analysis Centre (EU INTCEN),³⁷¹ and Europol.³⁷² These tools are of importance to law enforcement partners, and it is vital that any agreement secures future interoperability so that the UK can take advantage of developments in technology and approach over time for these and other tools. ***.³⁷³*

307. As at 31 January 2020, MI5 advised that negotiations with respect to the UK's access were still continuing, and cautioned that:

****, the limitations placed on security cooperation will have a detrimental impact on ***. However, MI5 are committed to ensuring that the Brexit process will not compromise the close relationship they have built with European partners over a number of years and significantly increased over the last decade. Indeed, MI5 need to strengthen relationships as the UK leaves the EU to improve its effectiveness at tackling shared threats. MI5 have done so by increasing bilateral and multilateral engagement since the Brexit referendum and will continue this trend into 2020.³⁷⁴*

308. The Director General of MI5 updated the Committee on intelligence-sharing and co-operation with its European counterparts post-Brexit. He observed that there had been no discernible impact on practical relationships, although it was possible that there could be issues around ***:

*The core answer is that the [practical] relationships that we enjoy with our European counterparts, both multilaterally and bilaterally, remain very strong. They really do. ***. It is embedded very strongly because the threats require it. So I do not have any particular concerns at that level.*

*Clearly alongside those operational relationships, which I am confident are in good health and are likely to remain in good health, there are some more technical things around some of the tools and measures that the UK previously enjoyed, not all of which have persisted into the new situation, but the ones that mattered most to us have. So *** for example, Europol, you know, *** remain available to us. ****

*So there are some shifts, for most of which we have adequate mitigations ***. The other place we will need to continue to watch is around data flows.³⁷⁵*

³⁶⁹ SISII is a Schengen area-wide travel-zone watch-list which allows participating states to place alerts against Subjects of Interest (SOIs) which are accessible to police and border agencies across Europe.

³⁷⁰ Passenger Names Records provide flight and booking data for individuals travelling in and out of the UK.

³⁷¹ EU INTCEN is the intelligence hub for the EU, and provides assessed intelligence to the EU institutions and Member States.

³⁷² Europol is the EU's law enforcement agency. Its mission is to support Member States in preventing and combating all forms of serious international crime and terrorism.

³⁷³ Written evidence – MI5, 31 January 2021.

³⁷⁴ Written evidence – 31 January 2020.

³⁷⁵ Oral evidence – MI5, 29 April 2021.

309. When we asked the Home Secretary what progress was being made with regard to discussions on UK access to the Passenger Names Records and EU INTCEN, she confirmed that discussions were still ongoing, but suggested that it was very much a case of business as usual when it came to co-operation with the EU on operational issues:

*tackling the day to day around serious and organised crime and terrorism and protecting the public and also bringing criminals to justice, that work continues along with the dialogue at a member state level as well. So not a commission level, I should emphasise this, at a member state level.*³⁷⁶

So we have, you mentioned the Schengen Information Systems, we have to return to tried and tested mechanisms around cooperation, I've mentioned bilateral channels, I've mentioned Interpol, which were already in use, as you'll be well aware, around the rest of the world and used in member states up until 2015.

*So these ways of working, circulation, diffusion notices, they're all there and we continue with that, I have to say, very strong and excellent working relationships that have, you know, really come together over a long period of time.*³⁷⁷

U. It is encouraging that the strong operational relationships built up over the years by the Intelligence Community and police with their European counterparts continue to develop in the post-Brexit era. Whilst most capacity has not been affected, we remain concerned about possible loss of access to some important capabilities, such as Passenger Names Records. We emphasise the need for ongoing discussion on alternative arrangements to succeed.

³⁷⁶ Oral evidence – Home Secretary, 20 May 2021.

³⁷⁷ Oral evidence – Home Secretary, 20 May 2021.

ANNEX A: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. It is clearly difficult to delineate precisely the ideologies that might motivate Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists; however, we recognise that MI5 and Counter Terrorism Policing must be able to differentiate between them, not least because of the evidential thresholds.

B. Nevertheless, there is a risk that the varying terminologies used to categorise potential terrorists may cause confusion, including, most worryingly, to risk conflation of ideology with intent. It is important to be clear that there is no suggestion that all those who subscribe to these ideologies have terrorist intent; this is simply a means to establish what might be motivating potential terrorists.

C. More broadly, we welcome the recent addition of the word ‘Extreme’ to the previous term ‘Right-Wing Terrorism’ – it allays any possibility of the stigmatisation of those holding mainstream right-wing views.

D. It is not surprising that there are reports that Extreme Right-Wing Terrorist groups and individuals have sought to co-opt the Covid-19 pandemic, using conspiracy theories and exploiting community grievances to attempt to radicalise, recruit and inspire plots and attacks. The full impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has yet to be seen – but 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.

E. The terrorist threat – regardless of ideology – is increasingly posed by Self-Initiated Terrorists, those who are incited or inspired rather than directed. Self-Initiated Terrorists are difficult to identify, and pose a significant number of challenges in terms of detection and monitoring. Their motivation can be highly individualistic and determining how, why and when they may choose to attack is particularly difficult for MI5 and Counter Terrorism Policing. An innovative approach will be needed to counter the fragmented and complex threat posed by these disparate groups and individuals.

F. Without an agreed understanding of the links between Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism and the developmental disorders Asperger’s and autism spectrum disorder (ASD), it is difficult to see how this problem can be tackled effectively. It is imperative that more is done to establish a cohesive and joined-up effort across the agencies, organisations and medical professionals involved in this area.

G. The fact that the Armed Forces do not provide clear direction to service personnel regarding membership of any organisation – let alone an extremist one – would appear to be something of an anomaly. It could be argued that this is a somewhat risky approach, given the sensitive roles of many service personnel.

H. There appears to be an issue around the current vetting processes for candidates applying to join the police – the lack of thorough background checks is a matter of concern. As the internet and the wider online sphere is the key driver of the Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism threat, it follows that online activity must be closely scrutinised when the police are assessing whether an individual is suitable to join its ranks.

I. There is no process in place to monitor those ‘G***’ individuals who have travelled overseas for Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism-related purposes and have returned to the UK – there is a strong possibility that these returning foreign fighters, some of whom may have fought ***, will have been further radicalised *** and developed connections with others who share their Extreme Right-Wing ideology.

J. The Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) is a popular activity enjoyed by many people across the UK. The fact that this is an area currently being targeted by the Far Right in other countries, and that a number of MMA instructors were previously found to have been involved in National Action, suggests that MI5 and Counter Terrorism Policing should be alert to the potential for links in the future.

K. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism online environment poses a new challenge for the Intelligence Community, and there is still a long way to go when it comes to tackling what is largely an ungoverned space. The Head of Counter Terrorism Policing told the Committee that “*the single biggest thing that keeps me awake at night is the proliferation of online and its ability to radicalise and incite people*”. The Director General of MI5 pointed to the particular challenge of determining Extreme Right-Wing activity online which could translate into ‘real-world’ terrorist activity:

the activity itself is often just online espousal of violent views without any real world accompanying activity and so often we are monitoring something which is just online and nothing else, potentially for years on end, but it doesn’t take much for an individual or a small group of individuals to change their direction and do something violent in the real world.

L. The Operational Improvement Review and its practical recommendations signalled a fundamental shift in the Government’s approach to what was then termed ‘Domestic Extremism’ – the subsequent transfer of lead responsibility from Counter Terrorism Policing to MI5 regarding what was by then recognised as a terrorist threat was a pragmatic and logical move.

M. The continuing rise in the number of referrals to Prevent for concerns around Extreme Right-Wing activity does not necessarily signal a similar increase in the Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism threat, but rather indicates a greater awareness of the potential risk and the greater focus being placed on this issue. We consider that the Home Affairs Committee may wish to examine how and why people are being referred to Prevent – and who is making these referrals.

N. Advocacy groups can play an important role, however we recognise that MI5 and Counter Terrorism Policing may be constrained in the way in which they are able to interact with them at an operational level, and we would encourage the Home Office to develop constructive relationships at a strategic level instead.

O. MI5 have taken on responsibility for Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT) without the commensurate resources. Taking the month of July 2020 as an example, ERWT and Left, Anarchist, Single-Issue Terrorism (LASIT) casework accounted for around under a fifth of all counter-terrorism investigations: that casework can only be undertaken at the expense of other MI5 work. The impact has been seen on * casework, which is now progressed more slowly, and on MI5's inability to expand its work on other threat areas as it had intended. This situation is untenable. While MI5, rightly, allocates its resources on what it assesses to be the highest priority work based on its expert knowledge of the threat, we are concerned that MI5 has been expected simply to absorb this new responsibility. MI5 must be given additional funding to enable it to conduct these cases without other areas of work suffering as a consequence.**

P. It is clear that the Behavioural Science Unit (BSU) is making a vital contribution to promoting an informed understanding of the complexities of the Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT) threat. We are puzzled that MI5 does not appear to be taking active steps to ensure it has the capacity to be involved at the outset of all investigations. The BSU is clearly an essential capability, particularly when it comes to meeting the ERWT threat, and must be resourced appropriately.

Q. Proscription has, to date, been an important disruptive tool in countering the influence and activities of bodies and organisations that seek to carry out terrorist activity. However, the ideologies driving Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism are complex, and in the case of, for example, neo-Nazi groups such as Order of Nine Angles, do not meet the terrorism threshold. We note that Counter Terrorism Policing and the Home Office are considering a possible review of the current proscription process – this is a welcome development.

R. The Government will need a new approach to tackle the financing of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT). It is one thing to take an agnostic approach and use shared methodology in assessing the Islamist terror threat and ERWT, however when it comes to the financing of this activity the reality is that the two are very different. Moreover, whilst it would appear that at present the financing of ERWT is low level and ad hoc, the reality is that this could change rapidly as the threat evolves.

S. It appears that there are inherent difficulties with the voluntary Code of Practice, and indeed across the Online Safety Bill more widely. Whilst the major communication service providers – who are already on board with the Government's drive to promote responsible behaviour – are adhering to the principles, it is the smaller organisations (many of which are particularly influential in the Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism space) who appear reluctant to step up. The emergence of many 'free speech' unmoderated platforms specifically aimed at the Extreme Right Wing are also a problem. It will be essential for Ofcom to develop the expertise and technical know-how as a matter of urgency if it is to be able to properly enforce mandatory Codes of Practice across the industry.

T. International co-operation is key to tackling Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism, however the disparity in approach and legal thresholds for defining the threat makes this particularly challenging. MI5 and Counter Terrorism Policing are committed to exploring a possible joint approach with international liaison partners, although we note that the nature of the problem varies greatly across different countries.

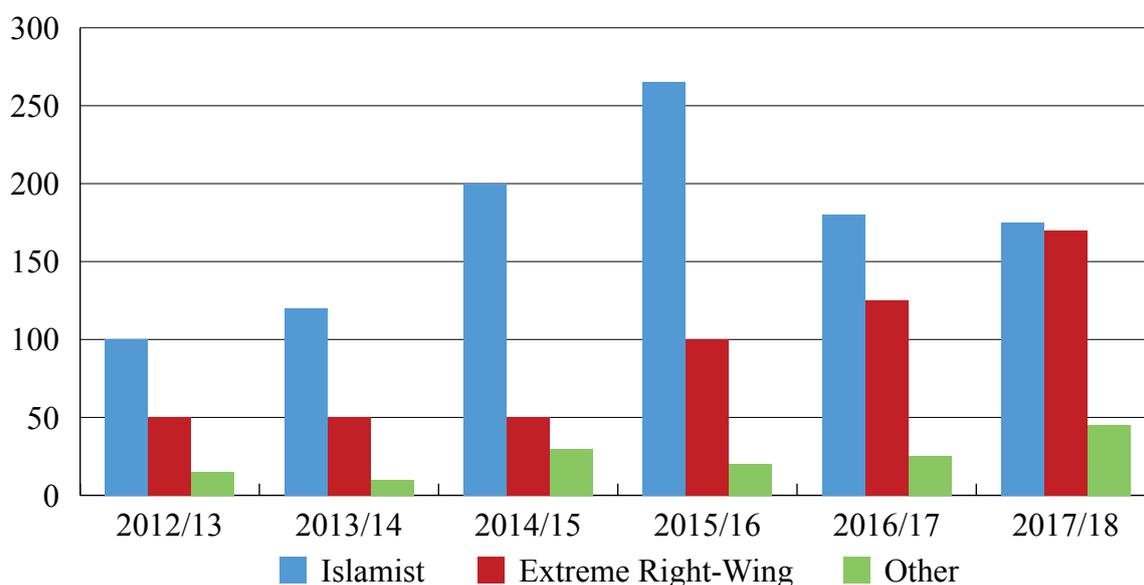
U. It is encouraging that the strong operational relationships built up over the years by the Intelligence Community and police with their European counterparts continue to develop in the post-Brexit era. Whilst most capacity has not been affected, we remain concerned about possible loss of access to some important capabilities, such as Passenger Names Records. We emphasise the need for ongoing discussion on alternative arrangements to succeed.

ANNEX B: PREVENT

Prevent strand

310. The aim of the Prevent strand of CONTEST is to safeguard and support vulnerable individuals to stop them becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. Individuals are referred by the police, prisons, healthcare and education practitioners, as well as the public. Referrals are assessed by Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) and a multi-agency panel to consider risk and, where appropriate, develop a support package (for example, this might include providing mental health support or assistance in finding employment). Within Prevent, the Channel programme is a voluntary, confidential programme, supporting those most at risk of radicalisation. Prevent referrals to the Channel programme from police and prisons, healthcare and education practitioners, and the public are assessed by CTP and by a multi-agency panel to consider risk, and where appropriate develop a support package. The majority of Prevent referrals for both Right-Wing Extremism and Islamist extremism come from education and the police.³⁷⁸

311. The process for individuals referred to Prevent, and subsequently assessed and supported by Channel, is ideology-agnostic. At the time of Prevent's inception, the focus was primarily on Islamist extremism. In the six-year period between 2012 and 2018, there has been an increase in the number being referred to the Channel programme for Extreme Right-Wing (XRW) concerns, as illustrated in the graph below.³⁷⁹



As already detailed in the earlier 'Prevent strand' section of the Report, there is no correlation between the number of individuals referred to the Prevent programme, and the number of individuals who are Subjects of Interest (SOIs) and on the radar of the counter-terrorism community.

³⁷⁸ Written evidence – Home Office, 27 May 2021.

³⁷⁹ Written evidence – Home Office, 31 January 2020.

312. Data from 2019/20 (ending in March 2020) shows that a total of 6,738 individuals were subject to a Prevent referral due to concerns that they were vulnerable to radicalisation. Out of this total, 1,387 were referred for concerns relating to Right-Wing Extremism, compared to 1,487 individuals who were referred for concerns relating to Islamist extremism.³⁸⁰

313. Data from 2020/2021 (ending in March 2021) showed that a total of 7,000 people had been referred to Prevent. Out of this total, 1,680 were referred due to concerns about Islamist extremism and 1,540 were referred due to concerns about Right-Wing Extremism.³⁸¹

314. Of those referred, many people who come into ‘the system’ are not suitable for intervention (from the Prevent programme) as they may already be on another intervention programme. In 2020/2021, of the 7,000 referred, just under 700 were formally adopted into the Prevent programme. The Home Office told the Committee that more Intervention Providers with specific expertise in the Extreme Right Wing are being recruited to handle the increased number of referrals.³⁸²

Prevent initiatives on ERWT

Homeland Security Group has provided Channel panels and Intervention Providers with bespoke training regarding the XRW threat. This includes:

- A four-day ‘Extremist Narratives’ course on both Islamist and ERWT, which launched in May 2019. So far, 26 Channel Intervention Providers and 11 Desistance and Disengagement Programme Intervention Providers have attended this course.
- A one-day workshop on ‘Right-Wing Extremist Narratives’ for Channel panel chairs and a one-day workshop on ‘Understanding Radicalisation’ for all Channel panel members.
- A communications campaign involved working with the *Hollyoaks* production team who were covering an XRW story-line, incorporating a Prevent referral. Counter Terrorism Policing Headquarters (CTPHQ) and a Channel Intervention Provider worked closely with the production team to ensure accuracy and also to promote Prevent. CTPHQ have provided schools with lesson plans focused around XRW.
- Counter Terrorism Local Profiles (CTLPs), created from intelligence-reporting, terrorism-related arrests and Prevent referrals detail the Far-Right threat at a local level. These profiles are used by local authorities, local policing, force contest boards and other partners to determine the Prevent response.³⁸³

Cross-Government

315. The role of other parts of Government would appear to be key to the successful delivery of Prevent – not least the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care (a number of those who have been convicted of ERWT offences, for example, suffer from mental health problems). Homeland Security Group told the Committee that:

³⁸⁰ Written evidence – Homeland Security Group, 28 May 2021.

³⁸¹ Oral evidence – Home Office, 29 April 2021.

³⁸² Oral evidence – Home Office, 29 April 2021.

³⁸³ Written evidence – Home Office, 31 January 2020.

*In developing our CT approach since 2015, HMG have been investing in a multi-agency approach at the national and local level. This approach recognises the complex needs and vulnerabilities of those at risk of being drawn into terrorism and extremism. It also acknowledges that, increasingly, data and information of relevance to CT is held by a wide range of departments and agencies, including non-traditional CT partners. When necessary and proportionate, OSCT [Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism], CTP and MI5 look to engage other parts of HMG, sharing data and information and building a joint approach.*³⁸⁴

316. The Director General for Homeland Security Group confirmed that Departments across Government are “*represented in all of the conversations we have ... [and are] actually seeing the wider strategic context of everything we are doing*”.³⁸⁵ She assured the Committee that central teams in Homeland Security Group and the Prevent team are working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education and others on joint programmes.³⁸⁶ The Home Secretary was confident that this multi-agency approach was proving particularly effective in countering XRW behaviours, telling the Committee:

*When you look at the associations, the age range and age profile quite frankly of individuals that are now being caught up, youngsters, children, there are all sorts of elements now about social services, education, we’re now able to join that up in a much better way.*³⁸⁷

Overdue for review

317. The Prevent programme – which has always been contentious – was supposed to have been reviewed in 2019:

- On 12 February 2019, Royal Assent was given to the Counter Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019, which included a commitment to undertake an independent review of Prevent.
- On 12 August 2019, the Government announced that Lord Carlile of Berriew had been appointed as the Independent Reviewer of Prevent.
- In October 2019, Human Rights Watch UK challenged the appointment of Lord Carlile and the terms of reference of the review.³⁸⁸
- On 19 December 2019, the Home Office confirmed that it would not be contesting the legal challenge, and Lord Carlile’s role as the Independent Reviewer was terminated.

318. As a consequence, the review did not begin until January 2021. Homeland Security Group advised the Committee that it would be finalised by September 2021, and emphasised

³⁸⁴ Written evidence – Home Office, 31 January 2020.

³⁸⁵ Oral evidence – Home Office, 29 April 2021.

³⁸⁶ Oral evidence – Home Office, 29 April 2021.

³⁸⁷ Oral evidence – Home Secretary, 20 May 2021.

³⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch UK contested the appointment of Lord Carlile on the grounds that he could not be truly independent as he had overseen the Government’s first review of Prevent in 2011, and had also sat on the Prevent oversight board.

that “*the delays were very much not of government’s making, they were very much of those who are never positive about Prevent making legal challenges*”.³⁸⁹

The Counter-Extremism Strategy

319. The 2015 Counter-Extremism Strategy was launched by the Home Office in a bid to address the harms of extremism beyond terrorism, both “*violent and non-violent; Islamist and neo-Nazi*”. In 2019, the Home Secretary announced a new ‘2020 Counter Extremism Strategy’, in which tackling XRW was to be a priority. At the time of writing, this new strategy has yet to be launched. The *Financial Times* reported on 11 October 2020 that “*One government insider said the Home Office’s counter-extremism unit was to be scrapped*” and that “*staff in the unit had been asked to draw up proposals to fold it into a new programme focused on hateful behaviour, or absorb it into the counter-terrorism work*”.³⁹⁰

320. The Commission for Countering Extremism told the Committee: “*We believe current Counter Extremism strategies are weak, slow, disjointed and outdated. While we have a well developed counter-terrorism machinery, one of the best in the world, we lack a similar machinery or infrastructure for counter extremism.*”³⁹¹

We questioned the Home Office as to what was happening with regard to the review – the Home Office advised that it is still under consideration:

*We are considering the best way to tackle extremism in future, and this includes considering whether a separate counter extremism strategy is the best way forward or to what extent it is better to incorporate this work into CONTEST. An important part of this work is how we respond to the Extreme Right-Wing and ensuring this is fully tied in with other work that is being done under CONTEST.*³⁹²

³⁸⁹ Oral evidence – Home Office, 20 May 2021.

³⁹⁰ ‘Britain to overhaul its counter-extremism strategy’, *Financial Times*, 11 October 2020.

³⁹¹ Written evidence – Commission for Countering Extremism, 17 December 2020.

³⁹² Written evidence – Home Office, 27 May 2021.

ANNEX C: LIST OF WITNESSES

Ministers

The Rt Hon. Priti Patel MP – Secretary of State for the Home Department

Other officials

Officials

MI5 (SECURITY SERVICE)

Mr Ken McCallum – Director General, Security Service

Other officials

HOME OFFICE

Ms Chloe Squires – Director General, Homeland Security Group

Other officials

METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE

Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu – Head of Counter Terrorism Policing

Expert external witnesses

Mr Jacob Davey – Head of Research & Policy for Far-Right and Hate Movements, Institute for Strategic Dialogue

Professor Matthew Feldman – Director, Academic Consulting Services and (then) Director of the Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right

Mr Tom Keatinge – Director of the Centre for Financial Crime and Security Studies at the Royal United Services Institute

Dame Sara Khan DBE – (then) Lead Commissioner, Commission for Countering Extremism

Mr Nick Lowles MBE – Chief Executive Officer, Hope Not Hate

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