

Counter-terrorism policing

An inspection of police counter-terrorism commanders

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Introduction

This inspection of police counter-terrorism commanders was set out in our *Inspection Programme and Framework 2016/17*.¹ National policing arrangements exist in England and Wales to counter the threat of terrorism. Chief constables have agreed, under certain circumstances, to cede control of their resources to a police commander working on their behalf: the Senior National Coordinator for counter-terrorism (the SNC), who in turn appoints one or more police counter-terrorism (CT) commanders to lead the combined response by police and counter-terrorism agencies.

Our terms of reference were to examine the role of the CT commander and report upon:

- the consistency of processes in place for their selection, training, exercising and accreditation;
- their role in the command and control of CT operations, including relevant policies, processes and comparable best practice;
- the capacity and contribution of the police service to deploy resources to meet the operational demand; and
- the capability and connectivity of structures in place to support officers when they are deployed.

In response to the most serious threats this country faces, we recognise that over the last decade the CT network has built command arrangements and capabilities that are probably unmatched internationally. Their strength is rooted in an ability to bring together command of local police, national CT police and counter-terrorism agencies to deal with high-threat CT situations. We have not looked at other nations' arrangements, but others have.

¹ *Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary's Inspection Programme and Framework 2016/17*, HC931, March 2016. Available from www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/hmic-inspection-programme-2016-17/

One military commander told us: "In my opinion, and having spoken to many of our international partners, the UK is seen as the 'reference nation' when it comes to a coherent counter-terrorism response, which is primarily because of our legislation, having a robust and responsive CT network, and the police/military interoperability underwritten by the Military Aid to the Civil Authorities' guidance."²

The evidence we collected tends to support this view; those who have developed, improved, and maintained this system deserve much credit.

² *2015 to 2020 government policy: Military Aid to the Civil Authorities for activities in the UK*, Ministry of Defence policy paper, 4 August 2016. Available from: www.gov.uk/government/publications/2015-to-2020-government-policy-military-aid-to-the-civil-authorities-for-activities-in-the-uk

Publication of this report

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services independently assesses police forces and policing across activity from neighbourhood teams to serious crime and the fight against terrorism – in the public interest.

This inspection was carried out in accordance with Section 54(2) of the Police Act 1996 (as amended by section 84 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011), which requires us to inspect and report on the efficiency and effectiveness of police forces. Section 55(1) of the Police Act 1996 requires us to publish reports prepared under section 54 in such manner as appears appropriate to us, although we must exclude from publication anything that we consider would be against the interests of national security or might jeopardise the safety of any person. Where we exclude any information from publication, section 55(2A) requires us to disclose that information to the Secretary of State.

We have submitted our full report to the Secretary of State. We consider that the publication of that report would be against the interests of national security, therefore we will not be publishing it. However, we have prepared this summary version of our full report, from which sensitive material has been excluded in order to fulfil our statutory duty and protect the United Kingdom's citizens from the threat of terrorism.

Our inspection, findings and conclusions

This inspection took place between April and September 2016 across forces in England and Wales. We reviewed force documents, visited CT police operation rooms, interviewed CT commanders and staff, and observed a CT commander training course and two national CT exercises. Fundamentally, we sought to establish whether the arrangements provided the right people, in the right numbers, doing the right thing, and with the right support to meet the severe terrorist threat faced by the UK. During this inspection we found some opportunities to further improve the effectiveness of CT command and made relevant recommendations.

The right people?

The level of responsibility ascribed to CT commanders is particularly high. All current CT commanders met a sensible and pragmatic set of role requirements. However, we identified opportunities to improve the selection process.

The national CT Commanders training course was well organised and included an intensive programme of teaching and instruction. The CT commanders were required to take part in continuous professional development (CPD) and a programme of training exercises, which provided realistic scenarios and a good test of the CT commander role. However, there are opportunities to improve the ongoing development of CT commanders through the CPD programme.

Doing the right thing?

Everyone we interviewed understood that the CT commander in any operation was appointed by, and was responsible to, the SNC. There was a generally good level of understanding about the role of the CT commander, but with a small number of surprising exceptions. We think there is a need to increase the knowledge of the CT commander role both within the CT network and within forces.

During the CT exercises we observed CT commanders take command of military personnel. We saw that this process was clear, precise and effective and that appropriate records were kept.

In the right numbers?

At the time of the inspection, we found that there were enough CT commanders to meet the requirements of simultaneous terrorist attacks, providing CT commanders in all CT police operations rooms, with sufficient resilience.

Many forces in England and Wales contributed resources to the core group of CT commanders or 'cadre'. The requirements on CT commanders – for planned rota

commitments, continuous professional development, CT exercises and live operations – were all manageable.

We conclude that capacity is sufficient to meet the demand and that the arrangements for securing the police service's contribution are efficient and effective.

And with the right support?

At the time of our inspection there were a number of police operations rooms in use, with enough capacity to manage the reasonably foreseeable terrorist threat. Each operations room can manage multiple operations simultaneously.

There are clear support roles and CT commanders are confident that they would have access to the specialist advice they need to perform their role effectively. We were disappointed to find in a small number of cases that CT commanders are not familiar with the CT police operations room to which they were most likely to be deployed. Familiarity with the operating environment is an important matter which some CT commanders need to address.

We conclude that the CT police operations rooms offer appropriate support to CT commanders. The police are working to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of CT police operations rooms through a national development programme.