

This article was downloaded by: [University of East Anglia Library]

On: 30 June 2015, At: 02:17

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Critical Studies on Terrorism

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rter20>

Terrorism and counterterrorism after 7/7: an interview with Charles Clarke

Lee Jarvis^a

^a School of Politics, Philosophy, Language and Communication Studies, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom

Published online: 30 Jun 2015.



CrossMark

[Click for updates](#)

To cite this article: Lee Jarvis (2015) Terrorism and counterterrorism after 7/7: an interview with Charles Clarke, *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 8:2, 306-320, DOI: [10.1080/17539153.2015.1043215](https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2015.1043215)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2015.1043215>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms &

Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

CONVERSATIONS IN *CRITICAL STUDIES ON TERRORISM*

Terrorism and counterterrorism after 7/7: an interview with Charles Clarke

Lee Jarvis

School of Politics, Philosophy, Language and Communication Studies, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom

Charles Clarke was born in London on 21 September 1950 and read for a degree in mathematics and economics at Kings College Cambridge. From 1974 to 1977, he was Treasurer, then President, of the National Union of Students. Charles was elected Labour councillor for Chatham ward in the London Borough of Hackney in 1980, and between 1980 and 1986 gained extensive experience of local government, becoming vice chair of economic development and then chair of the housing committee. From 1980 to 1983, he worked as a part-time researcher for Neil Kinnock MP, then Opposition Spokesman on Education. From 1983 to 1992, he then worked as political adviser and subsequently Chief of Staff to the Labour Party Leader and Leader of the Opposition, Neil Kinnock MP. In May 1997, he was elected Labour Member of Parliament for Norwich South, which he remained until May 2010. During 1997–1998, he was a member of the Treasury Select Committee, and then in July 1998 he became Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for School Standards. In July 1999, he was appointed Minister of State at the Home Office, with particular responsibility for the police. After the 2001 General Election, he joined the cabinet as Labour Party Chair and Minister without portfolio. He was appointed Secretary of State for Education and Skills in October 2002, and then in December 2004 Home Secretary, leaving the Home Office on 5 May 2006. The following interview was conducted at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, UK, on Thursday 19 February 2015.

Lee Jarvis: Thank you very much for agreeing to speak to me. I wondered whether I might start by asking you to reflect on your experience of the 7/7 attacks of 2005 that took place in London. You were Home Secretary at the time, and I was wondering how you heard of the attacks, and what your initial reaction to them was.

Charles Clarke: We were in a meeting in the Cabinet as it happened. Tony Blair was at the G8 in Scotland, John Prescott was chairing the Cabinet, and there were a couple of notes that came in. It wasn't clear at the beginning what actually had happened. Had there been some kind of tube crash, or whatever, people didn't know. They could see things were happening but they didn't really know. It then became fairly clear what had happened in general terms. There had been some kind of explosion on the tube, and news of the bus had been coming in at about the same time. So I asked John Prescott to stop the Cabinet, and we immediately

went to the COBRA room with a number of Cabinet members.¹ We updated and got what was the latest information.

There were a lot of conflicts of information. Firstly, we didn't know how many incidents there had been. The police in fact correctly identified there were four, but other people thought there might have been eight because of the explosions – the smoke and so on – coming out of different areas. But the first thing, clearly, was to get to the facts as fast as possible. Andy Hayman, who was the Commander from the Metropolitan Police, did a very good job in that respect. And, then, we had to decide what to do. The COBRA incident room has lots of televisions on the walls and we were getting inputs from the emergency services and so on to decide what to do. So, I decided to have that meeting last quite a short time – forty-five minutes or something like that, by my own recollection – because you don't want people sitting in meetings rather than actually understanding what's happening.

I then went to a separate room to communicate with Tony Blair who was up in Gleneagles, and I reported the information that we'd got. I said to him, if he wanted to stay at Gleneagles he should as we could handle it from where we were. But he decided he would come back to London – quite understandably. I think it was the right decision, but I wanted him to feel that it wasn't necessary for him to return because we were dealing with it. We went back to COBRA together for a further update on where we were. The biggest problem at the time was to know whether there was going to be a second attack immediately. As we know now there was another, a fortnight later,² but the Madrid attack had two incidents,³ and so the practical question was whether or not we should close down the transport network in London. And that was a very hard call.

I met with Alastair Darling – who was the Transport Secretary – in the Cabinet offices and we decided not to close it down eventually. We thought that the problems of closing it down – even if there were to be another attack – would still be immense. So we decided, and I think it was the right decision, to keep it going. I then had to report to the public and Parliament about what was happening, so we set up a photo call outside Number 10 and I went out to explain what was happening to the media. It wasn't a press conference, but a statement to give them the most up-to-date information we could. Obviously our desire was to give the most authoritative and accurate statement to people of what was happening so that we could deal with it.

And then there was an emergency statement to Parliament. I was late for the statement, which was extremely unusual, because I was writing it, and wanted to make sure it was as accurate as I could, and to give the most up-to-date information I could. And I went to see the Speaker first to tell him what was happening, and then to the Despatch Box. And that was all about reporting where we were and what we were doing. I remember it very well. I think I was very fortunate in that the process of dealing with an attack of this kind had been substantially rehearsed over a period. Nothing to do with me, but it was part of the general practice, and so the emergency services moved into operation very effectively, and by early afternoon we were able to have a joint event

with the leaders of all the emergency services. The most important thing is for people to feel that there is ... that we did know what we were doing in that situation. Because the danger of panic is obviously very great...

LJ: Public panic?

CC: Public panic. All the time we were getting intelligence reports from security services. It was completely unexpected, and we didn't have intelligence of other attacks either. But of course they were working completely flat out to try to go back over all of their previous information to see if they'd missed anything, if there was anything that could predict another event coming. I also was concerned about the possibility of inter-communal tension, so I asked all the main faith leaders to come to the Home Office early in the afternoon.

LJ: Of the 7th of July?

CC: Of the 7th of July – if you look back at the media of that time you'll see it. I thought it was very important that we were as reassuring as we could be that the people who had taken this action were individuals: they weren't "the Muslim community" or something of this kind. And so I was very grateful the faith leaders did all agree to come, at a very senior level, and we held a joint event to call for calm and encouraged people not to react in a negative way against others they thought might bear some responsibility for this happening. I saw this as very important as well as part of the process.

Tony Blair got back – I can't remember what time it was, about 4 o'clock, 5 o'clock, something like that – and we had a COBRA which he chaired to take things further forward. Again, I think in events of these types it's very important that people – the public – feel that the government knows what it's doing, the services know what they're doing – the police, firemen, ambulance, and so on – and I was very keen to create that. And, of course, we were working like hell to try to understand what had happened and to see if there were any other attacks. We didn't detect any others, but as we now know 21/7 then happened, which I discovered about in my offices in the Home Office having an inter-departmental meeting with David Miliband who was then Communities and Local Government. We'd just watched the Olympics announcement, which was an extraordinary thing.

LJ: Were these attacks something you had previously feared or expected?

CC: In a sense, yes, because there is always an emergency – there is a level of security that is always there. Had I really expected it? No, I hadn't. Had I expected this *particular* thing? Absolutely not. But had I really expected even a general attack of some kind, I wouldn't say I had. Obviously it was something I was aware of, but it wasn't something I had really factored into my thinking as a likely eventuality.

LJ: What latitude for agency is there in such a situation? Do procedures just kick in, or do decision-makers have to make choices and decisions, perhaps based on imperfect knowledge?

CC: It's a very interesting question that. To take the two questions the other way around: certainly, decision-takers have to make choices and decisions based on imperfect knowledge. That is absolutely the case. The classic imperfect knowledge in this case was: "is there going to be

another attack”. And, it wasn’t just imperfect knowledge: it was no knowledge. It wasn’t that the level of knowledge wasn’t very good. It was a complete absence of knowledge. But, what I always feel in such circumstances – and this is the most acute example I’ve experienced – is that it’s worth remembering that no decision is the same as a decision. That the status quo isn’t necessarily the most rational course, even though it is difficult to make any decision to change the status quo.

In the early stages, the lack of knowledge about what had actually happened was quite a major thing. The ambulance service was reporting to Patricia Hewitt, Health Secretary, who was in a meeting, that there were more attacks than the four that we now know about. And that was because they were coming out of different ends of tube stations and so on, and so people thought there were more things happening. But the police did get it right in terms of assessing right from the outset that there were four. Of course the other unknowns were who was responsible for the attack, what type of organisation? You couldn’t say it was self-evident that it was an al-Qaeda-related organisation or anything of that kind. You just didn’t know. You had to do the police work to try to come to your conclusions, and of course very substantial police work was done. I said earlier that there had been various practices of what to do in these circumstances, and there regularly are of different types of situations. It’s part of the infrastructure of the country to prepare for particular types of disaster which can take place, and there are fairly clearly defined command structures which emerge in those circumstances. The various agencies are accustomed to working together, and that was very, very much manifest that afternoon I felt, with the way the police were operating together with the various security services in sending that message very clearly.

Funnily enough, I’ve just finished reading a book called *The Sleepwalkers* about the origins of the First World War that was published about a year ago. And it’s so striking in Sarajevo when the Archduke Ferdinand was attacked there was absolutely nothing: none of the agencies knew how to work together or anything like that. And, actually if they had, he wouldn’t have been assassinated. So, I think this practice of building up the practice is important, but of course there’s flexibility and so when you ask the question “do procedures kick in?”, the procedures give authority to command individuals to take decisions, and the clarity is about who has the authority to take the decision. It’s not that there is a fixed way of responding at all times to whatever happens. Take the decision I mentioned about closing down the transport system in London. It was a decision we could take. There wasn’t a process that said you’ve got to close it down, or you’ve got to not close it down, because obviously the circumstances of this particular attack were different from some other circumstances that might have been.

LJ: Do you have time to take stock of the magnitude of those decisions, or is it more instinctive?

CC: You do have time to take stock. You’ve got very high-quality advice there. Obviously, the key people from each of the services are brought

together very quickly, although there is a tension between bringing people together and allowing them to get on with the job. And it is a major problem. I felt it was very important that they were allowed to get on with the job, and therefore we shouldn't have the COBRA in permanent session. Instead, we'd just have meetings at particular times because I'd wanted the top people who knew what was happening to come to the meeting. At the same time, I also wanted the top people who knew what was happening to be doing their jobs. So, Eliza Manning-Buller, the head of MI5, I thought it was right that she should be at the meeting to report what was happening. But also I thought it was right that she was making sure that her agency was doing the work it needed to be doing. So, I think there are interesting questions there about to what extent you can do that. You are aware of the magnitude of it – obviously not in detail, how many people were killed and so on – but the scale of it as an attack, and there is an element of instinct in what you do. But I would say there has been a lot of thought in all of the organisations about how to deal with different circumstances.

LJ: What was the impact of subsequent events including 21/7 and the death of Jean Charles de Menezes?

CC: 21/7 – the fantastic thing was, with the exception of Jean Charles de Menezes which I'll come back to in a second – nobody was killed and the perpetrators were identified and found, including using the European Arrest Warrant in Rome. We didn't expect it, again. I think we were very lucky actually that they weren't successful, those particular attacks. And, I'm not sure myself exactly what still is known about the links between the 21/7 group and the 7/7 group.

As far as Jean Charles de Menezes is concerned, I learnt about that here in Norwich the following day. I was in my constituency office, and a call came through from the Permanent Secretary saying this had happened and I immediately said there needed to be a full Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) enquiry which is what he was recommending. There had been some doubt about that because Ian Blair⁴ was unsure it was appropriate to go to the IPCC. I thought it was entirely right it should go and be properly investigated.

Obviously it was terrible for his family. I am also sympathetic actually to the shooters in those circumstances. Kratos – which was the command to shoot in a suspected explosion – is a very heavy burden for those people. When something goes wrong, as it did go terribly wrong on this occasion, it's also very bad for them. And I'm not one of those people who goes round pointing the finger, saying they must be gung-ho or gun-happy. I don't think that's right.

LJ: After those events the debate became: to what extent is this a response to British foreign policy? Or – please correct me if I'm wrong – your argument was the opposite: that it was about ideology, or religion, or particular interpretations of religion. I think you made a comparison with nihilism. And so I wondered what then those events tell us about the terrorism confronting the UK at the time, and maybe the broader significance thereof.

CC: I think this is a very difficult question. I've obviously thought about it a lot. And you're right, I did make a comparison with the late nineteenth-century anarchist and nihilist attacks. I think that the question of how these young people came to behave like this, and the extent to which they were in any sense representing the ideology or faith that they had, is pretty limited. There obviously is a quasi-military organisation, let's call it al-Qaeda (but a whole range of different organisations spring from that), which needs to be contested in a variety of ways. My problem is that I just don't see where compromise comes with the belief that the only solution is a caliphate with a suspension of things which have been absolutely fundamental to our national life, and indeed developed and fought for over centuries like democracy, the position of women, the rights of a free market, right to religious speech, and so on. I don't see where the compromise is with that set of views.

I contrast it very sharply with anti-colonial struggles. If you look at the ANC (African National Congress), or the IRA (Irish Republican Army) in a different way, or the situation in Cyprus. They are essentially struggles for national liberation by some definition. And you can argue the merits or demerits of each case, that's not the point. But, people went to terrorist actions – leaving loose the definition of that – in pursuit of that goal. It was a reasonably rational strategy. I'm not saying successful, but a reasonably rational strategy for pursuing a united Ireland or an independent Cyprus or whatever it might be. And, so, because of that you could imagine compromises. You could imagine a discussion about what the deal might be to take the issue forward. I never understood how we would have done that in relation to the demand for a caliphate. Now, other people say it is possible to do that, but I just don't quite get it. If you add to it the wealth and resources of the terrorist organisations, and the ability of people to take the decision to kill themselves in that process – which is again not a characteristic of those anti-colonial struggles – I think it's quite a different kind of beast to deal with. And that's why I thought the comparison with the nihilists or the anarchists in the late nineteenth century was more appropriate.

LJ: It's the absolutism of it?

CC: It's the absolutism of it, that's right. And, also, the readiness to destroy yourself. Obviously there are completely different types of terrorist threat, and terrorism can be defined in different ways: state terrorism/not state terrorism, etc. But from the point of view of the attacks of the type we saw in London, and also I think in Madrid actually, I don't see where – assuming one could establish a dialogue – I'm not at all clear how the dialogue could resolve the situation. Whereas in just about every other example, I can.

Obviously if you are talking about Nigeria today, you can imagine a process of getting to some position. In Afghanistan or in Iraq, you could imagine discussion to take you forward. But I think that's different: it's easier to imagine what the solution could be. But that's a good word you used a moment ago – absolutist – that aspect of it makes it difficult for me to see how you deal with it through dialogue.

- LJ: Sure, so it's a distinction between old types of terrorism and new types of terrorism?
- CC: Very much. I haven't studied the academic work as you have, so I don't quite know how you mean old and new. But I would use the terms old and new in a layperson's way.
- LJ: I think the argument would be that groups like the IRA were organised hierarchically, had political demands, and were open to dialogue, compromise and negotiation. Whereas groups like al-Qaeda – whatever al-Qaeda is – are much more nebulous, have absolutist and often religious inspirations, and are interested in generating mass casualties.
- CC: The examples I give on the religious side are things like James Jones in Guyana, or the sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo underground. I mean, what is the relationship of James Jones or Aum Shinrikyo to their faith or belief? I think it's really quite marginal. You've got completely obsessive, driven people who aren't in a real sense part of a religion. They call themselves part of a religion, because that's how they choose to clothe themselves, and they have apocalyptic views based on experiences that could be called religious, but I'd be quite doubtful about using the term religion to describe them. I think 7/7 is nearer to that kind of approach than a more strategic, military style attack of, for example, when the IRA bombers bombed 10 Downing Street or whatever it might be.
- LJ: This also presumably has implications for counterterrorism, and I wondered how the changing nature of terrorism might play into the way in which British counterterrorism is organised?
- CC: This is a difficult conversation, because my fundamental view is that people need to be educated about religion: what religion really is. And, distortions of religion, which are put about by various people – sometimes negatively, sometimes positively – need sometimes to be challenged very directly. And so that requires – my big answer to that question, I'm writing something on this at the moment on religion and schools – a re-evaluation of the 1944 Education Act. In schools, people should expect to understand what the nature of religion in the modern world is today, and I don't think we do a very good job of that, and so there is massive ignorance.

I think there are a whole set of issues about engagement of the faith communities in the wider society. That applies to policing; it applies to economic issues, housing, education, as I said. And the question of how Muslim communities, Sikh communities, Christian communities of particular denominations, for example, are engaged in the wider society requires a whole set of strategies of engagement which are fairly well practiced. Actually, I think the UK by comparison with some other countries over the last 20 or 30 years has probably done a relatively good job. But that I know is a controversial statement.

And then you have to find the level of security to enable you to try and detect people who are behaving in unacceptable ways. If you look at the Finsbury Park mosque and what was done there. The incitement of certain views in mosques, in prisons: you know the various descriptions. I think there is a justification for understanding what is happening in those areas, and trying to prevent it. I don't actually think what the

government is currently proposing on university campuses is intelligent at all.⁵ I think it's a stupid way of going about it. I've talked about this with Eliza Manning-Buller and she also shares that view, interestingly. So, I think you've got to have a targeted approach which says: where are the places where there could be issues of incitement which we've got to understand better? And I think we did, including when I was Home Secretary, stand back from doing that at some times, because we feared that getting involved in that way would be a provocation. But it was only a provocation if we'd not done the prior work on developing the relationship between the communities and the various other organs of the state. If there was a cold dialogue then it could be a provocation. If it wasn't a cold dialogue, but was a result of people talking, trying to explain what we were trying to do, and so on, then I think it could be a reasonable way of proceeding.

So my broad answer is that you need a very broad strategy to build a society which is based around respect for others, and that requires some quite significant changes to our institutions. And then, you need a very targeted strategy against the particular individuals who we think are trying to behave in this way. And it is a very small number of people; it's a tiny number of people you're talking about. But, of course that tiny number of people, as on 7/7, can do tremendous damage, and the fear is always that even more dangerous weapons can be used by that tiny number of people. But you're almost down to basic police work then.

LJ: It's the "they only need to get lucky once" argument.

CC: Yes.

LJ: So, there's a question in this about multiculturalism and community cohesion, on the one hand. There is also, perhaps, a broader question to which you've alluded: what is sometimes described as a trade-off between security and liberty. And I wondered whether you thought that to be a useful way of thinking about the limits of counterterrorism.

CC: I do. I've used it quite often myself. I mean there is obviously a spectrum – a range – between security and liberty. And it applies to counterterrorism measures: the measures you use to arrest people, the length of time before trial, and so on. It also applies to ID cards, it applies to DNA databases, it applies to CCTV, it applies to the use of Oyster cards⁶: it applies to everything. And, you have to decide in a given society, in a given circumstance, at a given time, what is the level of security risk which will be affected. And I don't think it's an issue of principle. There are some people who think it's an issue of principle. That you should never ever be prepared to look at people's travel patterns via Oyster cards. Or, you should never be prepared to have a surveillance regime on people's phones, or email communication systems. Or, you should never be able to listen to people's telephone or communications systems.

Now, most people actually don't take that view. Most people accept that in the case of terrorism – subject to definitional questions – and in the case of serious and organised crime, drug dealing and people trafficking, it is legitimate to bug people's telephone calls, for example. The questions that arise are: is it effective in getting the intelligence you need? And, is it properly supervised under law in a system which is

properly reported and can be assessed? My core point is that it's not an issue of principle as to whether you do it or not. It's a question of where are we standing on the spectrum of security to liberty, and you have to decide in a particular country at a particular time what you think is appropriate and not appropriate. For example, we think it's not appropriate today to listen to everybody's telephone calls. We think it *is* appropriate to listen to a small number of people's telephone calls who we think pose a particular threat, and that this is justified following some legal process to authorise that action. So, for me it's not an issue of principle. It is a question of a spectrum – I think that is the right way to look at it – and then you have to have a particular discussion about how you deal with it.

The one thing I would say is the sophistication of the terrorist organisations that we're talking about now, but also organised crime organisations, is so great. And they have so much wealth and new technology that the only way you can effectively counter them is by the use of intelligence to try to understand what they're trying to do and why they're doing it. And, if you get that wrong, it has very serious consequences in both directions. I mean the question of whether we got the intelligence on possession of weapons of mass destruction by Saddam Hussein wrong. We all believed that he did, it's never been found. There are some questions about whether he had them before and what has happened to what he had. But, fundamentally, it was because there was the belief – wrong as it turned out – that he possessed them, that many of the things followed through in terms of the Iraq war. So, it can go in both directions.

Getting accurate intelligence is very, very important, and I really try to convey – often unsuccessfully – the fact that we don't know what's happening. People think we know, the kind of general belief is that we – the state – somehow know what's happening, and we're only not telling you: we're hiding it, or we're evil bastards, or whatever. But, actually the fact is that our level of knowledge is very, very patchy. Now, one response to that is actually, "we don't care". We won't bother to find more knowledge; we'll just do it on instinct. I think that's stupid; you've got to try to acquire knowledge. But, of course, the acquisition of knowledge takes you straight into the terrain of civil liberties questions, which are very rightly controversial and sensitive. And you then just have to make your judgement at that time.

LJ: How important is cross-party consensus in this?

CC: I think this is an important thing and it doesn't really exist. I felt that David Cameron and David Davis in particular who were fighting the Tory leadership election at this time were not ready to participate in cross-party consensus.⁷ And I certainly felt that David Davis, the Shadow Home Secretary, did not accept there was really a risk of attack. It is very easy to say that there is no risk: that it is all just in people's minds. I worked very hard to try to achieve cross-party consensus, and I would say I didn't succeed.

The Tory party⁸ on this is very interesting, because it is a traditional hard-line security party that has now got completely divided with the civil liberties issue. Shami Chakrabarti⁹ has close working relationships with

key senior Tories, who in turn had close working relationships with people on the left of the Labour Party. But they were actually motivated, in my opinion, by a political issue within government rather than national security. I'm not criticising Shami; I think Liberty has a perfectly appropriate role to play in this. But I don't think some of the other parties were ready to deal with that. But, going back to the spectrum of security and liberty and the general debate, I think the more this is debated the better, and the more debate you have the more likely you are to get cross-party understanding of the issues which are there.

LJ: This leads us to some of the criticisms that are often addressed at counterterrorism, and the way it is organised in the UK and beyond. I wondered whether you would be happy to say a little bit about some of these. Firstly, that there is a temptation to be ultra-cautious because no one wants to be the person who makes the wrong call. That if intelligence or a warning comes in you don't want to be the Home Secretary who ignores a warning, and then the bomb goes off.

CC: Well I think it is very true. Tony Blair always used to say, quite rightly, that whatever concerns people had about civil liberties – and, of course, it was a standard line through the whole of this period that we were destroying civil liberties, in various respects – if, at the end of a day, a bomb had gone off and we hadn't prepared for it, people were killed even in small numbers, but far worse if it was a weapon of mass destruction or something, then people simply would not remotely accept the argument that we were worried about civil liberties. Now, I think that's true, and I certainly felt in my particular role as Home Secretary that it was my principal responsibility to do whatever I could to ensure that the people of the country were safe from these kinds of position.

Now there are arguments, I've seen them quite recently, that while there are only say 50 terrorism deaths a year – and that was in 2007, less than that in subsequent years – look at the number of people that are killed on the roads. Why don't we just accept the terrorism and let it happen, and you know deal with getting safer roads? I don't accept that argument at all. I think that terrorism is not just a question of attacking the power structures in our society – although it does attack the power structures in our society. I would say that the kinds of terrorism we're talking about have been about two things. Firstly, quite deliberately seeking to destroy – and I use that word advisedly – the fundamental democratic structure of the country in the belief that democracy is in principle a wrong thing. And this is something that you can't resist in part – we need to defend that structure. Secondly, it's also seeking to use mass terror as a political weapon to pursue their goals. And, again, I don't see any alternative but to resist that. So I think the principle of defending ourselves against this kind of attack, I think is really important.

Where does that get me to in terms of what you're asking? We could have a long discussion – I don't know what you think about these things – about what we mean by civil liberties, and to what extent my photo being on a CCTV camera dilutes my civil liberties. I don't think it does much; I would voluntarily put my DNA on the national DNA database. But the idea that you just then let terrorism

happen, I think is just completely unacceptable. So, I think you do have to fight against it and that of course again takes you into the discussion about what means are acceptable to do that, and what means are not. I made the argument in a lecture about ID cards, but it applies to much of this as well.

I think there's quite a sophisticated ideological point which is that the views and thoughts about this were built out of the correct anti-totalitarian responses to fascism and Stalinism. And, many of the writers of that time – for example, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, even *The Hobbit* – were all people who were fighting for the individual against the totalitarian state. And the model of the debate comes straight out of the 1930s and then to an extent the 1940s and 1950s, and it is the individual against the totalitarian state. So the argument is made: if this democratic government – we accept it as democratic – has the ability to collect this data, we might have a totalitarian state, which might then use that data in ways which are less acceptable. I don't really accept any of that at all. I think we have evolved and moved forward, and we're not in a position that we've got those totalitarian governments in this country. And, I think the whole story is of totalitarianism being pushed back, and democracy – albeit very imperfect in many ways – moving forward. And so the metaphor which is in people's minds, and indeed in mass culture through films like *The Lord of the Rings* and so on is a different one, and we need to tackle it in a different way.

LJ: What about the related argument, then, that these measures are less about actually deterring or combating terrorism, and more about a kind of security theatre: about reassuring publics, or being seen to do something?

CC: There's more truth in that. I understand the point about security theatre. Security is very difficult. I'm not very pro-security in lots of different ways. For example, I didn't like having special police following me around everywhere I went. But I felt that I couldn't reasonably say no, given it was part of the overall position for which I was responsible. And, the immediate default is, go to the security position, and I agree that there's an element of theatre about that.

There is a serious element of theatre about it, in that if people who seriously want to assassinate, for example, fear that there is a security around the Prime Minister of the day which they cannot breach then they'll be less likely to do it. So there is a point to what you call the "theatre" in a narrow range of targets. But, you meant the question not in terms of that narrow range of targets, but society as a whole: that this generates a sense of fear in the society as a whole. And, I just think that's not right. It's quite possible that the strategies are wrong for countering terrorism. But it's not for that reason: it's not that people are trying to create a society which is like that, and that's certainly true in our society which is fundamentally a democratic society. It may be less true in societies which are less democratic. But in the countries that we are really talking about – Western Europe and the United States and so on – I just don't think it's right. I know that people believe it, but I just don't think it's right.

- LJ: An even sharper extension of that type of criticism is that it's also about the self-interest of, say, political executives: it's about increasing executive power, or pushing through measures that would otherwise be controversial.
- CC: I just don't think that's right either. Again, look at us [the Labour Party]. I was defeated on the 90-day proposal by Parliament – a Parliament in which my party had a majority. Did the sky fall in? Did I go completely tappers? No! Now, are we less safe against some of these threats as a result of my having been defeated? I'd say probably we are a bit less safe. But it's only relatively marginal, and of course I hope that proposition is never tested. I also think that had we got my measures in, it wouldn't have changed life for anybody really, except for a very small number of people. That's not in itself a defence, but there is a process of stopping this happening in certain kinds of ways, and Parliament is the means of doing that.

Now, if you said we're going to strip away from Parliament the ability to do that, I understand the point. I took the Regulation of Investigative Powers bill through Parliament as a Junior Home Office Minister in 1999, and became very familiar with the arguments around this. And, of course, that happened, it's worth remembering, because we passed the Human Rights Act. And, having passed the Human Rights Act it became clear you couldn't ignore the Security Services in that – that they had already been made legal. But the fact was that you had to have a legal framework according to which all the various measures that were taken, were taken and approved and reported in the ways that you know. If we hadn't had the Human Rights Act, it wouldn't have been necessary, so it was actually a direct consequence of a libertarian piece of legislation. It wasn't as though we passed this piece of legislation and then suddenly all security services started doing things that they hadn't been doing before. It was exactly the opposite. It was that there was no legal framework in which this was happening before, and it was being brought in to a legally accountable framework. Now, you can then argue is it the right legally accountable framework – i.e. are the authorisations for action correct? And, then, is it the right level of person? Should it not happen at all, or whatever? You can have that discussion. And then you can have the discussion: is it enforced – or to put it the other way around – is it bypassed? And people are doing things they ought not to be doing, which aren't in fact properly authorised. And we deliberately put in Commissioners who would report on that every year to Parliament, so we could see what was happening.

Now there's always going to be a question, because in the secretive world there will be things happening that nobody knows quite what is going on. I don't think there's any way of dealing with people's paranoia in relation to that, but I don't think it's real.

- LJ: This is a criticism that comes up frequently in relation to proscription. That parliamentarians or legislators don't necessarily have the information to be able to contest an executive that is bringing forward potential cases of proscription.
- CC: Well, it's very interesting that indeed. In the Junior Ministerial role I mentioned, we had a list of organisations which we did proscribe. I

asked – and it was very, very hard – I asked the Department to produce an information document for Parliament, listing all of the organisations. It will still be there somewhere on the record, sketching out the reasons why we thought the organisations should be proscribed. Now that was extremely difficult, because the fact that they were doing certain forms of activity, which we could only discover by virtue of some of our clandestine activity, made it very difficult to put it in the public domain. And so some of it was media cuttings and so on which weren't substantive in themselves. But, if you start saying you could make it substantive, then you're immediately talking about giving to the public – because you can't give it to Parliament without giving it to the public – which goes back the other way. Now, actually at the time we did it in 1999, I think it was, maybe 2000, it was fairly successful. We published it, there was still argument about people like the Tamil Tigers and whether they were correctly described as a terrorist organisation or not, but I think the publication helped.

Funnily enough, I've always thought – I've never said this to anybody else – I believe that the idea of the “dodgy dossier” arose from the same origin. It was the idea of trying to explain as much as possible to Parliament, why we were taking the decisions we were. I wasn't involved in that, but in fact the precedent was set by the thing I did in about 2000 or 1999, maybe. But the fact is, it is very, very difficult to publicise that information. Now, people would say if you can't publicise it, then you shouldn't ever proscribe anybody. The question is: is proscription a worthwhile activity? In the case of the Provisional IRA, as was, was it right that we said it couldn't operate fully legally as a non-proscribed organisation? I would say yes. Was it a correct decision? I would say in the case of the Provisional IRA, definitely. But, it is true – the point of your question is right – as you go through potential organisations that are considering potential attacks, you get into a very, very marginal area about what is or is not a terrorist organisation.

LJ: That's very interesting.

CC: It is: it's an interesting area for you to work in.

LJ: I wonder how much attention political executives and legislators give to the language of counterterrorism.

CC: I would say that political executives and legislators don't give much attention to the language. I was never easy with the language of it; it's quite difficult, but I would say not much. I don't think the language of government or senior politicians has contributed to the demonisation of “suspect communities”, for example. I think there is a media issue, which is quite serious around all this.

LJ: I wonder whether I might ask you one final question, on the role of the academy in these areas. There are two things I wanted to hear your thoughts on, because you have a privileged background in Education and as Home Secretary. One question is: to what extent universities in general have some responsibility within the remit of counterterrorism? You touched on that earlier, in relation to the current bill. The second question would be: what about terrorism researchers more specifically? Is there a responsibility for academics working in this field?

CC: As far as universities are concerned – I don't think universities have a much greater or a much lesser responsibility in this than other major institutions in society. I think that, in terms of fighting terrorism, all major institutions in society have some kind of responsibility. Banks, for example, have got a responsibility in terms of terrorism finance. And so universities have got a general responsibility. Do I believe that there is in fact a reason why when we look at British universities today we should say there's a particular thing for them to look at? I have to say on the basis of my knowledge: no.

Now I'm not saying that knowledge doesn't exist that might say I'm wrong on that, but it would need to be demonstrated to me. This is why I think the current legislation is completely over the top and unnecessary and going in the wrong ways. I think it arose because of a general standoff, particularly about Islam, looking at what was going on in "cells" on campuses and so on. And I think, as I said earlier, if there is a genuine reason to believe that on this campus a particular group is behaving in ways inciting hatred and so on then under the police powers that exist one should prosecute that. I have no evidence of it whatsoever, but I do believe that if there were evidence, that would be the way to deal with it. And, I'm not quite sure why universities have got into such a position on this. There's a lot of worry, but I'm just not convinced. As I say, I don't exclude it, I could be convinced, but as we speak I'm not.

As far as the academic terrorist researchers are concerned, I'm not quite sure what the worries you're referring to are. Again, I think the more information, the more debate, about the kinds of discussion we're been having now – about what is terrorism, how does it work, how does it operate, what are its techniques, what are the means of identifying and contesting it – I think that's all to the good. I'm not saying I agree with all research that's done. And I do think there are some people in your field who come at it with a set of ideological baggage to which I'm not sympathetic, but that doesn't disqualify it as a way of looking at things. And I'm not quite sure what the argument would be that this would be a bad thing. It seems to me that it must inevitably be a good thing.

LJ: I think the argument would be that if terrorism researchers see their role as producing policy-relevant research, the research they do would be driven by the interests of policymakers or governments – rather than, say, the pursuit of knowledge.

CC: Ok, well I've got no time for that. I'm not in favour of the academic ivory tower. I'm not in favour of the view that they are just a few people going around thinking about things, doing their stuff, that bears no relation to anybody else. I don't think that's the same thing at all as saying that people's free thinking is being subverted by policymakers or the state, or whatever. And if they are, well so much the worse for them. People should do it.

I think there is absolutely no reason why people should do research unless it is thought to be a worthwhile thing. The bottom line is – as for all research – what should the state spend its money on? Because the money for research doesn't come dropping from the sky. Somebody takes a decision. Now, we set up a set of procedures in Britain which try

and create a reasonably independent process for doing that. But, if there are people who think they are not being funded for research that they need to do, and it would be right to do – I don't know if that argument is being made – that it was in principle wrong that, for the sake of argument, the Home Office should fund research about counterterrorism, well I don't accept that at all.

LJ: I think the argument, for example, would be that with the emergence of the Prevent agenda, there was a push toward getting academics to produce work on counter-radicalisation. And to think about these things in ways that were constrained by understandings of the radicalisation process at the time.

CC: But then as researchers they should try ... A shocking thing I discovered once – I went to Egypt and I talked to their security people – and they'd had a process of taking people who'd set off bombs down at Sharm el-Sheikh and they were imprisoned. And there was an enormous process they went through in prison of deradicalising these people through religious study. I'd never heard of it before, and was amazed about it as something that was happening. They described it as a "successful" process. Essentially, like the old Soviet system, seeing people who were attacking the state as having mental health problems. And so therefore they saw this as a means of educating people out of their illness, rather than anything else. Now, as I've said when I've talked about anarchism and nihilism, I'm not a million miles from that in some ways. Because I think there is a personal factor in the case of some people wanting to express themselves, which is wider than a political ambition. But I think research on how these things work, what happens, what goes on, is a valuable thing.

LJ: Thank you very much indeed for your time.

Notes

1. COBRA is an acronym for Cabinet Office Briefing Room A.
2. This is a reference to the "21/7" attempted bombing in London of 21 July 2005.
3. This is a reference to the "11-M" bombings in Madrid of 11 March 2004.
4. Ian Blair was then Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis: the most senior figure in London's Metropolitan Police.
5. At the time of this interview, the proposed Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill was being put through Parliament by the UK's Coalition Government.
6. Oyster cards are a cashless system for travel within the London public transport system.
7. David Cameron became leader of the UK's Conservative Party in December 2005.
8. "Tory" is a frequently used synonym for the Conservative Party and members thereof in British politics.
9. Shami Chakrabarti is director of Liberty: a prominent civil liberties advocacy organisation.