



**MANAGING THE THREAT OF VIOLENT  
EXTREMISM IN PRISONS**

**A RAPID REVIEW WITH RECOMMENDATIONS**

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## A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The current threat to front line prison staff posed by violent extremists and extremist adjacent offenders is *intolerable* and must be tackled urgently.
- The proximity of a murder of a prison officer on duty is closer and the consequence for rehabilitation, stability and the rule of law inside prisons is closer and more severe than at any time in the last 10 years.
- HM Prison and Probation Service does not have the capacity or capability or frequently the will to manage highly violent and ideologically motivated offenders using present approaches or structures.
- A new and purpose-built High Control Centre must be created for the management of such exceptionally dangerous people with the *primary emphasis* on eliminating the risk of harm they pose to others. Although this centre should be staffed by prison officers, such is the parlous state of defences against drone deliveries in the High Security Estate, as revealed by the Chief Inspector of prisons, this cannot and should not be located within the current prison estate. A military base is the obvious alternative.
- Front line staff dealing with dangerous terrorists are not adequately protected and the philosophical approach to managing the threat primarily through unearned incentives to behave is placing lives of these public servants at risk. The phenomenon of senior managers over-riding staff safety to appease prisoners is widespread and must be ended.
- Prisons holding terrorist prisoners *must* have a dedicated internal response capability that includes expanded less than lethal *and* lethal alternatives to respond in time to national security threats to aid deterrence and boost officer confidence and safety.

- The lack of energy and competence within HMPPS senior leadership to understand, transmit and respond to the operational threat posed by ideological offenders is a longstanding problem that shows no sign of abating. Ferocious attacks on prison officers detailed in this rapid review have exclusively taken place in prison establishments that are *not* overcrowded. This cannot be the primary excuse for unforgivable lapses in human and physical security. The secrecy of these centres has been a way to avoid corporate scrutiny or accountability for their evolution.
- Boosting prison officer confidence and competence in managing these offenders together with a much tougher approach to restoring order, control and authority across the wider prison estate will deliver potentially enormous cost savings in terms of eye watering and debilitating sickness absence rates. Poorly led and equipped officers who work in constant fear of attack with their authority undermined cannot provide the rehabilitative culture that society demands its prisons deliver.
- No operational review of the horrific attacks on staff allegedly carried out by a terrorist should shy away from asking important questions about the suitability and sufficiency of separation centres as a *concept*. However, it should also be accepted that reputable experts have confirmed the need for such a capability and its potential. We need to focus on how these centres have operated and the reasons why basic security and safety were undermined to such an extent murderous attacks were possible. This is a *strategic* as well as tactical question.
- There is no evidence that a comparable threat from neo-fascist or extreme right-wing terrorism exists in prison. However, a failure to robustly push back

against a struggle for dominance by Islamist infiltrated gangs in high security prisons is likely to replicate and magnify the risk. Terrorists observe each other and learn from what works in prison as elsewhere.

## B. INTRODUCTION

1. My first involvement in the analysis of risks posed by terrorist prisoners dates back to the mid-90s when I was a newly promoted junior governor working in what was then HM Prison Service, an agency of the Home Office. I worked in something called the 'Order and Control' section which was a part of the national incident response group that managed serious incidents in prison. The service was reeling from a high-profile escape by IRA terrorist prisoners held at the supposedly escape proof HMP Whitemoor. The Woodcock report which followed the escape revealed astounding failures of physical and human security failure.
2. The Prison Service was understandably keen for such a disaster not to happen again and dispatched me to the only terrorist prison in the UK and Europe at the time, HMP Maze, to see if we could learn anything from our Northern Irish colleagues about managing this risk better. I was better informed that many Governors about this institution, being born and raised in Northern Ireland and familiar with the special challenges of incarcerating people who kill for ideas. But even I was unprepared for the sheer difficulty of safely managing people who were ideologically motivated and regarded front line staff and governors as legitimate targets. 29 prison officers were murdered by terrorists during the Troubles and one officer was murdered by dissident republican terrorists in 2022.
3. I make this observation by way of introduction to illustrate both the complexity and potential human cost of managing the relatively small but highly potent ideologically motivated offenders presently held in custody in Great Britain. Dealing with people who often have little to lose and all day every day to observe

their jailers, the available targets of the state, sometimes with the objective of planning to murder them, is perhaps one of the most complex and consequential policy and operational tasks in public service. This rapid review will provide a brief retrospective on the threat and supply some short- and medium-term solutions to a problem that is lethal and dynamic. The public servants who bear the cost of politicians and senior bureaucrats getting this wrong should be foremost in our minds.

4. Finally, this account of what has gone wrong and what more there is to be done will come well before the conclusions of the formal independent review of the Frankland attack ordered by Justice Secretary Shabanna Mahmood. **It will suffer from the unavoidable defect of not having access to the same level of data and intelligence this process will benefit from.**
5. However, there is a moral and practical argument for a more agile approach which utilises both open-source material and information passed to me by credible prison sources who speak to me confidentially. I believe that the threat posed to front line staff by radicalised Islamists is now *intolerable*. My hope is that this short review will act as a spur to both the government and their pick to lead this review to consider the greatest thought diversity possible in protecting national security and the lives of public servants who guarantee it.

Professor Ian Acheson

18<sup>th</sup> May 2025

## C. THE NATURE AND SCALE OF THE RISK

1. After leaving public service in 2015, I was asked by the then Secretary of State for Justice, Michael Gove, to look into the problem of Islamist Extremism as it manifested itself in the prison, probation and youth justice sector. The review was prompted by increasing concern about the ability of terrorists to use prisons to radicalise others and destabilise a system already reeling from austerity cuts. It was also clear to me that there were strong concerns about the operational capacity of senior managers and Governors to understand and deal with the problem. A summary of the key issues was produced by the Government<sup>1</sup> In essence what I found was:

- A toxic combination of corporate arrogance, cowardice and incompetence when it came to admitting, scaling and responding to the extremist threat
- Front line prison staff ill equipped and reluctant to confront and challenge hateful ideologies because of misplaced fears of racism.
- Officers dealing with terrorist prisoners' day to day not adequately protected from potential attack, including hostage taking.
- Prison Imams unable and sometimes unwilling to promote British values and take on violent fundamentalism by Muslim prisoners.
- Muslim gangs infiltrated or animated by Islamist ideology in a struggle for power and space inside High Security prisons.
- The proper exercise of control by the state subverted by relentless agitation designed to intimidate and coerce.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7f7c13ed915d74e622abdd/acheson-review-summary-aug-2016.pdf>

- Radicalisation of vulnerable and suggestible prisoners taking place without hindrance as ideologues in close proximity to recruits.
2. In March 2016 there were 162 terrorist prisoners in custody in England and Wales and those motivated by Islamist ideology comprised 93% of the total . Today, there are 257<sup>2</sup> prisoners in custody for offences, mainly under the Terrorism Act 2006 or on conviction for offences which a judge has decided were ‘terrorism connected’ In the intervening years the overall numbers have increased and the proportions have changed. Those imprisoned for Islamist extremism now comprise 65% of the population while the fastest growing group are those with Neofascist ideologies at 27%. However, in terms of lethality and threat, Islamist extremism was and remains by far the greatest terrorist risk both inside and outside the prison walls. The latest available official disclosures show that the 75% of the Security Service (MI5) caseload is Islamist inspired together with 80% of counter terrorism police investigations . 67% of all terrorist attacks since 2018 have been islamist inspired and the toll from deaths and injuries as a result of such attacks on UK soil dwarfs that of XRW terrorists. Moreover the number of prisoners imprisoned for an islamist related offence has actually grown to 156 which may reflect longer sentences for this group for greater harm.
  3. While a stubborn narrative exists among some professional class commentators who attempt to paint the threat posed by XRW s in some way comparable to that of Islamist extremism, it is plainly the case that in terms of managing risks in prison, the

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/operation-of-police-powers-under-tact-2000-to-december-2024/operation-of-police-powers-under-the-terrorism-act-2000-and-subsequent-legislation-arrests-outcomes-and-stop-and-search-great-britain-quarterly-u#s4>

risks here mirror the data beyond the prison walls. We only know about how these dynamics play out when high profile attacks on staff take place. But such incidents, like that which took place in Whitemoor two decades ago, are not spontaneous. They are the malevolent exploitation of neglect and negligence that has disfigured the prison estate since 2010. This failure joins the past to the present. And it has potentially dramatic consequences for how we recruit and retain competent front-line officers who must work in close proximity to people who believe they have divine permission to kill and be 'martyred' in the act.

4. While Prison officers are prohibited from striking and their unions are prohibited from inducing such action, individual officers still, have rights under Section 44, Employment Rights Act 1996<sup>3</sup> to refuse to work if they hold a reasonable fear of serious and imminent risk of harm. While the bar for such actions will be relatively higher in a role which has an inherent risk of violence built in, the murder of a prison officer on duty would have a profoundly destabilising impact on the rule of law in prisons. It would be naïve to think that terrorists in prison, opposed to the state in fundamental ways, do not also understand these implications. Indeed, for those who have a jihadist mindset, many of whom thwarted in their mission by police action, this is a rational option.
5. I identified this option in 2016 in my final report as the top risk in one of four scenarios facing the prison service if it did not act to protect staff. These scenarios encompassed the following risks:

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/18/section/44>

- A single iconic terrorist act in prison – possibly opportunistic or ‘lone wolf’ that targeted a prison officer for murder/hostage and murder.
  - The escape of a terrorist prisoner from custody
  - Terrorist acts inspired or directed by Islamist Extremist prisoners in custody or on release.
  - Vulnerable people radicalised in custody who go on to commit terrorist attacks in prison or on release.
  - A member of staff radicalised or corrupted who assists terrorists in custody.
  - Networking between terrorists and prominent organised crime ‘nominals’ to enable access to weapons, explosives or other missing logistical support for terrorist offences.
6. I cannot say with any confidence that these risks are being controlled properly today. The statistics suggest otherwise. Four terrorist attacks resulting in fatalities and public outrage have been committed by Islamist inspired offenders after their release from custody in the years since my review. A terrorist accompanied by a violent offender he had radicalised carried out an attack on a prison officer at HMP Whitemoor in January 2020 for which they received life sentences for attempted murder<sup>4</sup>.
7. The evidence suggests that the ferocious attack, by assailants using improvised bladed weapons and dressed in fake suicide belts, was designed to incapacitate the target, a prison officer, and take him hostage to be murdered as a ‘political act.’ Last

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-54457605>

month at HMP Frankland a terrorist, Hashem Abedi, continued a pattern of behaviour that involved ambushing and attacking members of staff with hot oil followed by a stabbing attack on staff that seriously injured three officers. Abedi, already convicted of a violent assault on officers in the allegedly hyper secure High Security Unit (HSU) in HMP Belmarsh<sup>5</sup> was being housed in the separation centre in this prison. These centres were set up following my review which recommended special bespoke centres to totally incapacitate the hate preachers and other ideologues who intelligence indicated were radicalising others to break the psychological link between preacher and congregation, inspiration and action.

8. This attack came 10 days after an exclusive report in the Times Newspaper that claimed jihadist gangs controlled so much of the establishment that those who did not want to convert to Islam were forced to seek protection in the segregation unit.<sup>6</sup> These claims are contested by prison authorities. At Frankland last year, a police officer was stabbed by a prisoner in the visits area. In the last few days, Alex Rudakubana, convicted of a crime that was not judged terrorism but had all the hallmarks of it allegedly attacked and injured a prison officer with boiling water at HMP Belmarsh, another high security prison. It is worth sharing the judges' comments at the sentencing hearing<sup>7</sup>:

*'The prosecution have made it clear that these proceedings were not acts of terrorism within the meaning of the terrorism legislation, because there is no evidence that Rudakubana's purpose was to advance a political, religious, racial or ideological cause. I must accept that conclusion. However, in my judgment, his culpability for this*

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-60437894>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/crime/article/prisoners-isolation-islamist-gangs-jc2kvtkrn>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/R-v-Axel-Rudakubana.pdf>

*extreme level of violence is equivalent in its seriousness to terrorist murders, whatever his purpose. Whether his motivation was for terrorism or not misses the point. What he did on the 29th July last year has caused such shock and revulsion to the whole nation, that it must be viewed as being at the extreme level of crime.'*

9. The current threat to prison staff from terrorists is magnified by those held with them who have the same capacity and capability to inflict extreme harm. While there is no evidence yet of any connection between the recent attacks, I am in no doubt that the capacity of ironic 'rock star' terrorist offenders to attack the system attracts approval and may spur on other non-terrorist prisoners to copy that behaviour. Just days ago, at HMP Woodhill, a high security prison so destabilised that its terrorist separation centre had to be closed, a prison officer received serious injuries after being slashed in the throat by a prisoner who has fashioned and hidden an improvised weapon. In another long-term high security prison, HMP Gartree, an officer had her arm broken in a pre-planned assault by a prisoner faking a medical emergency.

10. The Frankland and Whitemoor stabbing attacks are a useful way of framing the historic and current challenges and failures of managing ideological offenders. In both cases, the assailants were known to be violent. In both cases they were able to manufacture weapons by wrapping fabric around twisted lumps of metal. In both cases the attacks were surely premeditated and carefully planned ambushes. The risks I identified in 2016 nearly became reality in 2020 and repeated themselves in 2025. This is not a track record that inspires confidence that the threat posed by a very small number of prisoners capable of catastrophic harm is being properly controlled.

11. Where human and physical security failures combine on the ground, attacks of this nature will be more, not less likely. But there is a third ingredient to the toxic mix that puts staff at risk and threatens national security and confidence in the rule of law – corporate culture. My 2015 review specifically addressed the capacity of the senior leadership at HMPPS to deliver safety and security. It was seriously lacking then as I believe it is now. Lives are still on the line.

## D. UNCERTAIN PROGRESS, LOST OPPORTUNITES

1. My 2016 report made a total of 69 recommendations for improvement, a testimony to the system wide complacency and failure I and my small independent team of prison and policing professionals uncovered. The recommendations were unilaterally turned into eleven consolidated 'super recommendations' of which 8 were accepted. I played no part in the rationalisation of the process and no part in any further implementation. I was given one briefing designed to demonstrate HMPPS commitment to implementing these recommendations. This process was quietly shelved after the sacking of the commissioning authority for the review, the then Justice Secretary, Michael Gove.
2. It is somewhat ironic that the last high security prison I visited was in 2024 in the Maldives when I was advising the government there through a UN programme on the management of terrorist prisoners. The last advice sought from me on the management of extremist detainees was by the Iraqi Government this year when advising them on the repatriation process of Islamist offenders from camps in NE Syria back across the border. While there is no requirement for the Government to listen to me above any other professional in this area, it is surprising, on the surface at least, that I have not been asked to feed into further work in this area in my own country, despite this international reputation.
3. Perhaps the most consequential of the recommendations I made was in the creation of Separation Centres. I was *very* specific in my intention to recommend the total incapacitation of offenders who demonstrated a highly subversive tendency to

undermine the rule of law in prison by radicalising others. Breaking the psychological link between self-appointed ‘Emirs’ who have influential status by virtue of their offence was and is extremely important. I made the critical distinction between violent prisoners who would need other means of control and those who directed and mobilised them. I was clear that creating a ‘cognitive break’ between the hate preacher and his ‘disciples’ delivered potential benefits on either side of that toxic relationship. Those subject to separation should be offered *individualised* programmes to tackle their often-diverse offending pathologies. Even where these were refused, separation still represented a clear benefit by preventing those with ‘bullet proof’ commitment to radicalising other more vulnerable prisoners.

4. What happened subsequently is an object lesson in the difference between political class commitment and administrative class delivery. While I had no role in how separation centres would be implemented or developed, the Secretary of State for Justice accepted the recommendation and ordered that the centres be created in 2016. I had argued that the unique nature of psychological threat posed by those ‘controlling minds’ selected for separation required a bespoke response. I was clear that new build units like those I had seen in the Netherlands were required where thought had been put into the design and security and humanity were balanced. Instead, the three centres originally opened in existing and spare accommodation at HMPs Frankland, Full Sutton, Woodhill with a total capacity for 28. In each case, existing parts of these prisons were hastily repurposed to carry out this role. Woodhill’s centre had to close as the whole prison became unstable due to chronic staff shortages. The two remaining centres, have to my knowledge never been used to anywhere near their capacity.

5. It is reasonable to argue that this does not signal a lack of will but the reality of utilising intelligence to identify and remove a small number of highly charismatic extremist proselytisers. I do not believe this tells the whole story. I think a significant part of the under-utilisation of Separation Centres has its roots in long standing HMPPS senior manager ambivalence and hostility towards an external solution imposed on them.

The April 2021 inquest into the victims of Usman Khan, a terrorist released on licence who went on to murder two students at London bridge in November 2019 revealed a rare insight into this mindset. Counsel for the families of one of the victims asked the Director of High Security prisons Richard Vince about the operation of Separation centres as a way of containing radicalisation in prisons. In evidence he said:

*'I should say, as well , the issue of separation remains one that receives very considerable debate about the merits or otherwise of doing so.'*

6. Mr Vince had to be reminded that Separation was Government policy. I believe that this ambivalence from the top was more widespread and translated into arrangements for the operation of separation centres that placed undue restrictions on their use and furthermore allowed a regime to develop that was so focused on the rights of those detained it lost sight of their potential dangerousness. In my view this culminated in the horrific attack on prison officers in the separation centre at HMP Frankland this Easter. At the time of this attack, Mr Vince remained the Director of High Security Prisons.

7. Independent examination of the function of Separation Centres from their inception to date is necessarily limited. The primary purpose of separation as I conceived it was to eliminate the potency of highly dangerous radicalisers by removing them from circulation. The denial of audience and communication to often narcissistic and grandiose influencers is part of the control mechanism to stop acts of terrorism taking place in or being planned from prisons. There have only been *three* significant events since then that throw light on the operation and effectiveness of the centres *as they were developed by HMPPS*.

✓ *Evidence provided to the Manchester Arena bombing Inquiry.*

8. In December 2021, the Head of the newly formed Joint Extremism Unit (Jexu) Paul Mott gave evidence at the Manchester Arena bomb inquiry<sup>8</sup>. The inquiry was considering radicalisation and preventability. One of the main subjects of this part of the inquiry was the behaviour of Hashem Abeidi. Abedi now serving a total of 58 years imprisonment is alleged to have attacked prison officers in HMP Frankland Separation Centre in April 2025 resulting in three officers being seriously injured by hot oil and improvised weapons.

9. Jexu had been established to give the Home office joint authority over the policy on terrorist prisoners. It is described as ‘the strategic unit for all counter-terrorism work in HMPPS.’ As reported in the Manchester Evening News, Mr Mott was rather clearer about the purpose and utility of Separation centres:

*‘The Prevent guidance in place in 2015–17 recognised the role that prison staff have in identifying radicalisation risks, and the training that they need to help them do. In*

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/manchester-arena-inquiry-volume-3-radicalisation-and-preventability>

*reality, however, Paul Mott described an “acute” issue with the level of resources committed to the prison estate in 2017 and acknowledged that issues with inadequate staffing numbers and counter-extremism training and support for prison officers “arguably” remained the same at the date of his evidence.’*

10. Mr Mott went on to say there was a 'potential' to use 'separation centres' for terrorist prisoners *"There are risks both with putting people in separation centres and risks with not putting them in separation centres. I think there are a relatively small number of people that represent disproportionate risk if left in the mainstream population of prison.'*

✓ *The 2022 Terrorism in Prisons paper.*

11. The Government's Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, Jonathan Hall KC went rather further in his review of Terrorism in Prisons in 2022. It is worth reproducing his main analysis here.

*'The risk of terrorism in prisons has special features and is sufficiently different from other risks (violence, criminality, escape) to warrant an additional option for those whose influence on other prisoners could lead to acts of terrorism within or outside the prison estate.'*

*'moving the right individual to a Separation Centre can be an effective means of reducing the risk of terrorism in the form of violence or encouragement to violence.'*

*'It is clear to me having spoken to front-line practitioners and counter-terrorism officials, and having read research, thematic reports, intelligence reports and existing caselaw, that for many years there have been prisoners whose influence on the*

*general prison population is damaging to national security by increasing the risk of terrorist attack both inside and outside prison.'*

12. Hall revealed an enduring problem of violent extremism in prisons which was *operationally* potent despite some useful policy innovations forced on the HMPPS bureaucracy like Jexu. He found that Islamist gangs had gained significant power and influence, often at the expense of prison order and safety. *'For its part, the prison service (now Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, HMPPS) failed to recognise the dangers of Islamist gang-type activity and the influence of TACT offenders and lost its role in the national endeavour to reduce the risk of terrorism.'*

13. This is a damning indictment of what I would call the dominant 'reclamation theology' over sensible and robust risk management to protect national security and the lives of front-line staff. In other words, those in senior leadership capacities within our prison system, including ambitious Governors and their senior civil servant bosses were converts to a belief that 'all souls can be rescued.'

14. This approach has allowed the proliferation of reckless strategies that amounted to appeasement of dangerous prisoners in the mistaken belief that granting privileges that ignore or override operational risk considerations would improve behaviour. These 'risks' were often taken by senior managers who would not be present to see the fruits of their piety. But we know to our cost is that external behaviour is often a poor indicator of internal commitment to ideological violence.

15. This misconception has been shown in repeated and tragic incidents where extremists being investigated or screened have used the deception of naïve and

credulous professionals a moral universe removed from them to further their violent intentions. This phenomenon is not limited to HM Prison and Probation Service. At his trial for the murder of the MP Sir David Amess, the Islamist terrorist Ali Harbi Ali disclosed that his prior encounters with deradicalisation specialists composed of telling them what they wanted to hear in order to get rid of the scrutiny.

16. Within the prison setting, this weakness was examined during the Usman Khan victim's inquest. Richard Vince, the Director of High Security prisons was asked about decisions regarding the risk management of this prisoner and suggested a principle that might well be valid when we consider the Islamist attack on officers at HMP Whitemoor. In his evidence he said:

*'In this particular case, yes, and I think, to use phrase that Jonathan Hall QC used in his MAPPA review, there can be an optimism bias, you know, people dedicate their lives to trying to change other people's lives and protect the public, and that may be what's here. I mean I certainly, through the category A review process, did not regard Usman Khan to be transformed, but, you know, I can equally see how his desisting from the very disruptive behaviour we had seen and engaging with his programme could and I'm not suggesting this here, Mr Styles and others would answer for their own assessments could create an optimism bias.'*

17. The person he refers to is William Styles, the then Governor of HMP Whitemoor. During the course of the Inquest, it was revealed that Styles was pursuing a part-time master's degree in criminology, including a dissertation on 'hope' for category A prisoners. The barrister for the family of one of Khan's victims, Nick Armstrong KC,

suggested this academic focus may have influenced Styles' professional judgments, leading him to view Khan through a rehabilitation lens rather than focusing on security risks. Armstrong further criticized Styles for contributing to a 'giddy' atmosphere around Learning Together<sup>9</sup>, using Khan as a "good news story" to promote the program's success. This approach, it was argued, lost the "hardheadedness" required when dealing with high-risk individuals like Khan. Styles refuted these accusations.

18. Following the inquest, William Styles was promoted to the head of all High Security prisons in the south of the prison estate. He subsequently left HMPPS to have high profile appointments in the private custodial sector<sup>10</sup>.

✓ *Standards set and measured by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons*

*(‘What gets measured, gets done.’)*

19. Although I had no formal role or input into how the Separation Centres I recommended I was encouraged to contribute to the expectation standards for inspection that were drafted for the centres shortly after they were set up. These standards hold considerable sway within HMPPS as they are inspected against them by an independent and external agency who make public their findings. Though these expectations and findings have no legal force they are seen as the most important indicator of prison performance with reputational consequences for senior managers, Governors and the Ministry of Justice.

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<sup>9</sup> The prison education charity that introduced Khan to the victims he later murdered at Fishmongers Hall.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/prison-officer-staffing-crisis-inspection-b2563799.html>

20. I have examined the draft and final expectations published and I believe I am the only person to have had any input between the two. I commented extensively on the proposed standards and much of what was in the specification struck me as naïve and impractical for the level of risk that prisoners in the centre would surely pose.

21. As an example, every amendment I proposed that would even mention 'national security' as one of the prime objectives of the centre did not survive. I suggested that the whole section on security be rewritten as it was almost entirely focused on the rights and protection of detainees as opposed to controlling the harm that might be capable of.

22. There is an important caveat here. The legislation that gives effect to the Inspectorate of Prisons had not changed substantively since 1952 when the law was enacted. HMIP statutory powers require them to inspect the conditions of prisoners. This means the inspectorate can only be peripherally interested in some of the factors that led to the attack in HMP Frankland such as leadership and culture. The focus on security and other forms of control is necessarily seen through the lens of protecting the rights of detained prisoners. While this is understandable, the standards for inspection finally published will have influenced the environment in which Hashem Abedi launched his murderous attack to a considerable degree.

23. Separation centres have been inspected once since 2022. The findings at HMP Frankland suggested some dysfunctionality in how this centre was run:

- Staff-prisoner relationships at HMP Frankland were poorer compared to HMP Woodhill. Prisoners often chose not to engage with officers, which may indicate issues with trust, communication, or the centre's approach to managing high-risk individuals. This lack of engagement was a significant barrier to effective rehabilitation and care.
- Security intelligence at HMP Frankland was described as '*impressive*', unlike at HMP Woodhill, the other functioning separation centre, where staffing shortages hampered efforts. This ensured effective risk management, with measures in place to handle the high-risk population within the separation centre.

24. This illustrates the heart of the problem with how to manage people motivated primarily by hateful ideas and not the essential impulses of other forms of criminality – power, sex or money. Firstly, many of those radicalised and especially those seeking to radicalise others in Islamist ideology will reject the state's authority and its attempts to correct a belief system which supports the dehumanisation and killing of non-believers as divinely ordained. Prison officers often lack the cultural competence to challenge hateful behaviour and the confidence to develop relationships with often highly sophisticated, charismatic and devious extremists they are in close proximity with.

25. This is not to say that it is impossible for change and disengagement to take place. It is right that this opportunity is presented and continuously refined. However, a lack of engagement does not imply failure. Because if the right people are selected for separation, their non-compliance with offending behaviour programmes can

actually confirm the right choice made. This outcome is not ‘failure’ and will still have important benefits for order and control more widely. Jonathan Hall KC illustrated this point in his 2022 Terrorism in prison review: *the existence of a Separation Centre regime was found by [researchers] to have a dissuasive impact against poor behaviour. This is important for prisoners serving very long sentences who may have little to fear from short term disciplinary measures or loss of incentives and earned privileges but may fear being transferred to a Separation Centre.*’

26. Moreover, it should be made clear to those selected, some of whom are serving very long sentences for terrorism, that unless or until there is an authentic change in behaviour and reduction in dangerousness, those in separation centres will remain there perhaps for many years. Placing the onus on the offender to change in this context is entirely reasonable. However, hastily converted existing premises like Frankland’s separation centre is not a tenable or decent long-term solution for a centre whose primary function is not punitive but protective. Setting standards for the operation of this centre that place little emphasis on the unique nature of the offenders in it, and their unique riskiness with an over emphasis on their rights to as close to a normal regime as possible may have inadvertently assisted the recent attack on officers.

27. Secondly, it is hard to reconcile an ‘impressive’ security intelligence system with the obvious human and system failures that allowed a terrorist prisoner with a track record of attacking staff to manufacture weapons to burn and staff officers in what appears to be a planned ambush. The inspection took place in April 2022. A significant deterioration in security systems is possible between that date and the

date of the attack on staff this April. But so too is misplaced optimism on the part of those reviewing these systems. have not been able to identify if the inspectors who led this review had any operational experience in national security protection. The lead inspector in the 2022 visit is described as the HMIP lead for women's prisons. I do not mention this to impugn her integrity or any of that team, but it seems obvious to me that it would be useful to have such a specialised inspection augmented by those who have particular experience in preventing/countering violent extremism and counter terrorism in an operational context.

28. One element of separation centres as I originally conceived them has been almost completely lost in their uneasy evolution: intelligence gathering. We cannot talk to dead terrorists, obviously. Learning as much as we can about those left alive and incarcerated for years in places where it is easy to get expertise around them is a golden opportunity to study terrorist ideology, motivation and develop new therapies and preventative strategies to combat violent extremism. A senior military intelligence source I consulted for this report demonstrated some of the ways that this opportunity could be exploited:

- separation centres provide a perfect opportunity for intelligence operations utilizing the prisoner to help inform current investigations and / or be part of active information operations
- It is critical to utilize the opportunity to exploit isolated prisoners for the greater good- trained debriefers / chis handlers should be talking to them on a very regular basis

- 2 things are outputs- actual intelligence whether background or exploitable and secondly the ability to leverage their captivity to inform active information operations that should be part of CONTEST
- active operations can help disrupt potential terror activity especially online using prisoner intelligence to contribute to disinformation strategies

29. Separation centres have much greater capability to enhance our fight against violent extremism than is currently the case. If HMPPS cannot or will not allow these opportunities to be exploited it should be divested of the responsibility.

*Tactical support to and protection of staff working with terrorists*

30. My 2016 review examined the ways that HMPPS (then known as NOMS but essentially the same organisation) protected front line staff who were tasked to look after the security and needs of terrorist prisoners on a day-to-day basis.

31. I discovered that in 2013, following a nasty hostage incident at HMP Full Sutton, all High Security prisons established dedicated 'Local Response Teams'. These teams were specialist officers with the training and equipment to respond to incidents, particularly hostage incidents, rapidly. Their existence was a semi open secret but one which allowed officers in face-to-face contact with terrorists to have confidence that if they were to be attacked the response would be immediate and effective. I cannot over emphasise how important this confidence is psychologically for front line staff who talked quite candidly and chillingly about how they worked using their jailcraft to avoid being attacked or taken hostage to be murdered. Many officers said they feared

being beheaded – an act of grotesque violence which is often repeated by jihadist terrorists to create fear and terror.

32. In the event, I discovered that these LRT officers were not necessarily deployed in the strength required during times when prisoners were unlocked. Moreover, they were not supernumerary to the operational compliment of staff which reduced their capability significantly. Credible sources now tell me that these LRTs have been allowed to 'wither on the vine' because of resourcing, training and expense difficulties. I cannot verify this situation as I have no access to such data. It ought to be a priority for the formal investigation of the HMP Frankland attack to examine the position. I am quite clear that the threat against prison staff from terrorist prisoners is now simply intolerable and such teams should be fully staffed, supernumerary and 'on call' inside all prisons where terrorists are being held during the core day.

33. I do not accept the argument that national tactical response resources - the NTRG- is a sufficient backstop for this activity for three reasons:

- They are located in two centres distant from High Security prisons so response times to spontaneous incidents is unacceptably long.
- Their range of skills - including riot control and working at height is too diverse for what is required.
- Their relatively small resources are overstretched as it is.

In a written statement on the deployment of Pava incapacitant spray to Young Offender Institutions, the Secretary of State for Justice illustrated the problem of NTRG response times:

*'It can typically take over an hour to deploy these officers. As altercations in YOIs arise rapidly, often with little warning, these officers can rarely, if ever, arrive on the scene in time to respond to active violence that is being experienced<sup>11</sup>.'*

34. Staff working in close proximity to terrorist prisoners need specific and sufficient training in countering the sort of conditioning that allows those detained to assert malign control over their environment and subvert their authority. This is not a new phenomenon and it remains to be seen whether or not conditioning and complacency played a role in allowing the attack in HMP Frankland to be possible. In 1994, the Woodcock inquiry into the IRA escape from HMP Whitemoor revealed the enduring threat presented by this phenomenon:

Staff in the SSU were prime candidates for conditioning and yet were given no special training in preparation for their role. They were made even more vulnerable by the absence of staff rotation and knowledgeable, supportive supervision. This vulnerability was recognised in the 1989 Home Office Study on SSUs (Number 109) where it was stated:-

"staff have always to guard against complacency and as one Governor put it the danger with staff who are unfamiliar with dealing with notorious category A prisoners is that when they find they are not eaten alive by these fearful unknowns, they could switch off completely. "

The extent of the inmate/officer relationship at Whitemoor SSU was brought home to the Governor, who reported after the escape that a:-  
'failure to understand what we are dealing with was evidenced by the shock and surprise of prison officers that one of the prisoners should actually shoot one of them. "

<sup>11</sup> <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-04-24/debates/25042440000012/YoungOffenderInstitutionsInEnglandUseOfPAVA?highlight=national%20tactical%20response%20group#contribution-C3C56554-6729-4EA3-BC15-4DE2EE6AF10C>

35. Any investigation into Frankland must in my view also consider the suitability and sufficiency of counter conditioning training given to Separation Centre staff, their psychological support and the duration of their tours of duty in such a challenging environment. This ought to be an elite job because it asks for special powers of persuasion and emotional resilience in an environment saturated with risk. However, the reality revealed extended periods of boredom and calm with little interaction in cramped and claustrophobic conditions punctuated by moments of extreme violence. These conditions are notoriously difficult to control for. Terrorists who have all day and every day to study their jailers know this as well as any psychologist. It is perfectly rational for them to work these weaknesses to their advantage.

36. The debate over further and better personal protective equipment is also one where perception and reality compete for importance. Had officers in Frankland's Separation centre been equipped with stab vests, it is likely their assault by hot oil and stabbing would have been minimised but probably not deterred. Terrorists will make use of 'tactical adaptation' in response to protective measures. However, on balance urgently equipping front line staff dealing with terrorists with stab vests including high collars<sup>12</sup> will be a sensible measure as well as improving the confidence of officers that their protection is being prioritised and enhanced.

37. The case for enhanced defensive weapons is similarly well made with caveats. Equipping prisoners with any defensive capabilities such as batons, cuffs and

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<sup>12</sup> At least one of the officers injured by Hashem Abeidi's alleged attack suffered stab wounds to the neck – a critical area for protection. Neck slash wounds have become an increasing feature of serious assaults lately.

incapacitant spray (as is standard issue) always carries the risk such kit can be taken from them in an incident and used against them. But the risk of *not* providing such equipment is no longer acceptable and alone, in my view not currently sufficient to counter a dynamic threat. The Ministry of Justice must consider equipping staff in the centres with Tasers. I will go further. I was dismayed and perplexed in 2016 by the inability of HMPPS to have in place a protocol which transferred the control of a terrorist incident scene to responding police where lethal force was indicated. I have no knowledge as to whether such a protocol has been revised and agreed but whether or not, police access into a prison with lethal firearms is a necessarily time-consuming business. Perhaps the difference between life and death.

38. On the known facts, if the attack on prison officers at Frankland was replicated in scale and ferocity as an attack on armed police officers outside the prison, lethal force would have been completely justified. The risk of not having firearms available inside High Security prisons is now greater in my view than the considerable hazards of deployment. The idea of a prison armoury is not a fanciful one. The main prison in Northern Ireland holding terrorist prisoners, HMP Maghaberry, has an armoury at the prison gate for staff to lodge their personal protection weapons. The creation of armouries in High Security prisons to hold a range of weapons including lethal weapons could open up the tactical options for responding specialist staff and act as a powerful deterrent. Moreover, the advice to officers at the time of my review, in terms of being taken hostage, was to surrender passively to perpetrators and wait for negotiations to resolve the situation.

39. I trained prison hostage negotiators in the 1990s so I am familiar with the conceptual approach which was designed for 'ordinary' prisoners who wanted to bargain not ideological prisoners who want to kill. This approach is plainly inadequate for the times we are now in and pithily dismissed up by one officer I spoke with who said he would 'fight like fuck' if a hostage attempt was made on him by a terrorist because the objective was not to bargain with him but to murder him.

40. In the horrific attack at HMP Whitemoor in 2020, it was clear to me that, like Frankland five years later, the incident was premeditated and designed to first subdue the victim and then take control of a hostage if possible. In 2020, the two Islamist assailants who fell on officer Neil Trundle with improvised weapons were also dressed in fake suicide belts. I believe this was in an attempt to drive off responding officers to allow them the time after they had ferociously attacked their victim to get him into a store cupboard to hold him hostage. I have no doubt their intent was to kill him. I have no doubt the attack in Frankland had precisely the same objective. Any formal investigation into this attack must look into the hostage training and rescue capabilities of all prisons holding terrorist prisoners as a matter of urgency.

## E. CONSEQUENCES

1. In 2016 I described four scenarios that were likely if HMPPS did not take the problem of Islamist extremism in prisons seriously.
  - A. The murder of a prison officer by terrorists
  - B. A terrorist attack directed from inside a prison
  - C. A terrorist escape from a prison
  - D. The destruction of rehabilitation in places where Islamist gangs held sway
2. History has shown a decade later we are still in a place where all four scenarios are still possible. In fact, the chances of all occurring have in my opinion increased over time since my 2016 review. We have been seconds and millimetres from the murder of prison staff in an act of terrorism on two occasions with the profound effect this would have on the safe functioning of all jails described earlier. Terrorists are known to have networked in prison both here in the UK and abroad. Illicit mobile phones are routinely available in all prisons and used to further this possibility. Four prisoners released under supervision have carried out terrorist attacks. A prisoner charged with a terrorist offence escaped from a Category B prison in London reeling in perpetual crisis within walking distance of HM Prison Service HQ.
3. The Chief Inspector of prisons has said the defective or missing anti-drone equipment and cameras in High Security prisons is a risk to national security. What he means is that drones used to smuggle drugs into such prisons, delivered to cell windows with near impunity could easily have their payloads including explosives, firearms and

ammunition. If such a payload were capable of being delivered to Hashem Abedi or others like him, the consequences would be utterly unthinkable.

4. The situation is very serious but it is not yet out of control. What it will take in remedy is strong and determined political pressure and relentless independent oversight to check that this threat is being properly and speedily responded to. I have no confidence that if left on its own recognisance, HMPPS corporately has the appetite or the aptitude to deal effectively with this combined national security and officer safety threat. Outrageously, the prison service bureaucrats have been assessing the benefits and feasibility of issuing stab vests since 2012 as violence has soared<sup>13</sup>. Then annual assaults on staff stood at 2,987. Today's latest figure is 10,605. Then, the number of non-front-line operational staff working at prison service headquarters was 1,580. Today that figure is 5613. While there are multiple reasons for this huge increase, it is hard not to conclude that all the additional bureaucracy has contributed nothing to the safety of the most vital people in the system – not the burgeoning rear echelon of civilian administrators, but the men and women who wear the uniforms.
5. Staff assault *rates* also stand at record levels. In some of our youth prisons it is become statistically inevitable that all youth custody workers will be injured on duty. Some prisons inspected show 50% or more of the population able to access illicit drugs. HMP Whitemoor, a modern purpose-built high security prison was inspected in 2023. Despite a baroque corporate structure of checking, monitoring and accountability squatting over the head of the Governor, it took this accident of random inspection to reveal it as the 'dirtiest' prison the Chief Inspector had ever

seen. HMP Whitemoor is not overcrowded. If the bins are not being emptied in a jail that houses some of our most critical national security risk, you can be sure many more safety and security critical systems are also failing.

6. I have said before that this safety threat is an intolerable situation. I do not use the word loosely. The forthcoming investigation into what went wrong at HMP Frankland - the leitmotif of all the problems in managing people who kill for ideas – will undoubtedly encounter a narrative that says that Separation Centres are the problem *per se*. I think this would be a convenient way of distracting from what is likely to be the real truth, not conceptually, but in terms of the ethos that the centres were allowed to devolve into focused far too much on appeasement and far too little on the sort of hardheaded security management these centres demand.
7. I was clear to ministers that separation of the most highly charismatic and subversive ideologues was the worst answer apart from all of the alternatives. In this business there are no silver bullet solutions. Prison terrorist populations are dynamic as are the individual characteristics and pathologies of the offenders within them. This is an exceptionally difficult penal management challenge and I fear that complacency and the dominance of progressive theorising have made these centres much more dangerous than the resource I originally conceived.
8. Added to that is the emergence of a new hybrid threat – a person who is ideologically committed to terrorism and has also demonstrated an active desire to maim and kill prison staff. The formal investigation into the Frankland attack will have to consider how and why someone with such obvious and realised dangerousness ended up in

a centre for psychologically harmful extremists and not other more suitable accommodation.

9. It is a matter of grim irony that the place where Abedi arguably should have ended up, the Close Supervision Centre for highly assaultive prisoners, was the reported scene only two days after his attack of what appears to be a prisoner-on-prisoner homicide at HMP Whitemoor. Given all the circumstances and the scale of the risks, it is necessary to demand some additional radical solutions that will keep his risk under control and protect prison staff from further harm.
10. Several previous attacks in prison have apparent features that reveal an evolving problem that requires a dynamic response. We have seen how the radicalisation of highly violent non-terrorist offenders by an Islamist almost led to the death of a prison officer in 2020. Five years on, there are suggestions that the alleged attack by Abeidi involved collusion with others in the Separation Centre to divide and isolate his alleged victims. This is significant and highly troubling.

## F. SOLUTIONS

### TERRORIST RISK MANAGEMENT

#### 1. Create a bespoke High Control Centre for dangerous terrorists

The prison service is not currently equipped to manage prisoners who represent an unacceptable risk of violence to staff *and* who are ideologically motivated. This risk is lethal and proximate and demands appropriate control measures. A new centre should be created for these offenders. It should be entirely separate from the main prison estate and its ethos must be focused on the protection of national security and eliminating the physical threat to staff.

The centre cannot be located in converted accommodation in High Security Prisons that are exposed to and unable to overcome the threat of drone deliveries. My recommendation is that this centre is purpose built and located inside the military estate where physical and human security is commensurate to the risks posed. HMPPS should retain responsibility for the deployment of such staff who can be segregated for such purposes using existing rules<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Rule 46A Prison Rules 1999 enables the Secretary of State to order separation where it appears desirable on one or more of 4 grounds: 1. The interests of national security. 2. To prevent the commission, preparation or instigation of an act of terrorism, a terrorism offence, or an offence with a terrorist connection, whether in prison or otherwise. 3. To prevent the dissemination of views or beliefs that might encourage or induce others to commit any such act or offence, whether in prison or otherwise, or to protect or safeguard others from such views or beliefs. 4. To prevent any political, religious, racial or other views or beliefs being used to undermine good order and discipline in a prison.

## 2. Create HM Prisons Directorate of Counter Terrorism

Following my 2015 recommendations , a new director of counter terrorism for HMPPS was created on paper and then removed, subsumed into the responsibilities of the Director for High Security prisons. This function is now deleted. This was a profound mistake and reflects a cultural trend to downgrade the importance of the role in protecting national security in places where most of our known threat from terrorism is located. This post should be recreated to give ministerial confidence that a senior official has accountability for and exclusive focus on combatting violent extremism in prisons and on probation.

## 3. Create Ministerial independent advisor for counter terrorism in prisons

This recommendation from my 2015 report was rejected but apparently held under review. This was a grave mistake. Again, culture is probably the main culprit as opposed to decent operational counter arguments. A report in the Times quoting prison sources said the main reason for rejecting the proposal at the time was that the post holder might be me.<sup>15</sup> This sort of corporate mendacity is likely to have meant that ministers have been exposed repeatedly to developing risks with terrorist prisoners having to rely on a detached corporate structure that permanently leans towards secrecy and obfuscation.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/law/article/the-blueprint-to-prevent-islamist-poison-spreading-in-prison-xh2hwpn5q>

#### 4. High Security prisons should become part of UK Critical National Infrastructure (CNI)

One of the problems in this sector is that of necessity they have become ‘hermit kingdoms’ detached and cut off from the rest of the body politic behind literal and figurative high walls. Our High Security prisons hold all of our known acute national security risk from terrorism. They are if used properly enormous reservoirs of intelligence and research into terrorist development and potential disengagement. The consequences of dysfunction and compromise of these vital assets can have an enormous impact on public life. I believe that High security prisons meet the bar for inclusion- an escape by terrorists or a terror attack inside or planned from a prison could significantly impact national security and the functioning of the state. They fit the definition of assets essential for societal safety. Inclusion would elevate their status, improve scrutiny, accountability and potential investment in greater security and safety. Secrecy has not worked in favour of effectiveness. This is an obvious way to bring additional resources and thought diversity into the realm of prison insurgency.

#### 5. Create immediate *in-house* tactical response teams for all High Security prisons holding terrorists.

This capacity has deteriorated and the alternatives that exist are incapable of providing either an immediate response to a terrorist threat in prison or give front line staff confidence to work effectively.

Each prison holding terrorist prisoners must in the meantime have a team of supernumerary officers on site who have no other task lines except maintaining

a high degree of readiness for a tactical response to spontaneous incidents and/or planned operational response. They must be equipped with greater less lethal *and* lethal capability as a proportionate response to an elevated level of threat. They must be capable of being deployed at all times prisoners are unlocked. This includes Taser, stun grenades, attenuated energy baton rounds and 'method of entry' equipment to breach doors and barricades. While all capabilities must be tested against lawful use and the built environment these additional weapons are the baseline for immediate change. Serious consideration must be given to constructing armouries at such prisons where lethal weapons can be stored and used as a last resort as police support cannot be guaranteed in time due to remote location and external barriers where seconds can mean the difference between life and death. These local teams should come under the operational control of the existing National Tactical Response Group (NTRG)

#### **6. Enhanced oversight of Separation Centres in particular and the management of terrorist prisoners in general.**

The latest Framework for the operation of Separation Centres has a (necessarily) redacted section on scrutiny and independent oversight. There should be an urgent review of these arrangements to ensure that operational counter terrorism experts are a regular part of assurance and such visits are focused not on the rights of prisoners, who are amply catered for in the specification, but the protection of staff from manipulation, conditioning and attack.

## PRISON OFFICER SAFETY GENERALLY

**7. All prison officers issued with stab, slash and spike resistant vests**

This is currently ‘under consideration’ by HMPPS after national outcry over officer assaults. There must be no delay in emergency procurement of this PPE to all staff working in the High Security and Long-Term estate. The prospect of serious harm, not to mention litigation and recruitment/retention impact *is not just imminent, it is already happening*. There is simply no reason for further dithering on this vital and obvious improvement. Ministers must take personal charge of this objective backed by independent oversight by professionals who have demonstrated a track record in delivery under pressure. Stab vests have been ‘under consideration’ for officers revealed in a ministerial answer *in 2013*. The Director of Public Sector Prisons then is the same person who is now the interim Chief Executive<sup>16</sup>.

**8. Establish ministerial cross-departmental oversight of prison officer assaults reduction**

The Guardian reported recently that over one third of reported prison officer assaults are not proceeded with through the internal discipline process<sup>17</sup>. While some may be referred to the police and discontinued there are repeated concerns that assaults on front line staff are not taken seriously by prison managers and are simply dismissed as ‘inherent risk.’ The perception and the reality are destroying confidence and safety on the front line. It has normalised violence with

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<sup>16</sup> <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm131014/text/131014w0004.htm>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/nov/16/assaults-uk-prison-officers-not-investigated-abuse-inmates>

the greatest proportion of all front-line staff sickness- 40%- attributable to stress. This perpetuates the collapse of consequence for behaviour which in turn wrecks rehabilitation. Ministers should convene a taskforce of *independent* safety specialists with full powers of entry to prisons to devise and deliver a *time critical* mandatory action plan to restore officer safety and dignity at work across the estate.

## ANNEXE A: CAVEATS

### 1. *Cost/benefit:*

Managing extremely dangerous people is labour intensive and expensive. It is right for ministers to examine the potential costs and benefits of significant investment into managing a relative few very dangerous prisoners. This is particularly the case when it comes to competing priorities such as new build prisons. However, as I have described in this report, the impact of a fatality if a prison officer is murdered by a terrorist is potentially huge and increasing to a probability if nothing is done to clamp down on what amounts to terrorist ambushes within a limited but lethal prison insurgency. Moreover, stress related illness by staff exposed to extraordinary and unprecedented levels of violence is at a rate of 40% of the total of 252,000 days lost last year for all reasons including assaults. An investment in their safety would make significant inroads into a sickness and staff replacement/overtime costs. Improving officer safety, boosts retention, improves confidence and over time would pay for any initial upfront costs detailed in this report.

### 2. *'Supermax' prisons*

There has been much talk of a supermax prison for terrorist offenders being the solution to current woes. Much of this has been based on a model of custody used in the ADX Supermax federal facility in Florence, Colorado. There prisoners endure almost total sensory isolation for years on end. It has been described as 'a clean version of hell.' Building such a facility would be

exceptionally expensive. Staffing it would be highly difficult and the conditions would certainly contravene both the European Convention on Human Rights and various international treaties we are part of including the UN standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners (The Mandela Rules). Moreover, we have had a 'supermax' prison in HMP Maze outside Belfast, now closed, which, during the Troubles was the biggest terrorist jail in western Europe. I worked there operationally. It was also the site of the biggest jailbreak in UK history in 1983. The two factors are related.

I am not convinced that we would be able to staff such a facility and the concentration of terrorists would magnify the risks of conditioning and subversion to such an extent serious violence would be inevitable. We should stick to a dispersal model for most terrorist prisoners within the high security estate with targeted alternatives such as separation for radicalisers. However, we absolutely must have new, bespoke high control capacity for the most subversive *and* violent 'rock star' ideologues as a signal of intent and a deterrent. This bespoke capacity will not only be cheaper than a separate prison, but it will also properly restore the balance of humanity and staff safety. In time this model could be expanded for other exceptionally dangerous and manipulative prisoners.

### 3. *'Ratcheting' risks*

It is always worth critically examining the impact of any changes in the way high risk prisoners like terrorist offenders are managed. Unintended consequences and perverse repercussions can undermine the efficacy of well-intended initiatives. With this cohort of prisoners, there are three key

emerging ‘ratchet’ risks - consequences that might have the effect of making the environment for officers less rather than more safe:

- Prisoners gain access to improved personal protective equipment/weapons and use them against staff
- More punitive methods of control drive prisoners to be more violent and raise the stakes in their assaultive behaviour
- The traditional relationship model that maintaining a safe environment is built on is undermined by a new ‘control’ paradigm.

I have carefully considered all three of these ratchet risks. My conclusion based on the data, my expertise and the contributions of others to this report is that the prospect of an officer murdered on duty by a terrorist is far greater than any of these other risks if carefully controlled and regulated. The prisoners in the cohort I am most concerned about- ideologues who still want to kill – are already focused on this objective. Further controls on their behaviour as suggested in the previous section would provide a significant net reduction in harm. This should not be delayed by any more straw men objections. For example, calculation that says officers will only be stabbed in the head or neck if their torso was protected, for example, is not supported by *any* research evidence I have found. This view was advanced by the acting chief of HMPPS in his address to delegates at the 2025 Prison Officers Association conference.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05aXiR7WCzU> 30.02 onwards

Perhaps the biggest objection to these suggestions will come from those opposed to the prospect of officers armed inside a prison. I need to be absolutely clear about this. I am not advocating routinely armed prison officers walking the landings carrying lethal weapons. That would be absurd and extraordinarily risky. What I believe the evidence of threat vectors, intent, escalation and crucially external threat response times dictates is the location of a greater degree of less lethal alternatives *and* lethal weapons within the prison to be used as a last resort by specially trained tactical response officers. All prison officers acting as such are warranted constables with all the powers, authority, protection and privileges of a constable

While we must always prioritise de-escalation and relationships as a means of control, it is naïve in the extreme given the escalating lethality of the threat to staff to dismiss this innovation out of hand.

