

**THE RT HON SIR MICHAEL FALLON MP**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA**

Speech  
6<sup>th</sup> March 2018

**The Millennial Terrorist**

It is a pleasure to be here to honour those helping in the fight against terror, and I look forward to presenting the winners with their awards soon.

This ceremony is timely.

The terror attack on Westminster took place a year ago this month.

Four more terror attacks have followed – 4 Islamist and 1 extreme right wing – including the cowardly attack in Manchester.

These five attacks left 36 dead and hundreds injured.

**Changing Threat**

Reflecting on these gutless acts of terror, it's clear to see that the threat from terrorists has dramatically changed.

During my time as Defence Secretary, I saw the shift from regionally defined groups

– organised and self-regulating –

to a blurred mix of dispersed amateur and professional cells in the name of Daesh, and a rise in lower-level attacks

– simple in their nature but brutal in their execution.

Year-long plots...

... coordinated by well-funded state-based terror cells and their careful network of plans and backup plans have now been complemented by crude, sudden killing.

Knives and vans can now be as deadly as bombs:

Easier to obtain,  
Easier to conceal,  
And don't require training.

Even the Manchester terrorist's rudimentary bomb was triggered in the venue entrance  
... long before its intended detonation inside the concert hall.

As the characteristics of the terrorist threat change to more amateur methods, the range of targets increases.

Icons such as the Twin Towers or an Israeli airliner are not the only objectives.

Everyone is now a legitimate target under the Islamist terrorist's warped dogma.

This slapdash form of terrorism empowers those who do not need training;

... only a rented car, a knife and a twisted determination to kill.

## **Cyber**

The spread of extremist ideology has proliferated as online communication has expanded and more people retreat into personalised echo chambers on phones, tablets and computers.

As Defence Secretary, I saw hundreds of pages of online content  
...designed by terrorists to incite violence in our communities and spread fear in our society.

Daesh create thousands of new social media accounts every month,

And three-quarters of their propaganda is shared within the first three hours

...faster than in 2016.

The Westminster terrorist watched extremist videos and hid behind encrypted messages to communicate with other terrorists.

Amateur though it may be, online Daesh propaganda is scarily effective.

It preys on the vulnerable and disenfranchised...

– those who live out their days online, emboldened by their anonymity.

Often, it's our children – in their teens and twenties – who are most at risk to online radicalisation.

Think back to the case of the Blackburn boy who plotted with an Australian jihadist over the internet to behead police officers at an Anzac Day parade:

He was just 14 years old.

But he had been groomed by extremists online, where he was alone and talking with strangers.

The Millennial Terrorist is the new threat of our time.

Our children are surrounded by tech from a young age:

Through Facebook, Snapchat and WhatsApp

...they can talk to friends

...share photographs of family holidays

...and contact Daesh operatives.

Through Instagram, Tumblr and Twitter

...they can follow their favourite celebrities

...campaign for good causes

...and share extremist content.

And through YouTube

...they can learn how to skip

...how to cook an omelette

...and how to make a bomb.

The internet allows adult extremists to carve out spaces in which they are free from criticism, reason or debate.

From there, they attract young, normal and impressionable people with the easy answers of terrorism in an age of instant-gratification

...where they are ensnared in a quiet web of cultish terror

...away from their parents

...away from reality.

This is the challenge we face:

Extremists cannot easily be exposed for their idiocy and danger online as they can be in political debate or by mainstream media.

90 per cent of organised terrorism on the internet takes place via social media,

And for the terrorist leaders, communication is 90 per cent of the struggle.

## **Prevention**

The kinds of amateur attacks that we saw in Westminster and at Borough Market are, at present, almost impossible to prevent.

End-to-end encryption makes communication interception tough.

We therefore need to plug the spiralling black hole of ideology at its source.

That means taking the fight online

...with better regulation and access to encrypted messages when warranted.

We need to send a clear message that what is illegal offline has to be illegal online.

We need to be much tougher with digital companies.

If you're harbouring terrorists online, you should not be allowed to operate in the UK.

No measly fines.

No second chances.

No excuses anymore.

They need to help root out this poisonous stain that is slowly spreading through society via their social media platforms.

Digital giants have a duty to help our security forces tackle the aggressors behind the algorithms; the enemies behind the encryption.

These companies are hiding behind the pretence that they are not publishers: on the contrary, they have created large ungoverned spaces in which extremism flourishes.

It's bad enough that some of them don't pay proper taxes in the UK: what's shocking is that they could be doing much more to help our security services forestall these deadly attacks.

## **Conclusion**

But I'm optimistic about Britain's capability to defeat terror in all forms.

Why?

Because as well as our hugely competent security services **I** believe in British common sense and in British brainpower:

Common sense of the public not to be taken in by fake or insidious material; to be vigilant of public danger; to take responsibility for their children.

But brainpower too – the cutting edge technology of often small British companies, many of them here today, coming up with innovative ways of helping government tackle these new, fast-moving threats.

I am proud with you, to honour them all.