Beat: News

MI5 Director General Andrew Parker gave a speech to the BfV Symposium

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USPA NEWS - Director General Andrew Parker Speech to BfV Symposium

MI5 Director General Andrew Parker gave a speech to the BfV Symposium in Berlin on 14 May 2018.

Introduction

Good morning. I´m delighted to be with you here today. I´ve worked with my close colleague and friend Dr Hans-Georg MaaÃŸen for many years. BfV are a vital partner for MI5 at the heart of a sophisticated European intelligence network. And Germany is of course at the heart of Europe. It therefore feels right that I´m here in Berlin as the place to give the first public speech outside the UK by a serving Director-General of MI5. Thank you, Hans-Georg, for the invitation.

Today I want to offer my reflections on the shared hybrid threats that European nations face from hostile activity by states but also from international terrorism. I also want to talk about how a joined-up European security response is critical to tackling these threats, and I want to give a flavour of what this response looks like today "" I believe the phrase in German is "˜Zusammenarbeit´. Delivering success together where delivering it alone is simply not possible.

The threat

Hostile activity by states

So, first, the current threat landscape. We are living in a period where Europe faces sustained hostile activity from certain states. Let me be clear, by this I don´t just mean spies spying on spies; spies following each other round at the dead of night. I mean deliberate and targeted malign activity intended to undermine our free, open and democratic societies; to destabilise the international rules-based system that underpins our stability, security and prosperity.

Chief protagonist among these hostile actors is the Russian Government. Notice I don´t say Russia. The United Kingdom has the utmost admiration and respect for the people of Russia; for their proud culture and long history. I myself studied the Russian language at school. We have no desire to escalate tensions, or to go back to the tense and dangerous times that Europe lived through during the Cold War "" Berlin more than most cities knows what that felt like.

One of the Kremlin´s central and entirely admirable aims is to build Russian greatness on the world stage. There are ways open for it to do so as part of the rules-based order. But its repeated choices have been to pursue that aim through aggressive and pernicious actions by its military and intelligence services. Instead of becoming a respected great nation it risks becoming a more isolated pariah.

We want cordial relations with the Russian government and for it to live up to its international obligations, taking its place on the world stage in the rules-based order. We look forward to that day. But our respect for Russia´s people and desire for a productive relationship cannot and must not stop us from calling out and pushing back on the Kremlin´s flagrant breaches of international rules.

Leaders across Europe and the world have taken a stand. They have sent a strong message that the first use of a nerve agent in Europe since the Second World War, and supporting and protecting the Syrian regime´s horrific use of chemical weapons to kill and maim civilians, is simply not acceptable.

The Russian government´s invasion of Crimea "" taking territory from another sovereign European country by force "" is not acceptable. Seeking to interfere with legitimate democratic elections in the US and in France is not acceptable. Attempting to mount a coup against the elected government of Montenegro is not acceptable. And neither is unleashing cyber-attacks against our countries and institutions, as they have done against the Bundestag here in Berlin.

Our adversaries have proven to be early adopters of technology "" particularly internet technologies: those extraordinary and exciting advances that increasingly power our economies and our lives. Age-old attempts at covert influence and propaganda have been supercharged in online disinformation, which can be churned out at massive scale and little cost. The aim is to sow doubt by flat denials of the truth, to dilute truth with falsehood, divert attention to fake stories, and do all they can to divide alliances. Bare-faced lying seems to be the default mode, coupled with ridicule of critics.

The Russian state´s now well-practised doctrine of blending media manipulation, social media disinformation and distortion with new and old forms of espionage, high levels of cyber attacks, military force and criminal thuggery is what is meant these days by the label "˜hybrid threats´.

We saw this approach again in Salisbury. The reckless attempted assassination of Sergey Skripal using a highly lethal nerve agent put numerous lives at risk. It was only through near-miraculous medical intervention that his and his daughter´s lives were saved and wider preventive action taken.

The attack was swiftly followed by a cynical and distasteful information campaign to sow confusion and doubt. The Russian state´s media outlets and representatives have propagated at least 30 different so-called explanations in their efforts to mislead the world and their own people. One media survey found that two-thirds of social media output at the peak of the Salisbury story came from Russian government-controlled accounts. Whatever nonsense they conjure up, the case is clear.

Similarly, after the sickening attack on the people of Douma the Russian state machine pumped out a torrent of lies aimed at undermining international consensus and well established systems to protect innocent civilians from chemical weapons.

Our democracies, our societies and our bonds of partnership are strong. But we must not be complacent about the longer-term potential impact of this activity "" whether by those in Russia, Iran or beyond "" on the international rules-based order that supports our security and prosperity. We are all used to living in free societies with democratic governments that operate on a strong foundation of openness, integrity and accountability within a system of law with strong checks and balances. That is the context for MI5 too. But all of that is entirely alien territory to our adversaries.

Terrorism

In parallel to this state-level hostile activity, Europe faces an intense, unrelenting and multidimensional international terrorist threat. Daesh continues to pose the most acute threat, but Al Qaeda and other Islamist terrorist groups haven´t gone away. With the police we are also actively monitoring the trajectory of extreme right-wing terrorism. As we see instances of it rearing its ugly head our response is equally firm.

The sickening impact, shock and disgust of terrorism has been felt right across Europe. Just two days ago Paris saw another brutal attack. Since 2016 there have been 45 attacks across 7 countries: the UK, Germany, France, Belgium, Spain, Sweden and Finland. This of course includes the despicable attack on 19 December 2016 right here in Berlin, in which 12 people lost their lives. It also includes the disgusting attacks the British public suffered last year.

Next week marks one year since the barbaric attack on the Manchester Arena. 22 people lost their lives, leaving many more with life-changing physical and psychological injuries.

These people, many who were young children, were simply enjoying an evening out at a concert with their families and friends.

The 13 people killed in two attacks in London last year were just going about their everyday lives. They were from the UK, Spain, France, the United States, Australia, Canada and Romania. Many of those indiscriminately killed and injured were citizens of our flourishing and diverse European democracies.

We remember those who lost their lives in these senseless attacks across Europe. I know that MI5 and our European partners feel the

impact personally as well as professionally: it re-doubles our shared determination to defeat this menace, and the threat it poses to our societies.

This unprecedented tempo of attack planning shows no signs of abating. In the UK alone, since the Westminster attack in March 2017, with the police we have thwarted a further 12 Islamist terror plots "" 12 occasions where we have good reason to believe a terrorist attack would otherwise have taken place. That brings the total number of disrupted attacks in the UK since 2013 to 25.

This upshift in threat is driven by Daesh´s murderous ideology. Whilst Daesh has now lost its false Caliphate in its strongholds in Syria and Iraq, tackling the group as a movement will require sustained international focus for years to come. As I speak today, they are seeking to regroup and the threat will persist.

I describe the terrorist threat as three dimensional because plots germinate at home, abroad and online. Terrorism operates across those three spaces. Online Daesh pumps out its vile propaganda and practical instruction. Daesh´s twisted ideology continues to influence vulnerable and violent individuals across Europe and beyond to use crude but deadly methods to kill: from stabbings to vehicle attacks; from bullets to bombs; from hard to soft targets. In Syria and other spaces of low or no governance Daesh still aspires to generate and direct devastating and more complex attacks.

Terrorism is not new. But, amplified and accelerated by the reach and tempo of technological change, it is now more global, more multi-dimensional and of a different order of pace and intensity than Hans-Georg and I have seen in our long careers.

Response

I´ve so far painted a rather bleak picture. Maybe that´s an occupational hazard for people in the jobs that Hans-Georg and I do.

The threat landscape I have described is shared across the nations of Europe, and that is how we address it. The picture is dynamic and can be dazzlingly complex: all the time shifting form and flitting across borders; straddling the cyber and real worlds; part in light, and part inhabiting the murky corners of the internet.

Our talented police and intelligence colleagues across Europe who combat the scourges of child sexual exploitation, serious and organised crime and modern slavery are working against a similar canvas.

It may therefore come as a surprise to you when I say that I´m confident about our ability to tackle these new shapes of threat. I´m confident because of the commitment, talent and skill of the people working against these threats. I´m confident because of the strength and resilience of our democratic systems. And the resilience of our societies and the support of the public.

I´m also confident because of the robust framework of law, oversight, transparency and accountability that UK Agencies work within and the values we share with European partners.

But I´m particularly confident because I firmly believe in the power of partnerships. By thickening existing partnerships, developing new ones and working in new and different ways we can find and stop the vast majority of those seeking to do us harm.

Partnerships are at the heart of our work. In the UK, MI5 is very closely partnered with SIS, GCHQ, the police, and the military across all our work.

We are working ever more closely and innovatively with both central government and local agencies, whether calling out hostile propaganda by malign states or supporting individuals at risk of being radicalised to the point of violence.

Our partnerships with industry and academia are developing in truly exciting ways, as we together build capabilities and solve intelligence challenges at the vanguard of science and technology.

Our relationships with social media companies and communications service providers remain as critical as ever. We are committed to working with them as they look to fulfil their ethical responsibility to prevent terrorist, hostile state and criminal exploitation of internet

carried services: shining a light on terrorists and paedophiles; taking down bomb making instructions; warning the authorities about attempts to acquire explosives precursors.

This matters and there is much more to do.

And, thinking of those we depend on, I want also to pay tribute to the extraordinary, brave and skilled help we are given by members of the public who work with us as agents "" human sources "" to whom we owe so much of our success in protecting society and I thank them for their commitment and courage.

Today, standing in Berlin, reflecting on the acute shared security threats we face, it is of course our vital European partnerships that are at the front of my mind. For many years we and partner services like the BfV have worked to develop and invest in strong intelligence and security partnerships across Europe: bilaterally, multilaterally and with EU institutions. In today´s uncertain world, we all need that shared strength more than ever. As Prime Minister Theresa May said in Florence: these are challenges to our shared European interests and values that we can only solve in partnership. Our democracy, prosperity and security all depend on collaboration to address such threats.

Europe

I believe there has been too little public explanation of the depth and quality of intelligence and security cooperation within Europe. That is understandable because so much of it is necessarily secret. But there is much we can say. I´ve heard our European partnerships characterised dismissively in terms of "˜simple´ intelligence sharing: swapping a document here, a phone number or email address there, and passing a tip-off where necessary. But this totally misrepresents the advanced arrangements, systems and structures that European security services have together built, and that we need to continue to build on to keep pace with shifting threats and technologies.

European intelligence cooperation today is simply unrecognisable to what it looked like even five years ago "" the vast majority of my intelligence officers will spend huge chunks of their careers working collaboratively with European colleagues. I´d like to tell you more about what this collaboration actually looks like.

Bilateral cooperation means building on our shared values and respect for the law, so that together we make the best use of each other´s knowledge, skills and capabilities to keep our countries safe. I can say confidently that this has prevented loss of life in Europe.

It means that we align our strategic interests and concentrate effort on the most pressing risks and challenges. It means my senior team engaged in substantial work programmes with our European counterparts. On data. On capabilities. On policy and compliance.

It means welcoming some European colleagues to MI5´s intelligence officer training programme and sharing our methods and practices, and MI5 learning from exchanges with our European colleagues. It means working together jointly on investigations and collection operations to deliver results and disruptions. Indeed, we have another session here in Germany soon. Together we will be building on recent joint work on running and protecting the human sources who risk their lives to protect us. And we will be continuing to learn from each other´s methodology on spotting so-called "˜lone actors´.

These partnerships also mean being there for each other when times are tough. I was overwhelmed by the generous support that poured in from my European colleagues following the terrorist attacks in the UK last year. And it wasn´t just sentiment: BfV, and others, made a material contribution to supporting our investigation into the Manchester attack. In the same vein, I have willingly sent MI5 officers to other European cities to support our friends following terrorist attacks.

Our multilateral operational collaboration is also increasingly critical to operational success, particularly through the Counter Terrorism Group, or CTG, which is made up of 30 European domestic security services. This is the largest multinational CT intelligence enterprise in the world, with thousands of exchanges on advanced secure networks every week.

This multilateral cooperation doesn´t look like frosty gatherings of strangers reading out national positions at each other. It looks like intelligence officers from 30 countries permanently co-located together as a joint operational platform.

It looks like real-time intelligence sharing and agreeing joint tactics to combine each country´s resources to best effect.

It looks like professionals from all across Europe who know and trust each other working together and sharing data on shared systems about terrorist fighters dispersing from Syria. It looks like developing new ways to run and de-conflict human intelligence operations together. It looks like attacks thwarted and terrorists arrested who could not otherwise have been found in time by any one nation alone.

This highly developed national security collaboration largely takes place outside EU structures, and doesn´t depend on membership. So, at the primary level, Brexit makes no difference to the strength of those partnerships. But that is not the whole story. National level and multilateral security work between European nations draws strength from a range of important EU systems and arrangements.

Exchanging data through EU law enforcement databases, and Passenger Name Records on the travel of terrorist subjects across Europe provides vital intelligence. Practical cooperation to efficiently arrest and surrender terrorists and criminals using the European Arrest Warrant enables the swift delivery of justice. And our exchanges with EUROPOL and other EU bodies, where the UK is a major contributor, make us all safer.

The UK is of course leaving the EU and our relationship with the EU must change as a result, but as our government has said many times, we are not leaving Europe. In the Prime Minister´s speech in Munich she signalled the government´s intent to sustain this mutually beneficial cooperation and develop a UK-EU treaty on internal security, building on our unique history of partnership.

MI5 “” and my SIS and GCHQ colleagues “” are absolutely and necessarily committed to continuing to develop our contribution to collective security. That is what the threats require. We must not risk the loss of mutual capability or weakening of collective effort across Europe. I don´t do politics, but it is of course political agreements, laws and treaties that permit or constrain what we can do together as agencies protecting our nations and Europe. So it´s as a security practitioner that I hope for a comprehensive and enduring agreement that tackles obstacles and allows the professionals to get on with the job together. We owe that to all our citizens across Europe.

Conclusion

I started out today by describing the shifting threat landscape and the impact of technology: an intense and diverse terrorist threat with plots that can come at us more quickly and which can be harder to detect; cyber threats that defy geography; and how the Russian state and others seek to undermine the international rules-based order that underpins our security.

Powerful partnerships are critical to facing down these threats and to keeping us all safe. I hope that I´ve given you a flavour of what these partnerships look like today, but also why we need to keep building and strengthening them. I´ve said that I´m optimistic about the future. And that is true. But I don´t underestimate the challenge. It requires sustained collective investment of effort, grit and political will.

But it is only through partnerships that we succeed. It´s by working with partners in Europe and beyond that we find the intelligence fragments we each need to get ahead of terrorist attacks. And it´s by working together that we deal with attacks by the Russian government and other states, and shine a light through the fog of lies, half-truths and obfuscation that pours out of their propaganda machines.

So, if I may, I´d like to thank not just my good friend and colleague Hans-Georg, but all of my European counterparts “” the French, Dutch, Scandinavian, Baltic, western, southern, central and eastern European services “” too many to name “” and all the myriad of partners we work with across Europe to keep all of our citizens safe, I say thank you to you all.

If my 35 years in intelligence work has taught me anything, it is to be extremely cautious in making predictions about the future. But I can say with absolute certainty that as old security threats evolve and new ones emerge, we remain unwaveringly and absolutely committed to working together with European partners to protect our collective security in these dangerous times.

The security challenges are stark. We will tackle them together.

Thank you.
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