



Intelligence and Security
Committee

Inquiry into Intelligence,
Assessments and Advice
prior to the Terrorist Bombings
on Bali 12 October 2002

Chairman:
The Rt. Hon. Ann Taylor, MP



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Presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister
by Command of Her Majesty
DECEMBER 2002

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From the Chairman: The Rt. Hon. Ann Taylor, MP

**INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY
COMMITTEE**

70 Whitehall
London SW1A 2AS

ISC 468/2002

10 December 2002

The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP
10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AL

Dear Tony,

On 12 October 2002 on the Indonesian Island of Bali, over 190 innocent people were killed in a terrorist attack that shocked the world. The Intelligence and Security Committee has examined all the intelligence, assessments and advice available prior to the attack and I enclose with this letter a Report, which covers the findings of our Inquiry. We would be grateful if you could publish the Report as soon as possible.

The Committee has copied both this letter and the Report to the Foreign and Home Secretaries.

*Yours sincerely,
Ann Taylor*

ANN TAYLOR

INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE

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Introduction

1. On Saturday 12 October 2002 a number of explosive devices were detonated on the Indonesian Island of Bali. One of these exploded outside a packed nightclub and more than 190 people were killed, including 24 Britons, and many more injured. The majority of those killed were Australians although nationals from some 20 countries died. These attacks were conducted by terrorists with the purpose of causing mass casualties to Westerners. Investigations are being carried out in Indonesia and the authorities there have made a number of arrests.

2. The Intelligence and Security Committee would like to take this opportunity to add its condolences to the families and friends of the people killed and sympathy to those injured in this terrible terrorist attack.

3. On Monday 21 October 2002, the Foreign Secretary said in the House of Commons¹:

“I do not want the relatives of those who died in this atrocity, nor those injured, to have nagging anxieties about whether different judgements should have been made. The Intelligence and Security Committee was established by Act of Parliament to scrutinise the work of the intelligence agencies. Through the Prime Minister, it reports regularly to Parliament. It is made up of senior members of both Houses of Parliament. It happens that the ISC is at present in Canberra on a long planned trip. This morning I spoke to the Chairman of the ISC, my Rt. Hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury, who had just arrived there. I told her that I had asked the Intelligence Co-ordinator in the Cabinet Office to ensure that all intelligence was made available to the Committee. The ISC will of course consider this and then reach their own conclusions upon it.”

The Report

4. We have examined the intelligence, the assessments and the travel advice available prior to 12 October 2002, and looked at the process by which intelligence and assessments are converted to advice to travellers. We have decided to produce an unclassified report to ensure that the maximum information is made available to those injured, the relatives of those murdered in the bombing and other interested parties. One consequence of this decision is that, while we can describe the available intelligence in general terms, we cannot publish the exact intelligence because the Intelligence Agencies' sources and techniques must be protected.

5. In producing this report we looked at the intelligence and assessments. The Committee also took evidence from the Foreign and Home Secretaries; the Heads of the

1. *Hansard 21 October 2002: Column 23.*

Security Service, Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ); the Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator and the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) from the Cabinet Office; officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and representatives of the travel industry. We also discussed the available intelligence with the authorities and our counter-parts in Australia and the United States of America. Additionally, the Australian Inspector-General for Intelligence and Security, whom we met in Canberra, is producing a report, at the request of the Australian Prime Minister, on the intelligence available to the Australian authorities prior to the bombings.

6. Our inquiry focused on six main questions:
 - a. Was terrorism in Indonesia a sufficiently high intelligence collection priority?
 - b. Was any intelligence overlooked?
 - c. Did the Security Service make the correct threat assessment on the available intelligence?
 - d. Is the current threat assessment system effective and adequate?
 - e. Did the FCO Travel Advice accurately reflect the Security Service assessment?
 - f. Is this advice effectively communicated to the public and the travel industry?

The Threat Assessment System

7. It is the task of our Intelligence and Security Agencies to collect secret intelligence of any potential threats to the United Kingdom and the security of its citizens. So far as the collection of secret intelligence overseas is concerned, Ministers approve the requirements and priorities. These requirements are then met by the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) operating under authorisations and warrants, which are approved by Ministers².

8. It is the responsibility of the Counter-Terrorism Analysis Centre in the Security Service to collate this secret intelligence, together with any other intelligence and open-source material they have collected, and produce threat assessments. These assessments are classified and known as Security Service Threat Reports or Security Service Reports. They are distributed to the relevant government departments including the MoD and FCO, as well as diplomatic missions overseas. Such reports are issued whenever significant and important intelligence is received.

2. *Further details on the process of tasking and collecting secret intelligence can be found in the Government booklet *The National Intelligence Machinery* and in the ISC's Annual Report 2001-2002 Cm 5542.*

9. These Reports assess the level of threat to British interests, both diplomatic and general, in a given country or region. The level of threat is based on a ranking system, ranging from IMMEDIATE to NEGLIGIBLE, depending on the severity of the threat and likelihood of attack. The Security Service does not consult Ministers when threat assessments are produced nor when the level of threat to British interests rises. Full details of the threat levels are given below:

Security Service Threat Levels

Level 1: IMMEDIATE

Specific Intelligence shows that the target is at a **VERY HIGH** level of threat, and that an attack is **IMMEDIATE**.

Level 2: HIGH

Specific intelligence, recent events or a target's particular circumstances indicate that it is a **HIGH** priority target, and is at a **HIGH** level of threat.

Level 3: SIGNIFICANT

Recent general intelligence on terrorist activity, the overall security and political climate, or the target's individual circumstances, indicate that it is likely to be a priority target, and that there is a **SIGNIFICANT** level of threat.

Level 4: MODERATE

A target's circumstances indicate that there is the potential for it to be singled out for attack, and there is a **MODERATE** level of threat.

Level 5: LOW

There is nothing to indicate that a target would be singled out for attack. There is a **LOW** level of threat.

Level 6: NEGLIGIBLE

A target would be unlikely to be attacked. There is a **NEGLIGIBLE** level of threat.

10. The JIC³, which meets weekly, is responsible for providing Ministers and senior officials with regular intelligence assessments on a range of issues of immediate and long-term importance to national interests, primarily in the fields of security, defence and foreign affairs.

Was terrorism in Indonesia a sufficiently high intelligence collection priority?

11. International terrorism, like domestic terrorism, is a First Order of Priority for the Agencies and it has been for some considerable time. Intelligence reports on possible terrorist plans throughout the world arrive on a daily basis; some cover South East Asia. The Agencies produced a large number of intelligence reports on terrorism in Indonesia, which cover the various terrorist groups operating there and their links with Al Qaida (AQ). To put the work of the Agencies in context, the volume of intelligence available since 11 September has increased by a factor of at least ten. During the period in question, they received at least 150 separate reports a day relating to terrorist activity in more than twenty different countries, including Indonesia and the UK itself. This intelligence comes from a range of sources of varying reliability, and difficult judgements about follow up action have to be made in each case. **The Committee believes that sufficient priority was given to the collection of intelligence, although we repeat the comments in our last Annual Report⁴ that the Agencies are still growing following the increased funding they received after the 11 September attacks and it takes time for the additional resources to be deployed to maximum effect.**

12. The JIC produced a paper in May 2002 on International Terrorism in South East Asia. In it they reported an AQ presence in Indonesia and noted that, of the terrorist groups there, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) had the closest links to AQ. They also observed that JI was the most capable of the many terrorist groups in Indonesia and was a continuing threat to Western interests. The JIC concluded that AQ was likely to develop a local terrorist capability, probably based on JI, with the capacity to act more or less autonomously under the AQ umbrella.

13. We noted that the Indonesian authorities had not placed a high priority on dealing with terrorism. On 1 February 2002 the Security Service issued an assessment that there was a HIGH level of threat (level 2) of terrorist attacks on British diplomatic premises, whilst the threat to general British interests in Indonesia was SIGNIFICANT (level 3).

3. Further details on the Joint Intelligence Committee can be found in the Government booklet *The National Intelligence Machinery and in the ISC's Annual Report 2001-2002 Cm 5542.*

4. Cm 5542.

14. As part of our work we saw all intelligence reporting that was received by the Agencies in the months preceding the Bali attack, including some from foreign sources reporting on terrorist planning for possible attacks on American, British and other western interests, including diplomatic premises. Among other targets mentioned were tourists in a number of locations in Indonesia, including Bali and nightclubs in Jakarta.

15. The above intelligence reports, together with information on the failed grenade attack on an American diplomatic residence in Jakarta on 23 September, were analysed and drawn upon by the Security Service. A Security Service Report was issued on 9 October 2002, which concluded that there was no need to change the threat assessment to either diplomatic or general British interests in Indonesia. However, it did conclude that attacks could start at any time.

Was any intelligence overlooked?

16. **The Committee, which had access to all the intelligence, has not seen any intelligence that described or directly related to any form of terrorist attack on Bali on or around 12 October 2002. We were assured that the UK, Australia and the USA share intelligence on terrorism in South East Asia.**

17. **We therefore conclude that on the available intelligence there was no action that the UK or its allies could have taken to prevent the attacks.**

Did the Security Service make the correct threat assessment on the available intelligence?

18. The Committee has established that:

- a. On 1 February 2002 the Security Service assessed the threat, in Indonesia, to diplomatic interests to be HIGH and the threat to general British interests to be SIGNIFICANT.
- b. The JIC reported in May 2002 that there was an AQ presence in Indonesia, along with many other terrorist groups, which was likely to develop a local, probably JI based, terrorist capability.
- c. The intelligence from September 2002 reported that attacks on US and UK interests, including tourists in nightclubs, were being discussed by terrorists.
- d. There was a failed grenade attack on 23 September on a American diplomatic residence.

None of these developments caused the Security Service to revise the threat level to general British interests in Indonesia.

19. These developments need to be considered together with both the public reluctance of the Indonesian authorities to deal with terrorism and the fact that the terrorist may be likely to attack a less well protected target in order to ensure success (target displacement effect). We therefore conclude that the threat assessments to general British interests ought to have been raised to HIGH. A threat existed to western tourists in Indonesia; the largest concentration of western tourists there is on Bali; and they gather in large numbers in a limited number of nightclubs. These facts should have been recognised by the Security Service as pointing to a potential target.

20. **This was a serious misjudgement and meant that the Security Service did not assess the threat correctly and, therefore, raise the level of threat to HIGH. However, we repeat that, on the available intelligence, we do not believe that the attack could have been prevented.**

21. **Notwithstanding that the Security Service orally briefed the FCO on the 4 October, the fact that the Security Service took over two weeks after the failed grenade attack on an American diplomatic property to issue a Security Service Report on Indonesia is also a matter of concern.**

Is the current threat assessment system effect and adequate?

22. The Committee has examined the current threat assessment system, which has been described earlier in this report. **We believe that the Security Service's system, with its six levels, does not provide sufficiently clear, differentiated definitions of the threat level. They need to be of greater use to customer departments.** It is perhaps useful to summarise this section in the words of a FCO official "Threat levels are imperfect but they are not useless".

23. The Committee is concerned that in defining the threats to British diplomatic premises and general British interests, the impact of poor or limited anti-terrorist policing in a country or the target displacement effect may not be taken sufficiently into consideration. Additionally, we do not believe that the current threat levels take into account the general and well-established threat to British interests world-wide from AQ and allied groups. This means that for the countries that already have a Security Service threat level of HIGH, as a result of this world-wide threat, an additional or specific threat to that country cannot be highlighted by changing the level.

24. **We were told that, before the Bali bombing, the Security Service was examining the threat assessment system to see if any improvements could be made. We welcome this review and believe that improvements can be made to the threat assessment system and the speed with which assessments are passed to customer departments. We suggest that there needs to be at least another level between**

SIGNIFICANT and HIGH, which would allow the threat to be better described for the recipients of the Security Service assessments.

FCO Travel Advice

25. Within the FCO the relevant Geographic Department is responsible for producing advice to travellers. Security Service reports are sent to the FCO where the Geographic Department, Counter-Terrorism Policy Department and the Consular Division, along with the missions in the relevant countries, use them to produce FCO Travel Advice. Advice produced by other countries can be taken into consideration, but the final product is essentially focused on British interests.

26. The FCO told the Committee that if the threat level for a particular country is raised by the Security Service, Ministers are informed and the FCO Travel Advice reviewed. It is also routinely reviewed every 3 months. However, the FCO would normally be dependent on the receipt of a Security Service Threat Assessment before the advice is revised.

27. The FCO Travel Advice is available on the Internet, CEEFAX and through travel agents. We were told that the Advice is designed to inform travellers to and residents in the country of issues, such as crime and security threats, natural disasters or other events, so that individuals can take any necessary precautions or avoid travel in the area/region highlighted. Additional, more localised advice can be sent by e-mail directly from missions to individuals who have requested this service. This was the case in Indonesia.

28. The Committee is not clear how many travellers actually read the FCO Travel Advice prior to embarking on a trip nor do we know how many people actually follow it. The FCO stated that some 650,000 hits/month are made on the Internet based Travel Advice and that the FCO's "Know before you go" campaign was increasing the awareness. The Committee is also not clear how people once they are in a country can be advised that the FCO Travel Advice has changed, although we were told that Travel Agents and Operators inform their customers.

29. The Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) and the Federation of Travel Operators (FTO) told the Committee that it is their policy that if the FCO Travel Advice requests tourists and residents to "take care" then that is drawn specifically to the travellers' attention whilst booking or before travel. ABTA and FTO also told the Committee that, when the FCO Travel Advice changes to recommend that "all non-essential travel is avoided", arrangements are made to evacuate all their customers from the area affected. ABTA and FTO communicate with their members to make sure they are aware of important changes in the FCO Travel Advice.

Did the FCO Travel Advice accurately reflect the Security Service assessment?

30. The FCO Travel Advice for Indonesia prior to 12 October 2002 was issued on 27 August 2002. (The Foreign Secretary has placed copies of all these documents in the Libraries of the Houses of Parliament.) The key sections read:

“Most visits to Indonesia are trouble free. However, particular care is needed for visits to some regions and others should be avoided altogether as specified below. (Bali was not on this list)

•••

“Following military action in Afghanistan, there have been protests in some cities in Indonesia. These may recur and visitors and residents should be careful.

•••

SAFETY AND SECURITY

“After a relatively calm period, three bombs exploded in Jakarta in June/July. Two other bombs were found in the city but were defused. Given the possibility of further incidents, and in light of the global terrorist threat, strange vehicles parked near residences, or unattended packages should be treated with great caution and reported to the authorities.

“Demonstrations are part of the Indonesian political culture. Most are peaceful and good-humoured but it is best to avoid large crowds on the streets.

•••

TERRORISM

“After the terrorist attacks in the US, there is a heightened terrorist threat to US and UK interests worldwide. Precautions that individuals can take include the following:

- *keep cars locked at all times and where possible secure in a garage when not in use;*
- *check underneath your vehicle before entering or using them, if they have been left in a publicly accessible location;*
- *vary routes and timings between the office and home, or for other regular destinations, as much as possible;*
- *take your handphone with you when you leave the office or home; and*
- *exercise extreme caution when answering the telephone at home. Do not volunteer information until you are sure of the identity of the caller.*

“We believe that Indonesia is one of a number of countries where there is an increased threat to visible British institutions and organisations from global terrorism. Visitors should be extra vigilant in public places.

•••

BALI AND LOMBOK

“Crime in Bali and Lombok remains relatively low but residents and tourists alike should take the same precautions as they would in any major city.”

31. This advice was not revised after the failed grenade attack on 23 September 2002. However, a revised e-mail advice was sent to subscribers in Indonesia on 27 September 2002, which, in addition to the above advice, had the following in bold:

“A grenade exploded in a central Jakarta residential area very close to a US Embassy home early on 23 September. The police investigation continues. While the investigation continues we advise UK citizens to be more circumspect than usual, especially in the evenings.”

32. A further e-mail advice was sent out to subscribers on 3 October 2002, which now stated that:

“In the run up to the fasting month which starts around 5 November, activists are more likely to show their disapproval of many of the bars and night-clubs which are popular with Indonesians and foreigners, especially on Friday nights. British citizens should avoid these establishments.

SECURITY ADVICE

“Several bombs have exploded in Jakarta this year; the latest incident was a grenade that exploded in a residential area very close to a US Embassy home early on 23 September. The police investigation continues. Given the possibility of further incidents, and in light of the global terrorist threat, strange vehicles parked near residences, or unattended packages should be treated with great caution and reported to the authorities. UK citizens should be more circumspect than usual, especially in the evenings.”

33. The FCO received the Security Service threat assessment on 9 October and as the specific threat had not changed, they saw no need to revise the FCO Travel Advice issued on 27 August 2002 – although there was some discussion between the FCO and the Embassy in Jakarta. The FCO informed us that, had the threat to general British interests been raised to HIGH, they would then have taken action, consulted Ministers and strengthened the Travel Advice.

34. We believe that the contents of these e-mails ought to have been reflected in the FCO Travel Advice. **We conclude that the FCO Travel Advice did not accurately reflect the threat or recent developments, although it was proportional to the then current Security Service assessment.**

Is this advice effectively communicated to the public and the travel industry?

35. **We believe that the FCO Travel Advice is not well formatted and consequently it does not highlight the key points, particularly risks – they get lost in the complexity of the document. Routine language is recycled from edition to edition and contains elements of reassurance that produce a confused effect. The terrorist threat to British citizens is not clearly identified, nor are the sensible precautions that could be taken by them clearly described.**

36. As part of our work, the Committee examined the FCO Travel Advice issued on September 2001, prior to the terrorist attacks on the USA. This contained the following text:

“DESPITE THE AREAS OF INSTABILITY MENTIONED BELOW, MOST VISITS TO INDONESIA ARE TROUBLE-FREE, MOST OF THE MAIN TOURIST DESTINATIONS ARE UNAFFECTED. DAILY LIFE AND BUSINESS CONTINUE AS NORMAL. DEMONSTRATIONS ARE PART OF INDONESIAN POLITICAL CULTURE. MOST ARE PEACEFUL AND GOOD-HUMOURED BUT IT IS BEST TO AVOID LARGE CROWDS ON THE STREETS.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

“Indonesia’s change of president on 23 July in the end took place without violence and with very little disturbance. Business in the capital and the rest of the country has returned to normal.

“The US Government believes there is a heightened terrorist threat to US interests, including in Indonesia, at the moment. American citizens have been warned to maintain a high level of vigilance and to take steps to reduce their vulnerability. The organisations who comprise the biggest threat to the US regard the UK as secondary targets, so British citizens are also advised to be on their guard whilst going about their business, and to report any suspicious activities to the authorities.

“Bomb explosions in Jakarta and elsewhere last year claimed several dozen lives and injured many others. The most recent was on Wednesday 1 August in front of the Atrium Plaza shopping centre in central Jakarta, when a nail bomb exploded

injuring six people. In light of the terrorist threat and given the possibility of further incidents, strange vehicles parked near residences, or unattended packages should be treated with great caution and reported to the authorities.

•••

“There is no strong anti-foreigner sentiment at present and none directed at Europeans. But there have been attacks by extremists on nightclubs in Jakarta, with expatriates sometimes being a target. British nationals visiting bars and clubs should remain alert and be ready to leave at the first sign of trouble.

•••

TERRORISM

“The Christmas Eve bombings, following the 1 August 2000 explosion outside the Residence of the Philippine’s Ambassador and the September Stock Exchange bomb, mean that all bomb threats must be taken seriously, despite the invariable rash of hoaxes. Visitors should be extra vigilant in public places.

“We believe that Indonesia is one of a number of countries where there is an increased threat to British interests from global terrorism.

•••

BALI AND LOMBOK

“Crime in Bali and Lombok remains relatively low but residents and tourists alike should take the same precautions as they would in any major city.”

37. We believe that the pre 11 September 2001 FCO Travel Advice actually gives a clearer picture of the threat to British interests in Indonesia than the subsequent advice in August 2002, which does not describe the terrorist threat sufficiently starkly to draw readers’ attention to it.

38. It has also come to our attention that the security advice given to travellers may differ from that given to overseas residents on matters that are relevant to both groups. This needs to be made consistent.

39. There has been much comment about the different ways that other governments advise their travellers and overseas residents about threats. Some countries offer general warnings about travel. Others offer no advice at all. We think that it is appropriate for the FCO to issue advice based on all the information available, including timely threat assessments.

40. The format of the FCO Travel Advice has been revised following the 12 October 2002 attacks. **We believe that the whole issue of FCO Travel Advice, its purpose, target audience and presentation needs to be examined by the FCO as a matter of urgency.**

Conclusions and Recommendations

Was terrorism in Indonesia a sufficiently high intelligence collection priority?

41. The Committee believes that sufficient priority was given to the collection of intelligence, although we repeat the comments in our last Annual Report⁵ that the Agencies are still growing following the increased funding they received after the 11 September attacks and it takes time for the additional resources to be deployed to maximum effect.

Was any intelligence overlooked?

42. The Committee, which had access to all the intelligence, has not seen any intelligence that described or directly related to any form of terrorist attack on Bali on or around 12 October 2002. We were assured that the UK, Australia and the USA share intelligence on terrorism in South East Asia. We therefore conclude that on the available intelligence there was no action that the UK or its allies could have taken to prevent the attacks.

Did the Security Service make the correct threat assessment on the available intelligence?

43. During the period in question, the Agencies received at least 150 separate reports a day relating to terrorist activity in more than twenty different countries, including Indonesia and the UK itself. This intelligence comes from a range of sources of varying reliability, and difficult judgements about follow up action have to be made in each case. However, none of the developments or intelligence caused the Security Service to revise the threat level to general British interests in Indonesia. These, when considered together with both the public reluctance of the Indonesian authorities to deal with terrorism and the target displacement effect lead us to conclude that the threat assessments to general British interests ought to have been raised to HIGH.

44. This was a serious misjudgement and meant that the Security Service did not assess the threat correctly and, therefore, raise the level of threat to HIGH. However, we repeat that, on the available intelligence, we do not believe that the attack could have been prevented.

5. Cm 5542.

45. Notwithstanding that the Security Service orally briefed the FCO on the 4 October, the fact that the Security Service took over two weeks after the failed grenade attack on an American diplomatic property to issue a Security Service Report on Indonesia is also a matter of concern.

Is the current threat assessment system effective and adequate?

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Did the FCO Travel Advice accurately reflect the Security Service assessment?

48. We conclude that the FCO Travel Advice did not accurately reflect the threat or recent developments, although it was proportional to the then current Security Service assessment.

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