

UK citizens and terrorist organisations

I attended the Home Secretary's statement about UK citizens seeking to return from Syria and other terrorist hotspots earlier this week. He made clear the government's displeasure that some UK citizens had left the UK to support or actively participate in terrorist movements. He reminded them that they chose to go to countries or territories where the UK warned they would have no Embassy or Consular support and where the UK state could not help them if they got into trouble.

He reminded us that he has powers to cancel a UK citizen's passport and citizenship if they are dual nationals who have joined terrorist organisations or murderous activities. If a person is only a UK national he cannot make them stateless, but if they wish to return to the UK they will face investigation and prosecution for crimes they may have committed during their period in support of terrorists. He can also impose restrictions on their passport and travel plans.

I asked him to tell me how the UK authorities will investigate and prosecute. So far it is a small proportion of returners from Syria that have been prosecuted. He agreed that it is not easy gathering evidence and sifting the truthfulness of claims about what people may have done in a Syrian warzone. Given the mood in the Commons he was keen to say he would be investigating and seeking evidence, and could also legislate further where a sensible redefinition of the terrorist crime could help bring people to justice.

It is difficult to see how after the event the UK can satisfy itself about all the actions of citizens who deliberately put themselves in harms way and were probably on the side of a banned terrorist group that has threatened the UK as well as occupying parts of Syria. The government is working with allies we are told to try to collect more evidence as the conflict takes place, but this is still difficult where the UK is not involved on the ground in the war.

What do you think can and should be done? The UK state has every right to protect us from returners who have learned the crafts of terrorism and have ill intent towards us. It also needs to be fair to returners who were not terrorists and who may not harbour any evil towards us.