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Brown sets out plan for tough new terror laws

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Nicholas Watt, political editor

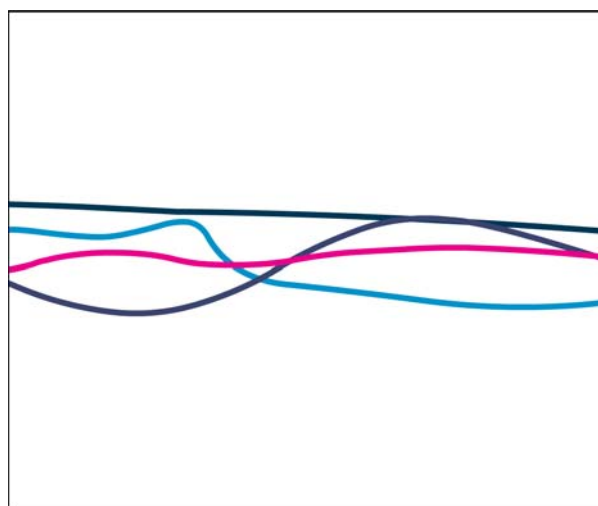
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[The Observer](#)

Hardline anti-terror laws are to be proposed by Gordon Brown - including an extension of the 28-day limit on detention without charge - as the Chancellor sends a powerful signal that he will take a harder line on terrorism than Tony Blair.

In an intensification of Brown's plans for Number 10, which follows criticism that he has failed to flesh out his thoughts on terrorism, he will call this week for a series of measures that will infuriate his party's left wing.

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They are contrasted with a strong attack on the government's 'macho posturing' on law and order by Peter Hain, the Northern Ireland Secretary, who is standing for the Labour deputy leadership post. The Chancellor will indicate that he has little time for the Hain approach when he calls for:

- An extension of the 28-day limit on detention without charge. Blair had wanted to extend this to 90 days, but had to limit it to 28 after a Commons revolt.
- Making terrorism an aggravating factor in sentencing,

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giving judges greater powers to punish terrorism within the framework of the existing criminal law.

- Ending the ban on questioning by police after a terrorist suspect has been charged. This would be subject to judicial oversight to ensure that it is correctly and sparingly used.

- Moving towards allowing evidence from telephone-tapping to be admissible as evidence in court by holding a Privy Council review into whether the law should be changed.

- Increasing the security budget, which has already doubled to more than £2bn a year after 11 September 2001, in the forthcoming spending review when a single security budget will be unveiled.

Brown signalled the changes yesterday when he appeared at a Labour party hustings meeting in Glasgow. The Chancellor said: 'We must be vigilant for the benefit of security in this country. Anti-terror methods must be more sophisticated, with earlier intervention. That is why I support an increase in the length of detention to build up evidence across nations and I support post-charge questioning with an increase in police resources.'

The incoming Prime Minister wants to show there will be no let-up in the fight against terrorism and he is prepared to wrongfoot the Tories as they question some of the government's harsher measures. But Brown will balance his message by indicating that the government needs to do more to assure people that civil liberties are not being trampled on. He believes that the handling of detention without trial is a strong example.

The Chancellor believes it is possible to win support for increasing the 28-day limit if there is stronger judicial oversight of any decisions to extend an individual's detention on a week-by-week basis and an annual report to parliament on the use of the powers. But Brown believes there is a need to extend detention because of the volume of international evidence which accrues in such investigations, most of which can be difficult to obtain from computers.

Brown said: 'Because we believe in the civil liberties of the individual, we must also strengthen accountability to parliament and independent bodies overseeing the police, not subjecting people to arbitrary treatment. The world has changed, so we need tougher security. We must recognise there is a group of people we must isolate who are determined to attack. Our security must be strengthened, but we must also strengthen the accountability of our institutions.'

Brown will demonstrate this by giving parliament a greater role in overseeing the intelligence services. He will place the Parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee, which reports to the Prime Minister, on a similar basis as parliamentary select committees, which are accountable to MPs.

Brown's decision to call for a Privy Council review on the use of telephone-tap evidence shows the Chancellor believes the traditional balancing act - whether it is right to produce in court irrefutable evidence of a terrorist conspiracy when that might expose other intelligence sources - has now come down in favour of presenting the evidence.

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