

## Politics

🕒 This article is more than **19 years old**

# Clarke 'ready to compromise' on terror law

---

---

## Oliver King *and agencies*

Thu 22 Sep 2005 16.42 BST

Charles Clarke said today he was seeking a compromise with opposition parties on his proposals to detain terrorist suspects without charge for 90 days.

In an interview published today in the *New Statesman* magazine, the home secretary said he was willing to consider limiting the timescale for detention in light of opposition from both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

Mr Clarke also alluded to revelations of his own reservations on the matter, when an early draft of a letter to his opposition counterparts was accidentally released. The first draft of the letter to the Conservatives' David Davis and the Liberal Democrat Mark Oaten was more equivocal than the one which was eventually delivered.

Today Mr Clarke said: "I'm convinced the three months is fine. But because David [Davis] and Mark [Oaten] had raised doubts, I was uncertain quite how to word the covering letter. "Will we compromise? We will seek to do so. My preference is to work on a basis of compromise and agreement if we can. But if Mark Oaten wants to say there is no case for extending the time beyond 14 days, I couldn't accept that.

"But you could have a slightly different argument about timescale."

However, Mr Oaten yesterday specifically said the Liberal Democrats were not prepared to "barter" on the matter. Mr Oaten dubbed detention without trial for three months "internment" and said he would oppose all of the government's anti-terrorist bill if that section was not dropped.

He said, "I'm not going to get into a barter [with Charles Clarke] My starting point is we don't need to extend it beyond 14 days. We are not going to barter about 1 month or two months ... "

Today the Liberal Democrat leader, Charles Kennedy, also attacked the idea in his speech to conference. He said: "There can be no consensus on detaining people for three months without charge. This proposal undermines our most basic rights and eats into our most cherished freedoms. If we undermine the foundations of our legal system then we let the terrorists win."

Liberal Democrat peers in Blackpool have suggested that the home secretary would find it very difficult to get his legislation through the House of Lords if he did not

compromise on detention without trial and drop the new offence of "glorifying" terrorism.

In his New Statesman interview, the home secretary said he believed that the 90 day period was still justified, because the police and security services needed longer than the present 14 days because of the difficulty of obtaining forensic evidence.

This afternoon, Mr Clarke hosted a press conference to announce the first details of proposals from seven working groups set up to tackle Muslim extremism.

Lord Nazir Ahmed of Rotherham told reporters that a national advisory council of imams and mosques should be established to advise religious leaders on how to prevent their centres being used by extremists. He said the council would improve the leadership skills of imams and reduce the need to recruit ministers from abroad by nurturing "home grown imams".

It was also recommended that a "national forum against extremism and Islamophobia" be set up. This initiative would provide a regular forum for British Muslims to discuss tackling Islamophobia and extremism as it affects the Muslim community.

Another proposal was for a country-wide roadshow of influential, populist religious scholars, to expound the concept of Islam in the west and condemn extremism.

"I am grateful to the working groups for drawing up such constructive ideas," said Mr Clarke. "We look forward to continuing the dialogue with Muslim communities and supporting the work that they are undertaking."

Earlier, Mr Clarke had hinted to the New Statesman that the government could be prepared to pull out of the European convention on human rights.

He said being unable to defend Britain against a potential terrorist would put "almost unstoppable pressure" on politicians.

"People would ask whether we were really saying that adherence to the European convention was more important than Joe Bloggs blowing up a Tube train," he said. "In those circumstances there would be immense pressure to change our relationship with the European convention on human rights."

Mr Clarke also addressed rumours he could be moved from his job in a cabinet reshuffle before Christmas. He insisted that would not happen.

"Tony [Blair] was outraged" at the suggestion, he said. "He denied it to me and I believe him completely."

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Most viewed

---