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U.K. Plans Curfews, Tracking Tags for Terror Suspects

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The U.K. will introduce curfews and electronic tags for terror suspects after judges ruled in December that it was wrong to hold foreign terror suspects without trial.

“My judgment is that there remains a public emergency threatening the life of the nation,” Home Secretary Charles Clarke told lawmakers today in a statement to Parliament in London. “My principal responsibility is to preserve our democracy against those who seek to destroy it through terrorist attacks.”

The U.K.'s highest court in December ruled that the government's indefinite detention of foreign terror suspects without trial breached European human-rights laws. Judges at the House of Lords in London said the government failed to prove that national security warranted the measures.

Britain wants to deport some of the 12 suspects currently held in Belmarsh prison in southeast London, Clarke said, and is negotiating with “certain key Middle East and North African countries” for assurances that returned suspects won't be tortured or killed. The 12 Belmarsh suspects won't be released yet, Clarke said.

New laws will allow the home secretary to issue a “control order” for a suspect. An order might impose a curfew, make someone wear an electronic tag or forbid use of the Internet, Clarke said.

‘The Real Threat’

“The real threat to the life of the nation, in the sense of a people living in accordance with its traditional laws and political values, comes not from terrorism but from laws such as these,” Lord Leonard Hoffmann wrote in the December judgment. “It is for Parliament to decide whether to give the terrorists such a victory.”

The Lords also said measures in the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act discriminated against non-U.K. citizens on the grounds of their nationality or immigration status.

The government argued the law was necessary because the prisoners were dangerous and the couldn't be deported as their lives would be threatened in their native countries.

While the prisoners are allowed to challenge their detention, they aren't allowed to see the evidence on which they are being held, or to communicate with the government-appointed lawyer representing them at their hearing.

Held in London

Police in London are continuing to hold four British men released from the U.S. military detention camp at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba after being held without charge for almost three years.

Moazzam Begg, Martin Mubanga, Richard Belmar and Feroz Abbasi returned to the U.K. yesterday and were arrested under the U.K.'s Terrorism Act of 2000. The men have been allowed to see family members and their solicitors.

Five U.K. detainees were freed from the Guantanamo Bay camp last year. They were questioned by British police and released.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in June that detainees in the war on terrorism -- about 550 are being held at Guantanamo Naval Base in Cuba -- are entitled to court hearings to challenge their imprisonment. Many of the prisoners were seized during the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan after the Sept. 11 attacks.

Prime Minister Tony Blair's spokesman Tom Kelly earlier this month denied there was any comparison between the U.K.'s detainees and people held by the U.S. in Guantanamo Bay. The U.K.'s prisoners are free to leave confinement as long as they leave the U.K., Kelly said.