

## **“Officers would have done their homework”**

**By Joe Willis**

SECURITY forces would have used every lawful technique available to monitor the suspected terrorists, experts say.

Metropolitan Police deputy assistant commissioner Peter Clarke said yesterday that "an unprecedented level of surveillance" led to the arrests of about 20 people suspected of plotting to blow up several USbound planes.

Neil Thompson is operations director for red24, a private company specialising in counter-terrorism security.

The former National Crime Squad detective superintendent told The Northern Echo that the security forces had probably been following the suspects for months.

He said: "I really do not know how the security forces were alerted to these people. "It could have been a tip-of from abroad for example.

"But I do know they would have done their homework and had good reason to cause this disruption to the British public. They would not have done it lightly.

"To build up a picture on the individuals, they could have used telephone intercepts, surveillance from a house opposite or even eavesdropping equipment that can hear from one building to the next.

"Bank statements and phone records can be looked at, you can use an undercover officer who can gain the trust of the suspect or you could pay for information from an informant.

"If you have a good terrorist cell, you use everything that is lawful.

"The intelligence would then be passed to an analyst, who would decide what the suspects were trying to achieve.

"You would then make a decision on whether you have enough evidence to make an arrest or you do not have evidence, but you need to disrupt the plans anyway because it is too dangerous to let them continue.

"I do not know if that is the situation in this case."

Mr Thompson said security forces would then search for further evidence in the homes and workplaces of the suspects.

Meanwhile, an expert from the region said terrorism could only be tackled by reasoning with the disenchanting and disenfranchised.

David Whittaker, from Richmond, North Yorkshire, has written widely on international terrorism.

The retired Teesside University lecturer in international relations spoke yesterday as more details of the plot to blow up planes over the Atlantic emerged.

Initial reports suggested that like last year's attacks on tube trains and a bus in London, young British-born Muslims may be involved.

Mr Whittaker said: "You have to look at the causes and reasons why they feel so aggrieved.

"The Muslim community is working very hard to reason with its alienated young people.

"I think it is absolutely necessary that we reason with the disenchanting, disenfranchised and disassociated.

"I think it is the only way - imprisonment and torture is not going to solve anything.

"If you look at the history of the IRA, although not a great parallel, the group was into absolute violence.

"But, gradually they realised that only through talking with the British Government would they get anywhere."

Mr Whittaker warned that political leaders should not underestimate the sophistication of terrorist groups, or the often complex reasons for their behaviour.

He said: "What really made me think recently was something George Bush said about Lebanon.

"He said Hezbollah were 'just a bunch of terrorists'.

"But if you look at the history of the movement, it is very much a political party with a liberation thrust.

"When you look around the world, there are maybe 100 of these groups.

"When you talk about them being 'just a bunch terrorists' you are being a little bit simplistic.

"It is not helpful because these are some very powerful forces at work."