

Longer behind bars for espionage in national security boost

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Offenders posing a threat to national security to spend longer behind bars.

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- Those seeking to compromise UK's national security on behalf of foreign powers to receive similar sentencing to terrorists
- Part of the government's action to keep dangerous offenders locked up, cut reoffending and protect the public

Dangerous criminals who pose a threat to the UK's national security will spend longer behind bars under new legislation coming into force today (22 March).

Now, offenders convicted of national security offences such as espionage, sabotage, or foreign interference will no longer be automatically released ahead of serving their full prison term under any circumstances.

Instead, they must be thoroughly risk assessed by the Parole Board before they are let out of prison, after serving no less than two thirds of their term behind bars. Once released, they will be subject to rigorous supervision and some of the toughest monitoring conditions, such as being tagged, until the end of their term plus an extra year.

The changes will strengthen public protection and send a clear warning to foreign powers with malicious motives.

Deputy Prime Minister, David Lammy, said:

Keeping the British people safe is our number one priority as a Government.

Those conspiring against this country should see this new measure as a clear warning. Public protection will always come first, and threatening activity by foreign powers will always be punished.

Minister for Sentencing, Youth Justice and International, Jake Richards, said:

This new measure, part of the historic Sentencing Act, cracks down on the most dangerous offenders to keep them behind bars for longer.

We will do whatever it takes to keep our country and people safe.

Security Minister, Dan Jarvis said:

States are deploying new hostile tactics on our streets, using proxies to do their dirty work and targeting our national infrastructure with cyber attacks.

Our police and security services have strong powers to defend and defeat these threats, but those responsible must face tougher consequences.

That is why we are introducing new laws so anyone compromising our national security for a foreign state will face longer behind bars.

The historic Sentencing Act received Royal Assent in January 2026. Firmly gripping the prison crisis which this government inherited, it will make sure future governments always have the prison places needed to keep people safe, with the most dangerous offenders locked up.

This comes days after the Government announced £100m investment in the biggest expansion of tagging in British history, putting thousands of extra domestic abusers, thieves and burglars across the country under tough GPS and alcohol monitoring.

The Sentencing Act 2026 follows the Independent Sentencing Review led by David Gauke, published in May 2025.

Key reforms in the Act include:

- Tougher community punishments such as new powers for judges to bar criminals from pubs, concerts and sports matches, curtailing offenders' freedoms as punishment, financial penalties that force offenders to pay back for their crimes or unpaid work orders that force offenders to give back to society.
- New "restriction zones" to restrict offenders to a certain area, allowing victims to travel without fear of seeing them.
- A judicial finding of domestic abuse in sentencing which will allow criminal justice agencies to identify domestic abusers, ensure they are better monitored, and the right measures are in place to protect victims.

Further information

- Further information about offences under the Sentencing Act can be found online
- Offenders must serve at least two-thirds of their custodial term, up from 50%, at which point they become eligible for release subject to the discretion of the Parole Board.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/longer-behind-bars-for-espionage-in-national-security-boost>