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28-day holding period is the longest in democratic world

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THOSE being held over the killing of two British soldiers and a policeman earlier this month can be held for longer than in any other democracy in the world.

The maximum period of pre-charge detention is 28 days in cases specified as 'terrorism' under the Terrorism Act 2006, which was introduced after the London suicide bombing.

After the first 48 hours in custody a warrant from a judge is required to keep a suspect in detention without charge for a further five days.

Further seven-day extensions may be approved by a judge, up to a maximum of 28 days.

A proposal to raise this time limit to 56 days was defeated. A second proposal for 42 days was passed by 315 MPs to 306, with votes by the nine DUP MPs proving crucial.

Following a heavy defeat in the House of Lords it was dropped in

October by the British government from its counter-terrorism bill.

Although the US has detained inmates in the notorious Guantanamo Bay camp for up to seven years without charge, its laws make such actions on home soil more difficult.

Under US federal law, the maximum period of pre-charge detention for criminal suspects, including those suspected of terrorist offences, is 48 hours, guaranteed by the Fourth Amendment to the constitution.

In the aftermath of the September 11 bombings, the USA Patriot Act was introduced allowing foreign nationals suspected of terrorism to be detained for seven days.

Some suspected have been detained under the immigration law and the executive 'war powers' privilege but this is outside its criminal justice system.

In Canada, arrest without warrant is available only in limited circumstances and anyone arrested without such a warrant must be charged within 24 hours

In the Republic, the maximum period of pre-charge detention is one day, although this is increased to three days in 'terrorist cases'.

In gangland-type offences which could cross over to terrorism the maximum is seven days.

New Zealand demands that people arrested must be charged "promptly".

Although it does not define prompt, case law shows that pre-charge of more than 48 hours would not pass the test.

Neighbour Australia gives a maximum period of pre-charge detention for a terrorism offence of 12 days.

France has placed its maximum period of pre-charge detention in terrorism cases at six days, although the

normal limit is two days, to be exceptionally extended in cases where the person is suspected of being involved in the organisation of an imminent terrorist attack.

In Germany, there is no exact equivalent of 'charge', the closest comparison is provisional police custody prior to a formal judicial 'warrant of arrest' which cannot exceed 48 hours.

In Italy the maximum period of pre-charge detention is four days.

Spain carries a maximum period of five days.

In Denmark, the maximum period of pre-charge detention is three days and it is the same in Norway

Russia has a maximum pre-charge period of five days.

In terrorism cases in Turkey, the maximum period is seven days, with a further 12 hours allowed for the transport of the suspect.

South Africa sets its maximum period in terrorism cases at two days.

Meanwhile, in Zimbabwe under the 29-year rule of president Robert Mugabe, the maximum period of pre-charge detention is 21 days.

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