

# London bombings: Why does Blair oppose an inquiry into intelligence failures?

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13 July 2005

Speaking in Parliament this week, Prime Minister Tony Blair rejected demands from the Conservative Party opposition for an inquiry into the July 7 London bombings that have so far have resulted in 52 confirmed deaths.

Tory leader Michael Howard called on July 10 for an examination of “whether anything more could have been done” to prevent the bombings. This broached the issue of possible intelligence failures—particularly the decision by the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) to downgrade the threat level facing the UK in June from “severe general” to “substantial.”

Cabinet minister John Hutton denounced the proposal, saying “every ounce” of effort was needed to bring the criminals to justice and that there was no evidence of “complacency” on the part of the security services. Blair himself told Parliament that no “specific intelligence” could have prevented the bombings, which he again attributed to Islamist terrorists.

The Tories clearly feared being denounced for breaking national unity, so Howard retreated from demanding an immediate inquiry in favour of suggesting a future probe. “A limited inquiry could, in due course, provide a calm and dispassionate forum for learning appropriate lessons, helping to quell unhelpful speculation,” he said.

In opposing such an inquiry, Blair is following in the footsteps of the Bush administration. After the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, the White House categorically opposed an inquiry into why the destruction of the World Trade Centre and the attack on the Pentagon had not been prevented.

Only months later, after revelations emerged that the FBI command had ignored warnings from lower-level officials of a possible hijack bombing at the hands of Islamic terrorists, and that Bush himself had ignored

similar warnings from his intelligence briefers, did Congress hold hearings. These were eventually followed by the establishment of a special commission, which held its own hearings and issued a report last summer.

Both the congressional report and the report issued by the commission proceeded from the premise that no section of the state or intelligence apparatus wilfully acted in a manner to allow the terrorists to carry out an attack. Instead, they attributed the failure of the FBI, the CIA and other government agencies to foil the hijackers to organisational glitches and an inability to “connect the dots.”

In the London bombings, too, a number of questions have emerged. (See “Unanswered questions in London bombings”.)

\* Why was Britain’s threat level not raised in advance of the G8 summit of major industrial nations held last week at Gleneagles, near Edinburgh?

\* Are reports that the Israeli embassy was informed of the bombings beforehand true?

\* Did Israel’s security service Mossad warn MI5 of a possible attack, as has been suggested by Stratfor?

In the past two days, more questions have been raised that demand answers. Not least is the fact that military explosives appear to have been used, according to Superintendent Christophe Chaboud, the chief of the French anti-terrorist police, who is working with Scotland Yard. Who would have access to such explosives?

There is one additional anomaly. On the morning of July 7, “BBC Radio Five Live” carried an interview with Peter Power, managing Director of Visor Consultants, a crisis management company. Power is a former Scotland Yard official who worked with the Anti-Terrorist Branch.

Power told “Radio Five,” “At half past nine this morning we were actually running an exercise for a company of over a thousand people in London based on simultaneous bombs going off precisely at the railway stations where it happened this morning, so I still have the hairs on the back of my neck standing up right now.”

The host then asked Power, “To get this quite straight, you were running an exercise to see how you would cope with this, and it happened while you were running the exercise?”

Power replied, “Precisely, and it was about half past nine this morning, we planned this for a company and for obvious reasons I don’t want to reveal their name but they’re listening and they’ll know it.”

This raises a number of issues. For which company was the exercise staged? Does the company have any government connections? Who decided the timing and location of the exercise?

Assertions that an investigation into the workings of the British government in the run-up to the bombings would be a “diversion” are a means by which the ruling elite defends itself from scrutiny. Those who will suffer the consequences are millions of working people, who are being asked to sacrifice their democratic rights. Every day brings fresh demands for greater repressive measures.

The government insists, on the one hand, that the so-called “war against terrorism” is the single most important issue facing the world, while on the other it maintains that the public does not have a right to know how the bomb attacks on London, resulting in the greatest loss of life in a terror attack on British soil since World War II, were allowed to happen.

Even if the government were to relent and acquiesce to a probe of its role in the events of July 7, no confidence could be placed in any investigation carried out by the establishment parties and the British state. They would serve a similar function as the official inquiries conducted in the US—to obscure the most vital facts, provide a rationale for further attacks on democratic rights at home, and justify militarism and aggression abroad. Any genuinely independent investigation can come about only as the product of an independent political movement of the working class against the ruling elite and its policies of war and social reaction.



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