

# Forces trained in Britain's dirty war in Northern Ireland involved in de Menezes killing

Julie Hyland  
8 August 2005

The admission that army special forces were involved in the police execution of Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes confirms that the techniques perfected in the dirty war conducted by British imperialism in Northern Ireland are now being employed on the streets of Britain.

The *Guardian* reported August 4 that “a new army special forces regiment was involved in the operation” that resulted in de Menezes being killed with eight bullets, seven to the head, in a London subway carriage on July 22.

Whitehall sources had confirmed, the newspaper continued, that the “Special Reconnaissance Regiment, set up in April to help combat international terrorism, was deployed in the surveillance operation” that led to the innocent electrician’s death.

The report continued that the unit, “modelled on an undercover unit that operated in Northern Ireland, were engaged in ‘low level intelligence behind the scenes’ when the Brazilian was shot.

“There was ‘no direct military involvement in the shooting’, the sources added.”

Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon announced the formation of the Special Reconnaissance Regiment (SRR) on April 5. In a written statement to Parliament he said that the unit, which would become operational the following day, was in line with the “Strategic Defence Review (SDR) New Chapter published in July 2002 [which] stated that we planned to enhance and build upon the capabilities of UK Special Forces.”

The SRR “has been formed to meet a growing worldwide demand for special reconnaissance capability,” Hoon’s statement continued.

“[T]his regiment will provide improved support to expeditionary operations overseas and form part of the Defence contribution to the Government’s comprehensive strategy to counter international terrorism. The SRR will bring together personnel from existing capabilities and become the means of the further development of the

capability. Due to the specialist nature of the unit, it will come under the command of the Director Special Forces and be a part of the UK Special Forces group.”

The *Scotsman*, April 6, reported, “The Special Reconnaissance Regiment is expected to play a key role in hunting down insurgents in Iraq and in the forthcoming UK-led operation against al-Qaeda remnants—including Osama bin Laden—in Afghanistan.

“Members will be expected to infiltrate terrorist organisations and identify targets to be attacked by other units.”

It continued, “Once SRR surveillance teams have identified human targets, other units will then eliminate them. It is understood that the new regiment will be based alongside the SAS at Stirling Lines barracks, near Hereford.”

De Menezes was certainly “eliminated.” But there was no “intelligence” on the young man, much less anything to connect him with Al Qaeda or any other terrorist group.

According to the *Guardian*’s August 4 report, de Menezes was targeted because the three-storey block of flats in which he lived in south London was under surveillance following the failed bombing incidents on July 21.

“Mr. De Menezes was followed and seen boarding a No 2 bus, heading north towards Stockwell,” the newspaper said. “Boarding with him, it is understood, were several plainclothes officers. Defence sources refuse to comment on suggestions that they may have been members of the Special Reconnaissance Regiment.

“Other officers followed the bus in vehicles. When it became clear that Stockwell tube was his possible destination, a team of armed police officers in plain clothes were alerted. They fired eight shots at Mr. De Menezes at close range after the 27-year-old Brazilian ran onto a tube train.”

Why police apparently allowed a man they considered to be a potential suicide bomber to board a bus remains

unexplained. As does virtually everything else to do with de Menezes' killing. But the SRR's pedigree gives some indication of why those involved in the young man's death felt they could act with impunity as judge, jury and executioner.

The "personnel from existing capabilities" announced by Hoon to constitute the SRR are drawn from the death squads employed by the British state for decades in Northern Ireland.

According to a *Telegraph* report July 25, 2004 that revealed plans to establish the SRR, the new unit "will at first be formed from members of a highly secret surveillance agency—the Joint Communications Unit Northern Ireland—which has worked in Ulster for more than 20 years. The unit, which worked with the SAS, MI5 and the Special Branch, perfected the art of covert surveillance in urban and rural areas and created a network of double agents who supplied the British security forces with intelligence on terrorist attacks."

A report in the *Sunday Times*, also July 25, 2004, said, "More than 150 members of the 14th Intelligence and Security Company have already left Northern Ireland" to form the SRR's "nucleus."

From the early 1970s, British imperialism waged a notorious dirty war against the Republican movement in Northern Ireland as part of its efforts to maintain control of the six counties. The 14th Intelligence was one of three army-sponsored undercover squads dedicated to this aim. The others were the Force Research Unit (FRU) and 22 Squadron.

In 1998, leaked military intelligence documents confirmed that these methods included the assassination of Republicans.

In March that year, the *Sunday Telegraph* alleged that secret documentation it had received showed that the FRU "was complicit in a series of murders carried out by the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) between 1987 and 1990." The UDA is a fascistic, loyalist paramilitary organisation, supporting union with Britain.

The *Sunday Telegraph's* article also revealed the role played by Brian Nelson, a key FRU operative. Nelson became the UDA's primary intelligence officer and passed on the names, photographs and addresses of suspected IRA members from Army Intelligence records to UDA gunmen for assassination.

Nelson was implicated in some in 15 murders, 15 attempted murders and 62 conspiracies to murder. These included the killing of Belfast solicitor Patrick Finucane, after he successfully defended an IRA man. Finucane was murdered at his home in 1989 in front of his wife and children.

Nelson was arrested in 1990 and stood trial for murder in 1992. In a deal struck with the attorney general at the time, Patrick Mayhew, Nelson agreed to plead guilty to lesser charges and was jailed for 10 years, of which he served just six.

The British state was forced to convene an official inquiry into collusion between the UDA and the British army as part of its efforts to establish power-sharing structures in Northern Ireland under the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. The investigation, headed by police chief John Stevens, confirmed Nelson's role in UDA assassinations. But every attempt was made to suppress Steven's findings and prevent further information being revealed about the extent of the FRU's activities.

The British state defended its murderous undercover operations, claiming they were directed only against known IRA terrorists. But dozens of Catholics with no connection to the IRA were killed by loyalist paramilitaries. In fact, the FRU's activities were deliberately aimed at stoking sectarian tensions in the north, so as to create the necessary climate for Britain's ruling elite to maintain its colonial occupation through police-state methods.

The FRU was formally wound up in 1990, but reconstituted in a different guise.

Scotland's *Sunday Herald*, July 24, confirmed that in the wake of the July 7 terror bombings in London that killed 56 people, "Techniques used by the SAS-trained 14th Intelligence Company—also known as The Det—in tracking and killing terrorists are being taught to British police firearms teams such as SO19 and to MI5.

"The methods of British military intelligence's Force Research Unit (FRU) and its successor outfit, the Joint Support Group (JSG), in recruiting and handling double-agents in terror cells are also being taught to MI5 and Special Branch."

The *Sunday Mirror*, July 17, 2005, also reported that the SRR had become active in the capital. It quoted an army source stating, "The regiment has been given a number of minor tasks in Iraq where they have been working with the SAS but this is its first major challenge."

The cold-blooded shooting of de Menezes is the first manifestation of how they intend to rise to this challenge.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**