

Britain: police chief insists “shoot-to-kill” policy remains in force

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A “shoot-to-kill” policy for terrorist suspects remains in force following the killing of Jean Charles de Menezes, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Ian Blair has said.

De Menezes was gunned down while he was seated on a London Underground train on July 22, despite having no connection with terrorism and presenting no threat to the police. Fabricated stories were leaked to the press in an attempt to justify the killing—including claims that de Menezes had attempted to evade capture.

Some of these stories could only have come from the police. Commissioner Blair himself had issued a statement claiming that de Menezes had refused to obey police instructions, despite the fact that he had been shot multiple times in the head by plainclothes officers who had issued no warning. It also emerged that Blair had delayed an obligatory investigation by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) for several days, fuelling calls for his resignation.

Despite this, the Commons all-party Home Affairs Select Committee inquiry into the July 7 London bombings gave Blair an easy ride—even when he made clear that Parliament had no say on the new police policy.

Blair admitted that the shoot-to-kill strategy, which he insisted on dubbing a “shoot-to-protect” strategy, was drawn up in secret with no reference to Parliament. The guidelines for dealing with suicide bombers were laid down in January 2003 by the Association of Chief Police Officers and covered all police forces in England and Wales, not just the Met. He also made plain that Prime Minister Tony Blair and Home Secretary Charles Clarke had been privy to the change in policy. The Home Office, the Crown Prosecution Service, Treasury counsel, the Metropolitan Police Authority and “independent advisers” had all been made aware of the

new guidelines, he said.

Nothing would change fundamentally, despite the killing of an innocent man.

Blair conceded that the policy would have to be debated in public, but under terms laid down by the police. “I accept that a watershed has been passed. I think now we have to find a process for debating these issues without necessarily revealing the absolute detail of the tactics,” he said.

No details, and certainly no reversal of policy—meaning that any “debate” will be simply a PR campaign to bully the public into accepting the right of the police to gun people down without warning.

The policy remained in place despite some minor changes being made as a result of a “fairly quick” review following the events of July 22, Blair continued. “We made a small number of administrative changes, but the essential thrust of the tactics remains the same,” he said.

Explicitly rejecting any suggestion that the police should be accountable for their actions, Blair insisted that chief constables had to be allowed to take “hard decisions” aimed at best protecting the public from terrorists.

When questioned, he also conceded that he initially tried to stop the IPCC from investigating the death of de Menezes. He claimed that this was because he thought at the time that de Menezes was a suicide bomber and there was a risk of compromising an ongoing anti-terror investigation. No one questioned this patently false claim, despite the fact that Blair must have known within hours of the killing at Stockwell Underground station that an innocent man had been shot, and yet the IPCC investigation was blocked for five days.

Earlier that day, Home Secretary Charles Clarke gave

testimony that served to underline the escalating attacks on democratic rights being mounted by the government on the pretext of combating terrorism.

Clarke told the select committee that the security services are presently keeping hundreds of individuals under surveillance.

He revealed that he had imposed the first anti-terrorist “control order” on a British citizen, rather than a foreign national. Those on whom an order is imposed can be kept under constant surveillance and are prohibited from meeting named individuals or communicating with others by mobile phones or using the Internet. Clarke refused to name the man involved, but said that he was currently considering imposing control orders on other British citizens.

The government also intends to go ahead with its ban on the Islamist group Hizb-ut-Tahrir, he said. This is despite having no evidence that it was involved in terrorism and that it requires Parliament’s agreeing to allow the banning of groups for “extremism.”

Three of the de Menezes family were present at the hearing: Alessandro Pereira, 25, Vivian Figueiredo, 22, and Patricia da Silva Armani, 31. They all refused to meet with Blair following the hearing, after the police commissioner made a perfunctory apology for the death of their cousin.

A statement from the family was read out to the media, calling for the shoot-to-kill policy to be suspended. “We are horrified to know that the shoot-to-kill policy is still in operation today,” it said. “It remains a secret policy, a policy that nobody knows how it operates, a policy that has never been discussed in Parliament. The death of Jean shows that this policy is a danger to innocent people all across the country.”



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