

Britain: More evidence suggests July 7 bombings were preventable

Paul Mitchell
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Evidence has grown over the last weeks suggesting the suicide bombers who carried out the July 7, 2005 bombings in London, which killed 56 people and injured 700, were known to the authorities months before the attacks.

At the time, Home Secretary Charles Clarke said the attacks came “out of the blue” and that the four bombers—Mohammad Sidique Khan, Shehzad Tanweer, Germaine Lindsay and Hasib Hussain—were “clean skins” with no known links to terrorism. Ministers and senior security officials insisted that there was no warning of an imminent attack ahead of the July 7 bombings.

However, a Joint Intelligence Committee report leaked to the *Sunday Times* February 26 suggests that, contrary to earlier denials, intelligence chiefs warned Tony Blair before July 7 that Al Qaeda was planning a “high priority” attack on the London Underground network.

The report reinforces previous suggestions that MI6 chief John Scarlett had been asked by the domestic spying agency MI5 to monitor a suspect during a trip to Pakistan. The suspect is believed to be one of the four men accused of attempting a second bomb attack on London on July 21. However, MI5 stopped monitoring him, claiming the Pakistani authorities had concluded he was not involved in terrorist related activities whilst there.

The disclosure is the latest in a series that suggest the July bombers were known to the security services and the attacks could have been prevented.

On the day of the bombings, the US-based Stratfor web site reported that the Israeli intelligence service, Mossad, had warned MI5 of a possible terror attack “a couple of days previous.”

At a July 13 press conference, French Interior Minister Sarkozy said he had been told at the European Union terrorism meeting following the London bombings that some of the suspects were arrested in 2004 and then released in order to break a wider network. Charles Clarke vehemently denied that any such conversation had taken place.

Press reports then emerged saying that the threat assessment, used to estimate the likelihood of a terrorist attack, was lowered just weeks prior to the bombings and kept at the reduced level during the G8 summit of government heads of major industrial nations, which was meeting in Britain at the time of the July 7

attacks.

Despite the fact that 16 months before 191 people had been killed in the Madrid train bombings, “Britain’s top intelligence and law enforcement officials concluded that, ‘at present there is not a group with both the current intent and the capability to attack the UK’” (*New York Times*, July 19, 2005). The article stated that “there is growing evidence that at least three of them may have been known to the security services before July 7 and that two or more of them had links to known members of al-Qa’ida.” It reported that one of the bombers, Mohammed Sidique Khan, was “scrutinised by MI5 last year after his name came up in an anti-terrorist operation but was not placed under surveillance.”

AFX News reported July 21, 2005 that a Pakistan intelligence officer, speaking off the record, claimed Khan and another bomber Shahzad Tanweer had visited Pakistan in July 2003 and then for three months between November 19, 2004 and February 8, 2005. There has been persistent speculation that an unidentified Pakistani man—seen with the suicide bombers on a whitewater rafting trip as well as at a Yorkshire community centre frequented by Khan—oversaw the operation.

Also in July 2005 two American intelligence officials said that Khan was known to Mohammed Junaid Babar, who pleaded guilty in June 2004 to providing material support to Al Qaeda. Babar had admitted setting up a training camp for Islamist terrorists in Afghanistan and that he helped with a bomb plot in Britain. American officials also claimed that another bomber, Germaine Lindsay, was on a terrorist watch list and that MI5 failed to monitor him. Some US officials claimed Lindsay was also implicated in a truck-bomb plot to attack the capital, to which Khan was indirectly linked. The British government said they were not aware of any such intelligence.

In August 2005 the *Observer* revealed that Saudi intelligence had passed specific warnings to British and US intelligence in December 2004 about a terror plot by British born Muslims aimed at the London Underground or a nightclub within six months. Senior officials at the US National Security Council confirmed that the agencies had received such a warning.

In September 2005, a video was released showing Khan praising Osama bin Laden and his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri.

A BBC investigation claimed Khan was secretly filmed speaking to a terror suspect living in the UK and that Khan had been in contact with Al Qaeda activists for the last five years. A terror suspect held in connection with the 2002 Bali bombings also alleged that Khan travelled to Malaysia and the Philippines in 2001 to train with the extremist Islamic group Jemaah Islamiah, which is closely linked with Al Qaeda and suspected of involvement in the Bali bombings of 2002 and 2005.

In November 2005 at the launch of his book *7-7: What Went Wrong*, Crispin Black, a former intelligence analyst for JIC (Joint Intelligence Committee) and the Cabinet Office, called the London attacks both “discoverable and preventable.”

Black said the decision to downgrade the terror threat was “against all the evidence.” He blamed an “overly close relationship” between intelligence chiefs and the government for ignoring the radicalising effect of the Iraq war on Britain’s Muslim community. He also claimed the British authorities had pursued a so-called “covenant of security” policy that had allowed foreign extremists to live in Britain in the hope that they would not organise attacks in the country. Other analysts have suggested that this policy resulted from years of Western use of Islamic fundamentalism to counteract secular nationalist movements in the Middle East.

Former MI5 whistleblower David Shayler was prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act for alleging a plot by Britain’s MI6 and Islamic fundamentalists to kill Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in the 1990s.

On December 18, 2005 the *Times* published extracts from a leaked top secret JIC document entitled “International Terrorism: The Current Threat from Islamic Extremists.” The report, dated April 2, 2003 and signed off by the heads of MI5 and MI6, included intelligence gained from the interrogation of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, said to be the mastermind of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks in New York.

It stated, “The UK and its interests remain high in Al Qaeda’s priorities. Interrogation of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and other detainees confirms this” and “that plans have been considered to attack Heathrow, the London Underground and other targets.” The JIC circulates its reports to the home secretary, the foreign secretary and defence secretary.

Other media reports at the end of 2005 repeated allegations that Khan and Tanweer had been under surveillance by the intelligence services the year before the attacks, as part of an investigation into the plot to blow up a truck loaded with 600 pounds of explosive. It is said that MI5 bugged Khan and Tanweer for two months in 2004 as the pair discussed Khan’s wish to fight an “Islamic war” and how to carry out crimes to raise funds. Khan also talked about returning to Pakistan.

On January 29, 2006 the *Sunday Times* published another leaked report entitled “London Attacks: the Emerging Picture.” The report was given to Tony Blair last October and claims MI5 still does not know whether the attacks of July 7 and July 21 were linked and whether Al Qaeda was involved. It says,

“We know little about what three of the bombers did in Pakistan, when attack planning began, how and when the attackers were recruited, the extent of any external direction or assistance and the extent and role of any wider network.”

These recent leaks are believed to be the work of intelligence officers who do not want MI5 to take the rap for alleged “intelligence failings” leading up to the bombings and instead are seeking to blame government ministers for withholding information from the public.

MI5 and MI6 officers have been appearing before the parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee, which is conducting a secret inquiry into the bombings and is due to report in April.

Lawyers for the families of the victims of the July 7 attacks have demanded a full inquiry to establish where and why intelligence failed and have criticised Clarke plans for a senior civil servant to write a “narrative of events” about the bombings.

The July 7 terror bombings in London have been used to justify an unprecedented offensive against civil liberties, including the adoption of a shoot-to-kill policy by the police that claimed the life of innocent Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes. Only days after the bombings, Prime Minister Tony Blair rejected calls for a public inquiry, insisting that Britain faced a continuing threat. He seized on the bombings to bring in measures to drastically curtail free speech rights and expand the powers of the state to spy on the population. In addition, powers were enacted to hold alleged terrorists and their supporters for long periods without charges, deport immigrants, close down mosques, and cordon off entire parts of major cities.

It is not possible to determine how much is really known about the perpetrators of the terror attacks in London but a full inquiry is necessary. Such an investigation has to be entirely independent of the British and American governments and probe the underlying causes of the bombings and their foundation in the Blair government’s participation in Washington’s illegal war against Iraq.



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