

Britain: More official lies and evasions on London bombings

Socialist Equality Party (Britain)
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Both reports issued this week on the July 7, 2005 London bombings, by the parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) and Home Secretary John Reid, are whitewashes. They are designed to ensure that no one is held accountable for what is described as a security failure, which allowed terrorist bombers to kill 52 people and injure more than 700, whilst concealing the fundamental political issues raised by this tragic event.

The central thrust of the two reports, which concern the actions of the security services and the bombers themselves, is that the security forces acted correctly given the information available to them. The ISC states that its conclusions “should not overshadow the essential and excellent work the Agencies have undertaken against the terrorist threat in the UK.” It maintains that the actions of the bombers—Mohammed Siddique Khan, Shazad Tanweer, Hasib Hussein and Jermaine Lindsay—could not have been predicted, and that no one should be held to account. Only additional funding could have possibly changed matters.

These claims are absurd. The ISC report documents that Khan and Tanweer were known to the security forces for at least two years before July 7, 2005 and that MI5, Britain’s internal security agency, could have identified them prior to the attacks if it had investigated them more fully.

On two separate occasions MI5 had placed both under surveillance in connection with other individuals who were under investigation. The pair had also been observed in Pakistan, where it was “likely that they had some contact with al-Qaeda figures,” the report states. MI5 had Khan’s telephone number as a contact of a terror suspect and also the phone number of Lindsay.

Nonetheless, the report claims that it was “understandable” that the security services decided not to pursue a more detailed investigation because of “more pressing priorities.”

The ISC also states that it was “not unreasonable” to reduce the official threat level for the UK in May 2005 from “severe general” to “substantial,” and that this diminution was “unlikely” to have affected the chances of preventing the attacks less than two months later.

This assertion also does not stand up. The report itself quotes speeches in parliament by Prime Minister Tony Blair and then-Home Secretary Charles Clarke warning that the UK faced potentially major attacks. It also notes a security report in 2004 that stated, “Security Service investigations and successful disruptions in the UK revealed that British-born citizens were involved in plotting attacks on their home soil.”

In May 2005, the same security report that downgraded the security alert also stipulated, with reference to the March 2004 Madrid train bombings which killed almost 200 people, that the UK’s rail network was high on the list of possible terrorist targets.

The “severe general” alert had been maintained for almost two years before it was inexplicably lowered just weeks before the G8 summit in Scotland, which was in session when the bombings took place. The ISC barely acknowledges the extraordinary character of this decision under conditions in which the leaders of the world’s most powerful nations were

gathering in Gleneagles, other than to assert that the summit had no bearing on the timing of the bombings.

Over the past decade massive security measures have been taken for every G8 summit, with their proceedings unfolding under near-siege conditions. The G8 has become a focus for political protests involving tens of thousands of people and has often been accompanied by violent exchanges with the police. The Gleneagles summit saw the mobilisation of thousands of police and the erection of an impenetrable security cordon around the area. To describe the downgrading of the security threat under these circumstances as “understandable” defies logic.

A number of conclusions must be drawn from this presentation of events.

The failure of the security services to prevent the bombings underscores the fact that the “war on terror” and the abrogation of democratic rights that has accompanied it have nothing to do with protecting the British population. Even if one were to accept the ISC’s account, it demonstrates that neither the government nor the security services believed their own rhetoric concerning the scale of the terrorist threat facing Britain.

Since 2001, a raft of legislation has been passed giving the government, police and security forces unprecedented powers to place people under surveillance, tap their phones, and arrest and detain suspects for lengthy periods without charge.

Two wars have been conducted with the supposed aim of ending the danger of a link-up between terrorists and “rogue states,” and vast resources have been made available supposedly to destroy the Al Qaeda network. Yet the ISC now claims simultaneously that the security services are under-resourced, July 7 could not have been prevented, and it is all but impossible to stop future terrorist attacks.

The real purpose of the “war on terror” is to build up the powers of the state and create the necessary political climate to justify wars of colonial conquest abroad and the gutting of civil liberties at home. It should be noted that the two years in which Britain was on a high terror alert, when Blair was arguing that it was “monstrously premature to think the threat has passed,” culminated in the approval of the Prevention of Terror Bill in March 2005.

Yet two months after Blair secured passage of the bill, his government, notwithstanding the previous fear-mongering about an imminent threat, downgraded the terror alert in the midst of preparations for the G8 summit.

Under the bill, the government overturned the legal principle of presumption of innocence so as to give itself powers to impose house arrest, electronic tagging and travel restrictions on anyone deemed to be a potential threat to national security.

As the measures were railroaded through parliament in record time, the security services web site warned that “both British and foreign nationals belonging to Al Qaeda cells and associated networks are currently active throughout the UK, that they are supporting the activities of terrorist groups, and that in some cases they are engaged in planning, or attempting

to carry out, terrorist attacks.”

But only weeks after the draconian legislation was on the statute books, the terror threat was deemed to have receded.

The deliberate exaggeration of the terrorist security threat for reactionary political purposes goes some way in explaining the decision to lower the terror alert and the woeful failure of the security services to investigate the four suspects. But there is another yet more sinister possibility. Given the record of MI5 and its external security counterpart MI6, and the central role provocations have historically played in Britain’s policy in Ireland and elsewhere, it cannot be excluded that the London bombings were allowed to take place.

The ISC report, in fact, offers only the vaguest of explanations for the failure to investigate the four bombers. It states that despite repeated appearances alongside key terror suspects, Khan and Tanweer were judged to be unimportant acquaintances of more dangerous plotters intent on targeting the UK. The ISC fails to identify these other terrorists.

The report states: “The judgment was made (correctly with hindsight) that they were peripheral to the main investigation and there was no intelligence to suggest they were interested in planning an attack against the UK.” The phrase “correctly with hindsight” is emblematic of the naked cover-up by the ISC.

The report offers an additional and astonishing justification for why the two bombers were not considered important figures: “Intelligence at the time suggested that their focus was training and insurgency operations in Pakistan and schemes to defraud financial institutions.”

And this means that they did not warrant further investigation?

The ISC report suggests that a great deal was known by the security forces about Khan and Tanweer’s earlier plans, which undermine its previous claims that they were insignificant figures. It should be noted that Pakistan viewed Khan as a serious terror threat and that, following July 7, he was identified by a number of detainees in Guantánamo.

Everything points to the fact that Khan and Tanweer had been placed under intense scrutiny. There is no plausible explanation for why it would have been lifted and why nothing was supposedly known about their movements in the months leading up to July 7.

The ISC is also forced to issue a blunt denial of reports in the media that the security services had been repeatedly warned of an imminent terrorist atrocity. “We have been assured by the Agencies that there was no prior warning of the attacks that took place from any source, including from foreign intelligence services,” it states.

The only actual warning that is dismissed as irrelevant is one from the Saudi Arabian intelligence. The ISC says that it has seen this information but the scenario it presents is not that which occurred on July 7.

It should be noted that previously the security agencies had denied receiving any warnings of potential terror attacks. Now the ISC acknowledges that such a warning was given, merely stating that the details turned out to be wrong.

Even this flies in the face of press reports regarding the warning from Riyadh. In August 2005, the *Observer* reported that the Saudis had passed information to London about a bomb plot. This was denied at the time, but in February 2006 the newspaper cited White House sources confirming that Saudi intelligence authorities had passed on specific reports of a bomb plot—and that it involved four Islamic militants, some of whom would be British citizens. The bombers could target the London Underground within the next six months, it said.

The *Observer*’s claims had earlier been confirmed by Prince Turki al-Faisal, Saudi ambassador to the UK.

The ISC report says nothing about reports that Israel’s Mossad had also warned of an imminent terror attack in London. Israel has never officially confirmed such a warning, but the US web site *Stratfor* wrote on July 7, 2005 that “unconfirmed rumours in intelligence circles indicate that the Israeli government actually warned London of the attacks ‘a couple of

days’ previous” to the bombings.

The events depicted by the ISC flatly contradict the other major lie repeated *ad nauseam* in the aftermath of July 7: that the London bombings had nothing to do with British foreign policy and that suggestions to the contrary amounted to an apology for terrorism.

The ISC cites a security report in May 2005 stating that “events in Iraq are continuing to act as motivation and a focus of a range of terrorist-related activity in the UK.”

Home Secretary Reid continues to reject any connection between Iraq and the bombings. However, his own report to parliament states that the four bombers were motivated by “fierce antagonism to perceived injustices by the West against Muslims.” He also notes that Khan had spoken out against 9/11, but that there was a “change in his attitude” within a year.

Similarly, having displayed no previous attachment to political Islam, Tanweer and Hussain had also become radicalised in 2002. Within a matter of three years, they had gone from being described as “popular” and even “highly regarded” individuals to suicide bombers.

The period identified by Reid as witnessing a dramatic change in the outlook of at least three of the bombers was one in which the US and Britain waged war against Afghanistan, followed by intensive preparations to invade Iraq.

The reports of both Reid and the ISC veer between suggestions of a link with Al Qaeda and claims that the London bombings were self-financed and home grown. Whichever claim is true, there is a clear casual link between the predatory actions of Washington and London and the July, 2005 London bombings.

The assertion that to point this out constitutes an apology for terror is a slander that turns reality on its head. Millions who opposed the Iraq war warned of precisely such an outcome, and even the official account provides ample evidence that the Blair government is politically responsible for recklessly endangering the lives of British residents.

Immediately following the issuing of his report, Reid rejected demands for a public inquiry into July 7, cynically arguing that this would “divert” resources from the fight against future attacks.

Once again, a whitewash has been concocted to ensure that no one within the government or the security agencies will be held accountable. As with previous lies and evasions over Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction and the death of whistleblower Doctor David Kelly, public outrage is fobbed off with an official investigation by a tame state body with a vested interest in concealing the truth. No real accounting is made.

The two reports are only the latest manifestation of how the democratic process has been eviscerated. Never before has a government been so impervious to popular control. Indeed, Blair has proclaimed his willingness to defy public sentiment as his greatest strength. And so it is, as far as the ruling elite is concerned.

A government intent on waging of wars of colonial conquest, decimating social services and slashing living standards on behalf of the major corporations must be prepared to do whatever is necessary, regardless of its consequences for the broad mass of the population.



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