

Britain: Man shot in police “terror raid”

Rick Kelly
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A 23-year-old postal worker, Abdul Kahar Kalam, was shot in the shoulder during a massive police raid in East London in the early hours of Friday morning. An estimated 250 police officers raided the house, reportedly in response to “specific intelligence” of a “viable” chemical device being developed on the property. Kahar, who was released from hospital treatment for his wounds yesterday, has been arrested under the Terrorism Act, as has his 20-year-old brother Abdul Koyair Kalam. Both are being held at Paddington Green top security police station in London.

Police have released very few details of any aspect of the case, including the nature of the alleged terrorist plot, the raid itself, and how Kahar came to be shot. Given the official wall of silence and the series of conflicting media reports which have emerged, it is impossible to determine with any certainty exactly what happened. The information that has been reported thus far, however, raises a number of serious questions regarding the nature of the alleged terrorist operation and the police response.

Lawyers for the two men have insisted both are innocent. Julian Young said that Koyair, who works in a supermarket, “denies any involvement in the commission, preparation, or instigation of terrorist offences and has maintained that position from the start... He knows nothing about cyanide or suicide belts or jackets or explosives or bombs or firearms.”

Kate Roxburgh, representing Kahar, who works for Royal Mail, similarly denied that her client had any involvement in terrorism. In a statement explaining how he had been shot, Kahar’s solicitors explained, “He was woken up at about four in the morning by screams from downstairs, got out of bed in his pyjamas obviously unarmed, nothing in his hands and hurrying down the stairs. As he came toward a bend in the stairway, not knowing what was going on downstairs, the police turned the bend up towards him and shot him—and that was without any warning. He wasn’t asked to freeze, given any warning, and didn’t know the people in his house were police officers until after he was shot. He is lucky still to be alive.”

Roxburgh’s account recalls the police execution of Jean Charles de Menezes in the London Metro last year. Menezes, a Brazilian immigrant and electrician who had no connection to terrorism, was repeatedly shot in the head at point blank range by plainclothes officers. The Crown Prosecution Service is currently assessing a report by the Independent Police

Complaints Commission and is reportedly considering laying charges against the Metropolitan Police commissioner, Sir Ian Blair.

It remains unclear whether Kahar was shot in accordance with the official “shoot to kill” policy that was first revealed after Menezes’s killing. Police have not admitted that they shot the Kahar, while a “News of the World” report alleged that he was accidentally shot by his brother after he grabbed the police gun during a scuffle with the raiding officers.

Koyair’s solicitor Julian Young dismissed this claim, which the “News of the World” claimed it had been provided with by a “Whitehall source.” Such conflicting reports are again reminiscent of the campaign of misinformation and lies in the wake of the de Menezes shooting, in which the young worker was initially claimed to be carrying a potential bomb and trying to evade arrest.

Koyair’s lawyers also condemned the police for leaking information regarding the alleged terrorist plot to the media while withholding it from those representing the accused. “The phrases ‘cover-up’ and ‘Stockwell’ [the underground station where de Menezes was killed] spring to mind,” Young declared.

The home of an immigrant family living next door to the two arrested brothers was also raided. Police reportedly questioned the family, four adults and an eight-month-old baby, for 12 hours before releasing them without charge. The unnamed family later issued a statement saying that they “would like to make it clear that we are completely innocent and in no way involved in any terrorist activity.”

The father condemned the violent police raid. “We would like to express our deep shock and anger at the operation that took place,” he declared. “My family members and I were physically assaulted. I received serious head injuries that required hospital treatment.” One of the women in the house was also hospitalised for shock.

A spokesman for the family said that they were considering legal action against the police for unlawful entry and assault, and had enlisted the support of Gareth Peirce, a human rights lawyer who has worked on the de Menezes case.

The raids were reported to be in response to the production of a chemical device in one of the properties. Police had monitored the Kalam’s phone calls, emails and movements in the weeks before Friday’s operation after an informant tipped

off MI5 last month.

According to the *Sunday Times*, the informant is an acquaintance of the men and overheard them talking about how they were going to fill a cloth pouch with explosives. The newspaper also reported that the bomb was believed to be packed with cyanide, a dangerous chemical which would disperse in a toxic cloud after the detonation of an explosive device.

No dangerous or suspicious substances, either of a chemical or explosive nature, were found during an extensive police search.

Despite the lurid nature of much of the British media's coverage of the raid—some reports spoke of a “suspected poison bomb factory”—the circumstances surrounding the operation suggests that the police never expected to find any chemical substances in the two houses.

Authorities have yet to explain why they imposed an air exclusion zone which banned aircraft from flying below 2,500 feet over the area, yet chose not to evacuate any of the neighbouring residents before the raid took place. A police cordon was established just 30 metres from the house while the property was searched.

The police officers who first broke into the house were not equipped with any protection from a chemical attack. According to “News of the World,” biochemical experts only began searching for chemicals within the property five hours after the raid began. Prior to this police reportedly investigated the circumstance of Kahar's shooting.

While the director-general of MI5 provided details of the alleged terrorist activity to Prime Minister Tony Blair and Home Secretary John Reid ahead of the raid, the national terror alert level remained unchanged from “severe (general)”.

One unnamed official contradicted several media reports that police believed the alleged chemical device was “primed and ready to go.” “It was more intelligence about the ingredients that go to make up a bomb,” the official told the *Sunday Times*. “[The police] probably wouldn't have gone in [to the house] at all if there was firm intelligence that it was a chemical device.”

Moreover, the terraced home in the suburbs of London would be an unlikely site for the production of chemical weapons. The two men, who were born in London to Bangladeshi parents, lived in the three-bedroom house together with at least eight other people, including their parents. “It just doesn't make sense that there would be a chemical weapon in the house in which they live with their mother,” one neighbour told the media.

It has also emerged that Kahar and Koyair may have known that they were under police surveillance. For the past several weeks, residents saw men sitting in unmarked cars parked at both ends of Lansdown Road. “For about three months, one at either end of the road, they have been sitting there from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. in the evening,” one resident, 19-year-old Ashish Khetani, told the *Independent*. “They were undercover, but we

knew they were police because of the phones, cups of tea and papers.”

According to media reports, the two brothers were previously known to the police, having committed burglary and theft when they were younger. The men later became devoutly religious, growing beards and adopting Islamic dress.

Kahar's friends protested against his shooting and arrest on Friday outside the Royal London Hospital, where he was being treated. Kahar reportedly took great pride in his work at the Royal Mail and showed friends his payslips and encouraged them to apply for work. One of his colleagues, Lutfur Rahman, told the *Sunday Times* that he was sure Kahar was not involved in terrorism. “When I see all these things on TV it is like they are talking about a different person here,” he said.

“We hang around all the time,” one relative told the *Guardian* after visiting Kahar in hospital. “If he were a militant do you think he would be hanging around with me? He works for the Royal Mail, he works for the government delivering the mail. He loves his motorbike and we go for rides in Enfield. He has been going to the gym to get fit for the summer. He is not some bad boy. He prays, but so what? We all pray.”

A young man in the area told the newspaper that he believed the Kalam's may have been the victims of a vendetta. “We all know about Guantánamo Bay,” he said. “They might take your brother away and you never see him again.”

There is every reason to question the veracity of the reported version of Kahar's shooting and the events leading up to last Friday's raid. The Blair government has used the so-called war on terror to tear up longstanding democratic rights and constitutional norms. In recent years, massive police raids, many against innocent people, have served to accustom ordinary people to police-state methods of rule, pave the way for further repressive “anti-terrorist” laws, and divert public attention away from the government's domestic problems.



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