

Five arrests in London car bomb attempts and Glasgow Airport attack

Britain's terror alert raised to critical

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The thwarted car bombings in London and the attack on Glasgow Airport have appalled people the world over. The political perspective underlying these attacks is utterly reactionary. Directed against innocent people, the terrorist campaign plays directly into the hands of the British government and the police.

Though potentially terrible losses of life and serious injuries have been averted, the bombings will be used to sow political confusion in the working class, justify Prime Minister Gordon Brown's continuation of the Labour government's neo-colonialist foreign policy in Iraq and Afghanistan, impose further attacks on democratic rights and civil liberties in Britain, and fuel anti-Muslim agitation.

While only the barest factual outline of the incidents has emerged, the events in Glasgow and London appear to have been staged in response to the formation of a government under Brown just two days earlier, following the departure of Tony Blair.

The arrests of two south Asian men involved in crashing a flaming Jeep Cherokee into Scotland's Glasgow Airport, located in Paisley, have been followed by house searches and three further arrests—two overnight on the M6 motorway in Cheshire and one in Liverpool. The police have confirmed that a number of houses in the Renfrewshire area have been searched, with eye witnesses reporting raids in the town of Houston, about six miles from Glasgow. Two houses have been searched in Liverpool and searches have been carried out in Staffordshire.

Britain was placed on the highest, "critical," level of terror alert after a series of meetings of Cobra, the government emergencies committee. The rating signifies a danger of imminent terrorist attacks. It is, according to police officials, based on concern that those involved have the capability and intent to carry out further bombings.

Security has been stepped up at airports across Britain, and John Lennon Airport in Liverpool was closed briefly due to suspicions regarding a vehicle there.

Both Saturday's attack on Glasgow and the two failed car bombs discovered in London early Friday morning were intended to inflict major loss of life. The Jeep hit airport security barriers at full speed shortly after 3 p.m. and managed to shatter the glass entrance doors. It came to a halt within metres of queues of holidaymakers at check-in counters.

The vehicle was set on fire, but gas canisters it contained failed

to ignite. Witnesses say the driver poured a can of petrol over himself. A member of the public and police officers wrestled the driver and a passenger to the ground.

The driver was engulfed in flames and was doused with a fire extinguisher. He was taken in critical condition to Glasgow's Royal Alexandra Hospital, where a controlled explosion was carried out on a parked car on Sunday.

The two Mercedes cars rigged to explode in London contained petrol, gas cylinders and nails. They were parked in Central London, with the first discovered outside the Tiger Tiger club in London's Haymarket.

The Haymarket thoroughfare links to Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square, the location of numerous theatres, bars, nightclubs and other places of entertainment. The Tiger Tiger is a 1,770-capacity three-story venue that stays open until 3 a.m. The car bomb was discovered in the early hours of Friday morning just as Ladies Night was turning out.

The car bomb's accidental discovery by an ambulance crew called to the venue occurred when there were still 500 people inside. The second car was illegally parked only a few metres away in Cockspur Street. It was ticketed and towed away an hour later to a car park on Park Lane. It was not disarmed until the next morning. Those arriving for work were told that the car had been left outside the office because there was a strange smell coming from it.

Security has been stepped up throughout the capital, after already been raised due to the forthcoming anniversary of the July 7, 2005 bombings. Police are presently examining the extensive closed circuit television footage of the area, which has 160 police cameras and numerous privately-owned cameras in shops and other commercial premises.

There are a number of related hypotheses circulating as to who is involved and the extent to which these are "home-grown" plots or linked in some way to Al Qaeda. The Security Services, MI5, says it is presently monitoring 30 suspected plots involving more than 1,700 possible terrorists, an increase of 100 since November.

Gas cylinder bombs are used by insurgents in Iraq. Closer to home, the car bombs in London's West End are similar to two planned attacks that failed three years ago. In particular, there have been repeated suggestions of a connection to those involved in the "Fertiliser bomb" plot. The so-called Crevice gang was arrested in

2004 after they were bugged discussing the possibility of attacking the Ministry of Sound nightclub, which is located less than two miles from the Tiger Tiger. Five men were jailed for life in April last year.

Given the nature of terrorism and the numerous examples of infiltration by the security services, it is impossible to rule out state involvement in or foreknowledge of the bomb plots. The July 7 bombers Mohammad Sidique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer had both been under surveillance by the security services and had even been photographed at meetings with Omar Khyam, the leader of the Crevice gang.

However, the actions of those involved in the latest attacks are politically criminal, regardless of whether or not there was state involvement. They will be employed first and foremost to legitimise authoritarian measures that undermine fundamental civil liberties.

It has been suggested that the absence of suicide bombers and the primitive nature of the devices point to a domestic source of the terror plot. In any event, the amateurish methods employed argue against the official depiction of terrorism as a highly organised network of Al Qaeda affiliates.

This did not prevent Brown appearing on television Sunday to claim that the attacks in London and Glasgow were perpetrated by people associated with Al Qaeda and aimed at “our British way of life.” Lord Stevens, Brown’s terrorism adviser, called the attacks proof that a “deadly network of interlinked operational cells has developed.” The new home secretary, Jacqui Smith, stated earlier that Britain was “currently facing the most severe and sustained threat to our security from international terrorism.”

That day’s *Observer* wrote, “Some believe that the solution to terrorism is to resolve the myriad grievances the terrorists broadcast so violently. This is a mistake. Many such grievances are imagined—the West does not want to ‘dominate the lands of Islam’, for example. Many more are simply not Britain’s fault; we are not to blame for the parlous economic state of many Islamic countries.”

On this basis it praises the strength of British democratic values, insisting they can “easily cope with the unpleasant but necessary measures, such as the controversial and currently flawed control orders, that are essential to fight terrorism.”

The same edition of the *Observer* draws attention to what it describes as Blair’s “powerful attack on ‘absurd’ British Islamists who have nurtured a false ‘sense of grievance’ that they are being oppressed by Britain and the United States.”

Blair’s statement is made in a forthcoming Channel Four documentary in which he tells *Observer* columnist Will Hutton, “The reason we are finding it hard to win this battle is that we’re not actually fighting it properly. We’re not actually standing up to these people and saying, ‘It’s not just your methods that are wrong, your ideas are absurd. Nobody is oppressing you. Your sense of grievance isn’t justified.’”

Denouncing those opposed to his attacks on democratic rights, Blair continues, “When I’m trying to change the law in order to make it easier to deport people who engage in terrorism—the idea that that’s an assault on hundreds of years of British civil liberties is completely absurd. Some of what is written on this is loopy-loo

in its extremism.”

The same message—that further repressive legislation is needed—comes from Murdoch’s *Sun* newspaper, which declared, “Labour and the Tories must unite to back moderate Muslims against the extremists and the brainwashing imams who sully their mosques. And new terrorism laws, such as 90-day detention for suspects, must be brought back to Parliament for further debate.”

Conservative MP Patrick Mercer told the press that the possible involvement of people on control orders or otherwise known to the police “calls into question the strategy about leaving these people in play and not arresting them.”

Brown has already let it be known that he wants to allow evidence from telephone taps to be used in court. Last month, the government announced a new counterterrorism bill giving police the power to stop and ask suspects for their identity and movements. Other proposals Brown wants to implement are said to include allowing police to continue to interrogate terror suspects even after they have been charged with a criminal offence and increasing the number of days a terror suspect can be held without charge from 28 days to 90 days—a measure previously thrown out by Parliament.

The assertion that Muslim peoples have no legitimate cause for grievance against Britain, or that Britain has no intention of dominating Muslim countries, is a grotesque lie. Historically, the role of British imperialism in subjugating vast areas of the world—in India, Africa, Asia and the Middle East—has earned it the enmity of millions.

Moreover, this is no past episode for which the British ruling elite are no longer responsible. Britain is a major power, whose corporations and banks play a significant role in maintaining the impoverished economic state of vast layers of the world’s population. And during Blair’s decade in office, it has played second-fiddle to the Bush administration in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as in backing Israel in its brutal suppression of the Palestinians and last year’s offensive against Lebanon.

The ability of Islamic fundamentalists to channel legitimate outrage at a nominally “Labour” government’s neo-colonial foreign policy and its promotion of social divisions and anti-immigrant sentiment at home is fuelled by the role played by the trade union bureaucracy in supporting this imperialist and anti-social agenda.



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