

British government faces legal action over refusal to hold inquiry into London bombings

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The British government is facing legal action over its continued refusal to hold an independent public inquiry into the July 7, 2005 bombings in London that killed 56 people and injured 700.

Lawyers for a group of survivors and relatives of the dead have applied for a judicial review of the government's decision to ignore their request for "an independent inquiry, open to public scrutiny to allow for participation from the bereaved and survivors." The Brown government has shown itself even more determined to rule out an inquiry than the Blair government, despite new evidence emerging in recent terror trials.

Clifford Tibber of Oury Clark Solicitors said, "We will ask the court to say that the home secretary's decision not to order an inquiry is irrational, and to recognise the rights the relatives and victims have to an inquiry."

Tibber said the government was "accountable" for the deaths and damage caused by the July 7 bombers, adding, "All the evidence shows that the government knew or should have known of the existence of at least two of those bombs; and they have done nothing about it."

This evidence means the statement by former Home Secretary Charles Clarke that the bombers were "clean skins"—that is, unknown to police and intelligence agencies—is "untrue" and the parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee report into the bombings, published last year, was "imperfect."

In the first terror trial, which ended in April, Omar Khyam, Waheed Mahmood, Jawad Akbar, Salahuddin Amin and Anthony Garcia were jailed for life for conspiring to cause explosions likely to endanger life before their arrest in March 2004 in the "fertiliser bomb plot" against nightclubs and shopping centres.

In July, a jury found Muktar Said Ibrahim, Hussain Osman, Ramzi Mohammed, and Yassin Omar guilty of conspiracy to murder in a failed attempt to set off four bombs carried in backpacks in London on July 21, 2005.

In 2003, one of the alleged fertiliser bomb plotters, Mohammed Junaid Babar, turned informer after being arrested by the FBI in the United States. Surveillance of the remaining fertiliser bomb plotters identified the July 7 bombers, Mohammed Sidique Khan and Shezhad Tanweer. Despite being watched during the 18 months leading up to the attacks, it is claimed MI5 did not send photographs of Khan and Tanweer to be shown to Babar, who subsequently identified Khan as someone he had trained with at an Al Qaeda camp in Pakistan in 2003.

MI5 officers followed Khan and photographed him on at least four occasions and made inquiries about a telephone registered in his name. There are disputed claims that detectives found a monitoring device in Khan's Honda Accord car. Tanweer was identified on three occasions.

On one occasion, in February 2004, Khan and Tanweer were followed for 15 hours while they were in turn following a car driven by Omar Khyam, the leader of the fertiliser bombers. On March 23, a week before Khyam's arrest, Khan and Tanweer were again filmed and recorded discussing Khan's wish to fight an "Islamic war" and how to carry out crimes to raise funds. Khan also talked about returning to Pakistan—which he did with Tanweer between November 19, 2004 and February 8, 2005—during which time they may have met Muktar Said Ibrahim, the alleged leader of the failed July 21 bombings.

According to journalist Ron Suskind, Khan was barred on security grounds from entering the US in

2004 because of his connections with Al Qaeda figures. US officials presented MI5 with a detailed file on Khan.

As these revelations show, the lie about “clean skins” is itself enough to warrant an independent public inquiry. However, there is a long list of other questions about the July 7 bombings that remain unanswered. These include claims that warnings were issued by foreign intelligence agencies about the bombings and that Britain pursued a so-called “covenant of security” policy with terrorist groups that allowed them to operate as long as they did not organise attacks in the country. The deal resulted from years of Western use of Islamic fundamentalism to counteract secular nationalist movements in the Middle East and the former Yugoslavia. Of particular interest is the relationship of British intelligence to figures based at Finsbury Park mosque such as cleric Abu Hamza al-Masri and his associate Haroon Rashid Aswat, wanted by the US for the alleged establishment of a terrorist training camp in Oregon.

There has also been no satisfactory explanation for the decision to downgrade the national security alert in March 2005 despite the pending G8 summit in Scotland, which saw a massive security mobilisation.

Then Prime Minister Tony Blair rejected calls for a public inquiry within days of the July 7 bombings. At the same time he made use of the bombings to claim “the rules of the game” were changing, justify the adoption of a secret shoot-to-kill policy, which claimed the life of innocent Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes, and the mounting of a further offensive on civil liberties. The government enacted new measures to curtail free speech and expand the powers of the state to spy on the population, hold alleged terrorists and their supporters for long periods without charges, deport immigrants, close down mosques, and cordon off whole areas of cities.

Since then, the Labour government has insisted on a “no inquiry” policy despite growing evidence that the state knew a lot more about the bombers than was previously admitted. The constant refrain has been that an inquiry will divert police and security service resources from the “war on terror”.

The catalogue of apparent security failures can be attributed to one of two causes. Either the actions of the government and security services in the period leading

up to July 7 were politically criminal—talking up a terrorist threat and an unending “war on terror” while failing to provide the necessary resources. Or there is a more sinister possibility—borne out by the record of MI5 and MI6, and the role provocations have historically played in Britain’s policy in Ireland and elsewhere—that the London bombings of July 7 and July 21 were allowed to take place so as to provide the government with a pretext for further attacks on civil liberties and new military adventures overseas.

No confidence can be placed in any investigation carried out by the establishment parties and the British state. The British parliament’s Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Law Society of England and Wales have voiced concerns about the 2005 Inquiries Act which sets the terms of reference for future inquiries. Amnesty International has also asked British judges not to take part, saying “any inquiry would be controlled by the executive which is empowered to block public scrutiny of state actions.”

Any such inquiry would serve a similar function as the official inquiries conducted in the US—to obscure the most vital facts, provide a rationale for further attacks on democratic rights at home, and justify militarism and aggression abroad. A genuinely independent investigation can come about only as the product of an independent political movement of the working class against the ruling elite and its policies of war and social reaction.



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