

# Britain: Youth convicted under antidemocratic terrorism acts

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25 September 2007

Mohammed Atif Siddique, a 21-year-old student from Scotland, was found guilty on September 18 of two charges under the Terrorism Act 2000 and one under the Terrorism Act 2006. The conviction demonstrates how far democratic rights have been eroded and legal norms abandoned, with Siddique convicted even though he has done nothing that breaches common law or endangered the lives of others.

The case is only the second successful prosecution under the Terrorism Act 2000 for possessing material useful for terrorism.

Siddique denies all charges and is planning to appeal.

After nine hours of deliberations the jury at the High Court in Glasgow found Siddique guilty on four charges. He was convicted of possessing CDs and videos that gave “a reasonable suspicion that they were connected with the commission, preparation or instigation of an act of terrorism” and of collecting “information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism.” He was also found guilty of setting up web sites that included links to other publications that contained information on how to use weapons and make bombs. Additionally, he was convicted on a lesser charge of breach of the peace by claiming to be member of Al Qaeda to his college friends.

All of the offenses related to the period between March 2003 and April 2006, when Siddique was a teenager. Two police Special Branch officers stopped Siddique at Glasgow airport in 2006, as he was about to fly with his uncle to Pakistan for a holiday. He was searched and questioned for five hours before being released. A week later Siddique was arrested on terrorism charges.

Though no evidence was presented in court, police and security services claimed after the trial that Siddique was going to Pakistan en route to Canada. Through unattributed leaks to the press, “sources close to the investigation” have suggested that he was going to participate in terrorist attacks against the Canadian parliament and prime minister.

Security services had been spying on Siddique for several months prior to his arrest in 2006. He had been held for 18 months prior to the commencement of his three-week-long trial.

Much has been made in the press of evidence given by former classmate Razia Hussain. Now an immigration officer, Hussain told the court that she had given Siddique the nicknames “suicide bomber” and “Al Qaeda,” and claimed that he was reluctant to talk about anything other than Islam. Hussain also told the court that Siddique regularly looked at what she called “suicide-bomb web sites.” “He said he was going to blow Glasgow up. As a joke, I

said, ‘Please inform me so I can run,’” she said in her testimony. No evidence was presented in court that Siddique was in any way involved in a plot to carry out such an attack.

The court also heard from Brian Glancey, a communications lecturer at Siddique’s college. He claimed that on two occasions around September 2003, when Siddique was 17 years old, he found the accused looking at “inappropriate” material on the Internet.

“I think I saw a video of Osama bin Laden or someone like him. There was no sound—the person was speaking, but to whom I don’t know. I told Siddique to stop it and he switched it off,” Glancey stated.

Under cross-examined by the defence, Glancey admitted that he did not know which web sites Siddique had been accessing at the time.

An investigating team of up to 80 police officers, computer specialists and terrorism experts spent months looking at the hard drives of Siddique’s computers, CDs at his family home, and at various web sites he used. Siddique was found to have possessed a number of downloads and CDs containing Islamic fundamentalist and militarist content.

During the four-week trial, prosecutor Brian McConnachie labeled Siddique a “wannabe suicide bomber” who helped distribute material that amounted to “a call to arms for Muslims.”

“It’s clear from that material that the whole idea was to glorify martyrdom operations, which we call suicide bombings,” McConnachie said.

Jacqui Smith, the home secretary, commented on the case: “The successful conviction of the individual today in Glasgow is a reminder that the threat we face from terrorism is real and not isolated to any particular region. The government has invested heavily in counterterrorism over the last five years and will continue to provide those on the frontline with the resources they need to counter the threat we face.”

It was clear from the evidence presented in court that Siddique’s interest in Islamist fundamentalist publications never amounted to any actual plans to cause injury or a conspiracy to commit a terrorist attack. He did not possess any explosives or weapons, nor was any evidence presented that he attempted to procure them.

The case showed that anger at American and British actions in the Middle East, especially in Iraq, sparked Siddique’s interest in Islamic extremist web sites. Much of the material that Siddique was found to have accessed related to Islamist opposition to the

United States in Iraq and Israel. He had spoken to classmates about the justification for suicide bombing against US forces in Iraq.

One video found on his computer showed the planes flying into the World Trade Centre on 9/11, as well as pictures of George Bush, Tony Blair and Osama bin Laden. Images of Muslim militants were accompanied by dialogue directed against American occupation forces in Iraq. Evidence was also presented that he had shown classmates a video on the Internet of a US serviceman in Iraq being beheaded by insurgents.

Documents found on his personal computer included theological tracts such as “The Islamic Rules On The Permissibility Of Self Sacrificial Operations” and accounts of young people from Palestine who had acted as suicide bombers. The court heard that one of the pseudonyms Siddique used on Internet chat rooms was Yahya Ayash, the name of a leading figure in the military wing of the Hamas movement.

Siddique’s lawyer said he would appeal, arguing the student’s actions amounted to doing “what millions of young people do every day—looking for answers on the Internet.”

“This verdict is a tragedy for justice and for freedom of speech and undermines the values that separate us from the terrorists. The prosecution was driven by the state, with no limit to the money and resources used to secure a conviction in this case, carried out in an atmosphere of hostility after the Glasgow Airport attack and ending on the anniversary of 9/11,” lawyer Aamer Anwar said outside the High Court in Glasgow.

“Atif Siddique states that he is not a terrorist and is innocent of the charges and it is not a crime to be a young Muslim angry at global injustice. In the end Atif Siddique did not receive a fair trial and we will be considering an appeal,” Anwar added.

Anwar, a leading Scottish human rights lawyer, added that young Muslims in the UK lived in “a climate of fear” and called some of the evidence against his client “farcical.” “When detained at Glasgow airport by Special Branch on April 6, 2006, his laptop was confiscated and he was released,” Anwar said. “At liberty for seven days he made no attempt to escape or to destroy his home computer, hardly the actions of Al Qaeda.”

Commenting on security service claims leaked to the press alleging that Siddique was planning to go to Canada to participate in terrorist attacks in Ontario, Anwar said, “This smacks of security services running around under the cloak of secrecy releasing tidbits of information to the press when not one scrap of evidence was ever produced in court to support this. They are trying to turn my client into someone he isn’t. He was a young boy who, at worst, had an unhealthy interest.”

Siddique’s biography is one of a young religious Muslim who attended mosque, played football with friends and attempted to get an education while working in various low-paid jobs. After leaving school aged 16, he went to a local college in central Scotland before moving to Glasgow to pursue his studies. There he became more interested in radical Islam after the invasion and occupation of Iraq by US and British forces in 2003.

Worried about their son, his parents and the head imam at Glasgow Central Mosque met with Siddique and persuaded him to delete the extremist files on his computer. His family maintains that his interest in fundamentalist ideology was a “phase” that he

had grown out of.

“My son is no terrorist, just a stupid boy,” Mohammed Siddique senior told Scottish Television. “The trial was unfair and there was no justice. My son is innocent. He hasn’t done anything wrong.”

Siddique’s father continued, “Any Muslim would be asking questions. They would try and find out why things are happening in the world. And that’s what he’s done. He’s gone on to the Internet to find some answers why this is happening. I’m just telling the public, my son is no terrorist.”

The 2000 and 2006 Terrorism Acts are draconian measures that attack the right to freedom of expression and establish in law what amounts to “thought crime.” The most serious offence that Siddique was found guilty of is having breached the Terrorism Act 2000 by downloading material that might “give rise to a reasonable suspicion” of being “for a purpose connected with the commission, preparation or instigation of an act of terrorism.” The offence carries a maximum 10-year sentence.

The Terrorism Act 2006 covers another of Siddique’s offences—encouraging terrorism by distributing terrorist publications on web sites. Originally intended to outlaw the “glorification” of terrorism, it carries a maximum seven-year sentence.

The Kafka-esque charges relating to the Terrorism acts 2000 and 2006 under which Siddique has been convicted, as well as the preposterous “crime” of boasting to be in Al Qaeda, represent a threat to the democratic and civil rights of all workers and youth in the UK. Reflecting both the lack of support for basic democratic rights in the ruling elite and the heightened “anti-terror” atmosphere whipped up in the aftermath of the attempted terror bombings in London and Glasgow in June this year, there has been no opposition in the media to a conviction that is based on virtual police-state measures. Instead newspapers have echoed the inflammatory statement of the prosecution that Siddique was a “wannabe suicide bomber.”

Siddique is due to be sentenced on October 23.



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