

Britain: Another “terror scare” revealed as baseless

Julie Hyland
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Only the most damning political conclusions can be drawn from the admission that 12 people rounded up in a major terror scare in Britain have all been released without charge.

Once again hysterical claims of an impending terrorist atrocity have proven baseless.

The 12 men—11 Pakistani nationals and one Briton—were arrested on April 8 in a series of high-profile swoops in Liverpool and Manchester.

Armed anti-terror police raided several premises in an operation that Prime Minister Gordon Brown claimed had uncovered a “very big plot” against the UK.

One young man was arrested by officers carrying machine guns as he ate his lunch outside Liverpool’s John Moores University (ten of the men are students at various northwest colleges and universities). Two other men were detained at the DIY store where they worked.

The media claimed the men had been planning to carry out a series of Al Qaeda-type explosions—potentially including suicide bombings—over the Easter holidays, targeting major public venues.

Despite holding the men for up to 13 days, searching their homes, computers and personal papers, police found nothing to substantiate these claims. It transpires that not only was no terrorist attack “imminent,” there is no evidence it was even in preparation. The Crown Prosecution Service has concluded there are no grounds for any charges and police failed to convince magistrates that they should hold the men any longer. Police can detain people for up to 28 days without charge under Britain’s anti-terror laws.

The men appear to be so blameless that there is no evidence of any misdemeanour. But that has not stopped police handing over the Pakistani nationals to

the UK Border Agency for deportation.

A spokesman for the prime minister claimed that they were to be removed “on grounds of national security. The government’s highest priority is to protect public safety. Where a foreign national poses a threat to the country, we will seek to exclude or deport them where appropriate.”

In a further infringement of the men’s democratic rights, their cases are to be put before the Special Immigration Appeals Commission, which is not subject to the burden of proof required in a criminal case. The supposed “evidence” supporting their deportation will be heard in secret.

Without a shred of evidence, their education is to be disrupted and they are to be banned from the country. What fate will await them in Pakistan under such conditions is another matter for concern.

The moves have been condemned by the men’s representatives. Lawyer Mohammed Ayub stated, “After 13 days in custody, during which no evidence of any wrongdoing was disclosed, they have now been released without charge.

“Our clients have no criminal history, they were here lawfully on student visas and all were pursuing their studies and working part-time. Our clients are neither extremists nor terrorists.”

Inayat Bunglawala, of the Muslim Council of Britain, said the government had been “dishonourable” in its treatment of those arrested.

Their detention “took place in very dramatic circumstances of students being arrested at university and thrown to the floor,” he said, with authorities claiming they posed a serious threat to the public.

Such claims represented political interference in the legal process, he continued. It was unacceptable for the government to make such prejudicial remarks, and

then, having failed to substantiate them, deport the men anyway.

Executive action

The media have described the release of the 12 as a humiliation for the government and the police.

The suggestion is that the raids were moved forward after Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner Bob Quick—Britain’s leading anti-terror officer—allowed a top secret document on the raids to be photographed when he went to brief ministers on the operation at Downing Street. He resigned the following day.

To reduce the issue to one of “embarrassment” in ruling circles, however, is to trivialise the issues raised by this latest “anti-terror” scare and its ramifications for democratic rights.

The *Guardian* reported that “Investigators had desperately hoped they would find something at the suspects’ homes. But after initially hunting for, and failing to find, bomb-making equipment, they turned to the computers with their fingers crossed that some evidence of a plot would turn up. They found nothing substantial.”

“Desperately hoped,” “fingers crossed,” “turn up.” What type of security operation is initiated on a wing and a prayer, and why?

Ever since the 9/11 atrocities, and especially since the London bombings in July 2005, the government and the security services have cynically manipulated public anxieties over potential terrorist attacks.

The latest raids followed an all-too familiar pattern. A major plot is supposedly discovered just on the eve of its execution. The media, ministers and so-called “terror experts” warn of the dire threat to life and limb that was only narrowly averted thanks to swift police action.

Time subsequently reveals that much of this was hype. The vast majority of those arrested under anti-terror legislation are never charged with terrorist activity. In the few instances that do come to court, it usually transpires that much of the original claims made about the “plot” were built up out of all proportion.

In the meantime, the scare has served its real aim in providing the pretext for a further assault on civil liberties.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* pointed out, the recent scare occurred “just as the government and Metropolitan Police faced mounting condemnation of police actions during the G20 summit of world leaders in London, which ended April 3.”

Video footage and photographic stills of indiscriminate violence meted out against protestors and bystanders—as in the tragic death of Ian Tomlinson—revealed the extent to which political dissent has been criminalised under Labour.

Another disturbing aspect of the recent raids was also revealed by the *Guardian*, although without any comment. Reporting on tensions between MI5 and the police over the raids, the *Guardian* reported that the police decided “to take ‘executive action’ even though the intelligence suggested there was little evidence to charge the suspects.”

Such are the extraordinary powers given to the police by the Labour government that they are now able to mount high-profile raids and arrests on the flimsiest of pretexts, detain people for weeks at a time while circulating false and highly damaging claims about them and then, at least in the case of foreign nationals, remove the evidence of their “mistakes” by handing them over for deportation on the most dubious grounds. And all apparently on the basis of “executive action” and without any form of democratic oversight.



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