

British police fabricate terrorist case against Rizwaan Sabir

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The internal West Midlands police professional standards investigation into the Rizwaan Sabir affair, following complaints by Dr. Rod Thornton over the police's handling of the case, is finally complete.

And what a tangled web it revealed. It found that senior police officers lied, misconstrued and fabricated what Thornton, formerly the University of Nottingham's terrorism and international security expert, told them in an interview conducted after Sabir was arrested in May 2008 under the Terrorism Act of 2000 for accessing online an al-Qaida training manual.

The standards inquiry upheld Thornton's complaint that officers "made up what he said about the al-Qaida manual." It also states that the minutes of the Gold Group meeting of the detectives assigned to the case "incorrectly recorded" their conversation with Thornton.

Sabir was arrested on May 14, 2008 after downloading and forwarding the manual to Nottingham University staff member Hicham Yezza. He was researching terrorist tactics as part of his master's postgraduate study but was accused by police of downloading the manual for terrorist purposes.

In total three documents were found on the workplace office computer of Hicham Yezza, a member of Nottingham's School of Modern Languages department. Sabir had sent the three documents to him, which included the manual. Yezza was helping Sabir with academic research on Islamic terrorism and assisting him in drafting a postgraduate research proposal.

After being tipped off by the University of Nottingham, local police arrested and detained the two without charges for a week. They subsequently unsuccessfully attempted to deport Yezza from the UK to Algeria on the minor charge of visa irregularities.

Sabir and Yezza were arbitrarily denied due legal process and the right to a public hearing. Their homes were searched, property seized, and their friends and families questioned at length.

Thornton points out in an academic paper that all three documents "were, in fact, available from their own university's library." Two were articles published in *Foreign Affairs* and the *Middle East Policy Council Journal*.

The manual too is available in different versions and can be freely downloaded from the US Department of Justice website or bought on Amazon. It is on academic reading lists at the University of Oxford.

The most complete edition of the manual, as Thornton makes clear, is the one available in the library of the University of Nottingham and which is accessible to all students and staff.

Regardless of this, University Vice Chancellor Sir Colin Campbell made his infamous statement that there is "no 'right' to access and research terrorist materials. Those who do so run the risk of being investigated and prosecuted on terrorism charges."

When Thornton criticised the university in an academic paper, he was suspended from his teaching post and effectively censored. Since then Thornton has left the university's employment by mutual agreement.

He was responsible for Sabir in his role as postgraduate tutor in the School of Politics. His paper was entitled "Radicalisation at universities or radicalisation by universities? How a student's use of a library book became a 'major Islamist plot.'" In it he accused the university of colluding with the police to frame the two men.

The local police interviewed Thornton as part of contriving a case against Sabir and Yezza. During the interview, he said that he merely told police that Sabir

was studying al-Qaida, but was never asked to discuss the manual. Thornton says that officers invented claims that he had concerns over the manual, which he said was an attempt to retroactively justify the arrest and police anti-terror operation.

When Thornton found his interview had been used by West Midlands Police to persecute Sabir and Yezza, he protested about the manner in which his evidence had been presented.

The subsequent police inquiry upheld five out of eight of his complaints.

Nottinghamshire Police later paid £20,000 to settle a civil case out of court but did not accept that their actions were unlawful.

The inquiry said there was “no case to answer in respect of misconduct,” and the matter was officially closed.

Sabir, currently a PhD student at The University of Bath, said, “I have known that the police lied and deceived in order to justify my arrest and treatment and this has now been proven. What should raise alarm bells is how and why the police think it is acceptable to make up information to send innocent Muslims to prison as terrorists.”

Speaking to the *Guardian*, Thornton, a former counter terrorism officer in the British army, said, “The police were totally unprofessional. After their mistakes they tried to cover them up. I’ve seen some altered police notes. I’ve seen evidence made up. The whole thing seems to be a complete tissue of lies, starting from the cover up of their mistakes in the first place.”

Sabir was conducting research into the attitude of the American government towards al-Qaida operations in Iraq. But universities have been encouraged to become the eyes and ears for British intelligence and to keep close surveillance on political activity on campuses. Sabir was a high profile campaigner for civil liberties at the university and is also the online editor of the campaigning website *Ceasefire*.

Documents released under the Freedom of Information Act reveal that the Sabir case was even mentioned in a report, cited and disseminated by the Home Office, called “Terrorist Plots in Great Britain: Uncovering the Global Network.”

It has become common place for crudely fabricated material to take on the status of “verified and confirmed” by multiple-source “intelligence.” Clearly

little has changed from when British intelligence composed the “dodgy dossier” to justify the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The persecution of Sabir shows that the British state and successive governments are engaged in a criminal conspiracy to undermine democratic rights and civil liberties by creating from whole cloth “terrorist plots.” These alleged threats are then used to justify a clampdown on free speech, the right to assembly, and other democratic rights and civil liberties.

Dr. Thornton has made a complaint to the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC). West Midlands Police said the issue had been “thoroughly investigated,” but it could not comment further while an investigation was ongoing.



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