

British fake bomb detectors withdrawn from Iraq following terrorist attacks

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Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi has demanded the withdrawal of all British-made bomb detector wands that have been proven to be fake.

The decision was taken following the horrific multiple car-bomb explosions carried out July 2 by ISIS in the Karrada district of Baghdad. They killed nearly 300, making it the single bloodiest attack since the illegal 2003 US-UK led invasion of the country.

In a statement al-Abadi said, "All security forces must take away the handheld detectors from checkpoints and the (ministry of interior) must reopen the investigation for corruption in the contracts for these devices and follow all entities which participated in them."

For almost a decade, at checkpoints across the country, Iraq's security forces have been attempting to thwart car bombs with bomb detector wands that have proven to have no effective value. Thousands of Iraqis have died as a result of car and truck bombs since 2006, when the fake devices first came into use at checkpoints in Baghdad and Basra. Since 2007, the majority of bombs that have killed and maimed at least 4,000 people have been driven past police or soldiers using the devices at checkpoints.

The devices, believed to be based on a golf ball detector, are essentially hand-held aerials fixed to plastic hinges. The instructions state that a small amount of the substance the user wishes to detect--such as explosives--is placed in a Kilner jar along with a sticker that purportedly absorbs the "vapours" of the substance. A card with a sticker attached is read by a card reader and inserted into the device. While pacing up and down, the user would then hold the device, which has no working electronics, and the swivelling antenna was meant to indicate the location of the sought-for substance.

In 2013, UK businessman James McCormick, who sold the devices and amassed enormous profits, received a 10-year jail sentence for fraud. He is thought to have made £50 million from the sale of more than 7,000 of the fake devices to several countries, including Iraq. The device was also sold in Georgia, Romania, Niger, Thailand and Saudi Arabia. The court was shown one invoice recording sales of £38 million over three years to Iraq.

Deaths occurred as the result of the device being used, said prosecuting QC Richard Whittam. He stated that the justice and foreign affairs ministries in Baghdad were hit by truck bombs that were driven through checkpoints where the useless devices were in operation. Whittam said the "inescapable conclusion" was that Iraqis died because of their use.

In a statement outside the courtroom, Superintendent Nigel Rock of Somerset and Avon Police said, "McCormick is a fraudster who over the last 10 years has made, manufactured and sold a device that is completely incapable of detecting explosives, drugs, or any other substance," adding, "There are no working parts in that device. It is empty."

Due to the corrupt nature of the US-backed Iraqi state, a previous investigation into the sale of the devices from 2007-10 was shelved by the interior ministry, and the devices continued to be used at checkpoints.

The Iraqi government spent over £55 million on the fake bomb detectors, some of which was paid as bribes to senior figures, including General Jihad al-Jabiri, head of the Baghdad bomb squad who helped McCormick to receive the contract. Jabiri and two other Iraqi officials are now serving jail terms for corruption.

The BBC's *Newsnight* programme conducted an investigation into the devices sold by McCormick's

company, resulting in a UK government ban on their sale in Iraq and Afghanistan in January 2010. A whistleblower told the programme he had confronted McCormick, saying he did not want to be any part of the business if the devices did not work. McCormick is said to have responded, “It does exactly what it's designed to. It makes money.”

It is not credible that the fraudulent character of McCormick's devices would have gone unchecked without official assistance. That the regime knew all about the bogus nature of the wand is evidenced by a statement from a senior Iraqi interior ministry official who told the *Guardian* this week, “Sometimes it is better to pretend. To say that these don't work says that we don't have anything better. The people need some sort of reassurance.”

The *Guardian* noted, “Some security officials were slow to respond to the order [to withdraw the fake devices], still holding wands on Monday [July 4] at approaches to the central city and along roads to the airport and the north. The reluctance to acknowledge them as useless was in part centred in having to acknowledge that there are few alternatives to keeping bombers away from Iraq's towns and cities.”

A rising tide of anger and hostility has been building up towards the Baghdad regime, expressed in the incursions into the government Green Zone and culminating in the sharp outburst of rage and bitterness towards al-Abadi when he sought to visit the site of the Karrada district.

Attuned to this rising anger and unable to shelter behind his US-paymasters, al-Abadi has sought to make a pose of being “anti-corruption”—making much of resistance from members of parliament and senior bureaucrats. The interior ministry, which was responsible for the procurement of most of McCormick's devices, is ostensibly in the prime minister's firing-line.

McCormick, who publicly boasted in the press of his lavish lifestyle, resulting from the sale of the fake devices, is far from a lone war profiteer. The convicted fraudster forms a relatively small part of a multi-billion dollar industry composed of construction companies, arms dealers and private security firms that have made huge sums of money from the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq.

McCormick's criminal profiteering is a war crime

against the Iraqi masses, but is one among many committed by the imperialist powers in this devastated country. It would not have been possible without the ultimate war crime: the illegal 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq.



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