

Westminster attacker was known to British intelligence

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Much remains unclear about the terror attack on Westminster Bridge and the Houses of Parliament in London that left five people dead and at least 40 others injured, some critically.

Unusually, it took more than 24 hours for the alleged perpetrator to be named. Khalid Masood, 52, a British citizen born in Kent and thought to have been living in the West Midlands, was killed in the incident.

Just before 3pm on Wednesday, he had driven a rented SUV at speed across Westminster Bridge, knocking pedestrians over, and causing one to jump into the River Thames, before the car struck a perimeter wall at the Houses of Parliament. He then jumped from his vehicle and attempted to force his way through an unlocked gate, fatally stabbing PC Keith Palmer with an 8-inch blade before he was shot by an armed police officer. He died later in hospital.

Parliament was placed on lockdown for several hours, and Prime Minister Theresa May was rushed to safety as armed police searched the building.

In her lunchtime statement before a reconvened Commons on Thursday, May only confirmed that the assailant was a British-born male who had acted alone. He was known to the domestic intelligence agency MI5, although only as a “peripheral figure,” and he was not “part of the current intelligence picture.”

Some 3,000 Britons are thought to be on MI5’s anti-terror surveillance list, but it appears Masood was not among them. May said that his identity was known to the police and security services and that, when “operational considerations allow,” he would be identified. He had once been investigated by MI5 in relation to “concerns about violent extremism.”

According to the *Guardian*, the original text issued by Number 10 said only that he had been investigated over such concerns, but not by whom. May did not state what these concerns were based on, or whether the subject had

ever been arrested. According to subsequent reports, Masood had previous convictions for assault, criminal damage and possession of offensive weapons, but none for terror-related offences.

The patchiness of the prime minister’s statement was underscored by her assertion that the “working assumption” was that the attacker was “inspired by Islamist ideology,” but police “have no reason to believe there are imminent further attacks on the public.”

Despite this, police raided at least six properties in Birmingham, London and elsewhere, making eight arrests.

May also stated that in the absence of “specific intelligence” that a further attack is imminent, the UK’s security level would not be raised and would remain at “severe.” Police patrols would be increased across the country as a “precautionary measure,” including armed police in major cities.

May struck a Churchillian pose, warning that in the face of the terrorists’ efforts to “silence our democracy,” the “oldest of parliaments” would not be cowed and that British “democracy and the values it entails will always prevail.”

There is something profoundly distasteful about the use of such a horror for political grandstanding. The reality is that the MPs gathered in Westminster were probably the safest people in the country at that moment. The Houses of Parliament is the most heavily fortified building in London, complete with concrete bollards, barriers and heavily armed police officers.

Masood only managed to attack PC Palmer because a side gate had been left unlocked. If not, he would have turned his knife, not just his car, on people outside parliament.

Wednesday’s tragedy follows a pattern seen in Germany, France, Belgium and elsewhere.

A lone operative, known to the security services,

launches an attack using a lorry, car, knife or some other unsophisticated weaponry to deadly effect. Once again, it is those going quietly about their daily lives who are the victims.

In Wednesday's incident, these included Aysha Frade, a college worker, and American tourist Kurt Cochran, celebrating his 25th wedding anniversary with his wife, who was injured in the attack. The fifth deceased individual was identified Thursday evening as a 75-year-old man.

In addition to the 12 Britons admitted to hospital, the injured include three French children, two Romanians, two Greeks, one Italian, one Pole, one German, one Irish, four South Koreans, one Chinese, one Italian and one American.

May's statement, like the wall-to-wall media coverage, is aimed not at uncovering the truth of this incident, its origins and implications, but at concealing, confusing and ultimately silencing any discussion.

Jonathan Freedland in the *Guardian* wrote, "The bastion of politics now has a human face, as vulnerable as the rest of us to an act of murderous violence."

Westminster, like "Washington, DC" or "Brussels", had been shorthand for a "loathed political establishment or distant, overmighty government," he wrote. Wednesday changed this. MPs "locked in" the Commons chamber trying desperately to contact loved ones, or the images of Conservative MP Tobias Ellwood giving CPR to PC Palmer; all contributed to parliament being "seen not as the widely despised bastion of the political class, but a real place inhabited by office workers, tourists, security guards and groups of visiting schoolchildren."

Scottish National Party leader Nicola Sturgeon summed up the purpose of such wishful prattle, insisting that acts of terror were the responsibility only of the individuals who carried them out. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn outdid the Archbishop of Canterbury in pious and saccharine platitudes as to how people must stand together in times of "darkness and adversity", in order to "defeat the poison and division of hatred."

The refusal to consider any political or social impulses for terror attacks goes hand-in-glove with the efforts to rehabilitate the discredited and loathed ruling elite, and to excuse the role its wars have played in fostering Islamist terrorism.

Just as the incident unfolded, foreign ministers from 68 countries were gathering in the US to step up their military intervention in Iraq, Syria and Libya. The day before, it was reported that a US-led airstrike had struck a

school building in Raqqa, the ISIS capital of Syria, killing more than 33 people. Days earlier, a US strike on a mosque complex in the northwest of the country killed at least 52 people.

While there are no public reports of British involvement in these attacks, in December 2015 parliament voted to authorise UK military airstrikes in Syria.

Then there is the alliance between the US and the UK alongside Saudi Arabia and others, in financing, arming and training Islamic extremists in Syria, Libya and Iraq as it suits their interests. Not only does this increase the danger of terrorism, such reckless actions threaten a global conflagration. But any discussion on these questions is being ruled out of order.

Instead, the UK government follows Trump's White House in imposing ever more worthless "security" restrictions, such as insisting laptops and tablets carried on certain airlines from specified airports be placed in the hold, rather than in the cabin. This is accompanied by shrill demands for greater police powers.

Rupert Murdoch's *Sun* newspaper demanded a massive increase in armed police, while the *Daily Mail* argued that such attacks make it seem "increasingly perverse to deny the authorities power to eavesdrop on our electronic communications for the purpose of protecting the public."

As for Freedland and Corbyn's calls for unity and solidarity, in reality the attack is being used to create an atmosphere redolent of the vicious anti-Muslim campaigns underway in the US, France, Germany, the Netherlands and elsewhere.

Writing in the *Daily Mail*, Katie Hopkins said London is a "city of ghettos behind a thin veneer of civility kept polished by a Muslim mayor [Labour's Sadiq Khan]." She described a "war" taking place in the country, between "those who think it is more important to tip-toe around the cultures of those who choose to join us, rather than defend our own culture."



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