

London attack perpetrator was monitored by British intelligence six years ago

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Within the space of a few hours Sunday and Monday, the media headlines regarding the perpetrator of last week's Westminster terrorist attacks, Khalid Masood, were turned on their head.

Last Wednesday, Masood drove a car at high speed into a number of individuals walking on Westminster Bridge, before crashing it into railings at the nearby Houses of Parliament. He then stabbed a police officer to death in the grounds of Parliament, after going through open gates of the perimeter fence. As well as the police officer, Masood killed three people during his attack, and injured around 50 others, some critically. Fifteen people are still being treated in hospital.

Masood was shot dead by an armed close protection police officer following his stabbing of the police officer.

According to a statement from Prime Minister Theresa May the following day, the British-born Masood was known to the domestic intelligence agency, MI5, although only as a "peripheral figure," and he was not "part of the current intelligence picture." She added, "There was no prior intelligence about his intent to mount a terrorist attack."

On Saturday evening, London's Metropolitan Police deputy assistant police commissioner, Neil Basu, said, "We must all accept that there is a possibility we will never understand why he [Masood] did this. That understanding may have died with him."

But just a few hours later the fiction that Masood was now a closed book was refuted by new revelations. The *Guardian* confirmed that Masood was known to the intelligence agencies as far back as six years ago. It reported that Masood "first came to the attention of MI5 six years ago after returning to the UK from Saudi Arabia where he had been teaching English. ... but he dropped off the radar of intelligence officials some time before the fatal attack in London ..."

It continued, "The *Sunday Times* reported the banned al-

Muhajiroun group, led by the jailed hate preacher Anjem Choudary, was active in the area at the time—and that Masood was regarded as a subject of interest because he was loosely connected to people under investigation by MI5."

The *Telegraph* substantiated this information Monday morning, reporting that Masood "was investigated by MI5 as part of a plot to blow up an Army base using a remote-controlled car ..."

The *Telegraph* reported that Masood was investigated by MI5, the domestic intelligence body, "six years ago over alleged connections to four al-Qaeda-inspired terrorists." It added, "Zahid Iqbal, Mohammed Sharfaraz Ahmed, Syed Hussain and Umar Arshad, were jailed for a total of 44 years in 2013 after admitting plotting to launch an audacious bomb attack on a Territorial Army base in their hometown of Luton."

The *Telegraph* continued, "Ajao [an alias Masood used] had moved to the town [Luton] in 2009 following two stints in Saudi Arabia, and lived just a few hundreds [sic] yards from one of the ringleaders."

It said Masood, "[M]ay have also come into contact with members of the gang when they started preparing for jihad by attending a local gym."

Of the fate of the investigation, the newspaper abruptly reports, "However after carrying out a risk assessment and looking into his background, it was decided he did not pose a terror threat."

On top of this investigation, Masood, who had a string of criminal convictions, was well known to the police. Between 1983—when he was aged 19—to 2003, Masood was arrested and jailed on a number of occasions, serving time in Lewes jail, East Sussex, Wayland prison in Norfolk, and Ford open prison, West Sussex.

The latest terrorist atrocity in London took place less than a week ago, yet it is now well established that the perpetrator was well known to British intelligence and the

subject of an investigation by them as recently as 2011.

However, yet more innocent people have now been slain, despite the massive and growing surveillance of the population—which is enforced in the UK in the name of fighting the “war on terror” and preventing terrorist attacks. These powers were augmented in January with the passage of the Investigatory Powers Bill—widely known as the Snoopers’ Charter—giving the police and intelligence services what have been described as “the most sweeping surveillance powers in the western world ...”

In each terrorist attack in the UK since the advent of the “war of terror” in 2001 following the 9/11 attacks in the US, it has been soon established that the perpetrators were known to the British state beforehand. These include those responsible for the bombings in London in July 2005 and the killers of soldier Lee Rigby outside London’s Woolwich barracks in May 2013. One of Rigby’s killers had been known to British intelligence for a decade prior to the attack.

No one should accept at face value the repeated “explanation” by the British state that terrorist incidents involving such individuals are merely the product of “security lapses” or “incompetence.”

The intelligence apparatus in Britain is now so all-encompassing that the Internet and phone communications of the entire population are being monitored at all times. Within this, according to a number of reports, an estimated 3,000 Britons—mainly Islamists who are regarded as capable of terrorism—are under watch 24/7. This is backed up by the largest CCTV coverage per capita of population of any country in the world. Every car driven on the UK’s roads is regularly recorded by a vast camera network, with each vehicle and driver captured in the Automatic Number Plate Recognition database around six times every week.

The only conclusion that can be drawn is that the “war on terror” is being utilised in order to further build up the repressive apparatus of a police state. Since 2001, an enormous raft of legislation—each piece more draconian than the last—has been introduced by successive Labour and Conservative governments, tearing up long-established civil liberties and democratic norms.

The Westminster attacks are now being utilised for this purpose. According to media reports Masood communicated via WhatsApp just prior to launching his attack. WhatsApp’s messages are sent via end-to-end encryption, keeping conversations hidden from electronic surveillance.

The May government is demanding that the government and intelligence service be given full access to spy on WhatsApp users and anyone using other encrypted services.

Speaking to the BBC’s “Andrew Marr Show” on Sunday, Home Secretary Amber Rudd said, “It is completely unacceptable” for the state to be prevented from accessing encrypted services. “In this situation we need to make sure that our intelligence services have the ability to get into situations like encrypted WhatsApp.”

The *Daily Express* reported Monday that following the Westminster attacks, a detachment of the Special Air Service (SAS)—part of the UK’s Special Forces troops—“will be placed on standby permanently at a secret location in the centre of the capital for at least one year.” It added, “Other new security measures ... in London include a new ring of steel around certain key London landmarks such as Buckingham Palace.” The newspaper reported, “The new tactics will also include plain-clothes armed police officers protecting major London landmarks.”

It added, “Cabinet ministers will also get SAS training, all police guarding iconic sites will be armed and MI5 is increasing its recruitment drive so they can monitor potential lone-wolf terrorists.”

What is taking place is part of an international phenomenon, with the terrorist attacks and their aftermath following the same pattern as similar events in Germany, France and Belgium. Following terrorist attacks in France, a semi-permanent state of emergency—backed up with vast numbers of armed police on the streets—has now been in place since November 2015.



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