



Institute for Policy Research and Development

Inside the Crevice

*Islamist terror networks and the 7/7
intelligence failure*

PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING PAPER

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August 2007

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The IPRD acknowledges and thanks the Special Fund Committee at Garden Court Chambers for their financial support toward the production and printing of this report, in particular Rajiv Menon and Francis Webber at the Chambers; Professor Anthony Glee at the Brunel Centre for Intelligence & Security Studies and Lt. Col. (ret.) Nigel Wylde for their critical review of the report and valuable feedback; Estella Schmidt, Les Levidow and Jonathan Bloch for their support for this project as well as critical feedback and organizational assistance. None of the aforementioned bears any responsibility for the contents of this report, which is the author's alone.

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Foreword

By Desmond Thomas, *former Senior Investigating Officer, Deputy Head of CID and Head of Forensic Science Services, CID Strategy, Computer Crime Unit, CID Training and Investigative Performance Review and Evaluation*

The picture painted by this briefing paper 'Inside the Crevice', primarily addressed to Parliament, may be familiar to anyone who has investigated terrorist offences. The problem is that political criminals can be as, if not more, intelligent than those set to oppose them. They will almost certainly be more ruthless and may be more highly motivated. Whereas police and security officials may be concerned about their careers, terrorists may be willing to risk and do anything to realise their objectives. If they win they simply edit their crimes from history. If they lose they melt back into the population to await more favourable circumstances.

Successful terrorists are also experts at manipulation. The first and principal objective of every terrorist organisation is to corrupt and confound the forces of law and order. There are many ways of doing this. None may be more effective than becoming a double agent. Not only does the act of offering information provide terrorists with intelligence on what the authorities know, it also provides them with the face to face contact required to assess the competence, motivation, morality and organisational culture of the police and security service. Individuals who lack competence and organisations that lack a strong moral compass may fall easy prey to the wiles of clever and amoral terrorists. The very act of offering information provides the informant with intelligence as to what the authorities are interested in and their state of knowledge on the subject. By manipulating the flow of information informants can buy themselves protection, they call it insurance, and create gaps in the intelligence screen through which attacks can take place. They may also trap their handlers into situations where they may have conspired to commit criminal offences, and as a result have to defend the indefensible.

The recent statement by the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland in relation to Operation Ballast and the book *Dead Men Talking* by Nicholas Davies may offer an insight to how things can go wrong. After reading the book one may be confronted with the question, was British intelligence running the agent known as

Stake Knife, or was it the other way around? Is that why, notwithstanding his outing as a British spy, he is still alive? Such questions may well apply to the events leading up to the 7/7 bombings. 'Inside the Crevice' raises the spectre not only of intelligence failure, but also of political Garbage Can Management in the wake of 7/7, tying problems to solutions so as to confer self advantage, perhaps leading to the release of wildly inaccurate information.

It never pays to underestimate your opponent. It seems that this atrocity was the product of a mind that understood both British politics and the culture of the security services. The principal and political purpose of the 7/7 attacks may have been to facilitate the introduction of repressive legislation and oppressive policing resulting in the frightening and alienation of the Muslim community, which in turn would be conducive to allowing insurgents to establish an area from which they would be free to move, recruit and mount further attacks. Laws of this kind are often impossible to implement and the trying may itself act as a recruiting sergeant for extremist organisations. The cycle of force begetting force begetting cruelty begetting even more force lost us the Empire, lost the US the war in Vietnam, is already losing the war in Iraq, and is unlikely to do any better inside this country.

Indeed, the outcome of the attack may have exceeded the expectations of those who directed it. The shooting of John Charles de Menezes (11 shots, 7 bullets to the head and one to the shoulder and three which missed their mark) and new anti terror legislation, perhaps made it much easier for Muslim extremists to convince potential recruits that the 'covenant of security' was dead and they had a duty to defend their faith. The short sighted and repressive nature of the state response is also of concern to non-Muslims, not least of which are the victims of the 7/7 atrocity, whose confidence in the honesty of government may not have been enhanced by the inclusion of erroneous information in the Parliamentary Report and rejection of their demand for a Public Inquiry. The police may only have themselves to blame for looking both ridiculous and dishonest. It seems that they could not even get right the time of the train on which the bombers travelled, and the belief, attributed by the CCRC to firearms officers, that a senior officer had altered a surveillance log associated with the shooting of Mr de Menezes is nothing short of alarming.

Where do we go from here? I hope and if I were religious I would pray that Parliament sits up and takes notice of this briefing paper. In my view it represents a splendid and very well researched attempt to turn back the tide of incompetent

repression that may lead us to wage war against our own people, a war which may cost us dearly in life, treasure and liberty. I would urge Parliament to take a lesson from history. The transfer of power in India and defeat of the Communist insurgency in Malaya were both achieved by winning the hearts and minds of those who might otherwise have opposed us, good intelligence and a strong moral purpose: recognising and protecting inalienable human rights.

I beg Parliament to assert its authority over the various interests that may have brought us to the situation in which we now find ourselves. Whilst I cannot comment on foreign policy (except to point to the blindingly obvious: power has its limits), from a law and order perspective I implore them to:

1. Establish a Royal Collage of Detectives capable of independently assessing and promoting the competence of detectives and intelligence officers. The members of every other profession are accredited or support by a professional body. Why should detectives be any different? I have no doubt that such a proposal would be fiercely resisted by ACPO and the Director Generals, not least because it would erode their power and status.
2. Insist that the Home Office Major Incident Room Standardised Procedure (MIRSAP) introduced after the Yorkshire Ripper Inquiry to ensure the validity of police investigations, is used to manage intelligence and any contingent investigation. In competent hands, the system is fool proof and is capable of audit.
3. Appoint independent Reviewing Officers, similar to those currently used to audit murder investigations, to assess the competence and ethics of those responsible for investigative policy, investigators, and intelligence officers and use the information to facilitate organisational learning. The independence of Reviewing Officers may be a critical factor in determining their success. Those whose contracts may be subject to review by Chief Officers or Director Generals may not possess the ability to be totally honest.
4. Establish an Ethics Committee in relation to the national security system composed of Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Jewish clergy and

lawyers. Positioning respected Muslims at the centre of the security system may destroy any suggestion that the religious ‘covenant of security’ had been broken. Moreover, some decisions can be morally demanding (for instance, do you let an informant drive whilst disqualified to identify a bomb factory; and what happens if he kills someone?)

5. Establish a powerful Parliamentary Committee to review and on occasion counter the advice given to Government Ministers by senior police officers and or security officials who may have a vested interest in the outcome.

British values are based on respecting another’s right to be different, cold courage exemplified by unarmed police officers and the restraint of our soldiers in the field, and most important of all, the wisdom of politicians who recognise the importance of the legacy they leave to posterity. I would exhort Parliament to protect and nurture these intangible things for they are the very essence of our cultural identity – the British Brand, if not civilisation itself.

Des Thomas has 35 years investigative experience. He is a former Senior Detective Superintendent, Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) and Deputy Head of Hampshire Constabulary CID. He was also Head of Child Protection, Forensic Science Services, CID Training, CID Strategy, Fraud Squad, the Computer Crime Unit and Investigative Performance Review and Evaluation. His last operational deployment was as an SIO on 9/11, after which he spent the remainder of his service reviewing and evaluating the quality of investigations. As a detective he lectured at the Police Staff College, and since leaving the police he has lectured at the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies at Portsmouth University, Southampton Solent University and Cardiff Law School. He is also a Consultant Director of the independent think tank ‘Reform’.

Introduction

On midday, 1st May 2007, a group of 7/7 survivors presented a letter drafted by Oury Clark Solicitors on their behalf, formally requesting that the government facilitate an independent public inquiry into the terrorist attacks on London's public transport system on 7th July 2005. The action followed the release of the jury's verdict on Monday 30th April 2007 for the Crevice trial, during which information was produced confirming the links between members of the 7/7 cell and terrorists apprehended in Operation Crevice.

This briefing report has been prepared primarily for the attention of several key UK parliamentary committees, especially the Intelligence & Security Committee, Home Affairs Committee, Defence Committee, Foreign Affairs Committee, and Communities & Local Government Committee. The issues raised therein are of relevance to all the aforesaid. The report does not purport to put forth an alternative narrative of events leading up to the London bombings, but to set out the key discrepancies and inconsistencies in the official account, and thus the central lines of inquiry that as yet remain unresolved. The findings of this report vindicate the legitimacy of the 7/7 survivors' formal request for an independent public inquiry. By drawing on information available in the public record, ultimately from Western government and intelligence officials speaking anonymously to journalists, it outlines the extent to which Operation Crevice obtained specific, credible intelligence of the 7th July 2005 attack plans and their perpetrators. The analysis suggests that MI5 declined to disclose the full extent of what was known prior to 7/7, for fear that doing so will highlight the extent of the failures that permitted the London Underground attacks to proceed unhindered.

These failures were not solely due to unsurpassable structural or bureaucratic barriers, or to an unspecified and unspecifiable incompetence, although both were clearly significant. Although exact figures are not available, MI5 has expanded its staff of intelligence analysts and officers drastically in the "War on Terror", perhaps by as much as 50 per cent. Yet the abundance of new officers also implies that the organization suffers from a lack of experience in counter-terrorism, particularly in the complex related issues of religion, extremism, national and cultural identities, and the

impact of regional politico-economic configurations¹ – not to mention the wider context of competing strategic interests amidst financial instabilities; energy scarcity; food, water and resource insecurity; and ecological crisis. All these are intimately interconnected security issues that fundamentally inform the way terrorism in its local and international manifestations should be understood to develop effective strategies of prevention and response across the spectrum of threats to national security. Given the extent of the interdisciplinary expertise required to sustain effective and meaningful methods of information collection and analysis, the implications of MI5's partial organizational inexperience can be seen in sharp relief. MI5's ability to train, collect and analyse is undoubtedly underdeveloped with respect to the extent of its expansion. In simple terms, as an organization MI5 has not been able to keep up with its own growth.²

In testimony before the All-Parliamentary Group on Extraordinary Renditions in June 2006, former Army Intelligence Officer Lt. Col. Nigel Wylde had already put such concerns on the record, describing a drastic decline in both moral as well as professional standards across both British and American intelligence services:

The training aspects and the recruiting aspects are quite important to this. We have cut training considerably. We have cut the way we recruit and the selection processes considerably. It's part and parcel of saving money at one end to eventually cause a problem at another. We do not have sufficient people of the right calibre to carry out the analysis of the information that's coming in – the raw information that is coming in – and to be able to actually apply that information sensibly. A number of the cases that I have worked on that have either gone through the courts, or are in the process of going through the courts at the moment, it is absolutely clear from the information that I have seen – and I have seen the official reports – that the people who have written those reports are not up to the standard that they used to be twenty years ago when I was receiving reports from the various intelligence services around the world and the quality of those people around the world. I have considerable contact with Americans with whom I have worked over the years, and they report exactly the same.³

This marked decline in standards is not simply a question of inexplicable incompetence. Rather, it is partly due to the post-9/11 *policy* emphasis on *results*

¹ Interview with Lt. Col. Nigel Wylde, former senior British Army Intelligence Officer and Ministry of Defence official responsible for Army command and control policy (May 2007)

² Ibid.

³ Lt. Col. Nigel Wylde, Statements before All-Parliamentary Group on Extraordinary Rendition, "Information Session on Binyan Mohammed" Uncorrected Transcript (London: Thatcher Room, Portcullis House, House of Commons, 19 June 2006) pp. 17-19.

defined according to speed and quantity of the production of intelligence assessments, rather than their depth and quality. Coupled with a decline in moral standards including a reliance on methods of extracting information categorized as torture under international law, the depth, quality and even validity of intelligence analysis by the service has been sacrificed by a demand for politically-defined results.⁴

According to Craig Murray, former Ambassador to Uzbekistan, during his diplomatic tenure he witnessed first-hand examples where senior MI5 policymakers acknowledged that intelligence derived from tortured detainees was false, but was still inputted into the analytical highway to inform decisions on intelligence conduct because it was “operationally useful.”⁵ The question of the politicization of intelligence has been similarly raised by Lt. Col. Crispin Black, a former counterterrorist intelligence analyst for Downing Street, the Joint Intelligence Committee and COBRA, who notes that British intelligence services are compromised by operating “to a political rather than a security agenda.” He points out the roles of the heads of MI5 and MI6, John Scarlett and Dame Eliza Manningham-Buller in the invention of false intelligence for the Iraq-WMD dossier, illustrating that they “allowed their judgement to be corrupted under political pressure.”⁶ Noting that intelligence analysts and collectors “came under intense pressure to produce intelligence” justifying the Anglo-American military invasion of Iraq, Black cautions that, “The Joint Intelligence Committee, supposedly independent of government (like JTAC), appeared to have actually been run by Downing Street officials”, such that, “the most senior (and illustrious) intelligence analytical body in the country buckled under political pressure” to produce false intelligence. “What kind of pressure was at work on the JTAC when it lowered, for example, its threat level on 2 June?” about a month before the London bombings.⁷

The thrust of these various observations from independent intelligence experts is that MI5’s intelligence capability has not only eroded, but its ability to conduct

⁴ Ibid., p. 20-1, 24.

⁵ Ambassador Craig Murray, “Torture and the ‘War on Terror’”, Public Address at Reclaim our Rights Conference, Campaign Against Criminalising Communities (London: London Metropolitan University, 6 December 2006). Audio recording available online at <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/media/2007/01//360081.mp3>. Also see Murray, *Murder in Sarmakand: A British Ambassador’s Controversial Defiance of Tyranny in the War on Terror* (London: Mainstream, 2006)

⁶ Lt. Col. Crispin Black, “Contempt is the new sleaze: Let us emulate the Americans, and insist on an inquiry into the 7/7 attack”, *Independent* (18 December 2005) <http://comment.independent.co.uk/commentators/article333786.ece>.

⁷ Black, *7/7 – The London Bombings: What Went Wrong* (London: Gibson Square, 2006) p. 44.

meaningful self-evaluation, criticism and performance improvement has been subsequently hampered – and further that the policy framework in which MI5 operates is principally responsible for this dire situation.

These highlight crucial questions about competency and efficiency that MI5 has successfully evaded despite the London bombings. But these issues by no means provide a sufficient explanation of the failure to prevent 7/7. They point to wider issues concerning the politicization of intelligence. While providing a general context for understanding MI5's internal organizational constraints (which is not simply a question of resources as security service spokesmen regularly claim, but is fundamentally about what precisely is done with those resources to improve methods of training, research, collection and analysis), we need to interrogate precisely how this general context interacted with the specific issues involved in pre-7/7 counter-terror operations. Ultimately, the failures that permitted the London bombings to proceed unhindered were the product of a series of fundamentally flawed policy decisions, some of which are identified in this report, rooted in a longstanding structure of British intelligence relations with Islamist terrorist networks in the UK and abroad. MI5's inability to transform this intelligence structure may well be symptomatic of its relative organizational inexperience, because it does not apparently fully appreciate the extent of the problem with this structure. The performance of the intelligence services, in other words, must be gauged not in isolation, but in the context of the parameters imposed ultimately by policymakers. These parameters, this report argues, effectively prevented MI5 from assessing potential terrorist cells in the UK as members of an overall, interconnected network, rather than isolated groups.

This report draws significantly on research originally intended for publication in the book *The London Bombings: An Independent Inquiry* (Duckworth, 2006), but which was deleted from the text due to sub-judice rules regarding the Crevice trial. The close of the trial means that these censored extracts can now be freely produced, and they are supplemented below with additional data and analysis.

Executive Summary

1.1 The official line

Originally, the government claimed that the 7/7 bombers were all “clean skins” with no suspicious background whatsoever. As information to the contrary has leaked, the government eventually admitted that at least two of the 7/7 bombers, Mohammed Sidique Khan and Shahzad Tanweer, emerged on the periphery of security surveillance under Operation Crevice. In March 2004, Operation Crevice led to 10 arrests, including nine Britons and a tenth in Canada. On Monday 30th April 2007, five of the defendants were convicted of planning al-Qaeda terrorist attacks.

MI5 now concedes that security services had photographed Khan and Tanweer meeting repeatedly with the ringleader of the crevice plotters, Omar Khyam; and had listened in to their conversations about terrorism. However, MI5 insists that Khan and Tanweer had not been identified until after 7/7; and that even with hindsight, it was impossible for the agency to conclude that the pair posed a terrorist threat. Appearing only as petty fraudsters, MI5 had no reason to divert scarce resources into further surveillance. Yet evidence in the public record leaked from American, British and French security sources contradicts MI5’s official line.

2.1 French security sources confirm a single network

The London bombers belonged to the same network as those who were partially arrested in March 2004 under Operation Crevice. French authorities state that the British had identified a total of 13 “presumed terrorists”, among whom eight were arrested, and five were permitted to evade arrest, precisely to allow the police to intensify surveillance of the group and uncover the wider network. Among the five escapees was chief bomber Mohammad Sidique Khan who was on a Scotland Yard “target list” of suspected terrorists for 15 months. The 7/7 and crevice cells were, therefore, not separate and only occasionally associated, but rather were intimately connected members of a single wider network planning multiple terrorist attacks against targets in the UK, London, and abroad.

2.2 British security sources and information from the crevice trial, including Crown Prosecution Service documents confirm extensive pre-7/7 surveillance

Mohammad Sidique Khan was indeed identified by name, by MI5 and Scotland Yard at least six months prior to 7/7. MI5 had in fact monitored Khan and Tanweer up to a year before the attacks, and perhaps as early as 2003. MI5 had obtained evidence that: 1) Khan and Tanweer met regularly with the fertilizer plotters, had knowledge of, and were involved in multiple discussions about attack planning; 2) they both repeatedly expressed the desire to participate in al-Qaeda terrorist activity; 3) Khan in particular had trained in an al-Qaeda camp specifically to conduct an attack inside Britain, and knew how to make bombs; 4) Tanweer was involved in discussions of plans to make bombs and conduct bombings.

MI5 was investigating Khan since 2003, intensifying in January 2005, and thereafter monitoring both Khan and Tanweer up to May-June 2005, within two weeks before 7/7. Both Khan and Tanweer fitted the category of an “essential” target, potentially involved in post-crevice terrorist activity linked to, but not the same as, the fertilizer plot which had been stopped in Operation Crevice.

2.3 MI5 officers confirm they were diverted from surveillance of Khan

Not only Khan and Tanweer, but all four London bombers had been under MI5 surveillance and were placed on a list of 100 key UK-based Islamist terrorists, along with a hitherto unidentified “fifth man” who fled Britain just before 7/7. By mid-August 2004, a target list of 100 suspected Islamist terrorists was described as being neither scant nor partial, but comprising of detailed dossiers on each individual including up-to-date surveillance data.

Sources also confirm that senior security officials were responsible for ceasing the surveillance operation against the 7/7 cell, in particular against ringleader Sidique Khan, against the wishes of MI5 officers on the ground. At the end of March 2006, British security sources told the BBC that MI5 officers monitoring Khan planned to intensify investigation into his activities, but were prevented from doing so by senior officials.

3.1 The fifth man: 7/7 mastermind ignored

American, British and French security sources suggest that Haroon Rashid Aswat, formerly Osama bin Laden's bodyguard and Abu Hamza al-Masri's right-hand man at the Finsbury Park mosque, is the elusive 'fifth man' mastermind of the London bombings. Aswat was allegedly linked both to the fertilizer bomb plot uncovered in Operation Crevice, and the 7/7 cell. Mobile phone records confirm Aswat's regular contact with the 7/7 cell, particularly Sidique Khan, including a conversation hours before the London bombings. He had, according to intelligence officials, visited the bombers at their home-towns, providing them significant technical and logistical assistance.

However, a former official of the US Justice Department confirms that Aswat was a long-time MI6 informant, protected by the agency from the CIA, the Justice Department, and even MI5 and Scotland Yard. Despite being on a UK terrorist watch list, Aswat was able to enter and leave the UK just days before the attacks. After these allegations were reported in the press, British officials backtracked on previous statements about Aswat, telling the media that they were no longer investigating him in connection with 7/7, but solely in relation to setting up a terrorist-training camp in Oregon.

3.2 Al-Muhajiroun, al-Qaeda recruiting front in the UK

Aswat was also closely associated with al-Muhajiroun, an Islamist extremist⁸ network described by intelligence officials as al-Qaeda's key recruiting front in the UK. Al-Muhajiroun, presided over by self-described cleric Omar Bakri Mohammed, has been linked to every single major al-Qaeda affiliated terrorist plot in the UK since 9/11, including the fertilizer, dirty bomb, liquid bomb, 7/7, among other plots. Individuals involved in these plots, including the London bombers, were associates of

⁸ The term "extremist" as used throughout this document designates a group or individual that justifies and advocates the use of violence against civilians for a political end on the basis of a political ideology. The term "Islamist" as used here designates any politico-ideological interpretation of Islam and in itself does not necessitate any negative connotations, as there are numerous diverse interpretations of Islam in this respect, many benign. Al-Qaeda's specific strain of salafist/wahabi ideology is a particularly abhorrent and marginal version. Hence, the term "Islamist extremist" refers to a group or individual that justifies and advocates the use of violence against civilians on the basis of a particular politico-ideological interpretation of Islam.

al-Muhajiroun, which incubated diverse cells based in Sussex, Bedfordshire, London and elsewhere across the UK, planning multiple terrorist attacks at home and abroad.

There is compelling circumstantial evidence of Omar Bakri's connection to 7/7 that police and security services seem inexplicably intent on ignoring or downplaying. Over one year before 7/7, one month after the crevice raid in March 2004, Omar Bakri warned of an impending terrorist attack on London being prepared by al-Qaeda affiliated groups in Europe and London, and appeared to identify himself with these groups. In January 2005, shortly after his close associate Abu Hamza had been arrested and charged by police under anti-terror powers, Bakri issued a fatwa⁹ over the internet declaring war on Britain, urging his followers to join al-Qaeda's jihad, and denouncing as defunct the so-called "covenant of security" purportedly binding Muslims to live peacefully in Britain. At that time, the first day of Abu Hamza's trial had already been scheduled for 7th July 2005, which should have been a high-risk date.

3.3 Al-Muhajiroun, recruited by British military intelligence

Bakri has not been arrested or even investigated in connection with 7/7. Although al-Muhajiroun and its successor organizations have been repeatedly proscribed by the government, these measures have been wholly ineffective. The network remains fully intact and continues to operate relatively unimpeded across the UK. Despite being exiled to Lebanon, Omar Bakri maintains regular communications with this network inside the UK.

Security sources confirm that al-Muhajiroun, including extremist clerics Omar Bakri and Abu Hamza, was hired by MI6 as early as 1995 to recruit British Muslims to fight alongside MI6-CIA sponsored KLA guerrillas in Kosovo. The KLA was simultaneously financed and trained by al-Qaeda. Despite this, as European security sources report, the KLA has continued to receive covert sponsorship from NATO up to January 2003 in its new incarnation as the NLA in Macedonia.

⁹ Arabic term meaning a legal opinion or ruling on a matter of Islamic law issued by a recognized Islamic religious authority. However, Omar Bakri is not a recognized religious authority in Islamic scholarship, and is not by any meaningful standard an Islamic cleric deserving of the title "Sheikh".

3.4 7/7 warning signs

The 7/7 attacks were not an isolated plot planned by an isolated cell, but only one part of an overall multi-tiered al-Qaeda attack plan involving a single interconnected network across the UK. This network was being run at least since 2004 by Abu Faraj al-Libbi, al-Qaeda's third in command, until his arrest in Pakistan in early 2005. According to American and British officials, al-Libbi, currently in US custody, was in regular communications with the fertilizer bomb plotters arrested in Operation Crevice. British officials expressed grave concern that only eight of the suspects had been apprehended, while the other five (including Khan) had evaded arrest. This is in tension with MI5's official position that agency officials saw no reason to monitor Khan.

Multiple sources noted that al-Libbi had planned to target London public transport systems, to conduct a repeat of the Madrid bombings in the UK, in addition to targets in Washington and New York. American intelligence sources confirm that al-Libbi had explicitly warned his US interrogators while in custody that London's public transport system was a likely target of imminent attack. This warning was considered credible and passed to British authorities two months before 7/7.

This was only one of half a dozen warnings from foreign intelligence services. One of these, from Saudi Arabia, is specifically dismissed by the House of Commons Intelligence & Security Committee's report of March 2006. However, not only the Saudis, but also the CIA and the FBI believe the Saudi warning to be credible. The warning was issued to Britain in December 2004, and stated that a cell of four British Muslims was planning a terrorist attack on the London Underground within 6 months (i.e. by July 2005).

Such warnings ought to have led to the intensification of surveillance, and the heightening – not downgrading – of Britain's alert status. In particular, the five individuals including Khan who had evaded arrest under crevice were prime candidates in this context for urgent re-investigation. MI5 did re-investigate Khan, Tanweer and the other members of the 7/7 cell from January 2005, and picked up evidence of Tanweer's bomb-making plans as late as two weeks before 7/7. It is therefore patently untrue for MI5 to say it received no warning whatsoever of the London bombings.

4.1 Official narrative discredited

MI5's official explanation of events leading up to 7/7 does not cohere with the evidence from Western security sources available in the public record. One can derive several different narratives fundamentally contradicting the official government line from French, American and British sources. The latter three narratives taken together offer a cumulative and reasonably coherent understanding of events. However, the significance of this is not to offer a separate alternative narrative as such, but rather to set out the key lines of inquiry that require resolution.

4.2 A defunct and dangerous intelligence paradigm

Recruitment and liaison with Islamist extremists in the UK for domestic and international intelligence purposes has been extensive, to such an extent that it appears to have obstructed the capability of the security services to act meaningfully against Islamist terror networks in the UK to this day. There are two mutually compatible strategic interests behind this defunct and dangerous intelligence paradigm.

The "covenant of security" between the British Government and extremist Islamism: British security services permitted Islamist extremist networks, many affiliated to al-Qaeda, to use the UK as a base of operations for recruitment, financing and planning of terrorist attacks abroad, as long as they did not target British interests at home. Lessons have still not been learned. Even now, despite a vast array of connections to every major terrorist plot in the UK, Omar Bakri and al-Muhajiroun have not been investigated. Police officials display an inexplicable reluctance to acknowledge these connections. As such, these networks remain intact, while police are pursuing fruitless and costly measures targeting British Muslims communities wholesale. It is difficult to put this down solely to incompetence.

Geopolitical expansion in regions of strategic and economic interest in the Balkans, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe: In the post-World War II period, British foreign policy has developed according to the strategic vision of the United States. Since the late 1990s, CIA policymakers advocated using Islamism to promote US interests in the Balkans, Central Asia and Eastern Europe, by countering Russian and

Chinese influence in these regions. Britain has followed this strategic vision (see Appendix).

4.3 Independent public inquiry needed for national security

In this context, the drastic extension of the state's anti-terror powers fails to rectify the multiple failures of domestic and international security policy that paved the way for 7/7. It only lends unprecedented powers of social control to a hobbled and outmoded intelligence architecture operating according to a defunct and dangerous security paradigm.

The solution therefore is not merely to haphazardly escalate the arsenal of anti-terror laws available to the state in reactionary fashion, as the Brown government is now doing, but to carefully and impartially evaluate the specific police and intelligence policy failures that disallowed the security services from preventing the 7/7 attacks, in order to develop more focused, effective and consistent deployment of law-enforcement powers. An independent public inquiry offers the only mechanism by which the relevant police and intelligence policies can be subjected to impartial scrutiny without government interference and obfuscation. Until policy is properly scrutinized in an independent public inquiry, the British national security system will not only remain open to another attack, but will end up increasing the likelihood of such an attack.

4.4 New policies of training, engagement and inclusion needed

This situation is compounded in the context of the rapid rise in new intelligence analysts and officers recruited to the agency over the last few years. MI5 has perhaps almost doubled in size. Yet the abundance of new officers also implies that the organization suffers from a relative lack of experience in counter-terrorism, particularly in the complex related issues of religion, extremism, national and cultural identities, and the impact of regional politico-economic configurations. MI5's ability to train, collect and analyse is underdeveloped with respect to the extent of its expansion. In simple terms, as an organization MI5 has not been able to keep up with its own growth.

MI5 needs to develop not only a new interdisciplinary approach to national security and threat assessment appropriate to an age of terror fuelled by intimately interconnected global political, economic, energy and ecological crises, it must develop corresponding methods of training, information collection and analysis. With the quality of British and American intelligence assessments declining markedly over the years according to intelligence experts due to policy demands that privilege political expediency, speed and quantity over quality, MI5's intelligence capability has not only eroded, but its ability to conduct meaningful self-evaluation, criticism and performance improvement has been subsequently hampered. This is exacerbated and exacerbates the extent to which intelligence has been politicized to perpetuate quite questionable interests with little real connection to ensuring public safety.

To alleviate this problem, MI5 should consider developing mechanisms to engage and include the British Muslim community in the formulation of strategies to counter Islamist terrorism to inform better training and improve expertise. During Abu Hamza's control of the Finsbury Park mosque, it was principally the British Muslim community calling on police to investigate and arrest him, yet they were ignored for just under a decade. Here, incompetence was compounded by dangerous political priorities. Hence, the British Muslim community is a powerful, majority force opposed to terrorism, whose insight, resources and vision must be drawn on in the formulation of foreign and security policies relevant to Islam and Muslims at home and abroad.

If the strategy is really to be about winning "hearts and minds", as the government now concedes, it must engage sincerely with the "hearts and minds" of the British public generally, and Muslim communities specifically, nationally and internationally. Purported citizenship programmes bear little relationship to the problems on the ground which increase the vulnerability of communities to extremist recruitment. This means developing specific mechanisms of engagement and inclusion, and drawing on new areas of relevant expertise, with a view to develop viable, new intelligence paradigms by which to tackle extremist Islamist networks. Given, the proven reluctance of the security services to conduct themselves transparently and accountably, this process patently cannot begin in the absence of an independent public inquiry.

1. Operation Crevice: The Official Line

Operation Crevice is the codename for an international anti-terrorist intelligence operation that involved over 1,000 British officers alone, but whose scope included extensive liaison with the security agencies of at least the United States, Canada, and Pakistan. In 2004, the operation led to 10 arrests, including nine Britons and a tenth in Canada. By mid-March 2006, the story hit the mainstream news headlines when seven of those apprehended were on trial at the Old Bailey. They had reportedly obtained aluminium powder and 600kg of ammonium nitrate for use in explosives, confiscated by police, and had decided on “pubs, nightclubs or trains”, including the Bluewater shopping centre in Kent, as potential targets.¹⁰ On Monday 30th April 2007, five of the defendants were convicted of planning al-Qaeda terrorist attacks.

Immediately after the 7th July 2005 attacks, journalists citing security sources reported that those apprehended in Operation Crevice a year ago had close connections to the individuals who went on to attack the London Underground. The reports raised probing questions about the extent of the government’s advanced warning of the 7/7 attacks, and whether more could have been done to prevent them. In all official statements, the British government and security services maintain that the 7/7 bombers had not been identified until after the 7th July 2005 attacks. Yet MI5’s position has also shifted with time. Originally, it claimed that the 7/7 bombers were all “clean skins” with no suspicious background whatsoever. As information to the contrary has leaked, the government has been forced to admit that at least two of the 7/7 bombers, Mohammed Sidique Khan and Shahzad Tanweer, emerged on the periphery of security surveillance, under Operation Crevice, of those involved in the nightclub and Bluewater plots.

MI5 now states that out of 55 individuals picked out for further interest after Operation Crevice culminated in the March 2004 arrests, 15 were graded as “essential – because they had been overheard discussing terrorist activity with Khyam or his associates – and were subjected to further electronic surveillance.” The other 40 were categorized as “desirable”, requiring follow-up at some point, but low-priority.

¹⁰ Jurist: Legal News & Research, ‘UK terror trial of seven gets under way’ (22 March 2006) <http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/paperchase/2006/03/uk-terror-trial-of-seven-gets-under.php>.

Among them were Khan and Tanweer.¹¹ However, MI5 insists that given the circumstances and resources available, there was no discernable reason to kick-start anew the surveillance of Khan and Tanweer, who remained unidentified and appeared merely to be petty criminals. There was no reason to link Khan and Tanweer to involvement or interest in any terrorist attack plan. This is how MI5 put it in an official statement on its own website:

... even with the benefit of hindsight, it would have been impossible from the available intelligence to conclude that either Khan or Tanweer posed a terrorist threat to the British public.

Khan and Tanweer were never identified during the fertiliser plot investigation because they were not involved in the planned attacks. Rather, they appeared as petty fraudsters in loose contact with members of the plot. There was no indication that they were involved in planning any kind of terrorist attack in the UK.¹²

According to *The Times*:

[Security sources] insist that, given the information they had at the time, they could not have justified diverting more resources to investigating [Khan and Tanweer]. They point out that... neither man had been overheard discussing actual terrorist activity in the UK with Khyam... “There is a threshold (for investigation) and Khan and Tanweer only spoke to Omar Khyam about fraud and petty financial crime”, one source said. “When we had a sizeable number of individuals posing a direct threat to life in the United Kingdom, there was no way resources would be diverted from other cases to a man who was a criminal.”¹³

The fact that MI5 does not have a single, consistent explanation suggests a deeper problem with the way pre-7/7 intelligence was handled, and is part of the reason that 7/7 survivors are now calling for a public inquiry independent from government influence. Furthermore, information available in the public record leaked by British, American and French security sources contradicts MI5’s new story. This information, culled from multiple, credible media sources, when put together provides a remarkably consistent picture that is at odds with MI5’s narrative.

¹¹ “MI5 criticised for missing 7/7 link to Operation Crevice”, *The Times* (30 April 2007) <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article1726161.ece>.

¹² MI5 statement, “Links between the 7 July plotters and the fertiliser plot” (2007) <http://www.mi5.gov.uk/output/Page384.html>.

¹³ “MI5 criticised”, *ibid*.

2. The Five that Got Away

2.1 French Security Sources on the Bluewater Plotters

One of the earliest indications that something was seriously wrong with the official British position on the bombers came from a series of leaks from senior French government and security officials. The most high-profile of these came when then French Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy and current President spoke at an emergency terrorism briefing for EU justice and home affairs ministers.¹⁴ Sarkozy was reported to have confirmed that “some of the suspected suicide bombers who attacked London on 7 July had been arrested about a year ago, but freed in a bid to catch a wider network.” He told a news conference that: “It seems that part of this team had been subject to partial arrest... in Spring 2004.”¹⁵ Sarkozy was referring to those individuals apprehended in Operation Crevice. His statements were immediately denied and ridiculed by the British government. Then Home Secretary Charles Clarke described Sarkozy’s statement as “completely and utterly untrue”, and denied that “there had been a discussion of this kind.”¹⁶

However, in later interviews Sarkozy clarified and elaborated on his previous statement. Arguing that he had been slightly misrepresented in media reports, he reiterated that the substance of his original claim was that the London bombers were members of a wider terrorist network known to British security services. He confirmed that he had not been quoting Charles Clarke in his original statement, but rather that his information came from French security officials. Several members of this extremist network had certainly been previously arrested by authorities on suspicion of involvement in terrorist activity, and the London bombers were members of this network uncovered in Operation Crevice. However, he did not mean to imply that any of the four London bombers had been arrested. Those who were not arrested

¹⁴ BBC News, “Row over French bomb arrest claim” (13 July 2005)
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4680155.stm>.

¹⁵ ‘Bomb suspects had been arrested before’, *Daily Mail* (13 July 2005)
http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in_article_id=355717&in_page_id=1770. Simon Jeffery and agencies, “Clarke denies bombing suspects were arrested”, *Guardian* (13 July 2005) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/attackonlondon/story/0,16132,1527699,00.html>.

¹⁶ BBC News, “Row over French bomb arrest claim”, op. cit.

including the London bombers were allowed to go free precisely in a bid to continue surveillance and uncover the wider network. As the French newspaper *Libération* reported, “According to the French intelligence services, the London suicide bombers *belonged to the same network* [my emphasis] as the Britons of Pakistani origin who were partially arrested in Great Britain in March 2004”, as Sarkozy had explained at the EU Council meeting:

Out of “the 13 presumed terrorists identified by the British only eight were arrested and five escaped. The arrests were part of an operation which recovered 600kg of explosives,” said a senior French police officer, who yesterday revealed to *Libération* the fact that amongst the five who escaped from the operation was Mohammed Khan.¹⁷

According to the French, then, there were not two separate groups that happened to meet up now and again. Rather, there was a single terrorist network of senior operatives consisting of a total of 13 individuals identified by the British in Operation Crevice, all of whom were seen as “presumed terrorists”, and among whom was Mohammed Sidique Khan. The French also state that Khan was placed on Scotland Yard’s “target list” of suspected terrorists for 15 months.¹⁸ The implication of the French claim goes further than what the British have so far officially admitted, suggesting that the Bluewater and 7/7 cells were not different and only occasionally associated, but rather that 1) the 7/7 cell and Bluewater cells were *intimately connected* and 2) both were part of *a wider network*, partially apprehended in Operation Crevice, planning multiple terrorist attacks against targets in the UK and abroad. In other words, Khan had already been identified as a member of the network apprehended by Operation Crevice, and in particular was among a group of five “presumed terrorists” who intelligence officials considered to have evaded arrest. The understanding of the French security services is that these five “presumed terrorists” including Khan were not arrested precisely for intelligence purposes.

¹⁷ Patricia Tourancheau, ‘Sarkozy drops a clanger in Bruxelles’, *Libération* (14 July 2005) <http://www.liberation.fr/page.php?Article=311133>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

2.2 British Security Sources on the Khan, Tanweer Connection

The claims of French intelligence have been corroborated in different ways in the British press. Reporting in the *Sunday Times*, David Leppard cites a “senior government official” confirming that Mohammed Sidique Khan was indeed identified by MI5 prior to 7/7:

One of the four suicide terrorists behind the London bomb attacks was scrutinised by MI5 last year, but was judged not to be a threat to national security, a senior government official said yesterday... Mohammed Sidique Khan... was the subject of *a routine threat assessment by MI5 officers after his name cropped up during an investigation in 2004*. [emphasis added]¹⁹

This report indicates that Khan was identified by name before 7/7, in 2004. This was also corroborated by other British security sources. 7/7 survivor Rachel North from the 7/7 Inquiry Group of survivors and families has stated that she was specifically informed by a senior security official involved in the 7/7 investigation that when investigators first looked up Mohammad Sidique Khan’s name on their database after the 7/7 attacks, he was flagged up as a known terrorist.²⁰ This also suggests that Khan was identified by name before 7/7.

Yet another separate investigation by Richard Watson for BBC Newsnight has confirmed the same. On Monday evening 30th April 2007, Watson reported that a year before the 7/7 attacks, MI5 officers had repeatedly tracked Khan and Tanweer while they were driven to Beeston by Omar Khyam, the ringleader of the Bluewater plot among the five convicted. MI5 not only tracked Khan’s car, but as part of their assessment conducted checks on his car registration details to identify him by name as Sidique Khan.²¹ This was less than five months before 7/7. In a detailed subsequent investigation elaborating on this lead, the *Guardian* reported that:

On January 27 2005, police took a statement from the manager of a garage in Leeds which had loaned Khan a courtesy car while his vehicle was being repaired. MI5 had followed Khan and Tanweer as they drove the courtesy car

¹⁹ David Leppard, “MI5 judged bomber ‘no threat’”, *Sunday Times* (17 July 2005) <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article545011.ece>.

²⁰ Rachel North, in various conversations with this author, 2006.

²¹ Richard Watson, “The terror network” and “The 7/7 connection”, BBC Newsnight (30 April 2007) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/6607647.stm>.

across London in March the previous year. *The garage manager told police that the car had been loaned to a 'Mr S Khan' who gave his mobile telephone number and an address in Gregory Street, Batley, West Yorkshire.*

Khan, the police were told, had asked for his repaired car to be delivered to another address, in nearby Dewsbury, which is now known to be his mother-in-law's home. Almost a year earlier, MI5 officers had followed Khan to the same address after watching him meet a number of suspected terrorists.

That was not the end of police interest in Khan in 2005. On the afternoon of February 3 an officer from Scotland Yard's anti-terrorism branch carried out inquiries with the company which had insured a car in which Khan was seen driving almost a year earlier. *He discovered that Khan had insured a five-door silver Honda Accord saloon, in his own name. Inquiries also showed that the car was registered in the name of Khan's mother-in-law.*

... Scotland Yard described the 2005 inquiries as 'routine', while security sources said they were related to the fertiliser bomb plot. [emphasis added]²²

The Newsnight and *Guardian* reports together indicate with some detail that the security services had indeed repeatedly identified Khan *by name* before 7/7. Some of this information was revealed in an official 37-page document cleared by MI5's legal department, prepared for the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for the crevice trial. The document confirmed that "Mohammad Sidique Khan, leader of the July 7 gang, was 'identified' six months before the attacks in 2005", his details "recorded in police files." He had been identified by name in January that year by an employee of a car garage in a police statement. The document also summarises MI5 logs showing how Khan was "followed in the Honda car the previous month."²³

Both Khan and Tanweer were closely monitored by MI5 more than a year before the 7th July attacks. Although MI5 officially denies it, security sources speaking to the *Sunday Times* assert that the two suspects were bugged by MI5 for two months in 2004, as they talked openly with one another about plans to fight for al-Qaeda, in particular Khan's desire "to fight in what he saw as the Islamic holy war." MI5 also listened to the pair discuss Khan's plans to return to Pakistan "where he had attended a camp for British terrorists. They also spoke about engaging in crime to raise money for Islamic extremism." The previous year, in the summer of 2003,

²² Vikram Dodd, Ian Cobain and Helen Carter, "7/7 leader: more evidence reveals what police knew", *Guardian* (3 May 2007) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/frontpage/story/0,,2071229,00.html>.

²³ David Leppard, "MI5 'knew' of 7/7 leader", *Sunday Times* (6 May 2007) <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article1752335.ece>.

MI5 was aware that Khan had visited an al-Qaeda terrorist training camp in northern Pakistan:

The aim of the camp, security sources say, *was to train would-be terrorists such as Khan to plan and carry out bomb attacks in Britain*. A source said that when Khan returned from the camp in the summer of 2003 *he was fully versed in how to make bombs*. The intelligence agency should have picked up the early warning signs about Khan and Tanweer's intentions as they travelled together around England during 2004. [emphasis added]²⁴

The Crown Prosecution Service confirmed the veracity of this report in the crevice trial, where it wanted to introduce the evidence of Khan's attendance at the al-Qaeda camp in 2003. The trial judge observed that the Crown's evidence was to prove "that the purpose of the training camp was to plan and cause explosions in the UK".²⁵ So according to these British intelligence sources, Khan went to an al-Qaeda camp in Pakistan specifically designated to train terrorists to conduct attacks using explosives in the UK. When he arrived back in the UK in 2003, he knew how to construct an explosive device. The implication is that *as early as the summer of 2003, MI5 knew that Khan associated with al-Qaeda, had trained to carry out a terrorist attack in the UK, and was able to build bombs*.

Information that emerged from the crevice trial showed that Khan met Bluewater plot ringleader Khyam five times in February and March 2004 alone, with Tanweer attending three of the meetings, each time tracked and photographed by MI5 as they travelled around Crawley, West Sussex, Slough and Wellinborough.²⁶ It seems that many of these conversations were recorded by the security services. Further secret MI5 tape recordings of Khan obtained by the *Sunday Times* showed him "talking about how to build the device and then leave the country because there would be a lot of police activity." The new evidence, reported David Leppard and Richard Wood:

... shows MI5 monitored Khan when he met suspects allegedly planning another, separate attack; that he *had knowledge of the 'late-stage discussions'*

²⁴ David Leppard, "MI5 knew of bomber's plan for holy war", *The Times* (22 January 2006) <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2087-2003915,00.html>.

²⁵ Sean O'Neill, "MI5 still might have case to answer", *The Times* (2 May 2007) <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/crime/article1733840.ece>.

²⁶ James Kirkup, "Terror-cell bombers met five times before carnage of 7/7", *Scotsman* (1 May 2007) <http://news.scotsman.com/index.cfm?id=668782007>.

*of this plot; and that he was recorded having discussions with them about making a bomb and leaving the country. He was also recorded talking about his plans to wage jihad – holy war – and go to Al-Qaeda terrorist camps abroad. [emphasis added]*²⁷

MI5 knew, therefore, that Khan was not only intimately acquainted with the fertilizer plot as it unfolded, he was also directly involved in the planning process, and expressed his own plans to participate in al-Qaeda related terrorist activity. A Crown Prosecution Service document prepared for the crevice trial confirmed that MI5 surveillance found that Khan and Tanweer “were concerned with intended terrorist activity” when they met with the fertilizer bomb plotters.²⁸

According to a British security source, Khan was monitored by MI5 seamlessly all the way until May 2005.²⁹ Other evidence suggests Tanweer was monitored as late as June 2005. A document disclosed by prosecution lawyers to the defence before the commencement of the crevice trial cited MI5 surveillance recordings of Tanweer “discussing bombings and using the internet to make such a bomb,” as late as “two weeks before” 7th July 2005. While MI5 describes the information as “false”, the Crown Prosecution Service confirms it came from Scotland Yard. “The Yard does not deny this but says its officers in the case had ‘no recollection’ of the information.”³⁰

So MI5’s statement that Khan and Tanweer “were never identified” prior to 7/7, were “not involved” in the fertilizer plot attack plan, and that there was “no indication” they were planning “any kind of terrorist attack in the UK”, appears to be severely strained by this evidence. On the contrary, Khan’s and Tanweer’s profiles, certainly Khan’s, met MI5’s pre-7/7 criteria for an “essential” target: “someone likely to be directly involved in, or to have knowledge of, plans for terrorist activity.” Compare this to the criteria for “desirable”: a mere “associate” of other people “involved in, or with knowledge of, plans for terrorist acts”, who may also be “raising money for terrorist purposes.”³¹ The distinction here is unequivocal. Khan was not merely a low-level associate of people involved in or acquainted with terrorist

²⁷ David Leppard and Richard Wood, “Spies ‘hid’ bomber tape from MPs”, *Sunday Times* (14 May 2006) <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article717798.ece>.

²⁸ Leppard, “MI5 ‘knew’ of 7/7 leader”, *op. cit.*

²⁹ Interview with British security official, December 2006.

³⁰ Dodd, “7/7 leader: more evidence reveals what police knew”, *op. cit.*

³¹ Fred Burton, “Tactical Realities in the Counterterrorism War” (Washington DC: Strategic Forecasting, 17 May 2006) http://www.stratfor.com/products/premium/read_article.php?id=266303.

activity. He himself was directly involved in, and acquainted with, the formulation of the fertilizer bomb plans. MI5 had obtained evidence that 1) Khan and Tanweer met regularly with the fertilizer plotters, had knowledge of, and were involved in multiple discussions about attack planning; 2) they both repeatedly expressed the desire to participate in al-Qaeda terrorist activity; 3) Khan in particular had trained in an al-Qaeda camp specifically to conduct an attack inside Britain, and knew how to make bombs 4) Tanweer was involved in discussions of plans to make bombs and conduct bombings. Moreover, the new evidence suggests that MI5 was investigating Khan since 2003, intensifying in January 2005, and thereafter monitoring both Khan and Tanweer up to May-June 2005, within two weeks before 7/7.³²

Some anonymous security sources state that this was merely a case of “routine” follow-up. Yet the surveillance continued from January through to May-June 2005, at least for five months, indicating an ongoing investigation. So what prompted the renewed, prolonged, re-investigation and surveillance of Khan from January 2005? The evidence of ongoing surveillance in itself contradicts MI5’s repeated claim that Khan and Tanweer were not re-investigated after Operation Crevice because they were seen only as petty criminals, and moreover that they could not be placed under surveillance due to lack of resources for such peripheral characters.

Indeed, the official British narrative so far has emphasised that surveillance resources are invested solely on the basis of reason to suspect terrorist activity, rather than diverting resources on any and every individual surfacing on the “periphery”. Hence, by MI5’s own logic, the continued surveillance of Khan must have been tied to specific reason to suspect his involvement in terrorist activity. If the continued surveillance was related to the fertilizer bomb plot as MI5 now claims, then this confirms that Khan was indeed understood to be a ranking member of the same terrorist network involved in the fertilizer plot, the Bluewater cell. But this is not a sufficient explanation, for the fertilizer plot had already been stopped in its tracks with the March 2004 arrests in Operation Crevice. The connection is only intelligible if we recall that the plot uncovered by Operation Crevice was of multi-targeted international scope (see part 3.3). With the fertilizer plotters already rounded up, the

³² Jamie Doward and Andrew Wander, “MI5 ‘asked police force to investigate 7/7 bomber’”, *Observer* (6 May 2007) http://observer.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,2073706,00.html.

only conceivable explanation is that Khan was being monitored in connection with new terrorist activity, linked to but not the same as the fertilizer plot.

2.3 MI5 Opens Files on All Four 7/7 Bombers, Khan Protected

Khan and Tanweer were not the only members of the 7/7 cell who had come under the scrutiny of MI5. In November 2005, British security sources told the *Mirror* that not only Khan and Tanweer, but all four London bombers had been “watched by intelligence officers a year before” partially in relation to the Bluewater plot. Khan had been filmed with a terror suspect and spotted in conversation with an “al-Qaeda fixer”, whom we now know was either Omar Khyam or Mohammad Quayyan Khan (known as “Q”). Police sources confirmed further that the other three were also “being tracked”, as they were on a list of “100 people throughout the country feared to be Islamic fanatics.” In addition, a “fifth man, thought to be an al-Qaeda operative” believed to have escaped to Pakistan after 7/7, “was being watched” in connection with the other four.³³ Yet it is important to note that the list of 100 terrorist suspects referred to here, in which all four of the London bombers were reportedly included according to the *Mirror’s* sources, was not a scant or partial list, contradicting MI5’s current position.

On the contrary, according to the *Observer’s* chief reporter Jason Burke, by mid-August 2004: “British intelligence agencies ha[d] drawn up a list of around 100 Islamist activists they suspect are involved in terrorist activities in the UK... The list, comprising detailed dossiers on each man, which often include up-to-date surveillance pictures, is continually being updated.”³⁴ The implication is that if the four 7/7 plotters were on this list of 100 key UK-based terrorist suspects, MI5 had detailed files open on each of them including identity and surveillance data.

The *Mirror* adds that security chiefs “pulled the plug” on the surveillance operation because there was “nothing out of the ordinary.”³⁵ This explanation does not tally with the evidence in the public record discussed previously. For the *Mirror*

³³ Bob Roberts and Graham Brough, “Terror cops tracked all 7/7 bombers”, *Mirror* (3 November 2005) http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/tm_objectid=16325181&method=full&siteid=94762&headline=exclusive--terror-cops-tracked-all-7-7-bombers--name_page.html.

³⁴ Jason Burke, “British terrorist suspect list ‘deeply flawed’”, *Observer* (15 August 2004) <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/waronterrorism/story/0,,1283580,00.html>.

³⁵ Bob Roberts and Graham Brough, “Terror cops tracked all 7/7 bombers”, op. cit.

report corroborates the information from French intelligence that five members of the crevice network were not arrested precisely in a bid to intensify surveillance and “catch a wider network” (in other words, for intelligence purposes). Khan was one of 13 individuals found to be members of the terrorist network involved in the plot, but he and four others avoided arrest. All the evidence available to MI5 at that time showed that Khan was not merely a peripheral character who happened to incidentally surface in marginal association with terrorists. On the contrary, he not only had direct knowledge of, but was directly involved in the discussions about the Bluewater terrorist attack plan. Khan, Tanweer, and the other 7/7 operatives, were intimately connected with the Bluewater cell, and both the 7/7 and Bluewater cells were embedded in a wider network; out of those apprehended in Operation Crevice, the four 7/7 suspects and a further unidentified ‘fifth man’ had evaded arrest. So the *Mirror*’s report of a total of five men, including the four known bombers and a fifth so far unknown figure, tallies with Sarkozy’s report that five members of the cell were not apprehended.

The problem can be reiterated. According to the French, the police allowed some suspects to go free not because there was no evidence against them, but precisely for surveillance purposes, to continue to monitor their activities with a view to uncover the wider network. If the French understanding is correct, then Khan and the other suspects should have remained under investigation – indeed this is precisely the reason they were not arrested. Yet according to the official British narrative, this did not happen. MI5 claims that Khan and the other three bombers were ignored because there was no reason to suspect they were involved in “any kind” of planning for a terrorist attack in the UK. Yet the final point of Operation Crevice was to open a window of opportunity for security services to continue and intensify surveillance of a wider network within which the terrorist plotters who had been arrested were operating.

It has now been confirmed in the public record that MI5 did indeed want to intensify surveillance of Khan, not downgrade him. In March 2006 after the release of the parliamentary Intelligence & Security Committee (ISC) report and the Whitehall narrative, British security sources told BBC News that:

... the security services had been so concerned about him [Sidiq Khan] they had *planned to put him under a higher level of investigation*. MI5 officers

assigned to investigate the lead bomber in the 7 July attacks were diverted to another anti-terrorist operation sources have now told BBC News. [emphasis added]³⁶

This explicitly contradicts MI5's statement that its officers saw no reason to continue surveillance. On the contrary, the security services were planning to intensify the investigation of Khan, but their plans were thwarted by senior officials: This revelation flatly contradicts MI5's insistence that its officers saw no reason to investigate Khan as he was only a "desirable" target. Further, it is consistent with the evidence that Khan's profile fulfilled the criteria for an "essential" target. The questions that must be asked, then, are 1) on the basis of what assessment did MI5 officers assigned to the surveillance of Khan plan to put him on a higher level of investigation?; and 2) why, despite this assessment that he posed a threat requiring continued and intensified surveillance, were MI5 officers prevented from doing so by senior officials? In summary, *MI5 officers investigating Khan planned to intensify the investigation into his activities, but were diverted by senior officials.*

³⁶ BBC News, "MI5 taken off July bomber's trail" (30 March 2006)
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4859464.stm>.

3. The Wider Network

3.1 The Fifth Man

The identity of the ‘fifth man’ is likely to be Haroon Rashid Aswat, a 30 year old British-born of Pakistani origin from Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, who has had a 10-year association with radical Islamist groups, including direct contact with Osama bin Laden as his personal bodyguard at an al-Qaeda training camp in Khalden, Afghanistan.³⁷ Aswat was the right-hand man of Abu Hamza while he was in control of the Finsbury Park mosque, and a leading associate of Omar Bakri Mohammad as a member of his al-Muhajiroun. He is currently in US custody for helping to set up an al-Qaeda training camp in Oregon on behalf of Abu Hamza.

Aswat has been linked by US and British intelligence sources to both the 7/7 and Bluewater cells. According to *Newsweek*:

Aswat has surfaced at least twice before in counterterror investigations. One involves Operation Crevice, Scotland Yard’s code name for a case that last year led to the arrest of eight British-born ethnic Pakistanis and the seizure of 1,300 pounds of ammonium nitrate fertilizer—material that authorities suspected was to be used to make bombs to blow up major British landmarks. Aswat is believed to have had connections to some of the suspects in the fertilizer plot, as did Mohammed Sidique Khan, one of the suspects who authorities say blew themselves up in this month’s London attacks.³⁸

Yet Aswat’s connection to the Bluewater plot has not been officially acknowledged by the British government. However, neither has his simultaneous connection to the 7/7 plot been officially admitted, despite evidence to the contrary. Immediately after the London bombings, British investigators were attempting to locate “a man they believed had entered the country two weeks before the bombings, contacted Khan by phone, then left the country hours before the attacks”. The man

³⁷ Zahid Hussain, Daniel McGrory and Sean O’Neill, “Top al-Qaeda Briton called Tube bombers before attack”, *The Times* (21 July 2005) <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,22989-1702411,00.html>.

³⁸ Michael Isikoff and Mark Hosenball, “Worldwide Conspiracy?”, *Newsweek* (21 July 2005) <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8647589/site/newsweek>.

was identified by US counter-terrorism officials as Haroon Rashid Aswat.³⁹ ITN News, elaborating on the evidence, reported that Aswat “had telephone links with two of the suicide bombers.” British security sources confirmed that the alleged al-Qaeda planner “had up to 20 conversations with Khan and another of the bombers, Shehzad Tanweer, one just hours before the blasts.”⁴⁰

On 20 July 2005, according to *The Times*, Aswat – described as the “British al-Qaeda leader linked to the London terrorist attacks” – was being investigated by British police in Pakistan “after the discovery of mobile phone records detailing his calls with the suicide bombers.” Intelligence sources confirmed that he had “visited the home towns of all four bombers as well as selecting targets in London”. He also “spoke to the suicide team on his mobile phone a few hours” prior to explosions. Intelligence sources also confirmed there had been “up to twenty calls between Aswat and two of the bombers in the days leading up to the bombing”, including a call from chief bomber Khan on the morning of 7 July 2005. Pakistani sources reported that Aswat had also stayed in a Pakistani madrassah in Sargodha with two of the bombers. He was apparently very well known to Western intelligence services, and was on a British terrorist watch list.⁴¹

Despite Aswat’s role as a senior al-Qaeda operative, the elusive unidentified ‘fifth man’ simultaneously connected to the Bluewater and 7/7 plots, the British government has shown no interest in investigating him in this regard, nor in disclosing the nature of his involvement to the public. Indeed, American and French security sources have stated that Aswat was recruited by MI6 as a long-time informant. After these revelations, British investigators backed-off from linking Aswat to the 7/7 attacks, and began denying he had any connection to the London bombers. Yet John Loftus, a former US intelligence officer and Justice Department prosecutor, told FOX News that the British were embarrassed because Aswat was an MI6 “double agent” who was being protected by the agency from the CIA, FBI and even our own police:

³⁹ Peter Finn and Glen Frankel, “Al Qaeda Link to Attacks in London Probed”, *Washington Post* (1 August 2005) <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/07/31/AR2005073100624.html>.

⁴⁰ ITN News, “‘Detained Briton’ in bomb phone link” (21 July 2005): www.itn.co.uk/news/962650.html

⁴¹ Zahid Hussain, Daniel McGrory and Sean O’Neill, “Top al-Qaeda Briton called Tube bombers before attack”, *The Times* (21 July 2005) <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,22989-1702411,00.html>.

... what's really embarrassing is that the entire British police are out chasing him, and one wing of the British government, MI6 or the British Secret Service, has been hiding him. And this has been a real source of contention between the CIA, the Justice Department, and Britain... the headquarters of the US Justice Department ordered the Seattle prosecutors not to touch Aswat... [because] apparently Aswat was working for British intelligence... the Brits know that the CIA wants to get a hold of Haroon. So what happens? He takes off again, goes right to London [shortly before 7/7]. He isn't arrested when he lands, he isn't arrested when he leaves [hours before the attacks]... The only reason he could get away with that was if he was working for British intelligence. He was a wanted man...

Whitehall does not deny the allegation, but only disavows "any knowledge" of a relationship between Aswat and MI6, while MI6 has made no official comment on the matter.⁴²

3.2 Al-Muhajiroun: al-Qaeda Front in the UK

A wealth of background evidence in the public record confirms that both the 7/7 cell and the Bluewater plotters were mutually tied into a wider network incubated by al-Muhajiroun, a notorious Islamist extremist organization founded and chaired by the Syrian self-described cleric, Omar Bakri Mohammed. Aswat was one of the leading links in this al-Muhajiroun chain. According to one US government security and defence analyst, al-Muhajiroun's and Omar Bakri's connections to al-Qaeda are well known in the intelligence community:

Sure, [al-Muhajiroun] are a major recruiter for terrorists. It is common knowledge among counter-terrorism operatives and agents that they are a front for bin Laden. There are clear al-Qaeda ties by way of religious, criminal

⁴² Richard Woods, David Leppard and Mick Smith, "Tangled web that still leaves worrying loose ends", *The Times* (30 July 2005) <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2087-1715122,00.html>; Christopher Berry-Dee, "London Bombing ringleader, Haroon Rashid Aswat – double agent for MI6?", *New Criminologist* (23 August 2005) <http://www.newcriminologist.co.uk/news.asp?id=1124824797>; Berry-Dee, "Haroon Aswat...FBI agent threatens former USDA federal agent, now staff reporter for The New Criminologist", *New Criminologist* (25 September 2005) <http://www.newcriminologist.co.uk/news.asp?id=-1677497717>; interview with John Loftus by Mike Jerrick, "The Links of Terror Suspect to MI6", Fox News (29 July 2005); Complete transcript (Montreal: Center for Research on Globalization, 1 August 2005) <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=20050801&articleId=783>.

and foreign mujahideen links. Al Muhajiroun, being the bin-Laden front in the UK, essentially connects all the dots.⁴³

We can only touch on this evidence of al-Muhajiroun's involvement in the Bluewater and 7/7 plots here. For example, Sean O'Neill reported a week after 7/7 in *The Times* that, "Some of the young men from Leeds who killed themselves in the bombings had connections with another group of alleged terror suspects, detained last year, who have been linked to Bakri Mohammed's al-Muhajiroun organisation."⁴⁴ This is a reference to the Bluewater plotters detained in Operation Crevice. The *Guardian* similarly confirmed that "at least one of the suspects killed after the London blasts had links with members of al-Muhajiroun in Bedfordshire."⁴⁵ Another indicator of the link between al-Muhajiroun, the Bluewater plotters and the 7/7 cell, comes in the form of Mohammed Junaid Babar, an al-Qaeda suspect detained in New York for attending an al-Qaeda terror summit in Pakistan. Babar, one of the chief witnesses for the prosecution in the crevice trial, confessed to US authorities that he knew the chief 7/7 bomber, Mohammed Sidique Khan. Babar was a member of the Queens branch of al-Muhajiroun, and had contact with the group's founding leader Omar Bakri. Reportedly part of a terrorist network in Pakistan, Babar was simultaneously connected with the March 2004 Bluewater plot uncovered by the police. After pleading guilty in June 2004, he turned informant for the security services.⁴⁶

Extremist Islamist networks in the UK have never operated as truly isolated terror cells. The opposite is the case. Rather than consisting of a collection of disparate autonomous entities, radical al-Qaeda affiliated Islamism in the UK operates through a single network of interconnected groups, formerly revolving around the Finsbury Park mosque, and presided over chiefly by Omar Bakri, whose al-Muhajiroun organization was one of the most prominent public faces of the network. Omar Bakri does not possess direct operational authority over terrorist activity, but rather acts as the primary ideological and material facilitator of such activity, inculcating extremist doctrines and values in a collection of up to 60 or so core

⁴³ Neil Doyle, "Al Qaeda uses Web sites to draw recruits, spread propaganda", *Washington Times* (11 September 2003).

⁴⁴ Sean O'Neill, "Radical Muslim leader goes into hiding", *The Times* (14 July 2005)
<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,22989-1693445,00.html>.

⁴⁵ Hugh Muir, "Police scrutinise extremist Islamist websites", *Guardian* (14 July 2005)
http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,3604,1528058,00.html.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Wald, "N.Y. man admits he aided al Qaeda, set up jihad camp", CNN (11 August 2004)
<http://www.cnn.com/2004/LAW/08/11/ny.terror.suspect/>.

students who act as senior extremist preachers⁴⁷ in the UK, and providing connections with al-Qaeda operatives abroad to establish terrorist training programmes. He continues to do so today despite having been exiled by the British government to Lebanon.⁴⁸

Just over one year before 7/7, and a month after the Bluewater plotters were picked up by police in the crevice sweep, Omar Bakri publicly declared that a terrorist attack was being prepared in London by an organization affiliated to al-Qaeda. Bakri gave the warning in April 2004 in an interview with a Portuguese magazine, *Publica*, “It’s inevitable. Because several (attacks) are being prepared by several groups.” One “very well organised” group in London calling itself “al Qaeda Europe has a great appeal for young Muslims. I know that they are ready to launch a big operation.” Bakri then went on to explain, as if to identify himself and his organization with the London terror group, “We don’t make a distinction between civilians and non-civilians, innocents and non-innocents. Only between Muslims and unbelievers. And the life of an unbeliever has no value. It has no sanctity.” Bakri also confirmed the existence of several “freelance” militant groups in Europe, such as “al Qaeda London” which was actively preparing to conduct terrorist operations.⁴⁹

Then in January 2005, using live internet broadcasts urging British Muslims to join al-Qaeda, Bakri declared that the “covenant of security” under which Muslims agree to live peacefully in the UK had been “violated” by the British government’s anti-terrorist legislation. Notably, at that time Abu Hamza was in police custody and charged under the new anti-terror laws, the first day of his trial scheduled for 7th July 2005. Omar Bakri asserted that consequently, “I believe the whole of Britain has become Dar ul-Harb (land of war).” In such a state, he added, “the kuffar [non-believer] has no sanctity for their own life or property.” He also urged his listeners to participate in al-Qaeda’s worldwide jihad. His statements were an unambiguous call to arms directed at British Muslims to consider that any obligation to abide peacefully by British laws was over; that Britain was now a legitimate theatre of war; that non-Muslim British citizens were legitimate targets; and finally that jihad in the form of

⁴⁷ The reference to “extremist preachers” designates individuals who attempt to articulate and propagate Islamic theological justifications for the use of violence against civilians, and in doing so are attempting to recruit Muslims into extremist and terrorist activity.

⁴⁸ Interview with British counterterrorist investigator, October 2006; Watson, *Newsnight* (30 April), *op. cit.*

⁴⁹ Reuters, “Militant cleric says attack on London ‘inevitable’” (19 April 2004) http://www.nzherald.co.nz/category/story.cfm?c_id=340&objectid=3561379.

military action must be embarked on under al-Qaeda's umbrella.⁵⁰ Given the context of this address in the detention and trial of Abu Hamza, Bakri's colleague and successor at the Finsbury Park mosque where he once preached, 7th July 2005 "being the first day of Abu Hamza's trial" ought to have been "a high-risk date".⁵¹

Thus, Omar Bakri provided the following alert signs: 1) in April 2004, just over a year before 7/7, he not only expressed advanced knowledge of an al-Qaeda terrorist attack plan targeting London, but implicitly associated al-Muhajiroun with the network behind this planning; 2) by January 2005, six months before 7/7, he issued a fatwa declaring Britain a legitimate target of al-Qaeda terrorist activity due to its anti-terror laws, under which his colleague Abu Hamza had been detained; 3) Abu Hamza's trial date had been set for 7th July 2005, given Bakri's fatwa, a particularly high-risk date. MI5 will have intercepted Bakri's statements – he and his network "are closely monitored" by British security services. What did MI5 do with this information?⁵²

When Bakri boasted in April 2004 of several terrorist attacks being planned in London by al-Qaeda in Europe, it seems he was referring partly to the Bluewater and nightclub plot shut down by Operation Crevice. But he must have been referring to others, as the latter plot had already been intercepted by police in the March arrests. Indeed, by August 2004, another 13 young Britons of Pakistani origin were identified as terrorist suspects in Luton. Eight were arrested in an attempt to foil a terrorist plot discovered on the laptop computer of Naeem Noor Khan, a captured al-Qaeda leader in Lahore, Pakistan. Once again, five unidentified individuals evaded arrest: among them was Mohammad Sidique Khan. This was the notorious multi-targeted plot led by convicted al-Qaeda terrorist Dhiren Barot, aimed at financial buildings in New York and Washington, but including other sub-plots such as the gas limo project, a dirty bomb project, among others. Crucially, the laptop contained plans going back to 2003 for "a coordinated series of attacks on the London subway system". Security sources confirm that Khan was linked to this Luton network. According to ABC News, security officials confirmed that "the London bombers have been connected to an al-Qaeda plot planned two years ago in the Pakistani city of Lahore...

⁵⁰ Sean O'Neil and Yakkov Lappin, "Britain's online imam declares war as he calls young to jihad", *The Times* (17 January 2005) <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2-1443903,00.html>.

⁵¹ David Davis, "Tell us the truth about those 7/7 blunders", *The Times* (1 May 2007) http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article1728700.ece.

⁵² Bill Gertz, "Islamists to honor 9/11 hijackers", *Washington Times* (29 August 2003) <http://www.washtimes.com/national/20030829-113829-1065r.htm>.

The laptop computer of Naeem Noor Khan, a captured al Qaeda leader, contained plans for a coordinated series of attacks on the London subway system... At the time, authorities thought they had foiled the London subway plot by arresting more than a dozen young Britons of Pakistani descent last August in Luton... Security officials tell ABC News they have discovered links between the eldest of the London bombers, Mohammed Sadique Khan, 30, and the original group in Luton. Officials also believe it was not a coincidence the subway bombers all met at the Luton train station last week.⁵³

By August 2004, then, British intelligence was aware that the “London subway system” was a prime, imminent al-Qaeda target, and that Khan was linked to the Luton cell involved in considering the London Underground for a terrorist strike. MI5 also knew that Khan as well as his own close operatives such as Tanweer, were involved in both the Bluewater and Luton cells, but still at large. Al-Muhajiroun encompassed both cells. Sherjeel Shahid, for instance, who reportedly ran an al-Muhajiroun safe house in Lahore, Pakistan, admitted to being a close friend of Naeem Noor Khan.⁵⁴

Omar Bakri has not been officially investigated in connection with 7/7, let alone arrested, charged or prosecuted. Yet he is on a par with Abu Hamza, convicted in February 2006 on charges of terrorism and incitement, and the evidence against Bakri in the form of audiovisual recordings, witnesses and so on, is of a very similar nature to that used against Hamza, if not even more compelling. The failure of British authorities to pursue Bakri is highlighted by their stated intention to investigate anyone who may have had advanced knowledge of the attacks but failed to inform authorities. MI5 therefore have strong grounds to suspect that Bakri knew about an impending attack on London one year before the 7/7 attacks, theoretically making him an “essential” target. Yet instead of being investigated, arrested and charged, he was permitted to travel to Lebanon where he is now exiled. Despite exile, Bakri remains in regular contact with al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Muhajiroun cells in the UK.

A 2005-6 investigation by the counterterrorism unit in the New York Police Department found that Bakri’s al-Muhajiroun had formed 81 front groups and support networks in six countries, most of them based in London, the home counties

⁵³ Brian Ross, “London Bombers Tied to Al-Qaeda Plot in Pakistan”, ABC News (14 July 2005) <http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/LondonBlasts/story?id=940198&page=1>.

⁵⁴ Nick Fielding, “Terror links of the Tottenham Ayatollah”, *Sunday Times* (24 July 2005) <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article547466.ece>.

bordering London, the Midlands, Lancashire and West Yorkshire. By the time Home Secretary Dr. John Reid moved in July 2006 to proscribe the latest incarnation of al-Muhajiroun, “al-Ghuraaba”, this interconnected network was fully functioning and continues to operate namelessly, despite proscription. Bakri’s network has recently adopted the name “Al-Sabiqoon Al-Awwaloon”.⁵⁵

British government and security agencies have an ambiguous relationship with Omar Bakri and his network. According to former Justice Department official and terrorism prosecutor John Loftus, al-Muhajiroun was hired by British intelligence services for recruitment operations in the Balkans:

What ties all these cells together was, back in the late 1990s, the leaders all worked for British intelligence in Kosovo. Believe it or not, British intelligence actually hired some Al-Qaeda guys to help defend the Muslim rights in Albania and in Kosovo... The CIA was funding the operation to defend the Muslims, British intelligence was doing the hiring and recruiting.

Loftus cites a detailed interview with Bakri in the London-based Arabic daily, *al-Sharq al-Awsat* in 2001, “describing the relationship between British intelligence and the operations in Kosovo and al-Muhajiroun.” Suspected 7/7 mastermind and alleged MI6 informant Haroon Rashid Aswat was apparently already involved, having joined the operation in “about 1995.”⁵⁶ In other words, Bakri and his al-Muhajiroun organization have not merely been tolerated by British authorities; they were actively protected by British security services in the late 1990s, operating as recruiting agents for British covert operations in the Balkans, especially in Kosovo (see Appendix).

3.3 Al-Qaeda, 7/7, and Warning Signs

The preceding evidence suggests that the plan to attack the London Underground was only one of a broader terrorist strategy to conduct multiple attacks in the UK and US. It was not a separate plot planned by an isolated cell, but a particular dimension of an overall multi-tiered al-Qaeda attack plan involving a single

⁵⁵ Nafeez Ahmed, “British Army Expert Casts Doubt on Liquid Explosives Threat”, *New Criminologist* (17 September 2006, Vol. 6, No. 2) <http://www.newcriminologist.com/article.asp?aid=1158484887>.

⁵⁶ Interview with John Loftus by Mike Jerrick, “The Links of Terror Suspect to MI6”, op. cit. Andrew Dismore MP (Hendon), *Hansard* (Westminster: House of Commons, 16 October 2001, Vol. 372, No. 31) <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200102/cmhansrd/vo011016/debtext/11016-15.htm>.

interconnected network across the UK. Much of this was confirmed by American and British security sources before, and immediately after 7/7. In September 2004, Pakistani intelligence officials warned that al-Qaeda's third in command, Abu Faraj al-Libbi, had "taken charge" of al-Qaeda sleeper cells in the US and UK. Over the previous 10 months, al-Libbi had "sent coded messages to 'several' Islamic militants in Britain," including some among the eight Britons arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act in Operation Crevice. According to one investigator:

The coded messages deciphered recently have revealed to us that he was not only co-ordinating pre-election terrorist acts in the US, but had sent several messages to several militants in the UK in the last eight to 10 months . . . to share notes with them about future terror attacks in the UK.

At least two British-based militants reportedly travelled from London to Pakistan "and met Abu Faraj to finalise details of attacks."⁵⁷ According to US law enforcement officials, the terror network involved in both the Bluewater and subway plots was "run by" Abu Faraj al-Libbi, according to "British officials," eight of the men arrested under Operation Crevice "were linked to a cell run by al-Libbi." They were not only planning terrorist attacks in the UK, but also in the US, explaining Khan's contacts with US-based terrorist suspects. A federal indictment unsealed in New York in April 2005 "alleges that three of those men conducted surveillance on the New York Stock Exchange and Citicorp building in New York, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in Washington, and the Prudential building in Newark, N.J." That information prompted "a heightened terror alert in New York and Washington in the summer and fall of 2004", despite their arrest. British officials also confirmed that "Al-Libbi had contact with the al-Qaeda suspects in London before their arrests" in 2004. In particular, al-Libbi was planning a large-scale operation to target public transport systems. Documents found in al-Libbi's possession after his arrest in Pakistan in May 2005 confirmed his specific interest "in repeating the Madrid train bombings in Europe." Although Operation Crevice did break up active

⁵⁷ Massoud Ansari, "Al Qa'eda third in command 'is running terror cells in the UK'" *Telegraph* (19 September 2004)

al-Qaeda cells, according to the US official, “British authorities recently expressed ‘concern that they didn’t get everybody.’”⁵⁸

This is a crucial revelation, for the reports cited above show that the other members of the al-Qaeda cells who authorities failed to “get” were in fact only five individuals including Sidique Khan. Moreover, British investigators did *not* merely dismiss the five individuals who escaped arrest – a group apparently including all four London bombers along with an identified fifth man. To the contrary, they were clearly concerned that they had not apprehended all suspects in connection with the London, New York and Washington terrorist plots being prepared by multiple cells operating as part of a single al-Qaeda network, run by senior operations chief Abu Faraj al-Libbi. In May 2005, al-Libbi was arrested and detained by Pakistani authorities, who quickly gave US investigators access to him. A US security official confirmed that: “US intelligence had picked up warnings recently that the al-Qaida terror network or its followers were seeking to duplicate the dramatic 3/11 Madrid train bombings in another European city.”⁵⁹

Other US intelligence sources confirmed that al-Libbi had specifically warned of an impending attack on the London public transport system, particularly trains, among other targets, during the course of his interrogation. “A captured al Qaeda leader warned United States interrogators that the London mass transit system was a likely target for an attack”, the officials told ABC News. Al-Libbi had specifically “detailed plans to target London and selected US cities, but did not specify a time for the attacks” in the interrogations.⁶⁰ Most critically, US intelligence sources confirm that based on al-Libbi’s briefing, “Britain was warned two months ago that Al-Qaeda was planning a ‘Madrid-style’ attack on the London transport network”.⁶¹ What was done with this and other warnings, and why did they accompany the downgrading of Britain’s alert status from “critical” to “severe”?

⁵⁸ Stephen J. Hedges, “Blast points to Al-Qaeda: Fragmented network makes probe difficult”, *Chicago Tribune* (8 July 2005) <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0507080202jul08,1,7884973.story?coll=chi-newsnationworld-utl>.

⁵⁹ “US intelligence may point to a link”, *Newsday* (8 July 2005) available at <http://answers.google.com/answers/threadview?id=546199>.

⁶⁰ Brian Ross and David Scott, “The Warning Before the Attack: Officials tell ABC News al-Qaeda leader warned of plans”, ABC News (8 July 2005) <http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/LondonBlasts/story?id=922494>.

⁶¹ Mushtak Parker, “Police Warn of New Attack on London”, Arab News (15 July 2005) <http://www.arabnews.com/?page=4§ion=0&article=66976&d=15&m=7&y=2005>.

Prior to his capture in Pakistan, al-Libbi had extensive contacts with a British terror network planning operations in the year leading up to the 7 July attacks – essentially the same network to which the London bombers were affiliated. These contacts were already known to US and British investigators. The information on a terrorist strike potentially on London’s public transport systems culled directly from al-Libbi himself pointed directly to the need to intensify surveillance of that same network, and of all individuals linked to it. Al-Libbi was clearly running both the Bluewater and the London Underground plots.

If British investigators were troubled by the fact that five operatives associated with the Bluewater plot had evaded arrest, they clearly believed that they still constituted a potential threat requiring continued surveillance. The decision to categorize the 7/7 plotters as low-level suspects with no reason to see them as involved in terrorist activity, precipitating the cessation of surveillance, therefore, came from hitherto unidentified senior levels: it was not justified by the evidence that disturbed British investigators on the ground.

Other warnings received by the British should have heightened concerns. One of particular interest here came from Saudi security sources – the parliamentary cross-party intelligence committee report makes brief reference to this warning but dismisses it as follows:

We have looked in detail into claims that the Saudi Arabian authorities warned the British Agencies about the attacks. We found that some information was passed to the Agencies about possible terrorist planning for an attack in the UK. It was examined by the Agencies who concluded that the plan was not credible. That information has been given to us: it is materially different from what actually occurred on 7 July and clearly not relevant to these attacks.⁶²

Unfortunately, this does not cohere with evidence in the public record. According to the *Observer*, Saudi security sources believe the warning they passed on to Britain was materially the same, and was connected to both the 7/7 plan and the earlier Bluewater plot. The newspaper reports that in December 2004, Saudi intelligence provided MI6 with details of an imminent terrorist plot to bomb the London Underground. The terror cell involved would consist of four people. Senior

⁶² Intelligence & Security Committee, *Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005* (London: House of Commons, May 2006) p. 13, Clause 44, <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm67/6785/6785.pdf>.

Saudi security sources told the *Observer* that the plot “involved a Saudi Islamic militant who fought with insurgents in Iraq and was financed by a Libyan businessman with links to Islamic extremists in the UK.” The militant was arrested after returning to the Gulf kingdom from Iraq on a false passport in the name of a fellow insurgent known to have been killed. Under interrogation he told Saudi intelligence officers that “he was on a mission to fund a plot to target the Underground or a London night club within six months” - in other words, by July 2005. The reference to a nightclub clearly indicates elements of the wider al-Qaeda plot uncovered in Operation Crevice to target a shopping centre, nightclubs and/or trains. The operation was allegedly funded by a Libyan businessman with close links to Islamist extremists in Britain, who is already known to the international intelligence community, but whose location is now unknown. One Saudi source remarked: “When we heard about the bombs in London we immediately recalled the warning we had given Britain – in particular the fact that four individuals carried out the attack and that it happened almost in the timescale we were told about.” Moreover, the Saudis confirm that the Americans have already taken the warning very seriously in hindsight, such that the CIA and FBI “are understood to be trying to trace the businessman.”⁶³ If the Saudi warning is not credible, as MI5 has told the parliamentary inquiry, why are the CIA and FBI pursuing it?

Remarkably, it contained very specific information alerting British security services to the threat of an imminent strike: it revealed the target – the London Underground; precisely established a maximum time-scale for the operation’s execution – July 2005; and confirmed the size of the cell involved, four men. At first glance, the casual observer is inclined to wonder how British authorities might be able to focus intelligence operations to discover a cell of four terrorists. However, British officials were already well aware from Operation Crevice that five associated terrorist suspects were at large. Out of these five, four apparently consisted of the would-be London bombers, whereas the fifth man with apparent foreign connections had escaped abroad, reportedly to Pakistan, at least for the time being. This left the cell of four London bombers, who were already under MI5 surveillance.

The idea that British counter-terrorist officers had no idea where to look is therefore questionable. The available evidence shows that MI5 did indeed re-

⁶³ Antony Barnett and Martin Bright, “We warned MI6 of tube attack, claim Saudis”, *Guardian* (4 September 2005) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/saudi/story/0,11599,1562436,00.html>.

investigate Khan, Tanweer and the other members of the 7/7 cell from January 2005, shortly after the Saudi warning of an imminent attack on the London Underground and just as Omar Bakri had issued a fatwa declaring Britain a legitimate target of al-Qaeda's "jihad". This surveillance continued through to the end of June 2005, two weeks before 7/7.

The evidence discussed here strongly suggests that the 7th July 2005 London bombing plot was the successor to the failed Bluewater operation, and further, that both the Bluewater and the 7/7 cells were incubated by Omar Bakri and his al-Muhajiroun network. British intelligence officials knew that some members of the network were at large, and the escapees consisted of the four would-be London bombers and an unidentified fifth man who were all already under surveillance in connection with multiple plots. Moreover, elements of the network that was partially wound up in 2004 had extensive contacts with senior al-Qaeda leadership in the planning of specific terrorist operations against targets in the United States and United Kingdom, including London's public transport system. Thus, it is patently untrue for MI5 to say it received no warning whatsoever of the London bombings. In the year before the July attacks, British intelligence services received vital clues as to the target, likely date, method, and even the key operatives to participate in the plot.

Conclusions

This analysis suggests that MI5's justification so far for the failure to prevent the 7th July 2005 attacks simply does not cohere with the evidence available in the public record. This evidence, originating ultimately from multiple Western security sources, indicates that far more intelligence on the 7/7 plot was available to British security services than has so far been officially conceded.

In summary, there are several different and mutually inconsistent narratives here about the implications of Operation Crevice:

- 1) The official British government narrative – there was nothing out of the ordinary about Khan and Tanweer (the other 7/7 cell members were not even known), at least nothing to suggest they posed a terrorist threat.
- 2) The French intelligence narrative – the bombers were part of the same network uncovered in Operation Crevice which was only partially arrested; the would-be 7/7 bombers were allowed to escape in order to conduct further surveillance.
- 3) The narrative from American security sources – the British were concerned they had not caught everyone involved in the Bluewater plot, which was one among several being run by al-Qaeda's no. 3 Abu Faraj al-Libbi, including a plan to target the London transport system. Al-Libbi's warning was passed to British intelligence two months before 7th July 2005.
- 4) The narrative from British security sources – Khan, Tanweer, and the other London bombers were all under surveillance for more than a year, Khan all the way up to June 2005. Surveillance was extensive and serious, and ceased due to senior decisions that conflicted with the assessments of MI5 officers on the ground.

Examining the relevant evidence available in the public record, most of which largely comes from Western security sources, suggests an overall alternative understanding of events that is far more plausible than the official account. This evidence gives us every reason to suspect that MI5 is concealing important

information from the public about the nature of its intelligence and security policies prior to 7/7, for fear of disclosing embarrassing failures rooted not simply in structural or bureaucratic constraints, nor merely in institutional incompetence, but in specific senior policy decisions made according to a defunct and dangerous paradigm by which British security services approach Islamist networks.

According to this alternative understanding, Operation Crevice had uncovered an al-Qaeda terror network encompassing multiple interlocking cells planning terrorist attacks on London, New York and Washington. The attacks included a plan to target the London Underground. The 7/7 cell was part of this wider network, and as such the four London bombers were ranking members of the same group apprehended in Operation Crevice. Yet they were among a total of five terrorist suspects, including most probably Haroon Rashid Aswat, whom British intelligence had not arrested precisely to continue surveillance operations in order to uncover and apprehend the wider terrorist network. Information from multiple security sources contradicts MI5's official insistence that surveillance of the four was non-existent, scant, or immediately downgraded. Rather, these sources provide a consistent picture of an ongoing long-term operation in which Khan and Tanweer were tracked and photographed as part of an overall surveillance project against all four members of the 7/7 cell, all of whom were identified on a terrorist watch list and possibly allocated their own files. Khan was monitored until June 2005, and MI5 officers were forced to cease surveillance due to senior decisions which they did not agree with. Several credible warnings of an attack on the London Underground in the months prior to July 2005 seem to have been ignored.

The evidence indicates that recruitment and liaison with Islamist extremists in the UK for domestic and international intelligence purposes has been extensive, to such an extent that it appears to have obstructed the capability of the security services to act meaningfully against Islamist terror networks in the UK to this day. There are two mutually compatible strategic interests behind this defunct and dangerous intelligence paradigm:

- 1) *The "Covenant of Security" Between the British Government and Extremist Islamism*: Its existence has been confirmed by former senior intelligence analyst Lt. Col. Crispin Black, who notes that British security services permitted Islamist extremist networks to operate freely in the UK,

even to use the UK as a base of operations for recruitment, financing and planning of terrorist attacks abroad – as long as they did not target British interests at home. According to Black, the Covenant of Security “pervades every aspect of our intelligence apparatus”, to the extent that “nearly everything we do or plan for our security takes place within this doctrine.”⁶⁴ Even in the aftermath of 7/7, this basic approach apparently continues to colour the authorities’ attitude toward al-Qaeda affiliated networks like al-Muhajiroun. Yet British authorities continue to downplay al-Muhajiroun’s significance. In an interview with BBC News, head of the Metropolitan Police Anti-Terror Branch, Peter Clarke, said that al-Muhajiroun “did not feature in the significant part at all” in the Operation Crevice investigation. Despite “linkages between al-Muhajiroun and some of the individuals associated with the Crevice plot”, he insisted “that doesn’t prove that al-Muhajiroun itself was a motivating factor or force in the development of this plot.” Yet the persistence of al-Muhajiroun’s connections to the Bluewater, 7/7 and past terrorist plots (e.g. the Tel Aviv bombing)⁶⁵ is itself *prima facie* evidence sufficient to justify investigating the nature of these connections. Ongoing reluctance to do so amounts indirectly to a form of passive protection of such Islamist extremist networks from proper legal scrutiny and sanction.

- 2) *Geopolitical Expansion in Regions of Strategic and Economic Interest in the Balkans, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe*: Throughout the post-Second World War period, notwithstanding some exceptions, the trajectory of British foreign policy has developed according to the strategic vision of the United States.⁶⁶ But what is this vision? In September 1999, Graham Fuller, former Deputy Director of the CIA’s National Council on Intelligence, advocated using Islamism to promote US interests and counter Russian and Chinese influence: “The policy of guiding the evolution of Islam and of helping them against our adversaries worked marvellously well in Afghanistan against [the Russians]. The same

⁶⁴ Crispin Black, *7/7 – The London Bombings: What Went Wrong*, p. 31.

⁶⁵ BBC News Press Release, “Links uncovered between Britain’s first suicide bombers and 7/7 bomber” (9 July 2006)

http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2006/07_july/09/bombers.shtml.

⁶⁶ Mark Curtis, *The Ambiguities of Power: British foreign policy since 1945* (London: Zed, 1995)

doctrines can still be used to destabilize what remains of Russian power, and especially to counter the Chinese influence in Central Asia.” The policy that “worked well” in Afghanistan and which Fuller argues in late 1999 should be transplanted to counter Russian and Chinese influence (i.e. in the Balkans, Eastern Europe and Central Asia) is precisely the sponsorship of al-Qaeda as a mercenary force to conduct US covert operations.⁶⁷ British policy toward Islamist terror networks in the Balkans in the post-Cold War period, discussed briefly above, suggests that Britain has actively participated in exactly the strategic vision outlined by Fuller (also see Appendix).

The government appears unable to fully extract itself from these strategic interests, continuing to tolerate Islamist extremist networks in the UK, including successor organizations to al-Muhajiroun, and showing an inexplicable unwillingness to investigate them; displaying ongoing reluctance to arrest and prosecute leading extremists despite abundant evidence of their incitement to terrorism, murder, violence and racial hatred (with serious action delayed until public pressure is brought to bear); and refusing to investigate key al-Qaeda affiliated terrorist suspects based or formerly based in the UK connected to 7/7 and other terrorist attacks. In this dire situation, proposing the extension of state power through yet further anti-terror legislation, as the Brown government is now doing, can never hope to contribute to real security. For in this context, such legislation not only fails to rectify the multiple failures of domestic and international security policy behind the paralysis of the British national security system; it simply lends unprecedented powers of social control to a paralysed system operating according to a defunct and dangerous intelligence paradigm.

Indeed, it is worth noting that Britain’s unique historic promotion of the rights of freedom of expression and association plays an important role here. These commendable liberal values mean that Britain was more ready to tolerate the activities of Islamists than its European neighbours. This no doubt played some role in official reluctance to take action against extremist groups and individuals. Yet recognition of this fact post-9/11 and post-7/7, has translated into an escalating full-frontal assault on

⁶⁷ Richard Labeviere, *Dollars for Terror: the US and Islam* (New York: Algora, 2000) pp. 7-9.

British civil liberties, including the quashing of the rights of freedom of expression and association. This is a fundamentally mistaken approach that is more likely to exacerbate tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Rather than attempting to extract Britain from its own historic rights and values, the focus should be on prosecuting activities that amount to incitement and/or conspiracy to conduct violence, murder and terrorism. Yet it is precisely this task of *focused* prosecution that police and security services are failing to pursue effectively and consistently. There are still between 20 and 60 extremist preachers operating in the UK, the arrest of whom would quickly liquidate the effectiveness and mobility of the networks who revolve around them, and for whom police and security services have firm evidence of incitement.⁶⁸ Yet instead, anti-terror powers have ended up incarcerating hundreds of mostly Muslim suspects who are repeatedly released without charge. This is a huge, fruitless and therefore unnecessary burden in cost and personnel on Britain's intelligence architecture, which needs urgent review and rectification. Moreover, the reason for this failure is not merely incompetence, but in addition a fatal combination of two dangerous paradigms, the covenant of security and geopolitical expansionism, resulting in an ongoing policy of collaboration with Islamist extremists – individuals who misuse a specific marginal politico-ideological interpretation of Islam to incite to violence against civilians. What we need, then, is not new laws and more power for a state increasingly reluctant to hold itself to account according to the rule of law; but more transparency, greater honesty, full accountability, as well as effective and consistent deployment of existing law-enforcement powers through a new process of public disclosure and engagement beginning with an independent public inquiry.

The alternative understanding outlined here is more plausible than the government's narrative of events, precisely because it can be traced back to verifiable evidence in the public record from security sources. As such, it raises pertinent

⁶⁸ Interview with British counterterrorist investigator, October 2006. Consider, for instance, the pattern of lengthy time-lags between the police's obtainment of evidence of activity in support of terrorism, and actual arrests and prosecutions of operatives linked to al-Muhajiroun. Abu Qatada was belatedly arrested by police only after French intelligence revealed he was being protected in an MI5 safe-house. Abu Hamza was belatedly arrested and convicted on the basis of evidence in the police's possession for more than 6 years. Abu Izzeddin was belatedly arrested after endorsing the beheading of British Muslim soldiers in a television interview solely on the basis of a speech he gave two years before-hand. About a week before Abu Hamza's successor, Abu Abdullah, was belatedly arrested by police late last year, the *Sunday Times* noted he "is apparently being allowed to operate unchecked by the authorities five months after a law was passed making it a criminal offence to glorify terrorism." In fact, he also was only eventually arrested for past activities, after several media appearances that week, including a television interview. For some references see Nafeez Ahmed, *The London Bombings* (London: Duckworth, 2006).

questions about whether the conduct of British intelligence services really was as optimal as it could have been, and justifies demands for an independent public inquiry. Indeed, being forced to rely on intelligence leaks to subject the government and intelligence services to some sort of accountability is clearly an unsatisfactory situation in an advanced Western democracy. The public should not have to rely on such obviously limited and fallible forms of analysis, but are entitled to rely on their political representatives to impartially interrogate the failures of policy that made 7/7 possible. The government's ongoing denial of this elementary entitlement only compounds the urgency of an independent public inquiry. Ultimately, the actual course of events leading up to 7/7, and shortly after, will never be known without an inquiry. Continuing obfuscation, denials, and misinformation about the real direction of British security policies toward Islamist extremists abroad and at home only serves to exacerbate the root cause of the problem, which lies in the policy itself. Until policy is properly scrutinized, the British national security system will not only remain open to another attack, but will end up increasing the likelihood of such an attack.

Meanwhile the British Muslim community faces increasing demonization, exacerbated by careless statements from government officials, as the "War on Terror" itself has escalated. Yet it is this very Muslim community which has been calling for British authorities to take action against extremists such as Abu Hamza, Omar Bakri, Abu Izzeddin, among many others, only to have been repeatedly ignored by police and security services until a public outcry makes continued inaction politically impossible. Police indifference toward Abu Hamza, who presided over verbal and physical abuse at the Finsbury Park mosque, permitted him to radicalize mostly impressionable young Muslims despite demands from the majority Muslim community to arrest him. This is merely one example of the broad failure of British security policies, for which the British Muslim community increasingly takes the blame. It shows that the British Muslim community is neither an enemy to be confronted, nor a passive or silent voice that must be awakened – it is a powerful, majority force opposed to terrorism, whose insight, resources and vision must be drawn on in the formulation of foreign and security policies relevant to Islam and Muslims at home and abroad.

The lack of Muslim representation in the formulation of British security policies in general and counterterrorism strategies in particular is symptomatic of

MI5's relative organizational inexperience in countering Islamist terrorism, which has developed in proportion to the rise in numbers of new recruits. MI5 needs to develop not only a new interdisciplinary approach to national security and threat assessment appropriate to an age of intimately interconnected global political, economic, energy and ecological crises, it must develop corresponding methods of training, information collection and analysis free of undue political influence, and informed by relevant expertise. This implies that if the strategy is really to be about winning "hearts and minds", as the government now concedes,⁶⁹ MI5 must engage sincerely with the "hearts and minds" of Muslim communities, nationally and internationally, to draw on its progressive cultural and intellectual resources to develop an informed comprehension of Islamist terrorism and the means to combat it. This means developing specific mechanisms of involvement and inclusion, and drawing on new areas of relevant expertise to inform policymaking on military intelligence issues, a factor so far systematically neglected by the government.

The British foreign policy and security establishment therefore must not only open itself up to legitimate criticism based on transparent, scientific standards of evidence; it also must develop new mechanisms of engagement and involvement with the British public. In other words, meaningful institutions of oversight of the security services, guaranteeing performance improvement and public accountability, are required. Such mechanisms of engagement and involvement must be designed to increase British public representation in the formulation of British foreign and security policies in general, and in particular to increase British Muslim representation in the formulation of these policies with a view to develop viable, new intelligence paradigms by which to tackle extremist Islamist networks.

MI5 has already demonstrated its inability to admit mistakes and remain honest in its public representations about the London bombings. This process therefore cannot begin in the absence of an independent public inquiry.

⁶⁹ CLG Report, "Preventing Violent Extremism: Winning Hearts and Minds" (London: Department for Communities and Local Government, April 2007)
http://www.communities.gov.uk/embedded_object.asp?id=1509401.

APPENDIX: The Balkans Connection

Throughout the post-Cold War period, the United States and Britain have directly and indirectly sponsored the mobilization and expansion of al-Qaeda affiliated networks for varied strategic interests. This has undermined the national security not only of the US and UK, but also of countries in the region.⁷⁰ Robert D. Steele, a retired US Marine Corps intelligence expert and operations officer in all four CIA Directorates who founded the newest US intelligence facility, the Marine Corps Intelligence Center, describes this thesis as:

... consistent with both my years of experience as a clandestine case officer, and my extensive reading on national security misadventures... [T]he US, the UK, and France, among others, have been actively using terrorists, nurturing terrorists, as part of a geopolitical and economic strategy, and that in their naivete, they nurtured a force they cannot control today.⁷¹

The Balkans is a prime example of this Western strategy in the form of the selective sponsorship of Islamist terrorist networks linked to Osama bin Laden, despite his avowed desire to target Western interests and civilians.

1992-1995: The Sponsorship of al-Qaeda in Bosnia-Herzegovina

From 1992 to 1995, the Pentagon assisted with the movement of thousands of al-Qaeda mujahideen from Central Asia into Europe, to fight alongside Bosnian Muslims against the Serbs.⁷² The air funnel was documented extensively based on five years of unrestricted access to Dutch intelligence files by Professor Cees Wiebes of Amsterdam University in Appendix II of the 2002 *Srebrenica Report*.⁷³

⁷⁰ This appendix is based on the author's research in *The London Bombings: An Independent Inquiry* (London: Duckworth, 2006); *The War on Truth: 9/11, Disinformation and the Anatomy of Terrorism* (New York: Olive Branch, 2005); "Terrorism and Western Statecraft: Al-Qaeda and Western Covert Operations After the Cold War", in Paul Zarembka (ed.), *Research in Political Economy* (Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2006, Vol. 23)

⁷¹ Robert D. Steele (CEO, Open Source Solutions, Inc.), Amazon.com review of *The War on Truth*, ibid. (25 October 2005)

⁷² Brendan O'Neill, 'How we trained al-Qa'eda', *The Spectator*, 13 September 2003.

⁷³ Cees Wiebes., *Intelligence and the War in Bosnia 1992-1995: The role of the intelligence and security services* (Transaction Publishers, Rutgers State University, 2003). Available online at the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation at <http://213.222.3.5/srebrenica>.

“Mojahedin fighters were also flown in”, reported Professor Richard Aldrich of the University of Nottingham in *The Guardian*, “but they were reserved as shock troops for especially hazardous operations.” The “hidden force” behind these operations was not the CIA, but “the Pentagon’s own secret service.”⁷⁴

Other intelligence sources reported that “the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had full knowledge of the operation” to fly in and equip hundreds of mujahideen in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Indeed, “the CIA believed that some of the 400 had been detached for future terrorist operations in Western Europe.” Mujahideen landing at Ploce were “accompanied by US Special Forces equipped with high-tech communications equipment.” Their mission was the establishment of a “command, control, communications and intelligence network to coordinate and support Bosnian Muslim offensives.” The US military, in other words, was actively coordinating on the ground with several thousand members of bin Laden’s al-Qaeda network in Bosnia up to 1995.⁷⁵ According to Yossef Bodansky, former Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare, most reliable intelligence estimates indicate that the number of al-Qaeda affiliated mujahideen operating in Bosnia at this time was more than 10,000.⁷⁶

The Dutch files confirm that British intelligence was fully aware of the US covert operation, but chose not to protest it. According to Professor Wiebes, “The UK Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS) was also aware of the American secret arms supplies to the ABiH [the Bosnian Muslim Army].” A British intelligence official explained that the DIS “never made an issue of them, so as not to further damage the sensitive relationship with the US services.” While an internal DIS analysis concluded that the US arms deliveries were “probably led by the NSC [National Security Council]... the DIS received a direct order from the British government not to investigate this affair.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Richard J. Aldrich, “America used Islamists to arm the Bosnian muslims: The Srebrenica report reveals the Pentagon’s role in a dirty war”, *The Guardian* (22 April 2002) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/yugo/article/0,2763,688327,00.html>.

⁷⁵ “US Commits Forces, Weapons to Bosnia,” *Defense and Strategic Policy* (London: International Media Corporation, 31 October 1994). Cited in Chossudovsky, Michel, ‘Osamagate’ (Montreal: Centre for Research on Globalisation, 9 October 2001) <http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/CHO110A.html>.

⁷⁶ Yossef Bodansky, *Some Call It Peace: Waiting for War in the Balkans* (London: International Media Corporation, 1996) Chapters 3 and 9. Also available online at http://members.tripod.com/Balkania/resources/geostrategy/bodansky_peace. See Ahmed, *War on Truth*, op. cit., p.

⁷⁷ Wiebes, op. cit., Chapter 4.

However, the British role went far beyond merely acquiescing in an exclusively American strategy. According to Michael Meacher MP, former Labour Environment Minister, as part of the operation the American and British governments also turned to “Pakistanis in Britain” to support the influx of radical Islamists into Bosnia. The Pakistani government, then led by Benazir Bhutto, sent a contingent “formed from the Harkat-ul-Ansar (HUA) terrorist group” trained by Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) at the request of the Clinton administration. Approximately 200 “Pakistani Muslims living in the UK went to Pakistan, trained in HUA camps and joined the HUA’s contingent in Bosnia”. The operation was conducted “with the full knowledge and complicity of the British and American intelligence agencies.”⁷⁸

1996-1999: The Sponsorship of al-Qaeda in Kosovo

The US and UK had supplied military assistance to the KLA long before NATO intervention. British SAS and American Delta Force instructors were training KLA fighters in “weapons handling, demolition and ambush techniques, and basic organization.”⁷⁹ The US even gave KLA commanders satellite telephones, global positioning technology, and the cell phone number of NATO Commander Gen. Wesley Clark.⁸⁰ But according to Ralf Mutschke, Assistant Director of Interpol’s Criminal Intelligence Directorate, one of these commanders was an emissary of Osama bin Laden himself, sent to lead “an elite KLA unit during the Kosovo conflict.”⁸¹ Tim Judah reports that KLA representatives had met with US, British, and Swiss intelligence services as early as 1996, probably even “several years earlier.”⁸²

By 1998, the KLA was officially designated by the State Department a “terrorist organization financing its operations with money from the international heroin trade and funds supplied from Islamic countries and individuals, including

⁷⁸ Michael Meacher, “Britain now faces its own blowback,” *Guardian* (10 September 2005) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1566916,00.html>.

⁷⁹ *The Herald*, (27 March 2000).

⁸⁰ *Sunday Times*, (12 March 2000).

⁸¹ William Norman Grigg, “Behind the Terror Network,” *The New American*, (5 November 2001, Vol. 17, No. 23) <http://www.thenewamerican.com/tna/2001/11-05-2001/vo17no23.htm>.

⁸² Tim Judah, *Kosovo: War and Revenge* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002) p. 120.

Osama bin Laden.”⁸³ US, Albanian and Macedonian intelligence reports show that KLA fighters trained in al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan and Albania, and sponsored border crossings into Kosovo from Albania, of hundreds of al-Qaeda mujahideen from Bosnia, Chechnya and Afghanistan.⁸⁴

It is during this period in the late 1990s that al-Muhajiroun was recruited by British intelligence services to enlist British Muslims to join al-Qaeda-affiliated mercenary networks interpenetrating with the KLA in Kosovo. According to the British Helsinki Human Rights Group, humanitarianism may have played a relatively marginal role in Anglo-American policy in Kosovo, which was “tied to economic considerations including the ambition to control oil and gas pipelines from Central Asia and the Caucasus region via the Black Sea.”⁸⁵

2000-2003: The Sponsorship of al-Qaeda in Macedonia

Long after the end of the Kosovo conflict and the demise of the Milosovic regime in Yugoslavia, in late January 2001, Western Special Forces were still training KLA guerrillas, who were now fighting under the banner of the “National Liberation Army”, the NLA. According to foreign diplomatic sources, the former KLA, now NLA, had hundreds of fighters “in the 5km-deep military exclusion zone on the boundary between Kosovo and the rest of Serbia”, where they were able to organize and launch operations against targets in Macedonia. “Certain Nato-led K-For forces”, reported the BBC, “were not preventing the guerrillas taking mortars and other weapons into the exclusion zone”, where they conducted exercises and live-firing of weapons.⁸⁶

Certainly up to 2002, the al-Qaeda backed NLA in Macedonia received US military intelligence assistance. As noted by Scott Taylor – Canada’s top war reporter,

⁸³ James Bisset, “War on terrorism skipped the KLA”, *National Post* (13 November 2001). Available online at <http://www.deltax.net/bissett/a-terrorism.htm>. Bisset was US Ambassador to Yugoslavia during the Balkans conflicts.

⁸⁴ Jerry Seper, “KLA rebels train in terrorist camps”, *Washington Times* (4 May 1999).

⁸⁵ BHHRG Report, *NATO Targets Yugoslavia: Report of a visit to Belgrade, 10th-13th May, 1999* (London: British Helsinki Human Rights Group, 22 May 1999)

<http://www.bhhrg.org/CountryReport.asp?ReportID=170&CountryID=20>.

⁸⁶ BBC News, “Kostunica warns of fresh fighting” (29 January 2001)

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/1142478.stm>. Also see Peter Beaumont, “CIA’s bastard army ran riot in Balkans, backed extremists”, *Observer* (11 March 2001)

<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,6903,449923,00.html>.

former soldier and editor of *Esprit de Corps Military Magazine* – after a visit to Tetovo in 2001, “there is no denying the massive amount of material and expertise supplied by NATO to the guerrillas.”⁸⁷ On 22nd June 2002, a secret European intelligence report leaked through the Clingendael Institute to Dutch National Radio documented ongoing NATO arms and training to the NLA. The report confirmed the German *Hamburger Abendblatt’s* story that 17 military advisers from the Virginia-based private US defence contractor Military Professionals Resources Inc. (MPRI) accompanied the NLA fighters evacuated from Aracinovo. The Dutch report also reveals that high-level US officials maintained constant telephone connection with the NLA rebels. The conversations were recorded by European intelligence. Although the conversations ceased when US intelligence uncovered the tapping, communications were restored after special computers with phone technology were supplied by the US to the NLA.⁸⁸

The US-backed NLA remains the most prominent wing of Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda in the Balkans. According to Yossef Bodansky, currently research director of Washington DC’s International Strategic Studies Association, the Albanian network is headed by Muhammad al-Zawahiri, the engineer brother of Ayman al-Zawahiri who is bin Laden’s right-hand man and mentor. Furthermore, Fatos Klosi – head of Shik, the Albanian intelligence services – reveals that a major al-Qaeda network was established in Albania in 1998 under the cover of various Muslim charities serving as a springboard for European operations. The network, Klosi noted, had “already infiltrated other parts of Europe from bases in Albania through traffic in illegal immigrants, who have been smuggled by speedboat across the Mediterranean to Italy in large numbers.”⁸⁹

The Macedonian Ministry of the Interior provided the US National Security Council with a detailed report on al-Qaeda activity in the Kumanovo-Lipkovo region of Macedonia, including lists of names and the role of two units, one consisting of 120 al-Qaeda fighters, the other of 250. Members of the NLA units are not only Macedonian and Kosovar Albanians, but also mujahideen from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Jordan, and Chechnya, some trained in al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan.

⁸⁷ Scott Taylor, “Macedonia’s Civil War: ‘Made in the USA’” (Randolph Bourne Institute, 20 August 2001) <http://www.antiwar.com/orig/taylor1.html>.

⁸⁸ Christopher Deliso, “European Intelligence: The US Betrayed Us in Macedonia”, (Randolph Bourne Institute, 22 June 2002) <http://www.antiwar.com/orig/deliso46.html>.

⁸⁹ Jamie Dettmer, “Al-Qaeda’s Links in the Balkans”, *Insight on the News* (1 July 2002).

“Officials at the NSC and CIA were polite and received the information with thanks, but little else has happened,” noted one Macedonian official.⁹⁰

Yugoslav intelligence, working on behalf of Interpol, has corroborated these findings “The American CIA has also been made aware that last year the mujahedeen had a training camp in the village of Tropoja in northern Albania.” On 23rd October 2001, Interpol released a report personally linking Osama bin Laden to the Albanian mafia and documenting that one of bin Laden’s senior lieutenants was commander of an elite Albanian unit operating in Kosovo in 1999. Macedonian intelligence complains that NATO political pressure and US interference pose the biggest obstacles to investigating al-Qaeda’s presence in the region.⁹¹

These covert operations have facilitated NATO occupation of the Balkans. Arguably, Anglo-American oil and gas interests play a significant role in the Balkans strategy. As Gen. Sir Mike Jackson, then commander of NATO troops in the region, said in 1999: “We will certainly stay here for a long time in order to guarantee the safety of the energy corridors which cross Macedonia.”⁹² Gen. Jackson’s remark relates to plans, extended since the intervention in Kosovo, to establish pipelines in the Balkans to Caspian oil, described in detail in *The Guardian*:

A project called the Trans-Balkan pipeline has been little-reported in any British, European or American newspaper. The line will run from the Black sea port of Burgas to the Adriatic at Vlore, passing through Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania. It is likely to become the main route to the west for the oil and gas now being extracted in central Asia. It will carry 750,000 barrels a day.⁹³

By 2002, Western security sources vindicated growing regional fears “that Islamic militants may be using Albanian rebel groups in Macedonia as cover for possible terrorist activities have increased.” They reported that: “Islamic fighters who have fought alongside Albanian rebels in Macedonia since [2001’s] seven-month conflict are now feared to be using the three main Albanian rebel groups in the

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Scott Taylor, “Signs point to a bin Laden-Balkan link”, *Halifax Herald* (29 October 2001), <http://www.balkanpeace.org/index.php?index=article&articleid=13047>. See Ahmed, *War on Truth*, op. cit.

⁹² Cited in Michel Collon, *Monopoly – L’Otan à la Conquête du monde* (EPO, March 2000) p. 96.

⁹³ George Monbiot, “A Discreet Deal in the Pipeline”, *The Guardian* (15 February 2001).

country as cover to target not only the Macedonian government but also embassies of western governments.”⁹⁴

7/7, British Geostrategy in the Balkans, and Islamist Terror Networks: “Out of Bounds”

With the assistance of the American and European intelligence services, the British criminal investigation of the 7/7 attacks has quietly pursued such clear international linkages, without formally publicizing the conclusions. According to British military and defence analyst Paul Beaver, the new CIA chief Porter Goss quietly visited Sarajevo and Tirana in the wake of the London bombings “to express grave concerns of Washington because of [these governments’] cooperation with radical Islamic groups.” According to Beaver, “a part of the investigation dealing with the London blasts is aimed at links between radical Islamists in Bosnia and Kosovo with international terrorist groups.”⁹⁵ Yet the details of this investigation and its implications for British security policies have never been explained to the British public by the government.

According to senior Bosnian government sources, British anti-terror investigators arrived in the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, in late January 2006 to investigate the Bosnian link to the London bombings. British investigators were interested in “four British citizens of Afro-Asian origin who had been under surveillance in Bosnia, one of which is believed to be the brother of one of the London suicide bombers.” The four reportedly arrived in the western Bosnian city of Bihac in late October 2005, and “were under surveillance for suspected radical Islamic activities in Britain.” They were traced to Sarajevo in December, where they remained for about a month before leaving the country. An official from the Bosnian Federation police service revealed that the four British citizens spent most of their time in Sarajevo at the Saudi-funded King Fahd Mosque, “which is frequented by naturalized Bosnians from Arab countries and fundamentalist Bosnian Muslims who have joined the Wahhabi movement of strict Islam.” While in Sarajevo, the four also

⁹⁴ Christian Jennings, “Fear over Islamic terror groups using Macedonia as base”, *Scotsman* (4 March 2002) <http://news.scotsman.com/international.cfm?id=241852002>.

⁹⁵ Vesna Peric Zimonjic, “Fears rise over support to terrorists”, Inter Press Service (25 July 2005) <http://www.ipsnews.net/africa/interna.asp?idnews=29625>.

reportedly visited the suburb of Hadzici several times, which “appeared to be the base for a Bosnian, or even European, ‘terror cell.’”⁹⁶

Just under a week after the 7/7 terrorist attacks, the Global Information System intelligence service for governments run by the International Strategic Studies Association reported cryptically that “despite firm linkages to 9/11, Madrid, and London attacks, Bosnian Jihadist networks remain ‘out of bounds.’”⁹⁷ There is a simple reason for this: British and American governments have actively fostered these terrorist networks all the way through to the early twenty-first century. This is a policy that has been conducted with wilful and reckless indifference as to its consequences in terms of the corresponding erosion of national security and ensuing loss of innocent lives. The sponsorship of extremist networks abroad in the Balkans, the recruitment of the al-Qaeda affiliated UK group al-Muhajiroun in Kosovo, was tied to a ‘Covenant of Security’ at home which granted Islamist extremists connected to al-Qaeda in the UK a virtual immunity to do as they pleased. Even now, British authorities remain reluctant to shut down the successor network to al-Muhajiroun, many of whose chief activists are implicated in violations of criminal and anti-terror laws but remain free to continue highly questionable activities. Detailed investigation thus not only reveals deep ambiguities in Anglo-American policy in the Yugoslav wars, it also unearths the extent to which the British and Americans promoted the interlocking networks that planned the London bombings.

⁹⁶ ISN Security Watch, “British in Bosnia to Probe 7 July Terror Link” (15 January 2006) <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/news/sw/details.cfm?id=14359>.

⁹⁷ Defense & Foreign Affairs Special Analysis, “Despite Firm Linkages to 9/11, Madrid, and London Attacks, Bosnian Jihadist Networks Remain ‘Out of Bounds,’” (13 July 2005). Cited in Valentine Spyroglou, “French UCLAT Chief Notes Balkan Link to London Bombings”, Defense & Foreign Affairs Special Analysis (Washington DC: Global Information System, 18 July 2005). This article is not normally public domain, but was reprinted with permission online, at <http://www.slobodan-milosevic.org/news/dfasa071805.htm>

Postscript: al-Qaeda Sponsorship in the Middle East 2005-2007

There is compelling evidence that al-Qaeda networks continue to be sponsored, primarily by the Bush administration, as a mercenary proxy force in the Middle East.; and that this may well have a direct and indirect connection to terrorist activity in the US, UK and Western Europe.

A prime example of this is the trans-Atlantic liquid bomb plot that came to light in late 2006. Both US and British officials have named the mastermind of the plot as Matiur Rehman, the emir of an al-Qaeda affiliated terrorist group called Jundullah.⁹⁸ Several of the British suspects arrested, who were members of the UK-based extremist network formerly known as al-Muhajiroun, reportedly received explosive training in Jundullah camps in Pakistan.⁹⁹

According to a 2006 report reviewing mostly British press reports by the South Asia Analysis Group (SAAG): “Four or five of those detained by the British Police [in connection with the alleged liquid explosive plot] had gone to Pakistan after the earthquake of October, 2005...to do humanitarian relief work in camps run by the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JUD), the parent organisation of the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LET).” After their arrival in Pakistan, according to SAAG, “The Jundullah (Army of Allah), a pro-Al Qaeda organisation, took them to its training camp in the Waziristan area, trained them in the fabrication and use of explosives and dropped them back in the JUD quake relief camps.”¹⁰⁰

The problem is that Jundullah “has been secretly encouraged and advised by American officials since 2005”, US and Pakistani intelligence sources tell ABC News. Jundullah is “made up of members of the Baluchi tribe and operates out of the

⁹⁸ Stephen Wright and David Williams, “Bomb plot traced back to Al Qaeda,” *Daily Mail* (12 August 2006)
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in_article_id=400189&in_page_id=1770>.

⁹⁹ Praveen Swami, “Evidence mounts of Pakistan links,” *The Hindu* (12 August 2006)
<<http://www.hindu.com/2006/08/12/stories/2006081205941200.htm>>

¹⁰⁰ Bahukutumbi Raman, “BOJINKA 2006: Focus On OMAR SHEIKH, RASHID RAUF & PROF.SAYEED,” *International Terrorism Monitor* (South Asia Analysis Group, No. 105, 16 August 2006) <<http://www.saag.org/%5Cpapers20%5Cpaper1915.html>>.

Baluchistan province in Pakistan, just across the border from Iran.”¹⁰¹ With covert US-backing, funnelled through the Pakistani ISI, and the Gulf States, Jundullah is carrying out terrorist attacks inside Iran. The operation has been approved by Vice-President Dick Cheney and Pakistani President Gen. Musharraf. “A senior US government official said groups such as Jundullah have been helpful in tracking al Qaeda figures and that it was appropriate for the US to deal with such groups in that context.” The Americans have also been flying covert reconnaissance flights inside Iranian airspace to aid such terrorist bombing raids, according to former chief UN weapons inspector and intelligence officer Scott Ritter.¹⁰²

Similar policies have been applied to al-Qaeda in Iraq certainly as early as 2005, and perhaps earlier. In November 2004, a joint statement was released on several Islamist websites on behalf of al-Qaeda’s leader in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and Saddam Hussein’s old Ba’ath Party loyalists. Zarqawi’s network had “joined other extremist Islamists and Saddam Hussein’s old Baath party to threaten increased attacks on US-led forces.” Zarqawi’s group said they signed “the statement written by the Iraqi Baath party, not because we support the party or Saddam, but because it expresses the demands of resistance groups in Iraq.”¹⁰³ The statement formalized what had already been reported for a year – that, as post-Saddam Iraqi intelligence and US military officials told the *Sunday Times*: “Al Qaeda terrorists who have infiltrated Iraq from Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries have formed an alliance with former intelligence agents of Saddam Hussein to fight their common enemy, the American forces.”¹⁰⁴

Pakistani military sources told the *Asia Times* in February 2005 that “the US has... resolved to arm small militias backed by US troops and entrenched in the population” involved in the Iraqi insurgency. For this purpose, the US has secretly “procured Pakistan-manufactured weapons, including rifles, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, ammunition, rockets and other light weaponry.” Consignments were bulk loaded onto US military cargo aircraft at Chaklala airbase arriving from and departing

¹⁰¹ Brian Ross and Christopher Isham, “ABC News Exclusive: The Secret War Against Iran”, *The Blotter* (ABC News, 3 April 2007)

<http://blogs.abcnews.com/theblotter/2007/04/abc_news_exclus.html >.

¹⁰² Scott Ritter, “The UN War with Iran has Already Begun”, *Al-Jazeera* (20 July 2005)

<http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/7896BBD4-28AB-48BA-A949-2096A02F864D.htm>.

¹⁰³ Correspondents in Dubai, ‘Iraq extremists threaten attacks’, *The Australian* (24 November 2004)

http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,5744,11488568%255E1702,00.html.

¹⁰⁴ Marie Colvin, ‘Al-Qaeda directs Iraqi hit squad,’ *Sunday Times* (10 August 2003) excerpts available online at http://watch.windsofchange.net/03_0804_0810.htm#directs.

for Iraq. “The US-armed and supported militias in the south will comprise former members of the Ba’ath Party” – the same people recruited and trained by Zarqawi’s al-Qaeda network in Iraq. A Pakistani military analyst familiar with strategic and proxy operations noted that the reason US-made arms were not being supplied was to conceal the role of US assistance. Their destination was not the Iraqi government’s Shi’ite security forces “because US arms would be given to them.” Rather, the US is playing a double-game to “head off” the threat of a “Shi’ite clergy-driven religious movement.”¹⁰⁵

We now know that this covert policy was intensified through 2006, and is currently being applied across the entire Middle East, albeit focusing on Iraq, Lebanon and Iran. Recent terror plots and incidents, such as the failed attempts in London and Glasgow in May 2007, cannot be fully understood in abstraction from this geopolitical context. On CNN last year, Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Seymour Hersh summarized his latest exclusive on the strategy. Hersh’s discovery was that the Bush administration is actively sponsoring al-Qaeda affiliated groups across the entire Middle East, with a focus on Lebanon, to counter regional Shi’ite Iranian influence. Moreover, much of the finances for these covert operations are being funnelled by Saudi Arabia through Iraq, with US connivance:

This administration has made a policy change, a decision that they are going to put all of the pressure they can on the Shiites, that is the Shiite regime in Iran, the Shiite - and they are also doing everything they can to stop Hezbollah - which is Shiite, the Hezbollah organization from getting any control or any more of a political foothold in Lebanon.

... we are interested in recreating what is happening in Iraq in Lebanon, that is Sunni versus Shia... we have been pumping money, a great deal of money, without congressional authority, without any congressional oversight, Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia is putting up some of this money, for covert operations in many areas of the Middle East where we think that the - we want to stop the Shiite spread or the Shiite influence.

They call it the ‘Shiite Crescent.’ And a lot of this money... has gotten into the hands - among other places, in Lebanon, into the hands of three - **at least three jihadist groups. There are three Sunni jihadist groups whose main claim to fame inside Lebanon right now is that they are very tough. These are people connected to al Qaeda** who want to take on Hezbollah...

¹⁰⁵ Syed Saleem Shahzad, ‘US fights back against “rule by clerics,”’ *Asia Times* (15 February 2005) http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/GB15Ak02.html.

My government, which arrests al Qaeda every place it can find them... is sitting back **while the Lebanese government we support, the government of Prime Minister Siniora, is providing arms and sustenance to three jihadist groups** whose sole function, seems to me and to the people that talk to me in our government, to be there in case there is a real shoot-'em-up with Hezbollah...

... So America, my country, without telling Congress, using funds not appropriated, I don't know where, by my sources **believe much of the money obviously came from Iraq where there is all kinds of piles of loose money, pools of cash that could be used for covert operations...** We are simply in a situation where this president is really taking his notion of executive privilege to the absolute limit here, **running covert operations, using money that was not authorized by Congress, supporting groups indirectly that are involved with the same people that did 9/11, and we should be arresting these people rather than looking the other way...**¹⁰⁶

Hersh's reporting makes it difficult to avoid the inference that al-Qaeda remains a nominally useful mercenary outfit for Anglo-American regional geostrategy, this time not in Afghanistan as during the Cold War, but instead in the Middle East. Moreover, the international structure of state-sponsorship has not significantly changed, with the US at the helm, Saudi Arabia providing the funds, and Pakistan providing military intelligence support.

In March 2007, Hersh reiterated this conclusion in the *New Yorker* magazine, citing White House insiders and other US government officials, all confirming in perhaps the clearest terms possible that the US was deliberately attempting to control al-Qaeda terrorist activity through Saudi Arabia (among others) to be re-directed against Iran:

The 'redirection,' as some inside the White House have called the new strategy, has brought the United States closer to an open confrontation with Iran and, in parts of the region, **propelled it into a widening sectarian conflict between Shiite and Sunni Muslims.**

To undermine Iran, which is predominantly Shiite, the Bush Administration has decided, in effect, **to reconfigure its priorities in the Middle East.** In Lebanon, the Administration has cooperated with Saudi Arabia's government, which is Sunni, in clandestine operations that are intended to weaken Hezbollah, the Shiite organization that is backed by Iran. The U.S. has also taken part in clandestine operations aimed at Iran and its ally Syria. **A by-**

¹⁰⁶ CNN, "Hersh: Bush Funneling Money to al-Qaeda Related Groups" ThinkProgress (25 February 2007) transcript and video available at http://www.truthout.org/docs_2006/022607A.shtml. [emphasis added]

product of these activities has been the bolstering of Sunni extremist groups that espouse a militant vision of Islam and are hostile to America and sympathetic to Al Qaeda.

... **The clandestine operations have been kept secret, in some cases, by leaving the execution or the funding to the Saudis,** or by finding other ways to work around the normal congressional appropriations process, current and former officials close to the Administration said.

... Flynt Leverett, a former Bush Administration National Security Council official, told me that ‘there is nothing coincidental or ironic’ about the new strategy with regard to Iraq. ‘The Administration is trying to make a case that Iran is more dangerous and more provocative **than the [al-Qaeda] Sunni insurgents to American interests in Iraq, when—if you look at the actual casualty numbers—the punishment inflicted on America by the Sunnis is greater by an order of magnitude,**’ Leverett said. ‘This is all part of the campaign of provocative steps to increase the pressure on Iran. **The idea is that at some point the Iranians will respond and then the Administration will have an open door to strike at them.**’

... This time, the US government consultant told me, Bandar and other Saudis have assured the White House that **‘they will keep a very close eye on the religious fundamentalists. Their message to us was ‘We’ve created this movement, and we can control it.’ It’s not that we don’t want the Salafis to throw bombs; it’s who they throw them at—Hezbollah, Moqtada al-Sadr, Iran, and at the Syrians, if they continue to work with Hezbollah and Iran.’**

Finally, Hersh repeated his findings on CNN in May 2007, the same month as the London and Glasgow incidents:

“The key player is the Saudis. What I [Hersh] was writing about was sort of a private agreement that was made between the White House, we’re talking about Richard—Dick—Cheney and Elliott Abrams, one of the key aides in the White House, with Bandar [Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the Saudi national security adviser]. And the idea was to get support, covert support from the Saudis, to support various hard-line jihadists, Sunni groups, particularly in Lebanon, who would be seen in case of an actual confrontation with Hezbollah—the Shia group in the southern Lebanon—would be seen as an asset, as simple as that. **We’re in the business now of supporting the Sunnis anywhere we can against the Shia... Civil war.** We’re in a business of creating in some places, Lebanon in particular, a sectarian violence..”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ CNN Interview with Seymour Hersh, CNN International’s Your World Today (21 May 2007). Cited in David Edwards and Muriel Kane, “Bush administration arranged support for militants attacking Lebanon” (Montreal: Centre for Research on Globalization, 25 May 2007) <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=5749>.

The import is that while the White House knows that al-Qaeda salafis will “throw bombs” particularly at American, British and other civilians, funnelling them arms, funds and logistical assistance may still permit US military intelligence to “control” them sufficiently to make life difficult for the Iranians, perhaps even provoke them into a response that will legitimize an Anglo-American “strike at them.” It is not entirely clear what the role of the British government is in the Bush administration’s strategy, although given the intimate coordination between British and American military intelligence agencies, it is not unreasonable to presume that this may well be a jointly coordinated strategy. In any case, this analysis clearly indicates that the trajectory of Anglo-American foreign policies in the Middle East is fundamentally undermining our national security. The political and moral implications demonstrate the urgency of a full-scale independent public inquiry not only into 7/7, but ultimately into the Anglo-American national security architecture.

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