

Britain: The mysterious case of the disappearing ‘terror’ plots

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Readers of Britain’s newspapers are regularly accosted with blood-curdling banner headlines screaming of the “thwarting” of potentially catastrophic “terror plots”, of “Islamic fanatics” being apprehended in daring midnight raids. “Chilling” details, “revealed” by anonymous police and government “sources”, underline why “we” must accept a “trade-off” between civil liberties and “security”, the editorials assure an apprehensive populace. Months or even years later, however, news that many of the “plots” never actually existed is buried behind the latest sex scandal or exploitative “expose” — if reported at all.

On August 10, deputy commissioner of London’s Metropolitan Police Paul Stephenson declared that a plan to “cause untold death and destruction” and “mass murder on an unimaginable scale” had been foiled with the arrest of 24 people. “We believe that the terrorists’ aim was to smuggle explosives onto planes in hand luggage to detonate them in flight”, Stephenson alleged. Britain’s and the world’s mass media trumpeted the claims.

However, within days the dramatic case against the detainees as told to the media by anonymous US and British government and police “sources” began to unravel. The claim that an attack was “imminent” was false. No reservations had been made or airline tickets purchased by the 10 charged with serious terrorism offences; several did not even have passports. Apparently, just one had used the internet to check flight schedules recently. There were no bombs.

The assertion that the detainees intended to destroy 10-12 aircraft was “speculative and exaggerated”, a British official admitted to the August 28 *New York Times*. Claims of a convoluted “Pakistani connection” between the plotters and al Qaeda have disappeared. The possibility of successfully concocting “liquid bombs” from household products in a plane’s toilet mid-air has been dismissed by chemical experts.

Misrepresentation

Gareth Pierce, defence lawyer for the 17-year-old in the case accused of possessing items “useful to a person preparing acts of terrorism”, told the August 31 *Chicago Tribune* how police had misrepresented what they had found at the boy’s mother’s home and twisted it to fit their grandiose claims. According to police, “suicide notes”, a map of Afghanistan and a bomb “manual” had been found.

What was actually discovered, Pierce told the *Tribune*, were wills written by people who had fought in Bosnia more than 10 years earlier. The accused was just six when much of this material was placed in the box! “They’re not suicide notes at all. They’re really simple wills.

To call these suicide notes was absolutely disgraceful", Pierce said.

The wills were found in a box that once belonged to the boy's father — who has since divorced and moved out — when he ran a now-defunct charity that helped displaced Bosnian Muslims. The box also contained a crude map drawn by the boy's younger brother when he was a child. There was also a book of drawings of electrical circuits, which even if it was of some use in building a bomb, it would be useless for the device that police allege the group was trying to construct.

Associated Press on September 4 reported that prosecutors told a London court that the detainees will not face trial until March 2008. They will remain in prison and the key details of the prosecution's case will be kept secret until then.

Lies and fabrication

Will the British government and mass media's accusations stand up in court? Not if the record of British police, government and media lying, exaggeration and fabrication in recent "terror" cases is anything to go by.

As Craig Murray, former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, pointed out in an August 14 article on his website (<http://www.craigmurray.co.uk>), "Of the over 1000 British Muslims arrested under anti-terrorist legislation, only 12% are ever charged with anything. That is simply harassment of Muslims on an appalling scale. Of those charged, 80% are acquitted. Most of the very few — just over 2% of arrests — who are convicted, are not convicted of anything to do with terrorism, but of some minor offence the police happened upon while trawling through the wreck of the lives they had shattered."

At 4am on June 2, around 250 police, some wearing chemical suits, stormed a house in Forest Gate, east London. Police claimed that a chemical bomb was in the house. Awoken by the sound of doors being broken down, the two families living there thought they were being attacked by robbers. Mohammed Abdul Kahar was shot in the chest by police, who failed to identify themselves or give a warning, narrowly missing his heart.

Rupert Murdoch's seedy *Sun* newspaper on June 3 ramped up the anti-Muslim panic, without a shred of evidence: "A CHEMICAL bomb held by Islamic terrorists is primed to go off at any time, police feared last night. The device is believed to have been designed to release a toxic cloud in a crowded space — killing hundreds. And senior officers are convinced it has been prepared for an 'imminent' attack in the UK ... Last night a frantic hunt was on to find the bomb before it could be activated by fanatics. One senior security source said: 'We are absolutely certain this device exists and could be used either by a suicide bomber or in a remote-controlled explosion.'"

Not to be outdone, Murdoch's *Times* on June 3 reported the finding of a "poison suicide vest of death". No chemical bombs or suicide vests ever existed. Kahar and his brother were detained for eight days without charge under the Terrorism Act (2000) before being released. "The only crime I have committed is being Asian and having a long beard", Kahar told the BBC on June 13. "They haven't had the decency to apologise."

'Red mercury'

In one of more bizarre examples of how the British government, police and the media work

hand in glove to manufacture terror scares was provided when the notorious “fake sheikh” Mazher Mahmood, a journalist for Murdoch’s tacky *News of the World* who regularly dresses up in Arab robes to trick celebrities and others into compromising themselves, and an undercover police agent in 2004 attempted to entrap three people in a “virtual” terror plot.

Mahmood offered to sell them an imaginary nuclear substance, “red mercury”, telling them it could be used to make a radioactive “dirty bomb”. However, the three seemed to be more interested in the claim that red mercury could also wash marked money. The undercover cop then offered to buy the fake substance from them for \$300,000 a kilo.

With the approval of the Labour government’s attorney-general, the three dupes were arrested by the Met’s anti-terrorist squad on September 24, 2004. They were charged with attempting to secure funding or property for terrorism and having “a highly dangerous mercury-based substance” for use in terrorism. The following day, the *News of the World*’s front page screamed, “Anti-terrorist cops move in after *News of the World* uncovers bid to buy radioactive material”. Red mercury, the *News of the World* lied to its unfortunate readers, is “a deadly substance developed by cold war Russian scientists for making briefcase nuclear bombs”.

The three remained in jail until their acquittal almost two years later. During the trial, which cost more than £1 million, the government prosecutor declared that “the Crown’s position is that whether red mercury does or does not exist is irrelevant” and urged the jury not to get “hung up” on that point. Luckily, the jury did not agree.

Own goal in Manchester

Britain’s government-police-press team scored an own goal in April 2004, when 400 Greater Manchester police rounded up 10 Iraqi Kurds. Leading the lynch mob was the *Sun*, which ran an invented story that began: “A SUICIDE bomb plot to kill thousands of soccer fans at Saturday’s Manchester United-Liverpool match was dramatically foiled yesterday. Armed cops seized ten terror suspects in dawn raids. Intelligence chiefs believe al-Qaeda fanatics planned to blow themselves up amid 67,000 unsuspecting supporters. A source said: ‘The target was Old Trafford.’ The Islamic fanatics planned to sit all around the ground to cause maximum carnage. They had already bought the tickets for various positions in the stadium, cops revealed last night.”

The entire fantastic story, and the cops’ case against the Kurds, was improvised from leaked police information about the “discovery” of a couple of old ticket stubs from a Manchester United soccer match in a suspect’s flat. He was indeed guilty of being a fanatic — a fanatical supporter of Manchester United who had kept the stubs as a souvenir of the only game he and a friend had attended! They were bought from a scalper, which explained why the tickets were for different parts of the ground. The 10 people were released without charge.

Ricin reflux

Perhaps the most cynically exploited of the British government’s series of fabricated “terror scares” was the police announcement in January 2003 that a “terrorist cell’s” plans to use ricin poison in an attack had been foiled.

On January 7, British government ministers announced that “traces of ricin” had been found in a flat raided by police. Prime Minister Tony Blair seized on the “plot” to bolster the propaganda campaign to go to war against Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. Blair made the ludicrous

claim that the discovery of ricin, which can only kill if directly injected into a person's bloodstream, proved that "this danger [of weapons of mass destruction] is present and real and with us now. Its potential is huge."

Then US Secretary of State Colin Powell also referred to the alleged "cell" during his speech to the UN Security Council on February 5, 2003, arguing for war against Iraq if Hussein did not abandon his non-existent WMD. Powell claimed it was proof of a "sinister nexus between Iraq and the al Qaeda terrorist network".

The truth was that there was no al Qaeda cell and no ricin. On the same day that the government proclaimed the discovery of "traces of ricin" in the flat, tests by the government's own research facility at Porton Down had found there was no ricin. That finding was kept secret by the government for more than two years.

In April 2005, four people were acquitted on charges of conspiracy to commit terrorism, while charges against four others were dropped. One person, Kamel Bourgass, was convicted on a lesser charge of "conspiracy to cause a public nuisance by the use of poisons and/or explosives", based on his possession of "recipes" to make ricin and evidence of attempts to do so. However, the April 20, 2005, *Independent* reported that "Professor Alistair Hay, one of Britain's foremost authorities on toxins, said Bourgass's attempts to construct toxic weapons from his small supplies of ingredients and ramshackle 'laboratory' were 'incredibly amateurish and unlikely to succeed'."

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