

WebMemo



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The London Bombings: One Year Later

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Thursday, July 7, 2005, will go down as one of the darkest days in British history since the Second World War. A series of bomb blasts in the heart of London killed 52 people and injured more than 700.

These suicide bombings were carried out by four British Muslim extremists. Three of the bombers—Hasib Hussain, Mohammed Sidique Khan, and Shehzad Tanweer—reportedly had received terrorist training and religious instruction in Pakistan several months before.¹ The fourth, Jamaican-born Jermaine Lindsay, is believed to have converted to Islam in Afghanistan.

Although the London bombings were carried out by homegrown terrorists, the bombers were almost certainly part of a larger international network. The latest evidence suggests the attacks were probably a sophisticated al-Qaeda operation, masterminded by experienced international operatives and with local extremists acting as foot soldiers. Just a day before the first anniversary of the London attacks, al-Qaeda released a propaganda video, shown on al-Jazeera, featuring suicide bomber Shehzad Tanweer boasting that “What you have witnessed now is only the beginning of a string of attacks that will continue and become stronger until you pull your financial and military support to America and Israel.”²

The video also included a statement by Osama bin Laden’s second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, who stated that Tanweer and fellow terrorist

Mohammed Sidique Khan had received training from al-Qaeda “in the manufacture of explosives.”³ In an August 2005 video, also shown on al-Jazeera, Zawahiri blamed the 7/7 attacks on British support for the war in Iraq, stating that “Blair’s policies brought you destruction in central London and will bring you more destruction,” and warned of more attacks on the UK unless “the people of the crusader coalition... leave Muslim land.”⁴

The al-Qaeda videos make a crude attempt to justify the London attacks by linking them to the Anglo-American invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. In reality, the suicide attacks against America’s closest ally would have taken place regardless of British military intervention abroad. The terrorists are driven by an evil doctrine of hatred and loathing, based on an extreme misinterpretation of Islam, that has as its ultimate goal the destruction of liberal democracy across the world and the establishment of a Muslim Caliphate.⁵ It is an ideology that cannot be appeased or negotiated with, but which must be defeated. The terrorist bombings in London, and the attacks of 9/11 in Washington and

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New York, were not the consequences of U.S. or British foreign policy, but part of an epic confrontation between the forces of barbarism and the forces of civilization.

The London bombings reinforced the fact that the United States and Great Britain are engaged in a global war against terrorism that must be taken to the terrorists. Iraq and Afghanistan are today the front lines in the battle against al-Qaeda, and it is there that the ideology of hatred espoused by bin Laden, Zawahiri, and their jihadist followers must be militarily confronted and defeated. Victory in Iraq and Afghanistan will make the streets of London and other Western cities safer, and this is why over 12,000 British troops continue to fight in both theatres of war.

Strengthening British Anti-Terror Laws

While waging war against al-Qaeda internationally, the United Kingdom must simultaneously redouble its efforts to defeat Islamic extremism at home. The UK has too long provided a safe haven for Islamic militants from the Middle East and North Africa. Tougher anti-terrorist legislation and stronger immigration and asylum laws are required to prevent further terrorist attacks on British cities. The British government must pursue a policy of zero tolerance toward Islamic extremism because it is a deadly threat to the fabric of British society. Foreign clerics who preach violence and hatred should be deported from Britain, and terrorist suspects must be extradited to friendly countries that request it, especially the United States. Every effort must also be made to energize Muslim community leaders in Britain to work actively against the extremists in their midst. As well, British politicians must immediately denounce and act against inflammatory statements by Muslim extremists.

Greater powers should be given to British authorities to detain suspected terrorists, and the

U.K. should immediately withdraw from provisions in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) that block effective anti-terrorism measures.

British anti-terrorism laws came under intense fire last week from a High Court judge who ruled that 'control orders' imposed against six Iraqi terror suspects were illegal. The Iraqis, all asylum seekers, were under house arrest on suspicion of planning terrorist attacks in the UK at the behest of the late al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The judge ruled that the government's actions under the 2005 Prevention of Terrorism Act violated the ECHR, which is enforced in British law through the Human Rights Act. The High Court's move was a huge blow to British anti-terror efforts in the wake of the 7/7 bombings and has sparked what one Member of Parliament has described as a "constitutional crisis," pitting Downing Street and Parliament against the Judiciary.

British anti-terrorism efforts must not be undermined by European conventions that are too often more concerned with the rights of suspected terrorists than with national security. Britain cannot fight its domestic war on terrorism with both hands tied behind its back amidst a powerful culture of political correctness, much of it imported from continental Europe.

Conclusion

The terrorists responsible for the London bombings did not succeed in changing British foreign policy. If anything, the attacks increased the determination of the British government to stay the course in Iraq and resulted in an expansion of British military operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan. In contrast to the Spanish response to the Madrid bombings in 2004, the British showed no desire to cut and run in the face of intimidation.

1. "Forgotten Men Who Became Foot Soldiers of Al-Qaeda," *The Times*, July 18, 2005.
2. "I Blame War in Iraq and Afghanistan, 7/7 Bomber Says in Video", *Times Online*, July 7, 2006.
3. "One Year On, a London Bomber Issues a Threat From the Dead", *The Guardian*, July 7, 2006.
4. "Al Qaeda Warns of 'More Destruction in London' Over Blair Policy on Iraq", *Financial Times*, August 5, 2005.
5. This is a point made powerfully by the British Prime Minister in a July 16, 2005, speech; see "Full Text: Blair Speech on Terror," BBC News, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4689363.stm.

The battle against al-Qaeda must be waged militarily across the globe, as well as through intelligence and police operations closer to home. Whoever trained, aided, or abetted the London bombers must be held to account. Special-forces operations, strategic air strikes, and the targeted elimination of terrorist leaders must all be on the table, in addition to a meticulous hunt for al-Qaeda sleeper cells operating in London and other major

cities in Europe. No quarter should be given to those responsible for the cowardly acts of savagery on the streets of London on July 7, 2005.

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