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**The External Links, Leadership and Support Network: The 7 July 2005 Bombings  
and the 2006 Airline Bombing Plot**

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"We were working off a script which actually has been completely discounted from what we know as reality."

Andy Hayman, then-Assistant Commissioner of  
Specialist Operations, Scotland Yard<sup>1</sup>

"I think the more we learned over this period of several years, the more we began to realize the limits of what we knew . . ."

Tom Dowse, Chief of the Assessments Staff<sup>2</sup>

These two admissions, made in 2006 by persons then at the apex of the United Kingdom's counterterrorism effort, encapsulate the central challenge today in effectively countering terrorism. Given the threat's dynamic and evolutionary character and our adversaries' seeming ability to adapt and adjust their tactics and modus operandi to overcome or obviate even our most consequential countermeasures, how can we best ensure that our own assessments and analyses are anchored firmly to sound, empirical judgment and not blinded by either conjecture, mirror-imaging, politically partisan prisms or wishful thinking?

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Intelligence and Security Committee, *Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005: Presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister by Command of Her Majesty*, Cmd 6785, May 2006, p. 30, accessed at [http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/publications/reports/intelligence/isc\\_7july\\_report.pdf](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/publications/reports/intelligence/isc_7july_report.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

## THE 7 JULY 2005 LONDON BOMBINGS

The United Kingdom rightly prides itself on decades-long experience and detailed knowledge of effectively countering a variety of terrorist threats. Over the past dozen years the UK homeland itself has been subject to attack from a diversity of adversaries including: the Provisional Irish Republican Army,<sup>3</sup> renegade Palestinian factions<sup>4</sup> and both before and since 9/11 by al Qaeda as well.<sup>5</sup> Yet, despite Britain's formidable counterterrorist capabilities and unrivaled expertise, only a month before the 7 July 2005 London bombings, the Joint Terrorism Assessment Center (JTAC) concluded that, "at present there is not a group with both the current intent and the capability to attack in the UK" and consequently downgraded the overall threat level for the UK.<sup>6</sup>

More astonishing perhaps was the dismissal of the prospect of suicide terrorist attacks occurring in the United Kingdom, despite the emerging global pattern of terrorism in this respect and the involvement of several British nationals in both attempted and successful suicide attacks elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> Seventy-eight percent of all the suicide terrorist incidents perpetrated between 1968 and 2004, for instance, had occurred in the years following 9/11. And, the dominant force behind this trend is religion — — specifically groups and individuals identifying

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<sup>3</sup> During the 1990s alone, major terrorist bombings rocked the City, London's financial center and the equivalent of New York City's Wall Street, on at least three separate occasions, with massive explosions occurring at St Mary's Axe, the Baltic Exchange building, and Canary Wharf.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, the 1982 assassination attempt on Israel's ambassador to the UK by the Abu Nidal Organization and the 1994 bombing of the Israeli embassy in London.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, the intended massive truck bomb attack planned for downtown Birmingham in 2000 and the plans in 2003 to simultaneously hijack a plane from Eastern Europe and crash it into a terminal at London's Heathrow Airport and then launch a secondary attack with remote-control mortars (see David Leppard, "Al-Qaeda's Heathrow Jet Plot Revealed," *Sunday Times* (London), 9 October 2005 at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2087-1817244,00.html>).

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Intelligence and Security Committee, *Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005*, p. 23. Note should be taken, however, that although the threat level was reduced to "Substantial," this designation still "indicates a continued high level of threat and that an attack might well be mounted without warning." See *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> For example, Richard Reid, the so-called "shoe bomber," who attempted to blow up an American Airlines flight en route from Paris to Miami in December 2001; the involvement of another Briton, Sajid Badat, in an identical inflight aircraft suicide bombing plot that same month; and the two British Muslims, Asif Hanif and Omar Khan Sharif, who carried out the suicide bombing of Mike's Place, a seafront pub in Tel Aviv, Israel in April 2003.

themselves as Islamic.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, of the 35 terrorist organizations that have employed suicide tactics, 86 percent (31 of 35) are Islamic. These movements, moreover, have been responsible for 81 percent of all suicide attacks since 9/11.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, at the time of 7/7/05 bombings, suicide attacks had taken place in at least two dozen countries – including Israel, Sri Lanka, Russia, Lebanon, Turkey, Italy, Indonesia, Pakistan, Colombia, Argentina, Kenya, Tanzania, Croatia, Morocco, Singapore, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq.<sup>10</sup> By comparison, at the dawn of the modern era of religious terrorism some 25 years ago, this was a phenomenon confined exclusively to two countries: Lebanon and Kuwait and employed by fewer than a half dozen groups.<sup>11</sup> Yet,

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<sup>8</sup> That there has been a significant rise in the incidence of suicide terrorism since 9/11 is not disputed by scholars. See, for instance, Robert A. Pape, “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,” *American Political Science Review*, vol. 97, no. 3 (August 2003), pp. 343-361 and idem., *Dying To Win: The Strategic Logic Of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005) p. 1; as well as Mia A. Bloom, *Dying To Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2005). The role of religion behind this increase, however, is debated. Pape argues in his seminal article that, “Religious fanaticism does not explain why the world leader in suicide terrorism is the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka . . .”; while conceding that “although religious motives may matter, modern suicide terrorism is not limited to Islamic Fundamentalism” (“The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,” p. 343). In his book, however, Pape is more explicit, writing that the “presumed connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism is misleading . . . there is little connection between suicidal terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, or any of the world’s religions. In fact, the leading instigators of suicide attacks are the Tamil Tigers . . .” (*Dying To Win*, pp. 1-2). While I fully agree with Pape on this point that the Tigers are responsible for the largest number of suicide terrorist attacks between 1968 and 2001, they are *not*, however, the driving force behind the increasing use of this tactic *since* 9/11. In fact, since 2002 an uneasy truce between the Tigers and the Sri Lankan government has meant that the Tigers have largely abjured from engaging in any terrorist operations, much less suicide attacks. Moreover, Pape is not accurate in categorizing the Tamil Tigers as a “Marxist Leninist” group. It is more appropriately described as an ethno-nationalist/separatist movement. Further, while the Tigers are not a religious terrorist organization, they nonetheless share some characteristics more common with a religious cult than with their secular ethno-nationalist/separatists counterparts. For a particularly incisive critique of Pape’s fundamental arguments about suicide terrorism see Bloom, *Dying To Kill*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>9</sup> The RAND Terrorism Incident Database. As Mia Bloom also concludes in her exhaustive study of suicide terrorism, “There is an increasing an disturbing trend towards Islamic suicide terrorism.” Bloom, *Dying To Kill*, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. See also, Israeli Security Agency, “Security Seminar on Combating The Threat of Suicide Bombers,” Israeli Embassy, Washington, D.C., 16 September 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Towards the end of the 1980s, however, suicide terrorism began to spread beyond the Middle East: first to Sri Lanka but then as the 1990s unfolded to India, Argentina, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Kenya, and Tanzania. It was also initially embraced by a couple of terrorist

only four months before the 7/7/05 bombings, the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), Britain's most senior intelligence assessment and evaluation body, judged that "such attacks would not become the norm within Europe." This judgment, coupled with the testimony of Dame Eliza Manningham-Buller, then Director-General of the Security Service (MI-5), prompted the Parliamentary committee investigating the 2005 London bombings to conclude that "The fact that there were suicide attacks in the UK on 7 July [2005] was clearly unexpected: the Director General of the Security Service said it was a surprise that the first big attack in the UK for ten years was a suicide attack."<sup>12</sup>

The point of this discussion is most certainly not to criticize British counterterrorism efforts but rather to highlight the immense difficulties and vast uncertainties concerning countering terrorism today that have confounded even the enormously professional and experienced British intelligence and security services. Moreover, the danger of similarly cloaking ourselves in America with a false sense of security based on faulty assumptions or wishful thinking is omnipresent in so fluid and dynamic a terrorism environment as exists today. Indeed, our appreciation and understanding of the current al Qaeda threat further underscores these perils. Both at the time of the London bombing attacks and since a misconception has frequently been perpetuated that this was entirely an organic or homegrown phenomenon of self-radicalized, self-selected terrorists.<sup>13</sup> Such arguments often were cited in support of the argument that entirely homegrown threats had superseded those posed of al Qaeda; that al Qaeda itself was no longer a consequential, active terrorist force; and accordingly that the threat had both changed and perhaps even receded. The evidence that has come to light since the 2005 London attacks and 2006 London airline bombing plot, however, points to the opposite conclusion: that al Qaeda is not only alive and kicking, but that it is still actively planning, supporting through the provision of training and even directing terrorist attacks on a global canvas.

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groups only: al Dawa, an Iraqi Shi'a group, and the Lebanese Shi'a organization Hezbollah (mostly using its cover name, Islamic Jihad). Hezbollah's example of successfully driving the U.S. from Lebanon with suicide attacks (as discussed below) subsequently inspired other groups to adopt this tactic, specifically: the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or the Tamil Tigers), Hamas, Palestine Islamic Jihad, and al-Qa'ida.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Intelligence and Security Committee, *Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005*, p. 28.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, most recently, Fareed Zakaria, "Getting It Wrong on Security and the Surge," *Washington Post*, 21 January 2009.

Indeed, more than seven years ago, 19 terrorists hijacked four airplanes and changed the course of history. Just as we underestimated al Qaeda then, we risk repeating the same mistake today. For example, initially, British authorities believed that the 7 July 2005 attacks were the work of disaffected British Muslims: self-radicalized and self-selected, operating only within the United Kingdom, entirely on their own.<sup>14</sup> We have subsequently learned, however, that:

- The cell's ringleader and a fellow bomber visited Pakistan between November 2004 and February 2005;
- Where they were hosted by Pakistani jihadi terrorists;
- And trained by al Qaeda operatives at an al Qaeda camp in the Malakand Agency of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province;
- Instruction at al Qaeda's camp in Malakand included bomb-making as well as counter-surveillance tradecraft;
- Plans for the attack were implemented immediately upon their return to England;
- The cell was in contact with extremists and terrorists in Pakistan up until the attack itself; and, that
- The cell was in contact with other radicals and extremists in the UK both right up until and even during the attack;

Hence, rather than an organic, entirely homegrown plot, al Qaeda's involvement is clear.

The aforementioned report by the Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee, despite its constraints on the sharing of classified information and careful wording for legal reasons given the bombings' then-ongoing investigations, confirms many of the above points noting, among its other conclusions, that

- "Investigations since July have shown that the group [the four London bombers] was in contact with others involved in extremism in the UK . . ."
- "Siddique Khan [the group's ringleader] is now known to have visited Pakistan in 2003 and to have spent several months there with Shazad

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<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, Jason Bennetto and Ian Herbert, "London bombings: the truth emerges," *Independent* (London), 13 August 2005.

Tanweer [another bomber] between November 2004 and February 2005. It has not yet been established who they met in Pakistan, but it is assessed as likely that they had some contact with Al Qaida figures.”

- “The [British intelligence and security] Agencies believe that some form of operational training is likely to have taken place while Khan and Tanweer were in Pakistan. Contacts in the run-up to the attacks suggest they may have had advice or direction from individuals there.”<sup>15</sup>

Equally compelling, evidence may be found in the “martyrdom” videos made by Khan and Tanweer sometime while they were in Pakistan between November 2004 and February 2005.<sup>16</sup> Like all Usama bin Laden’s and Ayman al-Zawahiri’s video taped statements and appearances, the Khan and Tanweer statements were both professionally produced and released by al Qaeda’s perennially-active communications department, “Al Sahab [the Clouds] for Media Production.”

The first of the two videos, of Khan, was broadcast on the Qatar-based Arabic-language news station, al Jazeera, on 1 September 2005. It is worth exploring the content of Khan’s statement in some detail since it accurately encapsulates the essence of European Muslim radicalism today. Khan’s statement is especially noteworthy for the following reasons:

- He professes his preeminent allegiance to and identification with his religion and the *umma* – – the worldwide Muslim community. Hence, unlike most Western conceptions of identity and allegiance that are rooted to the nation or state, Khan’s is exclusively to a theology.
- Like all terrorists before him, Khan frames his choice of tactic and justifies his actions in ineluctably defensive terms. He describes his struggle as an intrinsically defensive one and his act as a response to the repeated depredations and unmitigated aggression of the West that have been directed against Muslims worldwide.
- The sense of individual empowerment and catharsis evident in Khan’s words and demeanor.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 12. See also, the section of the Honourable House of Commons, *Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>16</sup> Honourable House of Commons, *Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005*, p. 20.

- The intense desire for vengeance and martyrdom, with the latter regarded by him as “supreme evidence” of his religious commitment.<sup>17</sup>
- Khan’s laudatory comments about bin Laden and his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri.

The relevant portions of Khan’s statement are as follows:

I and thousands like me are forsaking everything for what we believe. Our driving motivation doesn’t come from tangible commodities that this world has to offer. Our religion is Islam – – obedience to the one true God. Allah, and following the footsteps of the final prophet and messenger Muhammad... This is how our ethical stances are dictated.

Your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world. And your support of them makes you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters.

Until we feel security, you will be our targets. And until you stop the bombing, gassing, imprisonment and torture of my people we will not stop this fight. We are at war and I am a soldier. Now you too will taste the reality of this situation . . . .

I myself, I make du’a [calling] to Allah . . . to raise me amongst those whom I love like the prophets, the messengers, the martyrs and today’s heroes like our beloved Sheikh Osama Bin Laden, Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and all the other brothers and sisters that are fighting in . . . this cause.<sup>18</sup>

Al-Zawahiri in fact appears at the end of the same tape, praising Khan for having brought the “blessed battle . . . to the enemy’s land.” In a subsequent video, aired on al Jazeera on 19 September, al-Zawahiri also claimed responsibility for the attacks in the name of al Qaeda.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> “London’s blessed raid is one of the raids which Jama’at Qa’idat al-Jihad (Al Qaidah of Jihad Group) was honoured to launch.” Quoted in Ibid., p. 19.

On the first anniversary of the London bombings a similar martyrdom tape made by Khan's traveling companion and fellow bomber, Shahzad Tanweer, was released by al Sahab to mark the first anniversary of the London attacks. Titled, "The Final Message of the Knights of the London Raid," it showed Tanweer expressing similar views to those of Khan. "To the non-Muslims of Britain," he begins,

you may wonder what you have done to deserve this. You are those who have voted in your government, who in turn have, and still continue to this day, continue to oppress our mothers, children, brothers and sisters, from the east to the west, in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Chechnya. Your government has openly supported the genocide of over 150,000 innocent Muslims in Falluja.

You have offered financial and military support to the U.S. and Israel, in the massacre of our children in Palestine. You are directly responsible for the problems in Palestine, Afghanistan, and Iraq to this day. You have openly declared war on Islam, and are the forerunners in the crusade against the Muslims.

Al-Zawahiri then appears on screen to explain that, "What made Shehzad join the camps of Qaeda Al-Jihad was the oppression carried out by the British in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine. He would often talk about Palestine, about the British support of the Jews, and about their clear injustice against the Muslims." An unidentified narrator then continues:

In order to remove this injustice, Shehzad [sic] began training with all his might and devotion. Together with the martyr Siddiq Khan, he received practical and intensive training in how to produce and use explosives, in the camps of Qaeda Al-Jihad. The recruits who join these camps do not have to achieve high averages or to pass entrance exams. All they need is to be zealous for their religion and nation, and to love Jihad and martyrdom for the sake of Allah.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in MEMRI, Clip No. 1186, "Al-Qaeda Film on the First Anniversary of the London Bombings Features Messages by Bomber Shehzad Tanweer, American Al-Qaeda Member Adam Gadan and Al-Qaeda Leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri: *Recorded message of London bomber Shehzad Tanweer and statements by Al-Qaeda leaders Ayman Al-Zawahiri and Adam Gadhahn, which were posted on www.tajdeed.net.tc on July 8, 2006*" accessed at <http://www.memritv.org/Transcript.asp?P1=1186>

The video continues with Tanweer warning “all you British citizens to stop your support to your lying British government, and to the so-called ‘war on terror,’ and ask yourselves why would thousands of men be willing to give their lives for the cause of Muslims.” Al-Zawahiri also again appears to emphasize how both Khan and Tanweer were “striving for martyrdom, and were hoping to carry out a martyrdom operation. Both of them were very resolute in this.” Tanweer then calls upon his fellow British Muslims to rise and fight the “disbelievers, for it is but an obligation made on you by Allah.” A statement is then heard from U.S.-born, Muslim convert Adam Gadahn (“Azzam the American”) before concluding with Tanweer threatening that:

What you have witnessed now is only the beginning of a series of attacks, which, *inshallah*, will intensify and continue, until you pull all your troops out of Afghanistan and Iraq, until you stop all financial and military support to the U.S. and Israel, and until you release all Muslim prisoners from Belmarsh, and your other concentration camps. And know that if you fail to comply with this, then know that this war will never stop, and that we are ready to give our lives, one hundred times over, for the cause of Islam. You will never experience peace, until our children in Palestine, our mothers and sisters in Kashmir, and our brothers in Afghanistan and Iraq feel peace.<sup>21</sup>

## THE PLOT THICKENS: THE 2006 AIRLINE BOMBINGS PLOT

On 4 April 2008 the trial of the eight British Muslims implicated in the trans-Atlantic bomb plot began in Woolwich Crown Court in east London. The prosecution alleged that the men planned “wholesale death and destruction in the skies above Europe and North America.” The scale of the attacks was described as “unprecedented.”<sup>22</sup> The means were as sophisticated as they were simple. Liquid explosives, concocted from a mixture of hydrogen peroxide and other commercially available ingredients long favored by al Qaeda bombers, would be dyed to look like the popular British energy drinks Lucozade and Oasis. The terrorists would then use syringes to inject the explosives into the base of the sealed plastic bottles after their original contents had been drained

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Wright, for the prosecution, quoted in Mary Jordan and Kevin Sullivan, “8 Accused in Transatlantic Bomb Plot Go on Trial,” *Washington Post*, 4 April 2008; and Kevin Sullivan, “British Jury in Terror Case Shown ‘Martyrdom Tapes’,” *Washington Post*, 5 April 2008.

and the small insertion would then be sealed with epoxy. Ordinary disposable cameras were to be rigged to trigger an initial, small, explosion once the planes were in-flight, that would in turn detonate the larger quantity of explosive in the bottle. The hole made in the aircraft fuselage would be sufficient to cause catastrophic failure of the affected aircraft – – and the death of all passengers and crew on board.

A computer memory stick seized by police from one of the defendants detailed at least seven specific flights, departing within two and a half hours of one another from Heathrow Airport's Terminal 3, that had been selected as targets.<sup>23</sup> So-called "martyrdom tapes" – – suicide digital videos recorded by six of the plotters explaining the reasons for the attacks – – were also introduced into evidence by the prosecution. This author has screened one of them, made by a 27-year-old defendant, named Abdullah Ahmed Ali. It is chilling in both content and intention. Rather than the usual monotone recitation of the suicide bombers "will," Ali's tape is presented in question and answer format with an off-camera interlocutor. He describes himself as the leader of the "blessed operation," stating that,

We warned you so many times to get out of our lands, leave us alone, but you have persisted in trying to humiliate us, kill us and destroy us and Sheikh Osama [bin Laden] warned you many times to leave our lands or you will be destroyed, and now the time has come for you to be destroyed.

You have nothing but to expect that floods of martyr operations, volcanoes of anger and revenge and raping among your capital and yet, taste what you have made us taste for a long time and now you have [to] bear the fruits that you have sown.

Stop meddling in our affairs and we will leave you alone, otherwise expect floods of martyr operations against you and we will take our revenge and anger, ripping amongst your people and scattering the

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<sup>23</sup> They were United Airlines Flight 931 to San Francisco, departing at 1415; Air Canada Flight 849 departing to Toronto at 1500; Air Canada Flight 865 departing to Montreal at 1515; United Airlines Flight 959 departing to Chicago at 1540; United Airlines Flight 925 to Washington, D.C., departing at 1620; American Airlines Flight 139 to New York, departing at 1635; and, American Airlines Flight 91 bound for Chicago, departing at 1650. See Richard Edwards, Gordon Rayner and Duncan Gardham, "Airline terror plotters wanted heavy casualties," *The Guardian* (London), 4 April 2008.

people and your body parts and the people's body parts responsible for these wars and oppression decorating the street.

When asked how he justified the death of the many innocent women and children on board the flights, who would have had nothing to do with the oppression and attacks on Muslims elsewhere, Ali was dismissive. "There are no innocents," he blithely declared.<sup>24</sup>

During the opening phase of the trial it was also revealed that the bombers' targets and ambitions extended well beyond commercial aviation. They also discussed attacking power plants, including nuclear power stations, in Britain; gas and oil refineries located in Bacton, Fawley, Correton and Kingsbury; the country's national electricity grid; London's Canary Wharf office complex; a gas pipeline between Britain and Belgium; Heathrow Airport's new control tower; and industrial facilities that store and process hydrogen peroxide.<sup>25</sup> At least one or two of the plotters traveled to Pakistan to meet with and, presumably be trained by, Abu Ubaidah. It was also reported that in addition to the British plots, Abu Ubaidah was overseeing an operation to carry out a major attack in Copenhagen. Al Qaeda has repeatedly threatened Denmark because of the publication of cartoons regarding as insulting to the Prophet Muhammad and to Islam.

A terrorist trial is much like the tip of an iceberg: the exposed, visible area providing only a glimpse of a vastly larger but concealed expanse beneath the water's surface. This was no exception. Indeed, throughout the five months of hearings that produced some 5,000 pages of testimony, the name of the group that almost everyone with even the most basic familiarity of current events might reflexively have expected to have been associated with a terrorist act of this magnitude — — al-Qaeda — — was conspicuous by its absence. Instead the prosecution, as is typical of such cases, focused on the defendants and their roles in the plot. They deliberately ignored the broader conspiracy, orchestrated across at least three continents, and the terrorist organization ineluctably behind the plot.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "The Lion's Roar," digital videotape.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Edwards, Gordon Rayner and Duncan Gardham, "Terror suspects 'planned nuclear station strike'," *The Guardian* (London), 4 April 2008.

<sup>26</sup> See trial transcript, *Crown v. Abdulla Ahmed Ali [aka Ahmed Ali Khan], Assad Sarwar, Tanvir Hussain, Ibrahim Savant, Arafat Waheed Khan, Waheed Zaman and Umar Islam [aka Brian Young]*.

The prosecution identified three of the defendants as the cell's leaders: Abdullah Ahmed Ali, age 27; Assad Ali Sarwar, age 28; and, Mohammed Gulzar, age 27. Both Ali and Sarwar were found guilty of the lesser charge; Gulzar, the person alleged to have the closest ties with al-Qaeda and arguably the most professional of the three, was acquitted of all charges.

Ali became perhaps the best known of three largely because of the sanguinary martyrdom tape he made that the prosecution had introduced into evidence. Both the jury, and subsequently television audiences who saw excerpts on news shows in the UK and elsewhere, heard Ali promise "floods of martyr operations" and "volcanoes of anger and revenge" that would leave blood and body parts littered in the streets.<sup>27</sup> But rhetoric aside, Ali hardly conformed to the stereotype of the wild-eyed, fanatical, homicidal suicide bomber. A husband and father of a two-year-old son, Ali held a bachelors of science degree in computer systems engineering from a respectable British university. For all intents and purposes, Ali appeared to be a solidly middle-class product of a successful first generation immigrant family.<sup>28</sup>

Ali was born in Newham, east London. His father was a businessman who owned factories in both Pakistan and England and he grew up in a modern semi-detached house located in Walthamstow, a typical British middle-class neighborhood, where he attended local public (state) schools. Classmates remembered Ali as a devout, but by no means radical, Muslim. "He always joined in and accepted Western society," one recalled. Another remarked how Ali "was one of the lads, but one of the quiet lads; not the ringleader. He talked about having a family one day, and that was another thing that shocked me — to hear that he had contemplated taking his wife and child with him to do whatever he planned to do."<sup>29</sup> The latter point refers to a recorded discussion Ali had with the other plotters in which he mused about bringing his child on

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<sup>27</sup> "The Lion's Roar," digital videotape.

<sup>28</sup> Sean O'Neill, "The eight in the dock: The men who appeared at Woolwich Crown Court over a six-month period in the liquid bomb trial which finished yesterday," *TimesOnline* (London), 9 September 2008 accessed at: <http://143.252.148.161/tol/news/uk/crime/article4707712.ece>.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in David Harrison and Adam Lusher, "Abdulla Ahmed Ali: A terrorist in the making at the age of 14," *Telegraph.co.uk* (London), 13 September 2008 accessed at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/politics/lawandorder/2910971/Abdulla-Ahmed-Ali-A-terrorist-in-the-making-at-the-age-of-14.html>.

the inflight suicide mission in order to diminish his chances of arousing suspicion while passing through airport security.<sup>30</sup>

Mark Hough, Ali's high school religious education teacher, remembers two sides of his former pupil. On the one hand, Ali seemed a perfectly "ordinary lad," good at sports and especially basketball. But on the other hand, Hough observed the boy's growing Islamic militancy. Ali "thought the Taliban had created a model society in Afghanistan," Hough said, explaining that when Ali was age 14 or 15 he began to praise the Taliban and call for the introduction of strict Muslim sharia law to Britain. Hough believes that some older college-age students whom the young Ali began to associate with after school encouraged Ali's radicalization. They watched videos depicting the killing and mistreatment of Muslims in Bosnia and Chechnya along with ones extolling the virtues of Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.<sup>31</sup> It was around this time that Ali is believed to have become involved with Tablighi Jamaat, a Muslim missionary and outreach group that has repeatedly attracted the attention of British and American authorities.<sup>32</sup>

Ali also belonged to local gym where it is suspected he came into contact with Abu Izzadeen. The so-called "preacher of hate," Abu Izzadeen is currently in prison after having been convicted in an unrelated trial of inciting terrorism. Upon graduating from university Ali left for Pakistan where he worked for a British charity in a camp that helped Afghan refugees. He reportedly was deeply affected by what he regarded as the refugees' "appalling" condition, for which he blamed Western foreign policies.<sup>33</sup> Ali made at least four trips to Pakistan between 2003 and 2006.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, at least two parallels emerge between Ali and the four 7 July 2005 London suicide bombers. All were good athletes and keen at sports and it is believed that all underwent some terrorist indoctrination at local gyms – – a less than obvious rendezvous for militant

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<sup>30</sup> O'Neill, "The eight in the dock."

<sup>31</sup> Harrison and Lusher, "Abdulla Ahmed Ali: A terrorist in the making at the age of 14."

<sup>32</sup> Sean O'Neill, "Analysis: How the plan was put together; Little did Ahmed Ali and his cohorts know that they were under round-the-clock surveillance while plotting their attacks," *TimesOnline* (London), 9 September 2008 accessed at

<sup>33</sup> Harrison and Lusher, "Abdulla Ahmed Ali: A terrorist in the making at the age of 14."

<sup>34</sup> Greenberg, Cruickshank, & Hansen, "Inside the terrorist plot that 'rivalled 9/11'."

jihadis and therefore one presumably not high on the lists of priority surveillance sites for British the authorities at that time.

For reasons that have never been publicly disclosed, the authorities took special interest in Ali when he returned from a visit to Pakistan on 24 June 2006. Police secretly searched his luggage and then the investigation, in the words of the former Assistant Police Commissioner for Specialist Operations, Andy Hayman, became “red hot.” A month later, Ali moved into the east London apartment that he had recently purchased for £136,000 (approximately \$245,000) and was to become the cell’s bomb-making factory and venue for the recording of martyrdom tapes made by seven of the alleged plotters. Under police and security service surveillance, Ali was observed purchasing clamps, drills, syringes, glue and latex gloves – – the key accoutrements for the fabrication of the explosive devices that the cell planned to use.<sup>35</sup>

Assad Ali Sarwar, however, perhaps conforms more closely than Ali to the popular stereotype of the suicide bomber: a loser with little ambition and few prospects who is thus prime canon-fodder for a terrorist movement looking for someone who himself is looking for some purpose or meaning for his life. Sarwar was an unemployed university drop-out (from Brunel University) who, though nearly 30, still lived with his parents at their home in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. But rather than a pliable bit-player in the plot, Sarwar was one of its lynchpins. It was he who was assigned both to gather information on potential targets and to obtain all the ingredients required to fabricate the homeland explosives.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Sarwar’s purchases included more than 40 litres of hydrogen peroxide, the most important component of the home-made liquid explosive being brewed up in Ali’s apartment.<sup>37</sup> Sarwar also oversaw the concocting of the explosive agent. During the trial he “show[ed] extensive knowledge of how to boil hydrogen peroxide down to the right strength to be used in a bomb.”<sup>38</sup> As then-Home Secretary John Reid noted, “They had the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.; and, O’Neill, “Analysis: How the plan was put together.”

<sup>36</sup> Peter Walker and Vikram Dodd, “Video tirades that sealed case against liquid bomb plotters,” *guardian.co.uk*, 9 September 2008 accessed at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/sep/09/5/print>.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Greenberg, Cruickshank, & Hansen, “Inside the terrorist plot that ‘rivalled 9/11’.”

<sup>38</sup> Vikram Dodd, “Homemade explosive would be detonated with a camera flash,” *guardian.co.uk*, 9 September 2008 accessed at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/sep/09/1/print>.

components. And they had them cunningly, very sophisticated, but very simply made as everyday commodities that you might take onto a plane with you.”<sup>39</sup>

It was also Sarwar who recorded the martyrdom tapes made by his fellow conspirators and was responsible for their dissemination following the bombings.<sup>40</sup> Police found in Sarwar’s car the Sony Handycam camera that was used to record two of the videos and the remaining five tapes in his garage. Like Ali, Sarwar was also a volunteer aid worker in Pakistan and it is believed that they met there during 2002. Sarwar worked for the Islamic Medical Association, helping Afghan refugees. Upon returning to the UK in May 2003, he was variously employed as a postman and as British Telecom technician. Sarwar returned to Pakistan in October 2005 following the massive earthquake in Kashmir and spent two months there as an aid worker.<sup>41</sup> Both Sarwar and Ali were arrested on 9 August 2006 while sitting, talking together in the Walthamstow Town Hall’s parking lot.<sup>42</sup>

Mohammed Gulzar remains the most enigmatic member of the cell despite the voluminous evidence presented at the trial and his prolonged period in the dock often under withering prosecutorial questioning. A Birmingham native who also lived for a time in Portsmouth, Gulzar allegedly fled the UK in 2002 after being implicated with his friend, Rashid Rauf, in the Birmingham murder of Rauf’s uncle. Rauf is the al-Qaeda operative, cum protégé of senior al-Qaeda operative, Abu Faraj al-Libi, whose arrest in Pakistan in August 2006 forced British police to move more quickly than had been desired to round-up the cell’s other members. Gulzar himself had returned to the UK from South Africa in 2006, newly married and with false documents in the name of Altaf Ravat. He had reportedly concealed his true identity even from his wife.<sup>43</sup> Gulzar is

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<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Greenberg, Cruickshank, & Hansen, “Inside the terrorist plot that ‘rivalled 9/11’.”

<sup>40</sup> O’Neill, “The eight in the dock.”

<sup>41</sup> Peter Walker and Vikram Dodd, “Video tirades that sealed case against liquid bomb plotters,” *guardian.co.uk*, 9 September 2008 accessed at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/sep/09/5/print>.

<sup>42</sup> O’Neill, “Analysis: How the plan was put together.”

<sup>43</sup> See O’Neill, “The eight in the dock”; BBC News, “‘Bomb plot’ wife gave false name,” *BBC.co.uk*, 24 June 2008 accessed at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/7471766.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/7471766.stm); “Bomb plot suspect ‘wanted global jihad’,” *Metro.co.uk*, 19 June 2008 accessed at [http://www.metro.co.uk/news/article.html?in\\_article\\_id=183260&in\\_page\\_id=34](http://www.metro.co.uk/news/article.html?in_article_id=183260&in_page_id=34); Michael

alleged to have been the plot's "supervisor."<sup>44</sup> During the trial the prosecution maintained that the plot had acquired new urgency and preparations intensified shortly after Gulzar returned to Britain.<sup>45</sup> His involvement in it first came to light in August 2006 when a surveillance team tailing Sarwar followed him to a meeting at Gulzar's spartan house in Barking, East London. The team surreptitiously filmed Gulzar meeting with both Sarwar and Ali and arrested him on 9 August 2006 – within hours of Ali and Sarwar's apprehension. Gulzar reportedly claimed that his name was Ravat (as his South African passport stated) until DNA tests confirmed that his fingerprints matched that of the same Mohammed Gulzar wanted for the aforementioned 2002 murder. Only then did Gulzar admit his real identity.<sup>46</sup>

Gulzar, however, gave nothing away at the trial despite the prosecution's intense questioning. Peter Wright, QC, for example, accused Gulzar of being an "international terrorist," a "liar" and a "fraud." Gulzar maintained his innocence throughout, thus winning acquittal. The following is an excerpt of an exchange with Wright that occurred when Gulzar was in the dock on 19 June 2008:

Q. You are an international terrorist, are you not, Mr Gulzar?

A. You are very wrong. I am no international terrorist.

Q. You may indeed have a practised [sic] account to give to this jury as to your movements, but I suggest that they are entirely a fraud.

A. You are wrong.

Q. You have lived the life of a fraud successfully for many years, have you not?

A. No, not successfully.

Q. You are an international terrorist, are you not?

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Holden, "Airline plot accused posed as newlywed," *Reuters UK*, 7 April 2008 accessed at <http://uk.reuters.com/article/domesticNews/idUKL076388920080407>.

<sup>44</sup> Greenberg, Cruickshank, & Hansen, "Inside the terrorist plot that 'rivalled 9/11'."

<sup>45</sup> O'Neill, "Analysis: How the plan was put together."

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

A. Like I said to you before, Mr Wright, you are very, very wrong. I am not an international terrorist.

Q. I suggest, and will continue to suggest, you are also an accomplished liar, Mr Gulzar. . . .

Q. I suggest that you became radicalised and motivated in order to carry out a global Jihad?

A. That is false.

Q. And that part, and I emphasise [sic] part, of that global Jihad, so far as you were concerned, was the successful detonation of improvised explosive devices upon trans-Atlantic passenger jets departing for America from the United Kingdom.

A. I was not involved in any such thing.

Q. That is why you had the batteries in your bag.

A. No, I did not.

Q. That is why you were in contact with Sarwar and Ali.

A. I was not in contact with Sarwar and Ali for anything other than to receive some help.

Q. That is why you arrived in the United Kingdom at the time and in the circumstances in which you did?

A. I told you I arrived in the UK because of my wife and for no other purpose.<sup>47</sup>

Gulzar was also scrutinized about his relationship with an individual referred to in the trial transcript only as "Gabs."<sup>48</sup> "Gabs" is in fact Mohammed al-Ghabra. Although not introduced into evidence at the trial, according to British intelligence, Gulzar allegedly met with al-Ghabra several times both in South Africa and London during the spring and summer of 2006.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, in

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<sup>47</sup> Crown v. Ali, et al., 19 June 2008, pp. 83-84.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., *passim*.

<sup>49</sup> Greenberg, Cruickshank, & Hansen, "Inside the terrorist plot that 'rivalled 9/11'."

December 2006 the U.S. Treasury designated Al-Ghabra, a 28 year old Syrian-born, naturalized British citizen, who lives with his mother and sister in London's Forest Gate neighborhood, as an al-Qaeda agent and facilitator who had provided material and logistical support both to al-Qaeda and other jihadi terrorist organizations. A statement issued by the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control explained, "Mohammed Al-Ghabra has backed al Qaida and other violent jihadist groups, facilitating travel for recruits seeking to meet with al Qaida leaders and take part in terrorist training. We must act against those who fund and facilitate al Qaida's agenda of violence against innocents."<sup>50</sup>

Among other crimes, al-Ghabra was accused by the Treasury Department of:

- arranging for British militants to travel to Pakistan to receive training in "jihad" and to meet with senior al-Qaeda officials and then return to the UK to engage in "covert activity on behalf of al Qaida";
- arranging for British militants to travel to Iraq "to support the insurgents fight against coalition forces";
- providing material and logistical support to terrorist organizations in Pakistan, such as Harakat ul-Jihad-I-Islami (HUJI) and the Pakistan Kashmiri jihadi group, Harakat ul-Mujahideen (HuM);
- undertaking training himself at a HuM training camp in Kashmir;
- consorting with al-Qaeda leaders such as Abu Faraj al-Libi and Haroon Rashid Aswat while on visits to Pakistan; and,
- radicalizing British Muslims through the distribution of "extremist media."<sup>51</sup>

The British press has openly described al-Ghabra as a "senior al-Qaeda operative." Following his designation by the U.S. Treasury, the Bank of England followed suit by freezing his bank accounts and other assets. Al-Ghabra was subsequently placed on the United Nations Security List of terrorist suspects linked to al-Qaeda and the Taliban and his name entered on terrorist watch-lists maintained by Interpol and the European Union. Under the terms of British terrorist financing laws, al-Ghabra and his attorneys are prohibited from reviewing it or knowing how that information was obtained. Press reports suggest that it includes sensitive intelligence, based on confidential sources and

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<sup>50</sup> Quoted in "Treasury Designates Individual Supporting Al Qaida, Other Terrorist Organizations," *States News Service*, 19 December 2006

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. See also Sean O'Neill, "Terror suspect who won court battle is named as a 'top al-Qaeda agent'; a 'key player' accused of radicalizing British Muslims is living openly in the UK," *The Times* (London), 26 April 2008.

methods including telephone intercepts and information believed to have been derived from the interrogation of al-Qaeda detainees.<sup>52</sup>

Among the remaining five defendants<sup>53</sup> one, Tanvir Hussain, age 27, was convicted of conspiracy to murder and conspiring to cause explosions and cause a public nuisance. He was born in Lancashire but moved to London with his family as a young child. Hussain and Ali met while in secondary school when both were studying at Waltham Forest College. As a teenager, Hussain reportedly became an increasingly devout Muslim and by 2003 was “display[ing] signs of extremism.” The martyrdom video he recorded evidenced this fanaticism. “People are going to die, but it’s worth the price . . . . You know, I only wish I could do this again,” he declared, “you know, come back and do this again, and just do it again and again until people come to their senses and realize, don’t mess with the Muslims.”<sup>54</sup>

Further, the conspiratorial web that wove together Ali, Sarwar, and Hussain — the radicalized British Muslims — — on the one hand with Gulzar, Rauf, and al-Ghabra — — the alleged al-Qaeda operatives — — on the other, extends well beyond the 2006 airplane bomb plot. According to British authorities, for example, one of Ali’s visits to Pakistan coincided with trips taken by two of the 7 July 2005 suicide bombers, Mohammed Sidique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer, and the leader of the failed 21 July 2005 suicide bomb plot, Mukhtar Said Ibrahim.<sup>55</sup> In addition, al-Ghabra is believed to have arranged for Said’s travel to Pakistan on that visit so that he could be trained at the al-Qaeda terrorist

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<sup>52</sup> See “Briton denies being ‘Al-Qaeda banker’,” *Agence France Presse*, 7 January 2007; David Leppard and Robert Booth, “Londoner named as Al-Qaeda ‘banker’; Accounts frozen as suspect accused over terror pipeline,” *The Sunday Times* (London), 7 January 2007; O’Neill, “Terror suspect who won court battle is named as a ‘top al-Qaeda agent’”; “Bank Accounts of key al-Qaeda suspect frozen,” *Press Trust of India*, 7 January 2007; and, Jason Groves, “Fury as state benefits go to suspects on UN terror list,” *The Express on Sunday* (London), 8 July 2007.

<sup>53</sup> Those acquitted included: Waheed Zaman, age 24, a former biomedical college student who was head of his university’s Muslim students association; Umar Islam, age 30 (a Muslim convert and former Rastafarian of Caribbean origin who is also known as Brian Young); Arafat Waheed Khan, age 27, who had recently become engaged and had worked in a cell phone shop; and, Ibrahim Savant, age 27, another convert to Islam who worked in his British mother’s bookkeeping business. Burns and Sciolino, “No Conviction on Key Charges in Liquid-Bomb trial in London.”

O’Neill, “The eight in the dock.”

<sup>54</sup> Walker and Dodd, “Video tirades that sealed case against liquid bomb plotters.”

<sup>55</sup> O’Neill, “Analysis: How the plan was put together.”

camp in Malakand. Thus, authorities believe that Ali, the two 7 July bombers and Said were likely at that same camp at the same time.<sup>56</sup> In sum, rather than the isolated, unconnected outbursts of rage from entirely self-radicalized, self-selected, independently-operating terrorists that British authorities initially described the 7 July 2005 bombing, failed 21 July 2005 attacks, and August 2006 airline bombing plots as, a connecting thread directly linking Pakistan to Britain and al Qaeda to each of these incidents is evident.

Less clear, but potentially significant, are the mutual associations formed by all these plotters through participation in a variety of UK-based Tablighi Jamaat activities. As noted above, Ali had been involved with Tablighi Jamaat since he was a teenager. Both Sarwar and Zaman attended weekend camps that the movement hosted. At least two of the 7 July 2005 London suicide bombers, Mohammed Sidique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer, studied at a Tablighi Jamaat madrassa in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire (where the movement's European headquarters is located). One of the Tablighi Jamaat's most popular preachers, Abdulla el-Faisal, was an important influence on fellow Jamaican convert to Islam and 7 July 2005 bomber Germaine Lindsay.<sup>57</sup> Ibrahim and another 21 July 2005 would-be bomber, Manfo Asiedu, worshipped at Tablighi Jamaat services and participated in other movement activities.<sup>58</sup>

British authorities have described the investigation into the airline plot as "the biggest operation of its kind" ever in the UK to date. The trial has similarly been termed "one of the most protracted and complex ever held in a terrorism case in Britain."<sup>59</sup> The prosecution alleged that the men planned "wholesale death and destruction in the skies above Europe and North America." The scale

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<sup>56</sup> Duncan Gardham, "Airliner bomb trial: George W. Bush took decision that triggered arrests," *Telegraph.co.uk*, 8 September 2008 accessed at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/2707114/Airliner-bomb-trial-George-W.-Bush-took-decision-that-triggered-arrests.html>; and, David Leppard, "Fixer for 21/7 plot free in London," *The Sunday Times* (London), 15 July 2007.

<sup>57</sup> Convicted on terrorism incitement related charges, el-Faisal was recently paroled from British prison and left the country.

<sup>58</sup> Duncan Gardham, "Airliner bomb trial; Fears raised over fundamentalist Islamic group in Britain," *Telegraph.co.uk*, 9 September 2008 accessed at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/majornews/2708409/Airliner-bomb-trial-Fears-raised-over-fundamentalist-Islamic-group-in-Britain.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Burns and Sciolino, "No Conviction on Key Charges in Liquid-Bomb Trial in London,"; and, Greenberg, Cruickshank, & Hansen, "Inside the terrorist plot that 'rivaled 9/11'."

of the attacks was described as “unprecedented.”<sup>60</sup> Yet, the result belies the tremendous time, resources and energy devoted to the case by police, the security service, MI-5, and the Crown Prosecution Service. To be sure, being unable to introduce evidence into open court that could have compromised vital intelligence sources and methods hampered the prosecution. And, as noted above, British law also prevents the use of information gathered from domestic wiretaps thus limiting the prosecution’s access to admissible evidence.

But additional, equally critical, issues also affected the trial’s outcome. The jurors, for instance, believed that the prosecution had failed to prove that a terrorist attack on the U.S. and Canadian passenger airplanes was as imminent as the authorities and prosecution argued they were. There were also doubts that the defendants actually possessed the requisite technical skills needed to execute the planned attacks. Further, the defense maintained that their clients had never chosen passenger airplanes as targets. They argued that no flight reservations had been made nor tickets purchased. Not all of the accused had been able to obtain “clean” passports that did not have entry and exit stamps from Pakistan, which would presumably have been needed to avoid arousing suspicion at the airport before departure. Finally, Ali claimed that the plan all along had not been to kill anyone but rather to set off minor explosions at Heathrow Airport’s Terminal Three check-in counters in protest of British and American policies in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Middle East. He explained that the cell’s original plan had been a symbolic attack on the British Parliament building in Westminster. However, heavy security around had caused the cell to focus instead on Heathrow Airport.<sup>61</sup> Further straining credulity, Ali testified that the martyrdom videos the would-be bombers recorded were nothing more than a publicity stunt – a melodramatic way to attract attention to themselves and to their grievances.<sup>62</sup>

The U.S. and former President George W. Bush in particular, have also been blamed by British authorities for the trial’s disappointing outcome. Complaints

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<sup>60</sup> Peter Wright, for the prosecution, quoted in Mary Jordan and Kevin Sullivan, “8 Accused in Transatlantic Bomb Plot Go on Trial,” *Washington Post*, 4 April 2008; and Kevin Sullivan, “British Jury in Terror Case Shown ‘Martyrdom Tapes’,” *Washington Post*, 5 April 2008.

<sup>61</sup> Burns and Sciolino, “No Conviction on Key Charges in Liquid-Bomb Trial in London.”

<sup>62</sup> Gilbert and Rayner, “Airliner bomb trial: Three British Muslims guilty of conspiracy to murder.”

voiced in London allege that, upon learning that the plot involved attacks on American targets and American citizens, President Bush foiled the investigation by ordering Pakistan to arrest Rauf thus forcing the British authorities to act precipitously and round-up the UK-based plotters before sufficient evidence to ensure their conviction had been gathered.<sup>63</sup> A long and detailed passage in Ron Suskind's new book, *The Way of the World: A Story of Truth and Hope in an Age of Extremism*, recounts how purported Bush Administration concerns of the forthcoming 2006 mid-term Congressional elections and other partisan considerations were behind the White House's intervention that led to the inchoate plot's hasty dismantling.<sup>64</sup> The Crown Prosecution Service's re-trial of the six accused commenced in London in February 2009.

What is especially alarming about the airlines plot, however, is that it was not directed against the softer, more accessible targets like subway and commuter trains, hotels and tourist destinations that the conventional wisdom once held a diminished and de-graded al Qaeda only capable of: but against arguably the most internationally-hardened target set since 9/11 – – commercial aviation. This development calls into question some of our most fundamental assumptions about al Qaeda's capabilities and intentions, given that the movement seems undeterred from the same grand homicidal ambitions it demonstrated on 9/11. Equally disquieting is the fact that despite the capture of the operation's first al Qaeda controller, Abu Faraj al-Libi and the killing of his successor, Abu Hamza Rabia, al Qaeda's heinous plans were neither stopped nor de-railed. Instead, operational authority merely passed to Abu Ubaidah ("the Egyptian father of Ubaidah"). It is a reflection of al Qaeda's depth in numbers that the movement was apparently not thrown completely off balance by the successive deaths of two of its most senior operations officers. Indeed, rather than repine, al Qaeda's chiefs moved quickly to appoint a successor – – Abu Ubaidah, who stepped in to assume command of the airlines plot.

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<sup>63</sup> Burns and Sciolino, "No Conviction on Key Charges in Liquid-Bomb Trial in London,"; Gardham, "Airliner bomb trial; Fears raised over fundamentalist Islamic group in Britain"; and, Greenberg, Cruickshank, & Hansen, "Inside the terrorist plot that 'rivaled 9/11'."

<sup>64</sup> See Ron Suskind, *The Way of the World: A Story of Truth and Hope in an Age of Extremism* (New York: Harper, 2008), pp. 43-49

## CONCLUSION

“Could we, could others, could the police have done better? Could we with greater effort, greater imagination, have stopped it? We knew there were risks we were running. We were trying very hard and very fast to enhance our capacity, but even with the wisdom of hindsight I think it is unlikely that we would have done so, with the resources available to us at the time and the other demands placed upon us. I think that position will remain in the foreseeable future. We will continue to stop most of them, but we will not stop all of them.”

-- Dame Eliza Manningham-Buller, then-Director-General, UK Security Service (MI-5)<sup>65</sup>

In conclusion, al Qaeda may be compared to the archetypal shark in the water that must keep moving forward – – no matter how slowly or incrementally – – or die. In al Qaeda’s context, this means adapting and adjusting to our countermeasures while simultaneously searching to identify new targets and vulnerabilities. In this respect, al Qaeda’s capacity to continue to prosecute this struggle is a direct reflection of both the movement’s resiliency and the continued resonance of its ideology. Accordingly, if the threat we face is constantly changing and evolving, so must our policies and responses be regularly reviewed, updated and adjusted. In this struggle, we cannot afford to rest on past laurels or be content with security that may have proven effective yesterday and today, but could likely prove inadequate tomorrow given this process of terrorist change and evolution.

Al Qaeda’s “operational durability” thus has enormous significance for our struggle against terrorism. Because it has this malleable resiliency, it cannot be destroyed or defeated in a single tactical, military engagement or series of engagements – – much less ones exclusively dependent on the application of conventional forces and firepower. To a significant degree, our ability to carry out such missions effectively will depend on our collective ability to adjust and adapt to changes we see in the nature and character of our adversaries.

Dame Eliza’s final admonition that, “We will continue to stop most of them, but we will not stop all of them” is revealing. She did not describe terrorism as a

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<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Intelligence and Security Committee, *Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005*, p. 39.

tactic that can be eliminated or as an enemy that can be defeated or as a phenomenon that can be abolished. She framed the struggle against terrorism in its proper context: that we are neither defenseless nor powerless against this threat; but neither should we have unrealistic expectations nor raise impossible hopes. The reality is that terrorism is a fact of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and that we inevitably will be vulnerable to some new attack and new threat. Al Qaeda is constantly searching for new vulnerabilities and is adapting and adjusting to our countermeasures. The challenge for us is to be just as dynamic and evolutionary in our approach to countering terrorism – – and to avoid basing our analyses on incorrect or incomplete information, wishful thinking, or false foundations.