



"brain" relationship with Bush

Photograph: AP

# UK's tolerance has made it a breeding ground for militants

PART THREE:  
THE TERRORISTS  
BY NEIL DOYLE

**B**IN Ladenism is well established in the UK and runs much deeper than is generally appreciated. The government estimates that there are 1000 people in Britain who could turn into suicide bombers at any time, and a further 10,000 who are actively involved in terrorism. Those numbers might now have to be revised upwards.

Prior to 9/11, the official policy of successive governments towards militant Islamist groups was one of tolerance, on the understanding that no bomb attacks would take place on British soil. That was a catastrophic error. For the best part of a decade, the militants were free to organise, recruit and incite.

British governments have underestimated the power and virility of al-Qaeda's ideology, to the extent that we're now in the extraordinary situation where the UK is now the main launching pad for terrorists, outside the Middle East.

The fact that the planners of the alleged attacks foiled last week committed such a large number of personnel to the operation implies that replacing those people is not a problem for the militants. A key factor in this is the speed at which minds can be turned: two of the July 7 bombers had only converted to Islam nine months previously; one of those involved in the airliner plot is reported to have become a Muslim only six months previously.

Even before 9/11, Britain was a key base for the production of extremist literature and propaganda designed to incite and recruit young impressionable men to the cause. To some, it's an

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incredibly attractive proposition – they are being told, in effect, that they have been selected by God to take up arms and ride to the defence of oppressed Muslims. And the radical preachers hammer home a very simple message: you must learn to love death in the same way that non-Muslims love life.

Ultimately, our current problems can be traced to the publication in the 1990s of a little-known book. Called *In The Hearts Of Green Birds*, it told the stories of jihad fighters who had fought against the Serbs in Kosovo between 1992 and 1995 and died in the process. It inspired one university student into wanting to emulate these heroic figures and he would become probably the first British mujahidin hero of modern times.

Named Suraqah al-Andalusi (an al-Qaeda alias), he went to Afghanistan to assist with the network's media operations. He produced reports for a pioneering jihadist group called Azzam Publications. As well as producing books and printed material, it also distributed information via the web. It was the prototype of the jihad sites that today play such a crucial role in disseminating al-Qaeda's message.

America invaded Afghanistan in late 2001 and Suraqah was sent to Tora Bora to help defend bin Laden. Suraqah's group was attacked from the air and he was killed by a US cluster bomb.

Suraqah was close to finishing an English translation of a book written by bin Laden's spiritual mentor Abdullah Azzam, who is widely regarded as the godfather of the modern jihad movement. His work did not go to waste: the book was published in the UK and, as a tribute, Suraqah's final will was published at the end, along with obituaries written by his brother and a close colleague from Afghanistan.

One of the buyers of that book, called The Lofty Mountain, was Mohammad Siddique Khan. The ringleader of the July 7 attackers modelled himself on Azzam's man in Afghanistan. Buried in the government's official report on the July 7 bombings is a reference to Khan basing his final videotaped will on that written by his predecessor. Khan's story will, no doubt, have encouraged some of those involved in the airline plot – and will continue to inspire future would-be suicide bombers.

Bringing down airliners with bombs has long been a goal of British al-Qaeda supporters. The two British would-be shoe-bombers, Richard Reid and Sajid Badat, are the two best-known cases. Less well-known is the case of an Algerian, Abbas Boutrab, who was convicted late last year in Northern Ireland.

His story may well provide insights into last Thursday's events, as he was working on a new generation of bombs being developed by militants designed to evade airport scanning equipment. Boutrab was apparently caught by chance while constructing a bomb that could be concealed inside an electrical device such as a personal music player.

One of the documents he was found in possession of was a guide produced by British al-Qaeda supporters which described how to make a wide variety of innovative new devices. Further examination showed that it had been produced by a group of British militants connected to the radical Islamic cleric Abu Hamza.

In June, I obtained several documents which contained construction plans for these new kinds of devices. One of the advantages for the bombers is that only a small explosion is needed to destroy an aircraft. All that is required is that the charge be powerful enough to pierce the pressurised hull of an aircraft. In theory, only a few grammes of explosive are needed.

The documents show how the explosive can be concealed inside seemingly innocent items, such as medicine capsules. It also spells out ways to disguise the smell of the explosive to evade scanners and sniffer dogs. There have also been experiments with liquid explosives. One line read: "Detonate inside the plane's toilet and do not make the mistake of the shoe-bomber."

The big question now is whether there are other cells still at large, either inside or outside the UK. In recent years, there have been indications that al-Qaeda planners want to launch a series of simultaneous attacks in different countries, to go a step further than 9/11. What we've seen in the past few days may be part of a wider plan involving other European countries.

*Neil Doyle is author of Terror Base UK: Inside A Secret War (Mainstream, £10.99). He will be at the Edinburgh International Book Festival on Tuesday at 2.30pm*

## THERE'S NO HOLIDAY FROM WAR

By Mona Siddiqui

THERE is no time off from war and conflict. Tony Blair may be keeping in regular touch from his holiday in Barbados but his credibility is suffering blows on all fronts.

First, there is the letter sent to his deputy, John Prescott, signed by more than 100 MPs, calling for a recall of parliament for an emergency session amid the escalating destruction in Lebanon.

Then there is the letter signed by three of the UK's four Muslim MPs, three of the four Muslim members of the House of Lords as well as various Muslim organisations. This letter urges the Prime Minister to change his foreign policy in the Middle East since the alarming loss of civilian lives "becomes ammunition to extremists who threaten us all".

We regularly see young Muslims on our screens talking about the cultural and ideological gulfs between the generations and of Britain slavishly following the US on all matters related to Israel.

Despite the current concern about alleged terrorist activities in Muslim communities, much of the re-thinking that we so desperately need is not to quieten disenfranchised local communities, but is about a new vision for humanity on a truly global scale.

It scares me to see how slowly world leaders came to agree on some form of UN resolution calling for a cessation of hostilities between Lebanon and Israel. Even more frightening is how the Middle East and its people are always seen in the West as the "other". The Middle East is our neighbour and it is in our political, cultural and economic interests to be seen as a friend in this area.

While we ourselves have not been involved in the destruction of civilian societies, we have watched quietly from the sidelines. When these "wars" are over, the memories of the UK's failure to act morally will linger. For the survivors of these wars we will become the "other".

We don't have to rely on Muslim MPs to make a special case, we just have to remember that unless we are all receptive to the suffering of others, the destiny of the "other" will continue to affect our own lives.

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