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## Editorial Comment: The London Terrorist Attacks: 7 and 21, July 2005

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# **ACTA CRIMINOLOGICA**

## **EDITORIAL**

### **THE LONDON TERRORIST ATTACKS: 7 & 21 JULY 2005**

The threat was always there but in July 2005 the threat became an unlawful action against innocent victims without regard for race, religion or creed. Terrorism, justified under perverted Islamic religious interpretation, brought death and injury to the streets of London.

The sense of inevitability does not mitigate the shock and outrage that echoes across the world. In modern day terrorism the perverse point of terrorism is to spread fear by attacking the innocent and assaulting society's sense of humanity. The symbolic sites selected are so familiar, London Transport buses and underground trains that the targets selected only heightens the sense of violation. It has been 46 months since the atrocities of September 11, 2001, and some 16 months since the Madrid bombings of March 11, 2004. That passage of time had led some to conclude that the threat from terrorism had diminished or even that it had never been as intense as ministers and senior police and intelligence officers had consistently stated that it was. Unfortunately after the London attacks of July 2005, any sense of complacency about the character of religious fundamentalist terrorism, or cynicism about the nature and extent of the threat was immediately dispelled.

Many analysts were inclined to establish a link between the deaths in London and the coalition intervention in Iraq but it is argued that such association is flawed. Al-Qaeda, and its associated groups tied under the banner of Islamic Fundamentalism, began their terror campaigns over a decade ago and the removal of the sadistic dictator Saddam Hussein from power in Baghdad was not the catalyst for the London attacks. London was not

targeted because British troops are in Iraq or because of Great Britain's alliance with the United States of America in the global fight against terrorism. London was attacked as a symbolic target because Islamic extremists want to initiate and ignite a "holy war" between themselves and established democratic societies.

Terrorism, especially in London, is not new and the attacks of July 2005 will not be the last. Historical analysis has identified that the terror of the past was ultimately political being a means to an end. The approach to be employed was limited to defeating it, submit to it or negotiate with it. What was never accepted was that it was an effective diplomatic negotiation strategy.

Terrorism employed against the citizens of London on 7<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2005 is based upon religious fervor underpinned by Islamic Fundamentalism and is therefore more elusive and less formal. Some analysts argue that sense of itself is apocalyptic rather than political therefore its demands are therefore difficult to meet, even if negotiation was either practicable or acceptable.

To combat this kind of terrorism therefore calls for a permanent combination of smart strategies - the protection and security of communities and societies that are its potential victims. In addition, the legacies of earlier colonial occupations have influenced current British foreign policy and their needs to be an overhaul of current immigration policies. At present estimates are that over 500,000 illegal immigrants are in the United Kingdom including over 50,000 Romanians. Britain is and will remain a multi cultural nation where

at present there are over 1.2 million Muslims. The rise in Islamic fundamentalism has to be checked by the Muslim leaders who must denounce the radical clerics who preach hate against western democracies. There must be a strategy to deport such subversives but the lawyers claim that such actions infringe the subversives Human Rights under European Human Rights legislation. The question is raised, who looks after the Human Rights of the victims of indiscriminate terrorist bombings? The radical clerics espouse hate and fail to condemn, in fact support, such terrorist actions glorifying such actions as acceptable work of Allah. Although the majority of Muslims condemn such actions, with Muslim leaders suggesting that a mere 2% of British Muslim youth are disaffected and liable to be influenced by the Islamic Fundamentalist, those figures suggest that as many as 26,000 vulnerable youth may be initiated into fighting a 'holy war'.

The attacks on London have identified that those responsible have been brought up in Britain but see themselves as Islamic Holy Warriors fighting against Western democracy. Then is it not possible to strip them of their citizenship and the protections of British Law? For a British citizen, regardless of faith or political orientation the determination to defend our values and our way of life should be indomitable. British based Islamist fanatics were at the heart of this terrorist attack and that now identifies another problem where law enforcement agencies must ensure that the Muslim community in Britain is not victimized by others in the population. Whether terrorists were British citizens or outsiders who have infiltrated our borders, what they have done is also an attack on the principles of the religion whose name they have commandeered and corrupted. It would be wholly wrong to engage in guilt by association. The leaders of various bodies that represent Muslims in Britain have condemned yesterday's barbaric cruelty.

That certainly means implacability in the face of the direct threat from the identified terrorist enemy. There will be a change in British policing because it emphasises the need for intelligence led policing. It also involves trying to understand why people are drawn to commit such infamous and evil deeds, not merely tightening security to prevent them from happening again. It means strengthening our community relationships with minority groups whilst accepting that it means sticking resolutely to all the values that make an open society so worth living in, including tolerance and civil liberty. The absence of a terrorist incident in Britain since 2001 has, quite understandably, prompted calls for a rebalancing between counter-terrorism and civil liberties. New legal powers may be required to combat terrorism and that will have an effect not only on those suspected of terrorism sympathies but the broader public.

The back-to-back nature of the deadly attacks in Egypt and London, as well as similarities in the methods used, suggests that the Al-Qaeda leadership may have given the orders for both operations. Investigators and analysts suggest that the similarities of the bombing plots in Egypt and Britain, the deadliest terrorist strikes in each country's history, were organized locally by groups working independently of each other. In Sharm el-Sheikh, where the death toll exceeds 88 victims of many nationalities, attention centred on an Al-Qaeda affiliate blamed for a similar attack last October at Taba, another Red Sea resort. Intelligence officials and terrorist analysts suspect that Osama bin-Laden or his lieutenants may have sponsored both operations from afar, as well as other explosions that have killed hundreds of people in Spain, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Morocco since 2002. The hallmarks in each case: multiple bombings aimed at unguarded, civilian targets that are designed to intimidate Westerners and destabilise the economy.

July was also a month of celebrations, not least for the success of the investigations into the London and Egyptian bombings but for the fact that the IRA has formally ordered an end to its armed campaign and says it will pursue exclusively peaceful means. In a long-awaited statement, the republican organisation said it would follow a democratic path ending more than 30 years of violence.

The future holds the continuing philosophical debate concerning the existence of a caring Deity with the question raised, "If there is a God why does He allow this to happen?" and that debate continues.

For the terrorist, whether secular or religious, the fight continues against real or perceived injustices that are

not resolved through the democratic processes but through the bomb and the bullet. The next target is not known but all persons must be vigilant as intelligence is the key to defeating terrorism because until injustice is eliminated someone, somewhere can be manipulated to become a suicide bomber in the name of their God. There has to be a better way to deal with injustice because after every war there is always the negotiation. Perhaps we can begin with negotiation and dialogue and eliminate the senseless violence.

**Guest Editor**

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