

Analysis: London Tube Bombings

Downtown London hit by home-grown terrorists twice in the month of July 2005

Summary

- On July 7th, suicide bombers simultaneously detonated improvised bombs in the London Underground (Tube) train system and a double-decker bus in Tavistock Square
- Bombings occurred during the G8 Summit in Edinburgh, Scotland
- The first three bombs went off within 50 seconds, and the fourth occurred an hour later on a bus
- Authorities quickly evacuated and closed the underground network
- Passengers were told that a power-surge had occurred and were directed to take buses
- When the explosion on the double-decker occurred, authorities shut down all public-transportation in the city until the late afternoon
- 52 people were killed, and there were hundreds of casualties
- On July 22nd, a second attack featured four defective bombs that a terrorist cell intended to detonate both in the Underground and on a bus
- While this failed set of suicide bombers initially escaped from the scene of the attacks, the British authorities captured them later



The July 7th Cell

- All of the bombers were British citizens
- *Mohammed Sidique Khan*, 30, was a father of one and a teaching assistant. He was described as highly-westernized, and insisted that his friends call him “Sid.” He was the son of Pakistani immigrants. However, in the year before the bombings, his co-workers noted that he had become increasingly introverted and intolerant, and he was dismissed from his job in late 2004. Some time afterwards, he traveled to Pakistan along with another cell member, Tanweer, where they are thought to have had contact with some of Osama Bin Laden’s Al Qaeda network. He would later find a job at an Islamic bookshop, where Tanweer also worked
- *Shehzad Tanweer*, 22, was a sports science graduate who was said to be very religious, but not interested in politics. In April 2004, he was arrested for disorderly conduct, but only cautioned and let go. He traveled to Pakistan with Khan in late 2004, but



Mohammed Sidique Khan, the accused ring-leader of the group

was also rumored to have traveled there earlier. It is also rumored that during one of these trips, Tanweer met a leader of the group Jaish-e-Muhammad, which has links to Al Qaeda

- *Germaine Lindsay*, 19, was a recent convert to Islam just four years previously, and had been disciplined at school at one point for handing out Al Qaeda leaflets. He was born in Jamaica, but his family moved to the UK in 1986. He had a troubled family life growing up, living in

various homes with his mother during her many failed relationships. He was married in 2002, and his first child was born shortly after he died in the suicide attack

- *Hasib Mir Hussein*, 18, was also a second-generation British citizen of Pakistani extraction. A year before leaving school, he had traveled on the Hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca, and visited relatives in Pakistan. Soon after his return, he began to support radical Islamic movements, speaking openly about Al Qaeda. In 2004, he was cautioned for shoplifting, despite his claims of piety. Later that year, he stopped wearing traditional clothes and returned to Western wear. In July he left his home in Leeds and told his family that he was traveling to London to visit friends. When he failed to return, his parents reported him missing, and he was eventually found to be the fourth bomber



The July 7th bombers were captured leaving the Luton train station at 7:22am on CCTV cameras. From left to right, Hasib Hussain, Germaine Lindsay, Mohammad Sidique Khan, and Shehzad Tanweer

July 7th Bombings

- Bombs detonated while the trains were between stations. Early reports cited that there had been six bombings, because the injured emerged from both ends of the subway tunnels
- Authorities initially struggled to gain situational awareness, taking over an hour to definitively determine that a terrorist attack had occurred
- In short order, “The Secret Organization and Jihad Organization of Al-Qaeda in Europe” took credit for the attack. In September 2005, al Qaeda claimed responsibility
- British authorities would later determine that the cell had acted independently
- Britain remained on high terror alert for days, with rumors of suicide bombers abound

The July 22nd Cell

- *Yassin Hassan Omar*, 24, immigrated from Somalia in 1992
- *Muktar Said Ibrahim*, 27, came to Britain from Eritrea in 1992, and became a naturalized citizen in 2004
- *Ramzi Mohammad*, 23, was Said’s roommate
- *Whabi Mohammad*, 22, Ramzi’s brother, was also arrested
- *Hussein Osman*, 27, was born in Ethiopia but later became a British citizen. After the attempted bombings, he fled to Rome, but was arrested on July 29th and sent back to the UK where he was charged
- Police killed Brazilian immigrant, Jean Charles de Menezes, who was mistaken for Osman



The infamous CCTV image of Ramzi Mohammad, released by police during the manhunt.

July 22nd Bombings

- Cell targeted both the Underground and a bus, all within an hour time-frame during the early afternoon
- All bombs failed to explode. Attackers left these devices at the scene and successfully fled
- Observers described the explosions of initiation charges as going off like a large firework – yet in each case, the main charge failed to ignite
- The only casualty was an individual who suffered an asthma attack
- One of the attackers reportedly used a hand-gun in a failed attempt to detonate a bomb
- A fifth bomb, similar to the devices used on 7/21, was found abandoned in bushes two days later
- When the bombs did not detonate as planned, authorities feared a chemical attack. A smell of burning rubber or vinegar was also reported in the areas, furthering the fears of a biological attack

Law Enforcement Response

- Authorities shut down the transportation system in downtown London, once the nature of the incident was known. Buses would start again by 4pm, and trains resumed service shortly thereafter
- Authorities evacuated passengers from the Underground, fenced off entrances, and posted security guards
- Mobile phone network reached capacity almost immediately
- Following the July 22nd attacks, police tracked down six suspects within 7 days using images captured on CCTV
- A year later, a fellow employee in an Islamic bookstore claimed he told police about the extremist views of two members of the 7/7 cell. Police have no record of any such report



Implications for Law Enforcement

- All members of the implicated terrorist cells were British citizens or residents, many were born and raised in the UK, underscoring the increasing threat of homegrown terrorism
- Cell members were young males who adopted radical beliefs as demonstrated by sudden behavioral changes—which are best detected by community members, underscoring the need for police to maintain good community relations
- Multiple trips to Pakistan, although common for UK residents of Pakistani descent, raise the issue of coordination with AQ Central
- British authorities had difficulty gaining situational awareness—a reality that should be anticipated; few information sets trump on the ground observations of trained police officers
- Multiple attacks should be assumed at the first sign of trouble; on 7/7, an hour transpired between the first and last explosion, which offered a window of opportunity for mitigating actions
- Extensive use of CCTV allowed police to quickly identify the bombers after the fact. UK law enforcement are considering ways to use video images in a preventive manner. Also a consideration in the case of a successful suicide operation: video images enhance the terror effect

Eric Rojas, who was in London on 7/7, worked on this report for CPT. For more information please contact Tim Connors, at (212) 599-7000 or via e-mail: tconnors@manhattan-institute.org, or visit our website at www.cpt-mi.org