

Reasonable Doubt
James K. Galbraith

Anywhere else, the police killing of the young Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes in the London Tube on July 22 would be called a gangland-style murder. Yet the authorities are unmoved. Sir Ian Blair, Commissioner of Scotland Yard, stiffly warned that more shootings may follow. Home Secretary Charles Clarke stated “full support” for the police. Foreign Secretary Jack Straw gave the reason: police must “have effective discretion to deal with what could be terrorist suicide outrages about to take place.”

But this raises a question. Have any “terrorist suicide outrages” actually taken place? Outrages, certainly. But were the bombs of July 7 *suicide* bombs, as every commentator has accepted?

In judging this question, we can only rely on information that has come from the police. So let’s do that. Let’s assume that *every fact* asserted by British security forces with respect to the July 7 bombings is true. We may have to relax that assumption later, as economists say. But let’s accept them all, to begin with. And that includes some statements that were later retracted, but which are arguably more credible than the revised versions. What do we have?

We have three bombs that detonated on subway cars, in deep tunnels, at 8.50 am on July 7. One, at Russell Square, killed 25 people. The two others killed 16 people between them. A fourth bomb detonated some 57 minutes later, in the rear of the upper deck of the No. 30 bus, in Tavistock Square. This bomb killed 13 people. Total deaths so far: 55, including one not yet attributed to a site.

The fact that three bombs went off together establishes that detonation was by timers. No other hypothesis can account *reasonably* for the fact that less than a minute separated the explosions. (Also, on July 8 CNN reported that remains of timers had been found in the tunnel bombs.) The reasonable inference is that three alarms functioned, and that one failed.

The bombs contained military explosives—according to a front page report in *The New York Times*. Military explosives are powerful. Their use implies that the bombs were small. The joint hypothesis that the bombs were small, made from military explosives and detonated by timers implies that they were assembled by experts. This too has been stated by the authorities, and let’s accept it.

It’s true that these statements were later retracted, and the expertly-assembled, timer-detonated, military devices replaced by clumsy, homemade, volatile, hand-detonated bombs of the type found in the second round of bombings. But this is hard to believe. Detecting the chemical signature of explosives is reliable science, on which multiple sources based early statements to the press. The fact that other substances were later found elsewhere, in itself, proves nothing about what the bombs of July 7 were made of.

The bombs created havoc, especially underground. The tunnels in which the bodies lay were hot, dark and “vermin-infested.” One week after the bombings, only 22 bodies had been identified. Without doubt, recovery operations were grim. Secretary Clarke called it “total carnage.”

Yet, the identity documents of four British Muslim men were found in the debris close to the site of the bombs in each of the locations. The young men were seen together, wearing back-backs, on CCTV at King's Cross. Their faces were matched to the ID's, from among tens of thousands of images recovered from the Tube on that morning. According to reports, the young men on the videotape looked relaxed, as though they were going hiking. All this, we are officially told.

What do these "facts" establish? Do they show that the young men *were guilty* of the charge against them, that they committed the crime of mass murder, of which they have now been convicted, *post mortem*, in the press? Do they establish *suicide bombing*? No, they do not.

The method doesn't fit. *Suicide bombers use buttons.* If timed bombs are possible, it makes no sense to sacrifice the bomber. He can dump the bag, hop off the train, and live to bomb another day.

The effect doesn't fit. The point of a *suicide* bombing is to kill *many* people. With military explosives, a suicide bomber on a packed train could have killed many more than actually died. But with the small charges and the late hour, two bombs averaged only 8 deaths each (one report, possibly dated, puts the number at 6 each) including the "bomber." This suggests that at least two young men, with their large packs, did not seek out the most crowded cars on the Tube. Instead they looked for space to sit, just as you or I would have done.

The behavior doesn't fit. If the young men meant to be anonymous, why carry identification? If they wanted to be known, why not leave a letter or a video-tape, declaring their reasons? Why buy round-trip tickets from Luton? Why pay, diligently, for the parking of a rented car? These young men left no sign that they were preparing to die, and the most probable reason for that, is that they weren't.

Finally, the background doesn't fit. None of the young men were political. None were religiously extreme. One was, according to Reuters, "fanatical about sport." One had a fifteen-month old child and a partner who is eight months pregnant; he recently spent several hundred pounds on *perfume*. Another was, by the accounts of shocked and bereaved parents and colleagues, a "brilliant" teacher at a pre-school, where he specialized *for years* in small children with special needs. Now that's great cover for a "sleeper." Either that, or that man, too, was a victim.

Two of the young dead men featured luridly on the front page of *The Guardian* on July 19 in Pakistani entry photographs from 2003. But that young men of Pakistani origin should travel to Pakistan is not evidence of links to terrorism. The Israeli suggestion that one of these men helped to bomb a Tel Aviv nightclub is also not credible. If the Israelis had this information before July 7, why didn't they tell the British? He would have been easy to arrest.

Later innuendo was even more absurd. On July 24, the *Mail on Sunday* ran a photo of two of the young men, together with others, on a white-water raft. The article alongside suggested that the excursion was cover for "Al Qaeda military training." Well, possibly. But isn't it odd that terrorists would go to play and bond where photographers stand on the riverbank taking pictures? Here's an alternative thought. Maybe they went rafting for fun.

All in all, the reasonable inference is that the young men *did not know* that they were carrying bombs. It follows that they were duped into carrying them. This is a possibility *The New York Times* finally got around to discussing on July 27. The *Times* account notes that official statements, by police and politicians alike, have so far not *explicitly* stated that the bombings were suicides. But this fact had, until now, completely escaped the British press, and if you look again at that comment of Jack Straw's, it's easy to see why. Official statements have obviously been calculated to foster the impression that suicides were involved. Moreover the response, including the actions leading to the killing of Jean Charles de Menezes, was clearly predicated on the assumption that suicide bombers are about.

Simultaneity of the bombs would have insured that the young men could never report on who duped them. In this, it appears that the dupers got lucky. Had he been a bit quicker to catch on, the young man on the bus might have got away.

Who did it? So far, nobody knows. No credible claim of responsibility has been made. And once the premise of suicide is dropped, no link to Islamic terror has been established. So far, no credible suspects have been named – including the young biochemist arrested in Cairo. Hosni Mubarak's police are no friends of Islamic terror. If they will not deliver that young man to the British, they must have good reasons to believe that he wasn't involved. Their conduct is, at least, creditable so far.

The credit of British officials, on the other hand, is deeply damaged. In the case of Jean Charles de Menezes, we now know that he was tracked, over a mile, on and off a bus, and allowed to enter the Stockwell Underground station *before* being challenged, chased, cornered and shot eight times in the head and shoulder. All this, although he was, supposedly, a suspected suicide bomber! What is going on here? The case cries out for an independent inquiry. Meanwhile, *The Independent* on July 26 ran a small section titled "How the Story Has Changed," listing how various details in the official tale have unraveled. That alone, shows clearly that nothing stated officially in these matters can be taken on faith.

And that goes also for the four young men of July 7. *Innocent until proven guilty* is a principle of common law. One cannot convict in the presence of reasonable doubt. There is no reason why this should not also apply to the dead. They had friends and families, after all, and in several cases small children, who deserve a just accounting of whether their fathers were, or were not, suicide bombers. We cannot offer the four young dead men a fair trial. But we can apply the principle that we would use, if we could. It's actually one of those things, called values, which we're supposed to be fighting for, in the global clash of civilizations.

And in this case, doubt as to the actual guilt of Mohammed Sidique Khan, Shehzad Tanweer, Hasib Husain and Germaine Lindsay isn't just reasonable. It's overwhelming.

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