



The Car Bomb Jihad: Is Britain seeing clearly?

(Published in *World Defense Review*, July 2, 2007)

Walid Phares

Colaboraciones n° 1831

July 17, 2007

With each revelation made in Britain and in the West about a foiled plot or after an actual attack, a shower of questions is raised within the mainstream media, some of which contradict the other. The June 29 British success in averting two (maybe more) car bombs in London has also been accompanied by an endless series of issues, revealing among other things how the counterterrorism culture within Western democracies is still lacking in terms of cohesiveness. By comparison with previous conflicts, the analytical behavior of the global war on terror deserves a serious review. Following are a few questions I suggest we consider:

1. Let's begin with some British statements made after the announcement of car seizure in London: On

the one hand Britain's new home secretary, Jaqui Smith, said after an emergency meeting of top officials: "we are currently facing the most serious and sustained threat to our security from *international terrorism*;" only to bump against British authorities claiming they "found no link" between the defused car bomb and any *terrorist* group. This sharp contradiction between stating it is "international" but at the same time not linked to *any* terrorist group, is indicative of the tough political background UK counterterrorism efforts are being faced with. Since the 7/7 attacks and the following conspiracies, one cannot but note the hesitations of government public statements in defining the enemy. England is among the many other countries where Jihadi political activism has been able to win several

battles of ideas. For London's political establishment, at least the dominant one, (along with Brussels' European elite) is extremely cautious in manning the terms "war on terror," "conflict" and of course any terminology using a religious or ideological wording. Examined closely this attitude is the result of layers of "expertise" provided by academic "specialists" who advised not use sentences that would - in their arguments - exacerbate domestic tensions with a particular community, Muslims. Hence, not only the British Government and Bureaucracy have dropped preemptively all reference to the essence of the War aimed at the UK, i.e. Jihadism and its derivatives, but even the actual nature of the terror action: the very fact that it is global, systematic and ideological, in short a War.

2. A second series of questions accompanying the immediate debate about the plot centered on the link to al Qaeda. The ballet surrounding the media and official reporting went back and forth about the theory of Bin Laden responsibility in this affair, as if it would shape up the strategy to respond. Western, and in this case, British investigators must bypass the dead-ended guessing about al Qaeda's formal role and spend energies and time on the greater question of Jihadi penetration of British society. For Bin Laden and Zawahiri may or may not be the trigger factors in this specific operation; al Qaeda's central apparatus may or may not be in charge of the execution; and the perpetrators may or may not be professional terrorists. The issue at hand remains the

"factory" that produced these persons: Who indoctrinated them, how did they form a cell and how many potential Jihadi cells are there across the islands. Bin Laden or not is a secondary question. For after his passing, and if the reduction of Jihadism is not successful in Britain, there will still be attempts, even though not signed by the mother organization.

3. The "homegrown" versus the "international" mind game came back with a dizzying back and forth argument: Are the perpetrators "domestic" or "overseas" generated? One argument causing a different political resonance than the other, both unwanted by the dominant analysis: If the terrorists are "homegrown" the next question will reopen the debate about the so-called "radicalization of the British Muslim community." Obviously officials want to avoid the matter. If the terrorists are said to be "international," then the notion of "global war" would resurface, crumbling the advancing doctrine arguing otherwise. Worse would occur if it is learned that British citizens - claiming Jihadism - have indeed been in contact with outside terror networks (which in most cases would be logical). Then the analysis will go back to square one, a spot that many commentators have tried to get rid of, unsuccessfully. For very simply, the followers of Jihadism have no boundaries: homegrown and international are all part of a boundless ideology.

4. The public inquiry is so traumatized intellectually that it produces

sometimes strange statements. In the Police struggle against common criminals it is perfectly normal to proceed solely from the physical evidence in the crime scene for the simple reason that no previous context exist. But in a War, the context constitutes the framework in which the investigation of a war act is investigated. Scotland Yard is known among the most efficient police forces in the world. It has solved scores of enigmas from (literally) scratches. But during the London Blitz of 1940 it would have been odd for security authorities looking at bombs remains in the ruins to state that "bombs are connected because they are made with the same product"! In the London's last plot, the two Mercedes were declared as "linked" because they contained the same material! But what if the two car bombs were filled with different types of explosives? Would they have belonged to two different conflicts? Such a conclusion - remote from the logic of wars - is precisely odd because the standing doctrine is to distance the official analysis as much as possible from the concept of "War." Hence the Jihadists can strike at will in Britain - and in vast numbers - they will continue to be seen as dispersed, unlinked, and striking for their own particular causes, each one waging his or her private war, for private reasons.

5. Some involved in the commentary about the perpetrators spoke about a "population manhunt" of the terrorists based on the release of the films produced by London's many surveillance cameras. The UK pride itself for having installed more cam-

eras in their capital than all other European cities combined. But when one wonders why the dense surveillance is so extended one realize that Britain had to develop an extreme system of monitoring because it was forbidden to be preemptive in the war. Over the years, authorities were pressured by lobbies not to engage the Jihadists "before" they become terrorists and before they strike. So resources were reverted to spy on the Jihadis (and other terrorists) "after" they attack but not before: Another result of the initial shortcoming in the perception of the "enemy." The U.S. is under similar pressure by its own internal critics to follow the same path: Do not monitor the Jihadists before but only after they have engaged in terror action.

6. And as expected, the debate is loaded with the classical argument of "anger mounting among Muslims in Britain." Since the 7/7 attacks, a so-called socioeconomic doctrine has been injected into the discussion by Jihadi apologists. They argue that the perpetrators are "reacting to the marginalization of the Muslim community on economic grounds," an analysis that was crumbled by European social scientists. The growth of Jihadism is not the result of socio-economic disparities, as it was proven, but of the expansion of Wahabism, Salafism and other forms of radical ideologies.

7. What does this London attempt and the Scotland attack mean in terms of the intention of the terrorists regarding the UK? Is it an ongoing thing? Will we see others in the

future? The answer is self-evident: The Jihadists have declared war against the UK and many other countries. The operations will continue until the "factory" producing these ideologies is shut down.

8. Are British security services good at preventing? Is this a successful operation of counterterrorism? Certainly, yes: The various agencies on the Isles are dedicated, efficient and fast responding. But the matter is one of political orientation. Britain services are producing 100 percent results within the 50 percent margin allowed for them. And so is the case in most liberal democracies.

9. Should the US be worried about this development in London? Is there a potential link? Another question that seems logical when uttered but then again shows our general limitation in understanding the global threat. Our dominant political culture has been reducing the ability of the debate to grow intelligently with regards the Jihadi phenomenon. There is no question that Americans and British alike should be worried about a terror act anywhere on both sides of the Atlantic. For the Jihadi campaign targets both nations, and all other societies obstructing their goals. But on the other hand, terror operations taking place in one country do not have to replicate automatically in another country. Unless al Qaeda has coordinated an international spectacular campaign worldwide (which may not be impossible), uncovering car bombs in London don't have to mobilize police forces necessarily in US cities. We must be logical in perceiving the

enemy's moves. Both extreme are unreasonable.

10. And back to this last car-bombs seizure in London, one cannot but contemplate the sanguinary intentions of the perpetrators: Targeting citizens in a Night Club on a "Ladies Night." A very revealing dimension of the limitless savagery of the terrorists: Not only civilians are "permissible" enemies but women are a prime target too. This shows again that, beyond their physical threat, the Jihadists most dangerous features are their brainwashed minds. The Mercedes Jihad in Britain is yet another example of how deep they have reached within the realm of their enemies, and how lacking behind is the perception of their victims.

11. Last but not least, the Glasgow Airport "SUV" attack on Saturday is now showing clearly the "campaign" nature of the Jihadi assaults in the UK. Fortunately, British officials are perhaps slowly coming to see clearer, as Dame Pauline Neville-Jones, former head of Britain's joint intelligence committee, told Sky News "One has to conclude ... these are linked," speaking of the London car seizure and of the Glasgow Airport operation. But the quest for a "reason" behind these attacks remains the first concerns in their analysis. "This is a very young government, and we may yet see further attacks" added Neville-Jones. Maybe it is true that the Jihadists are attempting to drag Mr Gordon Brown's cabinet into military and security responses, so that a greater "insurrection" takes place, but again, British understand-

ing of the whole picture cannot complete itself unless a clear cut absorption of the fact that what the UK (and many other democracies) are facing now and in the future is a "War," not dispersed acts of violence that Mr Sherlock Holmes will have to link to each other.

12. So, are the bombings – failed or successful – aimed at achieving political targets at this point in time? Definitely: all Jihadi attacks in the UK or on the continent at anytime wants to weaken the European resolve in pursuing what the US calls a War on terror. There is a standing order by al Qaeda and fatwas by Salafi clerics (and Khomeinist as well, although in a different context) asking members, allies, local and

international to "strike into the heart of infidels, including the British." And that can't be taken lightly, cannot be dismissed and forms the core of the War against democracies. But in addition to standing orders, strategic considerations are also in play. There is little doubt that the Jihadi War room dealing with the UK wishes to test if not drag the new cabinet of Prime Minister Gordon Brown into "engagement." The focused psychological war against the Tony Blair cabinet by the Jihadi-Trotskyite axis has ended with his resignation. Now the British-based "axis" wants to demonize Brown by forcing his cabinet to respond and to be responded to. The Salafi move is clear ... but is Britain seeing clearly?

Professor Walid Phares is the author of [Future Jihad](#). He is a Visiting Fellow with the [European Foundation for Democracy in Brussels](#) and a Senior Fellow with the [Foundation for the Defense of Democracies](#) in Washington.