Anatomy of a Terrorist Attack
What the Coroner’s Inquests Revealed about the London Bombings

Rachel Briggs, Jennifer Cole, Margaret Gilmore and Valentina Soria
The views expressed in this paper are the authors’ own, and do not necessarily reflect those of RUSI or any other institutions with which the authors are associated.

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About the Authors

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Introduction

Margaret Gilmore

Nearly six years after the 7 July 2005 London bomb attacks, the Inquests into the deaths of the fifty-two commuters killed will finally conclude on 6 May. Coroner Lady Justice Hallett will deliver her verdicts, along with a list of recommendations suggesting how lives might be saved under similar circumstances in the future. She will also rule on whether she will hold inquests into the deaths of the four suicide bombers – Mohammed Siddique Khan, Jermaine Lindsay, Shazad Tanweer and Hasib Hussain – responsible for the atrocities. This RUSI Occasional Paper analyses the evidence given before the Coroner.

It concludes that the Inquests have been unprecedented in scope, bringing to light new detail on the bombers and new evidence on the response to the attacks. Bereaved families and survivors have been given unparalleled insight into the *modus operandi* of the Security Service (MI5), as the Coroner investigated not only the emergency response to the bombings, but also the issue of whether intelligence officers could have prevented the attacks. Rarely has MI5 come under such intense public scrutiny.

Crucially, the Inquests have pushed the boundaries on transparency. The balance between national security and the public’s right to information has been tested, and appears to have swung a little further away from secrecy towards openness – something of a novelty within the guarded world of security. The flow of information relating to terrorism is generally limited to those who ‘need to know’ – often for good reasons of national security, but sometimes due to little more than historical precedence or habit. These Inquests brought a fresh approach, seemingly operating on the basis that information would be released unless a strong case could be made to the contrary.

The purpose of an inquest is to establish the cause of death and, with constraints, to make recommendations. These Inquests have gone further. While there is little question that those who died were unlawfully killed, this Paper suggests that the Coroner’s recommendations are likely to concentrate on the emergency response, with few focused on MI5’s record-keeping.

Some of the most fascinating insights of the Inquests have related to how strongly the bombers operated as a cell. Fresh evidence on how the four men became radicalised reveals the importance of working as a group and of bonding through sport and communal activities. New material emerged on the planning of the attacks, including the revelation that the four bombers had nineteen different mobile phones in the run-up to the attacks. The
cell leader, Mohammed Siddique Khan, received frequent calls from what appears to have been a controller or mastermind in Pakistan, including one final call hours after the attacks. The caller always used public call centres and was never identified.

The Inquests revealed that some details in earlier reports into the atrocities were inaccurate, putting new focus on, in particular, the parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC). The Inquests may influence future government policy, coming as they have ahead of a Green Paper on intelligence in judicial proceedings, due to be published later this year. The successful use of intelligence in this instance may make any suggestion of stricter rules on disclosure less palatable to the public.

Finally, this Paper warns against quick fixes for emergency responders. They may be easy to make with hindsight, but could lack the adaptability necessary to be of any use should similar demands be made of it in the future – in all probability, any such incident will unfold differently. It examines the conflict between health and safety issues and the need for flexibility on the ground, looking at command and control issues and communications between different agencies. In the light of the Inquests, it investigates what might be done to improve interoperability and institutional oversight, and looks at the barriers to the implementation of recommendations from previous reports such as those which followed the Kings Cross fire in 1987. The Paper asks what tangible difference changed procedures and more advanced technology might make, urging caution in a time of fiscal austerity.

The Inquests have held agencies and responders to account. They should herald the way for greater transparency on security, and have brought serious review of the way future crises are handled. As such they may have brought some long-overdue closure to those bereaved.
Countdown to the Terrorist Attack

A timeline of how the bombers planned and carried out the 7 July attacks
Valentina Soria

The following is a timeline of significant events related, directly or indirectly, to the 7 July attacks. The second column includes information gleaned from previous official sources which had therefore entered the public domain before the Inquests. The information in bold refers to intelligence related to the bombers that MI5 and the police possessed before the atrocities. The third column contains details revealed or officially confirmed at the Inquests, having previously been speculative.

Key sources examined:

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<th>Developments Leading Up to 7/7</th>
<th>Details revealed or confirmed at the Inquests</th>
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<tr>
<td>26–28 January 2001</td>
<td>As part of a joint investigation – ‘Operation Warlock’ – MI5 and West Yorkshire Police (WYP) carry out surveillance of an outwards-bound exercise in the Lake District organised by Martin McDaid, an Islamic extremist known to MI5 and WYP. MSK observed and photographed, but not identified.</td>
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<td>Summer 2001</td>
<td>MSK and Tanweer attend terrorist training in Kashmir with Waheed Ali (Theseus Trial defendant).</td>
<td>Omar Khyam (arrested in connection with the Crevice Plot) also believed to be there.</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>The Iqra bookshop (selling extremist literature) opens at 49A Bude Road, Leeds.</td>
<td>Tanweer and MSK are among its trustees. The latter ceases to be associated with the bookshop in 2003.</td>
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<td>March 2003</td>
<td>MI5 hears Mohammed Qayum Khan (Crevice Plot suspect) calling unidentified man. Several calls made to a number registered to a Sidique Khan of 49A Bude Road. More calls made in July (13, 19, 24). This information is retained by MI5.</td>
<td>The ISC understood that Khan’s calls were made in July and August but the Inquests revealed that they actually started in March. A call highlighted in the ISC Report as having been made on 15 August was in fact made on 17 August.</td>
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<td>April 2003</td>
<td>On 14/15 April WYP observe McDaid being given a lift in a blue BMW registered to a Sidique Khan of 11 Gregory Street (Batley).</td>
<td>This information was not shared with MIS, but was inserted into WYP CLUE computer system and police national computer. It was later deleted when the car was scrapped.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>MIS and WYP launch ‘Operation Honeysuckle’, a joint investigation into McDaid’s connections.</td>
<td>Further connections to Bude Road are established: the address is linked to Tafazal Mohammed (McDaid’s associate).</td>
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<td>MSK transfers car to another person in July.</td>
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<td>November/December 2003</td>
<td>WYP conduct further enquiries into 49A Bude Road.</td>
<td>MSK now no longer associated with the Iqra bookshop.</td>
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<td>July 2003</td>
<td>MSK and Mohammed Shakil (Theseus Trial defendant) attend Malakand terrorist training camp in Pakistan with Omar Khyam. They use the pseudonyms ‘Ibrahim’ (MSK) and ‘Zubair’ (Shakil).</td>
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<td>2 February 2004</td>
<td>Khyam meets three unidentified men (UDMs), noted then as C (Waheed Ali), D (Tanweer) and E (MSK). UDMs are in a Honda Civic registered to a Hasina Patel of 10 Thornhill Park Avenue, Dewsbury – the address of MSK’s wife. The car is also connected to Lodge Road and Tempest Road in Leeds.</td>
<td>In a conversation taped by MIS, Khyam suggests that four cells are involved in planning an unspecified act: ‘One cell goes down,’ he says, ‘[and it] won’t affect other ones’.</td>
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<td>20 February 2004</td>
<td>Canada-based bomb expert arrives to advise Crevice cell.</td>
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<td>A member of the public reports a large store of fertiliser (location not disclosed). Further investigations by WYP confirm bag of 600 kg of fertiliser is being held in a storage facility.</td>
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<td>21 February 2004</td>
<td>Surveillance team notices only Khyam and two UDMs travelling in a Toyota Avensis (plate not spotted). Their conversation focuses on logistical details (terrorist activity overseas), and makes no reference to a potential UK attack. (It is transcribed again in March 2005 when the two UDMs are recognised as having northern accents.) After 7/7 it was established MSK was one of the UDMs involved in the conversation.</td>
<td>This information was not brought to the attention of MI5 desk officers. Only after 7/7 does it emerge that the Toyota was rented by a Sidique Khan of 11 Gregory Street. Meanwhile, operational updates during an ELG meeting suggest that ‘It is a real possibility that planning for more than one device is underway’.</td>
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<td>28 February 2004</td>
<td>Second meeting between Khyam and UDMs C, D and E in Honda Civic. Further checks are made on the car, which now appears to be registered to a Sidique Khan of 11 Gregory Street. Searches by WYP are extended to other addresses linked to the car, including 99 Stratford Street, where Khan used to live.</td>
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<td>21 March 2004</td>
<td>Third meeting with Khyam: A Vauxhall Corsa appears at 14 Langley Walk, Crawley (apparently Khyam’s address). The car was rented by a Sidique Khan of 11 Gregory Street on 21 March.</td>
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<td>23 March 2004</td>
<td>Khyam is seen meeting four UDMs travelling in the same Vauxhall Corsa observed two days earlier. MI5 surveillance team realises that the driver also drove the Honda Civic spotted on 2 and 28 February. During a conversation in Khyam’s car, men are heard discussing the success of the Madrid bombings.</td>
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<td>28 March 2004</td>
<td>ELG meeting concludes that ‘Intelligence indicates the existence of a second plot [apart from the Crevice Plot] of which we had no visibility and another attack was planned ... We could not ensure public safety with no knowledge of this plot’. ‘It may be possible they may be planning for an attack’.</td>
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<td>April 2004</td>
<td>MI5 and WYP launch ‘Operation Scraw’, following up Crevice. MI5 provide WYP with a list of twelve names and thirteen addresses (three connected to MSK) on which to conduct further checks. Nothing significant found to justify further investigation.</td>
<td>UDM D and E are later added to this list.</td>
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<td>6 April 2004</td>
<td>The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the US shows informant Mohammed Junair Babar surveillance photos of UDM D (Tanweer) from the 2 February meeting. He fails to identify him.</td>
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<td>May 2004</td>
<td>Special Branch identifies relevant intelligence strands suitable for development, and tracing the Honda Civic observed in the February meetings becomes a priority. The Vauxhall Corsa was identified among the priority lines of inquiry in March.</td>
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<td>12 May 2004</td>
<td>Babar reveals he was first introduced to ‘Ibrahim’ and ‘Zubair’ in June 2003 at Islamabad airport, when he and Khyam picked up individuals linked to Crevice Plot. All attended Malakand terrorist camp later that summer.</td>
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<td>May 2004</td>
<td>Details revealed or confirmed at the Inquests</td>
<td>Photos of UDM D and E shown to a second detainee, who fails to identify them. He/she does say that Ibrahim and Zubair had been sent to Pakistan on a fact-finding mission by Qayum Khan, and reveals that they are from Leeds.</td>
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<td>July 2004</td>
<td>Further enquiries and searches made by WYP on addresses and on the Vauxhall seen in March lead to a photo (taken in 1993 when he was cautioned for assault) and date of birth for Siddique Khan.</td>
<td>The photo was not compared with those taken during the 2 February meeting, so no match was found.</td>
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<td>August 2004</td>
<td>Photos of UDMs D and E, including ones taken during the 23 March meeting, shown to informant Babar, who fails to identify them or to match UDM E with Ibrahim.</td>
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<td>October/November 2004</td>
<td>MSK prepares two home-made videos, the second apparently a ‘goodbye’ video for his daughter before his departure for Pakistan.</td>
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<td>18 November 2004</td>
<td>MSK, Tanweer and Shipon Ullah (Theseus defendant) travel to Pakistan, intending to go to fight, and seek martyrdom, in Afghanistan.</td>
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<td>25 November 2004</td>
<td>MSK contacts his wife, probably to discuss his return from Pakistan. Further contacts made in January.</td>
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<td>16 December 2004</td>
<td>Lindsay, Hussein and some Theseus defendants travel to London. (Lindsay will conduct more trips to the capital between January and April 2005.)</td>
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<td>January/March 2005</td>
<td>New intelligence obtained by Security Services indicates that a man named ‘Saddique’ (surname not Khan) and another called Imran, from Batley, trained in Afghanistan in the late 1990s and early 2000s. ‘Saddique’ was in his thirties and received military training in a mujahedeen camp in Pakistan in 2001.</td>
<td>Further intelligence passed from WYP to MI5 suggests that the men have associates in West Yorkshire, including an Asian man named Taf, who WYP identify as Tafazal Mohammed. Info shared between WYP and MI5. No further investigative actions are taken for ‘good operational reasons’. Importance of 11 Gregory Street also being in Batley (see April 2003) not immediately realised.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 February 2005</td>
<td>MSK and Tanweer return from Pakistan, having probably been instructed to conduct a terrorist operation in the UK.</td>
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<td>27 January 2005</td>
<td>WYP find Vauxhall Corsa seen in March 2004 is registered to a Siddique Khan of 10 Thornhill Park Avenue.</td>
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<td>22 February 2005</td>
<td>The bombers make their first purchase of hydroponic material from Huddersfield Hydroponics. The bombers visit forty-five outlets from February to June.</td>
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<td>March 2005</td>
<td>Babar reveals that ‘Ibrahim’ and ‘Zubair’ are from the Bradford area and attended a terrorist training camp with the Crevice plotters. This information places the individual, later discovered to be MSK, closer to the attack planning. MI5 launches ‘Operation Downtempo’, aimed at identifying ‘Ibrahim’ and ‘Zubair’.</td>
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<td>10 April 2005</td>
<td>MSK calls the landlord of 111 Chapeltown Road, whose flat they rent and make their bomb factory. Text sent by MSK to Hussain on 14 April, detailing the flat’s window aperture and the size of the curtains, indicates that steps were taken to conceal activity inside property.</td>
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<td>23 April 2005</td>
<td>MSK receives call from Pakistan – men appear to have received advice and guidance from overseas.</td>
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<td>May 2005</td>
<td>The four bombers start using fifteen ‘operational’ phones between them (each also has a personal mobile). They are changed regularly (three or four times) in the months leading up to attacks, and are used exclusively to communicate with each other and for attack planning and logistics.</td>
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<td>Calls are made from Rawalpindi in Pakistan to MSK on 9, 10, 12, 19, 31 May and 2 June. On 14 May, a call is made to MSK’s second operational phone. Other calls received on 2 July to MSK’s third operational phone; all calls assumed connected to some bomb-making guidance. The devices are unique (instructions on devices manufactured with hydrogen peroxide and pepper were not yet circulating on the Internet) – and so instructions must have come from elsewhere.</td>
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1. Hydroponic products are used to grow plants. The products purchased by the bombers contained the components needed to manufacture triacetone triperoxide (TATP) devices.

2. Hydrogen peroxide is an oxidizer commonly used as bleach and hair dyes. It can be employed to manufacture TATP devices.
Anatomy of a Terrorist Attack

**Date** | **Developments Leading Up to 7/7** | **Details revealed or confirmed at the Inquests**
--- | --- | ---
**June 2005** | | Ahead of the Crevice Trial, the Met asks Pakistani authorities to share information on some of the Crevice defendants who had travelled to Pakistan in the summer of 2003. After 7 July it emerged that MSK had travelled with one of the Crevice plotters in July 2003.

**15 June 2005** | MSK calls subcontractor of a flat in 18 Alexandra Grove in order to set up a second bomb factory. Searches there after 7/7 revealed explosive material, bomb-making instructions, SIM cards and other documents related to the four bombers, and a London visitor’s map with several references to the Central line.

**28 June 2005** | MSK, Tanweer and Lindsay arrive at King’s Cross station, London, and travel on the Piccadilly, Hammersmith and City, Metropolitan and Circle lines. CCTV images recovered after 7/7 show particular interest in the Piccadilly and Circle lines. A letter in Tanweer’s writing recovered at the bomb scene and a burnt paper found at 18 Alexandra Grove in Khan’s writing both showed interest in Central line stations.

**4 July 2005** | MSK, Tanweer and Hussain visit B&Q in Beeston Road, Leeds, and buy three sets of pliers and two boxes of 50-watt bulbs. MSK rents Nissan Micra from First 24 Hour Car Rentals Ltd.

**6 July 2005** | MSK is forced to go to hospital with his wife. MSK texts Lindsay warning him of this change of plan. This suggests that the attacks had been planned for 6 July.

**7 July, 2005**

- Lindsay’s red Fiat Bravo arrives at Luton Station at 0500. A Nissan Micra with MSK, Tanweer and Hussain pulls in next to it. The bombers board a Thameslink train at 0725 and arrive at King’s Cross Station at 0823.

- Lindsay boards a Piccadilly line train, MSK a westbound and Tanweer an eastbound train on the Circle line. The three detonate their devices at 0850. Hussain exits King’s Cross at 0854 and buys batteries at WHSmith’s. Hussain calls co-conspirators several times after failing to board an Underground train. He gets on a Number 30 bus and detonates his bomb in Tavistock Square at 0947.

- Gym cards, bank and credit cards, several forms of ID (passport, driving license, national insurance card), all attributable to the four bombers, are recovered at the bomb scenes. At 1404 a call from Rawalpindi is made to MSK’s phone.

**After the Attacks**

- In August 2005, a plastic bag containing home video tapes, books and documents, including a hand-written note and a will, is found inside a metal box retrieved by the police through Witness ‘B’. The note is a farewell from Khan to his family. Evidence recovered from the two ‘bomb factories’ included the explosive component Hexamethylene triperoxide diamine (HMTD), an initiator, references to the actual bomb-making process, respirators, bulk explosive made up of concentrated hydrogen peroxide and a pepper/piperine mix, ice blocks, instructions linked to hydroponic products, saucepans (used in the bomb-making process), halogen light bulbs and pieces of paper with reference to the Underground.

- Evidence recovered from the cars used to get to Luton station included a home-made anti-personnel-type device, hexamine blocks, batteries, nails and shrapnel, ice-packs and cooler boxes, surveillance detectors, a handgun, ammunition box and a telescopic sight.
Radicalisation Towards Terrorism

Rachel Briggs

Introduction
The openness afforded to the Coroner’s Inquests – manifestations of which include (almost) full transcripts of the hearings, witness statements and supporting evidence – have brought some fascinating new insights into the four bombers and their associates. Due to the small sample size, surreptitious nature of much relevant activity, the fact that Al-Qa’ida terrorists often seek to die in the act, and because the perpetrators do not always know or want to admit the real reasons for their actions, theories of radicalisation are necessarily largely untested. However, whilst it is impossible to draw general conclusions from a single case, the Inquests have provided a wealth of new information about the relationship between the bombers and the wider network within which they operated. From this evidence, we are offered insights into how they behaved, how they organised themselves, and how they related to their family, friends and neighbours in the days and weeks leading up to their suicide.

Group Dynamics
In many respects, new evidence about the motivations and movements of the perpetrators has validated the theories of those, such as Marc Sageman, who have stressed the importance of groups and networks in encouraging radicalisation. Sageman’s ‘bunch of guys’ thesis argues that the group dynamic is critical to the radicalisation process on a psycho-social level, and also performs a practical facilitative role in providing the contacts, know-how and resources to allow individuals to turn their thoughts into action.¹ Our understanding of so-called ‘lone wolves’ – individuals willing to act alone – is growing,² but they remain a minority. Whether or not one agrees with the emphasis Sageman places on groups, the fact remains that most terrorists are team players – and the Inquests have demonstrated that Khan, Tanweer, Lindsay and Hussain were no exception.

A number of witnesses provided evidence to suggest that the London bombers had formed a tight-knit group, especially Khan, Tanweer and Hussain. They were regularly seen together and were known to attend sports activities, mostly as a threesome. Khan’s neighbour in Lees Holm, Sara Aziz, said that she had seen Khan, Tanweer and another Asian male together at Khan’s house a lot.³ She also saw an Afro-Caribbean man coming and going -- possibly Lindsay, given that his car was sighted at the house.

Tanweer Akhtar⁴ went into business with Lindsay and also lived in Lees Holm near Khan. He saw Lindsay at Khan’s home in September 2004, and said that Lindsay stayed in the house while Khan was away in Pakistan in early 2005.
He also saw Khan, Tanweer and Hussain attend karate lessons together at the Hamara Centre, where they kept to themselves, and knew that the three went swimming as a group. He also saw Khan and Tanweer together at a gym in Beeston.

Sports and physical activities have a long association with the radicalisation process. The grainy images of Khan and Tanweer on an outwards-bound course appeared in the aftermath of the bombings, as MI5 pieced together their histories (see Valentina Soria, ‘Countdown to the Terrorist Attack’, in this Paper). They had been captured by surveillance operatives, although at the time were not active targets so their presence did not raise a red flag.

Mark Hargreaves, an outdoor pursuit teacher, provided evidence to the Inquests about his contact with a number of individuals known to associate with Khan and Tanweer. They brought a group to him for outdoor pursuits, first in late 2001, and he was asked to organise training that would push the young people to their limits and toughen them up. He described some of the organisers as being aggressive, outspoken and keen to convert him to Islam with a strong religious fervour.

He was later involved with some of these people in helping to establish a youth drop-in centre, and describes being shown ‘hateful, deeply offensive pictures and videos’ by Martin McDaid (who organised an outdoor pursuits sessions with them and was a central figure at the Iqra bookshop). He felt that they were using these images and extremist literature to radicalise groups of young men. He states that his view, then and now, is that Martin McDaid was whipping up hatred. McDaid was under surveillance by MI5 because he was suspected of being an extremist, and in April 2003 was seen taking a lift in a blue BMW which was owned by Khan.

The Inquests also reiterated what is already known about the connections between Khan and Tanweer and the Crevice Plot, which is covered elsewhere in this report.

The Role of Place
Relatively little has been written about the geography of radicalisation. However, we know that places and institutions provide a location for radicalisation, a meeting point for like-minded people, a base for planning and a venue through which to distribute extremist material. The Inquests generated a considerable amount of new information about the Iqra bookshop, which opened in 2002 and appears to have performed this role for the London bombers.

Shabaz Amir Fazal, who gave evidence before the Inquests, was involved with the bookshop from 2001/2 onwards. His uncle, Tafazal Mohammed, was one of the bookshop’s trustees alongside Khan. We know that Khan was
heavily involved with the running of the bookshop; when police searched the computer he used at Hillside Primary School they found the bookshop’s accounts dating back to February 2002 and minutes of management meetings from April 2002. A number of witnesses also reported seeing Khan there throughout this time, and it is known that he paid a regular direct debit to help cover the bookshop’s costs.

Fazal reported that the bookshop was started because of frustrations about the lack of facilities for young people at the nearby Hardy Street Mosque. Fazal, his uncle, and Khan had attended the mosque and Khan worked from its basement gym. Another witness, Tanweer Akhtar, said that he had heard that Khan had been thrown out of Beeston Mosque as a result of his views, and if this is correct Khan had a history of disagreements and breaking away from mosques.

We know that other terrorists were associated with the Iqra bookshop. Fazal said he knew Khalid Khaliq through the bookshop; he was convicted in 2008 of possessing an Al-Qa’ida training manual. Shapon Ullah was seen at the bookshop over a number of years; it is known that he went to a training camp in Pakistan with Khan in 2001. And Mohammed Shakil, who went on a training course with Khan in 2003, also attended the bookshop. The training course they attended together is the one at which Khan met some of the individuals involved in the Crevice Plot.

There is also evidence to suggest that the bookshop was not just selling extremist material, but also acting as a base for its wider distribution. A number of witnesses referred to seeing such documents there, and Fazal said he was concerned that the appropriate vetting process was not being followed from an early stage in the shop’s operation. Martin Gilbertson, who provided computer technical services, testified that he was asked to prepare extremist DVDs for circulation, was subject to aggressive attempts to convert him to Islam, and that some of the key players said that suicide bombings could be justified and wanted to create an Islamic state in the UK. In his evidence, Mark Hargreaves described how the leading individuals, including McDaid, said that they were travelling at weekends in order to distribute this kind of material to other parts of the country. He also worked with Khan at Leeds Community School, and claims that Khan brought this material from the bookshop to distribute via the school. Witnesses also described how access to certain areas of the bookshop containing computers was strictly limited by the core leaders.
Behaviour and Activities

Perhaps some of the most fascinating new insights relate to the behaviour and activities of the four bombers in the months, weeks and days leading up to the bombings. Testimony from a number of witnesses gives us a better understanding of how they organised themselves, and how they behaved as the attacks grew nearer – even in relation to those closest to them.

Khan’s neighbour, Sara Aziz, gave an account of the comings and goings at his house in the months leading up to the bombings. She said that Khan was around most of the time; he would sometimes disappear for a couple of days or a week or so, but never for prolonged periods of time, although he was not around much at all in March 2005. In April 2005, she saw him frequently bringing rucksacks into and out of the house. She said he always had a sports bag, too, which made her think that he must have been going to the gym. We know from another witness that at this time Khan and Hussain were renting a flat which they used to make the bombs. Aziz recounted that he kept strange hours, usually arriving or leaving early in the morning or late at night.

Around this time, there was a dispute over parking by Khan’s house; it was a small area with limited spaces. She remembered that Khan was bringing things from his boot into the house, but that each time he went in he would close the boot as if he wanted to avoid anyone seeing what was inside. The behaviour seemed abnormal. One of her neighbours said she was going to call the police, but they did not come until the next day, by which time Khan and his car had gone.

Aziz also saw an Afro-Caribbean man frequent Khan’s house, and saw what turned out to be Lindsay’s car there three or four times. She recognised it when she saw footage of the car at Luton train station on the news a few days after the bombings. She saw Khan putting bags into Lindsay’s car on either 5 or 6 July 2005; she remembered the date because it was around the time of her birthday.

It is likely that a large proportion of these trips were to a flat rented by Hasib Hussain on Chapeltown Road from Wajid Hussain (no relation). Hasib found Wajid through Khan, and the two came with Tanweer sometime in April 2005 and paid the deposit and one month’s rent in cash. They later extended for a further two months. During this time, there was an overload of the building’s electrical system, so Wajid spoke to the tenants to see if they were experiencing any problems and to try and locate the source of the problem.

He knocked on Hasib’s door, and when there was no answer he tried to open it with his own key. He wasn’t able to get in because there was a key in the other side of the lock, indicating that there was in fact someone inside. He
eventually spoke to Hasib on another occasion, who explained that he was using an electric stove to boil water, but that he was sure this should not be cause for concern. He also warned Wajid off coming into the flat again.

When he saw reports of the bombings, Wajid became concerned about what he had seen, and so decided to look in the flat before going to the police. On 12 July 2005 he went to the flat. The lock had been changed, so he kicked open the door and found the place empty but in a mess. He found rubbish, a gas mask box, and a box for a double-ring portable electric hob. He also noticed that they had put up extra curtains.

**Personal Relationships**

Two of the witnesses – Witness ‘A’ and Nicki Blackmore – had relationships with Tanweer and Lindsay respectively. Their evidence provides a glimpse into the men’s mental state of mind in the weeks before the bombings.

Witness ‘A’ had a relationship with Tanweer, which started towards the end of 2001. They tried to keep the relationship secret and saw one another sporadically. She said that she remembered Tanweer as being very into sport, but not particularly religious beyond observing Ramadan. Their relationship ended after a change in personal circumstances, but they stayed in touch via occasional text messages.

He got in touch with her again in early 2005 and told her that he and his family were moving to Dubai in August that year. He also said that he had been to Pakistan for a few months with a friend or friends, but did not tell her who he had been with or why he had been. They continued to stay in touch via text messages. She got the impression that he loved her, and he expressed a wish to share some sort of a future together, despite what he knew he was about to do.

They met face-to-face for the first time in 2005 at the beginning of June. The hair on his head, eyebrows and arms had blond patches, presumably as a result of handling hydrogen peroxide during the construction of the bombs, but he told her it was caused by the sun in Pakistan. When asked whether she thought there was anything about his mood or behaviour that was out of place, she said ‘No, not that I noticed.’ He said he was going to Wales to do some youth work, and they met up the following weekend, after which he said he was going away again.

Witness ‘A’ received a text message from Tanweer in the first week of July asking if she would spend some time with him. He wanted to spend or go out all night with her during the first weekend in July 2005. They spent the night together at a hotel but did not become intimate. That night, he told her that he was about to go away to Scotland for a week and would get in touch with
her when he got back. He called her on 4 July and said he would be back by Saturday 9 July and would call again then. He did not mention anything to do with London or the other bombers and his mood seemed normal. That was the last contact she had with him. At every opportunity, he sought to convince her that there was a future and he remained calm throughout.

Interestingly, although Tanweer was close to Witness ‘A’, he never shared with her his opinions or beliefs, talked about events that were going on in the world, or discussed Iraq or Afghanistan. She also had no idea about his association with Iqra bookshop. Overall, she said, she did not notice a change in him; he did not change his appearance (apart from the bleached hair), and she had no concerns that he was becoming radicalised. This is in stark contrast to evidence from witnesses who described Khan as being highly vocal in his views.

Nicki Blackmore had a brief relationship with Lindsay shortly before the bombings. She met him on 20 June 2005 at Quanendon Community Centre. In her evidence, she said that he told her he worked for his father, but on another occasion that he had no contact with him. He also failed to tell her that he was married with a child. The following day they met again and he asked her if she could get him a gun because he needed to go to London to ‘teach some people a lesson’. She was not able to, but a gun was found in the boot of his car at Luton railway station. It is interesting that Lindsay decided to tell Nicki about the trip to London, although he concealed the true extent of his plans. During their meeting the following day, he read her poems that were positive about Al-Qa’ida.

On 25 June, he called and picked her up. He asked her whether she knew someone called Tanweer, and if yes whether he was bad. She told him she did not know him. Again, it is strange that he wanted to mention Tanweer to her. While they were out, he tried unsuccessfully to cash a cheque, and then received a call which records show was from Khan. Around this time, Khan received a call from Pakistan, although it is not known whether this is linked to Lindsay and his failure to cash the cheque. In the car on the way back, Lindsay again said something about ‘teaching a lesson’ to the people in London.

She tried to call him over the next few days but he did not return her calls. He eventually called on 29 June and said he had been injured in the shooting (there was no shooting). He asked her to go to London with him and stay together in a hotel on the night of 6 July. She changed her mind at the last minute, and did not go. Lindsay, like Tanweer, wanted to spend time alone with a woman in the days before the bombing.
Conclusion
The evidence and statements from the Inquests provide new information about the lives and actions of Khan, Tanweer, Lindsay and Hussain. While it is impossible to draw generalised conclusions from one case, it is interesting to note the importance of the group, the role of the wider network and the need for a central hub. We also get a fascinating insight into the behaviour of two of the bombers in the days and weeks leading up to the attacks: one able to maintain his composure without any apparent shifts in mood or behaviour, the other switching between truths, half-truths and lies, but both wanted to spend time with a woman shortly before they died. The evidence was also peppered with examples of instances where those in contact with the four men noticed strange patterns of behaviour or changes to their physical appearance. This serves as a reminder that normal people are just as much a part of the counter-terrorism effort as the police and MI5. And that, of course, is one of the reasons why the openness of the Inquests is so important.

NOTES
7. Gilbertson’s evidence was subject to considerable scrutiny within the Inquests, because evidence could not be found to support his claim that he had alerted West Yorkshire Police to the extremist activity at the bookshop and sent them copies of the DVDs he prepared.


Could 7/7 Have Been Prevented?

Margaret Gilmore

At the very heart of the 7/7 Inquests was the issue of ‘preventability’ – could MI5 and the police have prevented the attacks? The Coroner insisted this should form part of her investigations, although initially there were strong submissions against the idea from the Home Office and lawyers for MI5. The Security Service has, as a result, been subject to rare public scrutiny.

A senior MI5 officer spent the best part of a week in the witness box – screened from the public but visible to relatives of those who died. This was the first time since the bombings where they were able to call the Security Service to account on whether or not more could have been done to prevent the attacks. The Coroner Lady Justice Hallett pointed out:

The bereaved families have been waiting over five years to see this witness or a witness from the Security Service give evidence ... The issue of ‘preventability’ is extremely important to them. It has been at the heart of most of their submissions to me ever since my appointment as Coroner.

When the Coroner gives her verdicts, she can surely reach no conclusion other than that the fifty-two commuters who lost their lives in the 7 July 2005 London bomb attacks were unlawfully killed. She has also said that she plans to make recommendations for the future; what is less clear is how far these will go. The families have asked that they cover a wide area and leave a lasting, fruitful legacy from 7/7.

Anyone hoping the recommendations will concentrate on MI5 is likely to be disappointed. There could well be some suggestions aimed at it, but Rule 43 of the Coroners’ Act is limited in remit: recommendations must relate to preventing future deaths. Some relating to Emergency Responders might fulfil this criterion, and these are expected to form the focus of the Coroner’s comments. Recommendations for the Security Services will undoubtedly be harder to justify.

The Nature of Intelligence

Key to the issue of preventability is the nature of intelligence, which at its best aids judgement and at worst sends one down a rabbit hole. Intelligence is often perceived as more tangible than it actually is; sources can be unreliable and their relevance can change dramatically with time.

With hindsight, if we count the number of the times the 7/7 bombers crossed the radar of MI5 and the police (see Valentina Soria’s ‘Anatomy of a Terrorist Attack’ in this Paper), the list looks long. But that account is the sum of the
whole, and the reality is that each separate piece of intelligence – most of which related to men who were not identified at the time – was assessed separately. The intelligence strands were not joined up, and so the men were not prioritised as serious terrorist suspects and were more thoroughly investigated. Even if they had been, and even in light of the biggest criminal investigation ever undertaken in the UK – the 7/7 or ‘Theseus’ Investigation – MI5 would still have come to the conclusion that they did not pose a risk at that time. Peter Clarke was the police officer running the Counter-Terrorism Command at Scotland Yard, and was National Co-ordinator of Terrorist Investigations through this period. He told the Inquests:  

To the best of my knowledge, there’s never been a single shred of evidence that those people were part of the Crevice attack planning.

The Director General of MI5, Jonathan Evans, tried to explain the intelligence dilemma ahead of the Inquests:  

The most worrying leads are investigated most fully; those at the bottom of the priority list might receive only limited scrutiny. This is not ideal and involves difficult risk judgments, but it is the unavoidable practical fact of counter-terrorist work within any realistic resource constraints. We are fully aware that among those apparently lower priority leads might be some that are in reality very significant.

Many who attended the Inquests have come to recognise the limitations of intelligence. After six months of hearings, most of which were in open court with transcripts freely available on the Internet, even lawyers for the bereaved families appear unable to conclude that MI5 could have stopped the attacks.

Patrick O’Connor QC, when asking that the Coroner make recommendations for the future in accordance with Rule 43 of the Coroners’ Act, told the Inquests:  

The point about our submissions is not - and I say this slowly and with some emphasis - is not to seek to demonstrate that the Security Service could reasonably have prevented the 7/7 bombings. That is not a conclusion that we urge upon you and it’s neither relevant nor necessary for the purposes of Rule 43.

The bereaved do, however, allege that ‘grave errors’ led to a failure to assess two of the bombers as dangerous – although MI5 rejects this. The relatives suggest that there are flaws in systems at the Security Service, and they want them tightened to reduce the risk of other terrorists slipping through the net in the future.
What MI5 Knew

It is undeniable that there were missed opportunities to target the 7/7 cell leader Khan and Tanweer in particular. The two had extensive contacts with terrorists who planned an earlier attack, the Crevice Plot, but this only became clear after the 7 July attacks, when MI5 and police officers reassessed the surveillance material they had collected during Crevice. In 2008, a West Yorkshire Police officer painstakingly retranslated surveillance tapes of multiple conversations in different languages, which led intelligence analysts to conclude that Khan and Tanweer had been in direct contact with the Crevice cell several times, including during a visit by an explosives expert from Canada.

Although the authorities had no inkling of the 7 July plot before the attacks, the reality was that two of the bombers had been followed extensively, and all four had at some time crossed paths with the police or MI5. In February 1993, Khan had his photograph taken and a criminal record in his name put on the police national computer after he was cautioned for assault. As Valentina Soria’s timeline in this Paper highlights, in 2001 he was one of forty extremists caught on CCTV on an outward-bound expedition in the Lake District, although he was not identified. Between April 2003 and March 2004 he was filmed and listened to covertly, and his name was traced to cars and a phone by police and MI5 officers who had other plotters under surveillance. The Inquests found that one reason why he was not followed up was because his name had been spelled in various ways. Another was that the conversations traced between him and Tanweer had involved financial fraud, not terrorist activity, and so the men were not deemed an imminent threat.

Inquests Unearth New Information

Among the details unearthed by the Inquests is new material on the planning of the attacks. The four had nineteen mobile phones between them in the run-up to 7 July – one each for personal use and fifteen others for attack planning. Khan received frequent calls from public call centres in Pakistan right up to the week of the bombings. He never called back and so the caller was never identified, though he is now presumed to have been a mastermind with bomb-making knowledge who probably gave the final go-ahead for the attacks. At 1404 on the day of the blasts, after the bombs had detonated, there was one further call made to Khan from Rawalpindi in Pakistan. His phone was found at the Edgware Road bomb site.

The Inquests revealed further detail: a Beeston shop worker shop remembered selling one of them respirators, presumably to protect the bombers from the fumes of their home-made devices; an Asda worker sold them ice before the attacks, which was used to cool the explosives in the bombs in their rucksacks on the day. Detective Sergeant Mark Stuart told of
phone calls to outlets to buy large quantities of hydrogen peroxide – usually used for hair dye, but in this case a crucial component in their bombs.

All the above is detail which has emerged since the attacks. And there is no concrete evidence to suggest that the men were directly involved in the actual Crevice bomb plot that MI5 was investigating before 2005, or that they knew anything about it - even though two of the 7/7 bombers appeared on the periphery and clearly knew the Crevice plotters. Could, or should, these two men have been assessed differently?

**MI5’s Key Witness, ‘G’**
Witness ‘G’ was a key voice in these discussions. He was a powerful source – a member of MI5 since 1991, now Chief of Staff to the Director General, involved in formulating policy and strategy with direct experience of operations. Relatives of the deceased were unhappy that he was the sole witness from the Security Service, particularly since he was not directly involved in responding to the attacks, but they did get the chance to hear his evidence, which lasted four and a half days, and their lawyers were able to cross-examine him extensively.

‘G’ said that there had been a doubling of efforts against Islamist terrorist networks since 11 September, and pointed out that countering international terrorism now consumes 73 per cent of MI5’s resources. Asked if MI5 knew of the 7/7 plot but did not prevent it, he said that ‘would be both nonsensical and offensive’. He rejected the suggestion that there had been any intelligence failings. He also expressed profound regret on behalf of MI5 that they had not ascertained the full significance of the bombers and stopped the attacks, while the bereaved recognised the huge amount of work MI5 has done in preventing plots over the years.

‘G’ insisted that systems for analysing intelligence and computer systems for collating and storing it are adequate, given current resources. Lawyers for MI5 thus suggested that there was little point in the Coroner recommending changes for the future. The bereaved disagreed.

**Record-Keeping**
Analysis of the Inquests’ hearings shows that MI5’s record-keeping was not ideal before 7/7. Time and again, when Witness ‘G’ or MI5 lawyers spoke of a specific incident, there were no contemporaneous notes taken to explain a decision. There was nothing in writing, for example, about why no action was taken after an intuitive connection was made by an intelligence officer, linking two suspects calling themselves ‘Ibrahim’ and ‘Zubair’ with unidentified men in the north of England. It turned out to be an accurate guess, and would have connected the names of the suspects with the lead bomber. But that guess was not followed up, and we do not know why. Much later, it emerged that ‘Ibrahim’ was the 7/7 cell leader Khan.
Lawyers for the families want MI5 to introduce a formal written procedure for identifying the risks posed by an individual. They suggest that the Security Service should re-examine its procedures for taking contemporaneous records.

**Databases**
The relatives want better IT systems which ensure that all known intelligence relating to a person or place is brought together and flagged up if there are multiple strands. They want more sharing of computer databases between agencies — something government and agencies may resist. They cited evidence that police watched the 7/7 ringleader give a short lift to a known extremist in 2003, but this was not linked with other intelligence about him.

Proving that such changes could save future lives is impossible. For this reason the Coroner may not be able to make recommendations along these lines. MI5 can already get access into the police computer system when needed. It has improved systems for revisiting intelligence and for note-taking — a Legacy Review process is now in place. Witness ‘G’ told the Inquests that there has been considerable investment in MI5’s computers, with greater ability to search databases and better software, compared with 2005:

Software has improved over the years, and this kind of searching, which is known as ‘Fuzzy searching’, is better now than it was then, but it is still a long way from perfect on common names.

There will always be difficulties in getting matches with names like Mohammed Siddique Khan, which are common names and have different spellings. References to a specific address (and the authorities were aware of several references to his addresses before 7/7) are more likely to give automatic identification, given the right software. Witness ‘G’ claimed that some sightings of Khan with known extremists did lead to his being named, but were not followed up for ‘good operational reasons’.

Questions of photographs also caused much debate in court. Pictures of Tanweer and Khan were extensively cropped by MI5. They were shown to Mohammed Babar, an informant in a US jail who, it later emerged, had previously met the two men. But when shown their images from the cropped photograph he did not identify them. We will probably never know for sure whether this was due to the poor quality of the pictures. MI5 said cropping the pictures was necessary to keep secret the background and circumstances under which the photographs were taken. The families want photos to be routinely shown to as wide a group of informants and in as good quality as possible. But in asking for this they are veering into the territory of telling the agencies how to do their job. Decisions on who pictures are shown to, and when or why are likely to remain with investigators; although there is no doubt that advances in software means that
removing backgrounds while keeping the faces in photos is no longer difficult to achieve and can be done without loss of quality.

Furthermore, extra resources would not necessarily have made a difference in identifying the bombers as a threat at the time. Intelligence and surveillance officers must be adequately trained before they can work effectively, and staffing was already increasing at a fast rate. Witness ‘G’ told the Inquests that staff numbers doubled in a decade – from 2,000 to 3,800 – with resources dramatically increasing after the 9/11 attacks and again after July 2005, though he said that the increases really began to take hold by 2006. Nevertheless, the court heard that the Director General of MI5 Jonathan Evans believed that ‘they can still only hit the crocodiles nearest the boat’.

MI5 lawyers suggested that the Coroner need not recommend changes because, according to James Eadie QC, MI5 has either already made ‘very significant changes to working practices’ or come to the conclusion ‘by the expert and experienced people involved that there shouldn’t be such changes’. It is a forceful argument: lessons from 7/7 have already been learned.

**Intelligence and Security Committee**

The question of the governance of MI5, which was also raised, is more complex. During the Inquests, it emerged that some information in the official 7/7 report by the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) - which has oversight of MI5 and other groups – was not entirely accurate. Lady Justice Hallett, concerned at what recommendations she can make under Rule 43 of the Coroners’ Act, addressed MI5’s lawyer in court regarding how suspects or ‘targets’ are prioritised by MI5:

That’s the problem, isn’t it, Mr Eadie? When I read the ISC report, the second report, I thought the position was clear. I thought that the targets were characterised according to “essential”, “desirable”, “other” and I thought it was all resolved as to what assessment had been made, and now I discover that: (a) that was wrong, fundamentally; and (b) I don’t think I was told any attempt had been made to correct it. So Witness “G” came along, as a very senior representative of the Security Service, and was forced to agree it was most unfortunate that a statutory body carrying out a statutory duty had reported in a way that was inaccurate and hadn’t been corrected. Now, whether or not it comes within Rule 43, given that I have found out through judicial enquiry that this has happened, what do I do about it?

The lawyer for MI5 accepted the problem, but suggested that it was not an issue for the Coroner but for the ISC and other bodies which give oversight to the intelligence agencies, to address:

I think you summarised it accurately. Witness ‘G’ fairly accepted that the
position was that, first of all, that triple categorisation was only used for funding and was not used operationally, it was more nuanced ... Secondly it was, I think, accepted that that was a false impression that was given by the ISC report. I think work had been done to try to find out the history of quite how one had got there, and there are sensitivities attached to that.

The ISC will need to address these issues, not least because the Coroner has publicly raised concern (even though in the end she may not be able to make any recommendations concerning the Committee). The forthcoming government Green Paper brings an opportunity to re-examine its function. The ISC has already extended its original remit (to examine policy administration and expenditure), which now includes investigations into the work of the intelligence agencies.

The Government and ISC members will need to examine whether it has adequate resources to ensure that its investigations are as robust as its members would like. It might also re-examine how it can ensure it retains public confidence, avoiding the potential trap of appearing a mouthpiece for intelligence agencies which rarely speak publicly for themselves.

Conclusions
For the bereaved, the Inquests may well have gone a considerable way towards bringing closure. The families have held themselves with dignity as new and at times intimate details have been revealed regarding how and why their loved ones died. Moreover, lessons which could help shape the UK’s future strategies on national security have been learned. That could be a fitting legacy for those who died, and may be enough – for some, at least – to end their calls for a public inquiry into the bombings.

The debate on what should be published in the public interest and what was kept secret for reasons of national security revealed how the disclosure rules remain open to interpretation. Clearer guidelines could be agreed and set in stone, balancing the need for justice against the need to retain a secret security service that is able to operate effectively.

The hearings have put covert organisations like MI5 in an uncomfortable position. Since 7 July 2005, the Security Service has already dealt with many of the issues raised around ‘preventability’ – it has a legacy team, and counter-terrorism units around the country are encouraging closer co-ordination with other agencies like the police. To maintain public confidence in the intelligence agencies, these new systems should now not only work but be seen to be doing so effectively.

The events leading up to 7 July and investigated in such detail in these Inquests show that it is impossible to guarantee that every terrorist can be
stopped. However close it came to identifying the bombers in advance, MI5’s regret that it failed to prevent the attacks is likely to long be a driving force in its future work.

NOTES


11. Hearing Transcript, Coroner’s Inquests into the London Bombings of 7 July 2005,


The Emergency Response Dilemma: How Do We Measure Better?

Jennifer Cole

The Coroner’s Inquests into the London Bombings of 7 July 2005 have been neither the first review of events that took place that day nor the first to issue recommendations. However, unlike in previous appraisals, under Rule 43 of the Coroner’s Rules 1984, H. M. Coroner has the legal power to make recommendations for improvements to which the relevant organisations must respond.

The Inquests have served as an opportunity to revisit the extensive analysis that has taken place since 7/7 within the responder organisations themselves, through the Report of the London Assembly’s 7 July Review Committee, and amongst the many academics who study the emergency response community. For the first time, they have provided an opportunity to publicly scrutinise and cross-reference one organisation’s operational processes against others within a legal framework.

In hearing evidence from so many witnesses, the Coroner’s Inquests have at times held up a mirror to the idealism of the ‘perfect’ response, enabling firefighters, police officers, London Underground staff and others to explain not only how difficult their jobs can be but also why something that might seem logical or simple from the outside is anything but. At times throughout the Inquests, Lady Justice Hallett appeared to take on the role of Devil’s advocate as she teased out highly detailed information on why, for example, the entire London Underground network cannot be evacuated in seconds, or encouraged police officers to explain why they feel it necessary to prevent medical personnel from passing cordons into areas they cannot be sure are safe.

Perhaps most importantly, the Inquests have taken place against a measurable metric: Lady Justice Hallett is not asking the nebulous question of ‘Could the response have been done “better”’, regardless of what ‘better’ might mean, but rather: ‘Could any of the deaths that occurred on July 7 2005 have been prevented?’ This distinction is important: while ambulance response times could be faster, and multi-agency Command and Control more integrated on more advanced ICT systems by operators with different skills, the Inquests offer the valuable opportunity to question what difference such improvements would have made on that fateful day. In other words, had the emergency response to the incident been handled differently, would any more victims have survived?
The sheer financial and operational complexity of improving procedure may explain why suggested enhancements may ultimately fall by the wayside. This does not mean that such recommendations should not be made, nor that it would be wrong for them to be made again in future. However, it does open new questions about who is responsible for taking them forward, and where the legal responsibility for those decisions lies.

**Recommendations By the Wayside**

It is easy to identify what went ‘wrong’ and compare with similar criticisms in the past. On several occasions throughout the hearings, Lady Justice Hallett herself referred to Desmond Fennell QC’s investigation into the King’s Cross Underground Fire, published in 1988. Many recommendations made in that report, which would have improved major incident response on the Underground, had not been implemented by 7/7.

This observation is all-too-common in assessments of major civil emergencies. As part of a recent study, RUSI mapped recommendations from reviews of major civil emergencies across the past ten years. It found that many issues, from governance of inter-agency structures to how situational awareness is built and shared, continually showed up as failings without then being duly addressed. Guidance has been issued and numerous recommendations have been made on how to improve response times, better integrate responders’ ICT systems and improve their understanding of one another’s processes. But when the next major incident occurs, not only does the system appear to fail, it fails in largely the same way. This is fully recognised not only by academic researchers, but also by the practitioners themselves. One senior emergency responder interviewed during research for another RUSI report remarked that he could write the review of the next major incident tomorrow, all he needed to do was take the previous one and change the date, location and the cause.

However, measuring the effect improvements might have if they are implemented can be near impossible. Judging by the testimony of medical experts at the Inquests, it would seem that no amount of enhancement in the emergency response would have saved the seventeen victims who were not killed immediately but who succumbed to their injuries in the minutes and hours after the explosions. All of this raises the question of whether the cost and effort expended to implement those changes can therefore be justified.

**Left in the Lurch**

This conundrum often leaves emergency responders frustrated. With every major incident, the response is scrutinised and at times criticised, but responders have their hands tied by a lack of appropriate policy direction, doctrine or political governance. This, in turn, results in a lack of resources,
particularly financial, needed to make the identified improvements. No matter how sensible and logical recommendations may seem, if they are expensive to implement and their benefit cannot easily be measured, they are unlikely to be taken forward.

**Complex Decisions Assessed in Hindsight**

The Inquests have shed light on the enormous complexities of the response, a vital process that should help shape future policy and doctrine. An excellent example can be seen in the testimonies of London Underground Limited’s (LUL) Andrew Barr, Network Co-ordination Manager, and Geoff Dunmore, Operational Security Manager, who addressed criticisms of the time it took before LUL staff were told for certain that they were dealing with bomb attacks rather than electrical surges or derailments. Similarly, suggestions have been raised as to whether the entire London transport network, rather than just the Underground itself, should have been closed down. Doing so might, some have argued, have prevented the deaths of those passengers on the Number 30 bus.

In answer to the former concern, Barr and Dunmore were clear that their role was consequence management. They did not need to determine the cause: they needed to evacuate the Underground and do it as quickly and efficiently as possible. It was important that the evacuation was carried out in a staggered manner, ensuring as few bottlenecks as possible (one of the reasons why the order to evacuate the public was made ahead of the order to evacuate staff), and it was critical that the bus network be kept running so that passengers emerging from tube station exits could be safely moved away. In this particular incident, the decision not to shut down the entire London transport network may have had the unintended consequence of enabling the fourth bomb to be detonated on a bus, but in another situation stopping the buses may have left passengers stranded at tube exits and backed up those behind them – a potentially fatal situation had the attack involved a chemical release or a fire rather than a more conventional Improvised Explosive Device. The response needs to be considered in terms of its consequences during all eventualities, not just the ‘perfect’ response to the most recent attack.

When Habib Hussain set out on the morning of 7 July, he did not intend to detonate his bomb on the Number 30 bus – he changed his plan due to closures on the Tube line. Had the bus network been equally unavailable, it is unlikely that he would simply have abandoned his mission; more likely, he would have met the same fate in another crowded venue, such as a department store or a shopping centre. Closing down the bus network may have saved specific lives, but only at the expense of others. Alan Dell of London Buses, who would have been responsible for making the decision to suspend the bus network backed up Dunmore and Barr, described how,
despite improvements in communications since 7/7, the decision to keep the buses running up and until the fourth bomb exploded would still be the most likely option he would take today.

**Understanding the Complexities of Risk**

Information that emerged from the Inquests has led many critics to point towards an inconsistent attitude towards risk between the police, fire and ambulance services. Detractors see this manifested in the reluctance of some firefighters to go forward into the underground tunnels until they had received confirmation that the electrified third rail had been turned off, as doing so was contrary to their Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and established protocols, even though police officers had already entered the tunnels.

As with the detailed explanations given by the transport officials, the Inquests provided the opportunity to discuss this in light of the injuries and deaths that have resulted from personnel entering tunnels without confirmation that it is safe to do so (including examples showing that one person being able to enter the tunnel apparently safely does not mean the next one is also safe to do).

Most firefighters do not have paramedic training; in fact, they have no more advanced first aid skills or equipment than members of the general public. Had they gone forward into a situation where there was no fire to extinguish and no victims who needed to be cut out of wreckage, there is little they could have done – they may even have been in the way of those responders who did have appropriate skills and equipment. Finally, where there was indication that victims genuinely needed help, firefighters did go forward against protocol, in particular by entering the wreckage of the Number 30 bus even though the police could not confirm it was clear of secondary devices.

Emergency responders have a complex and multi-layered understanding of risk, and the processes and procedures that follow it, for good reasons. This is an issue that affects all organisations that operate in potentially dangerous environments: we should bear in mind here the cases of Private Martin Bell, who died trying to save an injured comrade in Afghanistan on 25 January 2011 after defying a direct order not to enter a minefield, and the three Warwickshire Firefighters who have been charged with manslaughter for breaching health and safety regulations when sending colleagues into a burning warehouse in November 2007.

The real difficulty in responding to such extreme situations lies in determining how close-to-perfect is close enough. This also opens the door to more philosophical discussions on how closely SOPs should be adhered to in distinctly non-standard situations, and is vital in considering which
recommendations from the Coroner’s report realistically can and should be taken forward.

The Challenge of Devising and Implementing Practical Solutions
Many of these challenges were writ large in the recommendations presented to the Coroner by the families of the victims on 10 March. Several of these appear to be straight repeats from the earlier Report of the 7 July Review Committee and, over the past six months, many of the agencies that would need to implement them have explained why doing so was not realistically practical in 2005, and why this is still the case.

The Inquests enabled several of these worthy but idealistic recommendations to be challenged by reality on the ground: for example, bestowing blue lights on London Underground’s emergency response vehicles so that they can use bus lanes and override traffic lights. Driving a blue light vehicle is dangerous and requires special training which will atrophy if not used regularly; witnesses were able to explain how, when the issue has been considered previously, it has been decided that the rare occasions on which the vehicles genuinely need blue light status do not occur often enough to warrant providing sufficient training to enough drivers to ensure that one is always on shift and has enough practice for their skills to remain current. A much better solution is to provide the vehicles with a blue light escort when they need one, which is the procedure already in place.

Another example is the recommendation that first aid packs should be placed on Underground trains for use by the public. Trials have shown that such kits are likely to be vandalised, stolen or quickly become too dirty to use. Locking them into cabinets might protect them, but equally makes them extremely difficult for anyone else to access.

In short, it is impractical. Instead, as a direct result of the 7/7 bombings, the Department of Health has funded over 250 Major Incident Emergency Dressings Packs, which are located at major transport hubs in London and other major cities. The packs provide enough dressings and other equipment to enable anyone at a scene where packs are located to provide first aid to large numbers of casualties with the appropriate equipment. This may seem like a compromise, but it at least has a chance of working.

As for other recommendations made by the families, given the current financial climate it is unlikely that all stations will be supplied with the specialist stretchers that are easier to manoeuvre up staircases and through narrow tunnels. Nor is it likely that the London Air Ambulance – which, like Air Ambulance Services around the UK, is funded through voluntary donations – will receive permanent public sector funding. Chief Inspector Short of the British Transport Police made it clear that they would like more
Airwave capability than they can currently afford. Emergency responders would always like more resources; weighing what is genuinely needed against what can realistically be afforded is a delicate balancing act that needs to be considered even more carefully given the current squeeze on resources.

**Improving Interoperability**

Like so many reviews before it, the Inquests raise the need for improved interoperability between the responder agencies, suggesting that such improvements might be driven forward through more inter-agency major incident training.

Evidence given during the hearings remarked on the immense value that used to be provided by a series of police-funded multi-agency seminars (referred to as ‘Hannovers’ after the hotel where the seminars took place) to address counter-terrorism issues. The recommendations made to the Coroner by the families of the victims asked for centrally-funded multi-agency training to be undertaken at all levels at a regular frequency, and questioned whether or not this should be compulsory.

There is no question that training and exercising plays a major part in driving forward interoperability and in breaking down the silos. The RUSI report ‘Interoperability in a Crisis 2’ and RUSI’s ongoing research with the Emergency Planning College have stressed this, but it will take a significant increase in funding (not to mention the development of a framework that does not currently exist) to develop, deliver and keep current the inter-agency major incident training the families call for, particularly where this training is very different from that required for day-to-day business.

Enabling significant numbers of ambulance paramedics to undergo something more akin to the type of training received by combat medics in terms of procedure, equipment and approach, for example, will require considerable resources. To what extent any such additional training can be justified against the rare occasions on which it would be used is difficult to determine, particularly as the medical experts giving evidence at the Inquests largely felt that such additional training would have made no significant difference on 7 July 2005.

Neither a lack of specialist equipment nor of specialist skills resulted in victims dying: uninjured and less seriously injured survivors showed remarkable fortitude and ability to improvise bandages, tourniquets and leadership when and where they saw it needed.

Paul Gibson of London Ambulance Service, giving evidence on 31 January, stated that he and his team ‘dealt adequately with the patients’, despite resources running out and paramedics needing to improvise – in this case
using table tops as makeshift stretchers. Such a situation may not be ideal, but how many stretchers is it reasonable for an ambulance to carry to ensure supply never runs low? Equally, how many paramedics would an ambulance need to carry before all casualties could be dealt with simultaneously?

More valuable, as has already been recognised, may be to increase the level of first aid understanding amongst staff likely to be present at an incident: in 2007, approximately 1,000 London Underground staff had first aid training, this has now increased to 2,000, with basic training given to an additional 1,700 station supervisors.

Much criticism focused on how long it took for each organisation (and all organisations collectively) to form the Commonly Recognised Information Picture (CRIP), that enabled the unfolding events to be consistently understood by all. Yet at present, is there really a clear understanding of who needs to see this bigger picture and for what reasons? In military terms, what effect would its earlier formation achieve? To the outsider, and often to the Coroner herself during her questioning, the Command and Control of the event looked slow to develop, at times highly chaotic, and, for too long a period of time, incomplete. It took the responding agencies more than an hour to ’get a grip’ on what was happening.

Criticism of Command and Control is a feature of nearly all major incident reports where the responders are faced with intensely challenging situations far beyond the daily operations they expect. The most recent has been the report into Operation Bridge, the response of Cumbria Constabulary to the shootings by Derek Bird in June 2010, which also concluded that very little could realistically have been done differently that day.

Many new systems, processes and technologies have been put into place since July 2005 by virtually every organisation involved in the response to the bombings – and by many who were not but nonetheless identified lessons from it. Should a similar event occur tomorrow, the speed with which communications can be sent and received will have been significantly increased, but it will still take time to assess what is going on, to build the common operating picture from that information and to formulate the message that needs to be sent. In the short term, it may be more important to ensure that the Underground is evacuated and casualties are treated than it is to determine the cause. As Chief Superintendent Alexander Robinson remarked in his evidence: ’[T]here will be confusion initially ... I think it is inevitable’. Chris Allison, Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police agreed:

The primary role of the police service and the other emergency services is ... to go there, initially save lives, then discover what’s exactly happened and
undertake an appropriate investigation. And whilst it may be nice to know exactly what is the root cause at the start, it doesn’t actually stop our people going and doing the things that they’ve been trained to do and they naturally want to do, which is to go and save people’s lives.

Creating the Ideal with Limited Resources
Reality dictates that the response cannot be instantaneous when an explosion occurs deep underground. During Exercise Osiris II, a training exercise to extract casualties from an underground carriage in 2003, the distance paramedics travelled in foot to and from the carriages was more than a kilometer – which at normal walking pace could be expected to take twelve to fifteen minutes. To focus on just one short-term survivor, the case of Samantha Badham who was grievously injured on the tube between Kings Cross and Russell Square: she was pronounced dead at 1043, by which time she had been assisted by a police detective, a British Transport Police officer, a HEMS (Helicopter Emergency Medical Service) Paramedic and two London Ambulance Service Paramedics. She had been given pain relief, carried from the tube carriage to ground level and died as she was being carried to the surface. How much quicker could this response have been than the 45 minutes it actually took?

It is, of course, right and necessary to consider whether ambulances could have arrived at the scene more quickly, or whether more should have been dispatched. Could those that were sent have been differently equipped and staffed? It is just as correct to question whether firefighters were right to refrain from holding back – as their protocols dictated – until the scene had been declared safe. If they are found to have acted inappropriately, then it becomes just as important to question whether it is the protocol itself that needs changing, or the firefighters’ arguably inflexible adherence to it in certain situations. There needs to be a clear understanding of whether the identified challenges need to be addressed at the strategic, tactical or operational level.

Such questions have been raised – and in many cases answered – by the emergency services themselves over the past six years. But changes take time and cost money, and this usually explains why some do not happen.

The Need for Representation at Whitehall-level
To ensure that the best effect is gained from the recommendations and from the Coroner’s final report, emergency responders need policy and doctrinal discussion of what implementing such changes entails, backed up by the political will to take those discussions forward. Political understanding of the complexities of major incident response is critical to the future of the emergency services. Unlike the military, which has the Ministry of Defence to look at policy and doctrine across the three armed services, there is
no equivalent organisation to which the emergency services can report collectively: where practitioners and civil servants sit side-by-side to identify end-user requirements, consider the implications of their implementation, analyse their introduction into theatre and make informed recommendations borne out of the deep understanding that can only come from insiders.

Whilst within the Home Office, Department for Communities and Local Government and Department of Health, professionals from the police, fire and ambulance services respectively ‘sit’ with civil servant colleagues, there is no body enabling them to do so together at a higher level. There is no Minister for the Emergency Services, or Minister for Civil Contingencies, who can fight for increased budgets, ring-fence threatened resources or argue for increased funding once a real need has been identified. This, as much as the financial constraints themselves, is why recommendations made in the wake of major incidents remain so difficult to implement.

Political oversight would not only also help to develop and inform the strategic understanding of international emergency services policy and procedure from around the world, it could also help to collect, disseminate, consider and act on lessons identified from overseas emergencies that might help to inform the future response to our own and, consequently, save money as well as lives in the long run. It could speed up those changes that are genuinely needed, cutting through the bureaucracy and fast-track the finances needed to make them happen, much as former Security Minister Lord West did for physical security following his review of the failed bomb attacks on London and Glasgow in July 2007.

Such oversight would bring with it many advantages. Without a dedicated minister to fight for the cause, the recommendations from the Coroner’s Inquests are likely to go the way of those from previous reviews: noted and filed until the next major incident occurs. 7 July 2005 was a tragedy, but the unprecedented level of scrutiny at the Coroner’s Inquests can help ensure that the lives lost were not completely in vain. A recognition that change will only come with new political oversight, combined with a genuine desire to act on her recommendations, would be an invaluable legacy.

NOTES

1. Health and Safety Executive, <http://www.hse.gov.uk/enforce/enforcementguide/wrdeaths/chronology.htm>. A ‘Rule 43 report’ can relate to issues that are peripheral to the inquest, and the deaths the report aims to prevent need not be similar to the death that formed the subject of the inquest. In this case, the issues could relate to the emergency response, which might have failed to save lives under different circumstances, even though none were savable in this situation.

3. Since July 2005, there have been dozens of internal reviews of procedure, processes and technology by emergency responder organisations themselves and by public bodies such as the London Assembly July 7 Review Committee, which reported in June 2006. See >http://www.london.gov.uk/who-runs-london/the-london-assembly/publications/safety-policing/report-7-july-review-committee> and <http://www.london.gov.uk/who-runs-london/the-london-assembly/publications/safety-policing/7-july-review-committee-follow-report>.


5. These include in particular, communications issues between staff on Underground trains, staff at Underground stations, and their communications with colleagues on the surface and with the wider emergency services, See <http://headlines-today.co.uk/2011/02/08/77-problems-identified-in-1987/>.


10. The Airwave network is the common communications network shared by all UK emergencies services and the organisations that support them.

11. The CCA requires Category 1 and 2 responders to exercise and train together, but in practice local interpretation can cloud effective interoperability.