

Britain's Security Service: More Questions about MI5's Relations with the Woolwich Killers

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Questions continue to pile up over the security services' familiarity and contact with the two killers of Drummer Lee Rigby in Woolwich, southeast London.

Rigby was hacked to death on a public high road, near Woolwich army barracks. His killers, Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale, made no attempt to flee the scene, instead talking to members of the public and giving video statements justifying their savage assault as revenge for the killings of Muslims by the British army in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For days the media and political elite sought to deny that their gruesome assault has any connection with British foreign policy. Initially they also denied that the two were known to the security services, portraying them as "clean skins."

This quickly unravelled. It been confirmed that both were under surveillance for years—in Adebolajo's case, since at least 2005. In addition, at the weekend, the Kenyan authorities finally admitted they had detained Adebolajo in November 2010 as part of a group attempting to cross the border into Somalia to join the Al Qaeda-aligned al-Shabaab.

In a statement, the Kenyan government confirmed his arrest under the name of Michael Olemindis Ndemolajo. He appeared in court and was handed over to British authorities, after which "he seems to have found his way to London. The Kenyan government cannot be held responsible for what happened to him after we handed him to British authorities."

Details of Adebolajo's arrest first came to light in an interview with the BBC's Newsnight programme last week by Adebolajo's close friend, Abu Nusaybah. He reported that Adebolajo had been detained, and physically and sexually tortured in Kenya, before being deported to the UK. He also reported that MI5 had made repeated approaches to Adebolajo on his return, attempting to recruit him to infiltrate jihadist groups in the UK.

In extraordinary development, Nusaybah was arrested by intelligence officers at the studio immediately following his recorded interview, and remains in detention on unspecified charges.

Speaking to ITV news, Nusaybah's account was confirmed by Adebolajo's brother-in-law. Immediately on hearing of his arrest in Kenya, the family "contacted the British government and essentially, they refused to do anything and the Kenyans were saying they were going to kill him, behead him," he said. "We had clear proof that he was being tortured ... violently and sexually."

On his return, Adebolajo had changed and become “a lot quieter and quite bitter towards the fact that he wasn’t getting any help from anyone,” his brother-in-law continued. “They [the British authorities] did the opposite of what they were doing really. If they wanted help [with information on jihadists], surely they would have given him some support first?”

The security services had approached Adebolajo to work for them, his brother-in-law continued. “They obviously asked him would he be a spy for them ... You’d expect maybe they’d say ‘Can you tell us about Kenya, can we do anything for you?’ But instead you know, they basically pestered him for years, when he was trying to recover from something psychologically damaging.”

Allegations that MI5 “pestered” Adebolajo are backed up by the *Guardian*, which disclosed that he had seen lawyers last year to complain of harassment by the security services.

According to the *Independent*, however, Britain’s security services “sought to recruit” Adebolajo while he was being held by the Kenyan authorities. The Foreign Office would only confirm that he had received “consular assistance ... as is normal for British nationals detained.”

Adebolajo was held in custody for several days in Mombasa. When he appeared in court he complained of severe mistreatment, including being denied food for days. If the accounts by family members and the *Independent* are true, it would mean that the British authorities were aware of his abuse and did nothing to stop it. Given allegations that the security services were trying to recruit him, this can only be because they hoped such mistreatment would break him and make him amenable to approaches.

Adebolajo returned to the UK without any reported follow-up investigation, let alone charges, as to his suspected activities in Kenya. This was despite the fact, again according to the *Independent* citing “Whitehall sources”, that Adebolajo “also made a second attempt to travel to Somalia last year but was stopped by MI5 and warned he would be detained once more by the Kenyans.”

These accounts refute claims that, despite eight years of surveillance and two occasions in which he had presented himself as someone actively seeking to engage in terrorist-related activities, Adebolajo was considered a “peripheral” figure, or a “non-risk”. This claim is made all the more suspect because the ruling elite has continuously cited terrorist activities in Somalia as a major threat, warranting British involvement in the impoverished African country.

It was only on May 7 that Prime Minister David Cameron hosted the second “UK-Somalia Conference” in London, where he warned that Somalia mattered “because when young minds are poisoned by radicalism and they go on to export terrorism and extremism, the security of the whole world is at stake.”

As regards Adebowale, Sky News revealed that he had recently been reported to police by a local shopkeeper for “grooming” a 12-year old schoolboy into jihadi politics. The shopkeeper, who spoke anonymously, said that he was told Adebowale “was being monitored by security services and his movements were being monitored.”

While the extent of MI5’s involvement with the Woolwich killers is concealed, public revulsion generated by the horrible death is being used to further attack civil liberties.

In what amounts to a form of collective punishment, this assault targets Muslims—although its broader aim is to undermine the democratic rights of all working people.

Home Secretary Theresa May has set out new measures to prevent the “radicalisation of British Muslims”, including “pre-emptive” censorship of the Internet, banning radical Muslim groups even if they disavow terrorism and violence, and a further crackdown on freedom of speech, especially on university campuses.

Exact details have yet to be announced, but indicating the open-ended character of the intended measures, May argued, “There is no doubt that people are able to watch things through the Internet which can lead to radicalisation.”

May made clear that she intends to revive the Communications Data Bill, dubbed the “snoopers’ charter” because of the wide-ranging powers it seeks to give to police, security services and the authorities to intercept all electronic communications.

The Conservative Party had been forced to retreat from the bill after protests by civil liberty organisations and sections of the Liberal Democrats, with which it is in coalition. But two former Labour home secretaries, Lord Reid and Alan Johnson, have backed the measures, while former Conservative Home Secretary Lord Howard called on Cameron and May to form a bloc with Labour to get the measures through Parliament.

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