

The War on Shampoo

"More propaganda than plot". Liquid bomb scare was a Home Office sponsored hoax

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Google "Rashid Rauf - mastermind". On the first page of results you will find CBS, the BBC, the Times, Guardian and Mail all describing Rauf last summer, on security service or police briefing, as the "Mastermind" behind the "Liquid terror bomb plot". So the fact that a Pakistani court has found there is no evidence of terrorism against him cannot be lightly dismissed by the cheerleaders of the plot story.

Rashid Rauf still faces other charges, including forgery, and what is touted as possession of explosives, although what he actually possessed was hydrogen peroxide, which is not explosive. As hydrogen peroxide is readily obtainable without limitation from any chemist or hardware store in the UK, why you would source it in Pakistan to blow up jets in Britain was never very convincing. The Pakistani court perhaps felt so too.

Rashid Rauf has much to answer. He is still wanted in the UK over the murder of his uncle some years ago - a crime which, like the alleged forgery, had no apparent terrorist link. None of which adds to the credibility of the evidence he allegedly gave the Pakistani intelligence services about the liquid bomb plot in the UK.

A second and simultaneous development is even more compelling evidence that this massive scare was, as I said at the time, "More propaganda than plot". Thames Valley police have given up after five months scouring the woods near High Wycombe where the bomb materials were allegedly hidden. They told the Home Office on 12 December that they would only continue if the government were prepared to meet the costs; they wished to get back to devoting their resources to real crimes, like armed robbery and burglary.

Remember this was a plot described by the authorities as "Mass murder on an unimaginable scale" and "Bigger than 9/11". There have been instances in the UK of hundreds of police officers deployed for years to find an individual murderer. If the police really believed they were dealing with an effort at "Mass murder on an unimaginable scale", would they be calling off the search after five months? No.

Which brings us to the lies that have been told - one of which concerns this search. An anonymous police source tipped off the media early on that they had discovered a "Suitcase" containing "bomb-making materials". This has recently been described to me by a security service source as "A lot of rubbish from someone's garage dumped in the woods". You could indeed cannibalise bits of old wire, clocks and car parts to form part of a bomb - perhaps you could enclose it in the old suitcase. But have they found stuff that is exclusively concerned with causing explosions, like detonators, explosives or those famous liquid

chemicals? No, they haven't found any.

Wycombe Woods, like the sands of Iraq, have failed to yield up the advertised WMD.

The other "evidence" that the police announced they had found consisted of wills (with the implication they were made by suicide bombers) and a map of Afghanistan. It turns out that the wills were made in the early 90s by volunteers going off to fight the Serbs in Bosnia - they had been left with the now deceased uncle of one of those arrested. The map of Afghanistan had been copied out by an eleven year old boy. All of which is well known to the UK media, but none of which has been reported for fear of prejudicing the trial. I am at a complete loss to understand why it does not prejudice the trial for police to announce in a blaze of worldwide front page publicity that they have found bomb-making materials, wills and maps. Only if you contradict the police is that prejudicial. Can anyone explain why?

While the arrest of 26 people in connection with the plot was also massively publicised, the gradual release of many of them has again gone virtually unreported. For example on 31 October a judge released two brothers from Chingford commenting that the police had produced no credible evidence against them. Charges against others have been downgraded, so that those now accused of plotting to commit explosions are less than the ten planes the police claimed they planned to blow up in suicide attacks.

Five British newspapers had to pay damages to a Birmingham man they accused, on security service briefing, of being part of the plot. Only the Guardian had the grace to publish the fact and print a retraction.

A final fact to ponder. Despite naming him as the "mastermind" behind something "bigger than 9/11", the British government made no attempt to extradite Rashid Rauf on charges of terrorism. That is not difficult to do - the Pakistani authorities have handed over scores of terrorist suspects to the US, many into the extraordinary rendition process, and on average the procedure is astonishingly quick - less than a week and they are out of the country. But the British security services, who placed so much weight on intelligence from Rashid Rauf, were extraordinarily coy about getting him here where his evidence could be properly scrutinised by a British court. However MI5 were greatly embarrassed by Birmingham police, who insisted on pointing out that Rauf was wanted in the UK over the alleged murder of his uncle in Birmingham. Now he was in custody in Pakistan, shouldn't we extradite him? So eventually an extradition request over that murder was formally submitted - but not pursued with real energy or effort. There remains no sign that we will see Rauf in the UK.

I still do not rule out that there was a germ of a terror plot at the heart of this investigation. We can speculate about agents provocateurs and security service penetration, both British and Pakistani, but still there might have been genuine terrorists involved. But the incredible disruption to the travelling public, the War on Shampoo, and the "Bigger than 9/11" hype is unravelling.

You won't read that in the newspapers.

As Britain's outspoken Ambassador to the Central Asian Republic of Uzbekistan, Craig Murray helped expose vicious human rights abuses by the US-funded regime of Islam Karimov. He is now a prominent critic of Western policy in the region.

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