

Sample issue 1 of Conspiracy Times

Headlines



- > Is New York about to lose its number one status as "Financial capital of the world"
- > *A major police scandal in the terror-ridden streets of Northern Ireland reveals collusion and police-sanctioned assassinations*
- > What next for Bush and Blair, seeing they have lost all support at home?
- > *The presidential plumber: E. Howard Hunt*
- > Both Saudi Arabia and Israel are telling the US to pull the plug in Iraq
- > *The foiled "shampoo bomb" plot on August 10, 2006 was seen as a major coup against terrorists who were about to hijack ten planes and kill all people inside. But now it all appears to be based on erroneous intelligence... or outright disinformation?*

This is a sample issue of Conspiracy Times. We have selected news items with a relatively long shelf-life, but which are nevertheless representative of content that will make it into the weekly edition of Conspiracy Times.

Is New York about to collapse?

> *New York is set to lose its number one status as "Financial capital of the world"*



9/11 and 7/7 were aimed at New York and London. 9/11 seemed to target the heart of the Western financial system: the World Trade Center. But what no terrorist could do - whether they were suicidal Muslims or not - the Bush government in the aftermath of 9/11 seems to have accomplished with ease: to topple New York - and the dollar - from its number one position.

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg has warned that the Big Apple is losing out as financial capital, with London, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Dubai set to take over. Between 2002 and 2005, London's financial workforce grew by 4.3% to 318,000, while New York declined by 0.7% to 328,400 jobs. Why? The McKinsey survey gave three main reasons: first, the culture of frivolous litigation; second, excessive regulation is scaring financial institutions away; finally, a tough immigration regime means foreign companies are afraid to bring skilled staff to New York. New York could miss out on 15 to 30 billion dollars of revenue from financial services per year by 2011, unless the White House is able to reform its policies. Or, to quote Bloomberg: "Unless we take corrective steps and soon, we're going to see America's leadership in global financial transactions dwindle."

Apart from the above reasons, participants in the study also blamed the Sarbanes-Oxley anti-fraud act, an outcome of the Enron scandal, which stipulates requirements to which companies listed on the New York Stock Exchange need to abide. Still, other reports have highlighted that an intelligent application of "SOX" had often shown an 8% benefit to companies' performances. Furthermore, the law affects companies listed on the Stock Exchange, not specifically based in

New York.

So what are the real reasons? "The legal environments in other nations, including Great Britain, far more effectively discourage frivolous litigation", which has indeed become an American trademark abroad. But it is clear that foreign (read: ethnically different) companies think twice before opening an office in America, specifically if these companies have a large Arab workforce. Any foreigner travelling to the US could now, more than ever before, lose awareness of whether he is about to enter a country or has unknowingly joined a line of convicts waiting for incarceration in jail...

China is a fast-growing economic power, yet is constantly maligned by the US; would you want to invest in the nation that is constantly bullying you? At the World Economic Forum in Davos (Switzerland), it was admitted that fast-growing economies, together with the old and new petrodollars of the Middle East and Russia, simply do not trust the US with their money. One participant added that US Homeland Security measures that require banks to monitor all transactions in dollars has encouraged a significant shift into euro-dominated assets in international markets.

9/11 may have brought down the symbol of Western Finance, but it is PATRIOT and other acts since that have done the rest. If New York will die as the financial heart of the world, the death certificate listing the cause of death should read "suicide".

The Killing Streets

> *A major police scandal in the terror-ridden streets of Northern Ireland reveals collusion and police-sanctioned assassinations.*



Anti-war protestor Brian Haw has been campaigning outside of London's Parliament Square since

June 2, 2001. He is an "eyesore" in the eyes of the government and reminds every parliamentarian on approach to Parliament about his "opinions". But how do you get rid of a man who practices his freedom of speech? Try this: according to the police, Haw posed a threat as terrorists could hide bombs under his many banners and placards! Indeed. Kudos for District Judge Quentin Purdy, who stated that Haw had not breached conditions imposed on him by the Metropolitan Police, as they were unclear and invalid.

Rather than focus on real crime, "the Met" have instead reduced themselves to becoming the executive force of Big Brother Britain. Meanwhile, in Northern Ireland's capital Belfast, an altogether far more unsavoury image of police practice was unveiled - a scandal of the worst proportions.

A report by Nuala O'Loan, the Police Ombudsman of Northern Ireland, focused on certain crimes in a small area of Belfast. It revealed collusion between the police and murderers over a period of at least twelve years. The report stated that Special Branch officers had colluded with criminals, going so far as to give the killers immunity: indeed, police officers ensured that murderers were not caught and even 'baby-sat' them during police interviews to help them avoid incriminating themselves. Furthermore, the Special Branch officers "created false notes" and blocked searches for weapons. Worse, Mark Haddock was paid at least £80,000 (\$150,000) as an informant by police handlers between 1991 and 2003, but the report shows that he was linked with 10 murders, a bomb attack against a Sinn Fein office in Monaghan, etc. - with the police aware that Haddock was at least one of the main suspects!

The report called for a number of murder investigations to be re-opened, but it is unlikely that any of the police officers involved will be prosecuted - the ombudsman said that evidence was deliberately destroyed to ensure there could not be prosecutions. The report stated: "It would be easy to blame junior officers' conduct in dealing with various informants and indeed they are not blameless. However, they could not have operated [...] without the knowledge and support at the highest levels of the RUC and PSNI." The report holds the former chief constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, Sir Ronnie Flanagan, personally responsible. Ironically, he is now head of the Inspectorate of Constabulary, responsible for standards for the police in England and Wales! No wonder we thus see police misuse of time against the likes of Brian Haw.

Current Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde offered an apology to the victims' families. He said the report made "shocking, disturbing and uncomfortable reading". Northern Ireland secretary Peter Hain stated that the problem of collusion was widespread and that this was merely the tip of the iceberg. Both claimed that such collusion would, after a series of reforms passed since, no longer be possible - a prediction which almost surely will be proven wrong at some point in the future.



The crimes that have gone unpunished include 10 murders, 10 attempted murders, 13 "punishment attacks" and 10 "punishment shootings", one bomb attack and several other "minor" crimes, ranging from drug dealing, extortion and intimidation. Observers have noted that the "Mount Vernon boys" were state-sponsored assassins, with Special Branch running their local leadership. This is, in short, state-sanctioned terrorism directed against British citizens, with the criminals protected and no-one brought to account.

The Republicans had always claimed that Special Branch was a "force within a force". But at the time, reports of collusion were often described as "rubbish" and "conspiracy theories". Now, they are "conspiracy fact".

The state-sanctioned terrorism had the desired effect, for as a consequence of the practices of Special Branch, the position of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), particularly in north Belfast and Newtownabbey, was consolidated over the years. After 1987, when the loyalist paramilitary organisations were beginning to contemplate peace, the British state re-armed them, taking control through its proxies amongst the warlords. These actions thus prolonged the war.

It may come as a surprise that any Western state wants an internal conflict to endure - if only because it is against all its own propaganda that it is there as a facilitator between two parties. But no-one is contesting these findings; instead, everyone agrees this is merely the tip of the iceberg, but one, which many in power hope will soon drift away.

I'm a president/prime minister... get me out of here!

> *What next for Bush and Blair, seeing they have lost all support at home?*

Riding high on the Iraq war, President Bush was re-elected (or elected, if taking Al Gore's 2000 non-realised victory into account) in November 2004 and Tony Blair led the British Labour Party to a third consecutive victory in May 2005. By November 2006, Bush was dealt an uppercut in the mid-term elections and Blair is in theory Prime Minister, though in practice, one of those very

expensive football players who sit on the substitute bench, knowing the crowd will boo him off the field.



Tony Blair has become Labour's biggest liability and though claiming he would serve a full-term (which would have taken him to 2009-2010), in 2006, he had to announce he would not go beyond the summer of 2007. Labour's popularity has gone down to 31%, 6% behind the Conservatives. Having won a "landmark" third consecutive election, they are now at risk of losing the next election. Worse, in late January, Blair went AWOL for a debate in the House of Commons on Iraq, the first the House had held since the invasion in 2003. His absence was seen as "not acceptable", though he clearly got away with it.

There is no such respite or hiding for Bush, who has, nevertheless, a hard exit date - if not strategy - of December 2008. The major question is whether he has or has not made it impossible for a Republican victory. Normally, it is customary for the vice-president to push for the presidential position, but it is now known that no-one from the Administration will run for office. Where are the days when the vice-president - in this case Cheney - asked for a mandate to carry on the president's policy?

Bush was elected on a "domestic agenda", but 9/11 radically made his presidency in what he had promised it would not be: a global policeman. Bush's 2007 State of the Union was a renewed focus on domestic plans. Indeed, both nations are trying to place a renewed emphasis on health, energy conservation and immigration. In truth, such policies should be taken as granted and should never be the main focus of a government.

But Bush has another problem: in Britain, the Prime Minister has a majority, so unless his own party votes against him (which happened in 2006 on a terrorism-related bill), Blair's electoral agenda gets voted into law. Bush has no such certainty, and since November 2006 is faced with a Democratic Congress, who will - or should - only vote on Bush's plans if they have any chance of being enacted. And if none of these domestic issues make it into law, in the latter half of 2008, Bush can blame a lack of cross-party support for his plans as the "real" reason why even his domestic agenda failed.

So, four years after the successful regime change in Iran and two years after re-election, the leading architects of those campaigns are seen in their own countries as lame ducks. Worse, the men who are apparently still in charge of the "war of terror" are liabilities to their own party, seriously endangering the possible success of their party at the next elections. Worse: leaders of a nation that has turned against them, 2007 and 2008 may be dangerous years, in which they pursue their own agenda, exiled dictators who however remain in power. Alternatively, 2007 and 2008 could go down as "wasted years", in which nothing got done, starting 2009 with all the same problems that existed at the end of 2006, but with two extra years of interest and inflation. For even though they have become near-impotent, there are important decisions to be made about energy, the Middle East and the American economy as a whole. The question is who and when they will be made.

The presidential plumber: E. Howard Hunt

> *E. Howard Hunt, CIA agent and political warfare operative died on January 23, 2007, aged 88.*



It is said that only the good die young. E. Howard Hunt lived till the ripe age of 88. Hunt has been claimed to be involved in two of the worst US political crimes of the 20th century: Watergate and President Kennedy's assassination.

To start with the latter: following on from the Watergate scandal, claims were made that Hunt was one of the so-called "tramps" that were arrested in the immediate aftermath of the Kennedy assassination. Since, some researchers have suspected they were the real assassins, dressed up as tramps. Though it is now known that Hunt was not one of these three arrested individuals, Hunt's possible involvement in the assassination did become the subject of intense scrutiny. And soon, Victor Marchetti wrote in the newspaper "The Spotlight" that Hunt had been involved in the Kennedy assassination. In 1981, Hunt was awarded \$650,000 in a libel lawsuit against Liberty Lobby, the publisher of "The Spotlight". The decision was overturned on appeal, with Mark Lane,

formerly the attorney to the widow of Lee Harvey Oswald, successfully defending Liberty Lobby. Lane outlined his theory about Hunt's and the CIA's role in the Kennedy assassination in his own book, *Plausible Denial*, published in 1991.

But Hunt's real claim to "fame" came during Watergate, when he was seen as the mastermind of the botched Watergate break-in of June 17, 1972. It was Hunt's name and telephone number that was found in the possession of one of the captured Cuban exiles that Hunt had hired to burgle the Democratic Party's offices. It opened up an avenue in which the White House was soon inculpated, eventually leaving a trail to Richard Nixon, who in 1974 became the first president forced to resign from office. In short, Hunt brought down the US president.

Who was this man? Former ambassador Samuel F. Hart described Hunt as "totally self-absorbed, totally amoral and a danger to himself and anybody around him". Hunt fought in the Second World War, subsequently joined the Office of Strategic Studies, the CIA's predecessor. He was stationed in Vienna, Mexico City, Tokyo, Uruguay and Madrid, and planned operations in the Balkans and Guatemala, taking credit for orchestrating a coup against the elected left-wing President Jacobo Arbenz. In 1961, Hunt was assigned to help plan the Cuban Bay of Pigs invasion, specifically to create a provisional Cuban government to assume power after the defeat of Castro's communist forces. Instead, the invasion proved to be a disaster, with Kennedy forcing CIA director Allen Dulles to resign. But rather than his organisation's leader, Hunt held Kennedy responsible, for failing to send in US armed forces to rescue the invaders when they were surrounded by Cuban forces. Though Kennedy put plans to attempt a second invasion on the backburner (though he never abandoned the idea, as some observers assume), Hunt remained involved with the leading Cuban exiles, largely resident in Louisiana and Florida. As these men came to be seen as the men ordering Kennedy's assassination as revenge for abandoning Cuba, Hunt's name became linked with the assassination.

Hunt left the CIA in 1970, claiming the agency was "infested" by Democrats, to concentrate on writing spy novels. Soon, Charles Colson hired Hunt to carry out "plumbing jobs" for the White House. He was officially a part-time consultant to the President, paid \$100 per day. He was tasked with digging into the private life of Edward Kennedy, specifically over the Chappaquiddick incident, when after a party on July 18, 1969, Kennedy left with Mary Jo Kopechne. Their car was involved in an accident, in which Kopechne lost her life. The scandal revolved around the fact that Kennedy waited several hours before informing the police of his involvement.

Hunt was also asked to collect damaging evidence on Daniel Ellsberg, a former Pentagon official who had leaked secret papers about the Vietnam War. It was - at least officially - the first of a series of break-ins, this one into the Beverly Hills office of the psychiatrist treating Ellsberg, in order to obtain personal information on Ellsberg. Nothing damaging was found.

After the Watergate burglary, Hunt stated that the burglary was an effort to uncover evidence of illegal foreign contributions to the Democrat Party. It is here that Hunt's warped view of reality came into clear focus, for he actually believed that the Vietnamese government and Fidel Castro had made donations to the Democratic Party... with Hunt apparently believing the party would

have entered those donations into their accounting books.

Hunt spent 33 months in prison for his role in Watergate and was bitter that Nixon did not stand up for him. Why Nixon would want to support the man who not only had failed to do a proper break-in but had actually directly implicated the White House, seemed a question that hadn't crossed Hunt's mind. Furthermore, in one of the incriminating pieces of evidence that led to Nixon's resignation, White House Council John Dean was heard informing Nixon that "We're being blackmailed - Hunt now is demanding another \$72,000 for his own personal expenses; another \$50,000 to pay his attorney's fees." When Hunt's wife Dorothy was killed in a United Airlines crash in December 1972, she was carrying more than \$10,000 in cash in her handbag. It took Watergate before Hunt realised that he was merely an agent, not a "spy master extra-ordinaire" as he seemed to think of himself. He finally learned that politicians, whether Democrat or Republican, looked after themselves, not after the likes of him.

In the aftermath of Watergate, Hunt accumulated legal fees of close to \$1 million (in the 1990s he declared bankruptcy), his wife had died and he suffered a stroke. Standing before the judge at sentencing, he said he was "alone, nearly friendless, ridiculed, disgraced, destroyed as a man". Freed on his 60th birthday, Hunt moved to Miami, remarried, and wrote a total of eighty spy novels, mostly published under pseudonyms, such as "Peter Ward". Hunt was both the hunter and the hunted. His misfortunes revealed to the world how the real powerbrokers truly operated. But Hunt was only ever hired help. In fact, he ranked low both in the CIA hierarchy and the Nixon White House. But thanks to his errors, the world got wiser. And in some bizarre way, he did become like the man he always felt he was. Though he never became a hero, he did become a symbol... he became "the plumber", the powerbrokers' "special unit", spoken of in such thrillers as John Grisham's "The Pelican Brief". Whether it is a legacy to be proud of...

They Said It: An unholy alliance threatening catastrophe (The Times (UK), Thursday, January 4, 2007)

> *Both Saudi Arabia and Israel are telling the US to pull the plug in Iraq*



With the dawning of a new year, the Bush-Blair partnership is working on an even more horrendous foreign policy disaster. What now seems to be in preparation at the White House, with the usual unquestioning support from Downing Street, is a Middle Eastern equivalent of the Second World War. The trigger for this all-embracing war would be the formation of a previously unthinkable alliance between America, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Britain, to confront Iran and the rise of the power of Shia Islam.

The logical outcome of this 'pinning back' process would be an air strike by Israel against Iran's nuclear facilities, combined with a renewed Israeli military campaign against Hezbollah in Lebanon, aggressive action by American and British soldiers to crush Iraq's Shia militias, while Saudi-backed Sunni terrorists undermined the increasingly precarious pro-Iranian Government in Baghdad.

Consider the ominous events that occurred in the Middle East and Washington over the holiday season, while most people were paying more attention to their turkeys and Christmas stockings. The first in this sequence of events was Tony Blair's abrupt announcement that members of the Saudi Royal Family accused of taking bribes from British defence contractors would be exempted from the application of British law. To risk a confrontation with the Saudi Royal Family, Mr Blair asserted, would have jeopardised Britain's security interests in Iraq and in the war against terrorism, as well as dashing hopes of progress towards peace between Israel and the Palestinians. This embarrassing announcement by Mr Blair was quickly followed by his Dubai speech, in which he called for an 'arc of moderation' to 'pin back' Iran's advances in the Middle East.

The second event, almost simultaneous with Mr Blair's bribery announcement, was the equally unexpected resignation of Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Washington, Prince Turki al-Faisal, on December 15. Prince Turki has long been a key figure in the Saudi security establishment, whose last abrupt career move occurred in the autumn of 2001, when he suddenly resigned as liaison between the Saudi Royal Family and the Taleban terrorists that they had been financing until just before September 11. Turki was a leading member of a faction in the Saudi Royal Family that has for months been advocating a more conciliatory response towards the Shia hegemony in Iraq, including an effort to open direct negotiations between America and Iran, as recommended by James Baker's Iraq Study Group. The Turki group's main rivals in the Saudi establishment have by

contrast argued for much tougher military action against what they called the 'Christian-Shia conspiracy' created by the US toleration of Iranian influence over Iraq. The Saudi power struggle came into the open through an article published in "The Washington Post" in mid-December, by Nawaf Obeid, a Saudi security consultant ostensibly working for Turki, but actually closer to the hardliners. Obeid cautioned that if American troops were withdrawn from Iraq prematurely, in line with the Baker report's recommendations, Saudi Arabia would have no choice but to intervene forcibly 'to stop Iranian-backed Shia militias from butchering Iraq's Sunnis'. Turki immediately fired Obeid, but shortly afterwards was himself replaced by a hardliner.

Within Saudi Arabia itself, meanwhile, the anti-Iranian rhetoric is gathering strength. Take this example from al-Salafi magazine, quoted in "The New York Times": 'Iran has become more dangerous than Israel itself. The Iranian revolution has come to renew the Persian presence in our region. This is the real clash of civilisations.'

The link between Israel and Iran in Saudi thinking brings us to the third event in this chillingly un-festive sequence: the confrontation over nuclear proliferation between the UN Security Council and Iran. If Iran is now really hell-bent on developing nuclear weapons, Israel has made it abundantly clear that it is equally hell-bent on stopping it - whether by diplomatic or military means.

Whether Israeli bombing would in practice do serious damage to the Iranian nuclear programme is far from clear, but there are certainly hotheads in the Israeli Government and military establishment who are itching to try.

There is, however, one binding constraint on Israel's freedom of action against Iran. This is the US. It is unlikely that Israel would bomb Iran without explicit American approval and it is certain that a US president would stop Israel if he believed America's national interest demanded it.

That has been the situation until recently, since America has depended on Iranian-backed Shia politicians to prevent a total collapse of order and a humiliating Saigon-style expulsion of American soldiers in Iraq.

Although Israel has never signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, many Israeli politicians believe that they are entitled to punish Iran for its non-compliance with the treaty. For these trigger-happy Israelis, Iran's backdoor influence over Washington via the Iraqi Shia has become a nightmare. The same is true of the Saudi princes. The Saudi Royal Family rules a largely Shia country on the basis of a fanatically enforced state religion whose senior spokesmen denounce the Shia as heretic scum. These feelings are entirely mutual - Iran's mad mullahs hate the Wahhabis every bit as much.

Thus, if there is one country in the world more worried than Israel about an Iranian A-bomb, it is Saudi Arabia. And if there are two countries in the world with real influence on the Bush White House, they are Saudi Arabia and Israel. Now both these countries are telling President Bush that he must pull the plug on Iraq's Shia Government, tear up the Baker report, whose most important advice was to open diplomatic channels to Tehran, and prepare to attack Iran, either directly or using the Israelis as a proxy. This is the basis of the unholy alliance between Israel, Saudi Arabia and America, with Mr Blair contributing a few choice soundbites.

The anti-Iranian 'arc of moderation' may seem like another meaningless Blairism, not nearly as threatening as Mr Bush's 'axis of evil'. But this soundbite could unleash a disaster on the Middle East, beside which the war in Iraq would be a mere sideshow.

Conspiracy Times Additions:

On September 22, 1980, Iraq's leader Saddam Hussein invaded Iran, starting the Iran-Iraq war, which would last until 1988. The invasion came as a result of the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The Ayatollah Khomeini was threatening to export the Islamic revolution to the rest of the Middle East, even though Iran was hardly in any position to do so militarily, for following the coup, most of the Shah's army had been disbanded. Iran could "export" the revolution in three possible, but only one logical geographical direction: towards Iraq. Iran also despised the Ba'athist secularism and believed that the oppressed Shiites in Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait could, should and would follow the Iranian example and turn against their governments.

But it was not Iran, but Iraq that acted first, and it seems with the full support of the West. If the coup itself had not alienated Iran from the West, the Iran hostage crisis of 1980 made sure of it. Saddam Hussein felt that Iranian Sunni citizens would rather join a powerful Sunni-led Iraq than remain in the Shia-dominated Iran. But Saddam miscalculated the power of nationalism over historically clan-centred differences... as well as the power of the central state apparatus that controlled the press. As a consequence, most of the Sunnis of Iran turned against the Iraqi forces. And rather than a swift victory, the Iran-Iraq war became a long and cumbersome affair... Whereas a US invaded Iraq was supposed to become a pillar of US power in the region, in truth, America has had to rely on the Shiite power in Iraq to portray it is able to maintain any form of order. The Baker Report thus argued that this path should be continued and actively use Iran to secure Iraq's stability. This would be termed "Real politik", i.e. dealing with real issues in the best possible way, but in a very isolated manner. And the larger framework is that Iran is once again hoping for a Shia revolution, which would once again endanger the existing regimes of Saudi Arabia and Iraq, two strong US allies, leaving only Israel in an even more isolated position. In short, a recipe for disaster, which will either explode or simmer on.



The Baker Report's recommendations were not followed and the question is whether Israel will indeed ignite the volatile soup by launching strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities. In the 1980s, Israel performed similar strikes to Iraqi nuclear facilities. Meanwhile, the US are moving carriers and other military apparatus in position in what some suggest are preparations for a military operation against Iran - which would largely rely on the US's air capability. Alternatively, is it "only" moving its pieces on a chess board, in the hope that Iran makes a bad move? The West and Israel would want nothing better than an aggressive act by Iran - and Republican Congressman and 2008 Presidential candidate Ron Paul even feared that there might have been a staged Gulf of Tonkin style incident to provoke air strikes on Iran. Meanwhile, the White House continues to argue that there are no plans to attack Iran. But that the US might be serious, might be extrapolated from the fact that President Bush removed General John Abizaid as commander of US forces in the Middle East and John Negroponte as Director of National Intelligence. Both did not consider Iran a priority. Or is their removal only part of the bluff?

Of course, there is a third way: use the media to seed stories that will aim to convince the public that a strike against Iran is "required"... that it is a moral duty. We all remember the Kuwaiti girl who claimed that Iraqi troops were killing innocent babies in Kuwaiti hospitals, only to learn later that she was the daughter of a Kuwaiti ambassador who had invented the entire story... though no doubt not without help or encouragement.

Stories about a pre-emptive strike against Iran led the ING Group to release a memo on January 9, 2007, detailing the "market impact of a surprise Israeli strike on its nuclear facilities." Sketching out the time line for an attack, the ING analysts said that "we can be fairly sure that if Israel is going to act, it will be keen to do so while Bush and Cheney are in the White House" and offered a February-March 2007 timeframe as the most likely scenario. "First, there is a comparable situation to Israel's strike on Iraq's nuclear program in 1981, including Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's political troubles within Israel. Second, late February will see Iran's deadline to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 1737, and Israel could use a failure of Iran and the UN to follow through as justification for a strike. Finally, greater US military presence in the region at that time could be seen by Israel as the protection from retaliation that it needs." Wait... and see.

Whatever happened to... the shampoo bomb?

> *The foiled bomb plot on August 10, 2006 was seen as a major coup against terrorists who were about to hijack ten planes and kill all people inside. But six months on, it all appears to be based on erroneous intelligence... or outright disinformation?*



As a frequent traveller, I hate the amount of luggage people bring with them on the plane. Quite often, a small bag with photographic and video equipment, a book and a laptop don't fit in the overhead bins, as large suitcases that should be in the hold below are in the cabin. Then, August 10 happened, in what the British government, or at least Home Secretary John Reid, in Tony Blair's absence, described as "mass murder on an unimaginable scale" and "bigger than 9/11". Since, further travel restrictions have been imposed over most of continental Europe; people are now also no longer able to bring on board bottles of material you can still buy in Duty Free shops. In Frankfurt, I saw the sad sight of one traveller having to part with and depart without a nice collection of whiskey and champagne; though at first pointing out the absurdity of him having to part with something he had bought within sight of the security personnel to whom he had to surrender it, he eventually gave in as he knew he was in a no-win situation.

So who do we have to thank for this latest assault on common sense in airports? The governments claim it is one Rashid Rauf. On August 12, US and British sources said Rashid Rauf had a key operational role in the alleged plot. Rauf, a British citizen, was arrested and appeared before magistrates in Pakistan, where he lives. On August 15, Pakistan said it might extradite Rauf to Britain, although no request had been received - apparently revealing that the UK was not overly excited to get their hands on this "mastermind". On August 17, it was alleged that the plot was sanctioned by Al Qaeda's number two, Ayman al Zawahri, this according to Pakistani intelligence.

As is so often the case with disinformation, the Pakistani "source" spoke "on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the investigation".

But after all these headline-grabbing allegations, hard reality set in. On August 19, after two weeks of interrogation and a careful search of his house, too little evidence was found to justify Rauf's extradition to the UK. Still, on August 26, Pakistani Interior minister Aftab Khan Sherpao said Rashid Rauf had "wider international links" and was in touch with an Afghanistan-based Al Qaeda leader. He however did not offer any evidence to back up his claim, underlining how Western politicians have been able to make enormous claims, which time and again courts show are without foundation. As a response to such "failings", there are then legal reforms, in an effort to show that the government was right after all, but the laws were outdated, unfit to face the challenges of modern terrorism - read: groundless accusations.

What has gone largely unreported is that on December 13, 2006, a court in Pakistan dropped terrorism charges against Rashid Rauf. Why? Again, a total lack of evidence. So, Rauf is the named "mastermind" and "ringleader" of the most infamous terror plot ever uncovered in Britain: the plan to explode a number of transatlantic airlines. Though he allegedly was in the possession of explosives, what he actually possessed was hydrogen peroxide, which is not explosive. Furthermore, hydrogen peroxide is readily obtainable from any chemist or hardware store in Britain. Why would you source it in Pakistan and make the cost and take the risk of importing it into Britain?

Largely unreported is that at the same time, Thames Valley police gave up, after five months scouring the woods near High Wycombe, trying to find the location where the bomb materials were allegedly hidden. Like the never discovered Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq, these bombs too seem to have vanished - or never existed? We should not blame the police for this waste of time; the police did tell the Home Office on December 12 that they would only continue if the government were prepared to meet the costs. But the sad fact of the matter is that months were wasted with no result to show for it, despite what was said on August 15: "The British security sources told they are confident evidence of explosives will be found", reported CNN.

So: no bombs. An "anonymous tip-off" had claimed there were bombs in that area; its clear there aren't. But the government's case did not rest solely on an anonymous tip-off, of course. Or should that sentence require the word "hopefully" in it? The other 'evidence' that was allegedly found consisted of wills (with the implication they were made by suicide bombers) and a map of Afghanistan. It turned out that the wills were made in the early 1990s by volunteers going off to fight the Serbs in Bosnia; they had been left with the now deceased uncle of one of those arrested. As to the map of Afghanistan, that had been copied out by an eleven year old boy. And thus collapses the official story of August 10.



So why does the media not report on the collapse of this case? The media did apparently not report out of fear of prejudicing the trials of those who assisted "ringleader Rauf". But as a consequence, Ministers get lavish airtime to make speeches that are back-to-back with "allegedly" this and that, but which eventually turn out to be totally without foundation. At best, it is misinformation, at worst, disinformation.

The arrest of 26 people in connection with the plot was massively publicised; the gradual release of most of them has gone virtually unreported. The first release came as early as August 11. Shortly before, a new law (the Terrorism Act 2006) allowed people to be arrested without being charged and this law was put into action for these arrests. By August 16, Home Secretary John Reid already had to acknowledge that some suspects would likely not be charged with major criminal offences, though he said that there was mounting evidence of a 'substantial nature' to back the allegations. This is obviously a contradiction... but who pointed it out?

Several people do remain in jail, with Prosecutor Colin Gibbs telling a packed courtroom during one hearing that due to the "mountain of evidence", he expected the men to face "a very long trial of (between) five and eight months". The trial, he said, would not realistically start until at least January 2008. But despite "mountains of evidence", on October 31, 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 are so few in numbers that they would not have been able to carry out the mission on the ten planes. It points out an obvious problem... the question is whether by January 2008, anyone will still remember what it was all about, whether all will have been released, or whether we are going to witness a show trial.

You may also not have heard that five British newspapers had to pay damages to a Birmingham man they had accused, on a security service briefing, of being part of the plot. Only "The Guardian" had the grace to publish this fact and print a retraction. There is nothing wrong with getting things wrong, specifically not as the world keeps turning and a newspaper is a "slice" through time of a situation - which a day, a week or a decade later may turn out to have been incorrect. The problem lies in the "what next" and whether newspapers should gullibly swallow briefing documents, when it is clear that they are often bursting at the same with unsubstantiated claims. But rather than admit they have been fooled and used, they fail to sympathise with a fellow victim.

The other obvious trend is obviously how easily the media is manipulated. On August 17, the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) reported that a suitcase was found in woodlands in High Wycombe. The BBC quoted an "anonymous police source" as saying a suitcase holding "everything you would need to make an improvised device". The Metropolitan Police refused to comment on the BBC report, saying it could not discuss anything found during the searches. Still, the BBC ran the in retrospect erroneous and perhaps even deliberately planted story.

Though labelled as the mastermind of 8/10 (we'll go for the American notation of August 10), the British government made no attempt to extradite Rashid Rauf on charges of terrorism. We note that the Pakistani authorities have handed over scores of terrorist suspects to the US, many according to the extraordinary rendition process. On average the procedure is astonishingly quick, taking less than a week.

But the British intelligence agency MI5 was actually embarrassed by Birmingham police, who reminded them that Rauf was actually wanted in the UK over the alleged murder of his uncle in Birmingham - the UK should have asked for his extradition anyway, 8/10 or not. Furthermore, if he was indeed the mastermind of this incredible plot, if the UK had asked for his extradition for this murder before, would they not have prevented this "bigger than 9/11" mastermind plotting his atrocity? Instead, Rauf became another Osama bin Laden: a far away criminal who could easily be blamed, whereby the claims would never be subjected to close scrutiny. The Pakistani court that had to do so, soon found it was nothing but hot air. And the case has thus disappeared like the air-bubbles in shampoo. Only the dandruff, it seems, remains in place.

So let us look back to what we were asked to believe on August 10: British authorities arrested 26 suspects in a suspected plot to blow up as many as ten passenger jets leaving Britain for New York City, Washington D.C. and California. The plot involved Continental Airlines, United Airlines and American Airlines.

But: the men detained had not bought plane tickets, as even the officials admitted; the suspects had been perusing the Internet to find flights to various cities that had similar departure times. What a crime indeed... and one which every holiday planner commits! Next allegation: the British suspects planned to mix a "British version of Gatorade" with a gel-like substance to create an explosive that could then be triggered with an iPod or cell phone, or so a senior Congressional source told. It has since been shown that this mix would never explode at all and the "Congressional source" should once again be treated with suspicion. Finally, the original information about the plan allegedly came from the Muslim community in Britain, according to a British intelligence official. We don't think so... but if it did, then it is clear that the only genuine crime is how easily British Muslims can upset a nation by making statements which everyone else is then over-eager to accept as truth, however improbable and impossible. And that may have been the only terrorist act that any Muslim committed in the sorry affair of the shampoo bombing.