

Terrorists Trained in Western Methods

Memorandum to File

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This story, by Michael Evans and Daniel McGrory, was published in the London *Times* on July 13.

The new breed of terrorists behind the London bombings are techno-experts who have become skilled in evading the electronic surveillance methods used by Western intelligence services.

Trained in counter-surveillance techniques in camps in Pakistan, Afghanistan and the southern Philippines, the latest generation of Islamic extremist espouses the *al-Qaeda* terrorist organisation's hatred of the West but relies on its own motivation and planning to carry out attacks.

This new breed does not wait for orders from on high, or for some coded message from the *al-Qaeda* hierarchy. In every sense these mostly young international terrorists have become the equivalent of the old Cold War Soviet "*sleepers*" – men and women committed to a cause who learn to blend in with their host countries to undermine it.

Those responsible for the London bombings have already proved that they were sufficiently savvy to avoid becoming one of the many terrorist suspects who are watched and monitored by MI5.

Security sources said: "*It's clear they have a general awareness of some of the techniques that can be used against them and have become more and more conscious of surveillance activities.*"

The sources added: "*They are also aware that while modern technology, such as mobile phones and e-mails, can enhance their way of operating, there are also built-in risks because they know they can be traced when they make use of them.*"


Recruits to what is being called the "*new al-Qaeda*" are computer-literate and skilled at ensuring that they leave no electronic footprints. This generation of *jihadists* was given as much training in technology as it was in bomb-making and reconnaissance missions.

They have learnt from the mistakes made by previous terror cells in allowing telephone calls and e-mails to be intercepted. The new recruits are taught how to communicate without sending e-mails or encrypting messages in seemingly harmless websites.

The easiest method is for a cell to share a single anonymous e-mail account. All the members of the cell would know the log-in and password,

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but instead of sending messages, they write their communications and leave them in the draft folder. This allows the others to read the message which never leaves the account. If the terrorists have to exchange information they use more complex forms of encryption, relying on mathematical algorithms to scramble communications, so that they are meaningless to anyone who does not have a numerical key to decode them.

They have also mastered the art of steganography, which involves hiding messages inside picture or music files sent over the internet.

The key to the sleeper terrorist is his normal appearance and his ability to avoid standing out in a crowd. Although some of the thousands of closed-circuit televisions in the capital may have the bombers on tape, they will be difficult to distinguish from anyone else caught on camera. *“We expect they will be clean-shaven, smartly dressed and looking every inch the Westerner,”* one security source said.

Dominic Armstrong, director of research and intelligence at Aegis Defence Services, said: *“The London bombers were an ‘A team,’ clearly well trained and good at counter-surveillance.”*

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