

Terrorism expert on UK plane plot

Reporter: Tony Jones

TONY JONES: Bill Durodie is an expert on terrorism - he's a senior lecturer in risk and security at the Defence College of Management and Technology at Cranfield University. He joins us now from our London studio. Thanks for being there, Bill Durodie.

BILL DURODIE: Hello.

TONY JONES: Now I know you flew into Heathrow Airport early this morning during the height of this, can you explain what that was like?

BILL DURODIE, CRANFIELD UNIVERSITY: Well, I think the first unusual sign was that our plane, a British Airways plane, pulled up at Terminal 4, not in one of the usual bays, but on the tarmac, and we were instructed to wait for a fleet of buses to take us to the terminal. Now there may be normal reasons for that, considering there's always construction work, but it seems to fit what then ensued. The pilot then informed passengers of a security alert at the airport and difficulties for those who were in transit - particularly in terms of carrying land luggage onto any aeroplane leaving the airport. And of course then as we proceeded through the airport, there were very long queues for passport checks and delays for luggage. But aside from that, I must say that the atmosphere was relatively relaxed, but that's, of course, at the arrivals end rather than the departures.

TONY JONES: Police say they uncovered evidence of this some days ago. They've moved on it very quickly, obviously. Do you know what sort of intelligence they've been working from? Is there any evidence that's been produced so far?

BILL DURODIE: Well, the only reasonable presumption I've heard as to why they've decided to accelerate the measures and to raise the alert level to critical is probably because they have lost track of some of the individuals that they were tracking and that led them to a presumption that they needed to act fast - and hence, we've seen a number of arrests today. But I suppose one important thing to bear in mind is that all of this, at this stage, is based on the information we've received from the police. And, of course, they got caught out a couple of months ago in a raid in East London, where they sent 250 armed officers to arrest two individuals who, quite patently, were totally innocent, as was subsequently shown. So the fact they've raised and alert level to critical - which means they have specific information of an imminent threat - now means important things for the police. They are going to have to prove their case.

TONY JONES: And an extraordinary case it is. They're at least giving details that this plot may have involved up to 10 aircraft. The plan was to blow them up in mid-Atlantic. Is there any indication as to what sort of intelligence they were getting? They must have been tracking a group for some time to come up with this theory?

(PROBLEM WITH SOUND)

TONY JONES: Alright, we've lost Bill Durodie for the time being. We'll come back to him if we can. To turn now to other news while we try and fix up that line.

(INTERVIEW RESUMES)

TONY JONES: We've re-established our link to London now and back with our terrorist expert, Bill Durodie. As I was saying, Bill Durodie, an extraordinary plot it is, something on a par with September 11. The idea that you could blow up 10 aeroplanes in mid-Atlantic is an extraordinarily coherent plot, if you like?

BILL DURODIE: Well, it certainly sounds horrific. I'm slightly concerned that we heard a very senior official in one of your opening packages describing this plot as being on an "unimaginable scale." I think we do expect officials to moderate their language appropriately. Obviously, it would be terrible, but to inflate the language in that way lends itself to increasing public concern, rather than assuaging

concerns and showing a robust response to this.

Of course, we have to bear in mind that at this stage, we don't have know the [inaudible] that is being operated upon here. And I think one of the biggest angers I've seen this morning in London and listened to many, many pundits and experts speculating rather wildly about who these individuals may be, what chemicals they may have been hoping to use and what devastating consequences they may have had. I think at this stage, we do have to reserve judgment and remind ourselves that people are innocent until they're proven guilty.

TONY JONES: Indeed, that's true. The theory that's being widely put about and one imagines it must have come from the police in the first place, is that they intended to use some kind of liquid explosive, which is why passengers are being prevented from taking liquids on board all aircraft now?

BILL DURODIE: Well certainly that's the information I've received, too. And the argument behind that is that certain forms of liquid explosive are undetectable from normal detection equipment that you would pass through on your way to the aeroplane and so that lends itself to this kind of scenario. On the other hand, we do have to ask ourselves what kind of society we want to move into where we cannot take any liquid, whether it be eye contact lens cleaning fluid or babies' bottled milk, on to an aeroplane? Is that the society we want to live in, or do we, at some stage, have to maintain some kind of reality check where we accept that there are some evil, nihilist criminals out there hell-bent on destroying society, but they're not going to destroy it. And we ourselves have got to show some fortitude and resilience and carry about our daily lives if we're going to overcome these fears.

TONY JONES: At some point, as you say, the police are going to have to come forward with evidence. And because of the problems they've had with past cases, you'd have to think they must have something pretty serious - like taped conversations between these people, informants and so on, telling them what is being planned. Have you ever heard of the use of any form of liquid explosive before? It sounds like something completely new and extremely sophisticated?

BILL DURODIE: I don't think there is anything particularly new under the sun in the world of explosives. At the end of the day, there are certain types of reactions you need to create in order to generate an explosion. Certain liquid explosives like TATP, that was held to have caused the explosions in London last summer, are known of. They can be readily made and put together using relatively easily accessible substances such as nail varnish remover. But they are unstable, it's not something that's totally straightforward. And of course, the explosion you would create is not necessarily as great as with conventional other devices. So there are various tradeoffs in all of this.

I am concerned, however, as I said that I now hear numerous pundits suggesting that hand luggage should never again go upon aeroplanes and that you can actually generate an explosion with just a few ounces of these liquids, apparently, which rather begs the question, are we going to have to subject ourselves to fairly intrusive examinations prior to going onto an aeroplane? And, of course, that's highly unlikely. So I think there's a number of issues that now need to be resolved. And the police certainly do have to come up with evidence because if they don't, there's going to be an enormous crisis of trust here.

TONY JONES: Let's talk about the people that have already been arrested. What do we know about the 21 arrests and what do we know about these reports that there may be as many as 30 people, suspects, still at large?

BILL DURODIE: Well as far as I know, they're all British citizens of Pakistani descent. And I think that's quite important here in these discussions, that we should remind ourselves that the form of terrorist threat that we face today is not necessarily one that comes and is driven by some alien and foreign ideology as many people seem to assume, but rather one that is cultivated within our own communities, within our own society, from a layer of people - not all of whom will be Asian - who are extremely alienated from the way of the world today and who want to lash out against it in a highly destructive manner.

And we need to ask ourselves, what kind of climate creates this? Is it some kind of religious ideology, as many commentators seem to suppose? Or is it maybe our own sense of nihilism and negativity that comes through in many, many debates we see today - from issues about how humanity destroys the planet, coming from environmentalists, to numerous other areas of our lives, where we seem to err on the pessimistic side of the argument in almost every situation. I suspect it's that kind of almost degenerate cultural climate that then encourages an alienated few to lash out.

TONY JONES: One thing we can say absolutely for sure is that if there is evidence that people were really planning to blow up 10 aircraft mid-Atlantic, the idea degeneracy will point back at them, won't it?

BILL DURODIE: It well may do, but at the end of the day, we would also have to ask ourselves what led them to do this. A point I often make in this kind of debates is that it's not so much what it is that attracts a few individuals to fringe radical organisations that we need to worry about, but rather what it is about our own society that it fails to attract quite often young, articulate, bright, energetic and ambitious individuals, that they feel so alienated from it that they look for something else to provide substance and meaning to their lives. Surely, that's an indictment of ourselves as well.

TONY JONES: Bill Durodie we'll have to leave you. Thank you very much for taking the time to come in and talk to us tonight.

BILL DURODIE: Thank you.



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