

Covering the car bombs: a special report

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The attempted double [car bombing](#) of West London was different for a number of reasons. And the media coverage has, therefore, been different, too. Unlike 7/7 the devices did not go off. Unlike the Heathrow bomb plot, the police action was not an intelligence-led operation.

The bombs possibly failed because of the terrorists' incompetence but we only knew about them because of the actions of an ambulance crew and some claspers. As Adrian [Monck points out](#), this meant that the authorities did not have a ready-assembled briefing in place for the media to give the news narrative a framework. I said in a previous post that I thought that as the events unfolded the broadcasters were handling the news with reasonable care and context. So what about the morning newspapers? They are playing it pretty straight with an emphasis on the incredible bravery of the policeman who removed the detonator from one car, and the narrow escape for hundreds of nightclubbers. Most are running with the line that there were warnings about this kind of attack on various Islamist websites, but there is no sense of outrage about police or government security policy. The somewhat shakey 'revenge for Salman Rushdie' theory gets an airing but only as a minor element. Most follow the Independent's description of 'London On The Edge' which is probably a fair description of the mood, although I very much doubt that crowds will be down much at either Gay Pride or Wimbledon. My wife promises to report back on public reaction after an extensive ~~shopping~~ research trip to Camden Town.



The terminology in these cases is always interesting. The Guardian called the suspects "Al Qaida-inspired", the Mail talks about how Al Qaeda has in the past targeted night-clubs, the Sun says 'Al Qaeda sympathisers were seen an Number 1 suspects'. That's all fairly restrained and sensibly qualified. None of the papers make much of their likely religion and they avoid using phrases like 'Muslim bombers'. This contrasts with page lead treatment given in the Mail and Express to the odd story about a JP who, it is implied, refused to hear a case because the accused was wearing a niqab, the all-body covering garment that Jack Straw questioned so famously.

Both the Mirror and the Sun cite the fact that this was a car bombing to raise the spectre of 'Baghdad-style explosions' (Mirror) and suggest that 'Basra Comes To London' (Sun). This is completely over the top and somewhat insulting to the superior efforts of Iraqi terrorists but I guess it just about falls within the parameters of dramatic licence in a headline. The Sun's Defence Corr Tom Newton-Dunn pursues the Basra theme:

'Just like the troops, it will be hard to walk about in central London without looking over our sholders. Can a night out in the West End ever be the same again?'

Well, we Londoners have been through this before – the IRA Hyde Park nail bomb was not so far from yesterday's attempts – and without wishing to invoke some fake 'Blitz spirit', I would suggest that some form of normality will resume. But Tom is right. Once again modern terrorism is changing the geometry of our lives and our sense of risk. I think the British media has responded well and proportionately to these latest events and wonder if the government will do, too.

If you are interested in a seminar we are holding related to these issues with journalists and key public figures, please contact me at polis@lse.ac.uk

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