

Terror leaks mystery

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2007/04/25/terror-leaks-mystery/

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Britain's top anti-terror policeman has [accused](#) the media of publishing leaks that have endangered intelligence officers lives and threatened community relations. He referred in particular to the mass [raids](#) across Birmingham earlier this year. On the morning of the raids virtually all the media appeared to have been briefed that the suspects had allegedly been part of a plot to kidnap and behead an Islamic member of the Armed Services. A grisly allegation guaranteed to put the raid at the top of the bulletins. A private POLIS seminar with journalists and policing officials had considered this kind of incident and various "sources" had been fingered including the police, Government and the Intelligence services themselves. It raises vital issues about press conduct and community relations at a time of heightened public security fears but

what exactly is Mr Clarke going to do about it? Is he implying that [Cabinet Office](#) or Number 10 leaked the allegations? That is a major allegation akin to the dodgy dossier scandal in the build-up to the Iraq War. Is he implying that some police officers leaked the facts, perhaps hoping to "prove" to local people that this was a serious raid, not a fishing expedition? Or was it Intelligence Officers showing off their prowess at uncovering a spectacular plot?

As our POLIS event showed, there is a fundamental problem with reporting terror incidents. The Police carry out the raids. They do talk on the record to the media on occasion. The Police watchdog, the [IPCC](#) investigates allegations when the raids go wrong. They also will eventually talk on the record to the media when their investigations are completed. Even Government is accountable on the record at some point to the media. All those have briefed against each other to journalists off the record in the past, so they are hardly innocent of mishandling media relations. But the people who provide the intelligence upon which these policing actions are invariably based are the Intelligence Services. And despite the greater openness on the part of MI5, including lectures by its recent former bosses [Eliza Manningham-Butler](#) and [Stella Rimington](#), it does not speak on the record to the media. The [CIA](#) and [FBI](#) both have press offices and the regularly hold press conferences and release press notices and reports. But this is the message on the [MI5 website](#) when you look for a media contact:

"Please note that we do not have a Press Office. Journalists should contact the [Home Office Press Office](#) if they have an enquiry about the Service."

Is it time for new MI5 boss [Jonathan Evans](#) to at least give the appearance of openness to try to stem the tide of leak, fabrication and suggestion?

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