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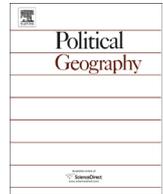
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Preemption contested: Suspect spaces and preventability in the July 7 inquest



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A B S T R A C T

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The London Coroner's Inquest into the deaths of July 7 2005 unequivocally rejected the notion that the security services could and should have been able to identify the 7/7 perpetrators as potential future terrorists before July 2005. These findings contest powerful post-9/11 security logics of preemption and anticipation that hold that security intervention is logical and desirable in the face of unknown and unspecified threats. This paper analyses the spatio-temporal work conducted in and through the Coroner's Inquest, with a specific focus on its preventability evidence. The Inquest provides a rich archive in which the potentialities for intervention and preemption, and concomitant questions of suspect spaces, are engaged, debated, accepted and rejected. This paper argues that the Inquest rendered '7/7' from a fast a familiar framing as anticipated catastrophe, into a 'matter of concern' in the sense discussed by Bruno Latour. The paper considers the ambiguous nature of the Inquest, and the way in which it both opened space for public debate and alternative conceptions of futurity; and closed down such space by accepting and normalising notions of networked threat.

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Introduction: prevention, preemption and (public) space

Between October 2010 and May 2011, the London Coroner's Inquest into the deaths of July 7 2005 took place at the Royal Courts in London. The London Coroner is empowered on behalf of the British crown to conduct investigations into the cause and circumstances of "violent or unnatural deaths", and to offer recommendations to avoid the risk of similar deaths in the future (Judicial Communications Office, n.d.). Adjourned in 2005 to give priority to police investigations, the Inquest resumed with the appointment of Lady Justice Hallett as Coroner in November 2009, with the bulk of the public evidence heard between October 2010 and March 2011. The Inquest was oriented toward what was felt to be a broad societal desire for detailed knowledge of the 2005 London bombings ('7/7') to be made public, and indeed situates itself explicitly in relation to the proliferation of conspiracy theories and 7/7 'truth campaigns' (H.M. Coroner, 2011g, p. 3).

The scope of the Inquest was defined through three "possible factual disputes": first, the immediate aftermath of the attack and the competency of the emergency response; second, possible post-July 7 failings on the part of the authorities; and third, possible pre-July 7 intelligence failings and the question of preventability (H.M. Coroner,

2010a, p. 9). Preventability, as defined in the Inquest, hinged on a multiplicity of issues, all relating to the question of whether police and MI5 had missed opportunities to identify – and to surveil, apprehend or disrupt – the 7/7 perpetrators *in advance* of July 2005. In relation to the question of preventability, the Inquest's conclusions – delivered in May 2011 – unequivocally rejected the notion that the security services *could* and *should* have been able to identify Mohammad Siddique Khan and Shezad Tanweer and their associates as future terrorists before July 2005. Coroner Lady Justice Hallett criticised the faulty logic of hindsight at work in assertions that the bombings could have been prevented or preempted, and concluded that our current knowledge about the bombers and the plot cannot be projected retroactively; as most information "was not known to the police and the Security Service before 7/7, and *could not* have been known to them" (H.M. Coroner, 2011g, p. 4, emphasis in original).

The Inquest's findings are important and remarkable in the sense that they contest powerful post-9/11 security logics of preemption and anticipation that hold that security intervention is logical and desirable in the face of unknown and unspecified threats. A growing literature in political geography and critical security studies argues that the spatio-temporal logics of the war on terror are strongly focused on the identification of possibilities and opportunities to disrupt and apprehend threat in advance of potential violence (Amoore, 2007; Anderson, 2010; Anderson & Adey, 2012; Aradau & van Munster, 2011, 2007; Cooper, 2006; De Goede & Randalls, 2009; Kessler & Werner, 2008; Krasmann, 2012; Opitz,

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2011). These authors show how our contemporary understanding of terrorism as a dispersed and largely unpredictable phenomenon has fostered a security politics marked by a precautionary or preemptive relationship to futurity, that is quite different from templates of *prevention* (Amoore, 2013; Anderson, 2010; Stern & Wiener, 2006). If prevention supposes a causal and actuarial relation to futurity, preemption is self-consciously speculative and entails an orientation to the future as ‘surprise’ (Anderson, 2010, p. 783). Put differently, preemption is less about prediction but entails an open orientation to multiple potential futures, and a valuation of action in the present *despite* incomplete knowledge or unknowable threat. With regard to terrorism, the rationalities of preemption are frequently carved out through the assessment of *past* attacks, whereby retrospective reasoning suggesting that leads, strands, and ‘dots’ of information revealed after the fact, *could and should have been* creatively or speculatively connected in advance of violence, is an important discursive strategy (Aradau & van Munster, 2011, pp. 31–51). Notably, the final report of the US 9/11 Commission largely accepted the logics of preemption, by emphasising pre-9/11 intelligence failures to ‘connect the dots’ of suspicious activity, and by explicitly encouraging security services to more actively deploy *imagination* to anticipate and act on terrorist threats (Salter, 2008).

In contrast, the 7/7 Inquest, to a large extent, questioned and disrupted the post-9/11 security logics that emphasise early intervention and preemptive possibility. It is important to note that the Inquest examined the *preventability* of 7/7, and not strictly the question of whether the attacks could have been *preempted* through the deployment of speculative or imaginative intelligence techniques. But it required hard work and conscious effort by the Coroner to maintain the strict focus of the Inquest on prevention – *contra* preemption – especially as many of the lines of questioning put before her implied that a more creative connection of the elements of information available to security services would have enabled preemption of the attacks. In particular, the discussion of a photograph of 7/7 perpetrators Khan and Tanweer, taken when they met with suspects of a different investigation about 18 months prior to their attack, came to publicly symbolise the missed moment of preemptive intervention. *Contra* these suggestions, the detailed Inquest proceedings drew attention to the contingent nature of future violences and the complex, mundane and fallible work of generating security knowledges. The Coroner in her final report deployed a legalistic stance toward the suggestive lines of questioning, and mobilised conventional paradigms of prevention and risk in her evaluation. Importantly, the Coroner underscored that taking action on the basis of incomplete and partial knowledge can be democratically problematic, and that the capacity to pursue suspect leads and associations is necessarily limited in a democratic society.

This paper analyses the spatio-temporal work conducted in and through the Coroner’s Inquest into the events of 7/7, with a specific focus on the preventability evidence. The Inquest provides a rich archive in which the logics of preemption, the potentialities for intervention, and their concomitant questions of suspect spaces, are engaged, debated, accepted and rejected. The temporal logics of preemptive intervention are inextricably tied to the practices of spatialisation within contemporary (counter) terrorism (Amoore, 2009a; Cowen & Gilbert, 2008; Elden, 2007; Gregory, 2004; Ingram & Dodds, 2007; Shapiro, 2009). Specifically, preemptive intervention hinges on the problematisation of mundane, urban, social spaces as incubating ‘environmentalities’ of violent action (Anderson, 2011). Such facilitating networks or ‘sympathiser scenes’ are spaces of anonymity and support that are thought to render terrorist action possible (Hannah, 2008, p. 68). The notion of incubating social environments holds out the

promise of the possibility of preemptive intervention in such environments to target potential attackers at the earliest possible stage.

This paper’s analysis of the spatio-temporal work of the Inquest has a dual focus. First, it considers how the Inquest *itself* established a space for public engagement and debate. The Inquest questioned the work of police, intelligence and rescue services; it rendered public minute details of the attack and attackers; it engaged the question of public responsibility and the limits of security. This paper argues that the Inquest – to some extent – rendered 7/7 from a fast and familiar framing into a complex and delicate ‘matter of concern’ in the sense discussed by Bruno Latour (2004, 2005). Second, the Inquest debated, mobilised and carved off its *own* notions of risky and at-risk spaces in the context of mundane, urban, British life. The extensive discussion of spaces of suspicion and radicalisation that took place during the Inquest are important especially for the potentialities of intervention they mobilised, accepted and rejected. In particular, the Inquest’s detailed evidence on the question of *whether* the future 7/7 bombers could have been identified in advance; and *how* security services pursue suspect leads and make decisions, is revealing for the ways in which it inscribes and rejects notions of networked threat and political responsibility.

The paper is based on a textual analysis of the transcripts and exhibits of the lines of inquiry that were central to the ‘preventability’ evidence in the Inquest. This concerns weeks 16–19 of the Inquest proceedings (February and March 2011), with special attention paid to the testimony of anonymous ‘Witness G’ of MI5, who was on the witness stand for most of week 18. Through this analysis, the paper contributes to the wider academic debates on the politics of preemption in two ways. First, the paper takes seriously and examines on its own terms the work of the Inquest, to which remarkably little social science attention has been paid to date. In general, public Inquests are understood as sites on which orders of normality are restored after disruptive or catastrophic events (Leslie, 2011; Simon, 2005). The 7/7 Inquest has been analysed in the context of contemporary cultures of memorialisation and “monumentalization” and the way in which it sought to narrate 7/7 as event and (re)instate national unity (Hoskins, 2011a, p. 274; Hoskins, 2011b). However, despite the “ethos...for...persons-as-such” displayed during the 7/7 Inquest (Edkins, 2011, p. 100), and despite the wealth of evidence rendered public, analysis of the proceedings in the context of contemporary British politics is currently lacking. In a time when security practice is marked by complexities of secrecy (Galison, 2004), the Inquest deserves serious attention as a public space that pried open security logics and rendered 7/7 intelligible.

Second, this paper contributes to ongoing academic analysis of preemptive temporalities and concomitant inscriptions of public and political responsibility. Teasing out the vibrant and detailed lines of questioning concerning the work of the security service and the potential preventability of 7/7 shows the range and limits of public discourse on these themes. Instead of asserting a broad political turn toward preemption, it shows how the possibility of intervening in advance of 7/7 was debated, contested, accepted or rejected. It teases out which lines of inquiry were successful in eliciting the Coroner’s support, which expectations of preemption were rejected, and which changes in security practice were welcomed. It reveals the hard work by the Coroner to draw demarcation lines between logics of prevention and preemption, and the way in which the Inquest yielded a notion of contingency attentive to the infinite multiplicity of leads and strands to be pursued in mundane security practice, and – arguably – to the idea that 7/7 as event is intelligible only in retrospect. At the same time however, the many lines of questioning during the Inquest, its

conclusions and its enduring archive, are inherently ambiguous and contribute in important ways to fostering notions of suspect spatialities and structuring public expectations of security intervention.

7/7 As a matter of concern

According to Angharad Closs Stephens and Nick Vaughan-Williams (2009, p. 4), the events of July 7 2005 were quickly scripted as a single and recognisable event, part of a larger sequence of global terrorist attacks that included “9/11, 11/3, Bali, Istanbul, 21/7.” This ‘fast and familiar’ framing, they argue compellingly, obscured a set of important political questions, for example concerning the “intricacies [and]...competing understandings of what happened [and]...the range of variegated responses occasioned by grief, anger and loss” (2009, p. 4). To some extent, the Coroner’s Inquest reopened the questions raised by Closs Stephens and Vaughan-Williams. Officially, the Inquest was a “fact-finding exercise,” described as “*simply* an attempt to establish the facts” (Judicial Communications Office, n.d.). However, the Coroner herself acknowledged early on in the process that the factual questions of the “who,” “how,” “when,” and “where” of the deaths are less straightforward than they might sound, and “bear different meanings” (H.M. Coroner, 2010a, p. 8). She pursued a broad definition of the scope of the Inquest and the extent of the factual inquiry, explicitly noting a societal need to engage and suppress “widespread speculation about the wider circumstances of the plot” and the proliferation of conspiracy theories (Edkins, 2011, p. 100; H.M. Coroner, 2010a, p. 4).

I suggest that it is helpful to understand the public space enacted in and through the Inquest through the conceptual lens offered in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel’s *Making Things Public* project. For Latour and Weibel, publics do not precede or pre-exist a political issues, but are actively assembled, aligned and constituted around particular narratives of concern. Latour (2005, p. 16) draws attention to the “double meaning of representation,” as both the public mediation of a (security) problem and as the term for the procedures that gather societal voices and input into the political process. “Procedures to authorize and legitimize are important,” writes Latour (2005, p. 16), “but it’s only half of what is needed to assemble. The other half lies in the issues themselves, in the *matters* that matter, in the *res* that creates the *public* around it. They need to be represented, authorized, legitimated and brought to bear inside the relevant assembly” (emphases in original). In contrast to a Hobbesian notion of a Body Politic – a fully formed citizenry consenting, or not, to the official’s gesture – Latour (2005, p. 38) offers Walter Lippman’s notion of a “Phantom Public,” understood as a public that is “fragile,” “provisional,” temporary, and drawn together through a shared attachment over a public matter. Furthermore, the assembly of the public is not, as Noortje Marres (2010) points out, a discursive exercise, but depends upon material, technical and spatial modes of assembling. The “infrastructures” of the public, for Marres (2010, p. 195), range from the space of the town hall to the technological circulations of modern media.

In many ways, the Coroner’s Inquest into the deaths of 7/7 sought to assemble a public in the sense discussed by Marres and Latour. The Inquest heard over 100 witnesses in open court between October 2010 and March 2011. The hearing was public and full verbal transcriptions of the day’s evidence were made available online almost instantly, including hyperlinks to the evidence shown in court. In fulfilling its function of publicity and public gathering, technology played a key role. As Hoskins (2011a, p. 276) has observed, the Inquest created a “new legal and state archive,” by uploading to a public website “*en masse*” detailed witness

accounts, digitised documents, weblinked shards of the original notes of rescue workers and security service personnel. Conform Marres’ notion of material publics, then, the public function of the Inquest was inextricably tied to its technological devices and the painstaking spatial work required to *gather* publics.

The character of the public gathered by the 7/7 Inquest was primarily determined through its engagement with victims, survivors and victims’ families. As Jenny Edkins has shown, in the aftermath of the bombings victims and their families were confronted with “formalist” and “instrumental” bureaucratic practices that delayed and hindered processes of mourning. Authorities gave priority to the criminal investigation and preemption of further attacks, over the identification of victims and care for their families (Edkins, 2011, pp. 87–106). In this context, the Inquest made an effort to display a different ethos, allowing “harrowing but hugely detailed” accounts of victims’ fates that rendered their lives grievable (Edkins, 2011, p. 100; Butler, 2004). The Coroner positioned herself on the side of the families and their demands, and the first day of hearings began with reading out the names of the 52 people who died (excluding the bombers) and a minute’s silence in their memory (Burns, 2010). Constituting the public around the visibility and recognition of victims is itself necessarily partial and can entail a familiar framing of the attack as ‘traumatic’ (rather than ‘political’) (Edkins, 2003). Indeed, as Hoskins (2011a, p. 274) has suggested, the Coroner was “intent on providing a definitive version of this event” that sought to satisfy families and lay to rest the proliferation of conspiracy theories. At the same time however, in keeping with Latour’s concepts, a public is necessarily emergent and incomplete. The enduring online archive, and the admittedly partial conclusions drawn by the Coroner, leave open the possibility of future publics and further interpretations and politicisations of the material.

The Coroner’s Inquest arguably rendered 7/7 from “a matter of fact” – a ‘fast and familiar framing’ – into what Latour (2004) calls “a matter of concern,” around which publics assemble and align. A matter of concern, for Latour, recognises the delicate gathering and contestability of the (political) *thing*, the multiplicity of opinions and forces constituting it, its “highly complex, historically situated, richly diverse” being. As Latour (2005, p. 21) put it, “Accurate facts are hard to come by, and the harder they are, the more they entail some costly equipment, a longer set of mediations, more delicate proofs.” The intricate and detailed Inquest proceedings, the many witnesses heard, the time taken to debate and reconstruct the sometimes minute details of security decisions (not) taken, underscore the costly and delicate nature of security ‘facts’ in relation to the events 7/7. Lady Justice Hallett carved out a broad scope for the Inquest by deploying a cascading notion of causality in explaining the deaths, and by positing that “an inquest is not limited to looking at the last link in the chain” (2010a, p. 38). Testimony exceeded that of experts and disinterested parties, but was “open to truth telling of a personal and frank nature,” by voices otherwise not often heard in the public debate, “permitting a rare kind of criticism of those in executive power” (Simon, 2005, p. 1449). This broad scope compelled testimony by Muslim community leaders as well as personal acquaintances and former colleagues of the 7/7 perpetrators – voices which would normally be silenced and reduced to the ‘sympathiser scene’ or ‘facilitating environment.’

In particular, it was Hallett’s unprecedented decision to compel the public testimony of a high official of the British Security Services that contributed to rendering 7/7 and its supposed preventability from matters of fact into matters of concern. The Coroner opined that the existing (2006 and 2009) reports of the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) – the official oversight body of the security services – were insufficiently independent to satisfy the

purposes of the Inquest (ISC, 2006, 2009). She overruled “danger to the country” arguments put forward by the government, and ordered the Security Service to testify publicly. The testimony and questioning of (anonymous) ‘Witness G’ of MI5 took place over four days in February 2011. It is remarkable for its detail: it entailed a public examination of “the raw intelligence material” (H.M. Coroner, 2010a, p. 61) and scrutinised the mundane, routine practices of MI5 field agents and desk officers. It held up to public scrutiny the threat perceptions and logics of decision deployed by the security services, and compiled an (enduring) online archive that renders visible the scraps and shards of field notes, desk files and surveillance logs that came to constitute security ‘facts’ in the months and years prior to July 2005 (for example, Fig. 1). Thus it rendered visible and publicly debatable the normally classified processes and practices of security surveillance and intelligence gathering. In this manner, the Inquest pried open a public space that – at least temporarily – reoriented the question of ‘what happened’ from the *matter of fact* of 7/7, toward the London bombings as a historically situated, inherently contested and highly complex *matter of concern*. In particular, this detailed examination of the intelligence work and its contingencies entailed a recognition of the limits to security knowledge that helped resist the idea – implicit in much of the questioning – that preemptive intervention could have stopped the bombers at an early stage.

Risky space/at-risk space

I have argued that the 7/7 Inquest sought to materialise a public in the manner described by Latour and Marres, by drawing together a public, rendering visible and debatable the ‘facts’ of security practice and establishing a national (online) archive of the event. At the same time, the Inquest debated and *itself* codified notions of risky/at-risk spaces in relation to contemporary terrorism. There is a profound duality at work in the spacings of the war on terror and the understanding of public space as potentially facilitating and incubating the terrorist threat. This duality renders suspect spaces simultaneously *risky* – and thus as targets to be hit – and as *at risk* – with populations vulnerable to radicalisation, violence and terrorist appropriation (Amoore & de Goede, 2011; Anderson, 2011;

Gregory, 2011; Gregory & Pred, 2007; Mohammad & Sidaway, 2011). The “environmental type interventions” that are developed in counter-insurgency thinking to address the incubating environment, include, according to Ben Anderson (2011, p. 225) “those pertaining to...social welfare, civilian safety [and] economic development.”

The remainder of this paper examines the spacings performed in the various lines of questioning surrounding the preventability evidence of the 7/7 Inquest. It follows Gregory (2006, p. 407) and others in understanding space as a *performative*, “a doing” – which does not pre-exist mapping and mobilisation in discourse, but which is performed and produced discursively, (re)iteratively and citationally (Bialasiewicz et al., 2007; Butler, 1997). In other words, the purpose is to tease out the “imaginative geographies” of risky and at-risk spaces that were performed – debated, contested, accepted, rejected – during the Inquest proceedings (Bialasiewicz et al., 2007, p. 417). This is done through a reading of two particular spatial notions mobilised and discussed during the Inquest. First, this section discusses the lines of questioning around the Leeds-based Iqra bookshop, that performed a very particular and local suspect space. Second, the next section discusses the lines of questioning around the connection between the future 7/7 bombers and another MI5 investigation named ‘Operation Crevice.’ This line of questioning performed an expansive notion of (transnational) networked threat. This analysis shows how notions of spatiality and preventability are inextricably connected, and how practices of preemptive security depend upon notions of suspect space.

First, then, one important line of questioning in the Inquest concerned the space, activities and networks of a Leeds-based bookshop called Iqra. 7/7 bomber Khan had been a trustee of the bookshop, which came under investigation after the bombings and was subsequently closed down. During the Inquest, a number of people associated with the bookshop were called to testify to give an account of the activities of the bookstore and its function as a social and political meeting place. It went uncontested in these accounts that the bookstore had a public and social function *beyond* the mere sale of books. However, the way in which these social functions were represented and discussed varied greatly. On the one hand, the founding trustees of the Iqra bookstore emphasised its function in the local community as a place where youngsters could “come and do their homework, go on the internet, like a drop-in centre” (H.M. Coroner, 2011a, §15). In this context, it was pointed out that there was a “lot of drug abuse going on” in the Leeds area where the bookstore was established, and that there was a need for “an outlet” or “facilities” for local youngsters to go and hang out (H.M. Coroner, 2011a, §3–4). Iqra seems to have included a library as well as sports facilities and functioned more like a community centre than a store.

On the other hand however, certain witnesses and lines of questioning carved out Iqra as a suspect space, where extremist literature was handled and that served as a distribution point for radical and inciting (video) materials. Questions pursued by the counsel of the Inquest and of the families focused on an (ideological) break between the Iqra trustees and a local mosque, and probed whether that break was due to radical and/or extremist interpretations of Islam espoused by the Iqra group (H.M. Coroner, 2011a, §17–19). One key witness, Martin Gilbertson, told of distressing and offensive video material shown on the computers of the shop, and that he, as computer expert, helped prepare. This concerned material of children “injured or killed” in various conflicts around the world, including Palestine and Kashmir, as well as material that was “anti-Semitic” and “anti-American” (H.M. Coroner, 2011b, §32–35). This witness represented Iqra as a meeting place for radical people and ideas that were “very extremist, anti-feminist, anti-gay, anti-western” (H.M. Coroner,

570 OP RAMJIS - X499 - - Book - Page 8 of 9

SURVEILLANCE RUNNING LOG

All timings are approximate

2126 hrs	Piw AT & UI male enter 56 Hencroft St.
2206 hrs	AT & UI male out of No 56.
2218 hrs	AT & 4 UI males enter No. 56
2306 hrs	AT, 2 x UI males out of No.56
2334 hrs	AT returns alone
2336 hrs	AT & UI at the front door of No.56, UI male departs carrying a bag, AT returns inside
2358 hrs	AT & 5 UI males out of No. 56
0001 hrs	V3 leads Corsa in convoy towards Albert St
0001 hrs	Windsor Rd towards Herchel St
0002 hrs	Windsor Rd northbound
0004 hrs	Corsa splits from V3 and travels east on the A4

Fig. 1. Example of inquest evidence: MI5 surveillance log, shown and discussed at 22:02:11pm, §56, <http://7julyinquests.independent.gov.uk/evidence/docs/MPS11011-95.pdf>. Reprinted with permission from the London Coroner's Inquest.

2011b, §40). According to Gilbertson, the bookstore functioned as a place of distribution for radical and inflammatory material to youngsters (H.M. Coroner, 2011b, §41–43).

The point of examining the different representations and lines of questioning around the Iqra bookstore is not to adjudicate between them. Rather, it is to tease out how public space in this case was represented as being both *risky* and *at risk*. The political activism that took place at Iqra was variously cast as legitimate – though extreme – opposition and mobilisation in the context anti-Iraq war protests, or as a nodal point for extremism and radicalisation which incited local youngsters to hatred and possibly violence. These different readings of public space versus risky space relate closely to questions of temporality and preemption: Witness Gilbertson, in particular, suggested in the press that Iqra *could* and *should* have been identified as suspect in advance of July 2005, and told *The Guardian* in 2006: “I wish I could have had some access to MI5...I probably could have got them in there, before the bombs went off” (quoted in Vuillamy, 2006). By identifying this as a ‘missed moment’ of potentially preempting 7/7, security interventions in risky and radical spaces are legitimised. Indeed, at the Inquest it was suggested that there was a failure by the security services “to understand that bubbling away in institutions, in organisations, shops, and libraries of the type that we’ve heard [about], [there is] extremist activity, extremist thoughts, people on the cusp of moving from facilitation and discussion...to attack planning” (H.M. Coroner, 2011e, p. 99). Current agendas of countering radicalisation in the UK and in the EU more widely build on such notions of suspect space, and embrace the preemptive intervention into the social lifeworlds of potential future radicals (Heath-Kelly, 2012; De Goede & Simon, 2013).

Preventability and networked space

In addition to the discussion of Iqra as a locally embedded nodal point of extremism, a second but related spatial imagination at work in the 7/7 Inquest was that of a *network* of extremists, suspects and potential perpetrators. This section hones in on the Inquest’s lines of questioning around the connections between the 7/7 perpetrators and Operation Crevice, a major MI5 investigation into a suspected terrorist bomb plot (the so-called ‘fertilizer plot’) that took place during most of 2003 and 2004, and which involved as many as 55 subjects of surveillance. Khan and Tanweer had been sighted and photographed over the course of Operation Crevice but had been dismissed as ‘petty fraudsters’ at the margins of the plot and they had not been identified and pursued. The Inquest sought to establish “whether any of [these] alleged failings contributed to or were causative of the events of July 7 2005” (H.M. Coroner, 2010b, p. 4).

This section examines the spatio-temporal performativities of the questioning related to Crevice in two stages. First, it focuses on the questions surrounding the publication of a photograph of Khan and Tanweer as they met with the Crevice suspects and the discussion surrounding this picture. Second, it examines the ensuing discussion surrounding MI5 target classification and the question why Khan and Tanweer had not been identified as essential targets after the taking of the photograph.

The photograph

A logic of preemption pervaded the questioning during the 7/7 Inquest in many ways. Public and media discourse in general and the questions raised during the Inquest in particular, suggested that there had been a number of missed opportunities to identify the future perpetrators of 2005 attacks in advance – and potentially to intervene, disrupt or pursue them. One widely circulated

photograph came to symbolise publicly the missed moment of security intervention, the potential opportunity of preemptive targeting. This image showed two Unidentified Males, who after 2005 were identified as Khan and Tanweer, at an M1 service station in February 2004, where they met with some of the Crevice suspects (Fig. 2). Audio surveillance of the meeting overhead them converse with the Crevice suspects about fraud schemes and travel to Pakistan.

The grainy picture of the future London bombers made headline news and came to publicly signify the logic of the ‘missed opportunity’: “MI5 had chance for supergrass to identify 7/7 ringleader,” headlined *The Independent* (Taylor, 2011, p. 2). “MI5 had four separate strands of intelligence on Khan before the bombings but failed to link crucial leads,” reported *The Times* (Hamilton, 2011, p. 5). Considered at the time to be “small-time fraudsters” with “minor contact” with the Crevice plotters, security authorities had not paid much attention to the men photographed in the service station, and had concentrated on other suspects whom they considered to pose a real security risk (ISC, 2009, p. 27). MI5 followed up the address and license plate of the car in which the trip to the service station was undertaken, but “nothing significant was found” and it was concluded that “there was no evidence to indicate” that these were “not innocent contact[s]” (ISC, 2009, p. 20). Khan and Tanweer remained unidentified at that time. In retrospect however, security services were severely criticised for not identifying and pursuing the men sighted at the service station, and connecting this incident to other pieces of intelligence that appeared as significant with hindsight.

The public mediation of the picture connected closely to some lines of questioning pursued during the Inquest. These lines of questioning moved beyond strict preventability, basing themselves on notions of *possibility* rather than probability (Amoore, 2013). For



Fig. 2. Khan and Tanweer at Toddington M1 Service Station, as shown and discussed in H.M. Coroner (2011d, §49), <http://7julyinquests.independent.gov.uk/evidence/docs/SYS11060-1.pdf>. Reprinted with permission from the London Coroner’s Inquest.

example, Mr Keith (Counsel to the Inquest) suggested that “it was quite possible” that the unidentified men photographed at the service station drove around with the Crevice suspects for purposes “connected to a nefarious, illegal or extremist activity” instead of just for purposes of financial fraud (H.M. Coroner, 2011d, §47, emphasis added). On the basis of their associations with Crevice suspects, demanded Mr. O’Connor (acting on behalf of a number of the families of the deceased), could it be “excluded” that “the visitors from Yorkshire [retrospectively identified as Khan and Tanweer] wanted to be members of an explosives conspiracy, that that was the reason for their visits, that attack planning, at some stage, was discussed during their visits?” (H.M. Coroner, 2011f, §11). Many questions were raised during the inquest on why the photographs of the service station were shown only in cropped form and in poor quality to an informant who was at the time in US custody (H.M. Coroner, 2011d, §43–61). Other questions were raised about the license plate and registered address of the car used to drive to the service station, a green Honda Civic, that in retrospect turned out to be owned by Khan’s wife, Hasina Patel (H.M. Coroner, 2011d, §61–62). These lines of questioning suggested that Khan and Tanweer could have possibly been identified as dangerous and potential attack planners prior to July 2005. They attempted to draw the Inquest from the realm of prevention to the realm of preemption, and suggested that a more speculative or imaginative approach by security services could have identified the unknown men sighted at the service station as potential perpetrators.

However, by entertaining the full range of preventability questions, and by forcing security services to address them explicitly and publicly, the Inquest in important ways questioned the wisdom and viability of such logics of preemption. By ‘digging beneath’ the supposed clear moment(s) of preemptive possibility, the missed opportunities were rendered into complex, situated and contingent realities in which multiple suspects and limited resources underlay complex and mundane processes of decision-making. The questioning drew attention to the “fragmentary nature of intelligence” and the contestable interpretative work required to render ‘raw material’ into actionable security facts (H.M. Coroner, 2011c, §49). Witness G of the security services admitted that it could not be entirely excluded that the men sighted at the service station posed a danger, as it could not for “anyone else involved in Crevice” (H.M. Coroner, 2011f, §11). But the M1 service station sighting became situated as part of multiple complex chains of events, whereby Crevice suspects met and engaged with many other contacts in various constellations, over the course of many months. In relation to the vast amount of intelligence material gathered in the Crevice investigation – described as “data amounting to roughly 12 times the height of Everest, if printed out and stacked” (H.M. Coroner, 2011d, §14), there had to be “a constant analysis, everyday...of who merits surveillance and, if not, what other intrusive methods do they merit?” (H.M. Coroner, 2011d, §15). Within the potentially endless investigative leads to be pursued, Khan and Tanweer – who remained unidentified at the time – were not considered to be “particularly significant,” and investigative resources were prioritised elsewhere (H.M. Coroner, 2011d, §60).

What is important about this for our analysis is not to argue that the security services’ decisions and assessments were necessarily right, but to retrieve a sense of contingency and multiplicity within the retrospectively identified ‘missed opportunities.’ The defense mounted by MI5, indeed, publicly acknowledged the complexity and contingency of drawing “lines of sight” in terrorism investigations (Amoore, 2009b). It drew attention to the “fragmentary” nature of intelligence, and the painstaking work of “gather[ing] and sift[ing],” assessing and selecting, required to turn intelligence observation into security fact (H.M. Coroner, 2011c:

§46). It reconnected the ‘missed moment’ of preemptive intervention to a complex and contingent futurity and underscored the limits of security in the face of potentially endless leads to be pursued.

Target classification

The publication and discussion of the infamous M1 photograph led to the question why the unknown men D and E (Khan and Tanweer) had not been identified and prioritised as targets for surveillance, and to a wider discussion of MI5 target classification. Louise Amoore (2009b, p. 20) has analysed the mediated, technologised and screened ways of “contemporary forms of attentiveness” that underlie security practices. She teases out the ways in which security decisions – for example, whom to surveil, question, detain – are informed by cultural practices of screening, sighting and classifying (also Amoore, 2007). Questions of *where* to focus security action and *which* leads to follow up for surveillance, investigation and transcription, were crucial to the 7/7 Inquest. Witness G was pressed to explain how security services decide, with “15 surveillance teams deployed...20 CCTV cameras installed...8000 hours of product [and] 25,000 man hours devoted to monitoring the transcription and covert searches,” which targets to prioritise (H.M. Coroner, 2011d, §14). Throughout 2004 and 2005, the Intelligence and Security Committee (2009, p. 14) had found, “MI5 were playing catch-up, moving resources from one plot to the next, whilst each time unearthing still more people of interest on the sidelines of each plot” (quoted in H.M. Coroner, 2011g, p. 11).

One artifact for structuring security attentiveness, that was at length discussed during the 7/7 Inquest, was MI5’s technology of target classification. MI5’s means and methods of target classification were described in the 2009 ISC report as operating through particular investigative categories that distinguished ‘essential,’ ‘desirable’ and ‘other’ targets of surveillance. Essential targets were those (likely to be) directly involved in attack planning, or having knowledge of terrorist activity; desirable targets were those “associated with” essential targets (ISC, 2009, p. 27). In the context of this classification, MI5’s line of sight remained fully drawn toward the Crevice plotters. As the ICS report put it, “MI5 were completely focused on how, when and where KHYAM [the lead Crevice target] was planning to detonate his bomb and who else was involved” (ISC, 2009, p. 36). By comparison, the unidentified men sighted at the service station, who were overheard to converse with the Crevice suspects about travel to Pakistan and “committing fraud” were classified as ‘desirable’ targets (ISC, 2009, p. 36) (Fig. 3).

Indeed, it was revealed during the Inquest that MI5 had difficulty recalling and accounting for the decision *not* to further pursue the identities of the men photographed at the service station. It appeared that target classifications and categories were only loosely applied within daily security practice, if at all, and that lines of sight were drawn on a more ad-hoc basis (H.M. Coroner, 2011e, pp. 143–152). Daily evaluations by desk officers of target prioritisation focused on evidence of concrete attack planning in the form of discussions of possible targets and bomb-making. In the case of Khan and Tanweer, MI5 was forced to admit that there were no “standalone records [or] documentary records” of the “assessments” made not to further pursue these suspects and so no “record of [the] reasons” behind this decision (H.M. Coroner, 2011e, pp. 153–155). It seems as if attention to the Unidentified Males was simply lost as other targets were given priority and as analysts remained focused on discussions of attack planning and bomb-making. It was this lack of contemporaneous record-keeping that would incur some of the Coroner’s most vehement critique (H.M. Coroner, 2011g, p. 23). The crucial security moment of not pursuing the future 7/7 bombers turned out to be a *non-decision*,

dissipated and dispersed within a mundane, bureaucratic security practice that was fully focused on following the Crevice lead suspects. This impression of dispersed, disembodied and indeed banal (non)decision-making inside MI5 – of whom to surveil, shadow and intercept – stands in contrast to received notions of sovereign security decisions (Adey & Anderson, 2011). It raises serious questions concerning the way in which responsibility is dissipated and effaced inside security bureaucracies (Amoore & de Goede, 2008; Huysmans, 2011).

More generally, both the *classification* and the *coverage* of essential versus desirable targets were discussed at length during the Inquest. It was discussed how MI5 has good coverage of only 6.13% of those targets classified as either essential or desirable. The fact that there was no information at all on 19% of targets deemed essential was referred to as “astounding” (H.M. Coroner, 2011d, §22). Furthermore, and despite the assertion in the ISC (2009, p. 27) report that target categories were “fluid” and that targets “might move between them,” a central point of critique was that MI5 was both insufficiently comprehensive and insufficiently flexible in its attentiveness. MI5’s surveillance focus and identification of targets was considered to be too rigorous, as during the Inquest it was suggested that references to fraud and travel to Pakistan could very well be associated with attack planning. The questions suggested that “the divide between people discussing attack planning and people discussing ancillary aspects of terrorism is a very difficult one to draw” (H.M. Coroner, 2011c, §57, emphasis added). This line of questioning emphasised the “speed and ease” with which “facilitators and hangers-on” – including “those engaged in ancillary activity...raising money for terrorism, talking about...training camps” – can transform themselves into attack planners and vice versa (H.M. Coroner, 2011c, §57–58). These lines of questioning – largely accepted in the Coroner’s final report – suggest that security services should be more flexible in their attentiveness, focusing not only on talk of targets and bombs but also on talk of travel, fraud and financing.

The novel focus on the thin line separating facilitators from attack planners, as well as the discussions on the need for more flexible target classification, perform an expansive notion of networked threat that is intimately tied to a notion of preemption. Notions of networked spatiality and the connections between local nodal points of extremism and distant associates increasingly

inform security practice, and act as devices to structure and broaden investigations (Anderson, 2011; Coward, 2009, 2012; de Goede, 2012; Jagoda, 2010). Focusing on associations of known suspects and attack facilitation – as Witness G assured the Inquest that MI5 now does more regularly – multiplies the lines of sight that can be drawn in security investigations and fosters public expectations of preemptive intervention. Witness G assured the Inquest that MI5 now focuses more on *whole networks* and groups, and described how new assessment methods produce a “broader canvas to make better judgments about the allocation of resources” allowing resources to be moved “around within the network more easily” (H.M. Coroner, 2011e, p. 91). Such ‘broader canvas’ works to draw in facilitating environments and wider networks into the field of visibility and intelligibility of security services, and inscribes sympathisers themselves with a propensity to, and responsibility for, violence. The idea that facilitators, hangers-on and silent supporters may themselves rapidly and unexpectedly become the perpetrators of violence loosens the causal logic between behavior and violence (demonstrated for example by the discussion of targets) and calls for more expansive and creative security intervention.

Responsibility and intervention

In May 2011, Lady Justice Hallett delivered her final report. The report is notable for the ways in which it configured public responsibility in relation to the preventability issue, accepting some critiques of the security service and rejecting others. The report attempts to establish a factual record of the London bombings, hoping to silence conspiracy theories (O’Loughlin, 2011). Still, the Coroner acknowledged that the factual account has not been determined in full, and declines to write the definitive story of “all of the evidence...heard or the narrative which it establishes” (H.M. Coroner, 2011g, p. 2). By creating an online archive “as a matter of public record” but leaving aspects of the narrative open (H.M. Coroner, 2011g, p. 2), the Coroner seemed to accept that establishing a definitive record is impossible if not undesirable, and that further questions and multiple narratives may still be raised in the future.

The Coroner’s final report rejected the notion that the security services *could* and *should* have been able to categorise Khan and his

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UM compares it to football, everyone plays different football, not everyone is David BECKHAM or Pele. UM refers to renting a shop then another UM refers to a brother who was going to have one year, stay, but says if you want to do a big one, we'll do a big one, set up a big company, ?mobile business, import and export. Indistinct speech. UM says his uncle knows what he's talking about, he knows ?banks and all this, ?companies, ?frauding, you lost i now and the two guys that stay for a year or two, and then you can just come up with a masterplan. Laughter UM says ?Ahmed (ph) is getting permission, get the ?guy and do it. UM says ask you uncle for a VAT number for mobile phones, (this is a serious scam you know. UM asks if it is just a limited company and if it has a VAT number. UM replies the one off the shop. Unclear speech. UM says three to six months, they have to give you (words unclear): UM says if wa set it up now (words unclear) they are going to say give me my ?rent money, (words unclear) come back here they are going to say you need to be registered on VAT, (words unclear) proper retail. UM mentions an accountant and a hundred thousand. Unclear reference to a bank account.

Fig. 3. MI5 surveillance field notes, shown and discussed at 220211pm, §52 (UM stands for ‘Unidentified Male’, later identified as Khan and Tanweer), <http://7julyinquests.independent.gov.uk/evidence/docs/SYS11068-19.pdf>. Reprinted with permission from the London Coroner’s Inquest.

associates as future terrorists before July 2005, and *could* and *should* have acted to prevent the bombings. As Lady Justice Hallett put it:

One must never lose sight of the fact that the material confronting the Security Service at the time would have comprised literally thousands of strands of intelligence of varying degrees of quality, in relation to thousands of possible contacts and hundreds of possible targets (H.M. Coroner, 2011g, p. 4).

This does not mean that the security services do not incur critique. Hallett speaks out publicly about how she was discouraged from “consider[ing] the issue of preventability” and how numerous and significant errors had been found in the ISC reports (H.M. Coroner, 2011g, p. 24). Hallett further expresses concern about processes of record-keeping at MI5, and criticises the “confusion” surrounding MI5’s methods of target classification. She notes that it was clear that the Unidentified Northern Men (later revealed to be Khan and Tanweer) who associated with the Crevice plotters were not “simply...common criminals,” but were assessed as being “possible insurgents” (H.M. Coroner, 2011g, p. 20). She severely criticises MI5 for not being able to account for the (non)decision that “prevented a more intense investigation” of them (H.M. Coroner, 2011g, p. 23).

Despite these critiques, Hallett found “significant flaws in the argument that Khan could have been identified...as an attack planner” (H.M. Coroner, 2011g, p. 22). She notes that there is a compelling but misleading *logic of hindsight* at work in the arguments that the multiple intelligence strands on Khan and Tanweer could and should have been connected in advance of the bombings. This argument, she notes, ignores other ongoing investigations and threats considered to be urgent at the time. Most importantly, it “presumes the desks of the officers concerned were clear of virtually all but the material which is now known related to Khan” (H.M. Coroner, 2011g, p. 22). In other words, the report underscores that the package with the multiple strands of intelligence material relating to Khan was collected and connected in hindsight. Hallett emphasises the elaborate work involved in pulling together those strands, through the transcription of audio files, new compilation of surveillance logs and collation of field notes. But we cannot deduce, she notes, that it would have been possible *with foresight* to collect this file, and to intervene preemptively. This emphasises the difficult work of pulling together leads and strands in security work, and takes a skeptical view of the preemptive possibilities of such work.

Furthermore, the Coroner’s final report rejects the assertion that the Iqra bookshop could have been identified as a nodal point of radicalisation and extremism, and, therefore, as a locus where preemptive intervention should have taken place. The bookshop may have been a place “visited by men with extremist views,” writes the Coroner, but there was no evidence that it was a “base for unlawful activity” (H.M. Coroner, 2011g, p. 6). “There is a world of difference...between those who promote terrorism and violence and those who simply promote their religion,” the report concludes (H.M. Coroner, 2011g, p. 6). Indeed, the Coroner reserves her most vehement critique for witness Gilbertson – who had suggested that he passed on information about the bookshop to police in advance of 2005. She judges him to be an unreliable witness, whose public statements have caused “unnecessary distress” to the families of victims.

The Coroner’s final report, in many ways, renders preventability from the stuff of conspiracy theories and widely circulated 7/7 ‘truth’ claims, to a matter of concern in the sense discussed by Latour, and a very complicated fact. The Coroner maintained a strict focus on her remit of assessing the *preventability* of 7/7, ignoring the many implicit suggestions that the London bombers could have been preempted as they perpetrated fraud, met with Crevice

suspects, or engaged politically at Iqra. By maintaining a strict separation between prevention and preemption, the report serves to contest and temper societal expectations not just of preventability, but of security preemption more widely. It draws attention to the complex and contestable work of generating security knowledge, and raises questions about the lawfulness of preemptively intervening in spaces of political extremism. Furthermore, instead of a predictable and familiar catastrophe, the detailed Inquest proceedings draw attention to the complexity and uniqueness of 7/7 as *event*. Drawing on Hannah Arendt, Jane Bennett has analysed the event as a unique and unpredictable coming together of forces. As Bennett (2010, p. 34) has put it: “the event illuminates its own past, but can never be deduced from it...like all phenomena, its sources can only be revealed retroactively.” Bennett thus contests the logics of preemption – and even preventability – of complex political events, understanding origins instead in terms of “complex, mobile and heteronomous enjoiner[s] of forces,” that can be traced backwards but not necessarily forwards (Bennett, 2010, p. 33). It is such a retrieval of contingent futurity and limited security that can be seized upon to critique the politics of preemption, and that is – I suggest – rendered palpable within the detailed Inquest materials if less so in the Coroner’s final report.

At the same time as opening a space for public discussion on the logics and value of preemption, however, the Inquest in other ways worked to close down those spaces by putting forward technocratic solutions. The Inquest, in other words, is inherently ambiguous, just as the political mobilisation of publics in Latour’s terms is fragile, unstable and temporary. Despite rejecting the preventability of 7/7 and opening questions of futurity to a vibrant debate, the Coroner’s verdict simultaneously worked to welcome and normalise certain aspects of expanded anticipatory security practice. It did so in at least two ways. First, throughout the questioning and in her final report, the Coroner notes with approval the increase in resources of MI5 and the (regional) expansion of Security Service capacity (H.M. Coroner, 2011g, p. 23). She applauds “the campaigns in the media which alert members of the public to possible suspicious activity and welcomes them to report it” (H.M. Coroner, 2011g, p. 16).

Secondly, the Coroner welcomes the broadening of target coverage and the modifications to methods of target classification that MI5 has put in place since 2005. MI5 target classification now professes to “[set] priorities...based on the threat posed by whole networks and plots” (ISC, 2009, p. 27). According to Witness G, MI5 have a “much better understanding” of “the significance of facilitation in contributing to the risk of overall ultimate attack planning” and endeavors to move its field of vision “further downstream” by paying closer attention to potential terrorist facilitators and trainers (e.g. H.M. Coroner, 2011c, §58–59). This new awareness of so-called facilitators and hangers-on inscribes the social field of suspects with the potential to undergo processes of speedy and unpredictable radicalisation. This understanding of networked threat fosters a politics of preemption and evokes promises of securability that are difficult to deliver.

In these ways, the Inquest itself contributes to a normalisation of the logic of preemptive security that is to some extent in tension with its own findings regarding 7/7 as unique and contingent event. The critical potential of the Inquest may, in other words, be temporary: the Coroner’s report closed down again some aspects of the space for public discussion and concern that the Inquest proceedings had opened up. Countering radicalisation, fostering public awareness campaigns and investing in MI5’s network surveillance capacities, on the whole, raise public expectations of preemption, and make security services more prone to undertaking disruptive intervention. In the context of these public ambitions and responsibilities, we may wonder whether it would still be acceptable

to argue, as the 2009 ISC report did, that “not everyone” a main suspect meets and associates with, “could be assumed to be part of the facilitation network” (ISC, 2009, p. 20). The longer term effects of the 7/7 Inquest thus also lie in the logic of political responsibility it evoked, and the prioritisation of following, discovering and targeting network leads (ISC, 2009, pp. 48–51).

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the UK 7/7 Inquest produced a vibrant public space where contemporary notions of preventability and preemption of terrorism played out. It has examined the spatio-temporal notions mobilised in and through the Inquest, in order to understand how it debated, accepted and rejected understandings of suspect space and public responsibilities to intervene. Rather than accepting a widespread public desire and political turn to preemption, the Inquest offered an understanding of futurities as contingent and complex, in which preemptive intervention may not always be possible or desirable.

This analysis of the 7/7 Inquest has relevance for the wider academic debates concerning the politics of preemption and risk in contemporary security practice, along at least two axes. First, it problematises the notion of a wholesale contemporary turn to security preemption, and draws attention to important public sites where such logics are contested and confounded. Such sites are not accidentally fostered through law or legal practice – law, indeed, has become a key battlefield where the logics of preemption are both contested and entrenched (e.g. Chesney, 2007; Johns & Werner, 2008; Krasmann, 2012). Law is not necessarily the antithesis to preemption – acting solely on the basis of past harm and retrospection – but is itself transformed in the face of the criminalisation of ancillary acts increasingly further removed from violence, such as financing, facilitation and incitement (De Goede & de Graaf, 2013). Courts are confronted with speculative security knowledge and invited to reflect on the possible futures of disrupted plots. The outcomes of these interactions between security speculations and established legal paradigms are of key importance to the future politics of preemption. In the case of the July 7 Inquest, we may say that the Coroner maintained a strict focus on preventability by mobilising traditional paradigms of risk-assessment and public accountability *contra* public demands for preemptive intervention into suspect spaces. This risk paradigm reinserted into debates questions surrounding the (statistical) predictability of danger and risk; cost-benefit analyses of surveillance methods and security spending; and the balance of purpose limitation and public accountability, and weighed them against widespread public demands for preemption. The significance of this confrontation between the paradigms of risk and preemption is that it challenges, reconfigures and legitimates certain aspects of preemptive intervention, while rejecting others. This moves the discussion concerning preemption beyond the (important) analyses of public discourse and (commercial) threatprint imaginations (Hall & Mendel, 2012), to study how these are actualised and reconfigured in security practice, in part through their encounter with (juridical) objects and obstacles.

Secondly, the case of the Inquest underscores how the politics of (contesting) preemption play out *through* the limits of knowledge, and invites us to explore further how these relate to notions of public responsibility and accountability. Existing analyses have done much to demonstrate how a politics of preemption both recognises the limits to knowledge and predictability, and seizes upon these limitations to transgress and spur action beyond them (e.g. Cooper, 2011). The July 7 Inquest, as I have argued, countered this ambition by drawing repeated attention to the limits of security knowledge and the fallible and painstaking work of rendering

suspect behavior intelligible. The Coroner’s report resists the notion that security services could and should have speculated beyond the limits of the material available to them. More needs to be known about the intersection between the deployment of speculative knowledge in security practice and the formulation and application of measures of public accountability. Preemptive logics foster public demands of securability that are not only difficult to temper, but that have a bearing on the very definition of public accountability, including cost-benefit measures and proportionality. Indeed, during the Inquest it was Witness G *himself* who pointed out that a world of limitless resources in which each and every potential target could be investigated and disabled “would be inappropriate in a democratic society” (H.M. Coroner, 2011c, §80).

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