

# The de Menezes Shooting in London – A Catalogue of Errors

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David Rubens

Meido Consultants Limited

The Arches,  
Maygrove Road  
London NW6 2EE

[info@meidoconsultants.com](mailto:info@meidoconsultants.com)  
[www.meidoconsultants.com](http://www.meidoconsultants.com)

**David Rubens** is MD of Meido Consultants, a corporate security consultancy.

He holds an MSc in Security and Risk Management from Scarman Institute, Leicester University, and is currently a visiting lecturer there on their Global Security and Policing MSc programme, as well as being a visiting lecturer in the Security and Resilience Department at Cranfield University at the UK Defence Academy.

[david@meidoconsultants.com](mailto:david@meidoconsultants.com)



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As described in last month's column, the response to a suspected suicide bomber moving around London in the immediate aftermath of the 7/7 and 21/7 attacks on London public transport systems in 2005 were an almost unending series of mistakes, incompetency and general lack of understanding of the requirements of a police-based anti-terrorist response team.

From the point of view of an operational management perspective, the question is not why did it go wrong, but rather why did anyone involved in the development of response options actually believe that the programme that they had developed was appropriate or effective for the mission.

One of the defences made by police spokesmen was that this was a unique set of situations. But surely, the whole point of developing a cohesive response programme is that it may only be required either once or at least in very rare circumstances, and it has to be designed to offer effective response options whatever the situation that arises. That is the purpose of the exercise!

Looking at the official reports into what happened, there are two clear and distinct areas worthy of comment. The first is that the basic management systems that were used to develop and implement any anti-terrorist response were neither sufficiently well thought-out nor sufficiently-well implemented and managed to allow them to be effective in the likely situations that they would be facing. The second area of concern was the post-incident phase when it seems clear that there is at least the suspicion that members of the police teams, at all levels of operation, colluded in order to either manage their evidence or, in certain circumstances, change and falsify their evidence in order to show themselves in the best possible light.

Given the seriousness of the situation, and the levels of resources, manpower and expertise that were brought to bear on the problem, it is significant that in the strategic briefing, Gold Commander Cressida Dick (a highly-experienced and respected officer) originally went to the wrong briefing room, and therefore missed the start of the strategic briefing.

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It is also significant that there was no formal recording of the briefing, and no audio record made, so that when differing versions of what was said in the briefing later emerged, there was no definitive record against which those statements could be measured.

The official report concluded that there was confusion at all levels of the operation, starting with the roles and responsibilities of the Gold and Silver Commanders and designated senior officers. The various teams, coming together from surveillance units, armed response units, anti-terrorist teams and the command teams themselves were not used to working with each other, and therefore there was a general lack of clarity about the way that those teams should interact, up to and including the precise meaning of the command to 'stop' the suspect.

The basic operational requirements – that everyone leaving the building where the suspect was living should be stopped upon leaving the building – was not adhered to. Six people had left the building before Mr de Menezes did, and none of them were intercepted.

There is even confusion about whether Operation Kratos, the official Metropolitan police 'shot-to-kill' policy was invoked during the operation. The official report said that in fact it wasn't, but some officers nevertheless believed that it had been.

It might be the basis of another column, but it is probably not encouraging to learn that Operation Kratos was developed with direct input from Israeli and Sri Lankan counter-terrorism units. If the Metropolitan Police authorities believe that the shoot-to-kill policies being used to target suspected Palestinian terrorists in the Gaza Strip are appropriate models for use in the streets of London, then perhaps we should be even more worried about their competency that we already are!

Given the reality of any surveillance operation (ie there is always a high possibility of either missing the target completely, or being unsure as to whether they are the person in question), it seems unbelievable that there was no risk assessment made on the possibility that there could be a mis-identification or only partial identification made, and therefore there were no clear guidelines as to what to do in the event that the response teams were unsure as to whether the identified person was in fact the target or not.

And finally, given the fact that the specific targets of the terrorists so far had been the London Underground system, no thought had been given to the fact that as soon as response teams went into the tube stations, all communication and command & control capabilities were lost.

It has been claimed by Metropolitan Police Commander Sir Ian Blair that the shooting of Charles de Menezes was a 'tragic mistake'. That may be the case, but that is not the same thing as saying that the police command teams were not responsible. The mistakes that were made were systemic weaknesses that meant that when the operation went 'live', with all of the confusion and unexpected activity that that always implies, neither the individual personnel involved nor the response system as a whole was either well-trained or flexible enough to deal with the reality of the situation on the ground. To put armed anti-terrorist officers on the streets of London carries with it a responsibility to accept the implications of that decision, and it seems clear that at every stage of this operation the policy as a whole was not thought through sufficiently to make it an effective tool for the purpose for which it was designed. In a very real sense, as was tragically proven, the operation was not 'fit for purpose'.

