

BUSH AND CHENEY RESPONSIBLE FOR FIVE SUSPECTED TERRORISTS GOING FREE

A Court in the UK just convicted three men it had charged with plotting to make bombs from bottles of liquid and explode them on planes flying over the Atlantic.

Three Britons were found guilty on Monday of plotting to kill people using homemade liquid bombs, but a jury failed to agree that they intended to blow up transatlantic airliners.

After a five-month trial, the jury found Abdulla Ahmed Ali, Assad Sarwar and Tanvir Hussain guilty of conspiring to kill "persons unknown" but were not convinced by the prosecution's case that they planned to target aircraft leaving London's Heathrow airport headed for North America.

But it failed to convict a majority of the eight men it had charged.

The jury failed to reach a verdict in the case of four other defendants and an eighth was cleared on all counts.

We'll never know, but there's a decent likelihood British officials could have convicted all the suspects had Bush and Cheney not prematurely trumped up these plans into a terror scare right before the 2006 elections. As Ron Suskind described, Bush and Cheney pushed the Pakistanis to break this, in spite of demands from the UK that the investigators allow their work to continue to fruition.

NPR: I want to talk just a little about this fascinating episode you describe in

the summer of 2006, when President Bush is very anxious about some intelligence briefings that he is getting from the British. What are they telling him?

SUSKIND: In late July of 2006, the British are moving forward on a mission they've been—an investigation they've been at for a year at that point, where they've got a group of "plotters," so-called, in the London area that they've been tracking...Bush gets this briefing at the end of July of 2006, and he's very agitated. When Blair comes at the end of the month, they talk about it and he says, "Look, I want this thing, this trap snapped shut immediately." Blair's like, "Well, look, be patient here. What we do in Britain"—Blair describes, and this is something well known to Bush—"is we try to be more patient so they move a bit forward. These guys are not going to breathe without us knowing it. We've got them all mapped out so that we can get actual hard evidence, and then prosecute them in public courts of law and get real prosecutions and long prison terms"...

Well, Bush doesn't get the answer he wants, which is "snap the trap shut." And the reason he wants that is because he's getting all sorts of pressure from Republicans in Congress that his ratings are down. These are the worst ratings for a sitting president at this point in his second term, and they're just wild-eyed about the coming midterm elections. Well, Bush expresses his dissatisfaction to Cheney as to the Blair meeting, and Cheney moves forward.

NPR: So you got the British saying, "Let's carefully build our case. Let's get more intelligence." Bush wants an arrest and a political win. What does he do?

SUSKIND: Absolutely. What happens is that then, oh, a few days later, the CIA operations chief—which is really a senior guy. He's up there in the one, two, three spots at CIA, guy named Jose Rodriguez ends up slipping quietly into Islamabad, Pakistan, and he meets secretly with the ISI, which is the Pakistani intelligence service. And suddenly a guy in Pakistan named Rashid Rauf, who's kind of the contact of the British plotters in Pakistan, gets arrested. This, of course, as anyone could expect, triggers a reaction in London, a lot of scurrying. And the Brits have to run through the night wild-eyed and basically round up 25 or 30 people. It's quite a frenzy. The British are livid about this. They talk to the Americans. The Americans kind of shrug, "Who knows? You know, ISI picked up Rashid Rauf."

DAVIES: So the British did not even get a heads-up from the United States that this arrest was going to happen?

SUSKIND: Did not get a heads-up. In fact, the whole point was to mislead the British...The British did not know about it, frankly, until I reported it in the book...

As Suskind describes in his book,

The British model is, after all, to be patient, gather sufficient evidence to try terror suspects in open court, and get long prison terms, treating it all as a criminal matter rather than a historic—and terrorist-glamorizing—clash of power and ideology. As for Rashid Rauf, the British had even more specific plans. He was wanted for murder in the UK. The Brits were preparing a case, for the Pakistani police to arrest him, and have him extradited to England for

trial, just like any murderer on the lam. Instead, he gets picked up by the notorious ISI, where he'll be either tortured or feted—depending on the ISI's complicated views of teh matter—and rendered unsuitable for public trial in the UK or anywhere else.

His arrest lights a fuse that will swiftly implode their entire investigation.

[snip]

British police slip into high gear. They race across metropolitan London, rounding up more than twenty suspects in a few hours, shutting down a yearlong operation in what can only be called a frenzy. The most knowledgeable British anti-terrorism officials are the most outraged. Before dawn breaks in the UK, they're already assessing the damage from what one calls a "forced, foolish hastiness."

That frenzied attempt to salvage aspects of their investigation—caused by Bush's desire for an election season stunt—led way to today's convictions, certainly. But it also almost certainly led to an insufficient case against at least four or five suspected terrorists, not to mention the men the Brits didn't charge.

But Bush and Cheney don't care. The GWOT for them is one rolling press conference, not a serious pursuit to be conducted as if the outcome—and not the media buzz—mattered.