

TERROR EXPERT CLAIMS ATTACK WAS INEVITABLE

BY MATTHEW PARDO
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An Academic from Bath has said the attacks on London were "inevitable". But Stefan Wolff, professor of political science in the Department of European Studies at the University of Bath, said Britain was now better prepared than ever for such horrors.

There has been no official confirmation of who was responsible for the attacks, but a claim was made on the Al-Qal'ah - Fortress - internet site, by a group calling themselves the Secret Organisation Group of al Qaida of Jihad Organisation in Europe.

Prof Wolff said: "I think what these attacks have tragically shown is that al Qaida, or one of its affiliates or allies, has created a presence in the UK.

"It has created resources and networks able to carry out a string of co-ordinated attacks in London which has traditionally proved itself relatively resilient in preventing such strikes.

"But I think this attack was inevitable to some extent.

"That doesn't mean it isn't shocking when it happens.

"London was quite well prepared - that was evident from the speedy response of the emergency services.

"What is important is not to overestimate the capacity of the terrorists to mount many more attacks of this kind.

"The security services have proved they have an amazing capacity to learn from incidents such as this and become much more effective.

"But I think that in the past several years al Qaida could have embedded itself in the UK and other European countries.

"Most of the 9/11 terrorists were from Germany which indicates the organisation had been successful in recruiting people in Europe."

Prof Wolff added that so far the most devastating attacks around the world - in New York, Bali and Madrid - had involved detailed and long-term planning, and suggested follow-up strikes were unlikely.

He said the UK's experience of coping with the threat of IRA strikes through the 1970s, '80s and '90s meant the country, and security services, were well-prepared to handle the terror threat.

But he said dealing with terrorists prepared to die for a cause was more difficult than dealing with those linked to organisations, such as the IRA.

"We should not underestimate the security threat this has generated," he said.

"It is important that people should start to rely on their common sense for what to do in the event of an attack.

"People in London seemed to react quite sensibly and we didn't see a massive stampede of victims from the explosion on the trains.

"So I think there is a high level of preparedness in the UK. What most people should now do is re-read the leaflet the Government posted through every door last year.

"It is that kind of common sense combined with not overreacting and suspecting anyone who isn't white, middle class and church-going of being a terrorist, that will allow normal life to continue in its normal way.

"And that will defeat one of the key aims of the terrorists."

Muslim leaders were due to hold talks at a national level with police today amid fears of reprisals against their community in the wake of the terrorist attacks.

The Muslim Council of Britain said it "utterly condemned" the perpetrators of the co-ordinated attacks.

A spokesman said: "These evil deeds make victims of us all.

"All of us must unite in helping the police to capture these murderers."

The Bath branch of the Stop The War Coalition said the Prime Minister's foreign policy in Iraq was to blame for yesterday's atrocities.

Group spokeswoman Diana Francis said: "Members believe that wars constitute systematic and devastating violence against other human beings.

"Wars are, ironically, justified in the name of security but violence begets violence, making terrorist attacks more, not less likely.

"Our members are as devastated as everyone else by the terrible events in London, which we recognise for what they are: large-scale crimes against ordinary people.

"Now we beg the Prime Minister to recognise that the only way we can address the real needs of people everywhere - for food, water, education, security from attack, and a planet that provides a safe home for us all - is to recognise our interdependence and to work together for the common good."

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PICTURE: Richard Lee