

PRESS RELEASE

'Al-Qaeda Arrest' Whistleblower Silenced by University

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE ON 4 May 2011

The website of the British International Studies Association [1] has removed a whistle-blowing article written by Dr Rod Thornton [2], a former soldier turned academic who served in a counter-terrorism role in Northern Ireland. Dr Thornton's article - *'How a student's use of a library book became a "major Islamist plot"'* - exposes how senior management at the University of Nottingham caused two men of ethnic minority background - Rizwaan Sabir, an MA student and Hicham Yezza, a member of staff - to be arrested and detained for six days under the Terrorism Act 2000 [3]. The removal of his article has allegedly come as a result of pressure on the website's editors by the University of Nottingham, ahead of its general release to the public and media today.

The article details how the university reported the two men to police for being in possession of three publicly available documents, all of which were available from the university's own library and, various academic and governmental websites [3]. Dr Thornton exposes how, in the aftermath of the men's release, the university's management conducted a behind-the-scenes campaign of disinformation and spin against them and their university supporters, disregarding university statutes and governmental guidance. All of this in an effort to shift blame and silence those who challenged the university's account - i.e. that the research material was illegal and the arrests were justified.

What's more, Dr. Thornton's article uncovers how Nottingham University's misinformation has seeped into policy circles. The arrest of the 'Nottingham Two' is now advertised as a 'major Islamist plot' by the Home Office [5]. Similarly, another government department calls the library books in question 'extremist material' [6]. His revelations arrive immediately after a cross-party parliamentary group published a report criticising universities for being hotbeds of radicalisation. Dr. Thornton's account, however, exposes how a university's unaccountable actions aggravate this problem.

Dr Thornton, a former counter-insurgency advisor to the British and US militaries said: "The paper is a detailed document that is carefully sourced. It tells of a very worrying incident which has serious repercussions for campus relations and for the ability of academics to fully to understand difficult issues such as terrorism. I am saddened by the removal of my paper from the BISA website. I cannot see that there is any reason for its removal other than the fact that the university is trying to prevent its secrets being publicly known, though I would hope that this was not the case."

Now a PhD student in Glasgow, Rizwaan Sabir said: "Dr Thornton's article proves that university management singled me out for differential treatment, despite my innocence. It is apparent that they and certain staff attempted to undermine my future at the university, perhaps because I would have been a constant reminder of their anti-terror cock up! The findings of this research, along with Nottingham's attempts to censor it, are damning. Such cavalier behaviour should not be tolerated in British academia. I call on the government to launch an independent public inquiry into the conduct of the university."

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/54454049/EXECUTIVE-SUMMARY-Radicalisation-by-Universities-or-Radicalisation-at-Universities-by-Rod-Thornton>

FULL ARTICLE: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/54150076/Radicalisation-at-Universities-or-Radicalisation-by-Universities-How-a-Students-Use-of-a-Library-Book-Became-a-Major-Islamist-Plot>

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Notes to Editors

[1] The article entitled “*Radicalisation at universities or radicalisation by universities?: How a student’s use of a library book became a “major Islamist plot”*” by Rod Thornton was presented at the British International Studies Association (BISA) conference in Manchester on 28 April 2011. The article was removed from the BISA website on 30 April, ahead of its general release to the public and media. While the article was originally available on the website for download prior to the launch of the conference, the BISA website (www.bisa.ac.uk) marks the paper as “Unavailable”. Dr Thornton did not authorise its removal.

[2] Dr Rod Thornton, a lecturer within the School of Politics at the University of Nottingham, is a specialist in terrorism, counterinsurgency and modern warfare. Before taking up an academic post, he was a Sergeant in the British army for nine years, serving in Bosnia and Northern Ireland. He has provided expert evidence to the House of Commons Defence Select Committee and has produced works for the Ministry of Defence, the US Department of Defence and NATO. He is the author of *Asymmetric Warfare: Threat and Response in the 21st Century* and other publications concerning issues surrounding terrorism and insurgencies.

[3] For an account of how the document came to the attention of the Registrar and the arrests, please see: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/54451596/Background-to-arrests-of-the-Nottingham-Two-in-Operation-Minerva-at-the-University-of-Nottingham-on-14-May-2008>

[4] The three documents judged to be ‘illegal’ by two members of the University of Nottingham - the Registrar and a Professor of Romance Literature - are all available from the University of Nottingham’s library. They were as follows:

- a) P. Gordon, “The end of Bush’s revolution”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 4 (2006), pp. 75-86 (*Foreign Affairs* is a US based, world-renowned, political journal).
- b) Q. Witorowicz and J. Katner, “Killing in the name of Islam: al Qaeda’s justification for September 11”, *Middle East Policy Council Journal*, 2003, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 76-92
- c) “Al-Qaeda Training Manual”, US Government Exhibit 1677-T (declassified), *Federation of American Scientists* (<http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/aqmanual.pdf>).

The same document is also available in book format from Amazon and from the University of Nottingham’s library, albeit, the document is not being actively advertised on the library catalogue (see footnote 18 of Dr. Thornton’s article). The document is also available from a number of academic and non-academic websites, including the US Department of Justice website (http://www.justice.gov/ag/manualpart1_1.pdf), albeit, now in a reduced form. Rohan Gunaratna, one of the world’s foremost experts on the

study of al-Qaeda and global terrorism wrote to Rizwaan Sabir and said that the al-Qaeda Training Manual was “required reading” for anyone studying al-Qaeda.

[5] The document which refers to the arrest of the ‘Nottingham Two’ as a ‘major Islamist plot’ was disseminated by the Home Office in April 2010 via a Freedom of Information request that asked for information on terror plots in the UK from 2006-2008. The [report](http://s3.amazonaws.com/thf_media/2009/pdf/bg2329.pdf) was authored by the Heritage Foundation in Oct 2009 http://s3.amazonaws.com/thf_media/2009/pdf/bg2329.pdf

[6] Undated document released under the Freedom of Information Act from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) entitled :‘Lines to take [to the media] on recent Nottingham arrests’. See footnote 90 and 313 of Dr. Thornton’s article.

END OF PRESS RELEASE