London Police Shoot Brazilian Following Bombing Attacks

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiSur by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.
London Police Shoot Brazilian Following Bombing Attacks

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Brazil
Published: 2005-08-12

Plainclothes detectives in London carried out what could be termed an extrajudicial killing against 27-year-old Brazilian electrician Jean Charles de Menezes in a subway station at Stockwell on July 22. The officers chased the young man onto the subway, pinned him to the ground, and shot him repeatedly in the head, apparently mistaking him for a bomber, after a series of attacks killed more than 50 London commuters and injured many more. The police killing resulted in high-level apologies and contacts between the governments of Brazil and the United Kingdom (UK), although the British government made repeated public mentions of Menezes' lapsed immigration status.

"Shoot-to-kill" policy kills innocent laborer

The British police defended the shooting of the innocent man on a subway car and its shoot-to-kill policy as Britain's political establishment rallied around the policies of Prime Minister Tony Blair in his "anti-terror" campaign. Sir Ian Blair, the London police commissioner, stopped short of an outright apology as he expressed "deepest regrets" and accepted "full responsibility" for the killing.

Menezes' cousin, Alex Pereira, who lives in London, said the police would "kill thousands of people" if they were not held accountable for what had happened at Stockwell. "They just kill the first person they see, that's what they did. They killed my cousin, they could kill anyone," he said.

Tony Blair said he was "desperately sorry" an innocent man had lost his life but also said the police must be supported. Blair added that they would have been criticized had the suspect turned out to be a terrorist and they failed to take action. London Mayor Ken Livingstone described Menezes as a "victim of the terrorist attacks. Consider the choice that faced police officers at Stockwell last Friday and be glad you did not have to take it."

On that morning, Menezes had left his apartment in Tulse Hill and boarded a bus toward Stockwell tube (subway) station to go to work, reported BBC News. He had been followed by police, who had his block under surveillance in the hunt for the group behind a set of attempted bombings on July 21 that failed to kill any Londoners. When he was challenged by police in the subway station, he fled, reportedly leaping the ticket barrier. When he got into a train car, he tripped and fell, and then a policeman leapt on top of him and shot him to death, firing seven times into his head and once into his shoulder.

The killing revealed that there had been a secret shoot-to-kill policy in effect at Scotland Yard since 2003, according to a former head of the Metropolitan Police who spoke to The Financial Times of London.
Critics say the Blair government is now seeking to further dismantle democratic apparatuses in England by setting up secret terror courts. Police, family accounts differ. In Brazil, grief-stricken relatives demanded answers to why Menezes ran and why police shot him.

Cousin Maria do Socorro Alves said she thought the police had acted "like amateurs....If you are going to have a war on terror, you have got to use brains to fight it not just brute force." Friends of Menezes in London said he had recently returned to Brazil for eight months to be with his father, who was being treated for cancer.

Fausto Soares, 26, said Menezes had been sending money to pay for the treatment and was concerned about how the family would now cope financially. The family did gain international support from human rights groups and celebrity figures like Bianca Jagger. His death drew national mourning and marches through London and Brazil.

At a July 27 appearance, relatives said Menezes was not wearing a heavy jacket that might have concealed a bomb and did not jump the ticket barrier when challenged by armed plainclothes police.

Speaking at a press conference after a meeting with the Metropolitan Police, his cousin Vivien Figueiredo, 22, said that the first reports of how her cousin had come to be killed in a mistake for a suicide bomber were wrong. "He used a travel card," she said. "He had no bulky jacket, he was wearing a jeans jacket. But even if he was wearing a bulky jacket, that wouldn't be an excuse to kill him."

Flanked by the Menezes family's attorney, Gareth Peirce, and by Bianca Jagger, the anti-Iraq war campaigner, Figueiredo condemned the shoot-to-kill policy that had led to her cousin's death and vowed that what she called the crime would not go unpunished.

"My cousin was an honest and hard-working person," said Figueiredo, who shared the apartment with him in Tulse Hill, south London. "Although we are living in circumstances similar to a war, we should not be exterminating people unjustly."

On the evening of July 25 about 300 people, many with the Brazilian flag wrapped around them, marched through the area where the incident occurred, asking for justice. A young white man carried a sign saying, "British 'values': brown-skinned blood is cheap in UK and Iraq."

Menezes came from Gonzaga, a rural town in the state of Minas Gerais about 650 km southwest of Brasilia with about 6,000 residents. About 1,500 Gonzagans have emigrated to the US and Europe in search of better opportunities. When Menezes' body returned to his hometown, a massive funeral commemorated him.

Police estimated that more than 10,000 people passed by the coffin as it lay draped with the Brazilian flag at the Sao Sebastiao Church in Gonzaga. The town's population had swelled by more than 2,000 people who came from surrounding communities and many decided to pass by the coffin more than
once, police Capt. Murilo Castro said. Homes and stores were hung with green, white, and yellow streamers and balloons. About 14,500 Londoners in the 2001 census gave their country of birth as Brazil. But some 130,000 Brazilians entered Britain in 2002, according to the National Statistics Office. The exact number of Brazilians living in Britain is unclear.

On Aug. 2, deputy assistant commissioner John Yates of the Metropolitan Police went to the town of Gonzaga with Britain's ambassador to Brazil. They were believed to have discussed compensation with Menezes' parents. There were also reports that Prime Minister Blair had called President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and given assurances that there would be an independent probe into the shooting. Immediately after the shooting.

Brazil's Foreign Minister Celso Amorim traveled to England to look into the incident. English communities of color under attack after bombings Labor parliamentarian Lord Nazir Ahmed said many Muslims in the north of England feared they could become victims of mistaken identity by armed police. And Azad Ali, chair of the Muslim Safety Forum, said many young Muslims were reluctant to leave their homes. "They fear that they're all suspected bombers," he told BBC. "We've received many emails, we've received telephone calls, about how young Muslims don't want to use the tube now."

Reports of racial violence since the July 7 bombings in London and the botched July 21 bombings have been numerous. One doctor of Indian descent was attacked with stones by a gang of youths on July 23 in Chatham, England. Ajmal Masroor of the Islamic Society of Britain said on July 25 that "the fear among the minority communities, such as Muslims, is the fear of reprisal. Many mosques have been attacked, many individuals have been attacked. One person was beaten to death."

One Londoner commenting on a forum on the BBC Web site conjectured, "A gang of BNP[British National Party]/National Front [fascist groups in England] men look very similar to young plainclothes police officers dressed in their casual clothes and trainers [athletic shoes]. In this climate there are attacks going on by violent and misguided British men on 'foreigners'. If I saw a bunch of these 'thuggish' looking guys shouting and running after me, my survival instinct would kick in and I would be off."

Other speculation about Menezes' reasons for running from police relate to his expired visa to be in the UK. Immigration documents showed he was allowed to stay only until June 2003, but Agence France-Presse said it saw a copy of his passport that showed he was allowed to stay indefinitely.

UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw sent Brazil's Foreign Minister Amorim news that Menezes' visa had expired, which Amorim said contradicted previous information the British government had given.

Some Brazilians call for UK to leave Iraq Although the Blair government has tried to separate the July bombings from its decision to join the US's pre-emptive war against Iraq, surveys have shown that popular opinion in Britain correlates the two. A suspect in the bombings apprehended in Rome also said he and fellow bombers were angry about the US-UK occupation of Iraq.
The UK's Ambassador to Brazil Peter Collecott visited one memorial to Menezes where banners said he was "another victim of state terrorism" and alleged "prejudice and cowardice." The banners also called on the UK to "Leave Iraq now!" Collecott said, "Words will not bring Jean Charles back but it is important for the family, especially for those living in Brazil, to know how deeply both the Metropolitan Police and the British government regret Jean Charles' death."

The militant Movimento do Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST), or landless rural workers movement, scheduled protests in front of the British Embassy in Brasilia and the consulate in Rio de Janeiro. The MST said in a statement that Menezes "was assassinated in cold blood, a victim of intolerance," and it called for the British withdrawal from Iraq.

-- End --