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The Woolwich killing and the responsibility of Britain's ruling elite

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The killing of soldier Lee Rigby in Woolwich, London has lifted a corner of the carefully constructed veil of lies, intrigue and criminality surrounding British foreign policy.

Immediately after Rigby's brutal murder, a chorus of political and media figures insisted that this was not the occasion for questioning the motives of his killers, Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale.

Labour MP David Lammy described "the suggestion that the murder was a direct consequence of British foreign policy" as "superficially compelling," including criticism of "my vote in favour of the invasion of Iraq."

The *Guardian*'s Jonathan Freedland attacked "liberal and left" figures for identifying a connection between events in London and the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria for having "some sneaking sympathy, not for the act itself, but for the cause it seeks to highlight."

Preventing discussion of the circumstances leading to the horrific crime of Adebolajo and Adebowale serves only to conceal the still-greater crimes perpetrated by Britain's ruling elite.

Within a matter of days, it was clear that both alleged killers had been known to MI5 for years, for a decade in Adebolajo's case. He was affiliated to the banned Islamist group Al-Mahajiroun. In November 2010, he was detained in Kenya while trying to travel to Somalia, allegedly to join the Islamist group Al-Shabaab.

On May 23, Abu Nusaybah, an associate of Adebolajo, was arrested immediately after an interview with BBC "Newsnight" in which he alleged that Adebolajo was tortured in Kenya and harassed by MI5, which asked him to become an informer.

Since then, evidence has emerged that Britain was in fact the architect of Adebolajo's arrest and actively protected him subsequently. According to the *Daily Mail*, it was an SAS unit, working with MI5, which snatched Adebolajo in Kenya as he prepared to cross the border into Somalia. A source said, "The SAS took the lead role. The reason they were involved was because this man was deemed important."

A Scotland Yard counter-terrorism officer based in Africa was "close by" as he was taken into custody by Kenya. Adebolajo was later sent back to Britain with "a Scotland Yard detective, travelling undercover," on board.

According to Adebolajo's legal representative in Kenya, he made a second attempt in February last year to travel to Somalia with five others and was detained by Kenyan authorities. The UK reportedly told Kenyan police he was "a clean man" and he was sent back once more to the UK.

Sources in Africa told the *Mail* that Adebolajo was seen in Kenya for a third time last November, in the company of a radical cleric Sheikh Hassan Makbul. On both occasions, he used a false passport.

Once again, the security services have been found to have established intimate connections with jihadist elements in order to further British imperialism's foreign policy in the Middle East and Africa.

A key factor in Adebolajo's being allowed free rein was his role in relation to Syria—and that of a broader layer of Islamists. A caller to the BBC's London 94.9 radio station, Abdullah, identified Adebolajo as campaigning recently outside a community centre in Plumstead, London for youth to go and fight in Syria. Abdullah explained, "We may not have to go there because their soldiers are here," before adding, "Success is closer than you think."

In April, Foreign Secretary William Hague acknowledged reports that more than 100 Britons were among the 600-plus Europeans that have gone to fight in Syria with groups linked to Al Qaeda, such as the Al Nusra Front. In a letter to MPs he said that such individuals were a danger, because they "will seek to carry out attacks against Western interests in the region or in Western states now or in the future."

The purpose of Hague's admission was in fact to argue the case for lifting the European Union's arms embargo on Syria in order to close down the "uncontested space" presently filled by fundamentalists with supposedly "moderate" forces armed by the Western powers.

Hague of course knows that arms sent by Britain, the European Union, the United States and its Middle East allies—such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar—are fuelling a sectarian insurgency dominated by Islamist groups they have cultivated for years. His pose was only to ensure that the war for regime change in Syria was stepped up, with the region's oil reserves as the strategic prize.

On May 28, six days after Rigby was hacked to death, the EU arms embargo was lifted as a result of a campaign led by the UK and France. The decision guarantees that innumerable atrocities no different to that carried out in Woolwich will continue to be inflicted in Syria and neighbouring Lebanon and Iraq, by jihadists acting as terror squads on behalf of London, Washington and Paris.

At home, political forces whose crimes have fuelled the anger exploited by Islamist groups—and which have been proved once more to have covertly worked with them—are using Woolwich to argue for still greater repressive powers.

Prime Minister David Cameron has launched an "anti-terror task force" to propose "practical measures" to tackle political extremism that includes the Metropolitan police commissioner, Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe, and Andrew Parker, the director general of MI5.

The government is already mooting the reintroduction of legislation requiring telecoms companies to record the time, duration, originator and recipient of all emails, phone calls, messages on social media, webmail and Internet voice calls made in the UK.

The murder of Lee Rigby is only one of many, many tragic manifestations of how decades of wars and other colonialist adventures have served to poison social and political life in Britain and internationally, pursuant to the predatory aims of the financial oligarchy.

To secure control of vital resources such as oil, gas and minerals, large parts of the world have been despoiled, impoverished and subject to brutal intervention. Meanwhile, working people in Britain, Europe and America are forced to pay the trillions of dollars these wars cost through savage cuts aimed at enriching the criminal element that now dominates society.

No one should be intimidated or confused by the "patriotic" lies and crocodile tears emanating from the ruling class and its media. In the most fundamental sense it is they who are responsible for what happened at Woolwich. And it is they who should be politically held to account by the broad masses of working people.

