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Downing Street silent over link to Iraq war

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Fri 2 Sep 2005 02.50 BST

Downing Street was in denial last night about Mohammad Sidique Khan's tape and al-Qaida's threat of further action.

A spokesman said Tony Blair had no comment about Khan's claim linking the bombings directly to Britain's participation in the Iraq war, a link which the prime minister has consistently denied.

The tape also appeared to link the attack to al-Qaida, rather than suggesting that it was the work of four homegrown bombers.

Mr Blair's immediate strategy appeared to be that any response from Downing Street would give further oxygen to the terrorists, so no comments would be issued.

New laws will make it a criminal offence to give indirect support to terrorism anywhere in the world, but there was no suggestion that broadcasting the tape could be construed as an offence.

Mr Blair had previously said the bombings in London were not linked to Britain's participation in the Iraqi and Afghan invasions. Mr Blair still insisted that the London attackers had been "driven by an evil ideology rather than [by] opposition to any policy".

He was backed by John Reid, the defence secretary, who told the BBC: "The terrorists want to kill anyone who stands in the way of their perverse ideology ... So when this report says we have made ourselves more of a target because of our involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq and our efforts to tackle al-Qaida, what alternative is it proposing?"

Mr Blair was not the only politician keeping quiet last night. Clare Short, the former international development secretary and critic of the war, had not seen the video and said she did not want to comment until she had. Denis MacShane, a former foreign minister, had seen it, but did not want to comment either.

David Davis, front runner in the contest for the Tory leadership, said after it was broadcast: "People across Britain will be sickened by this video. Nothing can justify the murder of innocent people."

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