Despite this, the logbook in the control room showed how in the space of four minutes, the police commander in charge of the operation first ordered the surveillance team to arrest the Brazilian, then directed that the firearms unit should carry out the arrest, then once again ordered the surveillance officers to do the job, finally barely a second later again instructing the firearms team to make the arrest after being told that they were at the Tube station.

Under the circumstances, it is quite understandable that the family of the victim was shocked by the recent ruling handed down by the IPCC that none of the senior officers who were in charge of the disastrous operation that led to the fatal shooting - including the police commander mentioned above will actually face disciplinary action for their conduct. Despite acknowledging that a series of "catastrophic errors" had taken place, investigators nevertheless decided that no one could be held personally responsible for the killing of an innocent man! Relatives of the Brazilian man described the decision of the IPCC not to recommend disciplinary proceedings against four senior officers as a "scandal", particularly since 11 other officers had already been cleared of any wrongdoing. Clearly, as Sir Ian's refusal to resign has already made clear, in this case the buck never stops, least of all with the person at the top.

Perhaps the most misleading aspect of the behaviour of the police in this case was their insistence that de Menezes had behaved in a strange fashion, the implication being that this contributed to subsequent events. The surveillance team claimed that de Menezes had appeared nervous, sending text messages and getting on and off buses. Apparently this suggested that he was a terror suspect, rather than simply being someone whose route to work involved taking a number of buses, and who was later discovered to have been texting a colleague to let him know that he would be late to work that day. At the trial, the defence lawyer stated that these factors explained why the Brazilian had allegedly behaved in an "aggressive and threatening manner" as armed police approached him in one of the carriages of an underground train. Perhaps the sight of armed officers approaching you when you haven't done anything would make most of us nervous?

In fact, as CCTV footage clearly showed, de Menezes had just picked up a morning newspaper and walked calmly through the Tube station in the moments before he was shot dead. There was no sign of guilt or nervousness in the footage that was shown at the trial, nor was he seen running or jumping over the ticket barriers as initial police statements had claimed. Perhaps those claims were just some of the many "mistakes" made by the police in their handling of this case. But the fact remains that no matter how many justifications are provided about the need for split-second action in order to avert potential disaster, and the inevitability that sometimes mistakes will be made, the spectacular failings of this particular police counter-terrorism effort beg the question of just how many mistakes can be made in the course of one operation!

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In addition to all the unanswered questions (and a few suspicions too ugly to articulate), further developments since the trial have done little to restore public confidence in Sir Ian Blair or the force that he heads. A recent report from the police watchdog, the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), was scathing in its criticism of Sir Ian when it was discovered that he had attempted to block its investigators from beginning an inquiry into de Menezes' shooting, because he wanted to ensure that the anti-terrorist operation to find the failed bombers who had attacked London on July 21st was unimpeded. The Chairman of the IPCC confirmed this, saying, "The Commissioner attempted to prevent us carrying out an investigation" (UK Independent).

And the pressure on Sir Ian has only intensified in recent days, after it was revealed that an internal inquiry is looking into allegations that six million pounds in expenses has gone missing from the Metropolitan Police coffers over the past three or four years. Detectives are alleged to have paid for holidays, jewellery and lifestyle essentials such as flat-screen televisions on American Express credit cards issued by the force in order to book accommodation and flights during police investigations.

As a final bitter twist to the story, Scotland Yard has confirmed that two detectives have been arrested on suspicion of theft they are believed to be members of the SO15 counter-terrorism squad. So all in all, the Metropolitan Police record on counter-terrorist activities leaves a lot to be desired... ■