

UK government deploys military following Manchester suicide bombing

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Last night, Britain's terror threat level was raised to "critical," its highest level. Prime Minister Theresa May declared that further attacks could be imminent in the aftermath of the suicide bombing Monday night of the Ariana Grande concert at the Manchester Arena.

Up to 5,000 military personnel are being deployed to police key locations. May has triggered "Operation Temperer," devised in secret in 2015 under Prime Minister David Cameron, when May was home secretary. The plan was subsequently leaked to the press.

The June 8 general election will now proceed under the barrel of a gun.

The Manchester bombing is a horrific crime. The bomber, 22-year-old Salman Ramadan Abedi, packed his device with nails, nuts and bolts to inflict the maximum carnage on his victims, taking 22 lives and injuring almost 120, some gravely. The fact that Grande has a predominantly youthful audience meant that 12 of the dead were children, including the youngest named so far, Saffie Rose Roussos, who was only eight years old.

But the grief and anger this barbaric act engenders make it all the more necessary to maintain one's critical faculties in the face of the unprecedented moves undertaken by the government. As so often before, the latest terror bombing is being used to advance a right-wing political agenda, giving rise to questions as to the degree of foreknowledge and even active involvement of the state.

Abedi's name was made public Tuesday evening after raids by armed police, evacuations and a controlled explosion in his Fallowfield south Manchester neighbourhood. It has already been confirmed that he was known to the security services, but was supposedly not considered to be a threat.

This type of evasive response, meant to explain why nothing could have been done to prevent the tragedy, has no credibility. The same excuse was offered in so many

previous incidents—most infamously in the November 2015 Islamist attack on the Bataclan concert hall and other sites across Paris, which killed 130 people. The press later revealed connections between the Paris bombers and the perpetrators of the March 2016 suicide attacks on the Brussels airport and subway, and the fact that the police were familiar with many of those involved.

Only this week, the informant Claude Hermant implicated the French state in the January 2015 attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* satirical magazine. The perpetrators of what remains Britain's most deadly terror attack, in London on July 7, 2005, were also known to the police and clearly protected by the security services.

Even after such revelations, things always remain "murky" and are never properly investigated. Little wonder, given that the groups involved are invariably the political creation of the major imperialist powers—used to further their predatory interests abroad and legitimise the repressive measures imposed at home in the name of the "war on terror."

The growth of Islamist terror groups is the by-product of the endless series of imperialist wars waged since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and escalated since the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and now Syria have provided the breeding ground for the bitter resentments on which the Islamists feed and then channel in such a deeply reactionary direction.

These groups are often considered allies before later being deemed to be enemies. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has claimed responsibility for the suicide nail bombing. Its origins lie in the 2003 US-British invasion and occupation of Iraq. ISIS began life as Al Qaeda in Iraq, the product of the Sunni insurgency that emerged after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. It shifted to Syria in 2011 thanks to the US-led efforts to destabilise and overthrow the regime of Bashar-Al Assad through the arming and funding of Islamist militias.

Abedi's parents were Libyan refugees opposed to the Gaddafi regime and have reportedly returned to Libya following Gaddafi's overthrow and brutal murder. Regime change there was again orchestrated through an alliance of the imperialist powers with Islamist groups, including Al Qaeda.

In the course of these wars, the MI5 and MI6 security services have built up extensive knowledge of and connections with the followers in the UK of Islamist terror organizations.

Faced with this record of state criminality, nothing should be accepted at face value regarding the official narrative of the events of May 22. However, it is not necessary to prove direct state involvement to understand the ends for which the attack is being used.

On Monday, May and her despised government were in political crisis. She has tried to centre the June 8 snap general election on her claim to be a "strong and stable" leader compared with Labour's Jeremy Corbyn, who is denounced as a threat to national security. But this was derailed by popular disgust at her plans to force pensioners to sell their homes to pay for social care.

In the aftermath of the suicide bombing, all election campaigning was called off and remains suspended today, while May is left to speak unchallenged as the supposed guardian of the nation's safety. Rupert Murdoch's the *Sun* wrote baldly that the bombing "has put terror front and centre of this election campaign. It will shine a light on the character of those seeking to lead this country." The newspaper described May as an "ex-Home Secretary [who] has the experience and authority to respond." It called Corbyn a "sniveling IRA fanboy."

The dangers posed by these developments were underscored by *Daily Mail* columnist Katie Hopkins' call for a "final solution" to the problem of terrorism—a term infamously used by the Nazis to describe the Holocaust. *Telegraph* columnist Allison Pearson tweeted, "We need a State of Emergency as France has. We need internment of thousands of terror suspects now to protect our children."

Events in Britain are indeed following the pattern set in France, where a state of emergency has been in force since 2015. It is just one month since the presidential elections there took place at gunpoint, with over 50,000 police and soldiers stationed at polling booths. The reason given was the murder of a police officer by Karim Cheurfi, a career criminal supposedly acting on behalf of ISIS. Cheurfi was well known to security and intelligence agencies, yet was left free to carry out his deadly assault.

The parallels are striking. That assault took place under conditions where rising anti-war sentiment, following the April 7 US air strike on Syria, had benefited "left" candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon. The political hysteria whipped up and Mélenchon's prostration before it were used to refocus official debate on "antiterrorism"—helping to ensure that right-wing candidate Emmanuel Macron and neo-fascist Marine Le Pen went through to the final round.

The escalating turn to domestic repression in the UK is bound up with the preparation of new and even bloodier imperialist crimes. The Manchester attack provided US President Donald Trump with an opportunity to deliver a thuggish speech from Israel demanding that "terrorists and extremists and those who give them aid and comfort" be "driven out from our society forever."

What this means in practice is the pursuit of war in Syria in an alliance with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other sponsors of Sunni terrorist movements. May is up to her neck in these plans, promising that the first act of a newly elected Conservative government will be to put a vote before parliament in support of military action against Assad.

On Thursday, May travels to a NATO summit in Brussels to be addressed by Trump in his first NATO appearance. The US president was already demanding US-led action on terror and increased military spending from the European powers. He will now be presented with a golden opportunity to urge support for a regional Sunni alliance, led by the US and Israel, against Shiite Iran.



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