

UK and US mount damage control operation over Manchester bombing

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Recriminations between Britain and the United States over leaks from Washington in the aftermath of the May 22 Manchester suicide bombing have given way to combined damage control.

There has been no crisis in US-British relations on this scale in recent memory. US intelligence from the first moments leaked crucial details to the media about Salmand Abedi, the suicide bomber.

Prime Minister Theresa May and Home Secretary Amber Rudd both demanded of Britain's closest military and intelligence sharing ally that the leaks stop.

As a result, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson flew to Britain Friday to discuss the crisis and held a joint press conference with UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson. Tillerson said, "We take full responsibility for that and we obviously regret that that happened."

The conference was held after May met Trump at last week's NATO summit in Brussels, during which she would have raised that the leaks were an existential threat to her government whose poll numbers were collapsing ahead of the June 8 snap general election. On Sunday, Trump, after stating that those who leaked the information would be "prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law," tweeted that May "was very angry that the info the UK gave to US about Manchester was leaked."

US Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly told NBC's *Meet the Press* Sunday, "I believe when you leak the kind of information that seems to be routinely leaked—high, high level of classification... I think it's darn close to treason."

Behind the leaks is no doubt the ongoing factional warfare within the US ruling elite—giving the reference to treason an ominous coloration.

Britain's scathing criticism of the US, even with their much-vaunted "special relationship" called into

question, is because the leaks are so explosive and destabilising.

The initial leaks set off further revelations, including by French intelligence, indicating that the UK's domestic intelligence agency MI5 knew Abedi and allowed him to travel to Syria and Libya without hindrance.

The May government's own damage control operation has begun with the launching of two inquiries by MI5 into Abedi. The first, according to the *Guardian*, began last week on the spurious grounds of aiming "to quickly identify any glaring errors" regarding Abedi.

The second is to "look at the decision-making around Abedi before his attack."

The *Guardian* reported a source who said "the key question, given what is now evident about the danger Abedi posed, would be: 'Would different decisions be made?'" It added, "The longer review will look at the processes and systems used to assess suspects and what was known about any of the other main conspirators."

It is already clear that what is being prepared is a cover-up. Abedi and his family were not only intimately known to British intelligence, but were used by them in 2011 as part of the British-backed regime change operation that resulted in the overthrow and murder of Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.

Rudd quickly gave her a seal of approval to the inquiries, telling *Sky News* Monday, "As a first step, it is absolutely right." This was in answer to the question, "Are you happy that MI5 should be investigating themselves?"

Rudd refused to comment on the information already available about Abedi and his family's connections to British intelligence. "There's a lot of information coming out about what happened, how this occurred,

what people might or might not have known... We shouldn't rush to make any conclusions at this stage," she said.

The damage control operation also requires a ratcheting up of political dissembling to divert the public's attention from the Manchester atrocity and establishing the truth about who is responsible. To this end, the only issues of security the Tories are prepared to countenance discussion on is Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn's alleged connections to Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Army more than three decades ago!

Government representatives and their media backers have in addition issued a series of hysterical anti-Corbyn diatribes—based around the accusation that he is a danger to national security—following a speech last Friday in which he suggested politely that Britain's aggressive foreign policy was connected to the growth of terrorist attacks in the UK. Corbyn stressed this in order to persuade the ruling elite that what was required was not a retreat from foreign interventions, but a "smarter way to reduce the threat from countries that nurture terrorists and generate terrorism."

On Monday, the *Daily Mail* published an editorial that did not once reference the Manchester bombing just days earlier, but targeted Corbyn and his Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott.

Headlined, "Corbyn, Abbott and a threat to our security", it railed against "Corbyn's attitude to terrorism that should ultimately disqualify him from ever being prime minister."

Speaking about deaths as a result of terrorism—which flowed from Britain's centuries long occupation of Ireland—the *Mail* declared, "[M]any victims and their families have been unable to move on. These are not trivial issues to be brushed aside—they are central to our national security."

The government has been joined in the attacks on Corbyn by Labour right-wingers, along with a co-ordinated offensive by sections of the military. This is an escalation of attacks on Corbyn first made when he became Labour leader and was met with comments from an unnamed "serving general" that there would be a "mutiny" if he was allowed to come to power—given his declared opposition to the UK's Trident nuclear weapons system and criticisms of NATO.

The *Sunday Express*, under an inflammatory

headline, "Corbyn is calling all Our Boys murderers," aired the comments of Colonel Richard Kemp, who commanded British troops in Afghanistan and General Lord Dannatt, the former head of the British Army.

Kemp said, "It's a despicable thing to suggest that, while they were risking their lives in Afghanistan, they were actually complicit in the terrorist act that caused the deaths of 22 innocent people." He added, "We must face the fact that Jeremy Corbyn as prime minister would simply aid our enemies. He would rather support the likes of Hamas--every bit as fundamentalist as Islamic State—than oppose these extremists."

Dannatt said Corbyn was espousing "outdated left-wing views" in an "extraordinary intervention just three or four days after a terrorist outrage."

He warned, "And let's not forget that this is the man who had admitted that if he became prime minister, he would never press the nuclear button, so our nuclear deterrent would be rendered utterly useless."

"For a country like Great Britain, one of the permanent members of the [UN] security council, a leading major power within NATO and Europe, it is very isolationist to say we are not going to get involved," he added. "There will be circumstances in the future where we will just have to get involved."

The government is covering up everything it can and throwing dirt at its opponents to prevent any genuine examination of the Manchester bombing. But this is not a scandal that is so easily swept under the table. That night saw 22 people killed, including many children. Many more are still critically injured. Yesterday it emerged that Tony Walter, a 52-year-old man who worked at a legal firm in London had killed himself at home within hours of Abedi's bombing. Walter was a survivor of the London terrorist bombings of July 2007, in which 52 people were killed. He was within feet of one of the bombers when he detonated an explosive device on a Tube train after it left Edgware Road station.



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