

British Navy evacuated Manchester bomber Salman Abedi from Libya in 2014

Robert Stevens
2 August 2018

The *Daily Mail* has published further damning evidence that Salman Abedi, the suicide bomber who killed 22 people and injured many more in Manchester Arena in May last year, was protected as a British intelligence asset before committing his heinous act.

In articles published Tuesday and Wednesday, it revealed that Abedi and his brother received British government assistance and fled Libya onboard a Royal Navy vessel, HMS Enterprise, in August 2014, less than three years before Abedi bombed the Arena. “The Royal Navy was tasked with picking them up, along with other British nationals, on a list provided to sailors,” the *Mail* wrote.

Abedi’s presence aboard the ship was known to the highest levels of the British state. Then-Prime Minister David Cameron was personally informed.

This information has been hidden from the public, including the families of those Abedi killed and maimed, for over a year.

Abedi was rescued with 110 other British citizens, escorted to the Mediterranean island of Malta, and finally flown back to Manchester where he lived. Among those allowed on HMS Enterprise was Abedi’s brother, Hashem—who is currently in Libya and suspected of participating in the planning of the Arena bombing.

These revelations leave no doubt that Abedi and his circle were given a free hand to do whatever they wanted. They could travel unhindered between the UK and Libya because they were part of an Islamist terror network cultivated by British intelligence services and successive governments, as part of their regime-change operations in Libya and Syria.

The *Mail* articles repeat the official government narrative that although Abedi had been a Suspect of Interest (SOI) and previously known the intelligence agencies—being actively investigated as early as January 2014 and again in October 2015—he was not considered a

threat at the time he carried out the Arena bombing.

The newspaper’s reporters claim that at the time they were evacuated from Libya, the brothers “were on holiday.”

Who are they kidding? The Abedi brothers were in Libya fighting in a brutal civil war—in which Britain played a central role—that had previously resulted in the overthrow and murder, in October 2011, of the country’s leader, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.

When the war began in 2011, the Conservative government of David Cameron joined US and French efforts to topple Gaddafi. They allowed members of the Al Qaeda-linked Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) to travel to Libya in 2011. Abedi’s parents were both LIFG members, as were other anti-Gaddafi Libyans in his neighbourhood in south Manchester. Those who previously had control orders restricting their movements—during a thaw in UK-Libyan relations—had the orders lifted as London swung against Gaddafi.

Everyone knew what Abedi’s family were doing, with their Manchester group at the centre of operations funnelling rebel fighters into Libya. As a former anti-Gaddafi fighter told the *Middle East Eye*, “The majority who went from here [the UK] were from Manchester.”

However, the *Mail* report undermines the official narrative it repeats. It notes:

* The Abedi family “lived in the Whalley Range district of Manchester on the same street as another LIFG member, Abd al-Baset Azzouz, an expert bomb-maker.”

* “The Abedi brothers shuttled back and forth between Manchester and Tripoli because their parents, Ramadan and Samia, had returned to Libya.

* “Ramadan [their father] is thought to have gone back in time for the 2011 revolution, allegedly fighting against the Gaddafi regime with the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.”

* “[S]alman was hardly some idle tourist caught up in

the mayhem. Though born and bred in Britain, Abedi went on his school holidays to the war in Libya, where he may have learnt to kill as a 16-year-old.”

* Contrary to the claims of the British government and intelligence services, immediately prior to his jaunt aboard HMS Enterprise, “Other sources have claimed Abedi was on the front line and was hospitalised fighting alongside jihadis in Ajdabiya, eastern Libya.”

It is inconceivable that anybody in a war zone would ever be able to board a Royal Navy vessel and be transported hundreds of miles without being thoroughly vetted. Indeed, the *Mail* confirmed Wednesday, “The information [on the soldiers lists of who boarded HMS Enterprise] was subsequently passed on to Number Ten [Downing Street to Cameron], the Foreign Office and the Home Office.”

A contemporary report by *Sky News* states that the *Enterprise* “was moored offshore as her survey boat, Spitfire, collected people from the Port of Tripoli. A detachment of armed personnel, usually Royal Marines, provided force protection to the ship in the event of attack.”

According to Wikipedia, the *Enterprise* was involved in another operation of this kind, and “Over the course of two lifts, *Enterprise* evacuated a total of 217 civilians and landed them safely in Valletta, Malta.”

Sky reported that the evacuation followed a “similar scenario in 2011 during the uprising [against Gaddafi] when HMS Cumberland, a Type 22 frigate, evacuated foreign nationals and refugees from the civil war.”

This week’s revelations follow a by-now familiar pattern regarding terrorist attacks. From the 9/11 attacks in the US, to more recent atrocities in France, Belgium and the UK, it subsequently is revealed that the perpetrators were well known to the intelligence agencies.

Everything is being done by the British state to conceal the central issues involved in its protection of Abedi and its other assets. An article Wednesday by BBC Home Affairs correspondent Dominic Cascian asks: “Does this new fact raise questions about whether anything could have been done earlier to identify Salman Abedi as a threat—and stop him before he attacked?”

In the face of all evidence pointing to a massive cover-up, Cascian concludes that there is nothing to see here: “At the moment, it looks like it was a quirk of history, rather than a missed opportunity.”

In response to the *Mail* articles, published in arguably the most right-wing newspaper in Britain, Security Minister Ben Wallace said: “[Labour leader Jeremy]

Corbyn and his cronies often try to link terrorist attacks to UK foreign policy,” adding, “The Manchester bomber was saved, sheltered and supported by the United Kingdom when we went to the aid of the people of Libya. His thanks was to attack our citizens. It has nothing to do with foreign policy and everything to do with the twisted ideology of Daesh [Islamic State] and Al Qaeda.”

In December, a review was published of contacts MI5 and counter-terrorism police had with Abedi and other terrorists involved in attacks in London last year. The report by David Anderson QC noted that 1,150 pages of “detailed and highly classified documents provide a comprehensive account of the handling of intelligence prior to each attack,” but that these were not available to the public.

The report said nothing about the Abedis being protected aboard HMS Enterprise. This begs the question: How much more material revealing the extent of state collusion with the Manchester bomber and other terrorists is also being withheld? The *Mail* noted that Anderson “declined to comment when asked if he knew about the Royal Navy rescue when he compiled the report and why it was omitted.”

The *Mail* cites a “Whitehall source” who declares, “Salman Abedi was not a national security threat at that time.”

“The scope for [the Anderson report] was to look at what was known beforehand and decisions made in relation to intelligence. *It was not to look into his journeys to and from Libya, of which there were many.*” [Emphasis added]



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact