

# UK Intelligence and Security Committee admits Manchester bomb attack should have been prevented

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Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) has stated that the MI5 intelligence agency made a series of mistakes in its handling of the case of Salman Abedi, failing to prevent him from carrying out a horrific terrorist attack.

Abedi detonated a bomb at the end of a packed Ariana Grande concert in Manchester Arena on May 22, 2017, killing 22 people and injuring over a hundred.

The ISC's report stated that, "there were a number of failures in the handling of Salman Abedi's case and, while it is impossible to say whether these would have prevented the devastating attack on 22 May, we have concluded that, as a result of the failings, potential opportunities to prevent it were missed."

MI5 accepted that they "moved too slowly."

In reality, the report and all such admissions are tailored to hide a host of damning facts about Abedi's relationship with the British state that explain why such supposed "mistakes" were made.

The ISC is composed of tried and trusted MPs and Lords selected by the prime minister and sworn into the Queen's Privy Council. Its "investigation" is meant to complete a whitewash begun in December 2017 with a report on UK terror attacks by David Anderson QC—building on the cover-up launched in the hours after the attack.

Immediately after the bombing, Prime Minister Theresa May claimed Abedi was a "lone wolf", only known to the security services "to a degree." Two D-Notices (a request to the press not to report on a particular issue) were issued over the attack and were for the most part slavishly obeyed by the mainstream media. Information soon emerged, mostly via the US, that tore the government's claims to shreds.

It was revealed that the FBI had warned MI5 in January 2017 that Abedi belonged to a North African terrorist group looking for a political target in Britain. Then it was reported that Abedi was in contact with a Libyan Islamic State battalion and that he had twice visited in prison the convicted terrorist and fighter in Libya and Syria, Abdal

Raouf Abdallah, which would have triggered extensive security checks as a matter of course.

Abedi regularly travelled from his home in Manchester to Libya to visit his parents, who were members of the anti-Gaddafi Libyan Islamic Fighting Group—which is closely tied to the British state. He is reported to have fought with Islamist forces himself. Actively investigated by MI5 in January 2014, Abedi soon had his case closed, to be reopened in 2015 and closed again within one day. At the time he detonated his bomb, four days after returning from a trip to Libya, he was supposedly not considered a threat.

Anderson's December report was designed to cover for the security services in the face of these incriminating disclosures. He previously defended GCHQ's mass surveillance of the entire population in a BBC documentary and paved the way for the Snoopers' Charter with the report, "A Question of Trust." He wrote, "It is not the purpose of the internal reviews, or of this report, to cast or apportion blame." The case of Abedi outlined was cast in terms of "tragic" mistakes only noticeable "in retrospect."

Anderson made no mention of the fact that came to light in August this year—that Abedi and his brother had actually been evacuated from Libya aboard a Royal Navy ship in 2014, with the personal knowledge of then Prime Minister David Cameron. He refused to comment on whether he had known about the evacuation when compiling his report and, if so, why he had chosen to omit it.

The only conclusion to be drawn from the available evidence is that Abedi was viewed as an intelligence asset, allowed free rein to participate in jihadist formations aligned with British imperialism in the Middle East and North Africa. Only this explanation makes sense of the incredible "lapses in security" revealed by the ISC, whatever combination of fact and fiction they may be.

According to the committee, Abedi's two visits to Abdal Raouf Abdallah in Altcourse prison brought "no follow-up action" and were "not passed to MI5." He was never

referred to the government's "Prevent" strategy—meant to prevent people being radicalized by "extremism"—and did not have his travel monitored or restricted.

Another security "failing" caused "serious concern" due to its "highly sensitive security aspects" and will only be revealed only to the prime minister in a classified report. Concealing this information strongly suggests that it is highly incriminating and possibly relates to Abedi's role as an asset in the operation to topple Gaddafi. Theresa May was home secretary at the time when the security services allowed LIFG members to travel to Libya, providing them with passports after they had been previously confiscated and giving them security clearance as part of the military operations to overthrow Gaddafi.

Abedi was never referred to Prevent, yet in 2015-2016 over a thousand schoolchildren were referred to its "deradicalization" programmes. The UK is a world leader in mass surveillance and had direct links with multiple Libyan Islamist militias. These "errors of judgement" were part of a deliberate policy.

The ISC's members know this is precisely how MI5 and MI6 operate: maintaining and protecting networks of jihadist fighters, who can be deployed against Middle Eastern and African governments. If some go rogue and kill British citizens, then that is considered collateral damage.

This pattern was confirmed in October, when head of counter-terrorism policing Neil Basu said that fighters returning from Syria were no longer considered the biggest terror threat to the UK. According to the UK's own counter-terrorism strategy documents, around 900 British nationals of "national security concern" are thought to have travelled to Syria, and 40 percent of them are thought to have returned.

Basu's comments prefigured a statement from Chief of the British General Staff General Mark Carleton-Smith last weekend. Smith declared that the threat from terrorism paled in comparison to the threat posed by Russia. Having served as a bogeyman to justify endless wars of intervention and attacks on democratic rights, "the terrorists" are now far more helpful as allies in proxy wars against rival powers—above all Russia.

The only ISC recommendations likely to be enacted are those which use state-created atrocities as an excuse for yet greater state surveillance and censorship in connection with rapidly escalating militarism. The report states that communication companies were failing to fulfil their duty to detect terror planning online and suggested government pressure be brought to bear.

Home Secretary Sajid Javid jumped at the opportunity, saying "We have updated our counter-terrorism strategy, introduced new legislation to allow threats to be disrupted

earlier and have increased information sharing with local authorities. We are also ensuring technology companies play their part by stopping terrorists from exploiting their platforms."

The media passed over the ISC report with nothing more than a "so what", with no further reporting on it after 24 hours. The BBC and the *Guardian* said nothing of Abedi's extensive connections with Britain's Libya campaign in their coverage. BBC home affairs and security correspondent, Dominic Casciani, provided an apologia for MI5, writing, "The big problem is that intelligence on suspects is fragmentary. A British-Libyan young man travelling to Libya is not the stuff of red alerts."

The Labour Party maintains its silence over Britain's deadly imperialist intrigues. Instead of questioning the government about its relationship with Abedi, Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott used the ISC report to call for more police and security: "This raises serious questions for the entire policing and security system, not simply MI5 alone. These questions include the proper identification, prioritisation and prevention of terrorists, which is an increasingly integrated process, involving multiple agencies, or at least it should be. But this government has undermined policing with cuts of 21,000 officers. And community policing, the frontline ears and eyes on the ground in the fight against terror, has been hardest hit."

Survivors and those bereaved by the Manchester attack criticised the government and intelligence agencies. Survivor Robby Porter is considering taking legal action against MI5. "This could have been stopped," he said, "and we're finding out now that it should have been stopped."

#### *The author recommends:*

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