

# UK intelligence agencies exonerated of responsibility in London Bridge terror attack

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An inquest jury found this week that the three men who killed eight people in the June 2017 London Bridge terrorist attacks were lawfully shot dead by armed police officers.

On June 3, 2017, the three Islamists—Khuram Butt, Rachid Redouane and Youssef Zaghba—drove a van into pedestrians on London Bridge before exiting the vehicle and stabbing numerous people in a 10-minute rampage through the Borough Market area.

Given that evidence was presented showing that police gave them warnings before shooting, it was fairly clear that a “lawful killing” verdict would be the outcome of the inquest into the deaths of the three—who were confronting the police with 12-inch knives when they were killed.

The inquest into the deaths of the terrorists followed the inquest into the eight victims last month, which failed to answer many unexplained questions as to how and why the perpetrators were able to commit such atrocities unhindered.

What soon emerged after the London Bridge attacks is that the ringleader, Butt, was well known in advance to the intelligence agencies.

Once again, the main question posed by these legal processes is how close are Britain’s security services to Islamist terrorists, who have now carried out multiple attacks on innocent civilians in the UK?

Throughout the inquest, the bereaved families heard a litany of evidence of what is routinely termed by a compliant media only as “a string of errors” and “missed opportunities” by police and intelligence agencies—leaving Butt to plot the attack free from any interference by the state.

In the face of this damning evidence, the chief coroner of England and Wales, Mark Lucraft QC, said, “My finding is that the pre-attack investigations of MI5 and SO15 [the Metropolitan police’s Counter-Terrorism Command] were generally thorough and rigorous. On all the evidence ... I am not persuaded that investigative opportunities were lost which could realistically have saved the lives of those who died.”

The families presented evidence before the inquest showing that the attacks could and should have been

prevented. A barrister for six of the eight bereaved families accused both MI5 and the police of missing “opportunities galore” to identify the perpetrators and prevent the attack.

Butt had been investigated by MI5 since 2015 over concerns he wished to stage an attack. The inquest heard that investigators inexplicably “failed” to spot Butt’s association with his fellow attackers, nor the fact that Butt was working at a gym and an Islamic school that were both owned by another alleged Islamist extremist.

As Gareth Patterson QC told the Old Bailey court on behalf of the victims’ families, “Straightforward investigative work would have revealed these things.” He said there was a “fairly damning list” of failings, noting, “The attack planning was going on for some time and was there to be detected, it was eminently detectable and these eight tragic deaths did not need to happen.”

Patterson explained that preparations for the London plot over several months were missed repeatedly. In particular, “Evidence of attack planning can probably be dated to the meetings of 7 March 2017 and the purchase of the operational telephone on around 15–17 March 2017.”

“This means,” said Patterson, “that there was a period of months during which an attack could have been detected. It is submitted that there is a ‘substantial chance’ that a higher level of monitoring would have detected such planning. It is important that the paucity of actual evidence of attack planning, in the context of a failure to investigate, is not used to suggest that there was no evidence that might have been uncovered through proportionate investigative steps.

“The truth is that the eight people who died relied, as we all do, on the police and Security Service to keep them safe,” the barrister said. “Regrettably,” he continued, “they did not discharge their duty when dealing with this dangerous man, Khuram Butt. Insufficient steps were taken to prevent the attack.”

Refusing to accept that the authorities were in any way responsible for the attackers being able to fulfil their plans, the coroner sought to deflect culpability from them and criticised Butt’s family for supposedly failing to inform the

authorities. But it is a matter of record, with the inquest hearing the evidence, that Butt's brother-in-law did in fact call police to warn them of Butt's intentions. But according to the official narrative, this information was supposedly "mishandled" and failed to reach the teams in the counterterrorism command and at MI5 investigating Butt.

Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu disputed claims that opportunities were missed. Citing the coroner's findings, Basu told the press, "Even those closest to the attackers, and we have heard from them during the inquest, knew nothing of their murderous plans." This is exactly the state defence Patterson argued was untenable. The state say they could not be expected to locate a plot because there was no evidence, while failing to explain why they refused to look in the first place!

After hearing the coroner's conclusions, family members took to the steps of the court to insist that they believed the police and MI5 had failed in their collective duties.

Philippe Pigeard, father of victim Alexandre Pigeard, said "Many of Butt's actions are unknown by the investigators, even though they were supposed to have him under investigation. The question is: could this attack have been prevented? The answer is really difficult—but yes, probably. I think they could have done a better job."

Christine Delcros, the girlfriend of victim Xavier Thomas, said, "I believe this attack was preventable. I find it staggering that Butt, a well-known extremist, was allowed to work within the London transport network, to have access to and teach young children, and to rent and use a vehicle in a manner now too often encountered. I am dismayed SO15 did not pass this critical information to any of his employers."

Just months after the London Bridge attacks, an investigation into that and three other terrorist attacks by the UK's former independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, David Anderson QC, concluded that three of the six attackers were well-known to MI5.

One named by Anderson was Salman Abedi, who committed the Manchester Arena bombing, in which 22 people were killed just days before the London Bridge attacks. A mass of classified information was withheld from Anderson's report, but it is widely known that not only Salman Abidi, but his entire family were implicated in the atrocity, including his parents and brother, Hashem Abedi.

Hashem Abedi was in Libya at the time of the Arena bombing but was detained shortly afterwards and this week was finally extradited to the UK to face charges in relation to the attack. He appeared in court Thursday after being charged with the murder of the 22 and denied any involvement.

Unlike many other perpetrators of terrorist attacks, Hashem Abedi—someone with intimate knowledge of the

Manchester Arena bombing—is not dead as a result of it. Any ensuing trial has the potential to reveal the intimate relationship between the British state and those it has enlisted for years in Islamist circles to take part in proxy wars on its behalf.

Last year the *Daily Mail* published further damning information about these connections, revealing that Salman Abedi was a protected British intelligence asset before committing his heinous act. The newspaper reported that Abedi and his brother received British government assistance and fled Libya—in the midst of the Libyan civil war—on board a Royal Navy vessel, HMS Enterprise, in August 2014. This was less than three years before Salman Abedi bombed the Arena. The *Mail* reported that the Abedis' presence aboard the ship was known to the highest levels of the British state, including in Downing Street.

All these events are a devastating condemnation of imperialism. The major imperialist powers created the conditions for the radicalisation of Islamist elements, on a right-wing basis, who were then used as foot soldiers in proxy-war operations. They have systematically worked with such forces, not as enemies but allies—in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. In turn, these Frankenstein monsters invariably respond by launching savage attacks, with working people being the main victims.

*The author also recommends:*

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[7 December 2017]



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