

Suspected assailant in Reading terrorist attack was known to UK intelligence agencies

Robert Stevens
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Within 24 hours of the stabbing to death of three people in a park in Reading on Saturday evening, it emerged that the alleged assailant was known to the intelligence agencies.

The assailant stabbed six people in Forbury Gardens, located in the centre of the Berkshire town, and three injured had to be airlifted to hospital. Two of the injured have been discharged and the other is in a stable condition under observation. The first victim to be named was teacher James Furlong. He was the head of History, Government and Politics at the Holt school in nearby Wokingham.

Witnesses and police officers immediately tried to help those stabbed, performing CPR as they lay dying and covered in blood.

Following the attack, police arrested a 25-year-old man in nearby Friar Street, a short distance from Forbury Gardens, after receiving a call at 18.56 BST from a member of the public.

Although the authorities have not yet confirmed the name of the person arrested, multiple news sources identified him as Khairi Saadallah, a 25-year-old man understood to be a Libyan national. According to reports, Saadallah had been granted asylum to live in the UK and had previously been in prison in the UK for a minor conviction, not related to a terrorist offence.

Citing a source, the *Guardian* reported Sunday evening, “The Libyan refugee held over the multiple killings in Reading was on the radar of the security services in the middle of last year...”

“Khairi Saadallah, 25, was under investigation as a person who might travel abroad ‘for extremist reasons’, but sources indicated that the inquiry was closed relatively quickly without any action taken as no genuine threat or immediate risk was identified.

“The intelligence agencies believe Saadallah had

mental health and violence problems, the sources said.”

The BBC reported that the attacker was made known to MI5 in 2019. Saadallah was brought to the attention of the security services, a source told the broadcaster, as they understood he had aspirations to travel abroad, “potentially for terrorism.”

The BBC added, “When the information was further investigated, as the first stage of looking into a potential lead, no genuine threat or immediate risk was identified. No case file was opened which would have made him a target for further investigation.”

After stating Saturday that they are not treating it as a terrorism incident, the local police force, Thames Valley police, declared the attack a terror incident Sunday morning. The investigation is now under the control of Counter Terrorism Policing South-East. The head of counter-terrorism policing, Metropolitan police assistant commissioner Neil Basu, said, “From our inquiries so far, officers have found nothing to suggest that there was anyone else involved in this attack and presently we are not looking for anyone else in relation to this incident.”

It is known that the attack began shortly after 7 p.m., after the assailant entered Forbury Gardens in central Reading and started stabbing people.

It is reported that the attack was witnessed by over 40 people.

Lawrence Wort, a 20-year-old eyewitness, said, “The park was pretty full, a lot of people sat around drinking with friends, when one lone person walked through, suddenly shouted some unintelligible words and went around a large group of around 10, trying to stab them.

“He stabbed three of them, severely in the neck, and under the arms, and then turned and started running towards me, and we turned and started running.

“When he realised that he couldn’t catch us, he tried

to stab another group sat down, he got one person in the back of the neck and then when he realised everyone was starting to run, he ran out the park.”

Police officers chased the man, tackled him to the ground and arrested him.

Later Saturday evening, armed police officers and counter-terrorism forces entered a block of flats on Basingstoke Road in Reading. A loud controlled explosion at the flats was heard by bystanders just before 1 a.m.

If the assailant is Saadallah, it would be the second terrorist attack carried out in Britain by a Libyan national—who was known to UK intelligence agencies—in the space of three years.

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On May 22, 2017, Salman Abedi detonated a shrapnel-laden improvised explosive device in the foyer of Manchester Arena after a concert by Ariana Grande, killing 22, many of whom were children, and wounding 116. Salman Abedi and his brother, Hashem—who helped to plan the operation—were both well known to the intelligence agencies prior to the attack. Salman Abedi was first investigated by UK intelligence services as far back as 2014. In January 2017, four months before the Manchester bombing, the FBI—after it had placed Abedi on its terrorist watch list—informed MI5 that that Abedi was part of a North African cell plotting to strike a political target in the UK.

The Abedis were protected assets of the British state, allowed to travel to and from Libya without hindrance because they were part of a network of Libyans who were working as proxy forces for British imperialism. The father of the Abedi brothers, Ramadan Abedi, was a member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), an Al Qaeda-linked group opposed to Libyan leader Colonel Gaddafi. Ramadan Abedi was one of a number of LIFG members based in the south Manchester area. Salman Abedi travelled to Libya in 2011 and as a 16-year-old child soldier fought alongside his father in the military operations to overthrow Gaddafi in a regime-change operation carried out at the behest of the US and Britain.

The most damning evidence on the protection afforded by the British state to the Abedis was revealed by a *Daily Mail* article published in 2018. It reported that as the civil war intensified, Abedi and his brother,

Hashem, received British government assistance and fled Libya *onboard a Royal Navy vessel, the HMS Enterprise*. This rescue operation happened in August 2014, less than three years before Abedi bombed the Arena. The newspaper reported, “The information [on the soldiers’ lists of who boarded HMS Enterprise] was subsequently passed on to Number Ten [Downing Street], the Foreign Office and the Home Office.”

In comments reported by the *Daily Mail* Saturday, “a cousin” of Saadallah, who lives in Libya and did not want to be named, said, “Khairi had been to the UK a number of times but at the end of 2012 he travelled there as a tourist and decided to stay and claim asylum.

“He was at risk of extremists in Libya because he liked to drink and socialise and didn’t really lead a strict religious life at all.

“He did get in trouble in England and could be aggressive but I can’t ever imagine him getting drawn into something as serious as this.”

He claimed that Saadallah had converted from Islam to Christianity two or three years ago. “He started going to church and had tattoos all over his body including one of a cross on his arm. I haven’t had contact with him since that time.

“He lived in Manchester first and now lives in Reading. I think the authorities in Britain have tried to send him back to Libya but he doesn’t want to go back. He’s been in the UK for about seven years so is practically British now.”

Saturday’s attack is the third terrorism incident in the UK in just over six months to have involved mass public stabbing attempts.

As with all such instances, the government is already moving to clamp down further on democratic rights. Prime Minister Boris Johnson responded to the attack saying, “If there are changes that need to be made to our legal system to stop such events happening again, we will not hesitate to take that action.”



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