

# Reading terror suspect fought in US-British proxy war to overthrow Libya's Gaddafi

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Khairi Saadallah has been named as the main suspect in the murder of three people stabbed to death in Reading's Forbury Gardens on Saturday evening. Three others were injured in the attack, with all now released from hospital.

Saadallah was arrested on suspicion of murder on Saturday and was later re-arrested under Section 41 of the Terrorism Act 2000.

The second and third victims of the attack were named on Monday, after the first—teacher James Furlong—was named Sunday. Pharmaceutical worker Joe Ritchie-Bennett, aged 39, was killed. Originally from Philadelphia in the US, Ritchie-Bennett had lived in the UK for 15 years. The third victim was David Wails, a senior principal scientist at global chemicals company Johnson Matthey. It appears Wails knew the two other victims, as they were together in the park and he was connected to them on Facebook.

It emerged within hours that Saadallah, aged 25, was known to the intelligence agencies. Last year, he was placed on MI5's "long list" of around 40,000 people, who are monitored as potential terrorists. The *Guardian* reported that "Saadallah...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." A source told the BBC that Saadallah wanted to travel abroad, "potentially for terrorism." The *Sun* was told by a source that "Saadallah was on MI5's radar for a few months last year over his aspirations to travel to Syria." Police closed their investigation into Saadallah after just two months.

Saadallah was released from HMP Bullingdon prison in Oxfordshire 18 days ago. He had been jailed last October for a total of 25 months and 20 days for

various non-terror-related offences dating back to November 2018. On appeal, his sentence was reduced to 17 months and 20 days in March 2020. Saadallah served less than half of his sentence before being released. The PA news agency reported that Saadallah had six previous convictions for 11 crimes between June 2015 and January 2019.

By far the most significant information that has emerged is that Saadallah and his family have connections to the British-based group of Libyans who were opposed to the rule of the country's then-leader, Colonel Gaddafi. Many of these lived in the Manchester area—the location of the UK's largest Libyan community—and travelled to Libya in 2011 as part of a proxy force for US and British imperialism in the bloody regime-change operation against Gaddafi.

Yesterday, the *Daily Telegraph* reported, "Saadallah lived in Manchester when he arrived in the UK and former neighbours in Reading suggested he moved in the same circles as Salman Abedi, who carried out the Manchester [Arena bomb] attack, when he lived in the North West."

Another *Telegraph* report stated that "Saadallah was about 18 when he moved to Bury, studying computing and communications at college, and living with friends. He told fellow students he had been in the military in Libya and had killed people fighting against Col. Gaddafi." Bury is part of the Greater Manchester conurbation, nine miles north of Manchester.

The *Telegraph* added, "He told friends in the UK that he had fought as a child soldier to overthrow Colonel Gaddafi." The newspaper quoted a friend who said, "He would describe himself as a Libyan soldier and said he had escaped [from Libya] because he didn't want to be in the army."

The *Guardian* reported that "Neighbours said a close

family member of Saadallah's had fought in Libya against Gaddafi."

Several sources including the *Telegraph* report that Saadallah arrived in the UK in 2012 as a refugee from Libya. In 2018, he was granted leave to remain in the UK for five years despite having convictions for violence and having reportedly arrived in the UK illegally.

Salman Abedi and his brother Hashem were responsible for killing 22 men, women and children, and wounding 116 in the foyer of Manchester Arena after a May 22, 2017, concert by Ariana Grande. Salman Abedi detonated a backpack full of explosives, killing himself in the process.

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 proxy forces for British imperialism.

The father of the Abedi brothers, Ramadan Abedi, was a leading member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), an Al Qaeda-linked group opposed to Gaddafi. His son Salman travelled to Libya in 2011 and as a 16-year-old child soldier fought alongside his father to overthrow Gaddafi.

The Abedis and other LIFG fighters travelled to and from Libya at will. In 2014, as the civil war raged, the brothers received British government assistance and fled Libya in August 2014 onboard a Royal Navy vessel, the HMS Enterprise. According to the *Mail*, "The information [on the soldiers who boarded HMS Enterprise] was subsequently passed on to Number Ten [Downing Street], the Foreign Office and the Home Office." Less than three years later, Abedi bombed the Manchester Arena.

As details emerged yesterday of Saadallah's involvement in the war in Libya, the media quickly focused on his mental instability as the central motivating factor in Saturday night's attack.

Official documents provided to the *Guardian* and other newspapers reportedly revealed that Saadallah had post-traumatic stress disorder and a personality disorder and had previously been detained under the Mental Health Act. The *Times* reported that Saadallah "had made erratic claims, including that he had fought for and against Isis. His comments were assessed by other officials as being linked to mental health problems." The newspaper added, "Officials outside

MI5 assessed that he did not subscribe to an ideology and did not have a belief system, although he suffered from mental health issues."

The *Telegraph* took the same angle, with an article headlined, "Khairi Saadallah boasted about fighting in Libya but had mental health issues, friends claim." The *Mail* reported, "Saadallah was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and delusional and paranoid schizophrenia, requiring medication before his release, a source told the Sun." The BBC's home affairs correspondent Daniel Sandford was "told by neighbours of the suspect that he once threw a television out of a top floor window and was regularly visited by a mental health key worker."

Saadallah's actions undoubtedly reflect an unhinged mental state—one entirely consistent with being pressed into service as a child-soldier in Libya's brutal civil war. He and others have returned to the UK as ticking time-bombs, protected by the British state.

Whatever further information emerges about Saadallah's mental health, there is no innocent explanation for his kid gloves treatment by the British state. Despite being on the radar of the intelligence agencies as recently as the middle of last year, "potentially for terrorism," MI5 deemed he did not meet the threshold for an investigation or even for the opening of an active person-of-interest file.



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