Cover-up continues of Manchester Arena suicide bombing

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The state-orchestrated cover-up of the Manchester Arena bombing has deepened, after survivors lost their appeal to attend a forthcoming public inquiry as "core participants."

This follows a decision last September by coroner Sir John Saunders that inquests into the 22 fatalities could not proceed. Saunders will chair the inquiry, which replaces the inquests, to begin September.

On May 22, 2017, Salman Abedi blew himself up in the foyer of the Manchester Arena after a concert by singer Ariana Grande. The horrific blast killed 22 and injured hundreds, including 600 adults and 340 children, as they were making their way out of the concert hall.

In a judicial review this month, Dame Victoria Sharp, the President of the Queen's Bench Division, and Mr Justice Garnham, upheld the decision of inquiry chairman Sir John Saunders to deny the survivors the status of "core participants".

Turning down the original application Saunders had declared, "The injuries, trauma and personal tragedy that the survivors have suffered cannot be overstated and I fully appreciate that this application is borne of the desire of the survivors to ensure that the reasons for the attack are fully understood, the adequacy of the emergency response is examined, and that lessons are learned."

Counsel to the inquiry Paul Greaney QC made less of a pretence of sympathy, stating that including the survivors might prolong the hearings.

Ruling against the survivors at appeal, Dame Victoria Sharp lamely declared their application "out of time" as it was submitted several weeks beyond the 14-day cut-off date after Saunders' decision on April 21.

"We would in any event have refused permission to apply on the ground that the claim itself is not arguable," she said, without explaining why. A full explanation has been promised at an unspecified date.

The survivors, many of whom received life-changing injuries, were seeking the same rights as the police, government, and bereaved families, who will be core participants. While the survivors will be called to give evidence at the inquiry, they will not have legal representation and thus have no control over proceedings or influence over the issues raised.

Martin Hibbert, the closest survivor to the bomb blast, has been left paralysed from the waist downwards after suffering 22 shrapnel wounds. "We were the lucky ones," he said, "We were there and we survived. So we've got a lot of information that we feel is imperative for a thorough investigation so lessons can be learned. We are perplexed as to the ruling given what we've seen, what we've heard and what we've been through."

Representing the 56 survivors, Saoirse de Bont, Associate Solicitor at Irwin Mitchell, described the decision as "hugely disappointing." The ruling resulted in "our clients who were seriously injured feeling like they will not have a voice at the public inquiry."

Since the fateful incident that shattered the lives of so many, the government has been intent on depriving survivors, bereaved relatives and the public, any knowledge about the background to this immense crime.

Salman Abedi, 22, detonated the bomb, with the help of his brother Hashem Abedi, but ultimate responsibility for the murders extends beyond them to the British ruling class and their intelligence agencies. The act of terror on that night at the Arena was a by-product of UK foreign policy in the Middle East. The victims were collateral damage.

In March this year, Hashem Abedi was found guilty

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along with his brother of the murders, as well as one count of attempted murder and conspiracy to commit an explosion.

The trial heard the Manchester-born brothers worked jointly sourcing the material, including chemicals, screws, and nails to make bombs that would cause as much injury as possible. Over five months, they used 11 mobile phones, and despite neither of them having a driving licence, freely transported components around Manchester in several vehicles. After the blast, police identified Hashem's fingerprints in a car and locations where traces of explosives were found.

At the time of the blast, Hashem was in Libya where he was arrested the following day. He was extradited to the UK two years later.

As coroner of the Manchester Arena inquest, Saunders ruled the inquests would not proceed after Counter Terrorism Police indicated material relating to the bombing was classified and not open to public scrutiny. His decision followed "public interest immunity" (PII) applications by Conservative Home Secretary Priti Patel and Counter Terrorism Police North West requesting vital intelligence material be excluded from the inquests.

Saunders said the information to be withheld was "relevant and central to the matters that fall to be investigated." He continued, "Accordingly, my provisional view is that an adequate investigation, addressing fully the statutory questions… could not be conducted within the framework of the inquests."

He added that "to make public those matters would assist terrorists in carrying out the sort of atrocities committed in Manchester and would make it less likely that the Security Service and CT [counter-terrorism] police would be able to prevent them."

What is being covered up is that the atrocity committed at Manchester Arena could have been prevented. Saunders admitted as much, saying that the government and police were withholding information that "relates to the issue of whether the attack by Salman Abedi could have been prevented by the authorities."

The brothers were well known to MI5, which had been informed by the FBI months before the attack in Manchester that Salman Abedi was planning a terrorist attack. It was also reported that he was in contact with a Libyan Islamic State battalion, and that he had twice visited imprisoned convicted terrorist and fighter in Libya and Syria, Abdal Raouf Abdallah.

Salman Abedi regularly visited his parents in Libya. His father Ramadan was a member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which was linked to Al Qaeda and closely tied to the British state. The father and sons are understood to have fought with Islamist forces against Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi as proxy forces of US and British imperialism in a savage regime change operation. Salman Abedi was investigated by MI5 in January 2014, but the case was closed, then reopened in 2015, and closed again within a day. Four days after a final trip to Libya, he blew himself up at the Manchester Arena. He was not officially considered a terrorist threat.

In 2018, the *Daily Mail* reported that as the civil war in Libya intensified, the brothers fled Libya onboard a UK Royal Navy vessel, the HMS Enterprise. The Abedis were clearly protected assets, given free rein in Libya, Syria, and the UK.

In November 2018, parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) issued a whitewash report stating 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" and made mistakes.

The ISC investigation was intended to complete the cover-up of the UK's murderous foreign policy dealings, begun with the publication of a report in December 2017 by David Anderson QC.

Hashem Abedi is due to be sentenced in August. Aided by the silence of the Labour Party, the Conservative government hopes that by the end of the inquiry all uncomfortable questions about events leading up to the Manchester Arena atrocity will be silenced and the survivors and bereaved, like the victims of Grenfell and the Hillsborough football stadium atrocity, denied justice.

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