

Manchester Arena bombing inquiry delivers cover-up “in the national interest”

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“...the bereaved families are entitled to know all of the evidence, except in so far as it would damage national security to disclose it publicly.” Sir John Saunders, Inquiry Chairman

The final report by Sir John Saunders from the inquiry he led into the Manchester Arena terrorist bombing is a state cover-up. It conceals the role of MI5, MI6, the Ministry of Defence and successive British governments in the grooming and protection of far-right Islamists who were deployed to achieve imperialist foreign policy objectives in Libya and throughout the Middle East.

Saunders’ final volume released last week includes a “closed” report whose content and findings are being withheld from the victims’ families and the British public because it “contains material that would be damaging to national security if it were to become public.”

On May 22, 2017, Salman Abedi detonated a bomb inside Manchester Arena killing 22 people at an Ariana Grande concert. His youngest victim, Saffie-Rose Roussos, was just eight years old. Most of the other victims were young.

Saunders’ “Volume 3: Radicalisation and Preventability”, purports to examine the causes of Abedi’s terrorist atrocity, and whether it could have been prevented by Britain’s security services. His carefully circumscribed finding of an undisclosed “missed opportunity” for investigating Abedi, including “a failure by a Security Service officer to act swiftly enough” (also unidentified) secures a finding that “It is not possible to reach any conclusion on the balance of probabilities or to any other evidential standard as to whether the Attack would have been prevented.”

Family members of those killed have spoken out in response. Caroline Curry, whose 19-year-old son Liam Curry died in the blast, told the press, “From top to bottom, MI5 to the associates of the attacker, we will always believe that you all played a part in the murder of our children.”

Andrew Roussos, father of Saffie-Rose said, “MI5, for me, had most of the blame”. The domestic intelligence service had “22 pieces of information about Salman Abedi” but had failed to act.

Roussos has instructed lawyers to investigate grounds for a lawsuit against MI5 over its failure to stop the bombing, and several other families are reportedly willing to join a class action against Britain’s domestic intelligence agency. Roussos has campaigned tirelessly, alongside other families, stating previously, “MI5 has blood on its hands”.

What are they hiding?

The Manchester bombing occurred at the height of the 2017 snap general election triggered by the Brexit crisis. It was seized on by Conservative government Prime Minister Theresa May to bolster her re-election on national security grounds, beating the patriotic drum and

pouring hundreds of armed British troops onto the streets. After Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn timidly suggested a connection between British military interventions in the Middle East and the rising threat of domestic terrorism—a phenomenon known as “blowback”—he was branded by senior military and political figures as an apologist for terrorism and a threat to national security who must never become prime minister.

The campaign against Corbyn, spearheaded by the Parliamentary Labour Party, reached fever pitch, stoked by corporate and state media outlets and the military. Colonel Richard Kemp, who commanded British military forces in Afghanistan, insisted, “Jeremy Corbyn as prime minister would simply aid our enemies”, while General Lord Dannatt, former head of the British Army, declared that a Corbyn premiership would threaten Britain’s security. Their comments ratcheted up threats by senior military figures after Corbyn’s election as party leader in September 2015, when an unnamed general threatened a “mutiny” by the armed forces if Corbyn ever became prime minister. Chief of defence staff, Sir Nicholas Houghton, had spoken of the “worrying constraints” of parliamentary consent.

The execution and timing of the Manchester Arena bombing, carried out by an individual known to the military and security services, raised sinister issues. The *World Socialist Web Site* warned that the democratic rights of the working class were endangered by the ensuing campaign against Corbyn, which sought to subvert the election and criminalise opposition to Britain’s filthy military operations in Libya and the Middle East.

While Corbyn refused to challenge the state forces raised against him, public sentiment against May’s government hardened, fuelled by widespread suspicion of a cover-up. Leaks from US and French intelligence agencies revealed within days that Abedi was a known terror threat. US sources claimed the FBI had warned MI5 that Abedi was planning to attack political targets in the UK.

At the general election on June 8, the Conservatives lost their overall majority and were forced into a confidence and supply agreement with Northern Ireland’s Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). Labour gained 30 seats, winning 40 percent of the vote, its highest increase in vote share since 1945 when it defeated Churchill’s government in a landslide victory after World War II. It was the closest contest between Labour and the Conservatives since the 1974 general election, held in the midst of strikes by miners and dockworkers, which Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath lost under the slogan, “Who rules Britain?” Corbyn’s popularity reflected an underlying leftward shift in the working class, which Britain’s ruling class feared he would be unable to contain if he were elected prime minister. The bomb that tore through Manchester Arena created the conditions for a state witch-hunt aimed at intimidating the working class and concealing the truth. Corbyn offered no resistance to this state conspiracy.

Britain in Libya

Saunders concluded the intelligence agencies had no forewarning of the Manchester bombing, but his report provides ample evidence of a terrorist atrocity planned and executed virtually under the nose of MI5. The 22-year-old Abedi worked with Islamist fighters who were trained, armed, and financed by the British state and NATO to topple Libyan leader Muammar and install a puppet regime.

British imperialism has a long and bloody record in Libya. The north African country was placed under British and French occupation during World War II, with nominal independence granted in 1951 under King Idris bin Muhammad al-Mahdi as-Senussi, whose regime, bankrolled by the US and Britain, was overthrown by Colonel Gaddafi's 1969 military coup. Gaddafi's bourgeois nationalist regime took over the holdings of British Petroleum and ultimately controlled around 70 percent of domestic oil production. But the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 ushered in three decades of imperialist violence as the United States asserted military dominance over the oil-rich Middle East, opening a renewed scramble for Africa.

While Gaddafi believed he could find a place in this new world order, especially after Tony Blair's 2004 "deal in the desert", he was instead assassinated in 2011 by Libyan "rebel" forces backed by the US, Britain and France.

Saunders' report found Abedi's actions were driven by "noxious absences and malign presences". Dr. Matthew Wilkinson, an expert in Islamist extremism, testified about Abedi's background, "I have never seen such a complete picture of the petri dish absolutely brimming with germs". His analogy captures the lawless and toxic character of imperialist foreign policy and its diseased domestic repercussions.

The inquiry found, "the Abedi family holds significant responsibility for radicalisation of SA and HA" (Abedi's younger brother Hashem Abedi is serving a 55-year prison sentence for his role in the mass killing). The family's connections with Islamist terror groups in Libya—including al-Qaeda, February 17th Martyrs Brigade and Islamic State—are described by Wilkinson as a "malign presence" in the brothers' lives. Saunders writes, "The long-running conflict in Libya represents the critical background to SA's journey to radicalisation."

All the more striking then that his final report rules the issue off-limits, evading any examination of the role played by the British government, military and intelligence agencies in Libya, "The interaction between various factions involved in the Libyan civil war, which began on 17 February 2011 is 'dizzily complex' and beyond the scope of this report."

Salman Abedi's family had extensive contacts with Islamist terror groups in Libya, although Saunders' report provides only the sketchiest outline. His father Ramadan Abedi was offered political asylum by the British government in 1993 and granted citizenship in 2007, despite his connections to known terrorists. In passing, Saunders notes that Ramadan Abedi was "friends" with Abu-Anas al-Libi, an al-Qaeda commander linked to the 1998 terrorist bombing of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. Abedi's sons were photographed with al-Libi's sons in military uniform and carrying weapons in 2011, most likely with the February 17th Martyrs Brigade.

The entire Abedi family travelled freely between Libya and Britain throughout the civil war. In 2014, Britain's Royal Navy war ship MHS Enterprise evacuated the Abedi brothers from Libya "because extremist militias were fighting in the area" (Saunders). The report is silent on the subsequent debrief they reportedly made to military and/or intelligence officers. It was during their repeated visits to Libya from 2011 to 2017 that Salman and Hashem Abedi joined rebel training camps, "and it is probable they obtained some form of training and assistance in how to

build a bomb".

The British military spent £212 million supporting Libyan rebel forces in 2011, according to then Defence Secretary Philip Hammond.

The extent of British and NATO involvement with Islamist terror groups was exposed during extraordinary testimony by jailed ISIS recruiter and convicted terrorist Abdalraouf Abdallah, who communicated with Abedi in the lead-up to the Manchester Arena bombing and was found by Saunders to have been a significant radicalising influence on Abedi. Abdullah testified he was trained by NATO and fought alongside NATO military forces in Libya, backed by the British government, "David Cameron praised us very well." Britain backed Islamist groups in Libya which it had designated elsewhere as terrorist, "maybe for their own gain or something like that."

Saunders interjected at once, "I don't want to get involved in that because it's not relevant to what I'm deciding, do you understand?" The exchange appears in a video produced by Declassified UK which has been censored (i.e., removed) by YouTube.

Significantly, key members of the Abedi family—father Ramadan and eldest brother Ismail—were able to evade testifying at the inquiry, in circumstances that are deeply suspicious. Ismail left Britain despite being stopped at Manchester airport just 24-hours prior. Doubtless the family has information that the British state would prefer to keep secret.

While the inquiry had broad powers under the Public Inquiries Act to compel testimony, neither former Prime Minister David Cameron nor Theresa May were called to explain their governments' open door policy for Libyan terrorists. Neither did Saunders' inquiry compel representatives of MI6 or the Ministry of Defence to testify on their relationship with the Abedis and the extensive network of Islamist rebels in Libya, Syria and elsewhere.

Questions that Sir John Saunders refused to ask of Britain's intelligence agencies, military and government include the following:

Was the Abedi family listed by MI6 as a protected asset due to its role in furthering British foreign policy objectives in Libya?

Why were the Abedi brothers evacuated from Libya by the British Royal Navy and what information did they supply to the British government? What did the British military or intelligence agencies provide to the Abedi family in return?

What intelligence did MI5 and MI6 receive from French and US security agencies about the threat posed by Salman Abedi? Who received the intelligence and why was it not acted on?

No mainstream media outlet has opposed the inquiry's blatant cover-up or its withholding of information from the public on national security grounds. The *Guardian's* defence and security editor Dan Sabbagh wrote last week, "it would be unwise to be excessively critical" of the final report. He concluded, "There is no independent way of knowing whether this amounts to a cover-up."

A *Guardian* editorial next day judged that "missed opportunities" by MI5 to stop the terror attack came from a "faulty mindset". According to the *Guardian's* editors, "Britain's air force was deployed with no proper intelligence analysis, and the mission drifted [!] into an unannounced goal of regime change". Britain was "shirking its moral responsibility to rebuild Libya". It lectured, "Levels of secrecy that go beyond MI5's operational needs damage public confidence and breed conspiracy theories."

The *Guardian* speaks for affluent, corrupt upper middle class "liberals" who have embraced imperialist war under the banner of "humanitarian intervention" and whose only real fear is that the crimes of the British state are being exposed. The verdict of Andrew Roussos and other families who lost loved ones, that "MI5 has blood on its hands", speaks to a growing awareness that British and NATO's military operations for oil and resources are a criminal enterprise, with deadly consequences for the working class in Britain, the Middle East and internationally.

The most explicit recommendation from Saunders' final report is that the 2021 Commission for Countering Extremism report, currently under consideration by Home Secretary Suella Braverman, be acted on "as a matter of urgency". Its definition of "hateful extremism" is "activity or materials directed at an out-group who are perceived as a threat to an in-group motivated by or intending to advance a political, religious or racial supremacist ideology."



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