

Survivors and families of the victims of Manchester Arena bombing to sue MI5

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Survivors and families of victims of the 2017 suicide bombing at the Manchester Arena which killed 22 concert-goers are suing the UK's domestic intelligence agency MI5, for failing to prevent the terror attack. This is the first case of its kind against the intelligence service.

On May 22, 2017, Salman Abedi, a British-born Islamist, walked into the foyer of the venue and blew himself up with a home-made bomb, as fans were leaving a performance by singer Ariana Grande. The blast killed 22 men, women and children and injured over 100. Many survivors suffered life changing injuries as Abedi added metal nuts and bolts to his home-made device to inflict maximum injury.

The bombing was planned by Salman Abedi and his brother Hashem Abedi. In August 2020, Hashem, after being extradited from Libya, was jailed for 55 years for the 22 murders.

Hudgell Solicitors, Slater & Gordon and Broudie Jackson Canter are leading the legal suit on behalf of 250 complainants, on the grounds MI5 negligence breached the injured survivors' "right to life" under the Human Rights Act. A legal source told the *Sunday Times*: "This... action is not about money or compensation. It's about holding MI5 to account for failing to prevent 22 people dying and many hundreds more being seriously injured."

The group claim has been submitted to the Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT).

The legal action against MI5 is important not just to establish the truth about the circumstances leading to the deaths of 22 people, but because it threatens to unravel the cover-up organised at the highest levels of the state.

The action follows the conclusion last year of the official inquiry into the Arena bombing, set up by then Conservative Home Secretary Priti Patel. The inquiry was an attempt to placate the families, but its main role was to conceal the role successive governments and the intelligence agencies played that culminated in the mass

murder carried out by the Abedis.

The inquiry sat for 18 months from September 2020 at Manchester's Magistrates Court. It revealed that Salman Abedi came to the attention of MI5 as many as 18 times over a seven-year period before he perpetrated his crime.

Given the extensive surveillance of both Abedi brothers by the intelligence agencies, the crime could have been foiled in the planning stage. Five months prior to the bombing, the FBI informed British intelligence that Abedi was planning a terrorist attack.

That they were not prevented from carrying out their heinous crime was because Salman and his brother were protected assets of British intelligence, given free rein to travel back and forth between the UK and Syria and Libya during the 2011 US-led NATO proxy war to topple the regime of Muammar Gaddafi.

The British-born brothers visited Libya regularly, where their parents returned in 2016. Their father, Ramadan, and an elder son fought against the Gaddafi regime as proxy forces of US and British imperialism in the savage regime change operation. British intelligence were well aware that the Abedi family and their Manchester group were funnelling rebel fighters into Libya.

In 2011, David Cameron's Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition allowed members of the Al Qaeda-linked Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) to travel to Libya from Britain. Abedi's parents were both LIFG members, as were other anti-Gaddafi Libyans in his neighbourhood in Manchester. Control orders previously restricting their movements during a thaw in UK-Libyan relations were lifted as London swung against Gaddafi.

According to then Defence Secretary Phillip Hammond, the UK military spent £212 million supporting Libyan rebel forces in 2011.

The *Daily Mail* revealed in 2018 that as the post-war conflict in Libya intensified in 2014, Salman and Hashem Abedi fled Libya with British government assistance

onboard the Royal Navy vessel, HMS Enterprise and were evacuated back to Britain. This operation was sanctioned at the top of government with the *Mail* report confirming, “The information [on the soldiers lists of who boarded HMS Enterprise] was subsequently passed on to Number Ten [Downing Street to Cameron], the Foreign Office and the Home Office.”

When it came to examining the links between the Abedis and British intelligence, the inquiry barred the public, including the affected families, and entered closed session.

The final inquiry report by Sir John Saunders covered up the role of MI5, MI6, the Ministry of Defence and successive British governments, in recruiting and protecting Islamists sent to Libya to expedite regime change.

The first volume of the inquiry was made public but such was the close relationship of the Abedis to the intelligence agencies that the second has only been circulated to those with security clearance. The inquiry was told that the closed report contained “material that would be damaging to national security if it were to become public.”

The final verdict—that the public were expected to swallow—was 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.”

Downplaying damning evidence, inquiry chair Saunders said there was a “realistic possibility” the bombing could have been stopped, but it was “quite impossible” to declare there could have been a different outcome. MI5 Director General Ken McCallum stated there was only a “slim” chance the plot could have been foiled.

As the legal action taken out makes clear, survivors and the families of the victims do not accept this whitewash.

The inquiry heard in a closed doors session that in the months before the attack, two pieces of information about Abedi were received by MI5. One specific piece of intelligence—the details of which have not been made public with “national security” being given as the reason—could “have led to actions which prevented the attack.”

This intelligence is understood to be related to Abedi’s return to Britain from Libya four days before the attack. He was not stopped at the airport, because MI5 failed to flag him up with counter-terrorism police. Had this been done he could have been followed back to the block of flats in south Manchester where his car was being used to

store explosives.

The *Times* reported on the news that the families were to sue MI5: “It is possible that Abedi had a switch for the bomb when he went through the airport. Had he been subject to an investigation, he would have been stopped and the authorities might have discovered it.”

So overwhelming was the evidence that MI5 could have prevented the bombing that McCallum was obliged to issue an apology to the families on behalf of MI5, saying he was “profoundly sorry”. He said, “There was a realistic possibility that actionable intelligence could have been obtained which might have led to actions preventing the attack... I deeply regret that such intelligence was not obtained.”

The father of the youngest victim, eight-year-old Saffie-Rose Roussos, told *Sky News* he believed his daughter would still be alive “if MI5 did their job”. Speaking to *Times Radio* last year after McCallum made his apology, Andrew Roussos said, “At 2017 we were at the highest alert and everybody was warned of an attack in this country, and MI5... had 22 pieces of information about Salman Abedi.” He added, “Salman Abedi should not have made it to that arena that night.”

He told ITV’s *Good Morning Britain*, “I’m sorry but yes, they [MI5] have blood on their hands.”

The Investigatory Powers Tribunal hearing the case of the families is expected to begin next spring. It is a government body, part of the Home Office, with the powers of the High Court that listens to complaints against the intelligence services. In most of cases, neither side wins. In 2020 and 2021, no complaint was upheld. The ITP is no more likely to reveal the truth than the public inquiry, on the grounds of national security.

Since the Arena bombing, Britain has become further embroiled in expanding NATO wars in the Middle East—against the Palestinians in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, in Syria, the Yemen and against Iran, stoking tensions that could result in further terrorist attacks in the UK.



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