

UK terror report confirms Manchester and London terror attackers known to MI5

By Robert Stevens
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The assessment by David Anderson QC of nine classified internal reviews by counterterrorist police and intelligence services into four UK terrorist attacks confirms that three of the six attackers were well-known to the state.

The four attacks reviewed took place this year at Westminster on March 27, the Manchester Arena on May 22, London Bridge on June 3, and Finsbury Park on June 19. They resulted in 36 deaths and multiple injuries.

Anderson, the UK's former independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, writes in his executive summary, "Three of the six attackers were on MI5's radar, either as an active subject of interest (Khuram Butt—London Bridge) or as closed subjects of interest (Khalid Masood—Westminster, Salman Abedi—Manchester)."

Such was the extensive knowledge about the individuals that Anderson's 61-page report concludes, in the case of Salman Abedi, who murdered 22 people on May 22 at Manchester Arena, "It is conceivable that the Manchester attack in particular might have been averted if the cards had fallen differently."

This is a damning admission. It means that police and security services could have stopped the attack, but failed to do so. This raises the question how and why this was the case. Anderson goes to huge lengths to conceal the implications of this finding, producing a whitewash.

Anderson presents his review, commissioned in June by Home Secretary Amber Rudd, as an independent inquiry. But he has played a key role in calling for the strengthening of state powers. He first came to prominence in a BBC *Panorama* documentary, "Edward Snowden: Spies and the Law" propagandizing in favour of the spying carried out by the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) on millions of people. As Independent Reviewer, he authored the report, "A Question of Trust", helping pave the way for the introduction of the anti-democratic Investigatory Powers

Act, known as the Snoopers' Charter.

Anderson's task was to ensure that the intelligence services and police—who exonerate themselves in their own reviews—were given a clean bill of health in his assessment. He writes, "It is not the purpose of the internal reviews, or of this report, to cast or apportion blame."

His document offers only oblique references regarding the detailed knowledge that the state had of the perpetrators prior to their attacks. He notes that classified documents being withheld amount to 1,150 pages and comprise "some 650 pages of text, with a further 500 pages of Annexes and references," adding, "Collectively, these detailed and highly classified documents provide a comprehensive account of the handling of intelligence prior to each attack..."

These reviews are being kept away from the public, and even parliament, with Anderson stating that only Prime Minister Theresa May, Home Secretary Rudd and the Chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee are privy to their contents.

However, in the case of Abedi, evidence already in the public domain points to the fact that the intelligence services were well aware, *months* before he carried out the Manchester attack, that he was planning to take part in a terrorist operation.

Anderson writes, "[S]alman Abedi was first actively investigated in January 2014, when it was thought that he might have been an individual who had been seen acting suspiciously with an SOI [Suspect of interest]." He claims that this turned out not to be the case and that his MI5 record was closed. He continues, "Salman Abedi was again opened as an SOI in October 2015, on the basis of his supposed contact with a Daesh figure in Libya, but he was closed as an SOI on the same day when it transpired that any contact was not direct."

There is no innocent explanation for two such failures.

Anderson continues, “Although he remained a closed SOI until the day of the attack, Salman Abedi continued to be referenced from time to time in intelligence gathered for other purposes . On two separate occasions in the months prior to the attack, intelligence was received by MI5 whose significance was not fully appreciated at the time. It was assessed at the time to relate not to terrorism but to possible non-nefarious activity or to criminality on the part of Salman Abedi. *In retrospect, the intelligence can be seen to have been highly relevant to the planned attack .*” [Emphasis added]

In fact, as reported by the *World Socialist Web Site*, on May 27 the *Mail on Sunday* published a story detailing how “the FBI told MI5 that Abedi was part of a North African Islamic State cell plotting to strike a political target in the UK.

“The FBI passed these warnings to MI5 in January [five months before the Manchester bombing], after placing Abedi on their terrorist watch list in 2016. An unnamed ‘security source’ told the *Daily Mail* that the FBI informed MI5 that Abedi ‘belonged to a North African terror gang based in Manchester, which was looking for a political target in this country. ... Following this US tip-off, Abedi and other members of the gang were scrutinised by MI5. It was thought at the time that Abedi was planning to assassinate a political figure. But nothing came of this investigation and, tragically, he slipped down the pecking order of targets.’”

Abedi was not even stopped and questioned at the UK border when he arrived back from Libya—just four days before the Manchester attack. He and his family were considered to be valuable state assets. Abedi’s parents were members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, who had participated in the 2011 military operations to overthrow Colonel Muammar Gaddafi as part of the regime change carried out at the behest of US and British imperialism.

None of this figures in Anderson’s report. Instead, he blandly asserts that although Abedi was not under active investigation at the time of the attack, “MI5 nonetheless came by intelligence in the months before the attack which, had its true significance been properly understood, would have caused an investigation into him to be opened. It is unknowable whether such an investigation would have allowed Abedi’s plans to be pre-empted and thwarted: MI5 assesses that it would not.”

Khuram Butt, states Anderson, was “a live SOI, under active investigation at the time of his attack.” One of Butt’s two accomplices in the London Bridge attack was

Youssef Zaghba, who Anderson acknowledges was put on a Europe-wide warning list after telling officials at Bologna Airport he was travelling to Turkey to be a “terrorist.” He was still allowed to travel by UK Border Force staff through British ports on three occasions. In June 2016, one year before the London Bridge attack, Italian intelligence requested that MI5 provide information on Zaghba—who was working in Britain—and his desire to travel to Syria, “and any contacts he had in the UK with individuals linked to Islamist extremism and/or with Italy.”

Of this, Anderson writes, “MI5 has no record of responding to this enquiry, noting by way of possible explanation that it arrived in the incorrect mailbox in MI5.”

Anderson’s assessment is the culmination of a state cover-up. Earlier this year, the *Daily Star* wrote that a DSMA Notice, known as a D-Notice, was issued by the Defence Security Media Advisory Committee in relation to the Manchester bombing. D-Notices are requests to news editors to voluntarily not publish or broadcast items on specified subjects on the grounds of “national security”. An article published five days after the bombing in the *Washington Post* revealed that, “According to Geoffrey Dodds, secretary of the Defense and Security Media Advisory Committee, two D-Notices have been issued in relation to the attack in Manchester...”

No other information has surfaced in the UK media about the role of Abedi or the other perpetrators since the *Daily Mail* article cited above.

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