

UK government, police prevent coroner's inquest into Manchester Arena bombing

By Robert Stevens
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The state cover-up of the circumstances surrounding the May 2017 Manchester Arena bombing has led to a decision by the coroner that inquests into the 22 deaths cannot proceed.

The ruling means that families of the victims slaughtered in the terrorist atrocity will never know the full facts as to how the bomber, Salman Abedi, carried out the operation.

On May 22, 2017, Abedi detonated a shrapnel-laden improvised explosive device in the arena's foyer after a performance by Ariana Grande, killing 22, many of whom were children, and wounding 116.

The coroner of the Manchester Arena inquest, Sir John Saunders, said last week in a ten-page "open ruling" that the inquests cannot proceed because the government and Counter Terrorism Police insist that classified material related to the bombing cannot be made public.

Saunders backed a "public interest immunity" (PII) application by Conservative Party Home Secretary Priti Patel that vital intelligence material be excluded from the inquests. A similar application was submitted by Counter Terrorism Police North West.

Saunders said the information being withheld from the public 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."

Legal representatives of the families had tried to accommodate to the state censorship and had "made it clear... that they were interested in what information the security service and the counter-terror police had and how

it affected their subsequent actions, and not with how they obtained the information." But this was still declared to be too dangerous to the state.

Saunders said, "I have considered in relation to each item over which PII is claimed whether it might be possible by gisting the information to minimise the risk to national security to a proportionate level. For reasons which I cannot elaborate in an open document, I am satisfied that matters are too inextricably linked to make that a realistic possibility."

Saunders openly admits that the government and police are withholding information that "relates to the issue of whether the attack by Salman Abedi could have been prevented by the authorities."

This makes a mockery of the inquest proceedings, as their scope provides that they include investigation of:

* "The knowledge of the Security Service, the police and others about Salman Abedi, his radicalisations and his relationship with relevant associates, including family members and others."

* "What intelligence and other relevant information on Salman Abedi and/or relevant associates was available to the Security Service, the police and others prior to the attack."

* "What steps were (or were not) taken by the Security Service, the police and others in relation to Salman Abedi prior to the attack."

The authorities have done everything possible to conceal the circumstances of the Manchester attack because even the facts available make clear that the state apparatus had intimate knowledge of Salman Abedi and his circle. Moreover, they were aware, *months* before he carried out the Manchester attack, that he was planning to take part in a terrorist operation.

Saunders' ruling states that in making the decision, he had full access to the unredacted report produced in 2017 by David Anderson QC of nine classified internal reviews

by counterterrorism police and intelligence services into four terrorist attacks in the UK, including Manchester.

Anderson's report was 61 pages long and its purpose was to hand the intelligence services and police, who exonerated themselves in their own reviews, a clean bill of health. But his report admits that three of the six attackers involved were well known to the intelligence agencies and police beforehand, including Abedi.

A massive amount of information about the attacks is being kept under wraps by the government, intelligence agencies and Counter-Terrorism Police. Anderson revealed that the *classified* documents relating to the attacks amount to 1,150 pages and include "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..."

The Saunders ruling seeks to bury the essential fact that bomber Salman Abedi was an expendable asset of British imperialism in its operation to overthrow Libyan leader Colonel Gaddafi in a regime-change operation. When the civil war in Libya war began in 2011, the Conservative government of David Cameron joined US and French efforts to topple Gaddafi.

The authorities knew what Abedi and his close circle were doing. They were part of an Islamist terror network cultivated by British intelligence services and successive governments. Abedi's parents were both members of the Al Qaeda-linked Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), along with other Libyans in the south Manchester area where he lived. They had participated in the 2011 military operations to overthrow Gaddafi carried out at the behest of US and Britain.

Those anti-Gaddafi forces living in Britain, who previously had control orders restricting their movements—during a thaw in UK-Libyan relations—had the orders lifted by then-home secretary and soon to be prime minister Theresa May, as London moved against Gaddafi. They were then free to travel to Libya and back as they pleased.

Just some of the known facts include:

* Salman Abedi was first investigated by UK intelligence services as far back as 2014.

* In January 2017, four months before the Manchester bombing, the FBI—after it had placed Abedi on its terrorist watch list—informed MI5 that that Abedi was part of a North African cell plotting to strike a political target in the UK.

* Anderson notes concerning Abedi that two sets of intelligence received by MI5 in the months leading to the Manchester bombing "can be seen to have been highly relevant to the planned attack . " The most damning evidence on the protection afforded by the British state to the Abedis was revealed by the *Daily Mail* last year. It reported that as the civil war intensified, Abedi and his brother, Hashem, received British government assistance and fled Libya onboard a Royal Navy vessel, HMS Enterprise. This rescue operation happened in August 2014, less than three years before Abedi bombed the Arena. The *Mail* reported, "The information [on the soldiers' lists of who boarded HMS Enterprise] was subsequently passed on to Number Ten [Downing Street], the Foreign Office and the Home Office." The intimate connection of the Abedis to the intelligence services has never been subjected by the media to any serious investigation. The presence of the Abedi brothers on a Royal Navy vessel was reported just once by the *Mail* and other national newspapers and never again.

Responding to Saunders' move, Steve Howe, whose wife Alison was killed, said, "It is a cover-up, right from day one... I know they are saying this information will safeguard the public, but it would also shed some light for the families."

The British state intends to complete its cover-up via its trusted method of a public inquiry. Saunders revealed that the home secretary is already supportive of an inquiry. However, it would be public in name only, with some evidence being taken in private without relatives of the victims or their legal teams. In addition, a public inquiry could take years to complete and could only take place after the trial of Hashem Abedi, which begins in November following his extradition from Libya earlier this year.

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