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Manchester's dead: Victims of British regime-change operations in the Middle East

By Robert Stevens

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More details have emerged about the prior familiarity of British intelligence agencies with the Manchester suicide bomber, Salman Abedi, whose murderous assault Monday evening left 22 people dead.

Given Abedi's connections and his travel movements leading up to the attack, the only explanation for him being able to remain at large for so long is that he was a protected asset—part of a broad network of operatives utilised by Britain and the US to conduct their nefarious operations in the Middle East.

It is the exposure of these operations which accounts for the fury of Prime Minister Theresa May over the US leaking of intelligence information about the UK's investigation into the bombing. Whatever the specific reasons for these leaks, they have completely undermined the British authority's original claims that Abedi was an unknown, "lone wolf". Rather, it is now clear that those killed and maimed while enjoying a pop concert are the victims of British regime-change policy in the Middle East and North Africa.

We know now that British intelligence had received warnings, on at least five separate occasions in the last five years, that Abedi presented a danger, including that he had discussed committing a suicide bombing.

According to new leaks Thursday, Abedi had travelled extensively in the run-up to the attack, including flying from Istanbul to the UK via Germany's Dusseldorf airport. For years, Turkey has been used as a transit point into Syria by European jihadists, joining Western-led efforts to topple the regime of Bashar Al-Assad.

Several sources, including French intelligence, have made public their conclusions that Abedi had been to Syria and received training there. The *Financial Times* also reported that a "Turkish official" said that Abedi had travelled through Istanbul on at least two other occasions over the past year. The newspaper reported, "In mid-April he flew from Amsterdam to Libya, while in late May 2016 he flew from Manchester to Libya, transiting through Istanbul Ataturk airport both times."

Abedi may have travelled through at least two European Union countries on his way from Turkey to Manchester. Berlin newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel* reported that Abedi flew from Dusseldorf to Manchester on May 18—four days before the attack. The newspaper cited German intelligence sources who said that he arrived in Germany from Libya via Prague.

The *Guardian* reported, "It is known that the 22-year-old travelled to Germany at least twice, including a visit to the financial city of Frankfurt." It added, "Düsseldorf is in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, where Anis Amri, the Berlin Christmas market attacker, spent time."

Further leaks were reported by the German magazine, *Focus*. Citing German intelligence sources, it said Abedi flew to Frankfurt from Britain in 2015. *Focus* said that Germany's intelligence agency BKA had been told by police in the UK that this visit took place before Abedi undertook paramilitary training in Syria. It reported that he had not been apprehended in Germany, as he was not on any watch list.

There is no innocent explanation for the fact that Abedi was able to travel to Libya, Syria, Turkey and the UK unhindered. It has nothing to do with the spurious claims about the UK having "leaky borders", or too few border guards. Abedi's ability to pass through customs without interference can only mean that he had been given the all clear.

For decades, successive British governments have worked with jihadi groups, prepared to use atrocities to achieve their objectives. This has meant that, behind the "war on terror" and the relentless assault on democratic rights that it has entailed, UK authorities have been harbouring Islamist extremist operatives and groups who can be set into motion at the required time, in line with British imperialist foreign policy objectives.

Groups such as Algeria's Armed Islamic Group (GIA), the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), Egyptian Islamic Jihad and al-Qaeda all had bases in London. Al-Qaeda considered London the nerve centre of its operations in Europe, with the security services collaborating with

some of these organisations and their leaders, the most well known being Abu Hamza and Abu Qatada.

Likewise, British imperialism worked closely with Libyan Islamists, supporting them in their opposition to then Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. As former MI5 agent David Shayler revealed, MI6 collaborated with one such organisation, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, in the attempted assassination of Gaddafi in 1996.

For years, a group of LIFG members were active in the Whalley Range district of Manchester, close to Salman Abedi's home. Salman Abedi's father, Ramadan Abedi, an airport security officer, was an LIFG member. He and his wife, Samia Tabbal, a nuclear scientist, fled Tripoli in 1991 after he was arrested by the Gaddafi regime. He had been employed in the regime's internal security service and was reportedly suspected of tipping off members of anti-Gaddafi Islamist groups about pending police raids. The *Daily Mail* reported, "It appears that Ramadan's life revolved at several points around toppling Gaddafi..."

After fleeing Libya, Ramadan and his wife lived in Saudi Arabia for a period. They both then went to the UK and applied for and were granted political asylum. They lived first in London and then moved to the south Manchester area, which had become a centre for many anti-Gaddafi elements with which British intelligence maintained the closest links.

Ramadan returned to Libya some time in 2011 in order to fight in the imperialist proxy war that resulted in the overthrow and murder of Gaddafi in October of that year by US/UK-backed "rebels". This took place after a NATO bombing campaign in which untold numbers were killed nationwide over the preceding eight months. Ramadan went on to become an administrative manager of the Central Security Force in Tripoli, one of the many militias vying for control of the country.

Samia, Abedi's mother, is a close friend of Umm Abdul Rahman, the widow of a former Al Qaeda commander, Abu Anas al-Libi. Accused of involvement in the 1998 US embassy bombings, the *Daily Mail* reported that al-Libi "spent five years in Manchester—having won political asylum in Britain in 1995." The *Mail* said that "Abdul Rahman went to college in the Libyan capital with Abedi's mother, who was studying nuclear engineering. She [Rahman] said the two women also lived together in Manchester for a number of years."

Al-Libi was seized by US forces in Tripoli in October 2013 and died in 2015 of liver cancer before coming to trial. Following the Manchester bombing, Ramadan Abedi and his youngest son, Hashem, were arrested in Tripoli Tuesday night.

Salman Abedi was also known to have been a close associate of one of the main Islamic State recruiters in the UK, Raphael Hostey, who was killed in a drone strike in Syria in 2016. Hostey grew up in Moss Side, just a mile away from Abedi's home in the Fallowfield district of the city.

In a statement on the bombing, the government of Abdullah Thinni in Bayda, Libya said it had warned the British government it was harbouring terrorists. Thinni's government was driven out of Tripoli in 2013 by Islamic extremists, including UK-based Libyan exiles. It accused May's

predecessor David Cameron of backing terrorist groups who “have been destroying our cities and towns in an attempt to shape Libya into an exporter of terror to the whole planet.”