

When it comes to terrorism, the 22nd of May is a black day for the United Kingdom. Indeed, first in 2013, soldier Lee Rigby was savagely murdered by two jihadists in Woolwich, writes Olivier Giutta of Globsec

Then in 2017, one jihadist, the British-Libyan 23-year-old Salman Abedi, affiliated to the terror group Islamic State (ISIS) stormed into the Manchester Arena and waited for concertgoers to exit after the end of American pop sensation Ariana Grande to detonate his bomb killing 22. ISIS had called for attacks on concert halls over the summer of 2015 then the Bataclan attack took place in Paris on 13 November 2015. ISIS had also time and again called for attacks against Western children. The Manchester Arena suicide attack was clearly disgustingly targeting kids and teenagers.

Salman Abedi's background totally explains his suicide attack: in fact, apples don't fall far from the tree. His father, Ramadan Abedi, aka Abu Ismail al-Obaidi, was a member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), a jihadist group, affiliated with al-Qaeda. This forced him to flee with his family the Gaddafi regime for fear of being killed or jailed in Libya. He was welcomed in Britain and brought up his family in a salafist-jihadist milieu.

In 2011, when Salman Abedi was still a teenager, he travelled to Libya with his father to fight with him to oust Gaddafi. He was rescued by the Royal Navy from the Libyan war zone in 2014 and evacuated back to the UK. When Salman Abedi returned to Libya before the Manchester Arena attack, he met there with an ISIS unit linked to the November 2015 Paris attacks cell. His brother, Hashem Abadi was involved in an ISIS terror plot in Libya to kill the former United Nations Envoy to Libya, Martin Kobler. He is believed to have played a key role, building the device used by his brother in the Manchester Arena suicide attack, was arrested in Libya right

after the attack. He has been held in custody in Tripoli by a powerful militia that has refused to extradite him, despite an agreement made with British authorities, a few months ago.

The milieu where Salman Abedi gravitated also reinforced his jihadist convictions. Indeed, for instance, all of the leadership of the LIFG lived in Manchester at one point, including Osama bin Laden's associate, Anas al-Libi. Unsurprisingly as well, at least 16 men from the neighbourhood of Salman Abedi have left to fight with ISIS in various theatres of jihad.

MI5 did not see the Islamist Libyan community in Manchester as a threat to the UK because of what they assessed was a focus on jihad in Libya. Nonetheless, Abedi was investigated by the security services twice in 2014 and 2015. Then, the American FBI warned MI5 in January 2017 that Salman Abedi was planning an attack on the UK.

MI5 had planned to discuss Manchester Arena bomber suspicions just 9 days after he launched terror attack. The review by David Anderson QC found that the Manchester Arena bombing could have been averted "had the cards fallen differently."
There is also the intriguing fact that security services were aware that Salman Abedi went to visit twice in 2017 just before the Manchester Arena attack a fellow Libyan inmate, Abdal Raouf Abdallah. Abdallah has been sentenced to five and half years in jail for terrorism for trying to help people to join ISIS in Syria.

Salman Abedi's profile really stands out because he was brought up in a jihadist household and didn't really go through a classical radicalisation process.
One similar aspect though in this case is that like most of the jihadists that carried out attacks on European soil, Abedi was on the radar of security services and was at one point actually monitored until the investigation was dropped off because nothing happened.

A pattern seems to emerge. Indeed, GLOBSEC's research found out that, consistent with our findings for France:

88% of jihadists that carried out attacks in Great Britain since 2013 were known either for radicalisation (63%) or to the police

88% were either on the United Kingdom's terror watchlist (75%) or on that of other European nations

Out of the 39 British jihadists arrested for terrorist offences in 2015 and prosecuted by the end of 2018, 57% were under surveillance prior to their arrest, some for many years

Out of the 39 British jihadists arrested for terrorist offences in 2015 and prosecuted by the end of 2018, 62% received sentences of less than five years

There are some extremely compelling stats concerning the jihadists involved in terrorism in the United Kingdom that should be turned into policy recommendations.

First and foremost, the canard of self-radicalised "lone wolves" unknown to authorities has been debunked. A whopping 88% of jihadists that carried out attacks in Great Britain since 2013 were known to law enforcement. Moreover 88% of them were also actually listed on the UK's Terror watch list or that of another European country.

The security services are therefore doing a very good job at honing down on the potential terrorists. The sheer number of people, up to 30,000, recorded on UK's main terror watchlist including 3,000 branded as dangerous, make it impossible for security services to monitor even a fraction of that, knowing that about 30 officers are needed per individual. In one sentence: detection works but preventing efficiently will require a huge financial and human capital investment. Moreover, due to early releases from prisons and generally short sentences, the situation is even more problematic and will allow 500 dangerous jihadists to be freed in the next two years in Europe.

Interestingly and unsurprisingly the United Kingdom has similar stats as France when it comes to the profile of jihadists. Now what to make of these findings?

I suggest a few policy recommendations:

* Extend the sentences for terrorism offences. Stop the lenient sentencing that allows the central figure of the UK jihadist scene, Anjem Choudary, to walk free after serving half of his already light five and half years sentence.

* Do not allow for terrorists/jihadists to be freed before serving their full sentence and ban the "good behaviour" early exit from jail.

* Focus on monitoring radicalised multiple offenders that may have a higher probability of carrying out a terror attack

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