



THE GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE
MANCHESTER ARENA TERROR ATTACK

A WOLF IN WOLF'S CLOTHING

FEBRUARY 2022

A Wolf in Wolf's Clothing

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE 2017
MANCHESTER ARENA
BOMBING

For the twenty-two who died

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Glossary of Abbreviations

BDB	Benghazi Defence Brigade (Libya)
CCC	Consolidated Construction Company
CMEC	Conservative Middle East Council (UK)
FAC	Foreign Affairs Committee (UK)
GNA	Government of National Accord (Provisional Government in Tripoli)
HOR	House of Representatives (Government under Haftar in Tobruk)
LIA	Libyan Investment Authority
LIBC	Libyan British Business Council
LIFG	Libyan Islamic Fighting Group
LNA	Libya National Army
MIA	Manchester Arena Inquiry (UK)
PFG	Petroleum Facilities Guard (Libya)

Introduction

No Alarms and No Surprises. Please

MAY 22ND 2017, 22.31 (BST)



In an attempt to unravel the deeply complex chain of events that were to culminate in the Manchester Arena Bombing, I have drawn up a list of issues and concerns that still need to be addressed, not as some readers might fear out of any kind of bid to absolve Abedi of blame or to present his actions as ‘justified violence’, or to paint them as anything other than the despicable act of terror that they were, but to explore how fast or sudden reversals in a country’s foreign policy and the inevitable rash of commercial, industrial and lobbying activities that prompt and then dominate those changes can put our home nations at risk. In offering moral and military support to the armed insurrection in Libya in 2011, Britain, France and America would blur the lines between ‘heroism’ and ‘terrorism’ to such a confusing degree that any notion of ‘unjustified violence’ was practically invalidated overnight. The fundamental principle of intervention may have been presented to the public as just and ethical, but our failure to provide consistent messages both before and after these events, and our bid to synchronise the country’s democratic process with our economic schedules, has corrupted not only the public’s conception of ‘justified violence’ but abrogated, temporarily at least, all future cases for full or limited intervention. Here are the issues I would like to focus on:

- The influence of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* on Salman Abedi and his family and the level of support the group and its affiliates had

received from the British Government at the time of the 2011 Revolution in Libya.

- The relationship between the historical *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* and the current Libyan GNA government (one of those people initially questioned in relation to the attack was Zuhir Nassrat, the son of Khalid Nasrat, a former LIFG leader who had served as labour attaché at the GNA's Embassy in Turkey).¹
- The part played by members and fundraisers of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* in the 2009 *Manchester Arndale Terror Plot*.
- Statements made by Lord Richards, former Chief of the Defence Staff to John Barron and Crispin Blunt of the Foreign Office Committee in January 2016 that suggest that the British Conservative Government's knowledge of the combat role played by Abdelhakim Belhadj and other members of the al-Qaeda affiliated *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* had been a "grey area" at the time that Britain supported the group's efforts to overthrow Gaddafi. The statement stops some way short of being a denial of government knowledge. Lord Richard also acknowledged that

¹ Law student among latest suspects held in terror swoops after Manchester bomber was invited to stay at his home, Daily Mail, May 29, 2017; <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4553284/Student-suspects-held-Manchester-terror-swoops.html>. The GNA is the *Government of National Accord*, a temporary administration set up in December 2015 whose senior ministers consist of former members of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group*. In March 2021 it was replaced by a Government of National Unity led by Mohamed al-Menfi in a bid to unify the Government of National Accord with the rival Government operating under its de facto leader, General Haftar in Tobruk. Until recently the Haftar regime has relied heavily on external support from the UAE, Russia and other international players.

with hindsight, keeping Gaddafi in power “may have been better from a vital national interest point of view.”²

- Whether statements made in support of the Libyan warlord, General Haftar by CMEC’s Kwasi Kharteng, Charlotte Leslie and David Morris in the House of Commons in October 2016 influenced the bombers, Salman and Hasheem Abedi (and other family members of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group*).³
- Whether the Libyan Summits in London and Malta between October 2016 and November 2017, hosted and called for by British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and attended by members of UAE banking houses, provided the first serious indication that Britain was prepared to enter discussions about a possible power-share with Haftar’s in Tobruk — the rival government to the largely ‘rebel’ staffed GNA which was closely associated with the bombers’ father..
- Whether a deeply provocative *Conservative Middle East Council* report produced in March 2017 and a Boris Johnson article in *The Spectator* in May 2017 — supporting a shift in the balance of power from the Islamic

² Oral evidence: Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options, HC 520, 19 January 2016, Questions 314-407, Examination of Witness, Lord Richards of Herstmonceux;
<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/foreign-affairs-committee/libya-examination-of-intervention-and-collapse-and-the-uks-future-policy-options/oral/27184.html>

³ Hansard, UK Parliament, House of Commons: October 26 2016, Westminster Hall, Libya, Volume 616, responses to Third Report from the Foreign Affairs Committee, Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK’s future policy options, HC 119;
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2016-10-26/debates/B4053264-E0B9-4237-A5CC-3C9ACB2C030D/Libya>

rebel government (the GNA) to the *House of Representatives* operating under General Haftar's regime in Tobruk — acted as the final trigger for the Manchester Arena Bombing.

- Five days after the Arena attack foreign experts found bomb materials matching those used in the Manchester bombing at a facility at al-Hadba prison. On Friday 9th June, just weeks after the Arena Bombing, Libya's most famous al-Hadba prisoner and Britain's long-time trade negotiator Saif al-Islam Gaddafi was released to pro-Haftar forces. He had been held in captivity some six years. What were the circumstances and conditions of his release, and did they constitute in any way an 'off the record' settlement over the Manchester Arena Bombing?
- Whether recent donors to the *Conservative Middle East Council* including *Consolidated Contractors Company* had vested interests in the release of their former Libyan negotiator, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi.
- The fatwas issued by Canadian-Libyan clerics, Abdul-Baset Ghwela and Grand Mufti Al Ghariyani on anyone supporting Haftar and his forces in the months prior to the bombing. Information learned during the course of the Manchester Arena Inquiry confirms that pictures had emerged of Ghariyani with the bomber's father Ramadan Abedi on social media platforms in May and June 2017.
- The 'fierce verbal assault' launched on supporters of the Haftar regime by the *Central Security Force* in the weeks before the Manchester Arena Bombing (the group were employers of the bomber's father, Ramadan Abedi)

- The nature of the trip to Turkey made by Salman Abedi on May 26th 2016 and referred to on Day 194 of the Manchester Arena Inquiry. ⁴ Abedi's trip coincided with reports in the press that Turkey — who are known to have provided arms in support of the Islamist militias — were going to be reopening the Turkish Embassy in Tripoli after closing it as a result of increasing instability in 2014. These reports also coincided with news that Russia was planning to provide military support to Haftar's rival forces in Tobruk and that the UN Security Council were considering exempting the GNA in Tripoli from the UN-arms embargo in support of its efforts against ISIS (and Haftar).⁵
- The evacuation of Hashem and Salman Abedi and 101 other British Nationals from Tripoli on the HMS Enterprise in August 2014. This was done at the behest of the British Foreign Office as pro-Haftar forces began to intensify their attacks against Islamist militias propping up the GNA between June and September that year. In text messages intercepted by Counter-terrorism officers, Abedi is believed to have said that Haftar would need to be “sorted out” ⁶ (it's to be noted that Abedi

⁴ Manchester Arena Inquiry, Day 194, February 15, 2022;
<https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2022/02/15172057/MAI-Day-194-Redacted.pdf>

⁵ ‘Will Russian arms soon start flowing to Libya’?, Yury Barmin Al-Monitor, May 31, 2016;
<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/05/russia-military-ties-former-allies-libya.html#ixzz7L9KYZOg3>; World powers prepared to arm UN-backed Libyan government, Patrick Wintour, The Guardian, May 16, 2016;
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/16/world-powers-prepared-arm-un-backed-libyan-government>

⁶ Official Sensitive,
https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2021/10/27185933/INQ033826_21.pdf

had travelled to Tripoli from Manchester only a month earlier, when Tripoli militias were demanding urgent support from its fighters).

- Whether the British Government under Prime Minister Theresa May made attempts to shift the weight of media and public attention away from the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* to ISIS in an effort to preserve a) the stability of a fledgling government in a fragile region in which Britain had already made considerable investments and b) the lucrative new oil deals being negotiated between Libya and UK-based oil company *Petrofac* and construction projects for companies like *Consolidated Contractors Company*. The heads of both companies were among the Conservative Party and CMEC's most generous donors at this time.

The Main Players

A WHO'S WHO GUIDE



The British Players

Boris Johnson

MP for the Conservative Party. London Mayor (May 2008 – May 2016. British Foreign Secretary (July 2016 – July 2018). British Prime Minister (July 1919 - present). An article published in *Spectator* on May 12 2017 paid homage to Libya's "amazing patrimony of hydro carbons" (oil). Whilst Gaddafi was a tyrant and a "monster" Johnson conceded that Libyans had probably enjoyed a better quality of life during the brutal dictator's regime. The man that he now considered to be Libya's "best hope" was General Haftar, the enemy of the Tripoli militias that both the bomber and his family were closely associated with.

Blunt, Sir Crispin

Conservative MP and former chairman of the *Foreign Affairs Committee* (June 2015 - May 2017). Responsible for producing *Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy option* report in September 2016 and subsequently used as springboard to initialise debate in parliament on Britain's continuing engagement and support of the GNA, and their Libyan rivals, General Haftar and the HoR. Believed to have received donations from *Le Cercle*.

Conservative Middle East Council (CMEC)

Organisation put together to inform parliament of Middle Eastern matters. Directors and sponsors over the years have included Charlotte Leslie (Bristol MP), Kwasi Kwarteng, Leo Docherty, property-tycoon David Rowland, Nicholas Soames (of Aegis/Gardaworld) and Abdul Majid Jafar, CEO of Crescent Petroleum. Produced the controversial ‘Chaos in the Mediterranean’ report in March 2017 advising the British Government to switch its support from the Islamic *Government of National Accord* to their rival in Tobruk, General Haftar.

Foreign Affairs Committee

A select committee within the British House of Commons moderating the activities and management of the British Foreign office. Produced the *Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy option* report in September 2016. Members at this time included Sir Crispin Blunt and pro-Haftar supporters John Baron MP, Daniel Kawczynski MP and Nadhim Zahawi MP who also occupied the chair at *Le Cercle* at this time. Its chairman was Sir Crispin Blunt. He was preceded in the chair by Richard Ottaway (Chairman at FOC at the time of the 2011 Revolution) and succeeded in July 2017 by Tom Tugendhat. Blunt's replacement had arisen in part as a response to the publication of FOC's follow-up report, *'Political Islam', and the Muslim Brotherhood Review* in February 2017 which contradicted earlier assessments which had presented the Brotherhood as a terrorist threat. Blunt had accused Egypt and Britain's ally (and Conservative Party donor), the UAE of heaping undue pressure on British policy regarding the group.⁷ The UAE has also been one of the most influential funders and supporters of General Haftar.

⁷ 'The British U-Turn on Egypt - and what's behind it', Amr Darrag, Middle East Eye,

Kwasi Kwarteng

Conservative Party MP who co-authored the *Inside Libya* report with Leo Doherty in March 2017 advising the British Government to switch its support from the rebel-staffed Government of national Accord to General Haftar. Known to have received donations from Majid Jafar of Crescent Petroleum and *Le Cercle*.

Rifkind, Sir Malcolm

Rifkind had served as the British Foreign Secretary under John Major's Conservative Government. Former Mi5 officer, David Shayler claims Rifkind had authorised the LIFG-Mi6 plot to assassinate Colonel Gaddafi in 1996. Rifkind had been a vocal critic of the Libyan Rendition case brought against Sir Jack Straw and Sir Mark Allen by former LIFG leader, Abdel Hakim Belhaj.

Theresa May

British Home Secretary (May 2010 – July 2016). British Prime Minister (July 2016 July 2019). May was Home Secretary when the British Home Office restored the passports of a large number of LIFG fighters ahead of the 2011 Revolution. In April 2017 May had called for a snap General Election, despite polls suggesting only a very narrow lead over Jeremy Corbyn's Labour. The election took place in June 2017, just weeks after the Arena bombing.

Jacqui Smith

British Home Secretary in Tony Blair's New Labour Government (June 2007-June 2009). British Home Secretary in Tony Blair's New Labour Government (June 2007-June 2009). Ultimately responsible for lifting the control orders and

September 19 2017; <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/british-u-turn-egypt-and-whats-behind-it>

sanctions placed on members and associates of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* in 2009. The decision had been based on discussions between Prime Minister Tony Blair and Libya's Colonel Gaddafi in a quid pro quo arrangement centring on trade negotiations.

Tony Blair

British Prime Minister (May 1997-June 2007). Responsible for negotiating the infamous Deal in the Desert with Gaddafi in 2004 and a number of additional trade deals in 2007 and 2009. A ground breaking legal case brought by Abdel Hakim Belhaj, a former leader of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* against Mi6 officer, Sir Mark Allen was to be cleverly synchronised with the Arena attack, either as a political accelerant or suppressant by a group or groups unknown.

The Libyan Players

Mu'ammār Al-Qadhafī (Colonel Gaddafi)

Libyan politician and military leader whose autocratic regime was overthrown by Libyan militias associated with the Abedi family in the 2011 Revolution. Murdered by insurgents in October 2011. Father of Saif al-Islam Gaddafi.

Khalifa Haftar (General Haftar)

Libyan-American military commander and politician and the secular rival to the Islamic Government of National Accord in Libya. Backed by Russia, the UAE, Egypt, Boris Johnson and CMEC. Leader of the Libyan National Army in Tobruk, and loyal to the elected legislative body, the House of Representatives. The 'warlord' has been charged by several courts over war crimes and Human Rights abuses. In May 2019, Amnesty International accused Haftar of participating in actions that amounted to war crimes during his battle for control

of Tripoli (home of the Abedi family). In 2016 and 2017, clerics and leaders associated with the Abedi family issued ‘fatwas’ (kill orders) on anyone supporting Haftar.

Libyan Islamic Fighting Group

(Al-Jama’a al-Islamiyyah al-Muqatilah)

Armed Islamic militants who took a leading role in the 2011 Revolution which overthrew Colonel Gaddafi. Listed as a terrorist organisation by Britain, America and the United Nations. Associated during the late 1990s and early 2000s with Al-Qaeda. The group has its origins in the Afghan Mujahideen who fought Soviet forces. Group formally dissolved in 2009/2010 as part of Saif al-Islam’s ‘Corrective Studies’ agreement in 2009/2010. Ramadan Abedi’s membership with the group has been acknowledged by security officers at sessions held at the Manchester Arena Inquiry.

February 17th Martyrs Brigade

Largest and best armed militia operating in Libya’s First Civil War (2011). The group had been financed by the Libyan defence ministry. Commanded in 2012 by Ahmed Abu Khattala. In 2014 the group’s leader, Mohamed al-Zahawi was killed. There is some suggestion that some of the members of the group had aligned themselves with ISIS. Alleged fighters include Ramadan Abedi, Mohamed al-Amari (Minister of State/GNA/NOC), Mustafa Graf (Didsbury Mosque) and Abdel Raouf Abdallah (who Salman Abedi visited in prison in January 2017).

Sadiq Al-Ghariani (Grand Mufti Al Ghariyani)

Declared Grand Mufti of Libya in February 2012 by the National Transitional Council. Studied Sharia-law in Egypt and Islamic Studies at University of Exeter in the United Kingdom. Affiliated with Ansar al Sharia. In 2016 ordered

Presidency Council boycott after inclusion and recognition by PM Seraj of General Khlaifa Haftar in peace negotiations. Al-Ghariani's office closed in June 2017, two weeks after the Manchester Bombing for repeated issuing of fatwas to supporters of General Haftar. His TV channel, Tanasoh, was added to a Saudi terror list in June 2012. The MAI duly acknowledged that pictures have emerged of Ghariani and Ramadan Abedi together.

National Transitional Council

(2011-2012)

De facto government in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 Civil War. Founded in Benghazi. Gained UN recognition as the official Libyan Government.

Mustafa Abdullah Graf

Leader at Didsbury Mosque in Manchester and friend of the Abedi family. Attended 2015 Libyan Conference in Brussels with Mohamed al-Amari, the Libyan State Minister the Manchester Evening News had claimed was a neighbour of the Abedi family in Manchester. Graf is believed to have fought alongside the February 17th Martyrs in Libya's 2011 civil war. Captured by Gaddafi Forces before returning to Manchester. He has been identified as a member of IUMS, headed by Global Muslim Brotherhood leader Youssef Qaradawi whose fatwas were instrumental in sanctioning Hamas suicide bombings.

General National Congress

(August 2012 - August 2014)

Tasked with the transition of Libya to a permanent democratic constitution.

Government of National Accord

(2015 - present)

Interim government formed under the terms of the Libyan Political Agreement, a United Nations-endorsed initiative not recognised by rival factions in Libya. Mohamed al-Amari is State Minister at the GNA.

House of Representatives (HoR)

Also known as the Tobruk government and based in the East of the country. Largely secular in nature and backed-up by General Khalifa Haftar of the Libyan National Army. Its current chairman is Aguila Saleh Issa. In October 2015, the UN envoy for Libya, Bernardino León proposed a power-share with the UN-backed GNA under Fayez al-Sarraj.

National Oil Corporation (NOC)

Holds executive control and management of Libya's oil industry. In September 2021, NOC set-up an office in London (Murzuq Oil Services) in a bid to boost the nation's oil production.

Libyan Shield Force

Country-wide alliance of fragmented Islamist militias and closely aligned to the GNA. Affiliated with gangster-Jihadi and terrorist Mokhtar Belmokhtar (AQIM, Al-Mourabitoun) and pro-Islamist militias like Libya Dawn.

Central Security Force

Under the control of militiaman, Abdul Ghani Al-Kikli and also known as *Abu Sleem Central Security Force*. Employ Arena bomber's father, Ramadan Abedi. Comes under the broader management of RADA's Abdul Raouf Kara – a hardline Islamist. Military intelligence and police security organisation.

Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (2011)

Salafist Islamist alliance, implementation of Sharia-law across Libya, February 17th Martyrs Brigade origin, UN, US and Saudi terrorist entity, alleged participation in Benghazi attack (in response to death of LIFG/Al Qaeda Abu Anas al-Libi in American custody) , allied to Benghazi Defence Brigade, Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries, Mohamed al-Amari (Minister of State/GNA), Ramadan Abedi, Mustafa Graf (Didsbury Mosque). Allied to Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade. Logo is Black Flag with pair of AK-47, open Koran and assault rifles. Supported by al-Ghariani. Suggestions that it may have been dissolved on May 27th 2017, one week after Manchester Arena Bombing.

Abu Anas al-Libi

Libyan Islamic Fighting Group leader and Al Qaeda operative (mentioned in the Bin Laden Abbotabad documents in trial of Abid Naseer). Sought in connection of 1998 US Embassy Bombings (Tanzania/Kenya). Possibly with Al Qaeda since 1994, granted asylum in UK in 1995. Lived in Manchester and London (after ailed Al-Qaeda plot to assassinate Hosni Mubarak). Possible return to Libya from Iran in September 2012. *The Times* newspaper claimed that al-Libi's wife, Umm Abdul Rahman is a friend and former University associate of the Arena bomber's mother, Samia Tabbal.

Abu Ismail Ramadan Abedi

Father of the Manchester Arena bomber, Salman Abedi. Former member of Gaddafi's police intelligence and security departments. Fled to Saudi Arabia in 1992 where he studied the Koran before making his way to London, England. Settled in Manchester with his family (Elsmore Road). Suspected member of The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group and February 17th Martyrs Brigade.

Returned to Libya in 2008. Now in the employment of the Central Security Force (Nawasi Brigade/Libyan Shield Force) protecting the GNA government.

Abdel Raouf Abdallah

Former LIFG/17th Century Martyrs fighter injured in the 2011 Libyan Civil War and visited twice by Salman Abedi at HMP Altcourse Prison in Liverpool in the months leading up to the attack. Serving a five-and-a-half year for recruiting and facilitating the travel of Jihadists to Syria. His witness testimony at the MAI confirmed that Salman Abedi had been radicalised by his father Ramadan Abedi.

The Lobbyists, donors and industrialists

Crescent Petroleum

An UEA-based energy consortium with Tory donor, Abdul Majid Jafar as its CEO. In 2010, it entered an agreement with Russia's *Rosneft* for joint expansion in North Africa. Sponsor of the *Conservative Middle East Council* (CMEC) and a personal friend of Kwasi Kwarteng. Businessman Abbas Yazdanpanah Yazdi was kidnapped just as he was about to provide a witness testimony in an arbitration case between Crescent Petroleum and Iran's national oil company.

Joseph Walker-Cousins

Walker-Cousins is a former officer in Britain's Paratrooper regiment who advised the British Envoy to Benghazi between 2011 and 2012. His Select Committee Testimony in 2016 and 2017 on Operation Sophia and the emerging 'Migrant Crisis' was the first to recognise the importance of General Khalifa Haftar in Libya's future. Employed as Middle East Business Development Director by KBR (Kellogg Brown and Root) - key members of the Libyan British Business Council. Served in an advisory capacity as 'specialist' for Sir

Crispin Blunt and the Foreign Office Committee's report, *'Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options'* (Sept 2016). The report duly acknowledged his role as Business Development and Libya Country Manager at KBR UK Ltd.

KBR (Kellogg Brown and Root)

America Engineering and Construction company and employers of CMEC ally and former Benghazi Envoy adviser, Joseph Walker-Cousins. In 2017 the company was at the centre of Unaoil investigation launched by the UK's Serious Fraud Office over suspected bribery. Included in the investigation are Mustafa Zarti and Libyan/ Benghazi businessman, Muhannad Alamir. Alamir also acted as agent for Blue Mountain - the British security firm brought in to guard the US Embassy in Benghazi just weeks before the September 2012 attack on its embassy staff.

Adam Smith International

Foreign aid contractor ('Poverty baron') and business management consultancy based in London whose directors include Sir Malcolm Rifkind (who David Shayler claims authorised the Mi6-LIFG assassination of Colonel Gaddafi in 1996). The company handled over \$1 billion worth of aid as part of the Temporary Financing Mechanism in Libya in 2011 (much of it spent on funding the rebel militia). In 2017 an investigation by the Department for International Development (Dfid) found the company guilty of unethical profiteering. Several founding members including Peter Young stepped down as a result. Associated with Jacqui Smith, the British Home Secretary at the time of the 2009 Arndale Plot (Operation Pathway).

Falcon and Associates

The UAE lobbying company who have made regular donations to CMEC and pro-Haftar Conservative MPs David Morris, Kwasi Kwarteng and Charlotte Leslie (among others). The country is said to have been seeking significant stakes in Libyan construction projects.

Consolidated Construction Company

UAE company with close relations with Saif al-Islam Gaddafi. Have made significant donations to CMEC and pro-Haftar MPs.

Ayman Asfari (Petrofac)

Petrofac chairman and Tory Party donor who found himself at the centre of a Serious Fraud Office and FBI Unaoil investigation in 2017. The Syrian is responsible for funding Syria's White Helmets (aka. Syria Civil Defense) — a volunteer/outreach organisation. Some claim that many of its volunteers are linked to various terrorist groups including the *Al Nusra Front* and ISIS. Asfari's company *Petrofac* were alleged to have been at the forefront of the new Libyan oil race.

I.I

The Warning Signs

THE LIFG | THREATS TO GLOBAL SAFETY & STABILITY



In order to provide the kind of context that can prise open the secretive doors of domestic terror attacks and expose them to broader, and hopefully more helpful, discussion, we will need to cast our minds back to the mid-2000s, just as the so-called Manchester Arndale plot was taking shape — the failed terrorist attack planned for Easter 2009 that prefigured the Arena bombing. The date was Wednesday, April 8th 2009 and the unsuccessful Jihadist attack was in the final stages of being planned and executed. The men involved were Janas Khan, a student at Hope University in Liverpool and Abid Naseer, a student in Manchester —acting, or so it was alleged, on the orders of senior Al Qaeda leaders. In a report by Duncan Gardham and Aislinn Simpson for the *Daily Telegraph*, published shortly after members of the group had been arrested, it is alleged that *Ozlam Properties*, owned and operated by Mohammed Benhammedi — a key financier for the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* — had been leasing a Liverpool bedsit to Khan, Naseer and their accomplices.⁸ During the course of the *Manchester Arena Inquiry* in December 2021 it was learned that letters from Benhammedi had been recovered from the Abedi's family home at 21 Elsmore Road, and that Salman Abedi and Abdullah Benhammedi

⁸ 'Manchester terror plot' suspect pictured for first time, Duncan Gardham and Aislinn Simpson, *Daily Telegraph*, April 12 2009;
<https://web.archive.org/web/20201109033518/https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/5145160/Manchester-terror-plot-suspect-pictured-for-first-time.html>

had attended Trafford College together. Communication data that had featured in the case against Hashem Abedi also revealed that the bombers had communicated with another member of the Benhammedi family “within a few minutes of placing a failed order for hydrogen peroxide on 19 March 2017”.⁹ We also learned on the last day of the hearings that Salman had travelled to Germany via Istanbul on his way to Weissenfels in Germany, where his brother Hashem had been working on a real estate venture with Abdullah Benhammedi. Istanbul, by contrast, is where Mohammed Benhammedi, the man who featured in *The Telegraph*’s ‘Arndale’ story in 2009, operated his own property business, *Aqar Istanbul*.¹⁰ According to a session held in November 2021, the Manchester Arena Inquiry heard how the boys’ father Ramada Abedi had similarly travelled to Istanbul in February, July and August the previous year under the name, Hannah Joseph.¹¹ He would, under that same name, make a separate journey to Istanbul in July 2017, re-entering the UK via that same city for a one week stay in Manchester at the beginning of April 2017.¹² Because of the groups’ respective business activities in both countries, it is entirely possible that there was a perfectly innocent explanation for the trip.

⁹ ‘Manchester Arena Enquiry’, Day 11, September 28, 2020; <https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2020/09/28185422/MAI-Day-11-1.pdf>, 93

¹⁰ According to a brief provided by Kharon Risks in July 2018, Aqar Istanbul and Weissenfels Immobilien Company operated as subsidiaries of the Hammadi Group.

¹¹ ‘Manchester Arena Enquiry’, Day 11, September 28, 2020; <https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2021/11/23202144/MAI-Day-171.pdf>, 93

¹² Chronology of Abedi travel; Manchester Arena Inquiry, https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2020/12/08142046/INQ034649_139.pdf

Inevitably, some of these things may be little more than a coincidence. This was a tight-knit community of Libyan ex-pats and the bomber's father had featured prominently in its chain of command and in the group's complex and still evolving internal politics that featured both moderates and radicals alike. Libya's problems were not resolved by NATO intervention in the 2011 Revolution, but altered rather. Gaddafi had been a life-threatening asteroid occupying the Maghreb region. NATO's disastrous intervention had simply split that asteroid into an unpredictable volley of smaller, destructive fragments. There was still much yet to do. Yet despite whatever coincidences or complex twists of fate had brought the fighters back together, there's one thing we can't refute about the 2009 Arndale investigation: senior members of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* designated (however unfairly) as a threat to "global safety and stability" by the United Nations and US Treasury Department in 2006¹³ had found themselves earmarked in the broader mechanisms of a plot to bomb a shopping centre in Manchester, and on Interpol's 'Most Wanted' list.

Little more than two weeks after *The Telegraph* story had been published, the British Home Office under Jacqui Smith, with the full backing of the High Court of England and Wales, revoked the control orders that had previously been imposed on the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* and *Ozlam Properties*. According to files maintained by the *British and Irish Legal Information Institute* the Home Secretary's decision had been made, at least in part, as a result of "significant developments" between Gaddafi's Government and the imprisoned LIFG leaders (and perhaps also within the broader context

¹³ US Department of the Treasury, Press Releases, Treasury Designates UK-Based Individuals, Entities Financing Al Qaida-Affiliated LIFG, February 8 2006, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/js4016.aspx>

of the ‘secret’ negotiations taking place between Tony Blair, the J.P. Morgan bank and Colonel Gaddafi in January that year ¹⁴). Revoking the control orders on the LIFG had proceeded as originally planned despite the report in *The Daily Telegraph* on Sunday, April 12th 2009 implicating *Ozlam Properties* in the broader context of Khan and Naseer’s plot.¹⁵ The High Court Ruling that came a few weeks later on April 30th 2009 had been built around the case of LIFG member ‘AV’ aka Abdul al-Rahman Al-Faqih.¹⁶ Just several weeks prior to the Arndale bust, al-Faqih’s name had appeared in a report by the *Daily Telegraph* linking him to Benhammedi and the *Sanabel Relief Fund*. Just that very week, Benhammedi, an alleged ‘jihadist’, had been placed on Interpol’s ‘Most Wanted’ list over suspicions that the fund was being used to subsidize terror plots by Al Qaeda.¹⁷ The general substance of the hearing heard at the Royal Courts of Justice on April 30th 2009 is that the control orders that Britain and the UN had placed on al-Faqih and Benhammedi in 2004 had been based in part on statements made and evidence produced by the authorities of states “with a questionable record of treatment of suspects and detainees.” As a result of “developments of great potential significance occurring in Libya in March

¹⁴ ‘Tony Blair’s six secret visits to Col Gaddafi’, Jasper Cropping, Robert Mendick, the Daily Telegraph, September 24 2011

¹⁵ ‘Manchester terror plot’ suspect pictured for first time, Duncan Gardham and Aislinn Simpson, Daily Telegraph, April 12 2009;
<https://web.archive.org/web/20201109033518/https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/5145160/Manchester-terror-plot-suspect-pictured-for-first-time.html>

¹⁶ The Birmingham-based Libyan known as AV in the High Court hearing in April 2009 has an identical date birth (15.12.1959) to Abd Al-Rahman Al-Faqih. See:
<https://sanctions.lursoft.lv/person/abd-al-rahman-al-faqih/ofac-9595>

¹⁷ ‘Terror suspects linked to al-Qaeda on the run in Midlands’, Daily Telegraph, February 8 2009;
<https://web.archive.org/web/20101128112723/https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/4559804/Terror-suspects-linked-to-al-Qaeda-on-the-run-in-Midlands.html>

2009” it was the considered opinion of the Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith that the evidence produced and statements which had implicated al-Faqih in the suicide bomb attacks in Casablanca in May 2003 were now “flawed”. The application for the lifting of sanctions against ‘AV’ was passed by Smith with complete indifference to the fact that his Birmingham associate, Mohammed Benhammedi was featuring in reports relating to Abid Naseer and the Manchester Arndale Plot.

The “developments of great potential significance” referred to by the Home Secretary appear to have been based on a decision made by Colonel Gaddafi and his son Saif al-Islam in Libya that month to ‘delist’ the LIFG as a terrorist organisation on the condition that they renounced all sympathies with Al Qaeda.¹⁸ The moves towards reconciliation being taken by Gaddafi signalled a desire to re-engage with the International community after the outrage which had been expressed over the Abu the Lockerbie Bombing and the Avbu Salim Prison Massacre.¹⁹ As a result of the ‘de-radicalisation’ process, something of a peace deal was brokered and prisoners were slowly released, relieving no small amount of moral burden on the deals being brokered by Britain.

Speaking to authors, Mary Fitzgerald and Emadeddin Badi in 2020, Miftah al-Dawadi, a former leader of the LIFG (or the Al-Jama’a al-Islamiyyah al-Muqatilah) explained how the group should have been formed under another name: “We could have been the ‘Islamic Front for Change’ or something like

¹⁸ ‘The Awakening: How Revolutionaries, Barack Obama, and Ordinary Muslims are Remaking the Middle East.’, Peter Bergen, Cornell International Affairs Review 5.2 (2012); <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=1245>

¹⁹ ‘The Limits of Reconciliation: Assessing the Revisions of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)’, Institute for Integrated Transitions, Mary Fitzgerald and Emadeddin Badi, September 2020

that because the term *muqatilah*, or fighters, is so easily associated with terrorism by people in different parts of the world”. It was, he lamented, simply a product of its time. Consequentially, all the holistic goals the group had sought had failed to register with the wider public.²⁰ Amnesty International would later note that of the 380 or so people killed as a result of the insurgency in the 1990s, none had been civilians.²¹

In September 2011, as pressure began to mount on Cameron’s Conservative Government to justify their cooperation with the LIFG in joint-efforts to against Gaddafi, *The Daily Mail* newspaper ran a story claiming that the addition of al-Faqih and other members of the LIFG to the British and UN terror lists in 2004 had been part of a secret trade deal between Colonel Gaddafi and the New Labour Government. The newspaper described how al-Faqih and the group had been designated a terrorist risk only *after* Tony Blair had signed “his infamous ‘deal in the desert’”. In an interview with the same newspaper, Conservative MP, David Davis said “it looks as if the Labour Government used control orders as a way of appeasing Gaddafi by handicapping his opponents, rather than as a way of protecting the safety of British citizens” and urged an immediate inquiry.²² It was duly acknowledged that the group’s only crime was to have used the fund to support the wives and children of dead or imprisoned LIFG members and to have assisted in the preparation of forged passports to secure their flights

²⁰ ‘The Limits of Reconciliation: Assessing the Revisions of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)’, Institute for Integrated Transitions, Mary Fitzgerald and Emadeddin Badi, September 2020, p.8

²¹ Ibid, p.12

²² ‘How Labour secretly put Libyan dissidents under house arrest at Gaddafi’s behest following Blair’s ‘deal in the desert’’, Ian Birrell, Abul Taher, Daily Mail, September 11, 2011

from Libya. No mention was made of the documents recovered by Police from al-Faqih's home in Birmingham in October 2005 which were alleged to have provided "detailed instructions on the preparation of explosives" and a "manifesto for the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group". The decision made Jacqui Smith, and a description of the documents and original charges can be viewed below on the BAILII website.²³

As a result of lifting the travel ban and un-freezing the group's assets, the rebels were not only free to move around in Britain and travel abroad, they were also free access and redistribute their assets. It was this court ruling that the coalition government under Prime Minister David Cameron would subsequently use to justify the return of passports to dozens of British-based LIFG members between December 2010 and January 2011, as part of the new Government's bid to remove Gaddafi. Speaking to the *Middle East Eye* in November 2018, several former rebel fighters now back in Britain had described how they had been able to travel to Libya with "no questions asked".²⁴ It is further alleged that the men had met several other British-Libyans who had likewise had control-orders lifted as the air-strikes against Gaddafi intensified. When grilled by MPs in the House of Commons in September 2011, Prime Minister David Cameron defended the government's support of the Libyan

²³ BAILII, England and Wales High Court (Administrative Court) Decisions, Secretary of State for the Home Department v AV [2009] EWHC 902, April 30 2009; <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2009/902.html>

²⁴ 'Sorted by MI5: How UK government sent British-Libyans to fight Gaddafi', Amandla Thomas-Johnson, Simon Hooper, Middle Eastern Eye, November 7 2018; <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sorted-mi5-how-uk-government-sent-british-libyans-fight-gaddafi>

Rebels by saying: “The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group was allied with al-Qaeda. *It is not anymore* and has separated itself from that organisation.”²⁵

Despite the inevitable frustration we are likely to feel at the Abedis’ historical links to the Libyan revolutionary movement, it is not the intention of this review to determine whether or not the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* were indeed freedom fighters or Islamic extremists. It will only be necessary to understand the fluctuating narratives that were being produced about the group as the governments of Britain and America responded to rapidly changing circumstances in their relationship with Gaddafi’s Libya, and to the supply chains that linked these countries politically and economically. The focus of the review will not be in identifying the credibility of the threat they posed, but in the trade and political mechanisms that led to changes and reversals in the *perception* and *presentation* of those threats before, during and after the revolution in Libya in 2011. Neither is it my intention to question the ruling made by the Crown Prosecution Service at the conclusion of the Arndale inquiry, or whether the attacker, Salman Abedi was acting as part of a wider revolutionary network or was a vitriolic fantasist inspired by Jihadist propaganda on YouTube.²⁶

Try to visualise if you can, the creation of a perfect storm and the various collisions taking place in the political stratosphere above Libya in May 2017.

²⁵ UK Parliament Hansard Commons Chamber Libya, Volume 532, 5 September 2011, Prime Minister David Cameron; <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2011-09-05/debates/1109054000001/Libya>

²⁶ Between 2017 and 2018, ISIS were by far the most dominant group in Jihadist propaganda. During a three month period in 2018 a study found that over 1,348 ISIS videos had been uploaded to YouTube, garnering in excess of 160,000 views; <https://www.hSDL.org/c/what-does-isis-post-on-youtube/>

Composing the first layer would be the drastic icy freeze in the relationship between the GNA Government and Haftar's forces in the East and the rapid rise in Fahrenheit among supporters of General Haftar in the West. On the second layer we have the vortex of winds touching down on the region's tumultuous oil crescent — a result of the major disturbances brought about by the rivals energies of the world's oil and construction magnates colliding. In Tripoli, where the rebel militias had been enduring some of the most violent and sustained assaults from Haftar forces in months, the grievances that had fired the spirit and lifted the souls of the *17th February Martyrs* in 2011 were being slowly redirected into a flood of erratic rage. Angry young men like Salman and Hashem Abedi, determined to prove their worth to their parent nation in the chaotic muddle of the Libyan diaspora, and perhaps feeding off a stream of pay-as-you go vitriol from propaganda gurus ISIS on YouTube, could have waited for the storm to pass, but instead they rushed straight into it, perhaps re-establishing the links and drawing on the energy that the *Martyrs'* group had relied from al-Qaeda prior to 2009; their fidelity to their ancestral roots untangled and restored in one earth-shattering moment.²⁷ It was at this very moment that the nightmares of a world on the margins literally collapsed centre-stage. They were no longer casualties of the storm, but a part of it. And they had brought that storm to Britain.

What follows is not an attempt to cast judgment on the moral grounds for either 'Jihadism' or 'Revolution' — the spiritual or literal call to arms based on a real or perceived sense of persecution or oppression — but to understand the flip-flopping security policies that had been impulsively rolled-out by

²⁷ 'A Study on Libyans Living Abroad', Martin Russell and Ramadan Sanoussi Belhaj, International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2020

successive British governments — Labour *and* Conservative — and how these stunning u-turns in policy prepared the ground and sparked the fury that led to the Arena Bombing.

I.II

The Arndale ‘Easter Bombing’

TERROR OPERATIONS | OPENING AND CLOSING PATHWAYS



Despite a later ruling of insufficient evidence, it was thought that Khan, Naseer and their accomplices had been targeting the Trafford and Arndale Shopping Centres as part of a broader suicide campaign. In the run-up to Easter 2009, flats in the Cheetham Hill district of Manchester had been raided by Police²⁸, just as other flats in the Cheetham area would be raided by Police investigating the Manchester Arena bombing in 2017.²⁹ Further associates of Khan and Naseer had been arrested in Norway that year. Some four years later, personal documents and correspondence found in the Abbottabad compound between the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group*’s Atiyah Abul al-Rahman and Osama Bin Laden were subsequently used to secure Naseer’s conviction in the US over the *New York Subway Plot*. Astonishingly, these documents not only expressed a plausible link between Naseer’s 2009 Manchester plot and members of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* in England, they also suggested that Britain’s Mi6 had been secretly negotiating with the group’s leader, Abu Anas al-Libi in Britain.³⁰ Taken at face value, the documents appear to confirm that senior

²⁸ ‘Revealed: The dramatic moment Abid Naseer’s Arndale Centre plot was brought down by machine gun police’, Yakub Qureshi, Manchester Evening News, March 6 2015

²⁹ ‘Large part of Manchester attack network detained, police say’, Robert Booth, Vikram Dodd, Haroon Siddique, Helen Pidd and Frances Perraudin, The Guardian, May 27 2017

³⁰, Abid Naseer Trial, Abbottabad Documents and Exhibits, United States v. Abid Naseer Criminal Docket No. 10-19 (S-4) (RJD);

LIFG members were hoping to negotiate a deal with Mi6 that would offer the British Government a political route out of Afghanistan and into the Maghreb:

“While brother 'Urwa al-Libi was in Iran a couple of months ago (shortly before he went to Libya), he had written me an email telling me that some of the Libyan brothers in England had talked to him about the following:

British Intelligence spoke to them (these Libyan brothers in England), and asked them to try to contact the people they knew in al-Qaeda to inform them of and find out what they think about the following idea: England is ready to leave Afghanistan if al-Qaeda would explicitly commit to not moving against England or her interests.”³¹

As a result of progress made at the Manchester Arena Inquiry it has now been confirmed that the family of Salman Abedi had been well acquainted with al-Libi and his family in Manchester.³² Abid Naseer was subsequently jailed in the US. It also transpires that the TATP explosive device that Naseer and his accomplice, Najibullah Zazi had been planning to use in Manchester and New York was the same TATP compound used in the Manchester Arena Bombing in May 2017.³³

https://kronosadvisory.com/Abid.Naseer.Trial_Abbottabad.Documents_Exhibits.403.404.405.420thru433.pdf

³¹ Ibid., p.8

³² Manchester Arena Inquiry, November 22, 2021, Day 170; <https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2021/11/22172239/MAI-Day-170-.pdf>, opus transcripts, 131

³³ ‘Manchester, New York and Oslo’, Raffaello Pantucci, CTC Sentinel, Vol. 3, Issue 8, August 2010, p.12; <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/CTCSentinel-Vol3Iss8-13.pdf>

On April 9th 2009, the six month old covert investigation into Naseer and the Manchester Arndale Plot (codenamed ‘Operation Pathway’) was prematurely blown when the London Metropolitan’s counter-terrorism chief, Bob Quick inadvertently leaked details of the operation to the press. Documents marked ‘secret’ had been photographed in Quick’s hands as he entered 10 Downing Street.³⁴ With the Operation compromised, Mi5 had been compelled to act much sooner than planned, leading to the premature arrest of Naseer and his accomplices. Both the leak and the premature actions of the counter-terrorist police would play a major role in the decision made by the Crown Prosecution Service in recommending that the case be dismissed. As with an earlier leak, opposition MPs were quick to point the finger of blame at the then Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith.³⁵

According to a report published by the Federal Research Division at the US Library of Congress in 2012, 2009 was also the year that Manchester LIFG member, Abd al-Baset Azzouz had left Britain for the Pakistan-Afghan border. The report describes how in mid-2011 Azzouz is believed to have made his way to Libya to build a team of experienced jihadists in support of al-Qaeda’s objectives in the Maghreb region.³⁶

³⁴ ‘Terror plot: How Bob Quick’s blunder forced MI5’s hand’, Gordon Rayner and Duncan Gardham, Daily Telegraph, April 9 2009

³⁵ ‘Former police chief defends decision to arrest Tory frontbencher Damian Green over leak’, James Meikle, The Guardian, April 28 2010

³⁶ Al-Qaeda in Libya: A Profile, A Report Prepared by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, August 2012;
https://www.kronosadvisory.com/CTTSO_Al_Qaeda_in_Libya_Final_Obtained260912.pdf



The photograph of Bob Quick entering 10 Downing Street that blew the terror operation

Interestingly, the 2009 plot to bomb the Arndale centre in Manchester had been set in motion just months after a series of trips that the British Prime Minister Tony Blair had made to Gaddafi in Tripoli at the end of May 2007. According to stories published in the British Press in 2011, Blair had been in Libya to negotiate a trade deal between the *Libyan Investment Authority* (LIA) and a company run by the Russian oligarch, Oleg Deripaska—a mutual friend of both Saif Gaddafi, Nat Rothschild and former Conservative Chancellor, George Osborne.³⁷

Jacqui Smith, the British Home Secretary caught up in the collapse of the Manchester Arndale plot and who had removed the control orders on the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* in 2009, would subsequently find employment

³⁷ 'Tony Blair's six secret visits to Col Gaddafi', Jasper Copping and Robert Mendick, Daily Telegraph, September 24 2011

with Roger Usher's *Global Governance Partners* who in 2017 had been assisting former members of the rebel militias in their attempts to build the parliamentary framework around Libya's GNA.³⁸ Another of Usher's aid companies, *Adam Smith International* handled aid totalling over \$1 billion as part of the *Temporary Financing Mechanism* in Libya in 2011. According to a report in the *Manchester Guardian* dated March 2nd 2017, *Adam Smith International* had already been placed under investigation after being accused of unethical practices.

Libya's *Temporary Financing Mechanism*, set up by the United Nations to help cover expenses incurred by rebel forces, has likewise been dogged by accusations of cronyism and malpractice.³⁹ According to a report by CNN in October 2011, the *Temporary Financing Mechanism* had been accused of negotiating deals that were believed to have been well below the existing exchange value. By the time that the *National Transitional Council* had been formally installed in Tripoli, little remained of Libya's wealth. Some claimed that it only had \$13.5 million in the Central Bank of Libya. Much of the money spent had been derived from plundering Gaddafi's frozen assets. Arming the rebels had become little more than a loan.

³⁸ <https://gpgovernance.net/associates/jacqui-smith/>

³⁹ United States Mission to the United Nations, August 8 2011, Letter to the Ambassador, Howard Wachtel; <https://web.archive.org/web/20121013203316/https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/194164.pdf>

I.III

Making Sensible use of Libya's Amazing Patrimony of Hydrocarbons

AN OIL STORY | BORIS JOHNSON SEES MOMENT OF HOPE FOR
LIBYA



In an article published by *The Spectator* magazine just one week before the Manchester Arena Bombing, the British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson put forward a typically ham-fisted case for the 42-year rule of Gaddafi. Whilst conceding that his rule had been “vile and incompetent”, he expressed his belief that it had, nevertheless “kept the country together”.⁴⁰ In all fairness, his opinion on the subject wasn’t substantially different to the views he’d expressed at the time that the British Parliament had first been considering military intervention in Libya in March 2011. Writing in his column for the *Daily Telegraph* just two weeks before his fellow Conservatives would vote on the controversial UNSCR 1973 UN directive requesting a military ‘No Fly Zone’ in Libya, Johnson explained that whilst he knew that Gaddafi’s security forces had been involved in the killing of “hundreds of innocent people” and that the “psychopathic, unelected dictator” had far more regard for oil than he had for “human rights”⁴¹ he

⁴⁰ ‘This is a moment of hope for Libya — We can’t afford to miss it’, Boris Johnson, *The Spectator*, May 13 2017; <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/libya-s-best-hope>

⁴¹ ‘Our betrayal of the Lockerbie victims returns to haunt us’, Boris Johnson, *Daily Telegraph*, March 7, 2011;

shared the view of Putin that intervention in Libya was “defective and flawed” and only likely to lead to further instability and more civilian casualties.⁴² Johnson’s greater concern, however, was that Gaddafi had lost control of the oil: *“Every instinct tells us that Gaddafi has had it. He has lost great tracts of the country, including the vital oil-producing facilities at Benghazi. His state TV boasts of recapturing towns that he palpably does not control, and even in his stronghold of Tripoli his face has been ripped from the hoardings and we hear of long bursts of unexplained machine-gun fire.”* A No Fly Zone, he went on, was not a “magic” fix, and despite what the Libyan rebels were saying, it was “far from clear that the people of that country want to see their uprising turned into a foreign-backed coup”.⁴³

After criticising the UN resolution for resembling the “medieval calls for crusades”, Russia abstained from the vote, perhaps anticipating the considerable disruption that it would bring to the region’s already crisis-hit oil crescent. But it wasn’t only the impact that regime change would have on Russia’s fairly substantial construction and energy interests here that troubled them, but the ripple-like effects that a successful revolution in Libya might have on the North Caucasus where densely populated states could split into even smaller challenging pieces, leading to the further

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/borisjohnson/8365454/Our-betrayal-of-the-Lockerbie-victims-returns-to-haunt-us.html>

⁴² ‘Putin compares Intervention to crusades’, Gleb Bryanski, Reuters, March 21, 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-russia-idUSTRE72K3JR20110321>

⁴³ ‘Our betrayal of the Lockerbie victims returns to haunt us’, Boris Johnson, Daily Telegraph, March 7, 2011.

spread of extremism.⁴⁴ In July 2011, Vladimir Chamov, a former Ambassador sparked fury when he accused Russia's President Medvedev of betraying the commercial interests of Russia by failing to veto the UN vote on the *No Fly Zone*. A *Reuters* report went on to explain how Russia was likely to lose over \$4 billion in weapons deals in Libya as a result of an arms embargo it had backed. In addition to the 2.2 billion euro contract between Gaddafi and the Russian Railways, the country had also invested hundreds of millions of dollars in the oil licenses secured in Libya by Germany's *Wintershall Dea* in 2007.⁴⁵ With this rather untypical alliance in mind, it is curious to note that Germany was one of only four member states who abstained from the No Fly Zone vote.⁴⁶

In all fairness, Russia probably reserved the right to be every bit as cautious as they were. In 1917, the era-shifting revolution that had swept the country and ended the three-hundred year rule of the Romanovs had, like Libya, seen the first screams of protest in February that year. By March 15th Tsar Nicholas II had abdicated, almost 94 years to the day that the UN approved the No Fly Zone in Libya and the rebel's Transitional National Council was formally declared. The events in February 1917 set in motion a chaotic chain of events that would eventually tear Russia apart — Britain,

⁴⁴ 'No Middle East-style scenario for Russia – Medvedev', RT, February 22, 2011; <https://www.rt.com/russia/middle-east-russia-medvedev/>

⁴⁵ 'The Global Expansion of Russia's Energy Giants', Nina Poussenkova, *Journal of International Affairs*, April 15, 2010; <https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/global-expansion-russias-energy-giants>; Reuters; <https://web.archive.org/web/20110709114235/http://af.reuters.com/article/libyaNews/idAFLDE72N04D20110324>

⁴⁶ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2011/sc10200.doc.htm>. Johnson was among a handful of MPs and Chief Executives who didn't back the No Fly Zone. Others included Labour's Jeremy Corbyn and Dennis Skinner.

America and France first welcoming the opportunities that had arisen as a result of the protests and the establishment of a Provisional Government, and then grappling with the brutal fallout that came in October when Lenin's Bolsheviks made a belligerent, game-changing grab for power, seizing control of assets and taking control of the oil fields that Britain and America had been making plans with Kerensky's Provisional Government to exploit.⁴⁷ Within a few short weeks, Russia had descended into Civil War and its allies in the West were faced with two conflicting governments: the 'Reds' in the West of the country and the 'Whites' in the East. The dilemma they were faced with was really quite straightforward: should they assist 'the Whites' in their war with Lenin's Bolsheviks, or should they ditch their loyalties to Russia's Monarchists and its Liberals and trade directly with the 'the Reds'? In the end it all came down to this: which side would be the more capable when it came to maintaining a stable environment and securing control of the oil fields: 'the Whites' or 'the Reds'? After a disastrous two years of limited intervention in the Russian Civil War, Britain and American opted for the latter.

Johnson's *Spectator* article in May 2017 had been partly brought about by debates led in Parliament by Charlotte Leslie, MP for Bristol and the Vice Chairman of the *Conservative Middle East Council*, Kwasi Kwarteng in October 2016. The pair had been responding to the findings of the Foreign Affairs Committee on *British Intervention in Libya* published in September that year which had created the framework of urgency and

⁴⁷ 'Our Mr Urquhart', *Daily Herald*, No. 1,085 July 16, 1919, p.4; 'Anglo-American Loan to Omsk', *The New York Herald* (European Edition Paris), April 1, 1919, p.1; 'Concessions to Britain and America', *Manchester Guardian*, Apr 2, 1919, p.7; 'Anglo-American Loan to the Omsk-Government', *The Scotsman*, No. 23,662, April 2 1919, p.7

relevancy required to propose such a dramatic change of direction.⁴⁸ In the report's preamble, Sir Crispin Blunt, who had served as the previous director of *The Conservative Middle East Council*, explained how the FOC inquiry had been launched with a call for written evidence in July 2015. Its task was to determine if British intervention in Libya had gone beyond the mandate of UN Security Council resolution 1973.⁴⁹ In January 2016, CMEC's Leo Docherty had been among the first Conservative MPs to openly express their belief that Libya was "a failed state, riven by warring militias and jihadists."⁵⁰ Expressing his own view on the subject to *The Guardian* newspaper in July 2015, Blunt put the whole thing in some perspective: it was not just "a catastrophe for the people of Libya" but a "growing problem" for the rest of us, as Britain's newest enemy ISIS was beginning to establish significant control of the area, which was leading in turn to a spiralling "migration crisis". An earlier interview had revealed the kind of deadlock that the Foreign Office was up against; Britain had a moral responsibility to support the *Libyan Ground Force* shoring-up the provisional government but the merest suggestion of British installing a 1,000-strong training force in Tripoli would be perceived as a military

⁴⁸ Hansard, UK Parliament, House of Commons: October 26 2016, Westminster Hall, Libya, Volume 616, responses to Third Report from the Foreign Affairs Committee, Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options, HC 119; <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2016-10-26/debates/B4053264-E0B9-4237-A5CC-3C9ACB2C030D/Libya>

⁴⁹ 'Foreign Office to face inquiry into role played by UK in Libya's collapse', Matthew Weaver, *Guardian*, July 24 2015 ; <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/jul/24/libya-gaddafi-uk-foreign-affairs-select-committee-inquiry>

⁵⁰ Leo Docherty: 'Now that Egypt is stable, let's help it succeed', Leo Docherty, Conservative Home, <https://www.conservativehome.com/platform/2016/01/leo-doherty-now-that-egypt-is-stable-lets-help-it-succeed.html>

occupation and “therefore a military target”. The British Prime Minister was, moreover, “unlikely” to receive the political support he needed to restore stability with a full scale military effort.⁵¹

Although Blunt had stopped short of actually saying it, the only credible military presence in Libya at this time was the Libyan National Army under the command of Khlaifa Haftar. There was one insurmountable problem, however — the autocratic warlord wasn’t willing to recognise the UN-backed GNA as Libya’s only legitimate government. Blunt’s report pulled little in the way of punches. Britain’s policy of limited intervention had led to Libya’s “political and economic collapse” and engendered an indefinite period of “inter-militia and inter-tribal warfare” that was quickly deteriorating into “humanitarian and migrant crises”. To make matters worse, the ratification of the *Government of National Accord* that the UN had worked so hard to establish in December 2015 was being boycotted by Haftar.⁵² The French and Russian Special Forces were exacerbating tensions by taking part in military operations against the GNA militias launched by Haftar’s forces in Benghazi, and the United Arab Emirates were supplying arms and trucks in contravention of UN Sanctions. The conclusions drawn by the Blunt Report appear to indicate that Britain was preparing the ground for a radical ‘rethink’ on its policy in Libya by blaming the Cameron Government for failing “to identify the extremist militant

⁵¹ ‘Crispin Blunt: Britain has moral responsibility to train Libyan army’, Patrick Wintour, The Guardian, March 31 2016; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/31/crispin-blunt-britain-moral-responsibility-train-libyan-army>

⁵² ‘Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK’s future policy options Third Report of Session 2016–17’, British Foreign Office Committee, September 6 2016, p.3

Islamist element in the rebellion”.⁵³ In actual fact, the ‘failing’ couldn’t have been more different: Britain’s ‘failure’ wasn’t in identifying the Islamist element — its ‘failure’ was in using the Islamist element to get the job done without incurring losses among British troops or be seen to be doing ‘another Iraq’.

Kwarteng, perhaps emboldened by a £5,000 cash donation from Majid Jafar just weeks before, was a little more forthright on the issue. In a well choreographed routine in parliament with Charlotte Leslie and David Morris⁵⁴, Kwarteng was asked if he agreed that Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar would “possibly be a better person” to lead security in Libya. Backed by Shrewsbury MP, Daniel Kawczynski, Kwarteng explained that whilst he wouldn’t be able to offer a definitive answer to the question at that precise moment, it was clear that General Haftar was probably Libya’s “biggest military presence” and that many of Britain’s allies, including Egypt and the UAE were openly supporting him. Whilst conceding that there was no doubt that he was a “controversial figure”, it was, he lamented, “difficult to envisage a stable Libya without his active participation.”⁵⁵ In contrast to the reserve that the young and ambitious MP for Spelthorne had shown in Parliament in October, an article that Kwarteng was to publish in the

⁵³ ‘Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK’s future policy options Third Report of Session 2016–17’, British Foreign Office Committee, September 6 2016, p.37

⁵⁴ David Morris would subsequently persuade his old friend and band-mate, Rick Astley to perform at the ‘We Are Manchester’ benefit concert to mark the reopening of the Manchester Arena in September 2017. See: <https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/rick-astley-net-worth/>

⁵⁵ Hansard, Westminster Hall, House of Commons debates, Libya, 26th October 2016; <https://www.parliament.co.uk/debate/2016-10-26/commons/westminster-hall/libya>

Evening Standard on January 10th 2017 revealed not only the new firmness of his convictions but his easy familiarity with writers of the French Enlightenment:

“Libya’s Government of National Accord (GNA) reminds one of Voltaire’s definition of the Holy Roman Empire, which he memorably said was “neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire”. The GNA in Libya cannot be described as a “national” government, neither does the existence of more than 1,500 militias suggest much accord.

In the midst of all this chaos one figure is often referred to as a potential saviour. Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar is a 73-year-old former associate of Gaddafi. He enjoys support from Russia, Egypt and the UAE. He has control over the oil fields and much of the eastern part of Libya. The West remains committed to support the GNA.

Haftar may, however, be a source of stability in that beleaguered country.”

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It was a resounding endorsement indeed for someone who had until October 2016 expressed no formal interest in Libya, and who had shown no real knowledge of General Haftar in Parliament.

According to *Guardian* journalist, Alistair Sloane, David Morris — the Conservative MP for Morecambe and Lunesdale who had done Kwarteng and Leslie the enormous favour of feeding that groundbreaking opening dialogue to the pair in Parliament in October 2016 — had himself travelled

⁵⁶ ‘Inside Libya: Chaos in the Mediterranean’, Kwasi Kwarteng MP, Leo Docherty, Conservative Middle East Council, March 2017; <https://web.archive.org/web/20170517100106/https://cmec.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/CMEC%20Inside%20Libya.pdf>

to the UAE in April 2016, with his £2,800 in travel expenses covered by their Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Sloane commented that Morris had also travelled with Charlotte Leslie to Dubai later that year, “again paid for by Falcon Associates – the Dubai lobbying arm.” Asked if there was any unnecessary pressure being heaped on members of Parliament to back a shift of power to Haftar, Sloane commented that there was “no doubt” that without the firepower provided by the UAE, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Haftar’s power in the region “would not have been anywhere near as successful”.⁵⁷

The donation that Kwarteng had received in October that year was from Majid Jafar of *Crescent Petroleum*, a UEA-based consortium who had just signed a “ground breaking Strategic Cooperation Agreement” with Russia’s *Rosneft* for joint expansion in North Africa ⁵⁸ and were likely to be anxious to capitalise on *Rosneft*’s deal with Haftar and Libya’s *National Oil Corporation*.⁵⁹ The one single-greatest threat to the success of the deal was instability in the Oil Crescent region. According to various biographies, Jafar and Kharteng had both been students together at Eton College and Cambridge in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In January 2021, Britain’s *Daily Mirror* would run a story in which it was being reported that despite the UK’s spiralling energy crisis, Majid Jafar, the man who had personally

⁵⁷ ‘Was Salman Abedi Seeking a Caliphate, or Exacting Revenge?’ email from alastair@unequalmeasures.com to pixel.surgery@outlook.com, September 3, 2017, 7:00:36

⁵⁸ Crescent Petroleum, Onshore Sharjah Concession, 28th August 2016, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/rgi-documents/b7cc70094822ed9007fdd63f66a35965870fecc6.pdf>

⁵⁹ ‘Russia’s Rosneft strikes Libyan oil deal’, Financial Times, February 21 2017; <https://www.ft.com/content/d9322ba4-f84d-11e6-bd4e-68d53499ed71>;

help fund Kwarteng's campaign to be Business and Energy Minister, had seen the prices of shares soar at his UAE-listed *Dana Gas*.⁶⁰

Building on the back of these parliamentary exchanges in September 2016, CMEC produced a report for the British Foreign Office in March 2017 pushing support for former Gaddafi General, Khalifa Haftar, whose Tobruk-based government in the east of Libya, was now locked in a debilitating stalemate with the rebel-backed GNA in Tripoli. Reacting to a wave of renewed interest in Libya arising from the FAC report in September, Leo Docherty, Kwasi Kwarteng and a small delegation of CMEC partners had met with Haftar in Al Rajma in the first week of March 2017. The report, entitled, *Inside Libya: Chaos in the Mediterranean*, was based on that meeting and concluded with these key recommendations:

- that the UK should urgently engage with Haftar, that the UK should support the LNA to secure Libya's borders
- that the UK should reconsider its view of the existing GNA (consisting largely of rebel militias) and acknowledge its limited capacity to deliver any kind of governance or security for Libya.⁶¹

Libya, in the report's own words, was looking to become Britain's number one trading target post-Brexit, and the Libyan rebel government that Britain

⁶⁰ 'Gas tycoon who funded Kwasi Kwarteng re-election sees share price soar amid energy crisis'; Pippa Crerar, Daily Mirror, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/gas-tycoon-who-funded-kwasi-25429690>

⁶¹ 'Inside Libya: Chaos in the Mediterranean', Kwasi Kwarteng MP, Leo Docherty, Conservative Middle East Council, March 2017; <https://web.archive.org/web/20170517100106/https://cmec.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/CMEC%20Inside%20Libya.pdf>

had helped create in 2011 was becoming increasingly surplus to those plans — if not an outright obstacle. Despite evidence provided in the previous year’s report by the *Foreign Office Committee* that suggested that General Haftar and his forces had spent more time protecting the oil terminals than they had in fighting ISIS ⁶², the key findings published by CMEC promoted the idea that Haftar’s ‘mission’ was to stamp out Jihadist terrorism in Libya. In Tripoli, the home of the UN-recognised government of Libya, the GNA, the city was “dominated by warlords and criminal gangs” determined to prolong “the confusion” in the West of the country. The report, some 16 pages in length, continued along these lines. ⁶³

“If [Libyans] can put aside their differences, and stabilise the country, then this place of six million will not only be able to make sensible use of their amazing patrimony of hydrocarbons. They can open up some of the greatest tourist sites in the world, including Leptis Magna — currently too dangerous to visit.” — ‘This is a moment of hope for Libya. We can’t afford to miss it’, Boris Johnson, Spectator, May 12th 2017

The CMEC report also renewed scrutiny of the historical indiscretions and the terrorist alliances of the former *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* whose

⁶² House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK’s future policy options, Third Report of Session 2016–17, September 6 2016;
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmfa/119/119.pdf>

⁶³ *Inside Libya: Chaos in the Mediterranean*, Kwasi Kwarteng MP, Leo Docherty, Conservative Middle East Council, March 2017, p.3

services Britain had been used to topple Gaddafi. A selection of extracts reads:

“In the west many of the militia leaders, such as Abdelhakim Belhadj and Khaled Al Sharif, were involved with the Libya Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), an organisation with loose links to Al Qaeda. Other leaders, such as Salah Badi and Ali Al Sallabi, were imprisoned under the Gaddafi regime. The political motivations of these different agents remain unclear. They do not have any organised political programmes, nor do they operate under party political labels. On the other hand, they have been effective at creating militias on the ground, and carving themselves positions of power and influence.

The commitment of such people to a strong, functioning central government in Libya is doubtful. Many people feel that these militia leaders are direct beneficiaries of the ongoing political instability in Libya. The militia men have a vested interest in prolonging the chaos.

Many of these figures rose to prominence in the 2011 revolution and later became involved in Libya’s political transition participating in elections and serving in the government. The LIFG was, at the very least, loosely connected to Al Qaeda. While the leadership never publicly supported Al Qaeda’s campaign against the West, and in fact, denounced a suggestion that the LIFG joined Al Qaeda in 2007, numerous LIFG members did join Al Qaeda’s ranks. One of whom, Abu Yahya Al Libi was Al Qaeda’s deputy leader.”⁶⁴

⁶⁴ ‘Inside Libya: Chaos in the Mediterranean’, Kwasi Kwarteng MP, Leo Docherty, Conservative Middle East Council, March 2017, pp.4-5; p.12; <https://web.archive.org/web/20170517100106/https://cmec.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/CMEC%20Inside%20Libya.pdf>,

Leo Docherty, who would be elected Conservative MP for Aldershot in the month that followed the Manchester Arena Bombing, had supported the publication of the CMEC report with an article on his *ConservativeHome* diary: “*Western policy in Libya has been a disaster — we need a new one*”, he wrote. According to Docherty, the UN-backed *Government of National Accord* was “nothing of the sort; it is not a government.” Its President Fayeze Serraj was an “unelected appointee”, whose “ineffectiveness” suited only one group of people — “the militias”.⁶⁵ When making any attempt to assess the depth and scope of their knowledge it is worth bearing in mind that the CMEC team had spent no more than 72 hours in total Libya. Between the years 2016-2017 the pro-Haftar lobby, comprising of Kwasi Kwarteng of CMEC, Charlotte Leslie and David Morris had collectively racked-up in excess of £300,000 in donations from the Saudis, Bahrain and a small but influential pack of oil producers and construction companies including *Crescent Petroleum*, *Consolidated Construction Company*, Rosemary Said and *Falcon Associates*, each with expanding interests in Libya.⁶⁶ The man that CMEC had in mind to pull the country together was General Haftar, a man whose troops had earned a rather terrifying reputation for exhuming and crucifying the enemy dead.⁶⁷

The report had been bankrolled by a pool of CMEC’s main financial supporters that included David Rowland of Aegis/Gardaworld, Nicholas

⁶⁵ <https://www.conservativehome.com/platform/2017/04/leo-doherty-western-policy-in-libya-has-been-a-disaster-we-need-a-new-one.html>, Leo Docherty, April 2 2017

⁶⁶ <http://search.electoralcommission.org.uk/>

⁶⁷ <https://en.minbarlibya.org/2017/03/23/haftar-is-a-big-bluff-believed-by-fools-only/>, March 23 2017

Soames and Abdul Majid Jafar, CEO of *Crescent Petroleum*, the latter a UEA-based consortium anxious to capitalise on the oil rich terminals in the Haftar-controlled east.⁶⁸ That *Crescent Petroleum* had entered an agreement with Russia's *Rosneft* for joint expansion in North Africa may also offer a glimpse of the broader commercial logic behind the pursuit of power change in Libya, especially in light of the recent deal negotiated between *Rosneft*, Haftar and the *National Oil Corporation*.⁶⁹ If the former American President, Donald Trump had cut a deal with pro-Kremlin oligarch, Igor Sechin for an estimated 19% stake in the Russian state-owned company, *Rosneft*, as was claimed in the infamous 'Steele Dossier'⁷⁰, then it may go some way toward explaining why in July 2017, the White House was reported to be considering ramping up military support in Haftar's East.⁷¹ It may also be significant to note that Salman Abedi had expressed sentiments about needing to 'sort out' General Haftar in conversations with convicted terrorist, Abdalraouf Abdallah in response to a Jihadi newsreel in November 2014.⁷² It was also duly acknowledged at the *Manchester Arena*

⁶⁸ David Rowland had made a personal contribution of £100,000 to CMEC in October 2010, just weeks before Kwarteng, Leslie and Morris began to put a series of questions regarding Libya's future to members of parliament.

⁶⁹ 'Russia's Rosneft strikes Libyan oil deal', Financial Times, February 21 2017; <https://www.ft.com/content/d9322ba4-f84d-11e6-bd4e-68d53499ed71>

⁷⁰ Steele Dossier (leak), Fusion GPS, Company Intelligence Report, Christopher Steele, December 13 2016; <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/3259984/Trump-Intelligence-Allegations.pdf>

⁷¹ 'US military considers ramping up Libya', Barbara Starr, CNN Pentagon Correspondent, July 10, 2017; <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/07/10/politics/trump-us-military-libya-strategy/index.html>

⁷² Official Sensitive, https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2021/10/27185933/INQ033826_21.pdf

Inquiry in December 2020 that the ex-Grand Mufti Al Ghariyani, generally believed to have been a figure of influence in the Abedi family, had been bitterly opposed to Haftar ever since the warlord's return to Libya from America in 2011.⁷³ Abdallah was also able to confirm for the Inquiry that he had served alongside the bomber's father in the Tripoli Militia (consisting of members of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group*) and the 17 February Martyrs Brigade.⁷⁴

Whilst the fabric of the 2017 discussions between CMEC and the LNA consisted largely of efforts to contain extremism, it was clear that Haftar's overriding concern had been his failure to harvest and retain the considerable oil revenues being passed from the LNA-controlled oil terminals in the east of the country to the NOC, and the Rothschild-owned Central Bank — 60% of which was going to Tripoli. In a no less provocative move, the CMEC report concluded with a quote from Winston Churchill: "I decline utterly to be impartial between the fire brigade and the fire." It turned out to be an unusually prescient statement in view of the challenges faced by the London Fire Department at Grenfell Towers in North Kensington some three weeks after the Arena Bombing.

There are reasonable grounds to argue that in light of the volatile nature of events taking place that week in Libya and the generally pique and outrage that had been felt by supporters of the GNA in response to the

⁷³ Pictures emerged of Ghariyani with the bomber's father Ramadan Abedi on social media platforms in May and June 2017; https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2021/12/14160356/INQ016276_1-4.pdf

⁷⁴ Manchester Arena Inquiry: Arena bomber's father part of militia, terrorist says, Daniel De Simone, BBC News, November 21 2021

CMEC report, Boris Johnson's article *The Spectator* on May 12th 2017 was an astonishingly tactless if not deeply provocative move from the British Foreign Secretary. The *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group*, with its sizeable contingent from Manchester, had been formed specifically for the task of removing Gaddafi from power and had played a critical role in British and American efforts to aggressively remove the dictator and his regime in March 2011 — as part of a thinly disguised grassroots insurrection. That Britain was showing signs of having changed her mind about the rebels could well have triggered an impulsive reaction among the legions of former revolutionaries who made up the LIFG. Johnson may have recognised that his rule was tyrannical, but the Foreign Secretary's support for the broader mechanisms of the Gaddafi regime (and his heir apparent, Khalifa Haftar) leaves little to the imagination. One can only imagine the sense of betrayal that was being experienced at that time by former members of the Manchester Fighting Group; their excruciating servitude under the most vicious of oppressors coddled into a deluded halcyon fantasy in the crassest of magazine articles by the British Foreign Secretary.

"The hotels are waiting to be filled. The sea is turquoise and lovely and teeming with fresh fish. Libya was once the birthplace of emperors, a bustling centre of the Mediterranean world. It can have a great future. All it takes is political will and the courage to compromise — Boris Johnson: 'This is a moment of hope for Libya. We can't afford to miss it', The Spectator, May 2017

Another central figure in Britain's swelling Haftar lobby at this time was Joseph Walker-Cousins. The Bristol-based Cousins had served as a key

adviser to the UK's special envoy in Benghazi from 2011 to 2012 and provided a critical advisory role as 'specialist' for the Foreign Office Committee's review of British Intervention in the Libyan Revolution of 2011 ('Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options', FOC, September 2016). Like Docherty, Walker-Cousins, a former paratrooper, was a graduate of the *School of Oriental and African Studies* (SOAS, University of London), an institution that not only has a reputation for turning out first-class linguists, but is also rumoured to have become a finishing-school students of Mi6 taking up positions in Asia, Africa and the Near and Middle East.

The testimony provided by Walker-Cousins before a UK Select Committee in March 2017 — part of a review on North Africa's 'migrant crisis' — reiterated the key recommendations that had made originally in Leo Docherty's CMEC report, published just a week or so before.⁷⁵ Within days of Walker-Cousin's appearance before the British Select Committee, *The Guardian* newspaper ran the headline, "1 million African migrants may be en route to Europe, says former UK envoy".⁷⁶ The 'envoy' that newspaper was quoting was Walker-Cousins — not a former envoy at all but an adviser to an envoy. Patrick Wintour of *The Guardian* also failed to mention that Walker-Cousins was now employed as Middle East Business

⁷⁵ EU External Affairs Sub-Committee, March 30 2017; <https://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/a01fb416-0d84-4faa-9bb7-a6687bf8eed9>

⁷⁶ '1m African migrants may be en route to Europe', says former UK envoy, Patrick Wintour, *The Guardian*, April 2 2017; <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/apr/02/1m-african-migrants-may-be-en-route-to-europe-says-former-uk-envoy>

Development Director at *Kellogg Brown and Root UK* (KBR).⁷⁷ This Texas-based company had not only won substantial contracts in Libya post-2011, they were also now key members of the *Libyan British Business Council* (other members also included *Petrofac*, *Adam Smith International*, *BP*, the *Libyan Investment Authority*, *Tatweer Research* and *Gardaworld*). Intended to promote business relations and commercial activity between the British and Libyan business communities, the *Libyan British Business Council* there may be reasonable grounds to argue that the group has become little more than a lobbying house carrying out the wishes of whatever leader is harvesting Libya's wealth at that time. The Council's director, Lord Trefgarne, a cherished member of the 1980s Thatcher Government, played a pivotal role in the release of Lockerbie bomber, Abdelbaset Ali Mohmed al-Megrahi in August 2009. As the Gaddafi regime collapsed and colossal sums of cash were being liberated from the banks by US and British-backed rebels, it was reported that Trefgarne had asked the then fugitive, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi to help him recover almost £1 million in fees for services rendered over the al-Megrahi affair.⁷⁸ LIBC's Ambassador, Dominic Asquith eventually took a paid position as senior consultant with *Tatweer Research*, a Benghazi-based research and development company, specialising in technology and engineering that has conveniently made it onto LIBC's exclusive council member list. Another

⁷⁷ House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, Formal Minutes, Session 2015-16; <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/commons-committees/foreign-affairs/FAC-FormalMinutes-2015-16.pdf>

⁷⁸ 'Former Tory minister asked Saif Gaddafi for £1m over Lockerbie bomber's release', Andy Bloxham, Daily Telegraph September 11 2011; <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/8755446/Former-Tory-minister-asked-Saif-Gaddafi-for-1m-over-Lockerbie-bombers-release.html>

of its Directors was Mohamed Fezzani, former Deputy Chief Executive Officer and General Manager at *British Arab Commercial Bank Plc* and director at the *International Libyan Bankers Association*.

That LBBC Council Member (and Walker-Couzen's employers), *Kellogg Brown and Root* were also at the centre of a *Unaoil* investigation launched by the UK's Serious Fraud Office in April 2017 also escaped the attention of Wintour and *The Guardian*. The leaked files at the centre of the *Unaoil* investigation included two Iraqi oil ministers, a fixer linked to Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, senior officials from Libya's Gaddafi regime, as well as officials in the United Arab Emirates.⁷⁹ The Libyan officials named in the leaks were Mustafa Zarti and Benghazi's Muhannad Alamir who had also acted as agent for Blue Mountain, the grossly inadequate British security firm who had been brought in to guard the US Embassy in Benghazi just weeks before the attack on its embassy staff on September 11th 2012.⁸⁰

Conservative Party donor, Ayman Asfari, has also been questioned by the Serious Fraud Office in connection with the *Unaoil* investigation, although no charges had yet been brought.⁸¹ The Syrian-exile is chairman of *Petrofac* who had come under investigation by the SFO just ten days

⁷⁹ 'UK fraud office opens probe into KBR unit', Jane Croft, Financial Times, April 28, 2017; <https://www.ft.com/content/e687cada-6e93-3f71-bdba-13dc9de2cdf0?mhq5j=e3>

⁸⁰ 'Benghazi Middleman Tied To Unaoil Bribery Scandal', Source Told FBI, Jessica Schulberg, Nick Baumann, and Nick McKenzie, Huffington Post, October 11 2016

⁸¹ 'Tory donor questioned by SFO over corruption claims at Petrofac', Holly Watt and David Pegg, The Guardian, May 12 2017

prior to the Manchester Bombing.⁸² Asfari and COO Marwan Chedid were arrested and then released without charge.⁸³ Marwan Chedid has since been suspended by the group. In the latter part of 2016, *Petrofac* had been looking seriously at Libya as a potential new ‘hotspot’ for oil, and something of an oil race has been developing. On May 4th 2017, *OilPrice.com* ran a story which claimed that *Petrofac* were frontrunners to reap the rewards of a stabilized Libya.⁸⁴

Given that so many donors to the Conservative Party have featured so prominently in Libya’s post-Gaddafi oil-rush, is it possible that certain members of the British Foreign Office, with the support of Mi6, had made deliberate attempts to shift the weight of the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing investigation onto issues pertaining to self-radicalisation in a desperate bid to maintain some fragile stability in Libya — and in doing so preserve the deals that might already be in the pipeline? Was Abedi’s alleged immersion in the narratives of ISIS a way of re-routing or ‘re-rooting’ the mitigating elements of the Arena Bombing into anything other than Libyan politics and the raging power struggles therein?

In a series of email exchanges in September 2017 with *The Guardian* and *Al Jazeera*’s, Alistair Sloane, the journalist expressed his concern over claims that had been put out by ISIS “propaganda channels”

⁸² ‘SFO confirms investigation into Petrofac Ltd’, Serious Fraud Squad Office, Case Updates, May 12, 2017

⁸³ ‘Petrofac suspends COO amid serious fraud probe’, Offshore Energy, May 25, 2017; <https://www.offshore-energy.biz/petrofac-suspends-coo-amid-serious-fraud-probe/>

⁸⁴ ‘Stability In Libya To Start An Oil Race’, Cyril Widdershoven, oilprice.com, May 04, 2017

in the immediate aftermath of the attack. Communicating from his ‘Unequal Measures’ website, Sloane explained how the two claims “contradicted each other”, with one being “mysteriously” deleted. His own point of view was that this was a highly unusual occurrence and that most of the world’s media had simply “gone along with the story” that this was an ISIS attack. The question he asked seemed fairly reasonable in this context of what has since been learned during the sessions of the Public Inquiry: was Abedi seeking an “ISIS-inspired caliphate” or was he “motivated by something more primeval – revenge?” Flip-flopping reversals in policy and the whims of the UN Security Council had led to *the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* being presented as ‘heroes’ one minute and terrorists the next. The bomber’s exposure to ISIS propaganda in the years and months leading up to the attack may have increased his lust for violence and sharpened his resolve, but his “immersion in the hardest end of Islamist violence”, had, according to Sloane, been “inculcated in him from birth”. It may have been very difficult to tell whether Britain’s decision to switch support to Haftar had inspired the bomber’s actions but the evidence seemed quite “compelling”. Abedi had flown out to Libya just five days after Boris Johnson, the British Foreign Secretary, had made his personal backing of Haftar public in *The Spectator* magazine.⁸⁵ Preparations may have begun in earnest shortly after the views of Kwarteng, Morris and Leslie had been aired in Parliament in October 2016, and general feelings of betrayal may even have predated this, but it’s certainly plausible that Johnson’s blundering and outspoken article

⁸⁵ ‘Was Salman Abedi Seeking a Caliphate, or Exacting Revenge?’ email from alastair@unequalmeasures.com to pixel.surgery@outlook.com, September 3, 2017, 7:00:36

had been all the evidence the network needed to give Salman the final go ahead on a much desired, if much resisted, plan.

It is certainly interesting to note that the same Ayman Asfari had already been accused of funding the Syrian revolutionaries, the White Helmets, a group regarded by some to have credible links to Al Qaeda and Isis, but praised by others like Boris Johnson and Hillary Clinton. In 2014 the Assad regime in Syria issued a warrant for the Tory donor's arrest. The charges related to the funding of terrorism but Asfari maintains his innocence. His donations to the lobbying group The Syria Campaign were covered by a series of press stories in September 2016.

II.I

Shifting the blame and steering discussion

LEGAL CHALLENGES AND ‘HIDDEN HANDS’



There's little mystery about how and why the Manchester Arena bomber, Salman Abedi became immersed in dangerous Jihadi narratives. He had afterall, been born into radical politics. Abedi had been nursed and instructed by deeply revolutionary narratives from birth and by a radical fraternity who had in turn been groomed and supported by two successive British Governments. And in the absence of the necessary recognition and full understanding of Western intervention in international conflicts, it's a cycle of nurture and abuse that is likely to continue for many years to come.

In an opening statement made on behalf of the families of Paul Hett, Robert Boyle and Paul Price at the *Manchester Arena Inquiry* in 2020 it was duly acknowledged that Salman Abedi was not an unknown ‘lone wolf’ but someone who had come to the attention of the authorities on several other occasions, having first come to the attention of the security services in 2011. Enormous concern was expressed by family members that no attempt had been made to scrutinize the young man's travels to and from Libya in the years and days leading up to the Arena Bombing.⁸⁶ A report prepared by Dominic Grieve

⁸⁶ ‘Opening statement made on behalf of the families of Paul Hett, Robert Boyle and Paul Price’, Manchester Arena Inquiry;
<https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2020/09/29100950/INQ035477.pdf>

and the *Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament* had even gone so far as to write in November 2018 that “it appears highly likely that Salman and Hashem’s extremist views were influenced by their father and fostered by other members of their immediate family.” At the inquiry special mention was made of his father’s membership of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* — the “armed Islamist Group” that had been designated as a terrorist organisation by both the UK and United States governments.⁸⁷ Likewise, the Grieve Report of November 2018 had considered it was very “concerning” that no member of the Abedi family had been considered for a referral to the ‘Prevent’ program after their closure as SOIs.⁸⁸ Interestingly, in April 2016 a picture was published by Tanzania’s *The Citizen* newspaper in which the family’s former neighbour (now Libya’s Presidential Council member) Mohamed al-Amari can be seen standing next to Britain’s then Foreign Secretary, Phillip Hammond. A press conference had been arranged for the purpose of reaffirming Britain’s full endorsement of the GNA as the country’s only legitimate government. The photo was taken as Hammond, al-Amari and Prime Minister Sarraj answered questions from the journalists.⁸⁹ Just three years later Philip Hammond and Dominic Grieve, the Conservative MP who chaired the review into the Arena bombing on behalf of the *Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament* would join forces against

⁸⁷ The 2017 Attacks: What needs to change?, Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, Rt Hon. Dominic Grieve qc mp, 22 November 2018; https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/20181122_HC1694_The2017Attacks_WhatNeedsToChange_Accessible.pdf

⁸⁸ The 2017 Attacks: What needs to change?, Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, Rt Hon. Dominic Grieve qc mp, 22 November 2018; pp.93-94

⁸⁹ ‘Libya delays vote of confidence’, *The Citizen*, April 20 2016; <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/News/Libya-delays-vote-of-confidence/1840340-3167370-uv5lnr/index.html>

Boris Johnson and his efforts to push through a ‘no-deal Brexit’. The ‘delay faction’ they were accused of representing was being blamed for trying to “sabotage” the Brexit process by tabling a motion for a further delay.⁹⁰ In more recent months, Hammond has angered members of the lobbying watchdog *Acoba*, after he was given the green-light to take up a role in advising the Saudi government. In the last few weeks, his former principle private secretary, Martin Reynolds (now principle private secretary to Boris Johnson) has found himself at the centre of the sensational ‘Partygate scandal’ when an email that he is alleged to have been sent on May 20th 2020, in which he is reported to have invited members of the Conservative Party to ‘a bring your own booze’ event, was found to have broken Covid restrictions. Reynolds had previously served as UK Ambassador to Libya between April and September 2019.⁹¹

Rewind to April 2016 and Hammond is presenting an even graver threat to Haftar and his supporters when during his visit to Tripoli to offer support for the *Government of National Accord* he expresses his opinion that troops could be deployed to Libya “without a vote in Parliament”, if they were to support the GNA forces as part of a “training” rather than “combat” mission. Among those offering the fiercest resistance to Hammond’s plans was Crispin Blunt of the Foreign Office Committee. ⁹² Six months later we had Blunt’s report cataloguing the catastrophic failures arising from Britain’s previous

⁹⁰ ‘Enter the Tory Brexit wreckers: Plot to delay October 31 deadline AGAIN is led by Philip Hammond and Dominic Grieve’, Glen Owen, Harry Cole, Daily Mail, October 12 2019

⁹¹ ‘Martin Reynolds: Official at the heart of lockdown-busting No 10 party row’, David Hughes, Evening Standard, January 11 2022

⁹² ‘British troops could be sent to Libya without a Commons vote’, Charlie Cooper, Independent, April 19, 2016

intervention and a whole new Foreign Secretary getting his feet under the desk at 1 Carlton Terrace in Whitehall — Haftar’s new best friend, Boris Johnson.

In contrast to multi-national Jihadist groups like Al-Qaeda, *the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* were a revolutionary movement committed to an unusually narrow Islamist cause, but this was a world in which the less-than-narrow policies and intolerance of the West had brutally conspired against them. Was Salman Abedi an ‘agent of influence’? Did associates and former members of the LIFG and the Saudi-backed ‘Nawasi Brigade’, which included Abedi’s father, deliberately lodge Salman in a nationwide ISIS network in an attempt to pin blame on this rival group? A ‘false flag’, as they say in conspiracy land. Was the intent to secure funding from the UK Government to drive-out ISIS in Southern Libya and to persuade the UN to step-up their airstrikes? ⁹³ It’s seems unlikely, but given the sheer determination shown by his father’s *Nawasi Brigade* and the *Libya Dawn* to remove ISIS in Libya in 2016 and 2017, and Britain’s failure to secure them a unity government, it’s a little fanciful but not implausible. ⁹⁴ One man who was clearly anxious to support the various ‘hidden hands’ stories, was Ramadan Abedi. Speaking to the Associated Press shortly after his arrest in Tripoli in May 2017, Abedi assured the agency, “I’m sure that Salman didn’t carry out such an act but there are hidden hands behind this, security authorities doing something against the Libyan community especially

⁹³ For a detailed looked at the various rival militias that have emerged in Libya in the aftermath of the 2011 Revolution, see: ‘The Development of Libyan Armed Groups Since 2014’, Tim Eaton, Abdul Rahman Alageli, Emadeddin Badi, Mohamed Eljarh and Valerie Stocker, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House, March 2020

⁹⁴ ‘Libya ISIS Crisis: Libyan Militias Fight Islamic State With Airstrikes, Official Says’, Elizabeth Whitman, International Business Times, April 24 2015

the youth there.”⁹⁵ Despite it being the default setting for many a conspiracy theory, the ‘Hidden hands’ explanation could well carry some weight when you consider such fractious and capable stakeholders like the Qatar, the UAE, Egypt, Russia and Saudi Arabia.

A closer look at the period reveals a series of complex developments on issues relating to former comrades of Ramadan Abedi and the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group*. On May 4th 2017, Owen Bowcott of *The Guardian* newspaper reported on the decision that had just been made the director of Public Prosecutions, Alison Saunders not to challenge the former senior Mi6 Officer, Sir Mark Allen who had been facing an embarrassing legal challenge from former *Libya Islamic Fighting Group* leader, Abdelhakim Belhadj.⁹⁶ It was being alleged that Belhaj and another Libyan dissident, Sami al-Saadi had been abducted in East Asia and handed back to Colonel Gaddafi by the CIA in 2004. During their detention, Belhaj and Saadi claim they had endured regular torture and abuse. Evidence of MI6 involvement had been uncovered in correspondence that had been found inside the office of Gaddafi’s foreign minister, Moussa Koussa and his former intelligence chief, after his defeat at the hands of the rebels in 2011. Belhadj was an associate of Salman Abedi’s father, and also like his father, had played a key role in the 2011 uprising. Belhadj also became a prominent figure in the country’s democratic transition and the UN-recognised Government of National Accord, currently under the

⁹⁵ At the time of the Arena attack in May 2017 the Nawasi Brigade were one of several militias that provided armed protection to the Government of National Accord in Tripoli. Other militias included the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade, the Special Deterrence Force (Rada), and the Abu Slim unit of the Central Security Apparatus.

⁹⁶ ‘Libya rendition case against ex-MI6 officer may be held partly in secret’, Owen Bowcott, *The Guardian*, May 4 2017

protection of Ramadan Abedi's *Nawasi Brigade*. In 2018 Belhadj received a formal apology from the British government for any actions that might have contributed to his rendition in Libya.⁹⁷

What was happening here? Were we seeing punishment for past offences or were we seeing past offences being revived to punish more recent crimes? It's really very difficult to tell. At least one Intelligence Officer in America has claimed that by March 2015 Abdelhakim Belhadj had become one of the leaders of ISIS in the group's North Eastern districts.⁹⁸ If this is true (and I suspect it isn't) we may be looking at an altogether different set of possibilities. In any attempt to unravel the attack's many layers we may also have to take into account the potentially catastrophic series of moves by Russia to back Libya's eastern potentate, General Haftar, one of the most visible reminders of the old anti-Islamist regime and seen by many as the natural successor to Gadaffi.⁹⁹ The Nawasi Brigade had already expressed their concern at Soviet involvement in Libyan affairs after Haftar had made a second trip to Russia in November 2016.

However, if it transpired that former members of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* had played a part in the May 2017 attack at Manchester Arena, then this might very well have played to the Kremlin's and Haftar's advantage.

⁹⁷ 'Abdul Hakim Belhaj: Libyan rebel commander who got UK apology', BBC News website, May 10 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14786753>

⁹⁸ 'Herridge: ISIS Has Turned Libya Into New Support Base, Safe Haven', Fox News Insider, March 2 2015; <https://insider.foxnews.com/2015/03/02/catherine-herridge-isis-has-turned-libya-new-support-base-safe-haven>

⁹⁹ 'What Americans Need to Know if Russia Intervenes in Libya's Civil War', Christopher S. Chivvis and Amanda Kadlec, March 26, 2017; <https://www.rand.org/blog/2017/03/what-americans-need-to-know-if-russia-intervenes-in.html>

Which naturally gives rise to a second option: did the Arena bomber, Salman Abedi either wittingly or unwittingly become engaged in a complex plot to deliberately destroy the credibility of Libya's *Government of National Accord* in Tripoli — a government which was comprised, almost exclusively, of ex-members of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* and comrades and former friends of Ramadan Abedi?

At the Libyan Summit hosted in Vienna in May 2016, General Haftar and the GNA were demanding that the UN Security Council lift the strict, far-reaching arms embargo that was believed to be inhibiting their attempts to remove ISIS from the region. According to reports of the day the Russians were against this move, not least because the Kremlin had secretly been arming both Haftar and the GNA covertly through the Libya Shield.¹⁰⁰ As recently as April 2017 Russia's Envoy to the United Nations, Pyotr Ilyichev argued that the lifting of sanctions in Libya had been premature.¹⁰¹

Interestingly, the former-Chief of General Staff to the Libyan Ground Forces, serving under the direction of the GNA during the period in question, was Major General Jadalla al-Abedi. The report by the British House of Commons *Foreign Affairs Committee* in September 2016 suggests that Jadalla al-Abedi, like his predecessor, Youssef al-Mangoush¹⁰², had been channelling

¹⁰⁰ 'Vienna Libyan summit deal may not be all it seemed', Saudi Gazette, May 18, 2016

¹⁰¹ 'Lifting Libyan arms embargo is 'premature' – Russia's acting UN envoy', RT (Russia Today), April 19 2017

¹⁰² General Jadalla al-Abedi, the former Chief of Staff of the GNA. His predecessor Youssef al-Mangoush, a former Special Forces commander in Gadaffi's forces, appears to be the cousin of the GNA Foreign Minister Najla al-Mangoush. In May 2021 the *Libyan Observatory* reported that the two were in disagreement over Turkey.

money to the *Libya Shield* and other Islamist Militias. It is also known that al-Abedi had been determined to drive-out ISIS in the East.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ 'Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options, House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, September 6 2016

II.II

Summarizing what we know

A DETERIORATING SITUATION



Why the attack happened may be best explained by a sequence of events spanning nearly twenty years and during which members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group have been exploited and double-crossed several times. Yes, it's a complex issue with multiple dimensions to consider, including those of cultural dislocation, personal isolation and emotional dissociation, compounded all the more by the transitory needs of national and global economics. Occasionally however, the hopes and dreams of forgotten men built on the shoulders of First World giants in the theatres of forgotten wars will rise and then collapse, toppling centre-stage from the margins, flattening the lives of innocents. To trace each of the many frustrations that gave rise to Arena Bombing would take a lifetime, but these are the key events on the timeline:

- Mi6 and the British Foreign Office granting asylum to hundreds of Gaddafi rebels during the 1990s, many of whom had served as Mujahedeen fighters in Afghanistan.
- The formation of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* in 1995 with an estimated 200 or more settling in Manchester. Mi6 funding and supporting a series of assassination attempts by the rebels against Gaddafi between 1995 and 1996.

- The gradual assimilation of key *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* members into Al-Qaeda.
- The designation of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* as terror organisation by the US, United Nations and the United Kingdom between 2001 and 2006.
- The lifting of control orders and sanctions imposed on the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* in 2009 by the New Labour Government and the Home Office under Jacqui Smith (as a result of negotiations taking place between Tony Blair and Gaddafi).
- The oil deals negotiated between Gaddafi and former Mi6 bosses Richard Dearlove and Mark Allen on behalf of BP.
- The release and alleged torture of members of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group*, alleged to have been sanctioned by Mark Allen and Mi6 (heard in the High Court between January and April 2017, mostly in secret)
- The handing back of passports to Manchester members of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* by the British Home Office under Theresa May in 2011.
- The overthrow of the Gaddafi regime in 2011.
- The emergence of a British and UN-backed transitional Council consisting of members of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* in 2011-2012.

- The expression of support in 2017 for a power share between the rebel-based GNA former Gaddafi General, Khalifa Haftar who at this time controlled the oil-rich ports in the East. Russian oil deal struck with Libya's *National Oil Corporation* (NOC) and increasing support for overall military rule under Haftar (February 2017).
- Libyan Political Dialogue meetings hosted by Boris Johnson in London and Malta (October-November 2016) and featuring John Kerry and several Saudi and UAE banking representatives.
- Boris Johnson trip Libya on May 3rd 2017 to discuss power-share options between the rebel-based GNA and their rivals under General Haftar.

II.III

Struggles Past and Present

FRAGILE STATES AND FATWAS



At the time that Salman Abedi detonated the bomb in the City Room foyer at Manchester Arena, his father, Abu Ismail Ramadan Abedi was chief of police security for Abdul Ghani Al-Kikli's *Abu Sleem Central Security Force*, a Tripoli-based militia allied in a particularly ambiguous fashion to the state-affiliated, *Libyan Shield Force* (a country-wide alliance consisting of fragmented Islamist militias).¹⁰⁴ The 700-strong military unit, formerly known as the *Nawasi Brigade*, functioned under the Ministry of Interior leadership of Abdul Raouf Kara, a notorious hard-line Islamist whose ultra-orthodox approach to law and order could easily rival ISIS in its passion and ferocity. Both groups at this time were key members of an anti-ISIS coalition affiliated with gangster-terrorist Mokhtar Belmokhtar¹⁰⁵, leader of the AQIM (Islamic Maghreb) and pro-Islamist militias like *Libya Dawn* (Fajr Libyan).¹⁰⁶ By the time of the Arena attack in May 2017, ISIS were no longer in possession of any

¹⁰⁴ Al-Kikli is also known as 'Ghneiwa'. At the time of the Area bombing the force controlled the Abu Saleem district of the city. In May 2017 the Force was engaged in a conflict with rival militia and former ally, the Misratan Somoud Brigade.

¹⁰⁵ 'Profile: Mokhtar Belmokhtar', BBC News, June 15 2015;
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-21061480>;

¹⁰⁶ 'Libya ISIS Crisis: Libyan Militias Fight Islamic State With Airstrikes, Official Says', Elizabeth Whitman, International Business Times, 24 April, 2015;
<https://web.archive.org/web/20180215143559/http://www.ibtimes.com/libya-isis-crisis-libyan-militias-fight-islamic-state-airstrikes-official-says-1895583>

defined territories like Sirte. They existed not as an occupying force but as a roaming insurgency, launching surprise raids and causing — and exploiting — general instability. By 2016, most of the group's 5,000 insurgents had fled south. Contrary to what many might expect, the coalition's war with ISIS hadn't been based on ideological differences (such as the apocalypticism that dominates ISIS or their idea of caliphate as global conquest) as on a turf-war driven by efforts to control (and tax) the various drug cartels operating throughout Southern Libya and maintain control of the Oil Crescent terminals in the ports on the Eastern coast around Benghazi. In April 2017, just one month prior to the Arena Bombing, Emadeddin Muntasser, founding member of the *Libyan American Public Affairs Council* put together a persuasive argument that the most urgent concern facing Libya today was not ISIS but "corruption", which threatened to tear the country apart. Even today, any attempt to define boundaries between the various state-allied, Jihadi and Islamist militias collapses almost on inspection.¹⁰⁷ It is a region wracked by chronic tribal conflict, fragile institutions and fast-changing pacts. And the inequitable distribution of economic resources only adds to this state of flux and Libya's ongoing — and not entirely successful — political autophagy. But in spite of its fluidity, power in Libya at this time fell broadly between three National actors: the *Presidential Council* (PC) headed by Prime Minister al-Sarraj, the GNA — a Tripoli-based parliament operating from Libya's western coastline (Libya's executive centre, if you like) — and the Tobruk and al-Bayda authorities in Libya's East, which even at time of writing remains under the control of Egypt and Emirates-aligned, self-described anti-Islamist General Khalifa Haftar, who

¹⁰⁷ 'Libya's (Very) Profitable Business of War', Emadeddin Muntasser, The Libya Observer, April 07, 2017; <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/opinions/libya%E2%80%99s-very-profitable-business-war>

heads-up the Libyan National Army (LNA). As a senior member of the *Islamist Central Security Force*, Ramadan Abedi's role at this time was to protect the Interim Libyan Government at the GNA headquarters in Tripoli.

During the period in question, this Saudi-backed militia was determined not to let the country collapse into the same state it had under Gaddafi. As a result of this the *Central Security Force* aligned themselves with the Jihadists, steadily loosening the grip of British influence in the region. In return for protecting the current Government, the *Central Security Force* (the Nawasi) secured the right for the Islamists to bear arms and protect their own interests. On the one hand you could see them as king-makers or peace brokers and on the other as heads of a protection racket operating on a national (and perhaps even global) scale. Any unity they had with Gaddafi's former general, Khalifa Haftar in the East, had been volatile at best.

On May 9 2017, just one week prior to the attack in Manchester, Ramadan Abedi's *Central Security Force* had launched a blistering verbal attack on Mohamed Sayal, the Minister for Foreign Affairs under Prime Minister Serraj.¹⁰⁸ In a move that was almost certainly designed to cause as much controversy and discussion as possible, Sayal had described Haftar as a "legitimate part of the solution" to Libya's ongoing conflicts. A "strong worded statement" was released immediately by the Central Security Branch of Abedi's *Nawasi Brigade* in which the group rejected Serraj's comments: "*We have followed with concern the remarks issued by the Minister-designate of Foreign Affairs Mohamed Sayala, in which he described Khalifa Haftar as a legitimate*

¹⁰⁸ 'Nawasi Brigade launches scathing attack on foreign minister', The Libya Observer, May 09, 2017; <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/nawasi-brigade-launches-scathing-attack-foreign-minister>

part of the solution, although he is not a part of the Libyan Political Agreement. Also disregarding Haftar's attempts to undermine the security and stability of the capital Tripoli, the Libyan south and the massacres committed by his armed militias in the eastern region, which are blatant violations of human rights."

In a separate story published on May 27 2017, *The Times* newspaper was making the claim that Canadian-Libyan cleric, Abdul-Baset Ghwela (aka. Abdu Albasset Egwillla) had been meeting regularly with Ramadan Abedi in Benghazi in the weeks leading up to the Arena Bombing.¹⁰⁹ Just twelve months prior to this in March 2016, it was being reported that Ghwela had issued a fatwa on anyone associated with Haftar and his forces after the death of his son in clashes with Haftar's men in Benghazi the previous week.¹¹⁰ In a televised speech to a crowd in Tripoli and translated by the *SITE Intelligence Group* for Canada's *National Post*, Ghwela is alleged to have rallied his followers behind their enemies, telling them that Allah would "break the backs of the tyrants and the oppressors" and the countries who stood alongside them: "they have gathered against us and are scheming against us, so scheme against them ... Trick them, kill them." However, the founder of *SITE Intelligence*, analyst Rita Katz had just 12 months before been forced into an embarrassing u-turn when it was discovered that an Australi witness who held a position of prestige in online

¹⁰⁹ 'Salman Abedi was radicalised by Canadian', Bel Trew, *The Times*, May 27, 2017

¹¹⁰ 'Trick them, kill them': Former Ottawa imam issues call to arms after son killed in Libya', Stuart Bell, *The National Post*, March 8, 2016

Jihadi circles was in actual fact a known American troll called Joshua Ryne Goldberg, who was promptly arrested by the FBI.¹¹¹

When viewed within this context, the pro-Haftar article by Boris Johnson published by *The Spectator* magazine just a few days after Ramadan Abedi's *Central Security Forces* had launched their fiery attack on Sayal, would have only served to intensify that anger. And this is the central point: the increasing support that prominent individuals within Russia and Great Britain had been offering Haftar at this time was potentially tipping Libya into a full-blown civil war. Even now some five years later there are a mass of competing militias all jostling for control in the country. The emergence of ISIS in the region had been a consequence of a power vacuum, itself the result of Western intervention in conflicts it has neither the knowledge nor resources to resolve. Britain and America had made exactly the same mistake in Russia some hundred years earlier when it supported Liberal and White Russia in its two-year war with Lenin's Bolsheviks. And much the same arguments had been made then: Lenin's Bolsheviks were an unruly and ungovernable ragbag of Revolutionary maniacs who had neither the skills nor capacity to offer an adequate administration. Neither were they likely to be able to control Russia's vast oilfields in Baku. And on that occasion at least, the opinion of the diplomats and academics proved to be dangerously wide of the mark.

¹¹¹ 'Florida Jew arrested for posing as online jihadist, encouraging terrorism', Times of Israel, September 11 2015; <https://www.timesofisrael.com/florida-jew-arrested-for-posing-as-online-jihadist-encouraging-terrorism/>)

II.IV

The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group Connection

DE-PROSCRIBING TERROR



That Salman Abedi may have become embroiled in the dreams of his father and Tripoli's Nawasi Brigade isn't at all surprising. The Libyan community had long joked that Manchester had become something of an Islamic State for the scores of exiles who ended up there in the 1990s and their swelling support for Al Qaeda in Afghanistan gave their dreams of a hard-line Islamic State in Tripoli, and a heroic repatriation, an increasingly visceral edge. The brutal reactionary sentiments of 'Jihad by the sword' appear to have made their way into Whalley Bridge and Moss Side, long before the ISIS franchise reached Britain and it's almost inconceivable that it wouldn't have found some sympathy with Salman Abedi given the family's desire to see Libya liberated from Gaddafi and an Islamic State declared. Contrary to what many of the broadsheets and the BBC news station will have us think, there's little doubt about how and when Salman became radicalised. The affairs of the Greater Maghreb and the dreams of the Manchester Fighters continued not only with their sons and daughters but with the exiles who remained there and the young Jihadi-sympathizers who grew up there or moved in, and whose regular diet of digital propaganda, alienation and conspiracy theory, continues to militarize frustration and dislocation in Britain's Muslim youth.

It may then come as no surprise to learn that the Manchester Arena bomber and his family had lived on the same Whalley Range street in Manchester as an Al Qaeda bomb-maker. The bomb-maker, Abd al-Baset Azzouz, a father-of-four, is alleged to have fought alongside the bomber's friends as part of the 2011 'Manchester Fighters' — the local regiment of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* who had been founded in the 1990s to remove Colonel Gaddafi from power.¹¹² Although delisted as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation by the US in 2015, the group remained a 'proscribed terrorist organisation' on a list maintained by the British Home Office until November 2019 following receipt of an application to deproscribe the organisation from Conservative peer and Minister of Home Affairs, Baroness Williams of Trafford in Manchester.¹¹³

Clearly anticipating the usual stiff challenges and tough questions from the House, the Baroness staved them off by explaining "that it would not be appropriate for us to discuss any specific intelligence that informed the decision-making process". The request to remove them from the list of proscribed terrorist organisations had been made to the Secretary of State in January 1919. The Liberal Peer, Baron Paddick of Brixton, a former Chief Superintendent at Scotland Yard, pushed ahead with some questions all the same, requesting some clarification on an apparent contradiction: "*The Proscription Review Group (PRG), a cross-Government group ... makes recommendations and provides advice ... on the implementation of the proscription regime including the case for proscription and consideration of deproscription applications ... The PRG*", as the Minister has just said, "*has assessed that the group is now defunct and*

¹¹² 'Manchester is a haven for Libya's opposition', Bel Trew, The Times, May 26 2017,

¹¹³ Hansard, UK Parliament, Lords Chamber, Terrorism Act 2000 (Proscribed Organisations) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2019, (No. 2) Order 2019, Volume 799

*no longer exists". What is not clear to me, even after what the Minister has said, is who made the application for the deproscription."*¹¹⁴

Paddick went on to explain to the house that very few organisations had applied to be deproscribed, not least because at £300,000 it was a relatively expensive procedure. Baroness Williams responded by saying that to the best of her knowledge, the identity of the person or the group who had made the application for deproscription was "not in the public domain". And without further challenges, the motion was agreed. Although it's impossible to know for sure if there's a connection, it's peculiar to note that the request for deproscription had come some fourteen months after an order had been served by the British Home Office for the immediate extradition of the Arena bomber's brother, Hashem Abedi. Hashem was finally released from detention by his father's *Nawasi Brigade* and arrived in the UK in July 2019 where he was duly charged with the murder of 22 people.¹¹⁵ The motion to deproscribe the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* as a terrorist organisation was passed just weeks before his trial opened in February 2020. And there's another mystery to unravel. At the time that the Conservative Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, Alistair Burt was reported to be "welcoming the release" of a 110 members of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* by Gaddafi in February 2011, the group was still listed as a proscribed terrorist organisation in Britain.¹¹⁶ Which presents us with a very confusing problem; how was it that an existing member of the British Foreign Office — serving under Cameron's Conservative Government

¹¹⁴ Hansard, Lords Chamber, Terrorism Act 2000 (Proscribed Organisations) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2019, Volume 799, October 1 2019

¹¹⁵ 'Manchester Arena bomber's brother held in UK after extradition', The Manchester Guardian, Nazia Parveen, July 17 2019

¹¹⁶ 'Minister for the Middle East comments on recent events in Libya', Foreign & Commonwealth Office and The Rt Hon Alistair Burt, February 16 2011, gov.uk

— was in any position to welcome the release of LIFG group members in Libya at a time when that same organisation featured prominently on a Home Office list of ‘proscribed terror’ organisations? Were they a terrorist group or not? Between 1995 and 1996 it is alleged that the group were behind at least three attempts to assassinate the Libyan leader, Gaddafi. None of the three attempts were successful, and its founder and leader, Abu Laith Al-Libi, like the bomber’s father before him, fled east to Saudi Arabia.

As the result of a Police counterterrorism operation Abedi’s former neighbour Azzouz is thought to have left Britain for Libya sometime in 2009, the year of the Manchester Arndale plot. The UN Security Council describes him as a “*key operative in Al-Qaida who travelled to Libya in 2011 under the direction of Al-Qaida leader Aiman Muhammed Rabi al-Zawahiri (QDi.006) to build a network of terrorist fighters, and recruited 200 militants in the eastern part of the country. He is considered a key Al-Qaida operative due to his ability to mobilize terrorist fighters and train recruits in skills like improvised explosive devices construction.*”¹¹⁷ At time of the Arena bombing, Azzouz was awaiting trial for suspected involvement in the attack on a US consulate in Libya’s eastern city of Benghazi. Another man who was alleged to have been at the forefront of Azzouz’s network was Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden’s successor as leader of al-Qaeda.¹¹⁸ Although Abu Yahya al-Libi, speaking of his affiliation to the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* had declared it was the intention of the

¹¹⁷ Security Council Committee Pursuant To Resolutions 1267 (1999) 1989 (2011) And 2253 (2015) Concerning Isil (da'esh) Al-qaida And Associated Individuals Groups Undertakings And Entities, ISIL (Da'esh) & Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, Narrative Summaries, Abd al-Baset Azzouz;
https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list/summaries/individual/abd-al-baset-azzouz

¹¹⁸ ‘Ayman al-Zawahiri: How a CIA Drone Strike Nearly Killed the Head of Al-Qaeda’, Jeff Stein, Newsweek, 21 April 2017

group to establish a 'stable Islamic secular state' their affiliation with leading Al Qaeda members and their roots in Salafi jihadism throws considerable doubt on the sincerity of that pledge.¹¹⁹

In the period leading up to the Manchester Arena bombing, Salman Abedi was living just 800 yards from the address provided by the former director of the *Sanabel Relief Fund*, Tahir Nasuf.¹²⁰ Nasuf had been held in a terror raid in Manchester in 2006 and the relief fund's Manchester HQ was based on Widgeon Close (M14 7FJ), just fifteen minutes walk from the home of al-Baset Azzous on Wilbraham Road, a road where Salman is alleged to have resided on and off between 2000 and 2017.¹²¹ At the time of the Arena bombing, Salman Abedi lived on nearby Elsmore Road (M14 7FP), little more than a five minute walk from the HQ of the former relief fund. And whilst there is absolutely nothing to link Nasuf to night of May 22nd it is clear that the district around Whalley Grange featured prominently in Manchester's radical fringe. There is additionally no evidence to suggest that Salman had received any technical or logistical support from the group. In spite of that, it's still entirely likely that he derived no shortage of inspiration from the passionately revolutionary messages that were being pushed in the local area. That the bomber visited or made plans to visit Abdal Raouf Abdallah in prison TWICE

¹¹⁹ 'Libyan accused of US embassy bombings which killed 244 and wounded more than 5,000 dies in New York hospital aged 50 - just days before start of trial', Daily Mail, January 4 2015

¹²⁰ 'Man denies terror link after assets freeze', Rosie Cowan, The Guardian, February 9 2006; <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/feb/09/terrorism.alqaida>

¹²¹ 'The Making of a Monster', Chris Osuh, Manchester Evening News, September 17 2017; <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/salman-abedi-manchester-arena-bomber-13601393>; 'Manchester Arena attack: Bomber's friend sentenced over fraud to buy chemicals', Duncan Gardham, Sky News, November 26, 2020

before the attack, only serves to reinforce this view.¹²² According to Police, Abdal Raouf Abdallah, a veteran member of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group*, had been at the centre of a jihadist network transporting foreign fighters into Syria. He was found guilty in May 2016 of aiding and funding terrorism.¹²³

An article by Chris Osuh, the Features Editor at the *Manchester Evening News* in September 2017 made another startling discovery when it was revealed that ‘Mohammad al-Amari’, who was at that time serving as a prominent minister in Libya’s *Government of National Accord* had “lived in a neighbouring house to the Abedi family on Elsmore Road in Fallowfield”. The paper additionally alleged that he had worshipped at the same Didsbury Mosque.¹²⁴ On closer inspection it was evident that al-Amari not only had strong ties to Manchester but now boasted a prominent place in the Libyan Provisional Government. He had also been duly appointed to the board of Libya’s *National Oil Corporation* and its subsidiary, *Zallaf Libyan Oil & Gas*.¹²⁵

According to one CV currently online, the Libyan Minister of State, *Mohamed al-Amari Zayed* studied Engineering at Manchester University before enrolling

¹²² ‘Manchester Arena bomber visited terror convict in Liverpool prison’, Joe Thomas, Liverpool Echo June 25, 2017

¹²³ ‘Libyan refugee found guilty of Syria terror offences’, Press Association, The Guardian, May 11, 2016

¹²⁴ ‘The Making of a Monster’, Chris Osuh, Manchester Evening News, September 17 2017; <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/salman-abedi-manchester-arena-bomber-13601393>

¹²⁵ Further investigation reveals that a company had been registered in the name of a ‘Mohammed Alamari’ using the Abedi’s family home address of 21 Elsmore Road address in July 2015 during the period in which the Abedis were residents. *The International Organisation for Institutional Excellence Ltd* was dissolved in December 2016. It has not been possible to verify if it is the same Mohammed al-Amari as the GNA minister and NOC executive.

at a University in Benghazi.¹²⁶ The CV appears to back up the claims made in the *Manchester Evening News*: —that al-Amari had become politically and religiously active in the Manchester area, supporting Mustafa Graf at the Islamic Centre and Didsbury Mosque attended by Abedi and his family.¹²⁷ Several *Facebook* entries seen by the *Almarsad* news channel indicate that Graf had accompanied al-Amari to a special conference on Libya in May 2015.¹²⁸ According to other reports by the same news channel, al-Amari had also been a vocal supporter of the Shura Council of Benghazi. In the first week of March 2017 the *Libyan Herald* ran a story that al-Amari and Abdulsalam Kajman, his colleague within the Islamist faction of the Presidency Council, had both expressed their support of the attack by the Benghazi Defence Brigade on the Oil Crescent in the East of the country. Al-Amari, not unreasonably, justified the attack by saying that this was the only way to guarantee that the regime of Gaddafi could not be revived under his post-revolutionary counterpart, General Haftar.¹²⁹ It was the view of al-Amari that the oil belonged to the people and as such, should serve the people and be owned by the people.

A more curious development came in November 2020 when after a period of some three years it was announced that Police were looking to trace and eliminate a ‘Majdi Alamari’ from the Arena investigation after it was learned during the MAI Public Inquiry set-up by the British Home Office that Salman

¹²⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/Alresala.Party/posts/326422714112658>

¹²⁷ ‘Didsbury mosque distances itself from Manchester bomber’, Steven Morris, The Guardian, May 24, 2017

¹²⁸ ‘Investigation: Was the “Didsbury Mosque” frequented by the Manchester attacker and his family a platform for spreading extremism among Libyans?’, May 24 2017; <https://almarsad.co/2017/05/24/ارتاده-الذي-إرتاده-تحقيق-هل-كان-مسجد-ديزيري-الذي-إرتاده>

¹²⁹ ‘Kajman and Al-Amari back BDB in Presidency Council split’, Libya Herald, March 6 2017; <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/03/06/kajman-and-al-amari-back-bdb-in-presidency-council-split/> ; <https://almarsad.co/2017/03/06/إلى-جنگ-عماري-يعلن-دعمه-لعملية-العودة-إلى-جنگ>

Abedi may have communicated with the bomber just 24 hours before the attack.

¹³⁰ An entry from a redacted report, dated December 8th 2020, day 45 of the hearing, describes how he had come to the attention of the Police for “his involvement in purchasing welding accessories from China.” Further enquiries revealed that the funds used to purchase the items “came from the bank accounts of Salman Abedi and Relative C”. The individual was not a suspect, but a ‘Trace/Interview/Eliminate’ (a ‘TIE’). There is currently no way of knowing if the two al-Amaris are related.

Among Mohammed al-Amari’s closest comrades during his time in Manchester was Mahmoud Mohamed Boshima. Described by reporters of *The Guardian* newspaper as a ‘family friend’ of the Abedi family, the former Professor of Chemistry at Salford University and King Saud University in Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, is alleged to have told journalists Nazia Parveen and Josh Halliday that Salman’s actions could have been influenced by the gangland trouble that had led to the death of a friend some twelve months previously. However, if Halliday or Parveen had dug a little deeper they would have discovered that Boshala had himself come under the scrutiny of Libyan Security Services a number of years prior to this event.

In a report by *Almarsad* dated October 2016, the news channel alleged that Boshala had appeared on a list of 22 British persons thought to have been

¹³⁰ ‘Manchester Bomber’s Parents among Six Sought for Questioning’, Nazia Parveen, *The Guardian*, November 6 2020. Rulings in the Manchester Arena Inquiry suggest that Police were investigating Majdi Alamari’s alleged involvement in purchasing welding equipment from China;
<https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2020/10/22163732/Ruling-on-GMP-restriction-order-application.pdf>;
https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2020/12/08173104/MAI-Day-45_Redacted.pdf, 208-2011

active members of the *Islamic Gathering Movement*, a non-terrorist organisation espousing the principles of Political Islam and who had stood unsuccessfully in the post-Revolution elections of 2012.¹³¹ The report went on to describe how the group had been aligned with the Grand Mufti Sadiq al-Ghariyani, whose picture with the bomber's father, Ramadan Abedi had been widely circulated on social media in Libya and Tunisia in the immediate aftermath of the Arena attack.¹³² According to press reports published both in Britain and in Libya, al-Ghariyani had been issuing fatwas on any government or individual seen supporting the recognition of Khalifa Haftar in the power deals being brokered by the UN.¹³³ A friend and leading member of the *Gathering Movement* was Mohamed al-Amari, the man linked by the *Manchester Evening News* with the Abedi's 21 Elsmore Road address. Just months prior to this, the *Almarsad* news station had run another story. Al-Amari had been a founding member of the movement in Switzerland in the early 1990s and is said to have championed its cause when elected as an Independent in Libya's Provisional Government.¹³⁴ However, a certain amount of caution should be reserved about these reports. In April 2019 the *Sky News* reporter Alex Crawford, posting on the social media platform, *Twitter* accused the *Almarsad* news agency of rewriting and

¹³¹ 'Al-Amari's influence on the Al-Wefaq presidency revives the 'Islamic Gathering Movement' again', October 26, 2016, *Almarsad*, <https://almarsad.co/2016/10/26/نفوذ-العماري-الى-رئاسي-الوفاق-يحيي-اما>

¹³² Manchester Arena Inquiry, Official-Sensitive, Libyan Diaspora in Europe; https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2021/12/14160356/INQ016276_1-4.pdf; <https://almarsad.co/2016/06/20/الافتاء-يلقاسم-قزيط-يجب-اعادة-تشكيل-دار-الافتاء>

¹³³ An Abu Dhabi broadcaster and French Magazine, *Marianne* alleged that Salman Abedi knew al-Ghariyani's son, Suhail Al Sadiq Al Ghariani in Manchester. Interestingly, officials shut down al-Ghariyani's office in Beghazi shortly after the attack.

¹³⁴ 'Al-Amari's influence on the Al-Wefaq presidency revives the 'Islamic Gathering Movement' again', October 26, 2016, *Almarsad*, <https://almarsad.co/2016/10/26/نفوذ-العماري-الى-رئاسي-الوفاق-يحيي-اما>

misrepresenting her dispatches from Tripoli. In a series of Tweets on April 16th the journalist claimed the news station was being funded by the UAE and had a “partisan pro-Haftar agenda.”¹³⁵



Almarsad article dated Oct 2016 showing Mohammed al-Amari (top row, far left) and Ahmed Boshala (bottom row, third from left) as members of the *Islamic Gathering Movement*.

Whilst the genesis of the *Gathering Movement* is complex to say the least, it is believed that its leader, Abdul Wahab Al Hilali, had shaped it from the ashes of a splinter-group associated historically and ideologically with the Muslim Brotherhood and various Salafist figureheads including Mustafa al-Trabulsi, Khalid al-Warshafani and Idris Mahdi. Whilst the movement had made efforts to engage with Libya’s political machinery through discussion and peaceful discourse, its ideals were nevertheless based on the passionate pursuit of a purely religious State, adhering to the strict Islamic political ideology of the Shari’a. Two names that appear on the list alongside Boshala and al-Amari in

¹³⁵ ‘Libya’s UAE-funded AL Marsad newspaper twists Alex Crawford's report on Tripoli war, Abdulkader Assad, *The Libya Observer*, April 16, 2019; <https://twitter.com/alex crawfordsky/status/1118085213035356160?lang=en>

the *Alamarad* report are more notorious still. Ibrahim Jadran, now leader of *Libya's Petroleum Facilities Guard* (PFG), was accused in January 2016 of handing Libya's oil terminals to Isis "on a plate".¹³⁶ Set up to protect Libya's oil assets, the *Petroleum Facilities Guard* was alleged to have surrendered control of Libya's oil crescent to the *Islamic State* with little or no resistance. Another of the names that appeared on a security watch-list unearthed by *Almarsad* in October 2016 was Youssef Haroun al-Shehibi, a Manchester property developer whose brother Ali Haroun al-Shehibi had been murdered by Gaddafi forces during the *Abu Salim Massacre* in 1996. Abdul Basit Haroun Shehibi, also from Manchester, went on to become commander of the *Abu Salim Martyrs' Brigade*, one of the fiercest fighting units in the 2011 civil war. Abdul would later tell Reuters that he had been personally responsible for handling the largest shipment of illegal arms from Libya to Syria. "They know we are sending guns to Syria," Haroun said. "Everyone knows."¹³⁷ The GNA's Defence Minister, Al-Mahdi Al-Barghathi was another name on the list. Just three days before the Manchester Bombing, Al-Barghathi had been suspended by Prime Minister Serraj over the part played by his forces in a massacre at Brak El-Shati airbase. Seventy-five bodies were recovered from the site, including those of two 15-year old boys. Soldiers and civilians had been summarily executed.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ 'The rogue private army that handed an oil field to Isis on a plate', Kim Sengupta, Independent (UK), Monday 25 January, 2016

¹³⁷ 'The adventures of a Libyan weapons dealer in Syria', Jessica Donati, Ghaith Shennib, Firas Bosalum, Reuters, June 18, 2013; <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-syria/the-adventures-of-a-libyan-weapons-dealer-in-syria-idUSBRE95H0WC20130618>

¹³⁸ 'Serraj suspends Barghathi over the Brak Al-Shatti massacre, Moutaz Ali., Libya Herald, May 19, 2017

There is of course no suggestion that any member of the *Gathering Movement* had prior knowledge of, or played any part whatsoever in the 2017 Arena bombing. In fact, it is probably fairer to say that any complicity would have been completely counterproductive. Immediately prior to the attack, General Haftar and the House of Representatives had been accusing al-Amari and his people of not just supporting the attacks on the lucrative oil crescent region, but actually launching them.¹³⁹ Additionally, the fairly choleric response by members of the *British Parliament to the Foreign Affairs Committee*'s report on the failures of Britain's intervention in 2011 — and the report by CMEC that would re-sculpt those failures into a grotesquely twisted argument for backing Haftar — makes clear that growing numbers of right-wing populists within the British and American governments were looking for the slightest opportunity to justify a sharp reversal in policy, discredit the GNA and accelerate the transition of power to Haftar and the House of Representatives.¹⁴⁰ There would have been no wisdom at all in coordinating such a pitiful act of cruelty that could only have ever further jeopardised what remaining support the GNA had among its allies in the West.

However, if the claim made in the *Manchester Evening News* in September 2017 is true — and al-Amari was a neighbour of the Abedi family at their Elsmore Road address, it may yet shed some light on the sensitivity

¹³⁹ 'Haftar's spokesperson accuses Libya's Presidency Council of planning attack on oil ports with Al-Qaeda leaders', Noura Ali, Middle East Observer, March 7, 2017; <https://www.middleeastobserver.org/2017/03/07/haftars-spokesperson-accuses-libyas-presidency-council-of-planning-attack-on-oil-ports-with-al-qaeda-leaders/>

¹⁴⁰ 'House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options Third Report of Session 2016–17', published on September 4 2016. See: responses of Charlotte Leslie, David Morris and CMEC's Kwasi Kwarteng in October 2016: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2016-10-26/debates/B4053264-E0B9-4237-A5CC-3C9ACB2C030D/Libya>

surrounding the case. These are men who had been re-cast, re-deployed and betrayed by their UK allies on a systematic basis; ‘resistance fighters’ one minute and ‘terrorists’ the next. Any attempt to place them within the broader context of the 2017 attack at Manchester Arena would only serve to emphasize the West’s complicity in its own undoing and its failure to tame its allies.

According to a classified cable released by *Wikileaks* dated January 2008, Manchester’s Tahir Nasuf, the Relief Fund manager at Widgeon Close in Manchester, was a close associate of Benhammedi, al-Faqih and Ismail Kamoka — a senior LIFG member who had pleaded guilty to a terror related charge in June 2007. Communiqués found on a computer in Kamoka’s house are reported to have shown support for Abdul Rahman (Abdulbasit Abdulrahim) and an Algeria-based terror organisation.¹⁴¹ Responding to fears over his links to the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* and al-Qaeda, *The Times* made a shocking revelation in June 2017 when it announced that Kamoka was now in the employment of the British Embassy in London.¹⁴² However, in light of documents found at the British Ambassador’s former residence in Tripoli, Kamoka is now convinced that he and other members of the LIFG were used as pawns in a protracted power struggle between Tony Blair’s New Labour Government and the anti-Gaddafi movement taking shape under David Cameron. According to the *Wikileaks* cable, the LIFG was designated a terror group by the UN in 2001 and by the UK some three years later. The leak goes on to describe how the group had formally merged with al-Qaida in November 2007. The merger was announced through a Jihadist website affiliated with al-

¹⁴¹ https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08LONDON592_a.html; see (‘Raw Content’ tab)

¹⁴² ‘Terror chief Ismail Kamoka works for Libyan embassy’, Richard Spencer, David Brown, *The Times*; <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/terror-chief-works-for-libyan-embassy-6ccvmm3s3>

Qaida (the Al-Saheb media group). The website is believed to have shown two video clips; one featuring al-Qaida second in command Ayman Al Zawahiri and the other featuring Abu Laith Al Libi, a senior member of the LIFG who is alleged to have been active at training camps in Afghanistan. Nasuf's *Sanabel Relief Fund*, a recognised Manchester charity, had been accused by the US Treasury and the UN Security Council of funding terrorism.¹⁴³ And whilst he still maintains his innocence, Nasuf, the charity's president, was duly placed on a sanctions list along with several of the groups' property and rental businesses including *Sara Properties Ltd*, *Ozlam Properties Ltd* and *Meadowbank Investments Ltd*¹⁴⁴ — all of which operated throughout Manchester, Liverpool and the North West. The Wikileaks cable names three other men believed to have been providing funds for the LIFG through *Sanabel Relief Ltd*: Maftah Elmabruk, Abdelrazag Elostia and Abdulbasit Abdulrahim. And despite Kasuf and several other members of the LIFG being added to the sanctions list in 2011, the British duly handed back the passports of several other prominent members of the LIFG in preparation for the ground attack on Gaddafi.

¹⁴³ Treasury Designates UK-Based Individuals, Entities Financing Al Qaida-Affiliated LIFG, JS-4016, US Department of the Treasury, February 8, 2006; <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/js4016.aspx>

¹⁴⁴ *Meadowbrook Investments Ltd* was registered at the *Hanover* formations company. In an unusual twist this same address appears in the context of a British company alleged to have been used by Norwegian Terrorist, Anders Breivik to launder funds. It was initially feared that the attack at Utøya Island had been a far-right response to the Nato bombings in Libya.

II.V

The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group & the Manchester Arndale Plot

CONTROL ORDERS LIFTED



Significantly perhaps, *Ozlam Properties* features not only in the broader context of the Manchester Arena bombing, but also in to the Manchester Arndale Terror plot of 2009 (the so-called, Easter Bombing Plot). As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the bombing was alleged to have been planned by Janas Khan, a student at Hope University in Liverpool and Abid Naseer, a student in Manchester, apparently on the orders of senior Al Qaeda leaders.¹⁴⁵ *Ozlam Properties*, owned and operated by Nasuf's LIFG associate, Mohammed Benhammedi, had leased a Liverpool bedsit to Khan, Naseer and their accomplices. Astonishingly, just two weeks later, the British Home Office under Jacqui Smith with the full backing of the High Court of England and Wales revoked the control orders imposed on the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* and *Ozlam Properties* as a result of "significant developments" between Gaddafi's Government and several LIFG leaders who had been imprisoned by Gaddafi's government. These 'significant developments' are believed to have been a part of the 'secret' Rusal

¹⁴⁵ 'Manchester terror plot suspect pictured for first time', Duncan Gardham and Aislinn Simpson, The Daily Telegraph, April 12 2009;
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/5145160/Manchester-terror-plot-suspect-pictured-for-first-time.html>

negotiations taking place between Blair and Gaddafi in January 2009.¹⁴⁶ Revoking the control orders on the LIFG came despite the report in *The Daily Telegraph* clearly implicating *Ozlam Properties* in the broader context of Khan and Naseer's plot. This 2009 Court Ruling, built around the case of LIFG member 'AV' aka Abdul Al-Rahman Al-Faqih, can be viewed in full on the BAILII website.¹⁴⁷ It was THIS court ruling that Theresa May and the Conservative Party used as the basis to restore the passports of dozens of British-based LIFG members between December 2010 and January 2011 in their bid to remove Colonel Gaddafi from power. According to press and intelligence reports Khan and Naseer and their accomplices had been targeting the Trafford and Arndale Shopping Centres as part of a broader suicide campaign.

In 2009 flats in Cheetham Hill were raided by Police, just as other flats in the Cheetham area had been raided by Police investigating the Manchester Arena bombing in 2017.¹⁴⁸

Even if it is found that the LIFG had NOT leased the flats to Salman Abedi, it is still the case that at least one company associated with the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* has been name checked in the broader framework of not one but two recent Manchester terror plots: the Arndale bomb plot in 2009 and the more successful Manchester Arena bombing in May 2017. A director of

¹⁴⁶ 'Tony Blair faces calls for greater transparency over Middle East role', Robert Booth, The Guardian, September 25, 2011

¹⁴⁷

<https://web.archive.org/web/20210126214226/http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2009/902.html>

¹⁴⁸ 'The dramatic moment Abid Naseers Arndale Plot was brought down by machine gun police', Yakub Qureshi, Manchester Evening News, March 5 2015

LIFG fund-raising front, Ghoma Abdrabbha, eventually found himself governor at an Islamic primary school in Birmingham.¹⁴⁹ This was in spite of being included on the 2006 UN Security Council sanctions list.¹⁵⁰ Like many of the ‘Manchester Fighters’, Abdrabbha was removed from the UN terror list ahead of collaborating with the United Nations to overthrow Gaddafi in Libya in 2011 (the same group are also alleged to have collaborated with Mi6 in the attempted assassination of Gaddafi in 1996). Their travel restrictions were lifted and they were allowed to fight in Libya. Extraordinarily, the charity remained on the British charity register for some six years after being placed on the terror list.¹⁵¹ After the disposal of Gaddafi the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* formally disbanded and allied the UK-backed Transitional Council before splitting into various militias. But any clues lurking around Salman’s radical family history are not just to be found on his father’s side. Abedi’s mother, a Tripoli educated scientist, is alleged to have been an associate 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. al-Libi died in federal custody as he awaited trial in the US in 2015. He had been detained by Police in Manchester in the late 1990s after being granted asylum in Britain earlier in the decade.

In the days and weeks after the Manchester Arena Bombing, Mi5 and the mainstream press were certainly going through the motions of scratching

¹⁴⁹ ‘Ofsted warns Former governor of Birmingham Muslim School was once accused of funding terrorism’, Jeanette Oldham, Birmingham Mail, April 8 2017

¹⁵⁰ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2006/sc8892.doc.htm>

¹⁵¹ ‘Charity with Al-Qaida link remained on charity register for six years after UN sanctions began’, Daniel Lombard, Third Sector, February 14, 2013

their heads and asking how the Manchester Arena bomber ever got wrapped up with ‘the Jihadis’ but the answers were surprisingly easy to find. Salman had enjoyed regular contact with his father who had been active in radical politics for the best part of 30 years and was certainly immersed in it more than ever since his move back to Libya in 2011 as part of GNA security.

II.VI

Sir Richard Dearlove - A Spy Comes In From the Cold

TERROR GRIPS THE BRITISH ELECTIONS



It has to be said that by the time that the Manchester Arena attack took place, little had really been done to unpick the deeply frustrating knot of competing militias in Libya. And whilst the United Nations Security Council reiterated their support for the provisional government with no fewer than six resolutions in 2016 alone, no fresh assurances had been made to the GNA and no additional measures or new recommendations had been tendered by the time that things had deteriorated in spring 2017. Each of the statements expressed by the UN Security Council in December 2016 had been set-out very clearly, even if they had been defined in a discouraging and frankly robotic fashion: the UN Security Council would continue to support the UNSMIL in seeking a political solution to the problems. They then dutifully reiterated that they would keep pressing on with the full implementation of the Libyan Political Agreement urging Libya's political and economic institutions to address its economic challenges, in *all* parts of the country.¹⁵² And as a result of this inertia, something of a stalemate has developed. A series of meetings in Berlin in 2020 and 2021 made some headway, but by February 2022, the route agreed on appears to have collapsed.

¹⁵² Security Council, Press Release, Security Council Press Statement on Libya , December 2016, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12613.doc.htm>

Libya in February 2022, it has to be said, is not a great deal more stable than Libya in 2011.

Interestingly, a *Libyan Political Dialogue* meeting took place in Malta some years ago that promised to loosen the original stalemate. The series of discussions that took place between November 10th and November 11th 2016 had followed-up on meetings held in London the previous month featuring British Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, United States Secretary of State John Kerry, and a small yet powerful constellation of UAE and Saudi banking representatives.¹⁵³ Inevitably, discussion at that time had turned to the protection of Libya's Oil Crescent terminals in the ports along a short strip of coast, southwest of Benghazi. As we have learned already, Libyan oil production had endured repeated damage as a result of repeated strikes and seizures by IS militants and rival Islamist militias like the Benghazi Defence Brigade. By contrast, sales of US and Saudi oil had been soaring as a result of the seizures, before tumbling as Libyan production increased. As long as Libyan oil production remained in flux, Libya's economy, it was feared, would remain in a constant state of crisis.

In May 2017, just two weeks before the Manchester Arena Bombing, Boris Johnson made an unscheduled trip to Tripoli to negotiate plans for a fresh presidential election in March 2018 that would see Haftar and the Libyan National Army, operating in Libya's oil rich eastern region, play a more

¹⁵³ 'Resuscitating Libya in Malta?', Mohamed Mufti, Independent (Malta), Malta, November 6 2016; <https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2016-11-06/newspaper-opinions/Resuscitating-Libya-in-Malta-6736166178>; 'Foreign Secretary co-hosts meeting on Libya', Press release, Foreign & Commonwealth Office and The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, October 31 2016

prominent role in Libya's future.¹⁵⁴ Sir Richard Dearlove, the head of Mi6 under Blair, had long advocated a multi-state solution to Libya's problems, suggesting that East, West and Central Libya could easily exist in a semi-autonomous manner within the context of more central, federal framework. The response from Islamists in Tripoli was one of horror.

Whether it is a coincidence or not, the former leader of the mighty Tripoli Brigade, Mahdi al-Harati — a possible mentor to London Bridge attacker, Rachid Redouane¹⁵⁵ — was arrested for affray in Malta little more than a month after the meeting took place. Spotted by an eagle-eyed member of the press, the man who had played such a central role in the mission to overthrow Gaddafi claimed he was on a social visit to the area. And in what could have been a very significant move it was being reported on June 9th 2017 that the Dublin-based al-Harati had been urgently added to a list of Qatar-backed terror suspects provided by Saudi Arabia.¹⁵⁶ On Day 170 of the *Manchester Arena Inquiry* it was confirmed that al-Harati had been the leader of the *February 17th Martyrs Brigade* who had fought to liberate Tripoli during the 'February Revolution' of 2011.¹⁵⁷ Among pictures of his comrades discovered during the course of Operation Traverso was a boy with a strong-resemblance

¹⁵⁴ 'Boris Johnson throws weight behind Libya peace process', Patrick Wintour, The Guardian, May 4 2017

¹⁵⁵ 'London attacks: What we know so far about the Irish links', Seán Dunne, The Irish Times, June 7, 2017; <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/london-attacks-what-we-know-so-far-about-the-irish-links-1.3110618>

¹⁵⁶ 'Former Tripoli mayor Al Harati in Saudi list of Qatar-backed terror sponsors, Matthew Vella, Malta Today, June 9 2017

¹⁵⁷ February 17th was the day that the first official day of revolt in Benghazi in 2011. 'Revolution Day' is now observed as a national holiday in Libya.

to Salman Abedi.¹⁵⁸ Although Police were unable to offer a definite ID, it was strongly suspected that Salman was the boy in the image. Abedi's father, Ramadan Abedi is also suspected of having been a member of the group. Al-Harati would later serve in a similar capacity against the Assad regime in Syria.¹⁵⁹ Is it possible we might find further links between the former Mayor of Tripoli's links to both Manchester's Rebel Fighters and the Dublin-based London Bridge attacker?

For a moment, let us return to Sir Richard Dearlove and his plans for a power-share in the region: what role could he have played in all this? The role Dearlove played in the Libyan Government's relationship with Mi6's Mark Allen needs little elaboration. After retiring from Mi6 both men were recruited by *Monitor Group*, a global consultancy firm and tasked with running a two year public relations campaign on behalf of Gaddafi's Libyan government.¹⁶⁰ The close relationship the two men formed with Musa Kusa, former Intelligence chief to Gaddafi, was at the heart of an 'extraordinary rendition' case filed against Sir Allen by the former leader of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group*, Abdel Hakim Belhaj. Documents retrieved by the Libyan Rebels are alleged to have shown complicity between Blair's Labour Government and the release and torture of Belhaj and his wife.¹⁶¹ Any suffering re-lived as a result of the

¹⁵⁸ Manchester Arena Inquiry, November 22, 2021, Day 170; <https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2021/11/22172239/MAI-Day-170-.pdf>, opus transcripts, 151

¹⁵⁹ Salman's friend and Arena Inquiry witness, Abdalraouf Abdallah alleges to have fought alongside al-Harati

¹⁶⁰ 'LSE played a part in taming Libya's rogue regime', Jeevan Vasagar and Rajeev Syal, *The Guardian*, March 4 2011

¹⁶¹ 'UK may have been complicit in rendition', BBC News Today, April 9 2012; http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9711000/9711945.stm

ongoing legal case is likely to have been compounded when Belhaj learned of British plans to back Gaddafi's former General in the presidential elections scheduled for March 2018, first revealed in a fairly damning report by Britain's *Foreign Affairs Committee*. The report published in September 2016 even hinted that whilst regime-change did not feature in any formal argument or proposal put before the UK Parliament by Prime Minister David Cameron, it had certainly "drifted" that way: "*Libya was reactive and did not comprise action in pursuit of a strategic objective. This meant that a limited intervention to protect civilians drifted into a policy of regime change by military means.*"

¹⁶² Cameron's failure to offer stability and reconstruction after intervention also came in for some scathing criticism. It was determined that things were no better in Libya in 2016 than they had been under Gaddafi.

But there are other dimensions to consider. There is little doubting that the attacks in Manchester and on London Bridge brought a seriously divisive charge to Theresa May's election campaign, and had contributed in no small part to the hung-parliament the British public woke up to that Friday morning in June. That Sir Richard Dearlove had popped up on the eve of the election to positively trash the swelling support for Labour's Jeremy Corbyn by aligning him squarely with the IRA, practically guaranteed a split vote — and it all came courtesy of *The Daily Telegraph*, a newspaper that had been closely aligned with Cameron's second in command, George Osborne.¹⁶³ On the Sunday following the attacks, the readers of Britain were looking at demands for the

¹⁶² House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options Third Report of Session 2016–17, September 6 2016, p.18

¹⁶³ 'Jeremy Corbyn is a danger to this nation. At MI6, which I once led, he wouldn't clear the security vetting', Sir Richard Dearlove, *Daily Telegraph*, June 7 2017

resignation of Theresa May, the death of hard-Brexit and a leadership bid by Boris Johnson. And predictably, much of the momentum came from Osborne's *Evening Standard*.¹⁶⁴

What was behind the new, intense wave of hostility being shown by Osborne and other past and present members of Cameron's Conservative Party? Well, the address that Theresa May made to US Republicans in January that year had probably done little for her popularity. In a seismic shift of policy, the UK's Prime Minister had announced that Britain and America could not return to the "failed" military interventions and foreign policies of the past. "The days of Britain and America intervening in sovereign countries in an attempt to remake the world in our own image" were over. The Prime Minister also made a direct warning about Vladimir Putin, conceding that although we must 'engage' we must also 'beware'.¹⁶⁵ May's decision may have been brought about in part by the fairly damning report on British intervention in Libya prepared by the *British Foreign Affairs Committee* under Crispin Blunt the September before. However, in a statement that was likely to satisfy Britain's swelling Haftar lobby, the report had additionally accused the government of having failed to identify the "militant Islamist extremist element in the rebellion". Blunt, however, was able to offer very few words of support for General Haftar and the LNA. In an extraordinarily tactful statement explaining the options available, it was conceded that whilst the General had been keen to establish his credentials as a friend of the West and an enemy of ISIS, his

¹⁶⁴ 'Theresa May is a dead woman walking', George Osborne, *Evening Standard*, June 11 2017

¹⁶⁵ 'Theresa May: UK and US cannot return to 'failed' interventions', BBC News, January 26 2017; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-38747979>

rhetoric in relation to ISIS was seldom matched by his actions, acknowledging that in August 2016, Haftar had moved his forces towards an oil refinery “which is key to controlling Libya’s oil wealth” but which was totally unrelated to the operations of ISIS. In Blunt’s estimation, supporting Libyan General Khalifa Haftar would be a perilous “shortcut” in which Libyans might gain stability at the cost of losing their freedom.¹⁶⁶ They may not have had the solution at this stage, but they were beginning to ask the right questions. At the very least, it gave the small but influential pro-Haftar campaigners something to work with.

There is probably little doubt that Osborne’s takeover as editor of the *Evening Standard* on May 2nd 2017, had been rooted in a Machiavellian Tory plot to destroy Theresa May’s premiership, especially given the 65% stake that Moscow’s, Evgeny Lebedev has in the newspaper. More curiously still, it was Evgeny’s father Alexander Lebedev (former Chief Directorate at the KGB) who had come out to publicly challenge Steele’s dossier on Trump as a “poorly executed fake”. It was during this same period that Lebedev’s *National Reserve Bank* had significant stakes in Russian oil giant *Gazprom*, another company that had suffered as a result of sanctions placed on it by the Obama Administration. By October 2018, Italy’s ENI had offered to bring *Gazprom* into its concessions in Libya in return for some of the Russian giant’s assets.¹⁶⁷ Prior to the overthrow of Gaddafi in 2011, *Gazprom* were in talks to buy Libya oil and gas exports. The bid was seen by some as a means of gaining leverage over some European states. Libya’s failure to maintain stability of its oil terminals has

¹⁶⁶ House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK’s future policy options, Third Report of Session 2016–17, September 6 2016; <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmfaaff/119/119.pdf>

¹⁶⁷ Italy’s Eni to Take Control of BP’s Libya Assets Despite Insecurity, Benoit Faucon, Wall Street Journal, October 8, 2018

retarded Russian interest. In June 2020 it was being reported that Russia and the Kremlin-backed private security company, the *Wagner Group* had supplied thousands of mercenaries in support of Haftar's power grab for the National Central Bank reserves, presently controlled by the Tripoli administration.¹⁶⁸

Was it possible that foreign or domestic entities who shared Dearlove's vision had sought to engineer a climate and situation in which Boris could be elected leader? Were we looking at a possible 'Borisgate'. It's not as implausible as you might think, especially if one considers the skills, resources and reach of Haftar's most capable stakeholders, the UAE, Egypt, and Russia — the former being among the most generous donors to the *Conservative Middle East Council*. Reports by the UN's *Libya Sanctions Committee* published in February 2015 and repeated in June 2017 claiming that the UAE had violated UN arms embargo in support of *both* Haftar and his leadership rivals the GNA, leaves little doubt of UAE capabilities.¹⁶⁹ Arming Haftar's opposition would have greatly expedited the desired outcome (speeding up the crisis-point necessary for UN/NATO intervention, lifting the arms embargo, offering political and military support for Haftar and the House of Representatives in Tobruk). It is believed by other analysts that the UAE had started to perceive the possibility that a stable, peaceful and prosperous Libya presented a threat to its status in the region, and because of this had been fuelling the ongoing divisions and conflict

¹⁶⁸ 'Libya Oil Company: Russian Mercenaries Enter Major Oil Field', VOA News/Associated Press, June 26, 2020

¹⁶⁹ United Nations Security Council, Sanctions Libya Sanctions Committee, Panel of Experts Reports, S/2015/128; <https://www.undocs.org/S/2015/128>; United Nations Security Council, Sanctions Libya Sanctions Committee, Panel of Experts Reports, S/2017/466; <https://www.undocs.org/S/2017/466>

throughout the post-revolution period.¹⁷⁰ In 2019, a CNN investigation found that the UAE had transferred US-made weapons to Al-Qaeda-linked groups and a Salafi militia. Cooperation between the UAE and maverick Islamist factions within Tripoli militias — perhaps associated with Abedi’s Manchester friend, Abdalraouf Abdallah — in the months leading up to the Arena bombing are certainly not out of the question. In 2019, the *Anadolu Agency* in Turkey reported that the UAE “spy agents” had been training YPG/PKK terrorists in Syria since 2017. The UAE was alleged to have trained the men in “espionage, counter-espionage, sabotage and assassination acts”.¹⁷¹ Qatar, another country who is known to have played a crucial auxiliary role in the Libyan conflict — this time on the side of the GNA and its Islamist militias — had been engaged in something of a proxy war with Egypt and the UAE. Responding to the twin terror attacks in Manchester and London in May and June 2017, the UAE placed former ‘Manchester Fighter’ Mahdi Al-Harati (a possible mentor to London Bridge attacker, Rachid Redouane), Abdel Hakim Belhaj, ex Grand Mufti Sadiq Al-Ghariyani and Benghazi Defense Brigade on an updated list of Qatar-backed terrorists.¹⁷² In fairness, the scope for infiltration and manipulation is as deep as it is wide with neither side out of the frame.

¹⁷⁰ ‘UN report: UAE violates Libya arms embargo’, Al Jazeera, June 14 2017; <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/06/qatar-uae-libya-connection-170612080219306.html>

¹⁷¹ ‘UAE spy agents train PKK terrorists in Syria’, Mohamad Misto and Muhammed Temim Hocaoglu, Anadolu Agency, August 29 2020; <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/uae-spy-agents-train-pkk-terrorists-in-syria/1957339>

¹⁷² ‘Jamestown Foundation, Qatar’s Role in the Libyan Conflict: Who’s on the Lists of Terrorists and Why’, 14 July 2017, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/596c92b64.html> ; ‘Former Tripoli mayor Al Harati in Saudi list of Qatar-backed terror sponsors’, Matthew Vella, Malta Today, June 9 2017;

The UN Sanctions reports of 2015 and 2017 both pre-empted and expanded on claims made in Sir Crispin Blunt and the UK Foreign Affairs Committee's *Libya: Examination of intervention and Collapse* report published in September 2016. According to UN Sanctions inspectors, it was believed that the *Libyan Ground Force's* Chief of Staffs, Youssef al-Mangoush and Jadalla Al-Abedi, both performing under the direction of the GNA, had been channelling money and arms to the *Libyan Shield* and other militant Islamist militias in favour of strengthening their own military units. Alison Pargater, a Senior Research Fellow at the *School of Security Studies* at Kings College London and whose opinion had been sought for Blunt's report, suggested not only that Britain's understanding of Libya in the period leading up to the 2011 Revolution had been limited "by both resources and the lack of in-country networks" for British diplomats to draw on, but that the mass threat to civilians that Gaddafi had been presented as posing had been "very much amplified" and "exaggerated" in the months leading to the Nato-led mission.¹⁷³ The impact of Gaddafi's removal was being restyled as nothing short of catastrophic: "Libya was a country with no institutions to speak of. When you took Gaddafi away, you took everything away", Pargater had gone on to explain. The point of view, expressed as it was, may have the effect of dissuading ministers like Theresa May from contemplating further interventions, but equally it may have provided encouragement among those senior Conservatives looking for the right moral pretext to restore the power balances in Libya to those pre-dating the February

http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/world/77983/former_tripoli_mayor_al_harati_in_saudi_list_of_qatarbacked_terror_sponsors

¹⁷³ It difficult not to view Pargater's words a softening up of attitudes toward strongmen leaders like Gaddafi and Haftar, and lent no small amount of academic weight to the views later being expressed by CMEC and Boris Johnson.

Revolution. In January 2017 Theresa May had made her position on future interventions clear: Britain was not to rush in to foreign conflicts like it had done in the past. The “days of Britain and America intervening in sovereign countries in an attempt to remake the world in our own image” were over. The “opportunistic policy of regime change” that it “drifted into” in Libya in 2011 had led to poor rewards.¹⁷⁴ If we were to recoup any of those losses, Britain and America would need a new approach.

¹⁷⁴ ‘Theresa May draws curtain on era of British foreign intervention’, Henry Moore, Financial Times, January 27 2017; <https://www.ft.com/content/d6882ed4-e4b2-11e6-8405-9e5580d6e5fb>

II.VII

Inside Westminster: Chaos in the Conservative Party

IRREVERSIBLE HUMAN TIDES



If you have been an avid reader of newspaper spy stories over the past few years you will know that Dearlove has featured in not one but TWO absorbing (and related) espionage capers: the first centred on a Russian spy programme that was alleged to have been operating in Cambridge and the second emerged as part of the FBI's investigation into former Trump advisor, Michael Flynn.¹⁷⁵ The FBI and CIA's interest in the programme dates back to February 2014 when Dearlove, then Master of Cambridge's Pembroke College was seeking to establish a cross-discipline programme called the *Cambridge Security Initiative* (CSI).¹⁷⁶ Dearlove described the programme as a chance to create a "unique link between the worlds of business, government and academia". A dinner was hosted by Dearlove and the guest of honour was Michael Flynn, then head of America's *Defense Intelligence Agency* (DIA) and a little time later, the National Security Advisor for Donald Trump. It was here that Michael Flynn was introduced to Russian-banker-turned-historian, Svetlana Lokhova. It was

¹⁷⁵ 'Intelligence experts accuse Cambridge forum of Kremlin links', Sam Jones, Financial Times, Dec 16 2016; <https://www.ft.com/content/d43cd586-c396-11e6-9bca-2b93a6856354>

¹⁷⁶ <https://thecsi.org.uk/>

the friendship that subsequently blossomed between the two that is said to have stirred the interest of US spy chiefs about Mike Flynn.¹⁷⁷

I'd like to return for a moment to George Osborne, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer and First Secretary of State in David Cameron's Government whose appointment as Editor of the *Evening Standard* took place just twenty days before the Arena Bombing, and whose belligerent handling of the attack and the subsequent attack on London Bridge on June 4th dominated discussion in Britain's media. The newspaper's high-voltage coverage of the attacks seems to have had the desired result. A snap General Election had been called — against all better judgement — by Prime Minister Theresa May on April 18th 2017 and Osborne's handling of the tragedy provided an intense emotional boost to last-minute canvassing by the Conservatives. On the morning of May 22nd, the day of the Arena Attack, the headlines were talking of the closing gap between Labour and the Conservatives and a succession of U-Turns by a PM who had sloganned her campaign, 'Strong and Stable'. An almost somnambulistic election campaign had left many of the Conservatives who had been preparing their case for a hard-Brexit, the unconditional withdrawal of Britain from the European Union, with a palpable sense of unease. All that changed on the night of the Arena bombing when an overwhelming surge of anger put defence, national security and immigration, generally regarded as the propulsion system of Brexit, back at the centre of public concerns. The not totally convincing win for Theresa May and the Conservative Party resulted in a minority government that had been narrowly

¹⁷⁷ 'Cambridge University dragged into row over Donald Trump's ex-spy chief's links to Russia', Robert Mendick, The Telegraph, April 2, 2017; <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/04/01/cambridge-university-dragged-row-donald-trumps-ex-spy-chiefs/>

secured by a last-minute agreement with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) of Northern Ireland. The Sunday after the election Osborne's *Evening Standard* would launch the first in a series of strikes to force a leadership contest. Their headline on June 9th reading simply: *Theresa May hung out to dry: PM clings on to power with DUP*.¹⁷⁸

Osborne's appearance on the BBC's Andrew Marr show that week brought clearer definition to the statement: Theresa May, the woman who just months before had sacked him as British Chancellor, was "a dead woman walking". It was just a case of how long she was going to "remain on death row". He cited the resignation of Prime Minister May's two closest advisers, Nick Timothy and Fiona Hill as proof of just how close the party had come to a disaster.¹⁷⁹ According to a report in his own newspaper about his appearance with Andrew Marr, separate polls were now showing that one in two people thought May should resign and hand the leadership of the party to Boris Johnson, the gaff-prone Foreign Secretary who just four weeks earlier had shown his deepest regard for General Haftar and his forces and his support for regime change in Libya. Who knows how the Conservatives would have fared at the election had the full facts been shared with the public that it was May and the Conservative Party who had set the ball in motion for the Arena attack by seeking the return of passports for the 'Manchester Fighters' in preparation for

¹⁷⁸ 'Theresa May hung out to dry: PM clings on to power with DUP', *Evening Standard*, June 9, 2017; <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/theresa-may-insists-she-will-stay-on-as-election-disaster-ends-in-hung-parliamenttheresa-may-to-seek-permission-from-queen-to-form-a-government-despite-election-disaster-a3561066.html>

¹⁷⁹ 'George Osborne: Theresa May is a 'dead woman walking'', Jessica Elgot, *Guardian*, June 11 2017; <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jun/11/george-osborne-says-theresa-may-is-a-dead-woman-walking>

the war on Gaddafi.¹⁸⁰ As Home Secretary at that time, any decision on passports would have been a decision approved by Theresa May, at this time serving as Secretary to the Home Office. Osborne was forced to issue an apology to May in September that year when he alleged that he had told friends that he would not rest until she “is chopped up in bags in my freezer”.¹⁸¹

If Osborne’s ‘Yachtgate’ capers with Russian oligarch, Oleg Deripaska and Peter Mandelson hadn’t caused sufficient concern for Britain’s security services back in August 2008¹⁸², then they should surely have been listening now, not only on account of Osborne’s grisly pursuit of dismemberment, but in light of the mutual interests of Deripaska and the Russians in Libya’s General Haftar and the British General Elections in the period leading up to the attack. Deripaska, who had negotiated a £3 billion ‘Rusal’ financing deal for the *Libyan Investment Authority* (LIA) through Tony Blair and *JP Morgan* was also a good friend of Nat Rothschild and Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, whose shock release in June 2017, shortly after the Arena bombing, had threatened to spearhead a Loyalist revival.

The £50,000 donation that Osborne was alleged to have attempted to solicit from Deripaska in 2008 had arisen during a party at Rothschild’s Corfu Villa. In April 2018, the *United States Department of the Treasury* announced that it was imposing sanctions on Oleg Deripaska and *Rusal* after accusing them of “threatening the lives of business rivals, illegally wiretapping a government

¹⁸⁰ Perhaps this had been the intent all along.

¹⁸¹ ‘George Osborne’s Revenge, Ed Caesar’, *Esquire*, September 13 2017; <http://www.esquire.co.uk/culture/longform/a17158/george-osborne-revenge/>

¹⁸² ‘Osborne at bay over charge he sought cash from Russian’, Patrick Wintour and Nick Watt, *The Guardian*, October 22 2008,

official, and taking part in extortion and racketeering”.¹⁸³ As a result of the Treasury’s decision, four *Rusal* board members resigned, including Ivan Glasenberg, CEO of the Swiss commodities giant Glencore, and Philip Lader, former U.S. ambassador to the United Kingdom during Blair’s New Labour government. Lader had initially conducted business for *Rusal* as an independent non-executive director before being appointed a board member in November 2010.¹⁸⁴ He had served in the former capacity since March 2007, the same year that Deripaska had come on board as Chairman of the Supervisory Board of *Basic Element*. Lader’s wife, Linda LeSound Lader has for many years served as a trustee and director of the American Branch of the *Tony Blair Faith Foundation*.¹⁸⁵

The American think tank, the *Atlantic Council*, where Lader had been sitting as Chairman and Member of the Board of Directors since 2001, had been pushing for a change of leadership and direction in Libya as early as 2013 when their report, *Post-revolutionary Politics in Libya: Inside the General National Congress* arrived at the conclusion that the fragmentation and the collision that defined the two main blocs of Libya’s Provisional Government — “loosely defined as Islamists (led by the JCP) and non-Islamists (led by the NFA)” —

¹⁸³ ‘Battle of Corfu - island meetings that left Tory and millionaire at war’, Nicholas Watt and Patrick Wintour, *The Guardian*, October 22 2008. Deripaska was married to the daughter of Valentin Yumashev, a senior Adviser in Yeltsin’s Kremlin.

¹⁸⁴ ‘Anatomy of a Muddle: US Sanctions against Rusal and Oleg Deripaska’, William R. Spiegelberger, Russian Political Economy Project, 2019; <https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/spiegelbergerrpe3.pdf>; ‘United Company RUSAL Plc: Update on Possible Share Transfer between Shareholders of the Company and Resignation of Directors’, Bloomberg, April 10, 2018; https://rusal.ru/en/press-center/press-releases/uc_rusal_appoints_new_members_to_its_board_of_directors/

¹⁸⁵ The Tony Blair Faith Foundation US, Open Corporates, https://opencorporates.com/companies/us_wv/286099

had “paralyzed the decision-making process and brought about a dangerous polarization of the political landscape.” Libya’s General Council, whose members comprised of many former members of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group*, was in their estimation a “bitterly polarized assembly intent on passing a contentious political isolation law through the use of armed pressure”. However by the time that meetings were taking place about Libya in the UAE, Karim Mezran, a Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council, was less convinced about Haftar’s ability to stabilise Libya on his own. Speaking to *Al Jazeera* in the second week of May 2017, Mezran shared Dearlove’s opinion that “any accord that would ban other relevant players or place Haftar in a prominent role without the support of local actors” was wishful thinking.¹⁸⁶ In October 2012 it was announced that the *Marathon Oil Corporation*, on whose board Philip Lader also sat, was spearheading a program to revive the oil and gas production in post-Revolution Libya.¹⁸⁷ Some six years later in March 2018, with production levels in chaos as a result of the ongoing power struggles, *Marathon Oil Libya Limited* sold its assets in Libya for \$450 million to Total SE.¹⁸⁸

But in terms of reimagining Libya under partial control of Haftar what was in it for the likes of Sir Richard Dearlove and the Kremlin?

¹⁸⁶ Post-revolutionary Politics in Libya: Inside the General National Congress, Karim Mezran, Fadel Lamien, and Eric Knecht, Atlantic Council, 2013; https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/169100/postrevolutionary_politics_libya.pdf

¹⁸⁷ ‘Libya to ramp up Waha oil and gas production’, October 26, 2012, 2b1st Consulting; <https://2b1stconsulting.com/libya-to-ramp-up-waha-oil-and-gas-production/>

¹⁸⁸ Marathon Oil Announces Libya Divestiture for \$450 Million, Press Release, March 2, 2018; <https://ir.marathonoil.com/2018-03-02-Marathon-Oil-Announces-Libya-Divestiture-for-450-Million>

Back in 2007, the former Head of Mi6, Sir Richard Dearlove and his ambitious Mi6 subordinate, Mark Allen, had been instrumental in brokering a \$900m oil deal that had been struck between BP and the Libyan government.¹⁸⁹ The deal looked set to go ahead right up until Gaddafi's removal in 2011. The man who had played a key role as bridge in those discussions had been Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, whose dramatic release from prison in Zintan was being (somewhat under) reported just three weeks after the Arena attack.

Today nothing of that deal remains. As the country descended into chaos investors withdrew, plans were suspended and interest froze. By 2017 Allen and Dearlove's romance with Libya was served a final crushing defeat when former LIFG leader, Abdelhakim Belhadj took Allen to court over the role that he and Mi6 were alleged to have played in his illegal rendition to Libya in 2004. The Supreme Court ruling that gave Belhadj the go ahead to launch his legal case against Allen and Mi6 was made on Tuesday May 23rd, the day after the Arena bombing.¹⁹⁰ Despite reporting developments in the case on May 4th, The Guardian newspaper waited a surprising six weeks before publishing news of the ruling.¹⁹¹ All other press titles in Britain ignored it completely, not publishing news of developments until the case reached some kind of conclusion in May 2018.

¹⁸⁹ 'BP marks return to Libya with \$900m gas deal', Richard Wray, The Guardian, May 30 2007; <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2007/may/30/libya.oilandpetrol>

¹⁹⁰ 'Belhaj ruling brings fresh scrutiny on Blair-Gaddafi 'deal in the desert'', Simon Hooper, Middle East Eye, May 25 2017; <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/belhaj-ruling-brings-fresh-scrutiny-blair-gaddafi-deal-desert>

¹⁹¹ 'Libya rendition case against ex-MI6 officer may be held partly in secret', Owen Bowcott, Guardian, May 4, 2017; 'Foreign Office wants rendition case against Jack Straw to be held in private', Iain Cobain, Guardian, June 29, 2017;

Staying in 2017 for a moment, we find that the Kremlin is making significant in-roads with General Haftar. In a report by Carl Lampe of the *Foreign Policy Research Institute* in May 2019, it was said that Russia had viewed the collapse of the Gaddafi regime “as a blow to its political and economic interests”. It was alleged that since his fall in 2011, the country’s President, Vladimir Putin, had been eager to capitalise on the chaos in Libya to “strengthen its image as a power broker” in Middle East and North Africa politics, and to benefit economically from oil and government contracts. Other benefits Lampe cites include the perks of the so-called guns for oil trade, government contracts, leverage over the European Union, deep-sea port access on the Mediterranean and neutralising extremist Islamic threats abroad.¹⁹²

As the Lampe report quite rightly observes, Haftar had travelled to Moscow more than three times since 2016. These trips included meetings with Russia’s Defence Minister, Sergei Shoigu, and Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov. Haftar was also aboard Russia’s Admiral Kuznetsov aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean in 2017, during which he is alleged to have spoken to Sergei Shoigu via video conference.

In February 2017 it was being reported that Russia’s *Rosneft* had struck an oil deal with the state-owned Libyan oil giant, National Oil Corporation (NOC).¹⁹³ Haftar, it was further alleged, was now determined to ramp-up oil production in the East. Given that an increase in Libyan production is

¹⁹² ‘Moscow’s hand in Libya, Carl Lampe, Foreign Policy Research Institute’, Middle East Program, May 30, 2019; <https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/05/moscows-hand-in-libya/>

¹⁹³ ‘Russia increases involvement in Libya by signing oil deal’, Patrick Wintour, The Guardian, February 21 2017; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/21/russia-increases-involvement-libya-signing-oil-deal-rosneft>

traditionally followed by a fall in sales of US and Saudi oil, something of a power-struggle over Haftar had begun. And whilst the European Union had been hoping to persuade Haftar to accept a power share with the UN-backed *Government of National Accord* (GNA) set up in December 2015, Russia was said to have been supporting Haftar's bid to seize overall military power. In Europe this was never seen as a viable option for lasting peace, but the Trump Administration was beginning to show signs of offering its support alongside Russia. As *The Guardian* reported in February 2017, "European diplomats fear that that (Haftar) could join what has been described as Vladimir Putin's axis of secular authoritarians in the Middle East."¹⁹⁴

Something came along next that would boost Putin's plans significantly. A phone call alleged to have been made by President Trump to General Haftar on April 15th 2019, appears to have signalled the White House's public shift to support for his army, bringing America closer in line with the policy being expressed in Russia at this time.¹⁹⁵ None of this should have been a surprise. British spy Christopher Steele, whose now infamous Steele Dossier blew the lid on Trump's kinky sex antics in Moscow, suggested subsequently that Putin had offered Trump the brokerage on 19% of *Rosneft* in return for lifting the sanctions placed on Russia and *Rosneft* Chairman, Igor Sechin by the Obama administration in 2014. The meeting is said to have taken place in July 2016 and is alleged to have featured Trump's then Foreign Policy Adviser, Carter Page

¹⁹⁴ 'EU reaches out to Russia to broker deal with Libyan general Haftar', *The Guardian*, Feb 2017; Patrick Wintour, February 9 2017; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/09/eu-russia-broker-libya-khalifa-haftar-libya-tobruk>

¹⁹⁵ 'White House says Trump spoke to Libyan commander Haftar on Monday', *Reuters*, Steve Holland, April 19, 2019

and *Rosneft* Executive Chairman, Igor Sechin.¹⁹⁶ To the best of my knowledge the claims remain unverified, but it is curious to learn that Steele, a confirmed Socialist, is another prominent figure on the Cambridge University alumni and headed the Russia Desk at Mi6 under Sir Richard Dearlove. Interestingly, Jonathan Winer, US special envoy for Libya, was one of several people who came forward to endorse Steele publicly.

By May 2017 something of a proxy war had developed around the subsidy rights and pipelines that Libya boasts. British Defence Minister Michael Fallon was pretty blunt when it came to a Russian-Haftar alliance telling Kremlin representatives at the Munich Security Conference in February 2017 that Russia was being belligerent in testing the fragile NATO alliance over Libya. UK oil giant *BP*, on whose behalf Dearlove and Allen had successfully negotiated a deal with Libya's Gaddafi between 2007 and 2010, were just two of many competitors.

At the beginning of June 2017, little more than two weeks after the Arena Bombing, President Donald Trump appointed *Rosneft* stakeholder, Christopher Wray, as new head of the FBI.¹⁹⁷ Wray's law firm, *King & Spalding* at this time, represented not only the interests of *Rosneft* but *Gazprom*, two of the largest state-controlled oil companies in Russia.¹⁹⁸ Just twelve

¹⁹⁶ Steele Dossier (leak), Fusion GPS, Company Intelligence Report, Christopher Steele, December 13 2016; <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/3259984/Trump-Intelligence-Allegations.pdf>

¹⁹⁷ 'Trump nominates lawyer Christopher Wray to lead FBI', BBC News, June 7 2017; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-40189690>

¹⁹⁸ 'Donald Trump's new FBI director pick has Russian ties of his own', Kenneth F. McCallion, USA Today; <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2017/06/08/trump-new-fbi-director-chris-wray-russian-ties-rosneft-gazprom-column/102603214/>

months before in April 2016, *Africa Intelligence* was reporting that Wray's law-firm *King & Spalding* were to be replaced by *Curtis, Mallet-Prevost* as the legal team now tasked with securing the release of Gaddafi's frozen assets on behalf of the Libyan administration in Tripoli.¹⁹⁹ However, the firm's interests in Libya go all the way back to 2011, when it drafted a report assessing the opportunities now open to oil companies internationally.²⁰⁰

One month before the Arena Bombing in April 2017, an estimated \$160 billion in LIA frozen assets was being fought over by two main rivals factions: General Haftar in the East and Ali Shamekh, a man who was at that time heading-up the *Libyan Investment Authority*.²⁰¹ Ali Shamekh was claiming that a sizable volume of the frozen funds could have played a significant role in energy and power generation, including oil and gas. This would have been backed by a British-based office staffed by Libyan and British experts, with the aim of enlarging Libya's investments in Britain and using the office as a platform to encourage international investors to look at Libya.

According to a statement made on the *Legal 500* website in 2020, Wray's *King & Spalding* law-firm remained one of a handful of international law firms with strong links to Libya, the firm's Paris-based partner, Mehdi Haroun having represented several senior interests in the region. "Libya was

¹⁹⁹ 'Curtis replaces King & Spalding in frozen assets quest', April 21, 2016, *Africa Intelligence*; https://www.africaintelligence.com/north-africa_business/2016/04/21/curtis-replaces-king--spalding-in-frozen-assets-quest,108146276-art

²⁰⁰ Crisis in Libya: What Legal Options are Available to Oil and Gas Companies, Client Alert, *King & Spalding*, May 17, 2011

²⁰¹ 'Libya sovereign wealth fund chief to appeal to UN over frozen assets', *Financial Times*, February 25, 2016.

very fashionable,” he had told the *Wall Street Journal* in 2011.²⁰² Everyone had seeing it as a “huge opportunity”. It was now being forecasted by Libya’s state-owned *National Oil Corporation* that Libyan oil production would return to the 1969 level of three million barrels a day by 2012.

Another man that Trump had been tipping to replace Comey at the FBI was Joe Lieberman, the ex-Senator and Democrat who had defied all expectations in his support for the much-loathed President.²⁰³ When Lieberman abandoned his Senate post in 2013 he immediately took up with law firm, *Kasowitz Benson Torres*, whose senior partner, Marc Kasowitz, Trump had chosen as Defense Attorney in the FBI’s Russian Probe.²⁰⁴ Again there were a series of strong links to Libya. In 2013, Kasowitz and Lieberman had signed up as foreign agents for Basit Igtet, a Libyan businessman and activist who was seeking office in Haftar’s oil-rich east. At this time, Igtet’s wife had played a role at the *US-Libya Chamber of Commerce* and claimed a personal familiarity with John Kerry. The ‘Coexistence Agreement’ that Libya’s Haftar signed in June 2016 was proposed and conceived by Igtet.²⁰⁵ The only thing threatening Igtet’s bid for the Libyan Presidency was his relationship with fellow Benghazi native, Ahmed Abu Khattala, the Benghazi militant charged by the US Justice Department for his involvement in the attack in Benghazi in 2012 that killed US

²⁰² ‘For West’s Oil Firms, No Love Lost in Libya’, Guy Chazan, *The Wall Street Journal*, April 15, 2011

²⁰³ ‘How Joe Lieberman Became a Trump Supporter’, Max Kutner, *Newsweek*, May 20, 2017

²⁰⁴ ‘Trump has retained a defense attorney in the Russia probe—and he’s a strange choice’, Max de Haldevang, *Quartz*, May 24, 2017; <https://qz.com/990889/trump-hires-lawyer-marc-kasowitz-as-russia-investigation-gets-closer-to-white-house/>

²⁰⁵ ‘Ceasefire in Libya: Libyan Leaders’, Aguila Saleh and Khalifa Haftar Sign Libyan Coexistence Agreement, PR Newswire/BasitIgtet.com, 30 Jun, 2016

Ambassador Christopher Stevens.²⁰⁶ It might also be noted that Igtet had entered into a partnership around this time with Richard H. Griffiths, a senior representative of super lobbyists, *Squire Patton Boggs* in the *American Libyan Chamber of Commerce*.²⁰⁷ In 2017 Griffiths relocated to Britain to work for *Dentons* after his evacuation from Tripoli during 2014.

Anyone familiar with Trump's sport and leisure enterprises may also recall that Trump had previously approached Gaddafi with plans to build a 'super resort' on Libya's Mediterranean coastline. That Basit Igtet has similarly been pushing super-resort interests with *Athal Hospitality* may give us some indication of the direction his cooperation with Trump could well have taken.

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So what else was likely to be in it for Putin? Well not only would Russia's engagement in Libyan affairs likely strengthen the country's position as a key international player, siding with strongman leaders like Haftar is also likely to blow apart the UN's 2015 Libyan reconciliation effort and its supporting architecture, the Nato alliance. In this respect Libya presents little more than a blast hole, with Trump the stick of dynamite they were no doubt anxious to wedge it into. And this was clearly the long-term objective.

Just precisely where Britain's self-styled "security" overlord Sir Richard Dearlove stands in all this isn't entirely clear. Announcing himself as a "former

²⁰⁶ 'Joe Lieberman's Benghazi Connection; Trump's possible FBI chief pick lobbied for a Libyan politician who courted a Benghazi terrorist suspect', David Corn, MotherJones.com, May 19, 2017; <https://www.prnewswire.co.uk/news-releases/ceasefire-in-libya-libyan-leaders-aguila-saleh-and-khalifa-haftar-sign-libyan-coexistence-agreement-585050441.html>

²⁰⁷ <https://web.archive.org/web/20130316054924/http://www.amchamlibya.org/who-we-are>

²⁰⁸ <https://www.multivu.com/players/uk/8105051-athal-hospitality-new-style-of-hospitality/>

spymaster who has spent a good deal of his career in and around Europe” , Dearlove had managed to lodge himself at the centre of ‘migration crisis’ discussion with a well-timed appearance at the BBC’s *World on the Move Day* on May 16 2016. Before a large and appreciative audience of journalists, MPs and political ‘influencers’ who had assembled at Broadcasting House, Dearlove had set the tone of the agenda with a reference to Edward Gibbon’s *The Fall of the Roman Empire* in which the author had “elegantly charted how Rome with its civic and administrative sophistication and military prowess could not stop its empire being overrun by the mass movement of Europe’s tribes.” History, he assured them, had proved time and time again that “human tides are irresistible unless the gravitational pull that causes them is removed.” The argument he put forward had been calibrated to raise the threat level at both ends of the political spectrum. To those on the ‘left’ he raised the spectre of a ‘populist uprising’. ‘Extreme right populist parties’, were already, he warned, “gathering support in central Europe”, eventually giving rise to an “Iron Curtain” of racial prejudice, based on our collective failure to stem migration now. To those on the ‘right’, the picture he painted was a little less mollifying but just as bleak, cautioning that the EU’s decision to allow 75 million Turks to flow across the Aegean was like “storing gasoline next to the fire we are trying to extinguish”.²⁰⁹ It was a really rather skilful double-barrel narrative. Unless Britain was prepared to act now, those on the Left would be facing the return of fascism; those on the Right, an escalation in Social unrest and greater numbers of people “carrying the terrorist virus”. On the one hand, Dearlove (perhaps avoiding any risk of alienating Britain’s ‘Left’) was asking us to “conflate the

²⁰⁹ ‘Europe migrant crisis: EU faces ‘populist uprising’,’ BBC News, May 16 2016; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36304721>

problem of migration with the threat of terrorism” and on the other he was persuading us that it was, nevertheless, a deeply worrying contributor. Where you stood politically determined what sound-bites carried the most weight. Somewhat inevitably, the official website for *Vote Leave*, at that time operating under the direction of its founder, Dominic Cummings, the British svengali-figure who had arrived in Russia just as Dearlove’s friend Mark Allen had assumed direction of the Russian Desk at Mi6 ²¹⁰, duly provided a full transcript of Dearlove’s address on the ‘migrant crisis’ on the group’s official website, adding bold-type to any statement deemed sufficiently recyclable for their legion of keyboard warriors.²¹¹

The gravitas that the speech would give the migration issue would be enormous. Within months, Joseph Walker-Cousins, the former advisor to the British Embassy in Benghazi now employed as Middle East Business Development Director at *Kellogg Brown and Root UK* had found himself localising the solution to unregulated migration gateways like Libya. The failure of the West to help stabilise the country with effective leadership after the collapse of the Gaddafi regime had only exacerbated the crisis. Based on statements made by Walker-Cousins at the testimony that he provided at the *UK Select Committee* that month, the *Daily Mail* had run the headline: “*More than ONE MILLION migrants hoping to cross to Europe are 'in the pipeline' in*

²¹⁰ Cummings lived and worked in Russia between 1994 and 1997. His employer in Russia was American, Adam Dixon. At time of writing, Dixon’s *Ecoenergen* offices in Wien are just 500 hundred feet from pro-Kremlin Ukrainian, Dmytro Firtash who partnered Cumming’s brother in law, Jack Wakefield at the Firtash Foundation. Firtash is currently facing corruption and bribery charges in the US relating to his dealings with close associates of Donald Trump.

²¹¹

https://web.archive.org/web/20170711153407/http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/sir_richard_dearlove_speech_at.html

Libya".²¹² Dearlove might have had no formal position at Mi6 for some fifteen years, but he was certainly in the habit of making simple, if rather backhanded contributions to policy-making decisions in the timeliest of fashions. In 2018 Dearlove was back in the headlines again, this time describing his personal and professional regret with having helped Putin seize power at the Kremlin in the late 1990s.²¹³ Just seven years earlier he had paved the way for the case brought against Mark Allen by LIFG leader, Abdelhakim Belhaj when he confirmed to a government think-tank that the British Government under Tony Blair had colluded in returning Libyan dissidents to Gaddafi and their inevitable torture.²¹⁴ On each of these occasions Dearlove delivers the most astonishing bombshells with the most apologetic and contrite of admissions: depth-charges disguised as confessions, cloaked with all the virtue and probity of 'transparency'— and always with the easy misdeeds of Tony Blair to offer by way of a scapegoat. The man who had assisted his friend Mark Allen with his BP Oil deal in 2007 and who had established close professional ties with Saif Gaddafi in advance of that deal was an expert in subsurface warfare.

Of course none of the people mentioned above were in any shape or form responsible for the Manchester Arena Bombing or doing anything illegal, but it's clear that a complex chain of political and financial exchange mechanisms operating beneath the radar in Britain in 2009 and 2011 was leading to some

²¹² 'More than ONE MILLION migrants hoping to cross to Europe are 'in the pipeline' in Libya: Senior diplomat warns EU has done 'too little, too late' to tackle the crisis', Ian Drury, Daily Mail, March 30 2017.

²¹³ 'MI6 regrets helping Vladimir Putin to win power, says ex-spy chief,' Dave Sanderson, The Times, October 1 2018, The Times

²¹⁴ 'Former MI6 chief says ministers approved Gaddafi links', Richard Norton-Taylor, September 15 2011.

stunning reversals in government policy, and in a way that helped transform the common ‘Jihadi terrorist’ into a respectable ‘freedom fighter’ — a trigger configuration that had been developed on a global and very unpredictable scale.

II.VIII

Back to the Conservative Middle East Council

CONSOLIDATING CONTRACTORS



The question remains; did *'Inside Libya: Crisis in the Mediterranean'*, the report published by the *Conservative Middle East Council* in March 2017, in which it recommended an immediate reversal in policy in favour of General Haftar and the LNA, trigger the sequence of events that resulted in the Manchester Arena Bombing on May 22nd 2017? Well if claims at the time are true and the Abedi brothers were also considering the Libyan Prime Minister Serraj, British Ambassador, Peter Millet and Martin Kobler, Head of the UN Support Mission as targets, then yes, it's plausible it played a part.²¹⁵ Political assassinations of this kind are not a typical characteristic of ISIS — certainly not in the West — and the official recognition of General Haftar as 'Army Chief' which had been announced in a joint statement by Kobler and Mohammed Siyala during a press conference in Algiers on May 8th may have also have tipped the scales.²¹⁶ The most likely mitigating factor, however, is probably the not-so-secretive trip made by Boris Johnson to Libya on Thursday

²¹⁵ 'Salman Abedi was taken from Tripoli to Malta by the HMS Enterprise', The National, July 31, 2018; <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/europe/manchester-suicide-bomber-was-rescued-by-royal-navy-from-libya-1.755606>

²¹⁶ 'Libya foreign minister names Khalifa Haftar army chief', Al Jazeera, 9 May 2017; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/5/9/libya-foreign-minister-names-khalifa-haftar-army-chief>

May 4th 2017, just one day after the historic meet between Haftar and Serraj in the UAE, a meet that many analysts feared would completely derail the fragile peace process.²¹⁷ Had his lightning trip to Libya really been planned in advance as Boris had suggested? Or was it a last-minute response to an emerging and unmanageable crisis taking root among the various (and unruly) GNA militias? The press mentioned that the trip had been planned for some weeks but had been ‘kept under wraps’ as a result of enormous security risks. If that is so, then wouldn’t it have been safer and more practical for Johnson to have attended the ‘historic’ UAE summit between Haftar and Serraj on May 3rd? The correction to *The Guardian’s* report on the Johnson trip provides an unusually candid insight into just how sensitive this trip was. The note at the bottom of the article reads simply: “This article has been amended to make clear Boris Johnson only met Fayez al-Serraj, and not Khalifa Haftar”.²¹⁸

Whatever the exact nature of Johnson’s visit in that first week in May, the *Conservative Middle East Council* is by no means the only Tory lobby that has been gently but no less purposely shaping the direction of Britain’s policy in Libya and the wider world. And it is for this very reason that it might be worth pausing a moment to review the fairly intricate web of links between the *CMEC*, *Blair Associates* and Jonathan Powell’s *CforC Ltd* (subsequently operating as *Inter Mediate*).²¹⁹

²¹⁷ ‘British Foreign Secretary meets Al-Sirraj in Tripoli’, Abdulkader Assad, *The Libya Observer*, May 04, 2017; <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/british-foreign-secretary-meets-al-sirraj-tripoli>

²¹⁸ ‘Boris Johnson throws weight behind Libya peace process’, Patrick Wintour, *The Guardian*, May 4 2017; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/04/boris-johnson-libya-peace-process-tripoli>

²¹⁹ <http://www.inter-mediate.org/>

Founded several years ago by ex-Foreign Office and Mi6 operative, Christopher James, *CforC*, like the deeply mysterious *Hakluyt*, had been awarded the ambitious task of resolving problems and building dialogues in some of the world's most conflict-prone regions. As was the case with *Tony Blair Associates* — who Powell also worked for — CforC had been focusing its efforts during this time in Central Asia. Countries with pitiful human rights records (but plenty in the way of cash) like Tajikistan and Kazakhstan were being imaginatively resold as tourist destinations and attractive investment centres. Playing a minor, but no less imaginative role in these efforts, was *Steppe Magazine*.²²⁰

According to its website, *Steppe Magazine* was the “ultimate guide for anybody travelling to or interested in learning more about Central Asia.” It covered art, it covered history, it covered Kazakhstan's gorgeous, rugged mountain-scapes and its ‘totes amazeballs’ nightlife. What it didn't cover in quite the same depth were the notorious abuses and indiscretions of its tyrannical President, Nursultan Nazarbayev. Interestingly the magazine's founder was Lucy Kelaart — wife of CMEC's Leo Docherty, the co-author of the report offering support to Haftar's Libya in March 2017. Kelaart's partner in the venture was Summer Coish, a young, intrepid Bostonian, who would subsequently provide solutions in the Oil and Gas sectors at *Kiron Global Strategies* in Washington DC alongside UN Development manager, Mohammad Kalabani. A colourful adventurer and ‘development’ expert, Coish had spent several years in Afghanistan working for USAID. Precisely how or why this came about isn't terrifically clear, but it's here that she joined Obama's

²²⁰ <https://web.archive.org/web/20130720041628/www.steppemagazine.com/>

Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Richard Holbrooke and US Ambassador Karl Eikenberry in their various (and unsuccessful) ‘nation building’ activities.²²¹

It was whilst she was in Afghanistan with Holbrooke that Summer was introduced to Lucy Docherty’s sister, Thierry Kelaart, who was working at this time for another charity-based nation-builder, the *Turquoise Mountain Foundation*.²²² The *Turquoise Mountain Foundation* was and remains a Prince of Wales-funded project, founded by Sir William Patey, former-British Ambassador to Afghanistan and by now a permanent (and surprisingly level headed fixture) at CMEC roundtables. More intriguing perhaps, is the role played by the Foundation’s director, Khalid Said, son of CMEC donor, Rosemary Said and Tony Blair associate, Wafic Said, the Syrian-Saudi billionaire who was famously enmeshed in all those BAE, Oil and Libyan Tourism scandals.²²³

At *Turquoise Mountain Foundation*, Thierry worked alongside Rory Stewart, who would go on to serve the Theresa May government as Minister of State at the Department for International Development. He was also one-time tutor to Princes William and Harry. Thierry herself is a good friend of William’s wife, Kate Middleton.²²⁴ In fact it’s probably fair to speculate that Thierry’s

²²¹ Why did America send its C team to Afghanistan?, Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *foreignpolicy.com*, June 26, 2012; <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/06/26/deadwood/>

²²² <http://turquoisemountain.org/>

²²³ Billionaire arms deal fixer Wafic Saïd weighs up Barclays lawsuit, Jill Treanor, *The Guardian*, March 19 2016; <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/mar/18/billionaire-arms-deal-fixer-wafic-said-weighs-up-barclays-lawsuit>
<https://companycheck.co.uk/director/906321811/MR-KHALED-RIDA-SAID/companies;>

²²⁴ ‘Kate and the Middletons all smiles at wedding of family friend’, Roya Nikkhah and Royanikkhah, *The Telegraph*, September 30 2012

relationship with CforC and Leo's eventual tenure at CMEC may have arisen as a result of their mutual friend, Sebastian Roberts, a Sandhurst mentor to William and a director at Powell's company.

Although specialising in development and negotiation in Central Asia, CforC did send a small delegation to Libya in May 2010 ahead of the 2011 revolution.²²⁵ According to a press release at the time, the trip had been arranged in association with the *Libyan British Business Council*. JP Morgan's Gerald Pane and Toufic Sarah also went along for the ride. The company's interest in this pre-revolution period was to help build investment strategies and 'sustainable and profitable business' in what the press-sheet would wryly describe as 'challenging markets'. CforC's Jonathan Powell, Tony Blair's most senior adviser during all his time in office as British Prime Minister, eventually landed a more central role in Libyan affairs some three years later, when Prime Minister David Cameron appointed Powell as Britain's special envoy. His job — to build bridges between the rival warring factions that were tearing the country apart. Powell would subsequently serve as a member of the panel for the report on British intervention in Libya for Sir Crispin Blunt and the Foreign Affairs Committee in September 2016.²²⁶

Whilst there is nothing tremendously sinister about any of this, it's clear that Britain's commercial objectives are 'humanitarianized' in a fairly routine fashion for the sake of what is often sceptical public consumption. The tragic cycles of conflict may be viewed with pity and horror by the vast majority of the decent British public, but to the likes of *Gardaworld*, *CforC* and *Blair*

²²⁵ <http://lbbc.org.uk/preston/Finance%20Tripoli%20May%202010%20-%20Booklet.pdf>

²²⁶ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmfaaff/119/119.pdf>, p.9

Associates they are just lucrative stock options, often superseding the need for justice.

Five days after the Arena attack, foreign experts working in Libya found bomb materials matching those used in the Manchester bombing at a facility at Al-Hadba prison, in Tripoli.²²⁷ Hadba prison at this time was controlled by Khaled Al-Sharif, a former leader of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* now acting as Interior Minister. Within weeks of the Arena Bombing, Libya's most famous prisoner and the Britain's long-time trade negotiator) Saif Gaddafi was released to pro-Haftar forces and Al-Sharif's house and facilities destroyed.²²⁸ Gaddafi's former security chief, Abdullah Senussi (a key witness in the ongoing Mi6 illegal rendition case²²⁹) and Gaddafi's son, Al-Saadi Moamar Gaddafi were released from Hadba that same day.

Did the British Government at this time trade justice for the victims of the Manchester Arena Bombing to satisfy long-term plans for Libya's future and greatly expedite the release of Gaddafi's frozen billions? The answer to these and other questions is likely to be found among the various negotiations taking place between the *Conservative Middle East Council* (who produced the pro-Haftar report in March 2017) and several of their main donors who have strong historical links to Saif Gaddafi. These include Marwan Salloum,

²²⁷ 'Foreign experts check Hadba prison bomb factory', Libya Herald, June 4, 2017; <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/06/04/foreign-experts-check-hadba-prison-bomb-factory-report/>

²²⁸ 'Libyan Interior Ministry: Gaddafi-regime Hadba prisoners in safe location', May 27, 2017; <https://www.libyanexpress.com/libyan-interior-ministry-gaddafi-regime-hadba-prisoners-in-safe-location/>

²²⁹ 'Rendition, torture, MI6 and the dreadful secrets of Libya's gulag', David Prat, The Herald, June 12 2016; <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/14551819.rendition-torture-mi6-dreadful-secrets-libyas-gulag/>

Mohammed bin Rashid and Baroness Elizabeth Symons, leading executive figures at *Consolidated Contractors Company (CCC)*, *Falcon and Associates* and *DLA Piper* respectively, each of the companies having donated in the region of £30,000 to £65,000 during the years 2011-2017.²³⁰

As the bombing campaign got underway in Libya in May 2011, *The Daily Telegraph* ran a typically salacious story featuring Marwan Salloum — Vice-President of the *Consolidated Contractors Company* — Saif Gaddafi and a group of bikini-clad young women under the headline: “Saif-Gaddafi, the Tory Donor and Girls in Bikinis — How the Libyan Dictator’s Son does Business”.²³¹ The newspaper went on to explain how the same company had paid Stephen Byers — described in the story as the “disgraced former Cabinet Minister” and “a close friend of Tony Blair” — as adviser, insinuating perhaps that his ‘Cash for Access’ reputation had been a key factor in the business arrangement. Byers had been brought in by CCC to boost development in Libya and Kazakhstan at approximately the same time that Leo Docherty’s wife Lucy Kelaart had arrived in Kazakhstan to launch *Steppe Magazine*.

Salloum and CCC were brought back into the narrative in 2018 when Peter Osborne and Alastair Sloan, writing for the *Middle Eastern Eye*, raised a series of questions about the direction that the *Conservative Middle Eastern*

²³⁰ <http://search.electoralcommission.org.uk/>

²³¹ ‘Playboy Saif Gaddafi, the Tory donor and girls in bikinis – how the Libyan dictator’s son does business’, Jason Lewis, *The Daily Telegraph*, May 15 2011

Council was taking after several years of funding from the *Consolidated Contractors Company*.²³²

According to one press story published in February 2017, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid of the UAE's *Falcon and Associates* had harboured a vision for Libya that was not unlike that of Boris Johnson, when he discussed plans with General Gaddafi to build a city in Libya that was fit for the 21st Century. In the pair's utopian vision, Libya would raise its global and cultural status beyond even that of the UAE.²³³ In October 2009, an unnamed Palestinian businessman, recounting the complex chain of relations between Rashid, Tony Blair, Saif Gaddafi and the *Consolidated Construction Company* told David Rose of the *Daily Mail* that Libya was essentially a "two-man show — Colonel Gaddafi and his son, Saif al-Islam". The story also recalled several other episodes in which Blair, Byers and Rashid had collaborated on several energy projects and a separate a plot, again featuring Saif Gaddafi, but this time with the help of Sir Mark Allen from Mi6 to heap pressure on Libya to give up its nuclear weapons programme.²³⁴

The Former Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Tony Blair's former Envoy for the Middle East, Baroness Elizabeth Symons²³⁵ was adviser

²³² 'Why is the Conservative Party ignoring Palestine?', Peter Osborne and Alastair Sloan, Middle Eastern Eye, May 16 2018; <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/why-conservative-party-ignoring-palestine>

²³³ 'Gaddafi wanted help to build the 'Dubai of Libya' - Sheikh Mohammed, Shane McGinley, Thomson Reuters, Zawya, February 3, 2017

²³⁴ 'Gas from Gaza, mobile phones in Palestine and a \$1m peace prize ...Tony Blair and the Middle Eastern Eldorado', David Rose, Daily Mail, October 31 2009

²³⁵ 'Labour peer who was Blair's Middle East envoy forced to quit Libya role', Michael Seamark, Daily Mail, March 11 2011

for *DLA Piper* and the *Consolidated Construction Company* from the mid-2000s until April 2021²³⁶, the Baroness also sat on Gaddafi Snr's 'National Economic Development Board of Libya' until his overthrow in March 2011. Some several weeks after Baroness Symons had resigned her interest as adviser to *DLA Piper* in April 2021, Saif Gaddafi hinted to the *New York Times* that he was considering entering the Libyan Presidential elections.²³⁷ It was the first interview he had granted to a foreign journalist since being released from al-Hadba prison in Tripoli just weeks after the Arena Bombing. According to the *New York Times*, Saif had been anxious to preserve an air of mystery in the decade since his release, reluctant to pose for photographs in the belief that he had been reborn as the spirit of Libya, "strong but not clear." He explained it by saying that he had been away from Libyan people for some ten years or more. "You need to come back slowly, slowly. Like a striptease" he added. Just two weeks later, prosecutors in Tripoli issued an arrest warrant for Saif over his suspected dealings with the *Wagner Group* — the Kremlin-backed private security company who were reported to have supplied thousands of mercenaries in support of Haftar's power grab for the oil reserves of the *National Central Bank* during the spring and summer of 2020.²³⁸ In the months that followed, his election hopes remained in jeopardy, but a decision made by a court in Sebha overturned the electoral commission's decision to nullify Saif al-Islam's candidacy. On 21 December, the head of Libya's High National Election Commission ordered the dissolution of electoral committees nationwide. The

²³⁶ <https://members.parliament.uk/member/2233/registeredinterests>

²³⁷ 'Qaddafi's Son Is Alive. And He Wants to Take Libya Back', Robert F. Worth, *New York Times*, July 30, 2021

²³⁸ 'Libya Oil Company: Russian Mercenaries Enter Major Oil Field', *VOA News*, June 26, 2020

Presidential Elections that had been due to take place that month have been shelved indefinitely.

Gaddafi's bid to be President was followed by that of Haftar, who in preparation for his campaign had temporarily resigned his command of the *Libyan National Army* in September 2021. Haftar, who holds a US Passport after living for several years in the Falls Church district of Washington DC in the post-Gaddafi period, is still facing charges for war crimes levelled against him in America.²³⁹ Like Saif Gaddafi, Haftar was initially banned from running.

In January 2022, it was being reported that responding to judgments made in favour of releasing Gaddafi Snr's frozen assets, a Belgian court had issued a decision to arrest the head of the *Libyan Investment Authority*.²⁴⁰ On January 6th, the *Libyan Investment Authority* (LIA) had responded with disappointment when it was announced that the *UN Security Council Sanctions Committee* had reiterated its pledge to preserve "the integrity and value" of Libyan frozen assets that were wholly intended "for the benefit of the Libyan people."²⁴¹ To date approximately 85% of Gaddafi's assets remain frozen to protect them against — or so it is alleged — misappropriation and corruption. There is of course a reasonable case to forward that whilst the billions remain

²³⁹ 'Libya's Haftar announces he will run for presidential elections', Al Jazeera, November 16 2021; 'Khalifa Hifter, the ex-general leading a revolt in Libya, spent years in exile in Northern Virginia', Abigail Hauslohner and Abigail Hauslohner, Washington Post, May 20 2014; 'Libyan warlord faces legal action in US for alleged war crimes', Patrick Wintour, Manchester Guardian, September 4 2020

²⁴⁰ 'Libyan Ministry of Justice: Belgium is putting pressure on Libya to seize part of its frozen assets', The Libya Observer, January 11, 2022

²⁴¹ 'UNSC Sanctions Committee confirms "preserving the integrity and value of Libyan frozen assets meant for the benefit of the Libyan people"', Sami Zaptia, Libya Herald, January 6, 2022

frozen, the West (and also its rivals in the East) will continue to maintain some leverage over the direction that Libya is taking. The UN — perhaps reasonably, perhaps not — continues to insist that the funds will not be released until a credible and enduring unity government can be formed and can guarantee control of Libya. The decision made by the Sanctions Committee in December 2021 was made irrespective of the fact that a *Government of National Unity* had been formed including members of the Rebel Government and Haftar’s regime in Tobruk under Mohamed al-Menfi in March.

From this perspective it may be possible to view the outrageous ambitions of Saif Gaddafi to become the country’s President as little more than a moral and practical deterrent to Libya holding these elections or, conversely, to take a solid wedge of the votes away from Haftar who has lost some of his original charm for the West. The chaotic postponement of the elections planned for December 2nd 2021 have led to leaders of opposition parties like Guma El-Gamaty to accuse Haftar and the House of Representatives of deliberately trying to stall the elections and prevent the Libyan people from electing a fair and democratic parliament. Not only that, it was being carried out with the connivance of “international intelligence”. The undemocratic replacement of Libya’s internationally recognised Prime Minister, Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, on February 8th 2022 was cited as proof that forces were conspiring to deny the will of the people. A similar claim had been made about the influence of foreign agents (‘hidden hands’) in the protests in Tripoli in 2020.²⁴²

²⁴² @Guma_el_gamaty, Twitter February 8, 2022-February-February 12, 2022; <https://almarsad.co/en/2020/08/27/guma-el-gamaty-tripolis-protests-are-being-manipulated-by-international-intelligence/>

II.IX

Lessons Learned – The World Outside the Arena in 2022

FEBRUARY 2022



In March 2020, Hashem Abedi, the brother of the Manchester Arena Bomber, was found guilty on all 22 counts of murder relating to the attack. Over twelve months later in October 2021 it was being reported that the pairs' elder brother, Ismail Abedi, had been ordered to attend a formal Public Inquiry as witness. His request for immunity from prosecution, arising from any information that may be shared during the course of the hearings, was rejected by the Inquiry's Chairman, Sir John Saunders. The BBC learned subsequently that Ismail had left Britain for the Middle East and that there was currently no indication as to when he would return.²⁴³

A year on from Vladimir Putin and Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan making an unexpected joint appeal for a ceasefire at the *First Berlin Conference on Libya* in January 2020, something of a credible dialogue was finally established between the UN-backed GNA in Tripoli (backed by Turkey) and Haftar and the House of Representatives in Tobruk (backed by Russia). The *Second Berlin Conference* some fifteen months later in June 2021 saw genuine

²⁴³ 'Manchester Arena Inquiry: Bomber's brother leaves UK before hearing', Daniel De Simone, BBC News, October 19 2021; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-58966113>

progress being made with firm plans put in place to hold the country's first National Presidential and Parliamentary elections on December 24th 2021.²⁴⁴

The approach by the organizers in Berlin was a significant improvement on the fairly improvised and naive methodology adopted by Britain in 2011, and which had been based on little more than 'wishful thinking'. This time around, things were different. This time around, commitment was being shown by both Prime Minister Serraj *and* General Haftar to the sixty or so declarations that had been made in the first agreement. As a result of the resolutions and recommendations made at the First Berlin Conference, a brand new *Government of National Unity* had been formed in March 2021, unifying the two rival factions. Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh was appointed the Prime Minister with Mohamed al-Menfi selected as head of the Presidential Council.²⁴⁵ A short time later Najla al-Manqoush was appointed Libya's first woman Foreign Minister.

In a biography published on the website of the *Centre for World Religions, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution* (CRDC), Mangoush alleges that she was born in Cardiff, Wales before the family returned to Benghazi.²⁴⁶ After graduating with a degree in Criminal Law from Benghazi University, Mangoush found herself acting as spokesperson for the Rebel Alliance in the months

²⁴⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/210623-lby-abschlusserk-download-en-data.pdf>

²⁴⁵ At time of writing on February 10th 2022 it is being reported that Dbeibeh has been replaced as PM by the Muslim Brotherhood's Fathi Bashagha amid predictions of further conflicts. Al Jazeera claims Haftar and the House of Representatives have welcomed the new appointment.

²⁴⁶ 'Speaking Their Peace: Personal Stories from the Frontlines of War and Peace', Colette Rausch, Roaring Forties Press, 2015. Despite a trawl from the Births, Deaths and Marriage Records I have failed to identify an individual under this or similar names (Mangush, Mankush, Elmangoush etc).

leading up to the Revolution in February 2011, campaigning, amongst other things, for the release of Benghazi militants. After the Revolution, Mangoush — a cousin of the former Chief of Staff of the *Libyan Ground Force*, Yousef Mangoush — relocated to the US, completing an MA in Conflict and Peace Management at Eastern Mennonite University before embarking on her Ph.D. in Conflict and Peace Management at George Mason University. She later received a Fulbright Scholarship to study Conflict Transformation at the *Centre for Justice and Peacebuilding* in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

In October 2021, Mangoush held a bilateral meeting with British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss in London. A short-time later Mangoush was briefly suspended after being accused of discussing policies outside the scope of the issues agreed by the GNU. In an interview with the BBC she told viewers that “positive outcomes were coming” as a result of talks between the US and Libya regarding the case of Lockerbie suspect, Abu Agila Mohammad Masud.²⁴⁷ That Truss received a donation in excess of £8,000 for a four-day visit to Washington from the influential US neo-con think tank, the *American Enterprise Institute* in March 2019²⁴⁸ might be an indication of the direction that British foreign policy is likely to take, as the organisation’s *Critical Threats Project* begins to focus its efforts on a renewed ISIS threat in Libya and North Western Africa.²⁴⁹ Among the other eight members of parliament who have

²⁴⁷ ‘Lockerbie bombing: Libya could work with US on extradition’, November 3 2021, BBC News; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-59153059>

²⁴⁸ Truss was serving as Chief Secretary to the Treasury in the Theresa May Government at this time. The AEI was closely aligned with the Trump Administration. Boris Johnson famously received a donation of £16,800 to cover a three-day trip to Washington in September 2018. See: <http://search.electoralcommission.org.uk/>

²⁴⁹ ‘Africa File: Libya foothold creates options for the Islamic State in north-western Africa’, December 09, 2021, Critical Threats Project, AEI;

been in receipt of donations from *American Enterprise Institute* are Boris Johnson (£16,846.09, September 2018), Michael Gove (£16,544, March 2017-March 2019), Savid Javid (£3707, March 2014) and our old friend, George Osborne who received a donation of £6,454.00 in March 2017, just weeks after being appointed as part-time advisor to US investment managers, *BlackRock*. The donation also came just three weeks prior to Osborne resigning his position in Parliament and taking control of the *Evening Standard*. He relinquished his role at both in April 2021. However, these figures pale in comparison to the millions of pounds donated to the Conservative Party by Russian Oligarchs, many of whom are to greater or lesser degrees are linked closely with the Kremlin.



Boris Johnson with Russian energy tycoon, Alexander Terko ('Conservative Party ministers bankrolled by donors linked to Russia', July 23 2020, The Times)

<https://www.criticalthreats.org/briefs/africa-file/africa-file-libya-foothold-creates-options-for-the-islamic-state-in-northwestern-africa>

According to a report by *The Guardian* newspaper in November 2021, Conservative Party donors “who have made money from Russia” or were born in Russia have given close to two million pounds to either the Conservative Party or Conservative Party members since Boris Johnson became Prime Minister in July 2019.²⁵⁰ The individuals cited in the report include Lubov Chernukhin, Mohamed Amersi and Alexander Temerko and Victor Fedotov of *Aquind Ltd*. In January 2022, Mohamed Amersi described his vision for a new Conservative network in the Middle East in an article that was published in the *Middle East Eye*. In June and July 2017, the *Amersi Foundation* had ramped-up its campaign to call the world’s attention to the worsening humanitarian crisis (and increase in Islamic extremism) in Libya and North Africa. The work had been dutifully carried under the auspices of the *Islamic Reporting Initiative* (IRI) on whose board Amersi sat.²⁵¹ In an article published by *Middle East Eye* in January 2022, Amersi explained how Britain had been presented with an opportunity to “reshape its relationship with the Middle East” and that it was time for the Conservative Party “to seize the moment”.²⁵² Only last month Charlotte Leslie, the new director of the *Conservative Middle East Council* had complained in parliament about the pressure that had been placed upon the group to appoint Amersi as CMEC’s ‘chair’. In response to the undue pressure, the Committee’s honorary president, Sir Nicholas Soames delivered a due

²⁵⁰ ‘Labour challenges Tories over checks on Russia-linked donations’, Dan Sabbagh, *The Guardian*, November 1, 2021 ; <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/nov/17/labour-challenges-tories-over-checks-on-russia-linked-donations>

²⁵¹ ‘IRI – Islamic Reporting Initiative, Malta Summit: Ending Modern-Day Slavery’, July 7, 2017; <https://islamicreporting.org/malta-summit-ending-modern-day-slavery/>

²⁵² ‘My vision for a new Conservative network in the Middle East’, Mohamed Amersi, *Middle East Eye*, January 19 2022, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/my-vision-new-conservative-network-middle-east>

diligence report describing Leslie's findings, together with the allegations of intimidation, to Conservative headquarters. The memo, it is believed, outlined details about his past, some of his more unsavoury associates as well as his Iranians connections and Russian interests.²⁵³ It also explained how Amersi now seemed intent on setting up a rival group. Amersi responded to the dossier by launching data protections proceedings against Leslie. A short time later Leslie was compelled to call the Police after receiving what the press described as "sinister phone calls". Curiously enough, among the Conservative Party members who had received donations from Amersi's Russian associates was pro-Haftar MP for Morecambe and Lunesdale, David Morris — the man whose well choreographed routine with Kwasi Kharteng and Charlotte Leslie in Parliament in October 2016 had got the ball rolling on the pro-Haftar campaign in Britain.²⁵⁴ Amersi's criticisms of CMEC were not unreasonable. In his article for the *Middle East Eye*, the millionaire-philanthropist explained how CMEC, which had "strayed from its founding principles", had abandoned the original reasons for its formation and "morphed from a pan-region friendship group into a group that arranges junkets, with opaque funding". It was a view shared by Peter Osborne and Alistair Sloan when writing for the same publication in May 2018: the group which had been launched to foster links between UK

²⁵³ Hansard, House of Commons, Lawfare and UK Court System, Volume 707: debated on Thursday 20, January 2022; 'Tory fundraising machine to come under scrutiny in UK court case', Tom Burgis, Financial Times, February 11 2022; <https://www.ft.com/content/fcf90497-e283-4645-b18f-d95d35ff3fcd>

²⁵⁴ Morris received donations from Aquind and Alexander Temerko, Deputy Chairman of the offshore oil and gas company, *Offshore Group Newcastle*. Interestingly the father of Johnson's former adviser Dominic Cummings (who had spent four years in Russia) had worked in offshore projects for *Laing Offshore Yard*, also in Newcastle. It was bought out by AMEC Offshore Developments in the 1990s which was then absorbed into *Offshore Group Newcastle*.

Conservatives and the Middle East had come under the influence of Gulf countries and had “badly lost its way”.²⁵⁵ In March 2019 CMEC disaffiliated with the Conservative Party and became a limited company. Among its directors are former banker, Mark Garnier and Hugo Swire, the former Minister of State within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office who has served as the group’s chairman since 2016.²⁵⁶ According to Amersi, Garnier and Swire have also expressed interest in becoming members of a new group, *Conservative Friends of the Middle East and Africa (Comena)*, launched in opposition to CMEC and currently seeking formal affiliation with the Conservative Party. The idea, or so he has claimed, came directly from Boris Johnson. According to several sources Amersi and his Russian partner, Nadezhda Rodicheva have contributed somewhere in the region of one million pounds to the Conservative Party under May and Boris Johnson since 2017.²⁵⁷ The first of the donations came on June 1st 2017, ahead of the snap election called by the Theresa May government in April and which took place the following week.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ ‘Why is the Conservative Party ignoring Palestine?’, Middle East Eye, Peter Osborne and Alastair Sloan, May 16, 2018

²⁵⁶ <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/11902485/officers>

²⁵⁷ Several newspapers over the years have claimed that Amersi is a close associate of Vladimir Putin. In 2006 he was accused of trying to “extort” a \$2bn payment from a businessman on behalf of a Russian oligarch. His partner in several philanthropic commercial ventures is Ian Maxwell (brother of Ghislane Maxwell) and Malcolm Grumbridge (at whose house Prince Andrew allegedly had sex with a girl procured by Jeffrey Epstein). The companies include *Rambure Ltd*, *Avenue Partners Estates* and *Cojit* (Combating Jihadist Terrorism and Extremism).

²⁵⁸ Electoral Commission, <http://search.electoralcommission.org.uk/English/Donations/C0330862>, Nadezda Rodicheva, Cash, £215,000.00, 01/06/2017. Rodicheva founded *Dentray* (Дентрай) with Igor Vladimirovich Galinsky, Anna Igorevna Larina (Consult-TV) and Natalia Vasilievna Adamovich in 2004.

In January 2021, Libya's *National Oil Corporation* announced that it would be opening a London Office in a bid to increase the North African state's production to 2.1 million barrels a day. Speaking to *The Times* of London, the NOC's Chairman Mustafa Sanalla explained that the office would oversee consultancy tenders, portfolio management, and capacity building services. "There will be an agreement with well-known British companies, the large well-known companies in all specialisations, whether engineering or reservoir studies, specifically. And chain supply will be from London, over the medium term," Sanalla is reported as saying.²⁵⁹ The decision to open the hub appears to have been made after a series of successful meetings in London in November.²⁶⁰ Among those attending these discussions was Mohamed al-Amari — NOC Board Member and Head of Production — and the man who the *Manchester Evening News* had alleged had lived "in a neighbouring house to the Abedi family on Elsmore Road in Fallowfield".²⁶¹ The company set-up to represent the hub's interests in London was *Murzuq Oil Services Ltd.* A statement prepared by NOC explained how the hub would be the "final gateway for Libyan investment decisions". The company was incorporated at Companies House in May 2020, less than eight weeks after Hashem Abedi had been sentenced to a minimum of 55 years in prison at the Old Bailey.²⁶²

²⁵⁹ 'London hub to play central role in Libya's oil expansion', Samer al-Atrush, *The Times*, January 27 2021

²⁶⁰ 'A meeting in Britain of the Libyan National Oil Corporation regarding marine installations', September 11 2020, Arabisk (London); <https://www.arabisklondon.com/?p=4303>

²⁶¹ 'Making of a Monster', Chris Osuh, *Manchester Evening News*, September 17, 2017

²⁶² <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/12597062>

In September 2021 *Murzuq*'s London office was formally opened. Within days it was being announced that Ayman Asfari's company *Petrofac* had signed an engineering, procurement, construction and commissioning contract worth more than \$100 million with *Zallaf Libya Oil & Gas Exploration*, owned and operated by the NOC.²⁶³ Whilst Asfari may have retired from the firm's executive in 2020, it was being reported in November 2021 that the millionaire Tory donor had increased his holdings in the company considerably as part of a £200 million share offer to pay off debt and bribery fines that had arisen during the course of the 2017 Serious Fraud Squad investigation.²⁶⁴ Among those men who sit on the Board of Directors at *Zallaf* is the NOC's Head of Production — and Abedi's former "neighbour" — Mohamed al-Amari.²⁶⁵

For a moment, let's roll the calendar back to May 4th 2017, just two weeks prior to the Arena bombing, when *OilPrice.com* are running a story in that puts Ayman Asfari's *Petrofac* as frontrunners in a race to reap the rewards of a UAE-backed attempt to stabilize Libya.²⁶⁶ For many, preserving the legitimacy and integrity of the UN-backed GNA would have paramount. Despite the setbacks, there was great hope of getting the two warring factions back around the table. In April, Italy was taking credit for a diplomatic

²⁶³ 'British energy services company Petrofac secures US\$ 100 m EPCC contract with Zallaf Libya', Sami Zaptia, Libya Herald, September 6 2021; <https://www.libyaherald.com/2021/09/06/british-energy-services-company-petrofac-secures-us-100-m-epcc-contract-with-zallaf-libya/>

²⁶⁴ 'Former CEO Asfari increases Petrofac stake by £27million in new share issue'; <https://www.energyvoice.com/oilandgas/363978/former-ceo-asfari-increases-petrofac-stake-in-new-share-issue/>

²⁶⁵ The General Assembly of "zallaf" Expects to Put "erawin" Field on Production Next November, *zallaf.com*, January 18, 2022

²⁶⁶ 'Stability In Libya To Start An Oil Race', Cyril Widdershoven, *oilprice.com*, May 04, 2017

breakthrough in Rome when something of a compromise had been brokered between the House of Representatives and the Presidential Council.²⁶⁷ The slightest acknowledgment of the bomber's links to the GNA was only ever likely to intensify the problems and derail the peace process — oil and gas deals included.

As the Conservative Party's biggest donor, is it possible that the British Conservative Government were anxious to shift the focus of the Arena investigation away from the various militias supporting the Government of National Accord and onto issues of 'self-radicalisation' in a desperate bid to maintain some fragile stability in Libya — and in doing so preserve the deals that might already be in the pipeline for Britain?

At a fringe meeting held at the *Conservative Party Conference* some five months after the Arena attack in October 2017, the British Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson reiterated his support for the Haftar regime in the most boorish and insulting of ways, significantly out-crassing the article he had produced in *The Spectator* magazine that May. Reviving the Libyan fantasies of Saif Gaddafi's friend, Mohammed bin Rashid, Johnson made overly lavish statements expressing his hopes that the Libyan city, Sirte could be transformed into "the new Dubai", before adding rather oafishly that all they had to do first "was clear the dead bodies away".²⁶⁸ The Foreign Secretary's statement received a stiff rebuke from Guma El-Gamaty, leader of the Taghyeer Party and

²⁶⁷ 'Libya's warring sides reach diplomatic breakthrough in Rome', The Guardian, Patrick Wintour, April 24, 2017; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/24/libya-warring-sides-diplomatic-breakthrough-rome>

²⁶⁸ 'Boris Johnson Libya 'dead bodies' comment provokes anger', BBC News, October 4, 2017; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-41490174>

a member of the Libya Political Dialogue group said that the comments had dishonoured the sacrifice of the 750 young Libyan men who had died trying to push ISIS militants from Sirte.²⁶⁹

The statement in its entirety is a little more intriguing: “*There's a group of UK business people, actually, some wonderful guys who want to invest in Sirte on the coast ... They have got a brilliant vision to turn Sirte into the next Dubai*” Regrettably, who these “UK Businessmen” were was never disclosed by Johnson. The whole thing was tossed out for the sake of headlines in his usual flippant and casual way, with little in the way of evidence provided. As this was a principally a construction and renovation project, it might be reasonable to speculate that one of these ‘UK Businessmen’ was *Fosroc* owner, David Hay, whose wife Fitriani Hay had made a £50,000 donation to Johnson in May 2016. And it’s not as random a guess as one might think, as among *Fosroc*’s regional sales managers in Dubai during the early to mid-2000s was Hassan Bouhadi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the *Libyan Investment Authority* (LIA).

After playing a prominent role in the overthrow of Gaddafi in 2011 and the activities of the *National Transitional Council* that followed, Bouhadi had been appointed Director to the LIA by the House of Representatives serving Haftar in Tobruk.²⁷⁰ Following the creation of a memorandum of understanding between Libya and the Maltese government, a second office was set-up for

²⁶⁹ ‘Boris Johnson ‘dead bodies’ row deepens as Libya demands explanation’, Middle East Eye, Jamie Merrill, October 6, 2017; <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/boris-johnson-dead-bodies-row-deepens-libya-demands-explanation>

²⁷⁰ ‘Following the Money in Libya’, Elisabeth Braw, The National Interest, October 10, 2015; <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/following-the-money-libya-14041>

Bouhadi in Valetta. It was this tiny capital city in Malta that would play host to an emergency summit meeting on Libya called by Boris Johnson in November 2016, as Johnson made the first of several attempts to boost Haftar's appeal among more 'rightist' Conservative ministers.

As explained elsewhere in this report, it is believed that the meeting in Malta in November had been boosted by several UAE banking representatives and *National Oil Corporation* chief, Mustafa Sanalla.²⁷¹ The donation of £50,000 from Fitriani Hay had come on the very day that Johnson stepped down from his role as London mayor and prepared for a leadership battle with British Home Secretary, Theresa May after the resignation of Prime Minister David Cameron in July 2016. On July 11th 2016, it was announced that May would be the next Prime Minister and Boris Johnson would serve as Foreign Secretary. The man whose first foray into politics had come in 2001 at the age of 37, and who had occupied no previous role in any Conservative Cabinet was now well on his way to becoming Britain's Prime Minister. A note that accompanied the donation from Mrs Hay describes how the very generous cash donation, dispensed over a period of two months between May 2016 and July 2016 had been made to "assist in winding up" Johnson's mayoral role. A further donation of £125,000 was made by the same Mrs Hay to the Conservative Party the day after the Arena Bombing on May 23rd 2017 — bringing the total contributions

²⁷¹ 'Foreign Secretary in Malta for high-level talks', Press Release; 'Resuscitating Libya in Malta?', Mohamed Mufti, Independent (Malta), Malta, November 6 2016; <https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2016-11-06/newspaper-opinions/Resuscitating-Libya-in-Malta-6736166178>;

Foreign & Commonwealth Office, November 11 2016; <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-in-malta-for-high-level-talks>

that the couple had made to the party during the 2015-2017 period to some £684,000 or more.

Hay's former regional sales manager, Hassan Bouhadi resigned his formal role at Libya's LIA in August 2016 after a leadership challenge from the GNA-backed 'chairman' of the LIA Abdul Magid Breish in Tripoli. There were rumours at this time that pressure was being placed on Bouhadi to steer the direction of investments into projects he was not entirely comfortable with. The wrangle over leadership of the LIA, and attempts to resolve whether Bouhadi or Breish was to be recognised as 'official chairman' of the LIA by Britain, was still being heard in the courts of appeal in London in May 2020. The appeal continues to be rejected on the basis that the British Government had never formally recognised either the 'Tobruk government' or the 'Tripoli government' as the Government of Libya, creating a diplomatic nightmare that the UK Government was obviously keen to avoid.²⁷² One solution to Libya's cash and assets problem tabled by Boris Johnson at the summit in Malta had been the creation of a 'Higher Investment Council'. Writing in *Middle Eastern Eye*, veteran reporter Peter Osborne explained how Libya's 'Higher Investment Council' would rank above all the institutions of Libya including the *National Oil Company*, the *Libyan Investment Authority* and the *Central Bank*.²⁷³ Similar bodies have been set-up in Syria and Egypt and present an entirely more favourable route for foreign investors otherwise discouraged by the often

²⁷² Case No: A4/2019/1820 and A4/2019/1833, Royal Courts of Justice, 15/05/2020; <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Approved-judgment-2020-EWCA-Civ-637-Mahmoud-v-Breish-and-Hussein-15-May-2020.pdf>

²⁷³ 'Libya's UN-backed government is an utter farce', Peter Osborne, *Middle Eastern Eye*, November 16 2016; <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/libyas-un-backed-government-utter-farce>

intensely complex political challenges and impenetrable red-tape of troubled regions.²⁷⁴ Whilst it's unclear if Hassan Bouhadi, the recently deposed director of the LIA was being considered as its possible head, it would certainly have made a lot of sense, his familiarity with the wider mechanisms of business at an international level, and the idiosyncrasies of the West, being quite obviously a proven thing.

Jack Johnston of *PoliticsHome* unearthed another possibility when it emerged that Sir Edward Lister, a close adviser to Boris Johnson at both the Mayoral Office and the Foreign Office, had launched a company that “intended to undertake rehabilitation works in Libya.”²⁷⁵ The company, *Eribi Holdings Ltd* had been incorporated at Companies House on April 6th 2017 by New Zealander, Douglas Mckinnon-Snell, the managing director of oil and gas brokers, *DLJ Partners Ltd* and founder of *M'carta Management Services Ltd* who retain controlling shares in *Eribi Holdings*. A statement on the company website reads, “*M'Carta provides back-to-life solutions for war damaged and under-performing urban areas through structured development plans and engagement. Our team has decades of experience in MENA nations and globally*”²⁷⁶ Another shareholder, the UAE-based, Ibrahim Zahaf, an expert in the Islamic and Shariah finance industry has been a respected player in Libya's economic revival since its revolution in 2011. Acknowledging that the post-Revolutionary Libya had “great economic potential” his company in Dubai,

²⁷⁴ ‘Egypt determined to make foreign investments easier – Minister’, Michael Georgy, The Africa Report, 12 January, 2015’

²⁷⁵ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmregmem/210118/210118.pdf>

²⁷⁶ <http://mcartamanagement.com/>

Amanie Advisers ²⁷⁷ signed a memorandum of understanding with the Libyan Stock Market in July 2013 to provide support to the country's efforts to expand the role of Islamic finance. ²⁷⁸ In May 2011, the Auckland broker was brought in as director to the private security company, *OBS24 Security Services Ltd*, a rapid response bureau made-up of former Special Forces, whose parent company, *OBS Security*, had provided years of protection to embassies and facilities across the Middle East and for various venues and high-profile names in Britain. ²⁷⁹ McKinnon-Snell's co-director, Kevin O'Brien writes on their website: "*We have been retained to recruit and train numerous local security forces in support of exploration operations in many countries, including: Afghanistan, Iraq, Qatar, UAE, Sierra Leone, Sudan, The Republic of Congo, Columbia, Guyana and Brazil.*" Interestingly, the company had been incorporated in April 2011 just weeks after the United Nations had implemented the *No Fly Zone* in Libya. ²⁸⁰

According to his *LinkedIn* profile, McKinnon-Snell's experience over the years has included "two large acquisitions on Russian Oil and Gas". ²⁸¹ His partner at *DLJ* is David Lawrence Jamison, the founding director at both *Vitol*

²⁷⁷ <https://web.archive.org/web/20170519171345/http://amanieadvisors.com/new/>

²⁷⁸ 'Stock Exchange Signs Deal with Amanie Advisors', *Libya Business Now*, July 11, 2013, <https://libya-businessnews.com/2013/07/11/stock-exchange-signs-deal-with-amanie-advisors/>

²⁷⁹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20061002042317/http://www.obssecurityconsultants.co.uk/clients.html>

²⁸⁰ OBS24 SECURITY LIMITED/Company number 07607031 (name changed from OBS24 Security Services Limited, May 10th 2011 (associated company: *Custodia Worldwide Limited*, 29 Harley Street) ; <https://web.archive.org/web/20110129012604/http://obs24.com/>

²⁸¹ Among the four 'Thought Leader' Influencers' listed on his *LinkedIn* page are Dubai's HH Sheikh Hamdan Bin Mohammed and Boris Johnson.

— one of the world’s largest oil trading companies — and *Sibir Energy*, a British oil company that was to be wholly consumed by Russia’s *Gazprom Neft* at the time of Libya’s February Revolution in 2011.²⁸² When *Sibir* was formed, the Russian Oil industry was in dire need of investment. Responding to this, British investors set-up *Sibir* as a vehicle for the exploration and exploitation of petroleum and natural gas in Siberia. James Watson, writing in the journal *Europe-Asia Studies* at the time of its formation in 1996 describes how Russia’s oil output had fallen over 45% since its peak some ten years earlier. Russian firms, starved of cash and adequate technology and skills, were proving a turn-off for investors.²⁸³ Partnership with Western oil companies was the only option. Taking advantage of this downturn in Russia’s fortunes was Scottish oil executive, Henry Ogilvy Cameron, a lawyer by trade who became acquainted with Russian and Finnish businessmen whilst practising in Aberdeen. Incorporated originally as a private company, *Sibir* completed its initial investment in Russia on September 5th 1996 and was listed on the *Alternative Investment Market* (AIM) on April 8 1997, at which point it changed its name from *Roebuy PLC* to *Sibir Energy Ltd*.

By March 1997 Cameron had taken over the Russian oil firm *Evikhon*, at this time headed by Russian State Duma members, Vadim Evgenievich Varshavskiy (President) and Vladimir Shumeyk (Chairman). *Evikhon*’s 24% stake in *Ugraneft* extended *Sibir*’s reach still further and by the time of the

²⁸² In July 2009 *Sibir* found itself at the centre of a probe by Russian Police. The company was dissolved in July 2017. See: ‘Moscow eyes bigger *Sibir* stake amid shareholder probe’, Reuters, July 17, 2009; <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUKLH70922520090717?edition-redirect=uk>

²⁸³ ‘Foreign investment in Russia: The case of the oil industry’, James Watson (1996) *Europe-Asia Studies*, 48:3, 429-455

Russian Financial Crisis of December 1998 it was clear that Russia's staggering oil industry was in need of further privatisation. Within months of Vladimir Putin being appointed Russia's Prime Minister under Boris Yeltsin, Chvala Chigirinsky, the majority owner of the joint stock companies *Evikhon* and *Yugraneft*, merged his formidable oil assets with Cameron and *Sibir*. The move came after an intense 14-months of negotiations and by April 1999 the company's discussions with the Yeltsin government's *Moscow Oil Company* (MNC) — founded on the advice of *Sibir Energy* in February 1999 — were beginning to bear fruit. Cameron acknowledged that the greatest risk by far to business in Russia very often arose from the conduct of Russian businessmen. Chigirinsky was presented to the board as a partner who combined the ability to make money with a sense of fair play" to shareholders.²⁸⁴ It is not without some irony to discover that the support offered to Putin's election by Britain and the skills and resources it was able to pour into Russia's stagnant oil industry made it the formidable energy giant it is today. As a result of cooperation from Britain, income from oil exports grew dramatically from the transition from Boris Yeltsin to Vladimir Putin, from \$14 billion in 1999 to \$140 billion in July 2005–June 2006.

When Yeltsin had indicated that he would be appointing Putin his handpicked successor in August 1999, very few people believed that the politically inexperienced bureaucrat had any real chance of being elected President. A meeting with Tony Blair was set-up in St Petersburg in March 2000. According to a report in *The Times*, Blair was offering to give Putin lessons in how to be a moderniser, making arrangements for a spring visit to

²⁸⁴ *Sibir*, Annual Report and Accounts 1999, Companies House

Moscow from one of the Treasury's top officials, Sir Nigel Wicks to advise on ways in which Russia could better fit into the world economy.²⁸⁵ Despite the recent efforts of former Spy Chief, Sir Richard Dearlove to present Blair's visit as a defining moment in Putin's election,²⁸⁶ his popularity had already been soaring as a result of his handling of the crisis in Chechnya, an anti-Islamist rout that earned him no small amount of support from American neo-Conservatives and British Tories alike.

On paper at least, Putin's political profile was a far closer match to many of the more orthodox members of Britain's Conservative Party. This became abundantly clear when Putin endorsed Russia's new *Unity Party*, a purpose-built effort that would push the same isolationist and anti-Nato sentiments as Britain's Brexiteers some sixteen years later. If any there had been any attempt by Blair to renew and strengthen British ties with Russia, it was only ever an extension of a programme that had been rolled-out more energetically under Margaret Thatcher and John Major's Conservative Governments.

Writing in *The Times* in July 2000, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, the Foreign Secretary in John Major's Conservative Government at the time that *Sibir* had been conceived, did little to hide his sympathy with Putin's Russia over NATO's continuing attempts to press the Ukraine and other nations in the Caucasus into joining. As Rifkind saw it, the West had a "strategic interest in the independence and territorial integrity of the Ukraine" but the disappearance

²⁸⁵ 'Opera and Politics', *The Times*, March 11 2000; 'Blair to give Putin lesson in reform', *The Times*, March 13 2000;

²⁸⁶ 'MI6 regrets helping Vladimir Putin to win power, says ex-spy chief', David Sanderson, *The Times*, October 01 2018, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/mi6-regrets-helping-vladimir-putin-to-get-elected-says-ex-spy-chief-tbttxxljf>

of the old Russian Empire was not yet something that Russia was “reconciled to”.²⁸⁷ Twelve years later, Rifkind would become President of the Conservative Friends of Russia (renamed the Westminster Russia Forum). The group’s co-founder Nick Cobb, memorably described by Tom Rogan of the *Washington Examiner* as a “Kremlin facilitator”, organising and supporting individuals who could advance Putin’s interests²⁸⁸, would hook-up on several projects in Britain with Anton Samoylenko, a Moscow-born specialist in financial and political communications.²⁸⁹ On closer inspection it transpires that Samoylenko’s father, Vladimir Ivanovic Samoylenko, currently serves as General Director of the *Siberian Alliance Group*, the holding company set-up in 1991 to assist in building international business relations in the aftermath of Perestroika. According to the group’s website it has partners in the energy, construction and investment industries.

A report by Andrew Gilligan of *The Times* in November 2017 described how Russia had invaded the heart of British power when it was revealed that Cobb and Rifkind’s society boasted a disproportionate number of pro-Brexit ministers among its members, most notably, Dominic Cumming’s *Vote Leave* colleague, Matthew Elliot.²⁹⁰ Responding on the group’s website a few days later, Cobb explained that the group’s committee and membership was made of

²⁸⁷ ‘Dangers in Former Russian Territories’, Malcolm Rifkind, *The Times*, July 2000

²⁸⁸ ‘How a Kremlin facilitator in London weaves a web of money and pro-Putin influence’, Tom Rogan, *Washington Examiner*, October 01, 2019; <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/how-a-kremlin-facilitator-in-london-weaves-a-web-of-money-and-pro-putin-influence>

²⁸⁹ Cobb Energy Communications, Company number 09395005; <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/09395005/officers>

²⁹⁰ Vote Leave Limited, Company number 09785255, Officers, <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/09785255/officers>

a wide range of political, remain, leave views, and that he himself had for many years been an active Labour supporter.

Gilligan, who was famously blamed by journalist and author, Nick Cohen for having ‘betrayed’ Dr David Kelly when he revealed him to be the source of the claims made about the ‘sexed-up’ dossier on Iraq,²⁹¹ had been producing a fairly regular stream of ‘revelations’ about Putin’s grip on British politics since October 2016. On the first occasion, his dramatic full-page article for *The Sunday Times* explained how Putin was pulling the strings at the heart of *The Bruges Club*, one of the oldest Eurosceptic bodies active in the Conservative Party.²⁹² The article was duly followed by ‘*Putin’s true-blue Tory friends*’, that same week, ‘*How Russia invaded the heart of British power*’ in November 2017, ‘*Tories break Theresa May’s vow to ban Russian donors*’ in March 2018, ‘*Number of Russian spies in UK has risen fivefold since Cold War*’ in October 2018 and ‘*Establishment flock to dine at Kremlin-linked Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society*’ in March 2019. Extraordinarily, despite any misgivings the journalist may have about Putin’s stranglehold on the British Conservative Party, Gilligan traded in his job at *The Sunday Times* for an advisory role in Boris Johnson’s government in July 2019. Since that time, Johnson’s reluctance to apply the full weight of sanctions on Russian Oligarchs residing in Britain has reheated discussion about the Conservative Party’s proximity to Putin and his allies in the passionate media response to the invasion of Ukraine. So far Gilligan, who used his considerable skills to help unseat Ken Livingstone for Boris Johnson back in 2008, has not expressed any opinion on

²⁹¹ ‘The media’s part in the death of David Kelly’, Nick Cohen, *The Observer*, 22 Aug 2010

²⁹² ‘Putin’s True Blue Friends’, *How Putin Pulls the Strings*, Andrew Gilligan, *The Sunday Times*, October 30, 2016, pp.1-17;

the Putin-cronyism accusations currently being levelled at Johnson and his Party.²⁹³

On December 17th 1999, just two weeks before Putin became acting-President of Russia, *Sibir Energy* completed its acquisition of *Evikhon* and *Ugraneft*. The company's end of year report in December 1999 described it as a ground-breaking development in Russian-western business relations and that it owed no small amount of debt to the "vision and willingness" shown by Chigirinsky (elected President of the Moscow Oil Company) in transferring his upstream interests. Jamison resigned his directorship of the company in June 1999 as a draft proposal was being agreed.

Subsequent directors at *Sibir* would include Elena Ilyukhina and Russian oligarch, Aleksandr Tsjigirinski.²⁹⁴ *Sibir's* co-founder, Alexander Betsky stayed with the company until the first signs of the *Sibir* controversy began to emerge in 2008. This was followed by the exit of *Sibir* supremo and the company's major stakeholder, Shalva Chigirinsky, currently ranked Russia's 58th richest oligarch. Although Jamison had parted with *Vitol* in 1986, the company would be at the centre of a Libyan oil cell scandal in September 2011, when it was revealed that the British Minister of State for International Development, Alan

²⁹³ 'Boris Johnson Appoints London's Former Cycling Czar as Transport Advisor', Carlton Reid, *Forbes*, July 26, 2019; 'My war with Ken Livingstone', Andrew Gilligan, *The Independent*, March 2008. It's curious to note that Gilligan's scare stories about Russian Oligarchs have been applied fairly routinely to undermine the premierships of David Cameron and Theresa May. Since Johnson came to power, his stories about Russian-interference have dried-up.

²⁹⁴ Sir Stephen O' Brien, the former Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator joined Jamison at *Savannah Energy PLC* in December 2017 whilst MP and Russian gold and gas magnate, Patrick Meade (Earl of Clanwilliam) joined him at *Angus Energy PLC*.

Duncan (a former oil trader himself) had been part of a Whitehall group putting a stranglehold on Gaddafi's oil flow at the time of the revolution. In a development that drew criticism from Tory backbenchers and party opposition, it was found that *Vitol*, who took part in these sessions in Whitehall, had won exclusive rights to trade with the Libyan rebels in a deal estimated to be worth in excess of £600 million.²⁹⁵

Eddie Lister may have only been appointed a director of *Eribi Holdings Limited* in October 2018, his position as non-executive director at the Foreign Office during this time would have made him vulnerable to accusations of a conflict of interests, something which was duly acknowledged in the report at *PoliticsHome*.²⁹⁶ However, it is interesting to note that the company was incorporated just one month prior to Boris Johnson's article in *The Spectator* in which the British Foreign Secretary shared his ecstatic vision of a post-Revolutionary Libya reborn in Dubai's image in his typically effusive fashion. The timing would certainly add weight to the theory put forward by *PoliticsHome*.

It needs to be reiterated at this point that neither, Fitriani Hay or anyone associated with *Eribi Holdings* had been doing anything illegal. Everything had been above board. There was work to be done, money to be made. One might

²⁹⁵ 'Government admits Alan Duncan's links to company in 'Libyan oil cell'', Polly Curtis and Terry Macalister, *The Guardian*, September 1, 2011; <https://web.archive.org/web/20170114152121/https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/sep/01/libya-alan-duncan-links-oil-cell>

²⁹⁶ 'Exclusive: Eddie Lister Was A Director Of Firm Aiming To Build 'The Next Dubai' In Libya While Serving On Foreign Office Board', John Johnston, *PoliticsHome*, 24 April 2021. Lister had been appointed as non executive director at the FCO in April 2017, the month that *Eribi Holdings* had been incorporated at Companies House. He left his post in July 2019 when he became one of Johnson's chief advisers at No.10.

question the ethics of Sir Edward Lister in both advising on foreign affairs and capitalising on those policies with projects like Eribi Holdings, or even failing to declare them as formal ‘interests’ in the registers held by the Parliamentary Standards Commission, but unlike robbing a bank (or breaking lockdown restrictions) it was not a criminal offence.

Was the ‘dead bodies’ remark from Johnson just an ‘oafish’ choice of words or was it a more cynical manoeuvre? In his *‘Best Hope for Libya’* article published in *The Spectator* magazine some months before, the British Foreign Minister had been writing in an unofficial capacity; not as a member of Her Majesty’s government but as a private individual. This time was a little different. Now he had the full weight of office behind him. His decision to share these thoughts at the Conservative Party Conference in *Manchester* was more extraordinary still. The city had barely recovered from its collision with Libya in May. The Manchester Arena had been reopened only weeks before — an attempt to restore some much needed sense of normality for the city and its people. Even so, the families had mixed emotions about revisiting. There would be difficult memories to tackle. So what was Boris thinking of when he made such a deeply offensive statement in a city whose, restless, radical fringe were so demonstrably, and so viscerally, active? Was it a deliberate provocation? Was Boris, in his typical cavalier fashion, trying to coerce the kind of aggravated, knee-jerk response that would leave Britain — and the rest of the world — in absolutely no doubt about the dangers of Political Islam? Was Boris hoping that the Islamists militias in Tripoli supporting the GNA would respond in such a way that would leave Britain and the United Nations no other conceivable option but to back a power-share with Haftar, or, moreover, shift their support to Haftar completely?

Up until the attack in May, the moral high ground, certainly where the UN was concerned, was occupied pretty firmly by the GNA. Because of this, the GNA naturally saw little reason to make the concessions necessary for a mutually acceptable power-share. Almost overnight the moral balance had been redressed. Responding to Charlotte Leslie's words of thanks to Haftar's government in March 2017, Johnson had made a definitive, game-changing statement about his commitment to such a solution: "*The fundamental thing has to be rapprochement between the two sides in Libya. We certainly believe that General Haftar has to be part of the solution.*"²⁹⁷ If there were any doubts at all in the minds of the Abedi family about the moral legitimacy of such an attack, how skewed or repulsive they may have been, they had probably faded at this very moment. It might have been the farthest thing from their mind but they were about to hand Haftar and his supporters the opportunity of a lifetime. It was only the leaking of a video in July, purporting to show the summary execution of twenty of Haftar's prisoners that prevented the scales being tipped completely in his favour.²⁹⁸ By the summer of 2017 both groups were under overwhelming pressure to reach a compromise.

The statement made by Boris Johnson in Parliament in which he had expressed his support for the resumption of relations between the two warring factions, had been in response to an expression of thanks from Charlotte Leslie

²⁹⁷ Hansard, Oral Answers, Parliamentary debates, House of Commons, 2nd Session of 56th Parliament, March 28 2017. 'Rapprochement' is Foreign office speak for 'reconciliation', suggesting that it was one of the rare occasions that Johnson had actually been paying attention to his advisers.

²⁹⁸ 'General accused of war crimes courted by west in Libya', The Guardian, Stephanie Kirchgaessner in Rome and Ruth Michaelson, September 25, 2017; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/25/khalifa-haftar-libyan-general-accused-of-human-rights-abuses>

to the Haftar's government in Tobruk for the condolences they had offered after the "tragic and traumatic events" of March 22nd 2017. This was the day when hundreds of desperate migrants were found to have drowned in the turbulent waters just thirty miles west of Tripoli.²⁹⁹ Drawing on the role that was alleged to have been played by the people smuggling gangs operating with the support of the criminal gangs and militias, Leslie, who had declined to vote on the *No Fly Zone* over Libya in March 2011³⁰⁰, was demanding "urgent and active engagement" with the Haftar government in Tobruk. It was, she believed, the failure of the West to recognise Haftar and the HOR that was leading to such fatalities. Leslie, who with CMEC's Kwasi Kharteng had been among the first to call for a complete reassessment of General Haftar in October 2016, was quick to seize her moment. Did the Foreign Secretary not think after the "tragic and traumatic event" of March 22nd that the House of Representatives in Tobruk was "vital for a stable Libya and the ending of the mass export of migrants to their death by militia"?³⁰¹

The opening statement made on behalf of the families of Paul Hett, Robert Boyle and Paul Price at the Manchester Arena Inquiry reads:

²⁹⁹ '250 migrants feared dead in the Mediterranean after two empty dinghies found off Libyan coast', Fionn Hargeaves, Daily Mail, March 23 2017;
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4343622/Around-250-migrants-feared-dead-Mediterranean.html>

³⁰⁰ <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/divisions/pw-2011-03-21-235-commons/mp/24891>

³⁰¹ Hansard, Oral Answers, Parliamentary debates, House of Commons, 2nd Session of 56th Parliament, March 28 2017

“The two issues of the security arrangements at and outside the Arena and whether the authorities could have prevented the attack by Salman Abedi are of the most significance and concern for our clients because of the real and justified concern that this attack was preventable, that Salman Abedi could have been stopped, that there were numerous missed opportunities.”

To date, only a fairly predictable report of ‘lessons learned’ rooted firmly in the failures of emergency services and Security at the Arena has been produced. The part played by the bomber’s father and the British-backed revolution in Libya in the broader circumstances of the attack have been duly acknowledged in a series of ‘gist’ hearings³⁰², but little or no attention has been paid to the rather chaotic shifts and reversals in Britain’s policy on Libya that threatened the security of the GNA government we had been supporting. The raft of commercial opportunities that Britain, the UAE and several Conservative Party donors had been anxious to invest in those shifts and reversals have also been overlooked. In Sir Crispin Blunt and the UK Foreign Affairs Committee’s *Libya: Examination of intervention and Collapse* report in September 2016, Security expert, Alison Pargeter provided a clear and convincing explanation of how Britain’s “lack of insight” into Libya’s regional and tribal conflicts had contributed to its failure to stabilize the country after the 2011 revolution. The chaos that continued to dominate the country at the time of the Arena attack in May

³⁰² Security correspondent, Duncan Gardham explains that ‘gisting’ is information heard in courts that are stripped of its sourcing. It tells us what the security services knew, “but not how they found it out.” Gardham claims that the process dates back the “closed material procedures” against al-Qaeda suspects in the Manchester Arndale plot of 2009. See: ‘Has MI5 learned its lesson from the Manchester Arena bombing?’, The Spectator, January 27, 2022.

2017 had been the result of failures in government. If we were to extend that same logic, then the failure of the British government to secure Libya in 2011 made us vulnerable to reprisals in the uniquely Libyan enclaves of Greater Manchester in the post-revolutionary period. The problem we were always facing was ‘unknown quantities’. We had no more knowledge of *who* we were backing, than *what* we were backing. And if this was found to be true, then it was nothing short of reckless to alter that policy now, when we were still no clearer on certain key issues.

The Blunt report had also concluded that intelligence on “the extent to which extremist militant Islamist elements had been involved in the anti-Gaddafi rebellion” had been “inadequate”. The report did, however, stop short of admitting that the Manchester Fighters had played an active role in the ground-assaults supporting the NATO air-strikes. When the former Chief of the Defence Staff, Lord Richards was asked by the Committee if he knew that Abdel Hakim Belhadj and other members of the al-Qaeda affiliated *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* had participated in the rebellion in March 2011, he replied that this “was a grey area.”

This was certainly *not* a grey area — far from it. After considerable efforts from lawyers acting on behalf of families of the victims, the *Manchester Arena Inquiry* has finally been able to learn how the Abedi family and other members of the Manchester Fighters had been allowed to travel freely to Libya with an “open door ... no questions asked” policy put in place.³⁰³ When quizzed by at Inquiry, Abdalraouf Abdallah, an associate

³⁰³ “‘Sorted’ by MI5: How UK government sent British-Libyans to fight Gaddafi, Middle East Eye”, Amandla Thomas-Johnson, Simon Hooper, November 7 2018;

of the Abedi family and one of the Manchester Fighters allowed to travel that year to Libya, explained how he had been issued with a replacement passport by the British Home Office after sustaining injuries in the conflict. Abdallah also described how he and other members of the group had travelled to Syria in September 2016 “by arrangement with the authorities” to participate in a series of offensives launched by ISIS to remove Assad.

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To date, little has been said about Abedi’s trip to Tripoli at the height of the fighting in July 2014 and his return from Tripoli in August 2014 when he, his brother and another 101 British Nationals, including Embassy staff, had been evacuated to Malta on the *HMS Enterprise*.³⁰⁵ Just sixteen days earlier, Abedi had been closed as a Subject of Interest (SOI) by Mi5. When he had returned to Tripoli from Manchester on July 6th, the city was enduring some of the worst fighting it had seen in years. He was ‘closed’ as an SOI some days after his return to Tripoli. The ‘assisted departure’ of the brothers to Malta had taken place as Britain was forced to respond to a new intense wave of attacks on Islamist targets in Tripoli. The attacks

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sorted-mi5-how-uk-government-sent-british-libyans-fight-gaddafi>

³⁰⁴ Given the support his group had provided to Britain in 2011, there is of course, every chance that Abdallah was cooperating with British Security Services and infiltrating ISIS as part of a proxy bid to remove Assad. Manchester Arena Inquiry, November 22, 2021, Day 170; <https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2021/11/22172239/MAI-Day-170-.pdf>, opus transcripts, 143-150

³⁰⁵ Manchester Arena Inquiry, Day 169, October 28, 2021; https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2021/10/28150721/MAI-Day-169_Redacted.pdf, 10-11; ‘Royal Navy evacuates Britons from Libya amid fierce fighting’, Peter Walker, Guardian, August 3, 2014; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/03/royal-navy-libya-rescue-uk-nationals-tripoli>

were being led by forces loyal to Haftar. Responsibility for the attack was confirmed by the ‘renegade’ general’s commanders in a series of interviews with *Reuters*.³⁰⁶ A fierce aerial assault had been supported by pro-Haftar moderates on the ground as violence spread throughout the region.³⁰⁷ As a result, the Turkish and British Embassies had no other option but to relocate to Tunis. Within weeks of his return to Manchester, Abedi was expressing sentiments about needing to have Haftar ‘sorted out’.³⁰⁸ The statement had been made in a series of text messages that Abedi had exchanged with militia leader and ‘recruiting sergeant’, Abdalraouf Abdallah over a three week period in November 2014. It was estimated that the pair had exchanged in excess of a thousand messages during this time. Just two weeks later Abdallah and several of his associates were arrested and detained by Police as part of Operation Oliban. Despite the contact between the pair, no attempt was made to re-list Salman as a Subject of Interest.

When questions were put to Detective Chief Superintendent Dominic Scally about the scarcity of detail in the reports from Greater Manchester Police about Abedi, his brother and four other people who had returned on the *HMS Enterprise*, lawyers representing the families of the

³⁰⁶ ‘Libya’s Haftar claims air strikes on Tripoli’, Reuters, August 19, 2014; <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2014/08/19/Libya-s-Haftar-claims-air-strikes-on-Tripoli>

³⁰⁷ ‘Khalifa Haftar: renegade general causing upheaval in Libya’, Chris Stephen, Ian Black and Spencer Ackerman, Guardian, May 22 2014; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/22/libya-renegade-general-upheaval>

³⁰⁸ Manchester Arena Inquiry, Official Sensitive, October 2021; https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2021/10/27185933/INQ033826_21.pdf

victims drew attention to an unusual file entry: the document they had in front of them stated that the Abedi brothers “had agreed that they would be willing to be debriefed”. When asked if they were ever debriefed, Scally was forced to concede that he could “neither confirm nor deny” what information they held about that session.³⁰⁹

How Salman Abedi came to be among the 103 persons evacuated on *HMS Enterprise* in 2014 isn’t known, but one might speculate that his father’s extensive connections within the ever colliding circles of radical Islamist politics and British counter-intelligence would almost certainly have played a part. Intelligence shared with the Arena Inquiry by the British security think tank, the *Henry Jackson Society* alleges that Salman had sustained injuries that needed treatment when fighting with an Islamist group near Benghazi but Police and Counter-Terrorism officials have denied any knowledge of this.³¹⁰ That the brothers were involved in fighting is clear from evidence provided in an earlier session of the Inquiry when Paul Greaney QC produced a picture that showed Hashem Abedi holding a ‘rocket launcher’ during the period in which fighting was known to be taking place.³¹¹

One thing is certain, contrary to what Lord Richards had told the FOC panel in January 2016, there was no grey area regarding the part the

³⁰⁹ Manchester Arena Inquiry, Day 169, October 28, 2021; ; https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2021/10/28150721/MAI-Day-169_Redacted.pdf, 10-12

³¹⁰ It may be that he was engaged with the fighters of Ansar al-Sharia.

³¹¹ Manchester Arena Inquiry, Day 3, September 9, 2020; <https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2020/09/09184255/Transcript-9-September.pdf>, 103

‘Manchester Fighters’ had played in British efforts to topple Gaddafi, nor of the tributes being paid to them by respected members of the British Foreign Office. In February 2011, Conservative Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, Alistair Burt, had gone so far as issuing a press release “welcoming the release” of 110 members of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* by Gaddafi’s Libyan Government, despite the fact that the group was at this time still listed as a proscribed terrorist organisation in Britain. The group’s fund-raising channels in Manchester had even been earmarked during the investigation into the 2009 Manchester Arndale Plot. On Day 170 of the Inquiry, we learned from Counter-Terrorism Police that Anas al-Libi, a known Al-Qaeda commander linked to both US embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam had been a friend of the Abedi family at the time of their arrival in Manchester in the mid-1990s.³¹² Furthermore, documents alleged to have been signed by al-Libi that had seized during the raid on Bin Laden’s Abbottabad compound in May 2011, appear to suggest that British Intelligence had been seeking an agreement with the group that would offer the British Government a plausible route out of Afghanistan.³¹³ When asked if the bomber’s father had been associated with the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group*, the officer responded by confirming that it was established through various open source reporting that Ramadan Abedi, who had worked as an informant and spy

³¹² Manchester Arena Inquiry, November 22, 2021, Day 170; <https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2021/11/22172239/MAI-Day-170-.pdf>, opus transcripts, 131

³¹³ Abid Naseer Trial, Abbottabad Documents and Exhibits, United States v. Abid Naseer Criminal Docket No. 10-19 (S-4) (RJD); https://kronosadvisory.com/Abid.Naseer.Trial_Abbottabad.Documents_Exhibits.403.404.405.420thru433.pdf

for the Gaddafi regime in the early 1990s, “was an active member of the LIFG”.³¹⁴ It’s clear from the grilling of Alzoubare Mohammed, also on Day 170 of the Inquiry that ISIS were certainly *not* operating in Tripoli when Salman Abedi commenced his month-long visit to the city in April 2017. Daesh were, moreover, actively being fought by his father’s *Central Security Force* in other regions. Alzoubare also made it clear that many of their friends in Manchester had travelled to Libya to assist in the removal of ISIS from the region, the Internationalism of the group being in direct opposition to the tribal Nationalism of the *February 17th Martyrs* and other Sanusiyah–inspired militias in Tripoli.³¹⁵ Security experts like Dr. Azeem Ibrahim generally acknowledge that the sectarian prejudices of ISIS against other Islamist militias in Libya have alienated a whole range of potential allies and are ideologically at odds with the Tripoli coalitions. However, the failure of John Cooper QC, the solicitor representing of the families of the victims and the Greater Manchester Police, to get to grips with the complex power and tribal structures that exist within Islamic Extremism in this region (and the likely ‘reapplication’ of the Martyr’s group in Syria by the CIA and Mi6) has resulted in an inadequate and rather narrow appreciation of Salman’s ‘Jihadist’ mindset at the time of

³¹⁴ Manchester Arena Inquiry, November 22, 2021, Day 170; <https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2021/11/22172239/MAI-Day-170-.pdf>, opus transcripts, 130-142

³¹⁵ Azeem Ibrahim’s *The Rise and Fall of ISIS in Libya* (2020) provides a useful explanation of how the nineteenth-century Sanusiyah movement marked a fusion of religious revivalism and Libyan nationalism. The *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* was one such Sanusiyah movement; <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1912&context=monographs>

the Arena bombing.³¹⁶ The political and procedural weight that has been brought to bear on the Inquiry has practically ensured that the only motivation the panel is willing to consider for the Manchester Arena Attack on May 22 2017 is ‘support for Islamic State’ rather than in the emotional and psychological decline of the family in the chaotic and brutal aftermath of the 2011 Revolution, and the spiritual resurrection of the *February 17th Martyrs Brigade* in response to the Haftar campaign.

In the current climate it is probably only natural to be a little cautious when representatives of the British Government allege that they knew nothing of the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group’s* links to Islamic Extremism. If the fairly chaotic scenes at Westminster over the recent ‘Partygate’ affair have told us anything, it’s that it’s not beyond the conscience of the British Government to deceive its people, or to say one thing and mean another. An article published in *The Economist* some months before the scandal had derided the government’s reputation for “Bungling, lying and sleaze”. Their attack on Boris Johnson was particularly damning; he had reached the pinnacle of British politics by weathering exposure “as a liar and philanderer”. The trigger for that particular outburst was Johnson’s handling of the Owen Paterson affair, a Brexiteer ally who had been found guilty of bringing Parliament into disrepute with paid lobbying work on behalf of two companies that earned him almost twice his MP’s salary.³¹⁷ Johnson had made the same mistake

³¹⁶ Manchester Arena Inquiry, November 22, 2021, Day 170;
<https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2021/11/22172239/MAI-Day-170-.pdf>, opus transcripts, 10-12

³¹⁷ ‘Johnson the muggle: Bungling, lying and sleaze catch up with Britain’s government’, *The Economist*, November 5 2021

as he had with his former adviser, Dominic Cummings and stood by him, denying all allegations, and when the facts were became too difficult to refute, dutifully changing his mind. At best you might accuse the British Prime Minister of shameless blind loyalty to his ministers, or a failure to ask the right questions. But those elected to senior government — certainly those in the British Cabinet — have won their various appointments based on the trust that the public has invested in them to *ask the right* questions. We don't elect our officials to make far-reaching and irreversible decisions based on 'grey areas' but to be able to separate those grey areas into black and white. They are quite literally our receptors and translators.

In the last few days, Kwasi Kharteng, the man spearheading the campaign to boost the appeal of General Haftar in Britain alongside CMEC director Leo Docherty in 2017, has been back in the news again, this time for alleging to have made “disrespectful” comments about the victims of online fraud, and for supporting Boris Johnson in a ‘slur’ made against labour Leader Keir Starmer. The ‘slur’ had been one of those typically ‘oafish’ comments that have come to define Johnson’s career in politics. Johnson had made the comments about Starmer when lashing out at the former director of public prosecutions during a heated Commons exchange about the lockdown-breaking parties that had taken place at Downing Street during the Covid pandemic. During Prime Minister’s Questions, Johnson claimed that Sir Keir had “used his time” as head of the Crown Prosecution Service “prosecuting journalists and failing to prosecute Jimmy Savile”.³¹⁸ The slur had the desired effect. Again, what appeared

³¹⁸ ‘Boris Johnson: Kwasi Kwarteng defends PM's use of Jimmy Savile 'slur' against Sir Keir Starmer as 'perfectly reasonable', Alan McGuinness, Sky News, February 6, 2022,

as an oafish, blundering comment carried an ingenious political payload, stirring the historic vitriol of right-wing conspiracy theorists and heaping it on the leader of the opposition, downgrading any moral high ground that the Labour Party may have gained as a result of ‘Partygate’. The impact of Johnson’s comments, were again, as you might predict, just as crudely effective as they were destructive. Within days of the comment being made, the *Evening Standard* was reporting that police had had to disperse a 100-strong crowd of demonstrators who had mobbed the Labour Leader as he had emerged from the Houses of Parliament with shadow foreign secretary, David Lammy. However, the number was a drop in the ocean compared to millions of populist sympathisers hurling similar insults from their online battle headquarters back at home.³¹⁹

Sir Crispin Blunt, the former Cabinet Minister who drew-up the *Intervention in Libya* report that had triggered Kharteng and Docherty’s 2017 pro-Haftar CMEC campaign, similarly attracted the scrutiny of the press when it was revealed in 2019 that he and other Conservative ministers (including Kwasi Kharteng and Rory Stewart) had been in receipt of donations from the secretive *Le Cercle* organisation. The foreign affairs think-tank, with its 80-100 or so members has worked diligently on maintaining a fairly glamorous air of mystery and is believed to operate as a kind of ‘hub’ for influential figures in politics, business and media. The

<https://news.sky.com/story/boris-johnson-kwasi-kwarteng-defends-pms-use-of-jimmy-savile-slur-against-sir-keir-starmer-as-perfectly-reasonable-12534378>

³¹⁹ ‘Sir Keir Starmer led into police car after protesters surround him shouting abuse and Savile slurs’, Daniel Keane, *Evening Standard*, February 8, 2022; <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/keir-starmer-police-car-parliament-protesters-lockdown-b981231.html>

group which maintains only a virtual office and retains strong links to Saudi Arabia has boasted a steady rotation of current and former officers of Mi6, the DGSE and the CIA.³²⁰ Those who have occupied the chair of *Le Cercle* have, over the years, included the former Defence Procurement Minister, Jonathan Aitken and Nadhim Zahawi — the latter appointed *Under-Secretary of State for Business and Industry* by Boris Johnson in July 2019 alongside its Secretary, Kwasi Kharteng. It's curious to note that during the period in which Zahawi occupied the chair at *Le Cercle*, he was also a member of the *Foreign Office Committee* who drew up the September 2016 report into the failures of British intervention in the February Revolution in Libya in 2011 — ostensibly a shot across the bows at ministers like Sir Philip Hammond who had been contemplating the deployment of British troops to Libya to shore-up GNA forces in their war with Haftar and Islamic State. Other pro-Haftar members of the Committee who contributed to the Blunt Report included Daniel Kawczynski and John Baron, the latter a deeply committed Eurosceptic who's grilling of Lord Richards in January 2016 was to reveal the full extent of his hostility to the GNA in Libya and the role the review might take in transforming British policy in Libya in favour of Haftar:

“Do you take on board the view of many that our intervention in Libya empowered extremist groups, particularly ISIL, by

³²⁰ ‘Top Tories face questions over links to secretive foreign affairs group’, John Johnston, PoliticsHome; <https://www.politicshome.com/news/article/excl-top-tories-face-questions-over-links-to-secretive-foreign-affairs-group>, July 22, 2019

removing an important barrier to the growth of militant Islam generally in the region?”³²¹

A second report published on March 6th 2017, *Political Islam’, and the Muslim Brotherhood*, in some ways anticipated Britain’s divided response to the credibility of the LIFG and the GNA’s commitment to democratic elections. Despite its purported intention to downgrade the extremist threat of the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates, it raised the heat on the group substantially.³²² The report’s publication also coincided with the CMEC report on the growing appeal of General Haftar, the failures of the GNA and their various engagements with Islamic extremism. An article published about the *Le Cercle* organisation in June 1997 does little to dispel the fabulously sinister nature of its ‘hidden hands’ appeal. Among its ‘listed objectives’: *International campaigns aiming to discredit hostile personalities or events.*³²³

In the conclusions drawn by Sir John Saunders in Volume 1 of his report for the Manchester Arena Inquiry, much attention has been made of the “mistakes and shortcomings” of security at the Arena at the time of the attack. The report has addressed a range of failings, ranging from risk

³²¹ Oral evidence: Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options, HC 520, 19 January 2016, Questions 314-407, Examination of Witness, Lord Richards of Herstmonceux; <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/foreign-affairs-committee/libya-examination-of-intervention-and-collapse-and-the-uks-future-policy-options/oral/27184.html>

³²² ‘Political Islam’, and the Muslim Brotherhood’, Eighth Report of Session 2016-2017, February 28 2017. The LIFG and several Tripoli and Benghazi Militias had roots in the Muslim Brotherhood movement.

³²³ ‘Aitken dropped by the Right's secret club’, Chris Blackhurst, Independent, June 28, 1997

assessment issues to policing of the City Room. In its detail and its breadth it is nothing short of inspiring. If the same meticulousness and scope are to be applied to the Third Volume of the series — the volume dealing with how the brothers became radicalised — then the abject failures identified by security experts like Alison Pargater in Britain's understanding of its Manchester Fighters and its reckless disregard for the group's links to Islamic Extremism, the 'lessons learned' from the Arena Bombing would be of long-lasting value to any future decisions made by the government relating to British intervention in conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East. There would be more value still if the inquiry were to assess the role played in intervention by lobbyists and entrepreneurs in the energy and construction industries. If nothing else, it would certainly balance up the public's understanding of the mechanisms of radicalisation with those of radical commerce, and the complex trade-off between the two that very often transforms the much-loathed terrorist into the heroic 'resistance fighter'.

In a multi-cultural and multi-Religious Britain, where issues of ethic and national identity are more complicated than ever, it is only reasonable that we should expect a more thorough analysis of the various consequences of war before engaging in violent conflicts that put the loyalties of its dual-nationality citizens to such a test, and which likewise create such a highly-charged environment for violent extremism to take shape. Quick to recognise that there was no greater hot-house for hate than war, even the Soviet Revolutionary leader, Vladimir Lenin had been forced to acknowledge that the men who had reaped the experiences of the trenches would come back trained to use guns and bayonets and act in an

organised fashion. The boys who had been trained in ‘capitalist’ wars would make demands upon their government, and would return home to their lands to enforce their demands as men. Mothers would hand their children a gun and instruct them to “learn the military art properly” putting an end to “exploitation” and “poverty.”³²⁴ Training and arming the men of rebel groups in the art of guerrilla warfare, as it’s believed that Britain and America did in Syria (and were suspected of doing in Libya) was always likely to come back to haunt us.³²⁵

It may be a little too early to arrive at any firm conclusions about the sincerity, scope and success of the Manchester Arena Inquiry, especially given that a full three weeks of hearings were only heard behind closed doors, but one thing we know for sure is that nearly five years on, the most difficult and probing questions have yet to be asked. The fire that engulfed Hunts Bank on the night of May 22 may have long since been put out but the smoke that buried the scene that day continues to preserve its mystery. For the time being at least, the health and wellbeing of Libya’s growth as a democracy remains tied at the deepest level to Britain’s increasingly desperate battles to save its own.

³²⁴ ‘The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution: Part II’, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Vol. 23 August 1916 - March 1917, Progress 1964

³²⁵ ‘West training Syrian rebels in Jordan’, Julian Borger and Nick Hopkins, Guardian, March 8, 2013; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/08/west-training-syrian-rebels-jordan>; US axes \$500m scheme to train Syrian rebels, says NYT, Ian Black, Guardian, Oct 9, 2015; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/09/us-to-axe-5-scheme-train-syrian-rebels-nyt>

<https://manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/evidence/>