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# Counter-terrorism/Counter-extremism

After final report of Manchester Arena bombing inquiry criticises MI5, British media attempts to provide cover for the agency and its failures in preventing the attack

- In early February the [third and final report](#) of the Manchester Arena bombing inquiry was released.

Focusing on the issues of the radicalisation of bomber Salman Abedi, and the avoidability of the attack, the report [headlined with a stinging indictment](#) of the failures of MI5 in missing key opportunities to potentially prevent the 2017 bombing, which led to the agency issuing a public apology.

- Despite the unambiguous criticism of MI5, mainstream media coverage in British news outlets of the report consistently sought to minimise or relativise MI5's failures, with editorials across the spectrum seeking to generate sympathy for MI5, or pointing to the difficult or 'thankless' nature of their work.

An editorial in *The Independent* used the report as an opportunity to call for [expanding Britain's 'secret defences'](#) - seemingly an appeal to increase resources to the security services - while *The Telegraph* used it as an opportunity to [promote the Shawcross review of Prevent](#).

A rare critical piece against MI5 could be found in the rightwing *The Spectator* - but they spun MI5's failures as a [result of its 'political](#)

[correctness'](#), a talking point used by Suella Braverman to legitimise the sharply Islamophobic direction of the Shawcross review, which the *Spectator* piece also promoted.

- Some of the report recommendations were kept confidential, but of the public recommendations significant ones included:
  - **Extremist prisoners:** A recommendation for the Home Office to introduce *'a system based on a robust assessment of the risk a prisoner poses for radicalisation of others. This system should allow for proportionate restrictions to be applied to visitors to that person.'*

This recommendation would contribute to a recent wave of punitive, security-centred policies to manage prisoners, particularly terrorist offenders, within prisons, which includes the drive to expand extremism segregation centres in prisons.
  - **School weapons:** A recommendation that all educational establishments and the Department for Education that *'images of school pupils or college students handling firearms, explosives or other weapons that come to the attention of staff be recorded as a potential indicator of violent extremism'*.
  - **Commission for Countering Extremism:** A recommendation to respond to the 2019 report by the Commission, titled *Challenging Hateful Extremism*.

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That report, conducted under Sara Khan's tenure as lead commissioner, was ignored by the new Home Office administration under Priti Patel.

- With regards to the Didsbury mosque where Salman Abedi attended - and which has been under heavy scrutiny over the course of the inquiry for accusations that it enabled, or failed to prevent, Abedi's radicalisation - the inquiry ultimately decided against the idea that his radicalisation occurred there.

However it did criticise mosque leadership for *'not hav[ing] policies in place that were robust enough to prevent the politicisation of its premises, which I find occurred... That is a lesson that all religious establishments must learn.'*

As a result, the report opted not to refer the mosque to the Charity Commission - though the Commission has since decided to [open a regulatory compliance case](#) into the mosque.

In spite of MI5's apology, Andrew Roussos, the father of the youngest victim of the attack, stated that he was [intending to sue the agency](#), potentially being joined by other bereaved families, due to their many failures to prevent the attack.

## Protect Duty bill scheduled for 'spring'

- The Protect Duty bill - also known as 'Martyn's Law' after one of the individuals killed in the Manchester Arena bombing - has been in development for a number of years following campaigning by bereaved families of the bombing victims.
- The Bill would place a statutory duty on public venues, according to a tiered system, to protect against terror attacks, ranging from developing and maintaining security plans to collaborating more intimately with security forces and agencies. A local version of Martyn's Law has also been trialled in Greater Manchester.
- Following Parliamentary debate into the inquiry report, Home Secretary [Suella Braverman](#) [stated](#) that the government intended to publish "draft legislation for scrutiny in the spring and after that introduce a bill to the house as soon as parliamentary time allows".

# National Security

## First-of-its-kind attempt to appeal Shamima Begum citizenship deprivation rejected by courts

- Attempts by the legal team of Shamima Begum - who fled for Syria in 2015 as a schoolgirl, and had her British citizenship revoked when she resurfaced in camps in North East Syria in 2019 - to appeal against her citizenship revocation [were rejected by secretive SIAC](#) (Special Immigration Appeals Commission) courts.
- The appeal had hinged on the lawfulness of the revocation, especially in light of the argument that she constituted a 'trafficking' victim - given her vulnerability as a child at the time. This should also be read against the published fact that her travel at the time was [facilitated by a Canadian intelligence agent](#).
- The appeal was the first to use the trafficking defence against a citizenship revocation, and to argue that such a question should factor into the national security considerations that led to her citizenship being removed.

While the SIAC court determined that "there was a credible suspicion that Ms Begum had been trafficked to Syria", it proceeded to defer to the Home Secretary and deemed it their prerogative to make the citizenship revocation.

- Last year report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Trafficked Britons in Syria released a report on their inquiry into British nationals held in the camps in

North East Syria following the fall of ISIS.

Utilising the 'trafficking' framework, report condemned British government policy towards nationals held in the camps, particularly Britain's almost unique approach of depriving their citizenship in order to 'wash its hands' of the problem, rather than repatriating them to Britain to face trial.

- Finally, recently disclosed figures also illustrated the sharp increase in legal challenges to citizenship revocation orders last year.

[According to the Guardian](#) 'between January and September 2022, there were 354 other legal challenges against the government's citizenship deprivation orders, less than a fifth of which were successful.', with the paper noting that these constituted the highest such figures on record.

## After recent setback, plans to amend 14th century Treason Act still on the cards for government

- Moves to update or amend Britain's archaic 14th century Treason laws, including for the purposes of prosecuting terror offenders, have been floated by government ministers for a number of years.
- Late last year, an attempt by Cabinet ministers to amend the Treason Act through the introduction of an amendment

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*inadequate. The problem is not that sentencing judges are too lenient but that the legal framework is too limited.”*

to the National Security Bill [was sunk by Justice Secretary](#) Dominic Raab at the final hour.

- Despite this, an independent legislative amendment to the Treason Act appears to still be on the cards.

At a panel hosted by rightwing thinktank Policy Exchange, [Labour MP Khalid Mahmood mentioned](#) that he and Conservative Security Minister Tom Tugendhat were working on such an amendment.

*In his words ““This would actually resolve the issues like this, where we have people who’ve gone out there, who fought against our military personnel and we just leave them there. The problem with that is that all the intelligence they have, we lose...But the treason bill would do that. You bring them back here, let the intelligence services deal with it and you incarcerate them, depending on the judgment given on that particular individual.”*

- In 2018, Mahmood and then-backbench MP Tugendhat co-wrote [a report for Policy Exchange](#) on updating the Treason Act for the purposes of enabling harsher prosecutions for terror offenders. As part of it, Mahmood argued that:

*“The sentences of imprisonment imposed on British citizens who choose to aid ISIS, or similar groups, are often manifestly*