

OPUS2

Manchester Arena Inquiry

Day 165

October 21, 2021

Opus 2 - Official Court Reporters

Phone: +44 (0)20 3008 5900

Email: transcripts@opus2.com

Website: <https://www.opus2.com>

Thursday, 21 October 2021

(9.30 am)

MR GREANEY: Sir, good morning. As everyone knows, Ismail Abedi is the elder brother of Salman and Hashem Abedi and he has important, indeed highly important, evidence to give about their path to radicalisation .

He was due to give evidence this morning, but as we explained on Tuesday, it was unlikely that he would attend because he had departed the country. In the event, in accordance with our expectation, he has not attended to give evidence.

That he has been able to thwart the wishes of the inquiry by getting on a plane is the subject of intense public concern and moreover anger amongst the bereaved families and it has caused your team and, sir, we know, you considerable frustration to say the least .

Against that background, it is necessary that I should set out what we know now about the circumstances of Ismail Abedi's departure.

The starting point is that Ismail Abedi has not adopted a cooperative approach to the inquiry, indeed quite the contrary.

As a result , on 22 July of this year , the inquiry served on him a notice under Section 21 of the Inquiries

1

Act 2005, requiring his attendance to give evidence here today. Some in the press have queried whether more could have been done at that stage, but sir , as you know, nothing more was possible to do at that stage. That simply is the law.

Any objection to the notice was required by 16 August, but no objection was received by the inquiry legal team.

SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Can I just say about the notice, I have seen some criticism of the terms of the notice. They are set out in accordance with the Act, so we are governed by the law, as everybody else is.

MR GREANEY: Absolutely, sir. The notice was in entirely conventional form, it was in the form that was required by the law, and nothing more was possible to do at that stage. You did all that you could.

As I was indicating, no objection to the notice was received by 16 August. The following day, 17 August, Mr Suter, the solicitor to the inquiry , wrote to Greater Manchester Police by email and the email contained the following request, and I quote:

"I wanted to make you aware of this [that's to say the Section 21 proceedings and the fact that there had been no objection]. I wanted to make you aware of this as it would be helpful if you could ensure we are

2

notified as soon as possible if there is any information to suggest that Ismail Abedi may not comply with the notice, for example by leaving the jurisdiction ."

On 28 August, Ismail Abedi was stopped at Manchester International Airport pursuant to Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act (2000). It was his intention to travel abroad that day. He was interviewed and, as a result , missed his flight .

However, the following day, 29 August, he returned to the airport and this time caught a flight departing the country, and as I have indicated, he has not returned.

Yesterday, sir , we received from the solicitor acting on behalf of Ismail Abedi a self-serving and frankly quite disgraceful statement that makes plain that Ismail Abedi's failure to attend this hearing is entirely deliberate , so he has made a decision, in other words, that he will not come and answer our questions.

The inquiry did not learn of Ismail Abedi's attempt to leave on the 28th or actual departure on the 29th until 31 August, when informed by Greater Manchester Police.

Sir, it follows therefore that the inquiry had no prior warning of Ismail Abedi's plan to depart on the 28th or 29th and no opportunity to seek to use the

3

provisions of Section 36 of the Inquiries Act (2005) to prevent him from doing so.

As the events in relation to Ahmed Taghdi illustrate , you will not hesitate to your use powers where necessary and we are therefore sure, sir , that you would have done all you could to prevent Ismail Abedi's departure from the United Kingdom, had you known of his plans to depart when he did.

Whether the High Court would have been prepared to take enforcement action nearly 2 months before he was due to give evidence must be a matter of some doubt and would have depended in any event on what he said of his plans and it seems certain that he would have said, as he said when port stopped, that he intended to return. But nonetheless, sir , we are confident that you would have tried.

SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Can I just say that, as we have found out in the case of Mr Taghdi, although possible, the means of enforcing someone's attendance at an inquiry are not straightforward.

MR GREANEY: No.

SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And although, as I have said, it is possible , no one should think that it 's something that can be achieved as a matter of course. So it is not straightforward and it is not inevitable what the

4

1 outcome would have been had we made attempts to prevent
2 Ismail Abedi going. But at least attempts could have
3 been made.

4 MR GREANEY: Well, that's the point, sir. As I'm going to
5 turn to say just in one moment, there is considerable
6 doubt about whether the police had a power to prevent
7 him from leaving when he did. They believe that they
8 didn't. And as I have already said, there must be some
9 doubt about whether the High Court would have been
10 prepared to take enforcement action. But as you have
11 just said, we are confident we would have tried.

12 Sir, in what we've said, we have simply sought to
13 identify what the inquiry knew, or rather did not know,
14 about Ismail Abedi's planned departure on the 28th and
15 actual departure on the 29th. It is not our intention
16 to criticise anyone and it shouldn't be assumed that
17 Greater Manchester Police failed to pass on the
18 information promptly when received by them.

19 In any event, we understand that they consider that
20 there was simply no power available to them to prevent
21 his departure when he did and they may well be right.

22 Sir, whether something has gone wrong here in
23 accordance with the existing structures of the law or
24 whether the law simply was not adequate to deal with the
25 situation we simply do not know at the moment. But

5

1 that is something we recognise that you may wish to
2 receive information about.
3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I certainly do. I think that no one
4 should rush to judgement and I'm certainly not going to
5 rush to judgement, so we would like to know from Greater
6 Manchester Police, clearly in detail, what happened as
7 far as they are concerned and what governs the actions
8 or lack of action that they took. But I do encourage
9 people not to rush to judgement: let's hear the whole
10 picture and then make a decision.

11 MR GREANEY: I entirely agree. The level of cooperation and
12 provision of information by Greater Manchester Police
13 has generally been quite exceptional, so we must all
14 await judgement until we have the full information.

15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And if there is a lack of power to deal
16 with these things properly then that's something that
17 I will deal with in any recommendations that I am
18 making. But it needs to be looked at calmly and
19 a proper judgement made.

20 I recognise and fully recognise the frustrations
21 which must be felt by the families. We all wanted him
22 to be here to answer questions. Whether he would have
23 been able to claim privilege against self—incrimination,
24 I have no idea, but the reality is we have lost the
25 opportunity to do that, so I recognise the frustrations,

6

1 but equally the frustration should not lead, as I say,
2 anyone to rush to judgement. Let's find out what
3 happened and then reach conclusions when we know.

4 MR GREANEY: Exactly, sir, and the simple fact is that
5 a situation in which this important witness has been
6 able to flee and then effectively laugh in the face of
7 the inquiry is one which should never be permitted to
8 occur again.

9 Against that background, finally —

10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That could be quite emotive language as
11 well, Mr Greaney, if you don't mind me saying so, but it
12 may well be true.

13 MR GREANEY: It perhaps represents the strength of feeling
14 that there is among your team about this issue.

15 Finally, may we make plain that we know you will
16 continue to use your powers in Section 36 and, may we
17 say, in Section 35 of the Act and no one should think
18 that the story is over so far as Ismail Abedi is
19 concerned.

20 Sir, we know that, as we've indicated, there is very
21 considerable strength of feeling about this issue.

22 Others do wish to address you about it and of course
23 they should be permitted to do so.

24 First of all, could I invite Mr Atkinson to make his
25 submissions, please.

7

Submissions by MR ATKINSON

1 MR ATKINSON: We are very grateful for all that Mr Greaney
2 has just said. The families have the very gravest of
3 concerns and the most extreme sense of frustration that
4 this has occurred, not only that so important a witness
5 has flouted this inquiry, but has shown such profound
6 disrespect to the families in doing so.

7 We encourage all enquiries to be made as to how this
8 happened, not with a sense of blame but so that mistakes
9 are accounted for and learned from. We do endorse your
10 observation, sir, as to whether the Inquiries Act
11 procedures are in fact fit for purpose in this regard
12 and whether that is itself a learning point that should
13 be taken forward to make something positive from what is
14 a profoundly depressing state of affairs as we stand
15 here now.

16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It may be a forlorn hope but the inquiry
17 is not giving up all hope of getting this witness to
18 come back. I think the more that is said about him the
19 less likely, I suspect, a return will be. So I'm keen
20 to get him back and to do everything we can.

21 MR ATKINSON: Yes.

22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm sure you understand what I mean.

23 MR ATKINSON: We absolutely understand that.

24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: He has been saying publicly how he's

8

1 been pursued as a result of this and the effect on his
 2 life as a result of the publicity surrounding it. He's
 3 not helping himself, I do understand that, but the more
 4 there is, the more he will think that he is in danger
 5 himself, which he has said himself in the past, and the
 6 less likely he is to come back.
 7 MR ATKINSON: As we said of Mr Abdallah yesterday, that
 8 although the families have heard what has been said
 9 about them, the families want to hear from them and are
 10 entitled to the courtesy of them doing so.
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Exactly. Thank you very much.
 12 MR GREANEY: Mr Cooper.
 13 Submissions by MR COOPER
 14 MR COOPER: I have listened to what has been said and I echo
 15 what Mr Atkinson said. I hear what you just said and
 16 I'll leave my questions until I've got someone to ask
 17 them.
 18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: When people say of a judge, "I hear what
 19 you say", it normally means they profoundly disagree,
 20 but I hope that's not the case.
 21 MR COOPER: Please let me make it clear: I profoundly agree.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you very much. I hoped that would
 23 be that case.
 24 MR GREANEY: Mr Weatherby sent me a highly constructive and
 25 helpful email on this topic last night. I know he may

9

1 have a contribution to make as well.
 2 Submissions by MR WEATHERBY
 3 MR WEATHERBY: Yes, very briefly, I did indeed and that,
 4 I hope, represents the level of cooperation between us
 5 on behalf of the families and your team over these
 6 issues. I very much endorse what's been said.
 7 I actually don't want to be critical of anybody at the
 8 moment, but I think Greater Manchester Police should be
 9 requested to set out in some detail, including once they
 10 had stopped Mr Abedi at the airport, what enquiries they
 11 undertook to determine whether in fact he was intending
 12 to stay abroad, which might be a matter which may have
 13 led to further enforcement or some enforcement action at
 14 that stage. So it would be helpful if they could
 15 address that.
 16 In terms of Mr Abedi, I respectfully underline what
 17 you, sir, have just said, that this should not be viewed
 18 as the end of the process. If Mr Abedi has answers to
 19 the questions that your team and the inquiry has and
 20 we have, then it's in his best interests, of course, to
 21 come and give those answers and to assist the families
 22 and the inquiry in so doing.
 23 So we very much agree that this is not the end of
 24 the process. Of course, if Mr Abedi doesn't return to
 25 the jurisdiction any time soon, then this will not leave

10

1 his life in terms of the fact that further processes can
 2 follow if he chooses to come back at a future point.
 3 Finally, this: given the level of frustration from
 4 the families, can I make clear, so far as we are
 5 concerned, that we will continue to work closely with
 6 your team and, even where witnesses such as Mr Abedi are
 7 not available to give evidence, then our questions and
 8 the questions of the inquiry will still be heard and
 9 we will discuss with your team how best that can be
 10 achieved to assist the inquiry process as a whole.
 11 Thank you.
 12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That's extremely helpful, Mr Weatherby.
 13 You ought to know, we lost sight of you halfway through
 14 that, but we continued to hear you and I thought it was
 15 your words rather than seeing you that was more
 16 important.
 17 MR WEATHERBY: Thank you.
 18 MR GREANEY: I know Mr Weatherby will have questions later
 19 on today and we'll do all we can to sort out that
 20 particular problem. Mr Weatherby raises an important
 21 point: if ultimately Ismail Abedi does not return in
 22 some form or another, you need to be made aware of the
 23 relevant evidential issues that would have been explored
 24 with him.
 25 Unless anyone else wishes to say anything about the

11

1 Ismail Abedi issue, and no one is indicating they do,
 2 we're most grateful for what has been said, I can deal
 3 with one other issue, which I know has been of concern
 4 to the families. It relates to Mr Abdallah and the
 5 relationship in terms of the temporal relationship
 6 between his evidence here and the Parole Board hearing.
 7 Mr Suter has been in touch with the director of
 8 legal for the Parole Board, Mr Atkins. We're extremely
 9 grateful to him for his prompt and full response. As
 10 a result, I can say that he, the director of legal:
 11 "... very much doubts that Mr Abdallah's parole
 12 hearing will be listed by or before the date on which he
 13 will give evidence here."
 14 Obviously we will keep an eye on that but we hope
 15 that provides some reassurance. I'm just going to check
 16 whether Mr Wright is in the room. (Pause). He isn't.
 17 We are going to move to deal with the restriction
 18 order in respect of Mr Taghdi, who is here, and then to
 19 hear evidence from Mr Taghdi.
 20 Sir, I wonder if we could have a break at this
 21 stage. I think what will be happening is Mr Wright will
 22 be seeing Mr Taghdi, who did not arrive in good time
 23 in the building, so could we restart at 10.15, please?
 24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Cooper, let me say, I intended no
 25 criticism of you in what I just said. Thank you.

12

1 (9.50 am)
 2 (A short break)
 3 (10.18 am)
 4 Application re restriction order
 5 Submissions by Mr Greaney
 6 MR GREANEY: Sir, as I indicated, the witness that we will
 7 call today is Mr Taghdi. On 17 October, an application
 8 was made by his solicitor, Ms Khan, for a restriction
 9 order preventing any publication of his name or, as it
 10 was put, his image when he gives evidence.
 11 Now, as we understand it, in the hands of Mr Wright
 12 Queen’s Counsel, who represents him, the application is
 13 for a restriction order preventing the broadcast of
 14 Mr Taghdi’s image over the YouTube feed.
 15 In support of that application, we anticipate that
 16 Mr Taghdi will rely upon two matters. First and
 17 principally, his subjective fear, underlining the word
 18 subjective, that his family will be at risk of harm if
 19 his image is broadcast, and secondly, to a lesser
 20 extent, his health, about which, sir, you know and in
 21 our view nothing needs to be said about that publicly.
 22 As you know, sir, very well indeed now, you have
 23 a power in Section 19 of the Inquiries Act (2005) to
 24 make a restriction order in the terms sought, but such
 25 an order must specify only such restrictions as are

1 necessary in the public interest, having regard to the
 2 particular matters mentioned in subsection 4.
 3 The matters in subsection 4 include (a) the extent
 4 to which any restriction on attendance, disclosure or
 5 publication might inhibit the allaying of public
 6 concern, and (b) any risk of harm or damage that could
 7 be avoided or reduced by any such restriction. To the
 8 extent relevant, the section defines "harm or damage" to
 9 include death or injury.
 10 The position of the inquiry legal team, subject
 11 of course to listening how Mr Wright develops his
 12 submissions, is that the restriction sought is not
 13 necessary, indeed certainly not necessary in the public
 14 interest, and we would invite you to attach weight to
 15 the following six factors.
 16 First, in fact Mr Taghdi’s image is publicly
 17 available in any event. And indeed, a photograph of him
 18 was broadcast during the national BBC News at 6 pm and
 19 10 pm on Tuesday and has therefore been seen by, no
 20 doubt, millions.
 21 Second, the order sought will in any event not
 22 prevent the media from filming him, for example outside
 23 the court building.
 24 Thirdly —
 25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And there is nothing I can do to prevent

1 that.
 2 MR GREANEY: I don’t believe — you are certainly not being
 3 asked —
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Wright can help me if he says I can.
 5 MR GREANEY: Absolutely. The point is that the order sought
 6 is not going to prevent the harm that is claimed.
 7 Thirdly, Mr Taghdi’s fears are not objectively
 8 well-founded, indeed I don’t believe it’s going to be
 9 suggested that they are. There have been risk
 10 assessments, certainly two, carried out by Greater
 11 Manchester Police, and they do not substantiate his
 12 concerns.
 13 Fourth, there is no evidence that if the order was
 14 not made, harm or damage of the sort anticipated in
 15 Section 19 will occur.
 16 Fifth, if you make the order, it will amount to
 17 little more than giving way to Mr Taghdi’s personal
 18 wishes and it may encourage other witnesses who fear
 19 criticism to seek a similar order.
 20 And sixth and very importantly, the making of such
 21 an order would do the opposite of allaying public
 22 concern.
 23 We hope it’s helpful to Mr Wright that we should set
 24 out our position at the outset. We’ll now invite him to
 25 develop the application and I know that Mr de Simone,

1 a member of the press, would wish to make some
 2 submissions in relation to the application.
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 4 Submissions by MR WRIGHT
 5 MR WRIGHT: Sir, I’m grateful to Mr Greaney for setting out
 6 his position. The application was made by my
 7 instructing solicitor, I’m not sure I would put it as
 8 strongly as an application for a restriction order, it
 9 might have the same effect, but the way I put it is
 10 this, sir. You made a determination earlier this year
 11 that Mr Taghdi was a vulnerable witness and was entitled
 12 to the assistance of special measures and you had regard
 13 to the arena’s (sic) vulnerable witness protocol in
 14 determining those special measures.
 15 You will recall, sir, that in a note of 9 March of
 16 this year, we set out our request for special measures
 17 that went beyond those that you granted. We accept, as
 18 we have throughout, that you have a broad discretion,
 19 and indeed the protocol itself speaks of that when it
 20 comes to determining what special measures are required
 21 for any particular witness.
 22 I think the highest I can put it today is to invite
 23 you, sir, to, as we know you will, revisit your decision
 24 if only to confirm it in its original form, having
 25 regard to the position we are in today.

1 I cannot place before you objective evidence. The
 2 height of what I can say is that Mr Taghdi is himself
 3 expressing fear. Mr Greaney has accurately identified
 4 the fear that he expresses.
 5 I have to accept the counterbalancing six factors
 6 that Mr Greaney has identified. So far as his image
 7 being available in any event, that must be right. The
 8 difference, we submit, would be this: that these
 9 proceedings are available on the internet and searchable
 10 and easily identifiable and would amount to
 11 a significant period of filming.
 12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I imagine the BBC News is available on
 13 the internet, even though it's passed by.
 14 MR WRIGHT: It is, but it's a very old photograph and it
 15 doesn't necessarily reflect how he looks today, that's
 16 the difference.
 17 As to the point about filming outside the court
 18 building, you do have a power to prevent that, but it is
 19 not a power on the evidence I could invite you to you
 20 exercise. It would be an anonymity order and I can't
 21 invite you to make such an order because there's no
 22 evidence supporting it.
 23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So you're inviting any to make a special
 24 measure that he shouldn't be seen on YouTube?
 25 MR WRIGHT: Yes. The protocol, the Arena Inquiry protocol

17

1 says, in paragraph 11:
 2 "The chair has a wide discretion to make such
 3 directions as he considers necessary. It may include,
 4 but is not limited to, one or more of the following
 5 measures."
 6 And then lists a number of measures which include
 7 screening.
 8 So that's how I would put it: if you made that
 9 special measures direction, it would have the effect of
 10 being a restriction order, but it is not — I wouldn't
 11 frame it as my applying for a restriction order, but
 12 rather inviting you to revisit the order for special
 13 measures.
 14 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you very much.
 15 Submissions by MR DE SIMONE
 16 MR DE SIMONE: I'm from BBC News, but I represent all the
 17 press. The fact is, this is an application for
 18 a restriction order, that's what we were served with.
 19 In effect, if it were granted, it would prevent us on
 20 the application that we were given, prevent us from
 21 actually naming him and showing him.
 22 Our submission is there's an overwhelming public
 23 interest in evidence that can be heard in open being
 24 heard in open. The public interest in full and complete
 25 reporting of Mr Taghdi's role in the inquiry proceedings

18

1 is very high and we say the media's Article 10 rights
 2 and the public's weigh heavily in favour of his evidence
 3 being heard in open. And the public include many people
 4 directly impacted by the bombing.
 5 The test in the Inquiries Act for a restriction
 6 order is not met in our submission and the concern
 7 around potential harm is speculative. Out of more than
 8 20 people who were arrested during the police
 9 investigation, only one has anonymity in this inquiry,
 10 and that's a hangover from an order in the criminal
 11 trial rather than something you have granted yourself.
 12 As the inquiry has heard, there are over 30 people
 13 who were investigated in the police investigation in
 14 various ways. The significant ones have all been named
 15 and all can be pictured in the media.
 16 Other people arrested as suspects gave evidence
 17 in the trial and here in this inquiry: Alharth Forjani
 18 appeared at the trial and his witness statement is on
 19 the inquiry's website; Rabie Zreba came and gave
 20 evidence in chapter 8 last December, which is when
 21 Mr Taghdi was meant to appear, and we all reported his
 22 evidence and showed his image.
 23 There is no suggestion that any of these people have
 24 faced harm as a result of being witnesses, nor that
 25 someone like Ismail Abedi has faced harm, or that any

19

1 Abedi family property has been damaged.
 2 Indeed, no one has ever attacked the home of
 3 witness, friend or family member of a terrorist suspect
 4 in the UK, as far as we know, and that includes the 7/7
 5 families, the 21/7 families, the friends of the Glasgow
 6 Airport attackers, and the parents of the Woolwich
 7 killers.
 8 But crucially, Mr Taghdi's name, image and link to
 9 this case is widely in the public domain already, both
 10 through the Hashem Abedi trial and this inquiry. The
 11 narrative of his link to the case is well-known, meaning
 12 his involvement in the Micra purchase, for example, and
 13 the visits to Devell House and other things, and it is
 14 therefore impossible to anonymise his role. Any
 15 reporting of his evidence will therefore identify him
 16 even if he were not named or his image shown.
 17 We at the BBC did broadcast an image of Mr Taghdi on
 18 our main evening news bulletins on Tuesday this week.
 19 The image is from social media and shows Mr Taghdi in
 20 2015 actually with Salman Abedi. Millions of people saw
 21 the image and the bulletins were then made available
 22 online. He also previously gave on-camera interviews to
 23 Channel 4 and the BBC many years ago.
 24 I should also say —
 25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: How many years ago are we talking about?

20

1 MR DE SIMONE: 2011.
 2 I should also say that in Mr Greaney's opening last
 3 year, Mr Taghdi was named as someone who was going to
 4 come along and give evidence. He's been named as
 5 someone giving evidence today, indeed his name is on the
 6 timetable on the inquiry website for today, and in
 7 transcripts and media reports it has been trailed that
 8 he is coming to give evidence today. There will
 9 therefore be public concern if his evidence is not then
 10 fully in public.
 11 Those are our submissions.
 12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm very grateful. Thank you very much.
 13 Reply submissions by MR GREANEY
 14 MR GREANEY: One observation seems to us that it may be that
 15 Mr Wright is correct to this extent, that what he is
 16 seeking is not a new restriction order but in effect an
 17 amendment or expansion of the existing restriction
 18 order. Subject to that, we have no further submissions.
 19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm not necessarily inviting any
 20 submissions from anyone else, but of course I always
 21 give the opportunity.
 22 MR GREANEY: I hadn't been told that anyone else wished to
 23 make a submission.
 24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Wright, thank you for your
 25 application, I'm afraid I'm against you and the original

1 order remains the same. It's very much for the reasons
 2 which have been given by Mr Greaney and by Mr De Simone.
 3 I am happy to give you a detailed judgment in due
 4 course, but you're not getting it this minute.
 5 MR WRIGHT: I understand that, and if it helps, I don't
 6 invite you to provide one for my part.
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm grateful for that. Thank you,
 8 Mr Wright.
 9 MR WRIGHT: Thank you. Before Mr Taghdi is brought into
 10 court, can I just mention a couple of practical things
 11 about his appearance and proceedings today.
 12 Firstly, he has access to a paper bundle. He was
 13 given access to that yesterday and had time with my
 14 instructing solicitor to consider that and I anticipate,
 15 having taken instructions this morning, that he is
 16 familiar with its content and in a position to answer
 17 questions about any documents within it.
 18 Second, having seen him in custody this morning, my
 19 expectation is that he will answer questions and that he
 20 understands his role as a witness.
 21 Third, those asking him questions should understand
 22 that he has been in custody now for 3 days. During
 23 those 3 days he has had no change of clothing, no
 24 opportunity for a shower or other ablutions, and has
 25 been held in segregation, locked up 24 hours a day. So

1 I mention those matters so that people asking him
 2 questions can bear that in mind in terms of his levels
 3 of concentration and whether he might need a break from
 4 time to time.
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you. And also they must bear in
 6 mind the order that I have already made and those
 7 special measures. But as I have said before, we are
 8 keen to get the information and we'll do everything
 9 we can to try and make that happen.
 10 How is he going to be brought into court,
 11 Mr Greaney?
 12 MR GREANEY: He's in an adjacent courtroom and he'll be
 13 brought in -- it's probably sensible, sir, if you rise
 14 for a few moments.
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I will do. Unless, it's really
 16 necessary for him to be brought in in handcuffs, I would
 17 prefer that not to happen.
 18 MR GREANEY: He will not be brought in in handcuffs.
 19 Sir, can I indicate that my recollection of the
 20 restriction order you previously made is that there
 21 should be breaks every 45 minutes for 15 minutes.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And we will obviously check with him as
 23 to whether he wants it. Sometimes witnesses actually
 24 prefer to go on.
 25 MR WRIGHT: I think, having spoken to him, he would prefer

1 to conclude his evidence as soon as he can, for
 2 understandable reasons.
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Yes. Obviously you will pay attention
 4 and if you think he needs a break, by all means tell me.
 5 I'll rise for a moment.
 6 (10.33 am)
 7 (A short break)
 8 (10.40 am)
 9 MR GREANEY: Sir, this is Ahmed Taghdi, and I'm going to ask
 10 that he be sworn, please.
 11 MR AHMED TAGHDI (affirmed)
 12 Questions from MR GREANEY
 13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Do take a seat. Mr Taghdi, if you need
 14 a break at any time, please do tell me and I'll make
 15 sure that happens.
 16 A. Thank you, sir.
 17 MR GREANEY: I have been told by Mr Wright, who represents
 18 you, that you're quite keen to go on for as long as
 19 possible and finish your evidence as soon as can be
 20 achieved; is that correct?
 21 A. It depends how it goes.
 22 Q. Okay. Let's see. Would you begin by telling us your
 23 full name, please?
 24 A. Ahmed Taghdi.
 25 Q. Are you Libyan by heritage?

1 A. Yes.
 2 Q. And were you brought up within the Libyan community of
 3 Manchester?
 4 A. Manchester's full of Libyans. There's a Libyan
 5 community, there's all sorts of communities, but there's
 6 a strong Libyan presence in Manchester.
 7 Q. And as we've understood, there's a strong and proud
 8 Libyan community in Manchester, is there not?
 9 A. Proud, what does proud mean?
 10 Q. What does it mean to you?
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay, there's a strong Libyan community.
 12 MR GREANEY: Did you grow up within that community?
 13 A. I knew people from the community. I knew people from
 14 all sorts of backgrounds in Manchester.
 15 Q. Let's see if you can help me with this. Would it be
 16 fair to say that in the lead—up to the Libyan Civil War
 17 in 2011, in broad terms the attitude of the Libyan
 18 community in Manchester was anti—Gaddafi?
 19 A. Some supported him, some were against him, 50/50.
 20 Q. Were you aware that in 2011, members of the Libyan
 21 community in Manchester travelled to Libya to fight
 22 against Gaddafi in the civil war?
 23 A. Yes.
 24 Q. And are you aware that many fought in what became known
 25 as the Tripoli Brigade?

25

1 A. I don't know what that is.
 2 Q. Did you fight in the Libyan Civil War?
 3 A. No, I didn't.
 4 Q. Did your father fight in the Libyan Civil War?
 5 A. Um... He didn't fight but he was present there.
 6 I prefer not to talk about my father because it's
 7 a sensitive topic for me.
 8 Q. I'm not going to ask you many questions about it and
 9 I do understand it will be a subject of upset, so let's
 10 get through this very quickly.
 11 What we know, not least because you spoke about it
 12 on the television, is that in 2011 your father was
 13 killed whilst in Libya.
 14 A. Yes.
 15 Q. Was he killed by the forces of Colonel Gaddafi?
 16 A. Can I not talk about my father, please?
 17 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That's what he said on television?
 18 MR GREANEY: I was going to say, you were prepared to talk
 19 to Channel 4 News about it and the BBC.
 20 A. I was 17 and it just happened.
 21 Q. I have about three questions about it, so let's just get
 22 through it and then it will be finished.
 23 A. I don't want to talk about my father. It's a very
 24 sensitive topic for me, it's very personal, it's
 25 a traumatic experience.

26

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Just tell me what was said on the
 2 television then.
 3 MR GREANEY: That his father had been killed during an
 4 attack by Colonel Gaddafi's troops and, I think he said,
 5 during the course of a bomb attack.
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Unless you tell me that's wrong, I shall
 7 treat that as being the truth, okay?
 8 A. Sir, he was killed. The specific details, I'm not clear
 9 on that, but he was killed and it was by Gaddafi's
 10 forces. He wasn't fighting.
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No, no. You have told us. That's all
 12 that actually Mr Greaney was asking you.
 13 MR GREANEY: It's the full extent of what I was asking,
 14 quite right, sir.
 15 What I would like to know, and perhaps others would
 16 too, is whether the death of your father at the hands of
 17 Gaddafi's forces has shaped your political views?
 18 A. How?
 19 Q. Well, I'm asking. Has it shaped your political views?
 20 A. I was raised by a father who was against Gaddafi, who
 21 ran away from Gaddafi, so no, I'm not a supporter of
 22 Gaddafi, before the civil war or after the civil war.
 23 Q. Has the death of your father shaped your religious
 24 views?
 25 A. It hasn't changed anything in terms of my religion.

27

1 Q. You are, I am sure you'll be able to agree, a Muslim?
 2 A. Yes.
 3 Q. Do you hold violent Islamist extremist views?
 4 A. No, I don't.
 5 Q. How would you describe your religious views as a Muslim?
 6 A. How can I describe it?
 7 Q. Well, are you extremist, are you moderate, are you
 8 someone who doesn't take his religion very seriously?
 9 There's a spectrum, where are you on it?
 10 A. I don't know what he means. I'm definitely not an
 11 extremist.
 12 Q. I'm going to ask you to look at just one — not just
 13 one, but look with us at a document that you were the
 14 author of and you have seen it, it's within the bundle
 15 you have. It's at divider 15. Would you turn that up,
 16 please?
 17 This is an email that was recovered by the police
 18 from your computer. I'm not going to ask that this be
 19 placed on the screen, but I will read it out. The INQ
 20 reference, Mr Lopez, is {INQ037656/1}.
 21 As I said, this was something found on your
 22 computer. It's an email, it's from you; do you agree?
 23 A. Yes.
 24 Q. It was sent to a woman; is that right?
 25 A. The name suggests so, yes.

28

1 Q. I didn't hear what you said.
 2 A. The name — it's a girl's name, isn't it? This is 2016
 3 and it's — if this wasn't shown to me yesterday
 4 I wouldn't even recall this. This was me.
 5 Q. It's a good job it was shown to you yesterday then. It
 6 was 14 months before the arena attack to the day. But
 7 let's just deal with the basics. Is it an email that
 8 you sent to [REDACTED]?
 9 A. Yes.
 10 Q. Did you send it on 22 March 2016?
 11 A. That's what it suggests. If I'm going off memory,
 12 I wouldn't remember, but the date here suggests it's the
 13 22nd.
 14 Q. Let me try to provoke your memory then or help you. The
 15 subject of this email is "Sympathise", isn't it?
 16 A. Pardon?
 17 Q. The subject of this email is "Sympathise"?
 18 A. I don't know what that means.
 19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That's what it says on — if you look
 20 at the document, where it says under subject —
 21 A. Okay, yes. Yes.
 22 MR GREANEY: What you wrote was:
 23 "Why is it I've not seen you post about Muslims
 24 getting killed in Syria, et cetera, in months yet you
 25 overly sympathise with Belgium and France? You make me

29

1 sick wallah. There was a stage I thought this is a cool
 2 Libyan Muslim girl but you're not, you're just
 3 a part-time Muslim seeking attention. Get some
 4 principles please and read the Koran and understand it
 5 when you get a chance. Taraa."
 6 Is that the email you wrote?
 7 A. Yes.
 8 Q. Just to place this in context, that very day,
 9 22 March 2016, the Islamic State had bombed a Brussels
 10 Airport and Metro station, killing 32 people. And
 11 4 months earlier, on 13 November 2015, the same group
 12 had carried out the Paris attacks, murdering many
 13 people. In your email you were criticising [REDACTED]
 14 for:
 15 "Overly sympathising with those killed in those
 16 attacks."
 17 Weren't you?
 18 A. I didn't say to her she was wrong to sympathise, I'd
 19 have said to her she should talk about other things, she
 20 should talk about other things as well. So it's fair
 21 enough. I didn't say to her don't sympathise with
 22 Belgium and France, I just said to her, because she has
 23 a strong platform to raise awareness about Syria.
 24 I didn't say to her it's wrong to sympathise with
 25 Belgian or France. I did say overly sympathise.

30

1 Q. And were you also criticising her for, my phrase, not
 2 being a good enough Muslim?
 3 A. It's just — it says what it says, like. I don't recall
 4 why I wrote this email. I did write it clearly but
 5 I don't recall why I wrote it. It's a girl that
 6 I follow on social media and I wrote something to her.
 7 I didn't try to hide it.
 8 Q. Do you think it would be correct to observe that the
 9 views you're expressing in that email were extremist
 10 views?
 11 A. How so?
 12 Q. Well, hundreds of people had been killed by
 13 Islamic State.
 14 A. Hundreds of people were killed in Syria. Thousands,
 15 actually.
 16 Q. Why can one not sympathise with all of those?
 17 A. I didn't say don't sympathise, I said you are
 18 sympathising with Belgium and France, you should raise
 19 awareness about Syria. At the time, obviously, there
 20 was a lot of killing and stuff happening in Syria so
 21 I asked her to raise awareness about Syria as well.
 22 I didn't say to her don't raise awareness about Belgium
 23 and France, I didn't say it is wrong to do that.
 24 Q. Let me just ask one question and then we'll move on or
 25 this will take a long time. Is what we see in that

31

1 email an indication that, at least at that stage, you
 2 held extremist views?
 3 A. I don't hold extremist views. I've never held extremist
 4 views.
 5 Q. Would you go, please, to divider 22.
 6 I'm afraid, Mr Cooper, we won't be able to display
 7 this on the screen, but it is an image that you're
 8 familiar with.
 9 Again we're going to see an image taken from your
 10 computer. Have you got divider 22?
 11 A. I don't have a divider 22.
 12 Q. You don't?
 13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You can take my copy. I'm sorry that's
 14 not in yours.
 15 A. Oh, I've got that, sir.
 16 MR GREANEY: So I'm just going to —
 17 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And you've had an opportunity to look at
 18 it?
 19 A. Yes, I've seen these pictures.
 20 MR GREANEY: It is an image taken from your computer. Do
 21 you agree, as is obvious, I suggest from the image, that
 22 it shows fighters of the Islamic State?
 23 A. It's not fighters of the Islamic State. It's not.
 24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: What is it?
 25 A. I think it's a different group in Syria. That's not the

32

1 Islamic State. If you guys check it out, you'll find
2 that what I'm saying is correct.

3 MR GREANEY: Let's just take it in stages and thank you for
4 your help. Is it showing a group of men dressed all in
5 black and wearing balaclavas?

6 A. True.

7 Q. All carrying what appear to be AK47s?

8 A. Okay.

9 Q. And one of them at the head of the group is carrying
10 a black flag on which there is Arabic language?

11 A. True.

12 Q. Do you agree?

13 MR ATKINSON: I think people are finding it quite difficult
14 to hear.

15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you very much.

16 MR GREANEY: So men dressed all in black, including
17 balaclavas, carrying automatic weapons, and did you
18 agree with me that the man at the head of the group is
19 carrying a black flag upon which there is white Arabic
20 writing?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Are we looking there in the photograph at a group of
23 Islamic extremists?

24 A. I don't know what they are, but it's definitely not
25 ISIS.

33

1 Q. This is an image from your computer, you stored it.
2 What is it?

3 A. I have lots of images in my computer. I read the news.
4 I save a lot of pictures. It doesn't show that I'm an
5 extremist or not an extremist.

6 Q. I hadn't got to that yet and it's not for me positively
7 to suggest you are an extremist. I'm asking you
8 questions about whether they are. If you are here to
9 help us, are you not able to agree that what photograph
10 shows is a group of armed Islamist extremists in Syria?

11 A. I don't know where they are, but it's a group of armed
12 men.

13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Are you able to read the writing?
14 Can you translate that for us? I'm afraid I can't read
15 Arabic.

16 A. It just says, "There's no God but Allah, Mohammed is His
17 messenger."

18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.

19 MR GREANEY: So it rather appears that they are Muslims
20 then, do you agree?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. And maybe then we can agree this much, they are armed
23 Muslim fighters?

24 A. Yes.

25 MR COOPER: I'm so sorry to interrupt, sir. As you know,

34

1 I lead on this witness. I haven't got the bundle,
2 I haven't even got it in any computer form. I'm
3 struggling to keep up. I would like a hard copy of the
4 bundle as I'm leading on this. I'm not asking for
5 everyone to have one, that's a matter for them.

6 MR GREANEY: This is material you have identified,
7 Mr Cooper.

8 MR COOPER: I understand, but there are tabulation
9 references here -- I'm flicking around --

10 MR GREANEY: I'm very -- this has been quite disrupted so
11 far, with people moving around. I will give the INQ
12 reference and I seek to do that with various documents.
13 The INQ reference for this photograph is {INQ037645/1}.

14 So where we've reached is we have looked at the
15 email you sent 14 months after the attack and you have
16 indicated that you don't regard that as evidence of
17 extremism. We have now looked at this photograph of, as
18 you have now agreed, armed Muslim fighters, and I'm
19 going to ask why you had this image on your computer.

20 A. I have many images in my computer. I read the news.
21 I'm a curious man. Why not?

22 Q. Well, it might be that some would think that storing
23 this image on your computer indicates that this was the
24 group or type of group that you agreed with.

25 A. I have many images of many things. I have images of --

35

1 if I have an image of something, it doesn't something
2 I agree with it or don't agree with it. It just
3 suggests that I'm interested, that I read about it.

4 Q. So were you interested in the activities of extremist
5 Muslim fighters?

6 A. No. I was more interested in the -- just the whole
7 rebellions against dictators and stuff. I've got all
8 sorts of images. Sometimes when you read an article,
9 images can download.

10 Q. Right. Let's move on. We'll come back to your
11 attitudes, no doubt, in due course.

12 Had you known Salman Abedi since your childhood?

13 A. I knew of him.

14 Q. You knew of him?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Well, isn't it the position that throughout your life,
17 until his death, whilst there might have been some
18 periods when you saw less of him than others, the two of
19 you were good friends, indeed weren't you really good
20 friends?

21 A. I said I knew of him of childhood, I knew who his family
22 was, but I didn't hang around with him until sort of
23 2015. He's much younger than me, so I wouldn't have
24 been hanging around with him.

25 Q. Was Salman Abedi a really good friend of yours?

36

1 A. From the period of 2015, yes.
 2 Q. That's really the period we're interested in. And
 3 in the month before the arena attack, were you in
 4 regular contact with Salman Abedi?
 5 A. Not regular, no. The month before it, I was, but it was
 6 something to do with me, I needed his help and he
 7 started university a year before me and I started in the
 8 same uni the year after and I didn't have any friends in
 9 that university, so I called him maybe once or twice
 10 in the semester to ask why he's not in uni and I want
 11 someone to hang around with. I was attending university
 12 every day, I was going to all my lectures, and I just
 13 never seen him, which was a bit odd. And one of the
 14 reasons I went to this uni was because I thought I had
 15 friends there. But I've never seen him at campus, he
 16 never came.
 17 Q. I'm just going to ask you to reflect, Mr Taghdi, on
 18 whether you are downplaying the nature and depth of your
 19 relationship with Salman Abedi.
 20 A. Salman Abedi was a good friend of mine from 2015 until
 21 about 2016. After 2016, I started seeing less and less
 22 of him, but that period, we were quite close, yes, in
 23 a social, friendly way.
 24 Q. You said to me a moment ago, I think, there were
 25 a couple of calls. As we are going to see a bit later

1 in my questions, just to take a snapshot between 12 and
 2 15 April, there were 38 contacts between you --
 3 A. I did just say that a month before that attack I was in
 4 regular contact with him because of an incident that
 5 I had for a 3 or 4-day period, but before then, since
 6 the summer I have not heard of him. I was at university
 7 and I never used to see him.
 8 Q. At all events, we can agree that you had known him
 9 throughout his life?
 10 A. I have known of him. I started hanging around with him
 11 since 2015.
 12 Q. And in 2015, you and he became really good friends,
 13 didn't you?
 14 A. For a period yes.
 15 Q. And can I invite you to agree, please, therefore that
 16 you are well placed to help us with Salman Abedi's path
 17 through life?
 18 A. Not through life.
 19 Q. And changes in his personality?
 20 A. When he was with me, we were into the same stuff, but
 21 like I said, he just went off the radar. Even before
 22 that month, I think during my first semester, I called
 23 him once or twice enquiring about his location, if he
 24 was at university or not, like because I wanted a friend
 25 to hang around with. He never came in, I didn't contact

1 him. In April, I had a personal incident and I called
 2 him for help.
 3 Q. Go to divider 1 of the bundle, please. Mr Cooper, this
 4 is Mr Taghdi's witness statement to the police,
 5 {INQ030658/1}.
 6 I asked you a moment ago to whether you were
 7 downplaying the nature and depth of your relationship
 8 with Abedi. I'm just going to remind you of what you
 9 said to the police in a statement back in 2019. Yes,
 10 28 June 2019.
 11 Go to the top of page 2 {INQ030658/2}, please:
 12 "I have known Salman Abedi since my childhood and my
 13 family knew Salman's family and we were all part of the
 14 Libyan community. I also know Hashem Abedi and
 15 Ismail Abedi and I would contact them if I wanted to
 16 speak to Salman but was unable to contact him."
 17 Is that true?
 18 A. As you can see, I said:
 19 "I have known Salman Abedi since my childhood."
 20 I didn't say he was my friend since my childhood.
 21 I have known of him, we live around the same area.
 22 Q. Is what I have just read out to you from your statement
 23 true?
 24 A. I have known Salman Abedi, I know who they are. I know
 25 who they are. I was only, like -- I only started

1 hanging around him and having like a personal
 2 relationship with him around 2015, I don't -- that
 3 period. But I've known of the family since I was young,
 4 yes.
 5 Q. Go to page 6 {INQ030658/6}, please, just by the bottom
 6 hole punch. I'm go going to read another passage out to
 7 you from this statement:
 8 "Salman was a really good friend of mine because we
 9 used to go to the gym and play five-a-side football
 10 together. When I started university, I didn't see much
 11 of Salman as he became more religious and I tended to
 12 spend my time chilling, smoking and generally having a
 13 good time going out."
 14 Is that true?
 15 A. Yes, that's true, we started to play football and go to
 16 the gym in 2015. We weren't going to the gym since
 17 we were children.
 18 Q. You go in the statement to talk about an incident on
 19 13 April of 2017 when you became involved in a bit of
 20 a fight with another man, didn't you?
 21 A. Yes.
 22 Q. And you decided that you and some friends were going to
 23 sort him out, didn't you?
 24 A. Yes, I had an altercation with a male.
 25 Q. We don't need the details. You decided that you and

1 some friends were going to sort out that man, didn't
2 you?
3 A. Yes, we wanted to go back and fight, yes.
4 Q. And who did you call upon in April 2017 when you needed
5 friends to sort out another man?
6 A. I called a few friends and one of them was Salman.
7 Q. Let me ask you again: have you, in what you've said to
8 me earlier, been downplaying the nature and depth of
9 your relationship with Salman Abedi?
10 A. I have just been telling you about my relationship with
11 Salman Abedi, I'm not downplaying or upplaying. I'm
12 just telling you what the nature of the friendship is.
13 Q. Bearing in mind that you had known or, to use your
14 phrase, known of the family since childhood, I'm going
15 to see if you can help us with a couple of details. Did
16 you know that the father of Salman and Ismail was called
17 Ramadan?
18 A. No.
19 Q. Did you know that they lived with their father?
20 A. Yes, they were a family.
21 Q. Did you know that their father held anti-Gaddafi views?
22 A. I don't know.
23 Q. Did you know whether their father held violent Islamist
24 extremist views?
25 A. I didn't know.

41

1 Q. Did you know whether their father was a member of the
2 LIFG, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group?
3 A. I don't know who that group is.
4 Q. Have you heard of it?
5 A. No. This is the first time I've heard of it, when I got
6 this brief.
7 Q. Let me just be clear about this. You've grown up in the
8 Libyan community of Manchester and you have never heard
9 of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group until your
10 involvement in this case?
11 A. Yes.
12 Q. At all events, did you know that throughout their lives,
13 Salman and Hashem Abedi made regular trips with their
14 father to Libya?
15 A. I didn't know the specifics of their life, but when
16 I was --- in 2015, they would regularly go back to Libya
17 to see their family and things like that, yes.
18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Did you go to Libya at all?
19 A. What, in my life?
20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Yes.
21 A. Yes, I have been, sir.
22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: What age were you when you went?
23 A. I went the first time in 2010 so I must have been 17 or
24 something. This was during Gaddafi's regime and then
25 I went again after that in --- I arrived in Libya after

42

1 he had passed away, so this is the first time I went ---
2 the second time I've been after Gaddafi passed away.
3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You sent in 2010 and 2015?
4 A. No, no, 2010 and Gaddafi passed away, I think, towards
5 the end of the civil war. I entered Libya a day after
6 Gaddafi passed away ---
7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay, thank you.
8 A. --- or got killed.
9 MR GREANEY: So I understand, you were in Libya a short time
10 before the civil war started, generally regarded as
11 having happened on 17 February 2011, so you were there
12 a short time before that?
13 A. No, I was there about 6 months before that.
14 Q. Were you there during the civil war?
15 A. No.
16 Q. But you were there very shortly after the war ended?
17 A. Yes.
18 Q. So just before or a short time before and just after
19 but, as you have told us, you didn't fight in the civil
20 war?
21 A. That's true.
22 Q. Did you know that Salman Abedi and Hashem Abedi made
23 a trip or trips to Libya during the course of the civil
24 war?
25 A. I wouldn't have known them during that time. I wouldn't

43

1 have any contact with them. Obviously I knew who they
2 were. But they weren't my mates at that time.
3 Q. Did they when you --- did he, when you became more
4 friendly with Salman from 2015, explain to you that he'd
5 been in Libya during the course of the civil war?
6 A. No. I had no reason to ask him about that or for him to
7 tell me about it.
8 Q. Maybe you did because you had a shared heritage, you
9 were both Libyan and you were both members of Libyan
10 families that held anti-Gaddafi views.
11 A. And?
12 Q. And so you had something in common and I'm asking
13 whether it was anything you ever discussed.
14 A. We didn't discuss this, no.
15 Q. Did you know whether their father had fought in the
16 civil war?
17 A. I wouldn't know.
18 Q. Did you know whether Salman or Hashem had fought in the
19 civil war?
20 A. At the time I didn't know, but now I did because of the
21 news and stuff.
22 Q. At the time you were friendly with Salman, did he
23 explain to you that he had fought in the civil war?
24 A. No, he didn't. He's not a very talkative guy.
25 Q. And you knew Hashem as well, didn't you?

44

1 A. I knew he was Salman's brother.
 2 Q. Did he not explain to you that he'd fought in the civil
 3 war in Libya?
 4 A. I wouldn't have a reason to raise this topic with them.
 5 Q. Would you go to divider 16, please, of the bundle.
 6 Mr Cooper, this is {INQ037644/1}.
 7 We will have this on the screen, Mr Lopez,
 8 {INQ037644/1}.
 9 This is an image that was found on your computer,
 10 Mr Taghdi. Can you --
 11 A. I don't remember -- I don't remember downloading this
 12 image. And this is --
 13 Q. I haven't asked a question yet. Who is the person on
 14 the left?
 15 A. That's Salman's dad.
 16 Q. That's Ramadan Abedi, isn't it? And who's that person
 17 on the right?
 18 A. Hashem.
 19 Q. Hashem Abedi. What's he doing?
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I think we can all see that, he's
 21 holding a gun, isn't he?
 22 MR GREANEY: Do you know where he is?
 23 A. I don't know the specifics of these pictures. These are
 24 the pictures that the news released.
 25 Q. Why did you have them on your computer?

45

1 A. I must have read that article about it, about the
 2 attacks and because I knew these guys, they ended up on
 3 my laptop. I didn't have it prior to that attack
 4 (overspeaking) --
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It comes out of a newspaper?
 6 A. These?
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Yes.
 8 A. These are pictures from news outlets.
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Can someone give me any idea of the
 10 rough date?
 11 MR GREANEY: Not at the moment, sir.
 12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Do you remember when?
 13 A. Sir, there's no chance that I would have downloaded
 14 these before that attack.
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That's fine. Are they pictures that
 16 were put in the news after the bombing?
 17 A. Yes, yes. Salman -- the family were never in the news
 18 before the bombing.
 19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Right. We'll find out the date. Thank
 20 you.
 21 MR GREANEY: Did Salman Abedi ever tell you whether he had
 22 received any training during his trips to Libya?
 23 A. No.
 24 Q. I explained that I was going to ask you about
 25 Salman Abedi's path through life. Did there come a time

46

1 when you noticed a change in Salman Abedi?
 2 A. He was becoming a lot more mature, I guess. I mean, he
 3 wasn't on the same nonsense as smoking and stuff like
 4 that.
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: He became more mature, is that what you
 6 said?
 7 A. Yes, he wasn't... He wasn't as like ... Because before
 8 he used to like to go out and stuff like that, he wasn't
 9 like that. To me, he had started university, he used to
 10 be the main guy who helps his mother, but all of that
 11 was things that showed this guy's like moving on in his
 12 life, he doesn't want to mess about any more.
 13 MR GREANEY: Did he become more religious?
 14 A. Yes, he did start going to the mosque.
 15 Q. And was this a distinct change that you noticed, that
 16 previously he'd smoked, he'd gone out --
 17 A. No, it happens a lot. People --
 18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It may be does. Sorry, the question
 19 was: was this a distinct change in him that you noticed?
 20 So before you'd done lots of things together when you'd
 21 gone out --
 22 A. Yes, and then he stopped -- I carried on going to the
 23 gym, he stopped going to the gym. He didn't play
 24 football any more. I just -- I just started seeing less
 25 and less of him and if I didn't call him to see how

47

1 he was, I wouldn't hear from him.
 2 MR GREANEY: In part at least this was because he was
 3 becoming more religious, do you agree with me?
 4 A. At the time I didn't think it was because he was
 5 becoming more religious, I just thought, "This guy's
 6 taking life serious now and he doesn't want to mess
 7 about". I didn't think, oh, he's becoming...
 8 Q. I did read out to you that passage from your statement
 9 when you said:
 10 "When I started university I didn't see much of
 11 Salman as he became more religious."
 12 A. Yes, in the sense of he started to keep his five prayers
 13 and he just wasn't on the -- he wasn't doing the same
 14 things that I was, that we was doing together before.
 15 Q. Is it right, as you said in your statement, that he
 16 became more religious?
 17 A. Yes.
 18 Q. When?
 19 A. He started going to the mosque a lot more in my first
 20 year of university, which is 2016.
 21 Q. This is the kind of thing that I would like you to help
 22 us with. So about 2016, you note that he becomes more
 23 religious; is the answer yes?
 24 A. Yes.
 25 Q. And did he during that period, when he was becoming more

48

1 religious , express any extremist views to you?
 2 A. No.
 3 Q. Did him becoming more religious coincide with contact
 4 he was having with a man called Abdalraouf Abdallah?
 5 A. I wouldn't know. I wouldn't know.
 6 Q. Do you know a man called Abdalraouf Abdallah?
 7 A. Yes, I do.
 8 Q. When did you first meet him?
 9 A. Same as Salman, the same community, round the same area,
 10 same heritage.
 11 Q. When did you first meet Abdalraouf Abdallah? Which
 12 year?
 13 A. Oh, I've known Abdalraouf since we were young.
 14 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: He's not the same age as you, is he?
 15 A. Who?
 16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Abdallah.
 17 A. He's closer to me than Salman is. I think there's --
 18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You're how old?
 19 A. 29.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: How old is Abdallah?
 21 A. He's a year younger than me, I think.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 23 MR GREANEY: At all events, you had known him for years?
 24 A. Yes.
 25 Q. As you said, you came from the same community. Was he

49

1 someone that you were friendly with?
 2 A. Yes.
 3 Q. Did you know that he travelled to Libya to fight in the
 4 civil war?
 5 A. Yes.
 6 Q. Did you know that he sustained life-changing injuries as
 7 a result?
 8 A. Yes.
 9 Q. And as a result, within your group of friends, did he
 10 become something of a hero?
 11 A. Not really. I wouldn't classify him as a hero.
 12 Q. Did he hold extremist views?
 13 A. I don't know.
 14 Q. On 26 February --
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Do you mind if I look at that slightly
 16 more?
 17 You and Mr Greaney may disagree about what extremist
 18 views are. Did you discuss with him, Abdallah, anything
 19 to do with what was going on in Syria and the bombings
 20 in Syria and things like that?
 21 A. No, sir. I mean, my relationship with him was, after he
 22 sustained his injuries, was just -- I felt very sorry
 23 for my friend, he was in a wheelchair, so it was that
 24 kind of thing.
 25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Just leaving that bit aside, when you

50

1 were talking, we've seen the email you sent to that
 2 lady, were you all talking among your group about
 3 what was happening in Syria and the bombings and the
 4 people dying in the bombings? Was that the topic of
 5 discussion?
 6 A. Sir, we spoke about many things.
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Was that one of them?
 8 A. It would have come up. I can't say -- I can't remember
 9 specific conversations where we were talking about
 10 Syria, but it was something that would probably come up
 11 and we would talk about it.
 12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And the regime in Syria, was that
 13 something you talked about? He'd gone out to fight out
 14 there, hadn't he? Sorry, Libya. Did you talk about the
 15 regime in Syria?
 16 A. Our topics were like -- it was like a broad thing. Say
 17 something was on the news on the day, maybe we would
 18 discuss that, but it was nothing, like, into specific
 19 details and things like that.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Is it something you consider to be
 21 wrong, the bombing going on in Syria and the people
 22 dying in Syria?
 23 A. What, civilians?
 24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Yes.
 25 A. Of course.

51

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And something you felt strongly about,
 2 them being Muslims like you?
 3 A. I just thought that awareness should be raised about
 4 what this dictator's doing, yes.
 5 MR GREANEY: So where you reached with the chairman is that
 6 it is likely that you had conversations with
 7 Abdalraouf Abdallah about Syria?
 8 A. Yes, it wouldn't be -- I wouldn't be surprised
 9 if we did, yes.
 10 Q. It would be surprising if you didn't, wouldn't it?
 11 A. Not really. We have so many things we talk about: we
 12 talk about football, we talk about girls, we talk about
 13 just what any young lads would talk about. We're not
 14 sitting -- and this will be in cafés or in a Subway
 15 restaurant or something. It was a social thing.
 16 Q. As it turned out during this period, Abdallah was part
 17 of a terrorist group in Manchester, holding extreme
 18 views.
 19 A. What terrorist group in Manchester?
 20 Q. As the Court of Appeal was to describe it, he was
 21 effectively the head of a terrorist group in Manchester
 22 that was promoting travel of fighters to Syria to fight
 23 for an extreme Islamist cause.
 24 A. I didn't know that, no.
 25 Q. So in the conversations that you were having with him,

52

1 we know that he is holding these extremist views, he
 2 didn't ever mention anything about them to you?
 3 A. He never expressed extremist views to me.
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: He never tried to encourage you to go to
 5 Syria to fight?
 6 A. Never, sir.
 7 MR GREANEY: I have suggested he was committing terrorist
 8 offences and I'm on firm ground because he was convicted
 9 of such offences.
 10 A. Yes.
 11 Q. But on 26 February 2015, he hadn't yet been convicted
 12 but he was in custody awaiting his trial at Belmarsh.
 13 A. That's true.
 14 Q. On that date you went to visit him, did you not?
 15 A. Um, yes.
 16 Q. And you were with Salman Abedi when you did so?
 17 A. Yes.
 18 Q. Did the two of you, you and Abedi, travel to south—east
 19 London, where Belmarsh is, together?
 20 A. Yes.
 21 Q. By train, by car?
 22 A. By car.
 23 Q. Was it just the two of you?
 24 A. No. Our driver was Mr Forjani.
 25 Q. So there are three of you there in the car?

53

1 A. There was at least three. I can't remember if there was
 2 a fourth guy or not, I honestly can't remember.
 3 Q. Three or four, two of those being you and Abedi. Did
 4 you travel from Manchester to south—east London?
 5 A. Yes.
 6 Q. You visited Abdallah for about an hour and a half,
 7 am I right?
 8 A. We visited him. This was 6 years ago now, like,
 9 I don't ... I don't recollect the period, how long it
 10 was, but yes, we did visit him.
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I shouldn't think you've been to
 12 Belmarsh too often, have you? Is that the only time?
 13 A. That's the only time I've ever been.
 14 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That might make things come back to you
 15 more clearly if it's the only time you've been there.
 16 A. It's the only time I've been, sir, but I couldn't tell
 17 you the duration.
 18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay.
 19 A. But we did visit him.
 20 MR GREANEY: It's about an hour and a half because we have
 21 the record from the prison.
 22 And did the group that you were part of then travel
 23 in the same car from London back to Manchester?
 24 A. That's true.
 25 Q. So you, a day in the company of Salman Abedi, and some

54

1 of that spent with Abdallah.
 2 As you will know, I suspect, Abdalraouf Abdallah is
 3 considered, by an expert instructed by the inquiry, to
 4 have played at least a part in radicalising
 5 Salman Abedi. So it's important for us to understand
 6 what was discussed during the course of that visit to
 7 him. So enlighten us, please. What was discussed?
 8 A. We were just saying, how are you, are you keeping well,
 9 is everything all right. We had two prison officers
 10 standing on either side of us the whole time, listening
 11 in. It was a very social visit. There wasn't any other
 12 visits going on around us. It was monitored.
 13 Q. Did you talk about religion?
 14 A. No, no, we didn't.
 15 Q. Did you talk about politics or geopolitics, for example
 16 what was happening in Syria?
 17 A. No.
 18 Q. Did you speak about his crimes?
 19 A. No, no. It was very, very social like I said and I'm
 20 sure that it was probably even recorded because of being
 21 such a high—profile prisoner, they didn't just let us
 22 sit with him, they put like a guard or two the whole
 23 time next to us, listening in. We weren't allowed to
 24 talk to him in our own language, we had to speak in
 25 English.

55

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: How long had he been in prison by the
 2 time you saw him?
 3 A. I don't know, sir. I don't know. I know he was just
 4 under remand and he was released after that.
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Did it come as a shock to you that he'd
 6 been arrested and locked up?
 7 A. I didn't know the details, I didn't know the details of
 8 why he was arrested. I just thought: this is my friend
 9 and —
 10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm not criticising you for going to
 11 visit him as your friend. I'm just wondering, did you
 12 ask him why he was there or whether he'd done anything
 13 or anything like that during the discussion?
 14 A. He told me his solicitors advised him not to talk about
 15 it. Obviously we were very curious —
 16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So you remember that detail of the
 17 conversation?
 18 A. No, I remember — even after it, he was very careful
 19 about what he did. He didn't speak about things with
 20 us, even after he was released, because his solicitors
 21 told him to be careful.
 22 MR GREANEY: When I use terms like radicalise or groom, do
 23 you understand what I'm talking about?
 24 A. I think so, yes.
 25 Q. And during that meeting that you had with Mr Abdallah,

56

1 did he do anything that you would regard as an attempt
2 to radicalise you or Salman Abedi?
3 A. No, no.
4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Were you as a group generally, you
5 Libyans there, were you angry about what was happening
6 in Syria and the bombing going on in Syria?
7 A. I wasn't angry, I just thought it was pretty horrific
8 what was happening there. I read the news a lot, but it
9 was never a thing of, like, "We need to do something",
10 just we need to maybe raise awareness. Nothing I was
11 extremely passionate about, it wasn't the main focus of
12 my life.
13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Who did you blame for it?
14 A. For?
15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: The bombing, the killing of innocent
16 people apparently in Syria.
17 A. The dictator, the ruler, the president.
18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Assad?
19 A. Yes.
20 MR GREANEY: So there was a visit, it was, I think you are
21 saying to us, just social chit-chat, nothing about
22 politics or religion and no attempt to groom?
23 A. I don't think he would have been able to get away with
24 saying we wanted to talk about politics, we wouldn't
25 have been able. Like I said, the visit was very, very

57

1 strict. There wasn't very many rules but there was
2 cameras, there was a person standing next to us, right
3 next to us. Each table had someone stood there from the
4 prison.
5 Q. After Mr Abdallah had been convicted, did you keep in
6 touch with him by post?
7 A. I sent him a letter, maybe, or two. I didn't go to
8 visit again when he was convicted.
9 Q. I think to my question, "Did you keep in touch with him
10 by post", the answer is yes?
11 A. I said I sent a letter or two, I answered your question.
12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I don't think you're actually at odds
13 about this.
14 MR GREANEY: I don't think so either.
15 The reason I thought I was on firm ground asking you
16 the question was because we have an example of a letter
17 you wrote. So could we look at that together, please?
18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Is it an example or did you only write
19 one letter?
20 A. Honestly, sir, I can't remember. I guess if that's the
21 only letter that's been presented, then it's the only
22 one, because the police have done a thorough research.
23 MR GREANEY: We'll go back to the statement. Certainly
24 in the statement he indicates he sent more than one
25 letter. At all events we have a letter.

58

1 A. I'm sure the police would have brought all the letters
2 that I sent.
3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: They may not find all of them.
4 Obviously you're the person who knows whether you wrote
5 more than one. Don't worry about it, let's just look at
6 the one.
7 MR GREANEY: Do you mind if we look at that one? It's at
8 divider 4. Would you turn it up, please?
9 I'm not going to read all of it out, but I'm just
10 going to take you to the paragraph that starts "I miss"
11 and this is {INQ033836/1}.
12 We can put this on the screen, Mr Lopez, so that
13 those who are watching can see.
14 Page 4 {INQ033836/4}.
15 By this stage, Mr Abdallah is at Altcourse, having
16 been convicted. You wrote to him:
17 "I miss you, bro, and think about you all the time.
18 It's sad to even go past yours. I remember all our
19 chills outside your place. I still keep the copy of the
20 Koran you gave me. Every time I open it (rarely)
21 I remember you, laugh out loud. May Allah reward you."
22 So you said:
23 "I miss you, bro, and think about you all the time."
24 Would it be reasonable to suggest that that
25 indicates a degree of closeness between you and

59

1 Abdalraouf Abdallah?
2 A. He was a friend of mine and I sent him this letter to
3 try and, like, support him, to try and make him think
4 that there's people thinking about it, that he's not on
5 his own. It was just a letter to support a friend of
6 mine.
7 Q. Was it true that you missed him?
8 A. I felt sorry for him.
9 Q. Was it true that you thought about him all the time?
10 A. Mate, I'm trying to be nice to him on a letter. I'm
11 sending a letter to a prisoner. I'm sure you exaggerate
12 emotions, you try to make the person feel comfortable,
13 you try to make the person — make his time go a bit
14 easier.
15 Q. By this stage, of course, you would have known what he
16 had been convicted of, terrorist offences?
17 A. I didn't look into it too much. It wasn't something
18 that really interested me but I knew he was a convicted
19 terrorist now, yes.
20 Q. And did you share his violent Islamist extremist
21 mindset?
22 A. You've already asked me that question and I told you
23 I don't have any extremist views.
24 Q. Let's move this along.
25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I have read it all and I understand the

60

1 full context. It's fair to say there is no suggestion
 2 about anything radical.
 3 A. Such is the nature of our relationship .
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I have read the whole letter.
 5 Thank you.
 6 MR GREANEY: I hope I haven't in any way overstated it.
 7 I specifically drew attention to the fact that there was
 8 a reference to rarely opening the Koran.
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm not suggesting you were; I'm just
 10 indicating I've read it all .
 11 MR GREANEY: Let's move things along in the hope that your
 12 evidence can finish reasonably soon.
 13 I'm going to turn to the month or so before the
 14 arena attack. So we're going to start around the middle
 15 of April. During that period, you used a phone with
 16 a number ending 9939, didn't you?
 17 A. That was my number, registered to my name. A contract
 18 SIM.
 19 Q. Are you telling me that on the basis that you'd be
 20 hardly like to use your own phone to get involved in
 21 crime?
 22 A. I'm telling you what the facts are.
 23 Q. The fact I was interested in is in this period, your
 24 number was one ending 9939?
 25 A. That's my number.

61

1 Q. And during that period from, let's say, 12 April
 2 you were in regular contact with Salman Abedi on that
 3 number, weren't you?
 4 A. That was the period where I had the fight.
 5 Q. Where you had?
 6 A. I had a fight and I called him that period, during that
 7 time, mid-April.
 8 Q. During that period, as I have indicated already, 12 to
 9 15 April, there were, the records reveal, a total of
 10 38 calls between your phone and Salman Abedi's phone.
 11 A. If the records say so, then it is so. Yeah, I was
 12 contacting him those days.
 13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Just so I get the picture, do we have
 14 the timings for them? I know from these records before
 15 you can get lots of things where there's no connection.
 16 MR GREANEY: They do exist, although they're not in this
 17 bundle. Let me put it in an accurate way.
 18 There were 38 contacts between you and Salman Abedi
 19 and you're not disputing that some, maybe many, of them
 20 led to conversations, are you?
 21 A. This is 5 years ago, 6, so ...
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You've agreed that you talked to him
 23 a lot.
 24 A. I did talk to him, I was in contact with him and I even
 25 him. I seen him that period, I seen him the day before

62

1 he left for Libya. I am not disputing that, I am saying
 2 when you are asking about specific numbers and times
 3 (overspeaking) whether a phone call went through or not.
 4 How am I supposed to recall, sir?
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You're not.
 6 MR COOPER: If it assists you, sir, in due course, document
 7 {IN030727/1} will assist on this.
 8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm grateful, thank you.
 9 MR GREANEY: At the moment all I'm keen to agree about is
 10 there was substantial contact between your phones over
 11 that period and you've agreed with that.
 12 That period, 12 to 15 April, is an important one, as
 13 you will know, because on 13 April the Abedi brothers
 14 acquired a car, a Nissan Micra, and you know that, don't
 15 you?
 16 A. Yes.
 17 Q. That was the car that was used to store the explosive
 18 used in the attack whilst they were in Libya. You know
 19 that too now, don't you?
 20 A. I know that now, yes.
 21 Q. And obviously, therefore, it was an important part of
 22 their plans. And do you agree that you played
 23 an important role in the acquisition of that vehicle?
 24 A. I acquired it. I was the one that helped them acquire
 25 it. I took them there to acquire it.

63

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Do you mind pulling that down? I'm not
 2 trying — thank you. It's just more difficult to hear
 3 you.
 4 MR GREANEY: You say you acquired it and I want to
 5 understand precisely what you did. Did you make a phone
 6 call to the person selling the car?
 7 A. Yes. I found the advert as well.
 8 Q. You found the advert and you called the vendor?
 9 A. Yes.
 10 Q. Both Salman and Hashem had telephones, didn't they?
 11 A. Yes.
 12 Q. So why was it that it was for you to call the vendor?
 13 A. Well, they didn't ask me to, I offered, and when I was
 14 offering them, I'll do it because I can — they were
 15 around me that day because of the fight and I can hear
 16 they're trying to acquire a car. So as a favour to my
 17 friend for helping me out that day and because he's
 18 leaving, I was trying my best to say to him, "I'll find
 19 you the car". He kept on saying, "No, I've got someone
 20 else who will take me, I don't need you", and I would
 21 say to him, "No, mate, I'm doing this for you as
 22 a favour".
 23 Q. So you were doing it as a good friend?
 24 A. Yes, and I wasn't asked to, I offered. I strongly
 25 offered, they resisted it strongly, but I insisted.

64

1 Q. So you overheard them talking about getting a car and
 2 you said, "Look lads, I'm going to take this over, I'm
 3 going to find one, I'm going to call the vendor"?

4 A. And they were trying to look for some as well on their
 5 own handsets.

6 Q. And am I right that, having spoken to the vendor, you
 7 drove them over to collect the vehicle, didn't you?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. And you remained there whilst they did so?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Did you become aware that they decided to buy that car?

12 A. They bought it when I was there.

13 Q. Did you know, as all of this was taking place, that the
 14 two brothers were departing the UK for Libya within
 15 days?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. And so did you wonder why it was that they wanted a car?

18 A. I didn't question it too much, but I did ask, like, why
 19 would somebody be buying a car if they're leaving and
 20 they said they needed a car for their last few errands
 21 before they leave.

22 Q. Were you suspicious in any way about why they wanted
 23 a car?

24 A. No, no. Not in any way.

25 Q. Literally within a couple of days they were going to be

65

1 departing the country and who knows when they were
 2 coming back.

3 A. I did question that, but I didn't find it suspicious, it
 4 just baffled me that if you're leaving the country, why
 5 would you be buying a car. But at the end of the day it
 6 was only a £100 car and they could leave it with their
 7 brother, I don't know what they were going to do to it.
 8 They just said to me -- their question was -- their
 9 answer was -- his answer, Salman's answer, was, "I need
 10 it for my last few errands for me and my family". And
 11 it made sense because if someone's leaving the country
 12 for good, they've got bits and bobs to do, to finalise
 13 their stuff and leave. I questioned it but I didn't
 14 find it suspicious.

15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Is that what they were telling you, that
 16 they were leaving the country for good?

17 A. Yes, they were --

18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: They said they're not coming back?

19 A. Yes, they were moving over to live with their family
 20 over there.

21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And they needed a car to do the last few
 22 jobs before they --

23 A. No, the family came over from Libya to basically take
 24 them home, so it was like errands and -- they explained,
 25 "I need to drop off my dad here, I need to take my mum

66

1 to get a few bits before she goes back", because there
 2 are a lot of things that are available in England that
 3 are not available back there.

4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Did you have a car?

5 A. Yes.

6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Did you not say: well you, can borrow
 7 mine if you just have a couple of jobs to do?

8 A. I use my car every day, sir, and I'm insured on it.

9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: All right, so not available. Thank you
 10 very much.

11 MR GREANEY: In all events you knew that they were leaving,
 12 as you thought, for good within days?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. You were a bit baffled why they wanted a car but, as you
 15 told us, you weren't suspicious?

16 A. No, I wasn't suspicious at all.

17 Q. Did you -- I have to ask you this question even though
 18 I know what your answer will be. Did you know anything
 19 of their plans when you assisted them to acquire the car
 20 that they used to store the explosives?

21 A. I had no idea or else I wouldn't have used the Gumtree
 22 that's on my account, on my personal number. I was just
 23 trying to help a friend.

24 Q. Whilst the --

25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Do you mind if I just ask something?

67

1 We've heard from a police officer about -- and I'm not
 2 suggesting you're involved, so please don't think it,
 3 I'm just asking whether you knew about this, that
 4 sometimes cars were used in order to store illicit goods
 5 such as drugs. Were you aware of that?

6 A. No, not really, but I didn't think --

7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Things called stash cars?

8 A. Everyone knows what a stash is, yeah, but people stash
 9 anywhere. At the time, Salman hated drugs, so that
 10 didn't like -- because I used to smoke and he used to
 11 always tell me, "Stop, stop". On that day itself, like,
 12 they weren't too happy because I was dropping them off
 13 and I was smoking.

14 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I just wonder whether you knew that
 15 people did use cars to store illegal objects.

16 A. I know people use cars to store objects, but it didn't
 17 cross my mind that these guys are going to use it for
 18 drugs or anything because they were so against me even
 19 smoking a cigarette.

20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That applied to Hashem too, did it?

21 A. Yes.

22 MR GREANEY: You've been very clear that your understanding
 23 was that they just wanted this vehicle for a couple of
 24 days to run some errands before leaving the country.

25 A. Yes.

68

1 Q. What we now know, and I believe you will know, is that
 2 once the brothers departed the UK, the Micra was left in
 3 the car park at Devell House. You know that, don't you?
 4 A. Yes.
 5 Q. And did you know at the time the car was there that
 6 that is where it was?
 7 A. Yes, yes.
 8 Q. How did you know that?
 9 A. Um... I used to go to Devell House anyway and I would
 10 see it there but I never questioned it or anything. He
 11 left and he was leaving his car there.
 12 Q. Did either Salman or Hashem say to you that is where the
 13 car is going to be?
 14 A. No. They didn't tell me they were leaving it there.
 15 I recognised the car -- when I was going through the car
 16 park, I'd recognise the car and I knew one of Salman's
 17 mates lived in that block, so he maybe asked a friend to
 18 leave the car there for him. He didn't tell me where
 19 he was leaving it.
 20 Q. Did you have anything to do though with the arrangement
 21 by which the car was left there?
 22 A. No, no, my friendship with the person who lives there is
 23 not...
 24 Q. Do you know a man called Elyas Blidi?
 25 A. I don't know him, no.

69

1 Q. You don't?
 2 A. He's not a friend of mine. He's not a friend of mine.
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Do you know of him? You know the name?
 4 A. I know the name, yeah.
 5 MR GREANEY: What we know is at the time we're talking
 6 about, so April and May of 2017, he lived at
 7 Devell House.
 8 A. Yes.
 9 Q. Did you know that?
 10 A. There was him and another Elyas. I didn't know whose
 11 flat it was, I just knew that these guys lived there and
 12 I would go up there sometimes.
 13 Q. And the evidence reveals, as I recall it, that
 14 Elyas Blidi was the person who gave the Abedis
 15 permission to store the car in the car park. You can
 16 take that from me maybe.
 17 A. Okay.
 18 Q. Between 13 and 15 April, there was no contact between
 19 your 9939 phone and Blidi's phone, okay?
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Did you mean that, Blidi's phone?
 21 MR GREANEY: I did. There was no contact between the two
 22 phones. But there was repeated contact between
 23 a number 1876 and Blidi's phone.
 24 A. Yes. That's my mother's number.
 25 Q. And it's your mum's number.

70

1 A. Mm--hm. Still my mother's number today.
 2 Q. I don't suppose your mum was particularly friendly with
 3 Blidi, was she?
 4 A. No. Maybe one of my siblings was a friend of his.
 5 Q. And that was you, was it, using her phone to call Blidi?
 6 A. I didn't have a relationship with Blidi. My sibling
 7 might have been his friend, but I wasn't Blidi's friend,
 8 no. I didn't really have contact with him and when I'd
 9 go up to the flat, I'd see him there, but we weren't
 10 associates. I didn't know him well at all.
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You were asked by the police about this
 12 presumably, were you?
 13 A. I wasn't really asked about Blidi, I was asked about the
 14 other Elyas.
 15 MR GREANEY: Would you go to divider 1, please, page 9.
 16 This is the witness statement. Do you see at the top of
 17 that page:
 18 "21876 is a phone that belongs to my mother but
 19 I used it then..."
 20 You're talking about April of 2017:
 21 "... on a regular basis if my battery was flat or if
 22 I had no credit left on my own phone. Any calls to
 23 capo..."
 24 And "capo" is the Elyas that you've been speaking
 25 about, Elyas Elmehti:

71

1 "... would have been made by me but I cannot recall
 2 why the calls were made or what was discussed."
 3 Let me just ask you again, now I've reminded you
 4 that you were using that number on a regular basis, were
 5 you the person in touch with Blidi on the 1876 number
 6 between 13 and 15 April?
 7 A. No, not me. Probably my brother.
 8 Q. I'll ask you the question, therefore, in an open way:
 9 were you, in those calls, making arrangements for the
 10 storage of the car at Devell House?
 11 A. If ... Would I not have to be close to Blidi for me to
 12 be able to ask him these questions? I wasn't --
 13 I didn't have such a relationship with Blidi to be in
 14 a position to ask him to store anything in his car park
 15 or not.
 16 Q. So if anyone were to suggest that you were using your
 17 mother's phone to conceal your identity as the caller,
 18 that would be wrong?
 19 A. Mate, if I wanted to conceal something, I wouldn't be
 20 using my mother's phone.
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So the answer is no.
 22 Just help me, and I suspect quite a lot of other
 23 people who may not be understanding, Elyas Elmehti lived
 24 at the same place, lived at Devell House?
 25 A. I don't know exactly where he lived but he was there

72

1 a lot. He was the guy that I was going to. I didn't
 2 really have a relationship with Blidi.
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Was Blidi in the same flat in
 4 Devell House?
 5 A. Yes.
 6 MR GREANEY: Sir, the evidential position is, I think,
 7 Blidi's flat, Elmehdi lives there.
 8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Lives in the flat?
 9 MR GREANEY: Lives in the flat or certainly spends a lot of
 10 time there. The arrangement for the storage of the
 11 vehicle at Devell House is made through the brokerage of
 12 those two men with whom the 1876 number is in contact --
 13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Sorry, there is information that Elmehdi
 14 was to do with the storage as well?
 15 MR GREANEY: Yes, there is, yes. In all events, I have
 16 asked my questions in an open way, the witness has said
 17 (overspeaking) --
 18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Absolutely, I just wanted to know so
 19 I could understand the context better.
 20 MR GREANEY: After the departure of Salman Abedi and
 21 Hashem Abedi from the country --
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I just want to ask him about something,
 23 I'm awfully sorry.
 24 MR GREANEY: No, not at all.
 25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So you were asked about that phone by

73

1 the police and you said it was not you using that phone,
 2 it must have been one of your siblings --
 3 A. No, I did use the phone. I did use it on an occasions.
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: But all the calls to Blidi would not
 5 have been from you?
 6 A. Not really. I don't have a relationship with Blidi,
 7 sir.
 8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No, no. Did you make any enquiries of
 9 you siblings as to whether they had been using the phone
 10 to ring Blidi?
 11 A. I didn't realise Blidi was being -- as he has told you,
 12 Blidi's phone was never on my -- I've never had contact
 13 from my personal phone. I didn't know Blidi's number.
 14 I knew Elyas Elmehdi and Elyas Elmehdi was closer to
 15 Blidi than I was, so why would Salman ask me to ask
 16 Blidi?
 17 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 18 MR GREANEY: I was moving us on again to the period after
 19 the brothers have left the UK and gone to Libya. Do you
 20 agree that during the period that they were in Libya,
 21 you had contact with Salman Abedi on a Libyan number?
 22 A. Yes.
 23 Q. Do you remember as well that the police asked you what
 24 the purpose or content of those calls was?
 25 A. Yes.

74

1 Q. Would you go to page 7, please, in the witness statement
 2 we were looking at, the very bottom of that page where
 3 you deal with these calls. You say:
 4 "All the conversations I had with Salman were
 5 entirely 100% social and they were mainly along the
 6 lines of him asking me how I was doing and was
 7 everything okay. I would have asked Salman how he was
 8 and how he was settling back down in Libya."
 9 And during this period, of course, we know that he
 10 and his brother had made the explosives, it was in the
 11 car at Devell House, and when you were speaking to him
 12 in Libya, did he seem just entirely normal or were you
 13 able to detect anything different about him?
 14 A. No, it was entirely normal. He was asking me just
 15 general questions about potential business ideas, things
 16 like that.
 17 Q. You go on to say about one of the calls while
 18 Salman Abedi was in Libya:
 19 "I do remember that during one call, Salman asked me
 20 if I could search how much sheep were for sale and could
 21 I get him some sheep to send to Libya. I thought the
 22 request was a bit strange and I think that Salman was
 23 asking the question to try and make some money off
 24 people as there are a lot of things that are a lot
 25 cheaper here in the UK compared to Libya. I never

75

1 searched the internet for or bought any sheep."
 2 Did you have any particular knowledge of or
 3 expertise in sheep such as to explain why he would call
 4 you about sheep?
 5 A. No, I didn't to be honest. He asked me for help, so I'm
 6 not going to say to him, "No, mate". Because I have
 7 said to him I'll have a look and I didn't even look. He
 8 said, somebody's looking for sheep over there -- and
 9 I've been asked before for many things by Libyans, like
 10 cars in the UK or tractors, because it's a lot cheaper
 11 here than it is over there.
 12 Q. The last message that Salman Abedi sent you from Libya
 13 reads:
 14 "Delete this number and delete the old chat."
 15 Why, bearing in mind that you had spoken only about
 16 social matters and the purchase of sheep, was it
 17 necessary for you to delete that number and delete the
 18 old chat?
 19 A. At the time it didn't really seem strange to me and
 20 I didn't even bother deleting it. I just said to him
 21 okay and I didn't delete the chat.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. When people ask you to delete
 23 messages, it's normally because they don't want anyone
 24 else to read the messages or read it because of some
 25 reason. Did that not occur to you?

76

1 A. No, sir, because the topic we were talking about, like,
2 it wasn't that sensitive and clearly I didn't even
3 bother deleting it because it didn't seem to me of any
4 significance and nobody looks at my phone anyway.
5 MR GREANEY: But you see the chairman's point? On the face
6 of what you have told us, there would be nothing
7 sinister, nothing to implicate you in any crime on that
8 phone, so do your best to explain to us why you
9 understood you were being told to delete not just the
10 chat but the very number itself.
11 A. In hindsight, now, clearly he wants to keep all his
12 conversations private. At the time, I didn't think much
13 of it, hence why I didn't even delete it. It was on my
14 phone when it was taken off me.
15 Q. And I will ask you the question and do so again in an
16 open way: was he telling you to remove traces of contact
17 with him because he had told you something of his plans?
18 A. No, no. That wasn't the case. It was just a social
19 conversation and I didn't even delete it.
20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It's not only the chat, is it, it's the
21 number? So it was almost either to stop you ringing him
22 again, that's why -- or so that people didn't realise
23 that you'd had contact with him or that he'd had contact
24 with you.
25 A. I mean, if I was trying to hide my contact with Salman,

77

1 would I not make sure I deleted it? Would I not
2 delete -- my phone --
3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We're not actually talking about you,
4 we're talking about Salman --
5 A. In hindsight, clearly he's trying to protect himself or
6 something. But at the time, I just thought, okay, I'll
7 delete it, and I didn't even delete it because I didn't
8 think much of it, a person asking me about sheep, and
9 the rest of the conversation, if you want to go through
10 it, is just very social conversation.
11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: He's a friend of yours, he might want to
12 ring you again.
13 A. It wasn't his number. I'm sure it was his mother's
14 number. So maybe that could have been the case, maybe
15 he didn't want me to have his mother's number.
16 MR GREANEY: Let's just think about this: you have suggested
17 he was giving you this instruction because he wanted to
18 protect himself.
19 A. In hindsight.
20 Q. Did he need to protect himself bearing in mind he was
21 going to kill himself with a month?
22 A. I don't know, mate, I'm not -- I don't know what -- he
23 just said, "Delete the number". I can't explain to you
24 what his intention specifically was.
25 Q. It might be suggested that the only person who was going

78

1 to be protected in that situation was you.
2 A. Why did I not delete the number? Why did I not delete
3 the chat then or the number?
4 Q. So what did you do? Did you hand the phone to the
5 police after the explosion?
6 A. No, I didn't. I had, a month before the bombing, over
7 a month before the bombing, to delete it, to delete any
8 sort of contact I had with Salman. I didn't do any such
9 thing.
10 Q. I asked a question. Presumably if you had nothing to
11 hide, you just handed your phone on the police after the
12 explosion?
13 A. Why would I?
14 Q. What did you do with your phone, Mr Taghdi, after the
15 attack?
16 A. Well, you brought Mr Balaam here last year and he
17 explained to you that he took the phone off me.
18 Q. That he took the phone?
19 A. Yes, he asked me for my phone because he wanted me to
20 revise. This was -- I don't know if you remember this,
21 Mr Chairman, he was in the inquiry.
22 Q. He did give evidence, yes --
23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Just remind me.
24 A. He made it clear in his evidence that I didn't offer him
25 my phone, he asked for my phone, and in fact when he

79

1 asked me for my phone, I didn't want to give it up
2 because that was my social life, but I listened to him
3 because I wanted to pass my exams.
4 MR GREANEY: I understand your explanation. But are the
5 facts also these, that in the aftermath of the arena
6 attack, you gave your phone, the phone with which you
7 had been in contact with Salman Abedi, to Mr Balaam and
8 got yourself a new phone?
9 A. I just got myself, yeah, a new phone.
10 Q. I'm going to turn next to the day after the arena
11 attack, so 23 May. I'm going to ask you about
12 a particular incident and seek your explanation for it.
13 Would you go, please, to divider 3 in the bundle.
14 We'll start at page 5. We can put this on the screen.
15 {INQ030360/5}.
16 We're going to be looking at some stills from CCTV
17 footage.
18 So 23.05.17:
19 "Shortly before 15.15, a blue Toyota Yaris pulls on
20 to the forecourt of the Shell service station on
21 Wilmslow Road."
22 Is that your vehicle?
23 A. Yes, it is.
24 Q. Within seconds, the suggestion is that you get out of
25 the driver's door and another man gets out of the front

80

1 passenger door. Do you agree that you are the person
 2 shortly before 15.15 on the 23rd getting out of that
 3 car?
 4 A. Yes.
 5 Q. Over the page to {INQ030360/6}, please.
 6 It reads:
 7 "Taghdi walks off the forecourt leaving the other
 8 male to put fuel in the Yaris. Taghdi appears to have
 9 a mobile phone in his left hand and be putting earphones
 10 in his ear."
 11 Next image:
 12 "Taghdi walks past the vehicle access gate of
 13 Devell House towards the pedestrian gate."
 14 And do you agree that what you were therefore doing
 15 was walking away from the petrol station towards and
 16 into the car park of Devell House?
 17 A. Yes.
 18 Q. Over the page, {INQ030360/7}, the top image, 15.16.37:
 19 "Taghdi comes into camera view from left to right,
 20 walking around the building line of Devell House."
 21 Is that you in the car park of Devell House?
 22 A. Yes. Sir, all this has been put to me before by the
 23 police, you know.
 24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Just listen to the question because
 25 I need to know the answers, okay? I know they may have

81

1 asked you before. Let's work through it and then you'll
 2 get plenty of chance to tell me, all right?
 3 MR GREANEY: I'm going to give you a fair chance to give an
 4 explanation of what we're seeing, but first of all
 5 everyone in this courtroom, particularly the chairman,
 6 needs to understand what the facts are.
 7 Go to page 8 {INQ030360/8}, next, please. You are
 8 still in the car park:
 9 "Taghdi continues past camera 12 towards the corner
 10 of the building. Once past this camera, the
 11 Nissan Micra would be in view in the corner of the car
 12 park."
 13 And then essentially, in the other images you are
 14 shown to turn around and walk back and return to your
 15 car.
 16 So you had, as you've agreed, go into the car park
 17 of Devell House?
 18 A. Yes, that was me.
 19 Q. You appear to be looking for something whilst you're in
 20 there; is that correct?
 21 A. I just wanted to see if the car's there.
 22 Q. You'd gone into the car park to see if the car -- do you
 23 mean the Micra?
 24 A. Yes.
 25 Q. See if the Micra was there where you'd seen it

82

1 previously?
 2 A. Yes.
 3 Q. So here's the fair opportunity to explain. Why?
 4 A. Because the documents here will say that around, I don't
 5 know, between 1 and 2 o'clock, an hour before, that's
 6 when Salman's name was released, and I didn't -- I was
 7 baffled because I thought Salman was still back home in
 8 Libya. Then things started to click slowly, slowly, and
 9 the car popped in my mind because I was the one who
 10 purchased the car. I thought, did he use this car
 11 in that attack? I went to see if the car was there,
 12 realised it was there and then I left.
 13 Q. Again, I'll ask you this question in an open way: was
 14 the reason why you went to the car park to check on the
 15 car because it had been your job to mind that vehicle?
 16 A. Why would I mind it if he's already dead?
 17 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I know it's difficult --
 18 A. Sorry, sir.
 19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: -- but don't ask a question back, just
 20 give the answer.
 21 A. No, no, I wasn't there to mind the car.
 22 MR GREANEY: Did you at any stage before Salman Abedi's name
 23 was released by the American media know anything of his
 24 plans?
 25 A. I didn't have a clue.

83

1 MR GREANEY: Sir, those are my questions, certainly at this
 2 stage. It's probably appropriate to have a break.
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It is.
 4 I'm sure we'll go back to it, but this Micra is just
 5 something, a £100 car, he just needed to drive around
 6 for some things before, and you were not suspicious
 7 about it at all?
 8 A. Sir, he didn't ask me to buy it.
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: But you were not suspicious about it at
 10 all?
 11 A. No, not until his name was released in the news.
 12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Why did it immediately come to your mind
 13 that it might have had something to do with the attack
 14 or be connected to the attack?
 15 A. Because then the question in my head was: he must have
 16 bought a car 2 days before he went away, for what I
 17 didn't know, so I thought he possibly drove the car
 18 there, he took the car with him. Bearing in mind
 19 I still didn't know Salman had been in England. To my
 20 understanding, until the American media released his
 21 name, the guy's with his family back in Libya.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We are going to have a break, because
 23 I need a break even if you don't, so a quarter of
 24 an hour.
 25 MR GREANEY: Thank you, sir.

84

1 (12.02 pm)
 2 (A short break)
 3 (12.23 pm)
 4 MR GREANEY: Sir, I've been told that some at the back of
 5 the courtroom are struggling to hear Mr Taghdi while he
 6 has his mask on.
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Are you happy -- you can take it off if
 8 you like. Put it under your chin a bit more if you
 9 wouldn't mind doing that.
 10 Just about timing, Mr Cooper, so you have some idea,
 11 we will need to break for lunch some time, but I also
 12 don't want you to have stop in 2 minutes. If we went on
 13 until about 1.30?
 14 Questions from MR COOPER
 15 MR COOPER: Of course, sir. I did check with my learned
 16 friend, in particular Mr Wright, about timings of this
 17 and I was told to -- obviously we wouldn't break at
 18 1 o'clock, subject to your view, sir.
 19 Obviously, Mr Taghdi, if there comes a time during
 20 my questions at any stage when you want a break, let me
 21 know and of course we will assist.
 22 I ask questions on behalf of the families. I want
 23 to start by asking you this. You know, don't you, that
 24 Salman Abedi and Hashem Abedi on the night of
 25 22 May 2017 murdered 22 people?

85

1 A. Yes.
 2 Q. They are murderers, aren't they?
 3 A. Yes.
 4 Q. And you're saying that you had no knowledge whatsoever
 5 of what they were doing or what they planned?
 6 A. Yes.
 7 Q. We'll come back to it. You were arrested, weren't you,
 8 on Saturday, attempting to get a flight to Vienna and
 9 then on to Palma and then back to the United Kingdom?
 10 A. Yes.
 11 Q. When did you buy that ticket? It was a return ticket,
 12 wasn't it?
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. When did you buy it?
 15 A. On Friday.
 16 Q. You knew, didn't you, when you bought it that you were
 17 due to appear in this inquiry today?
 18 A. Yes.
 19 Q. Did you inform your solicitors that you planned to
 20 travel?
 21 A. No.
 22 Q. I'm going from what's available --
 23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm always very concerned when we talk
 24 about conversations between a person and their own
 25 lawyer. I was just --

86

1 MR COOPER: I'm being very careful, but I'm extracting this
 2 from the judgment of Mr Justice Forbes --
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That's absolutely fine. You saw my mind
 4 moving.
 5 MR COOPER: I saw the reaction and I wanted to reassure the
 6 court that the only thing I'm referring to is
 7 paragraph 11 of Mr Justice Forbes' judgment, which
 8 I presumed was all right --
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It is all right.
 10 MR COOPER: -- at the weekend.
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Absolutely. It's publicly available.
 12 MR COOPER: Yes.
 13 It's apparent from that, Mr Taghdi, that you bought
 14 your ticket and planned to travel, you didn't tell your
 15 solicitors, did you?
 16 A. No.
 17 Q. Why not?
 18 A. I didn't see the reason.
 19 Q. Well, you were due, obviously, to be here today to give
 20 some very important evidence in the inquiry, weren't
 21 you?
 22 A. Yes.
 23 Q. And you knew there was concern that you remain, or at
 24 least make yourself available, within the jurisdiction
 25 to do that, you knew that was important, didn't you?

87

1 A. Yes.
 2 Q. Did you not think that if you were travelling, virtually
 3 days before you were due here, it would be a good idea
 4 to let your solicitors know that you were travelling?
 5 A. No.
 6 Q. Were you travelling in an attempt to avoid being here
 7 today?
 8 A. No.
 9 Q. You were going to your sister's, wasn't it, your sister
 10 in Vienna?
 11 A. No, she was with me. We were going together.
 12 Q. What were you planning to do in Vienna?
 13 A. Just a little break. We were going to go and take
 14 a hike in Slovakia, next door, just a day out.
 15 Q. And that was for a day, no doubt, because it was only
 16 3 days, you were then off to Palma, were you?
 17 A. Just for a transit to come here.
 18 Q. Do you understand why the timing of your trip for
 19 3 days, a rather packed agenda it seems, is to some
 20 suspicious? Do you understand why some might find the
 21 timing of your trip suspicious?
 22 A. Yes.
 23 Q. And why do you think some might find it suspicious?
 24 A. I don't know.
 25 Q. Well, you have just accepted, and you're not a silly

88

1 man, you're a bright lad, you accepted that some might
2 find it suspicious. Why do you think that that is the
3 case?
4 A. Because I've been locked in segregation for 3 days now,
5 so clearly people found it suspicious.
6 Q. No, no, my question was, and it was a very clear one,
7 why you think that your trip abroad, some might find
8 suspicious given the timing of it? And you said, yes,
9 you would agree with that, some might find it
10 suspicious. Why do you think, and I won't keep asking
11 the same question, last time, why do you think some
12 might find that suspicious?
13 A. I don't know.
14 Q. Can I suggest to you some might find it suspicious, as
15 well you know, because it was on the eve of you needing
16 to come here and give important evidence and they might
17 think that you are trying to do a runner, to use the
18 expression. What do you say about that?
19 A. I did book a return for the night before.
20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: But it would have been a good idea to
21 tell people you were going, otherwise to see you going
22 out of the country, even with a return ticket, so soon
23 before you're due to give evidence, and you haven't been
24 exactly — you've been a bit reluctant to give evidence,
25 haven't you, in any event — that we might consider that

89

1 to be like you were not intending to come back.
2 A. Sir, the offence that I would have breached is my
3 attendance on the 21st, so to my understanding if I go
4 out, if I fly out and fly back in, I haven't breached
5 anything.
6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It's quite a good idea to clear that
7 with your solicitor and let people know you're coming
8 back.
9 A. Sir, I'm a free man. I have a free will.
10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We'll move on from that.
11 MR COOPER: Were you concerned that your solicitor might
12 rightly say, "Don't go, it's too close to the hearing"?
13 A. No.
14 Q. You were trying to avoid giving evidence, weren't you?
15 A. No.
16 Q. All right. I want to go back, if I can, to the images
17 that you were shown by Mr Greaney at the start of your
18 examination this morning. I'm not sure how many of
19 these images can go on the screen. There's good reason
20 why not all of them can, but those that can go on the
21 screen, so that people can see, I'm not asking
22 a question in isolation, I'd invite them to go on the
23 screen, those that can.
24 My general question first is this: you accept, don't
25 you, all the images in the bundle that you've got and

90

1 that you've seen were on electronic devices associated
2 with you?
3 A. Yes.
4 Q. Do you have an interest, a general interest, for
5 instance, in firearms?
6 A. No.
7 Q. Do you have a general interest in warfare?
8 A. No.
9 Q. Do you have a general interest in armed struggle?
10 A. No.
11 Q. So before we look a little more at some of these images,
12 why are they on electronic devices associated with you?
13 A. I download many images, I read the news. The images are
14 not really of...
15 Q. So if we look closely at your electronic devices, we'll
16 find other images of the news and social affairs, would
17 we?
18 A. Yes.
19 Q. I see. So on the basis that you download images which
20 are associated with the news — and that's your
21 evidence, is it?
22 A. So I download all sorts of images, sometimes from the
23 news, sometimes from Google, it depends. I can't
24 specifically remember where I got these from.
25 Q. Why do you do that? Why do you download images on to

91

1 your electronic devices, what's the purpose of that?
2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Are you doing it so you can look at them
3 again?
4 A. I just save images, sir.
5 MR COOPER: Just what, sorry?
6 A. I just saved some images, sir.
7 Q. I'm not the most technologically sound, but even I know
8 that images are available without you having to save
9 them, general images, you simply flick on Google,
10 Wikipedia maybe, and there are the images. You don't
11 have to save them, do you?
12 A. Yes.
13 Q. No?
14 A. What's the question?
15 Q. The question is, you don't have to save them, do you?
16 Sorry, did my voice go quiet? Let me make it clear: you
17 don't have to save images, do you, just to look at them?
18 A. I still don't get your question.
19 Q. I'm sure you don't.
20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Let's understand. There is
21 a distinction between, or may be, someone looking on the
22 news and clicking on it on your phone and then you can
23 see it on your phone then. What's being suggested to
24 you is that doesn't save it, you have to do something
25 else.

92

1 A. Yes, I have to save the image myself, yes.
 2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So the question is why do that if it's
 3 not something which really interests you?
 4 A. It's just -- yeah, a bit of interest, like. Nothing --
 5 I can't -- genuinely can't recall why I saved these
 6 pictures. It's just general pictures that are available
 7 to anyone.
 8 MR COOPER: Oh, just a theme, is it, an interest you have of
 9 guns, warfare and weaponry?
 10 A. No, no, no.
 11 Q. Let's just have a look for instance at these images and
 12 examine your reason for saving them because you have
 13 just said they're just things you might be interested in
 14 in the news. {INQ037644/1}.
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Are you able to give us the number in
 16 the bundle?
 17 MR COOPER: I don't have the bundle.
 18 MR GREANEY: Divider 16.
 19 MR COOPER: (Overspeaking). Let's go to this image.
 20 {INQ037644/1}. Let's see it on the screen if
 21 we can, please, Mr Lopez. Thank you.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Have you got it, divider 16?
 23 A. Yes. The picture of -- yeah, 644.
 24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 25 MR COOPER: This is one of those images that you saw on the

93

1 news and felt that you'd just download out of general
 2 interest, is it?
 3 A. I downloaded it because I knew who these guys are.
 4 Q. Right. Did you not have pictures of them in less
 5 violent poses?
 6 A. Ismail's father is not in a violent pose and Hashem's in
 7 a violent pose. These are the pictures that were on the
 8 media. These are the pictures that the media used.
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: After the bombing?
 10 A. Yes, after the bombing.
 11 MR COOPER: I will press you one last time. Some again
 12 might find it suspicious, in terms of your ideology, as
 13 to why you feel the urge to download these pictures,
 14 particularly after this atrocity.
 15 A. There is no urge, I download -- well, because I'm really
 16 shocked that these guys were involved in the thing so
 17 I downloaded it and I've never seen them on the news
 18 before. It's people I knew.
 19 Q. If you were so shocked, and no doubt appalled, weren't
 20 you, that they were involved in this?
 21 A. I was appalled.
 22 Q. Their behaviour is disgraceful, isn't it?
 23 A. I was appalled and shocked, yes.
 24 Q. And it's certainly not in accordance with any decent
 25 religious text, is it, what they were doing?

94

1 A. No.
 2 Q. And you came --
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Sorry, I'm just concerned, because
 4 things do get reported. In relation to Hashem, he has
 5 been convicted of 22 murders. I understand that there
 6 are suspicions about Ramadan, but he has never been
 7 convicted of any offence arising out of it. I just make
 8 that clear.
 9 MR COOPER: These are suggestions that I'm making.
 10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm not criticising you, so that
 11 everybody understands.
 12 MR COOPER: Of course.
 13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Certainly in the case of Hashem, he has
 14 been convicted of 22 murders.
 15 MR COOPER: Hashem has been convicted of 22 murders and why
 16 do you even want to look at this man, this callous
 17 murderer?
 18 A. Hashem hadn't been convicted at that time. And when
 19 Salman -- I found out Salman was involved, I didn't
 20 realise that Hashem was involved with him up until
 21 obviously the news started to come out and he was
 22 arrested in Libya and stuff like that. I didn't know it
 23 was them two.
 24 Q. Nonetheless, after this atrocity has been announced, you
 25 soon after put Hashem's picture, save it, with him in

95

1 a violent pose with a weapon?
 2 A. Which is the only image that the media used of Hashem,
 3 violent with a weapon.
 4 Q. Because you agreed with extremist reactions?
 5 A. No.
 6 Q. And you were supportive, weren't you, of this awful
 7 atrocity to these people?
 8 A. No.
 9 Q. Let's look at another image, just you, I know it can't
 10 go on the screen. It's {INQ037660/1}.
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Divider 17, the next one.
 12 MR COOPER: Thank you, sir.
 13 Was this an image you saw on the news?
 14 A. Which one?
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Divider 17.
 16 A. I don't have a divider 17, sir.
 17 (Pause)
 18 MR COOPER: Is this an image from the news?
 19 A. I don't have a clue who that is. It's a male with
 20 tattoos.
 21 Q. Yes.
 22 A. I don't know where it's from, to be honest.
 23 Q. It's from one of your electronic devices.
 24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I think more importantly, he actually
 25 has a gun -- it looks like he has two, actually --

96

1 rather than the tattoos.
 2 A. Yes, I don't know why I saved this one. I don't recall.
 3 MR COOPER: Let's not move off it so quickly, Mr Taghdi.
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Presumably, the face, the identity of
 5 this person has been cut out for some good reason?
 6 MR GREANEY: Yes, it's a data protection issue, sir.
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Right. Do you think you might recognise
 8 him if you saw the whole thing?
 9 A. No, because I don't know somebody with tattoos like
 10 that.
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 12 MR COOPER: Why do you download it on to one of your
 13 electronic devices then?
 14 A. I don't know.
 15 Q. Are you in the habit of downloading photographs of young
 16 men with tattoos holding violent weaponry with one
 17 revolver stuck down his trousers?
 18 A. No, it's the only one I have, so ...
 19 Q. Why do you download that one?
 20 A. I can't recall.
 21 Q. What I'm developing with you is a theme with what you
 22 seem to be interested in downloading and it all seems to
 23 do, I suggest to you, with weaponry and warfare.
 24 Do you see?
 25 A. I have thousands of pictures on my phone and these are

97

1 the only pictures that I've been -- of weaponry and
 2 stuff.
 3 Q. You may indeed have, but I'm asking you --
 4 A. I don't recall. This was 2016. I wouldn't recall why
 5 I downloaded these pictures.
 6 Q. That's right, 2016, relatively shortly before this
 7 murderous attack by your friends.
 8 A. I don't know when it was, maybe it was even after that
 9 attack, I don't know.
 10 Q. Even after the attack, you put it in, did you?
 11 A. Yes.
 12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: He said he doesn't know.
 13 MR COOPER: I suggest you answer my questions, because the
 14 more you don't, the worse it may get.
 15 A. I'll answer your questions.
 16 Q. Here we have a picture, do you know who this is?
 17 17 July.
 18 A. No.
 19 Q. What is the possible interest of downloading a picture
 20 of a young man holding guns on to your phone? It's not
 21 a news item. So we can put to one side news item
 22 interests. Why do this?
 23 A. I don't know.
 24 Q. Do you find it exciting?
 25 A. No.

98

1 Q. It doesn't stop there, Mr Taghdi. Divider 18,
 2 I presume, {INQ037642/1}.
 3 This is again found on one of your electronic
 4 devices and there it is again: a man with a very, very
 5 dangerous-looking gun. Why did you download that?
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Let's stop for a moment. We can't show
 7 it. So everyone understands, this looks like it may be
 8 a picture of the military. I have no idea, but it's not
 9 an individual on his own.
 10 Do you know what it is?
 11 A. 18?
 12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Yes.
 13 A. I mean, I can't tell what country it's in, but... Yeah,
 14 they are in military uniform and they're not wearing all
 15 black or raising flags. I don't recall where it's from.
 16 MR COOPER: Before we go there, about whether they're
 17 wearing military uniform or not, terrorist and extremist
 18 organisations also wear what can look like paramilitary
 19 uniforms sometimes, can't they?
 20 A. I wouldn't know.
 21 Q. You wouldn't know? So we don't know one way or the
 22 other whether this is (overspeaking)?
 23 A. Maybe they are.
 24 Q. In any event, is this a news item or something? You saw
 25 this in a newspaper or online?

99

1 A. I do not recall.
 2 Q. No?
 3 A. I do not recall that I downloaded it, I don't know where
 4 I got it from.
 5 Q. It's on your electronic devices, what are you saying,
 6 someone else did?
 7 A. No, I'm not saying that. I am saying I don't recall the
 8 circumstances of me downloading these things.
 9 Q. If it was a one-off, maybe, but let's not waste too much
 10 -- let's go over the page and there it is again: sniper
 11 rifles. This is I presume, tab 19, {INQ037648/1}, and
 12 there we are, full picture. Men, and you're not going
 13 to suggest hopefully they are military, men with sniper
 14 rifles. How did that attract you such that it should be
 15 saved?
 16 A. I don't recall.
 17 Q. You don't recall?
 18 A. No.
 19 Q. I'm not going to detain the inquiry long with it. You
 20 don't recall it. Do you recall tab 20? {INQ037643/1}.
 21 Oh, there's a man with a rather dangerous-looking
 22 weapon. In your downloaded equipment, are you going to
 23 tell me you don't recall why you saved that as well?
 24 A. I don't recall why I saved these pictures, no.
 25 Q. Because I'm going to suggest to you, as we go through

100

1 this bundle of pictures of violent people with violent
 2 weapons, there's a bit of a trend here, isn't there, and
 3 that is you interested in violence and weapons?
 4 A. I download many pictures.
 5 Q. It's you interested in violence and weapons, isn't it?
 6 A. No.
 7 Q. No, all right. Unfortunately we don't stop there
 8 because we go to tab whatever it is, 21, is it?
 9 {INQ037650/1}. And we've rather upgraded the weaponry
 10 here, Mr Taghdi. We've got now some sort of, I don't
 11 know, I'm not into this sort of thing, I don't know how
 12 it can be described, it's a rather large machine gun
 13 with a man in a seat sitting behind it.
 14 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Perhaps an anti-aircraft gun.
 15 MR COOPER: Not my bag, as they say, sir. Let's assume it's
 16 an anti-aircraft gun. Rather a big piece of weaponry.
 17 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. What's the interest in this?
 18 A. Honestly, sir, I couldn't recall the exact circumstance,
 19 but like I said, I do read the news and anything I find
 20 interesting, I'll download, like any pictures.
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Can you give us any idea why you might
 22 have found this interesting?
 23 A. It's because -- I couldn't recall, honestly, like
 24 I don't want to make up an answer. This has been so
 25 long and like, I don't do this, I'm not really, I don't

101

1 really do this type of thing any more. In Libya they
 2 have similar, like, similar things and stuff like that.
 3 But I couldn't recall exactly the circumstances of me
 4 downloading it.
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: This could be a picture of Libya, could
 6 it?
 7 A. Potentially, yes. Potentially.
 8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: What you're being shown, I expect we've
 9 got more to come, is a number of pictures of things you
 10 saved and they have to be things you're interested in,
 11 you're not going to save things at random, are you?
 12 A. No, I wouldn't save things at random. Yes, articles
 13 I've read and pictures I've seen.
 14 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So they interested you at the time
 15 anyway?
 16 A. Yes, maybe at the time.
 17 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: But now you can't remember why they
 18 interested you?
 19 A. I don't know what year this was exactly. It's been so
 20 long.
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Cooper, I'm very happy for you to go
 22 through and show him all of them so you can make the
 23 point. You might get the same answer.
 24 MR COOPER: I want to pick up on something you said a moment
 25 ago to the chair:

102

1 "I don't do this type of thing any more."
 2 That's what you said a moment ago:
 3 "I don't do this type of thing any more."
 4 What do you mean, firstly, by "this type of thing"?
 5 A. I don't save images.
 6 Q. You don't save images at all now?
 7 A. No, I don't recall even saving these, but I can't deny
 8 that they're mine because they're found on my --
 9 Q. That's the point, Mr Taghdi --
 10 A. I don't even recall saving them.
 11 Q. I'll deal with this very swiftly because it's a slight
 12 change of pace. {INQ037645/1}. This is not just
 13 weaponry now, this is -- you tell me. You saved it.
 14 What is that image of? What does the flag say?
 15 Translate it for us.
 16 A. I just answered that to you before.
 17 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You have, but just remind Mr Cooper,
 18 will you?
 19 A. It says, "There's no God but Allah and Mohammed is His
 20 messenger."
 21 Q. And there are some people waving that flag, all dressed
 22 in black, with their faces covered with balaclava-type
 23 headgear, holding guns. Why did you save that?
 24 A. I can't recall actually the circumstances of why I'd
 25 save it. I'm a young Muslim, these are things that

103

1 people -- these people, some of them claim to be of my
 2 faith and stuff like that. So it's just general
 3 interest.
 4 Q. Can I suggest to you there are many, many thousands and
 5 millions of young Muslims, decent people, who don't
 6 think that they have to save photographs like this on
 7 their devices. Would you agree?
 8 A. I wouldn't know.
 9 Q. No. No, you wouldn't actually.
 10 Next, please, {INQ037646/1}. There we have, I'm not
 11 dealing with the weaponry here, but I am interested --
 12 there is a photograph of utter devastation, of
 13 a building, completely, it looks like, razed to the
 14 ground, with a photograph, with a picture in the corner
 15 of what looks like a Western soldier.
 16 A. No, it's not actually.
 17 Q. What is it then?
 18 A. I think that's Gaddafi's, possibly, old palace or
 19 something.
 20 Q. Thank you. I'll take that from you.
 21 A. That was knocked down by NATO, I think.
 22 Q. Why did you save that picture?
 23 A. I don't recall. I don't recall exactly.
 24 Q. Finally, {INQ037665/1}. Here are some photographs of
 25 people, one of them at least holding up a weapon, a gun,

104

1 all of them, it seems, with clenched fists. You saved
 2 that. Why did you save it?
 3 A. Um...
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Have you got it? Divider 24.
 5 A. Then again, it's just general interest, I guess.
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Help me with what it is, can you
 7 remember?
 8 A. I mean, from the uniform, what the people are wearing,
 9 I think it might be Yemen or something, and they had
 10 a revolution as well. So maybe because my country had
 11 a revolution, I'm interested in other revolutions,
 12 something along them lines.
 13 MR COOPER: I'll move on.
 14 Around about the time, 2016, 2017, what was your
 15 job? How were you earning your money?
 16 A. Working in a warehouse, a fast food warehouse that
 17 supplies restaurants.
 18 Q. And around 22 May 2017, what was your employment, if
 19 any?
 20 A. Yeah, I worked at a cash and carry.
 21 Q. You've been asked questions by Mr Greaney, Mr Taghdi,
 22 concerning your associations from the very beginning
 23 with Salman Abedi. I'm not going to go over old ground,
 24 but it is right, isn't it, that you have known -- and
 25 I'm taking this from your statement, we can remind

105

1 ourselves if we really have to, at {INQ030658/1} -- but
 2 you accept now, don't you, that you have known
 3 Salman Abedi since childhood and his family knew your
 4 family and your family knew his family and you were all
 5 part of the same Libyan community? That's from your
 6 statement. That's correct, isn't it?
 7 A. Yes, but I -- this whole inquiry has been on -- the
 8 titles of the news has said childhood friend, childhood
 9 friend. I wasn't his childhood friend. I knew who
 10 he was. I became his friend in 2015. Like, as in
 11 direct contact with him. Before he was just -- we were
 12 in the same community.
 13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So that everybody can properly
 14 understand, you have a period of close friendship?
 15 A. Yes.
 16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Tell me roughly the period over which
 17 that close friendship lasted?
 18 A. Like, maybe, early 2015 until to like, maybe, late 2016.
 19 Like just before -- because...
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That's before you go to university or
 21 when you've gone back? Did you start university in
 22 October 2016?
 23 A. Yes. So in university, like, I expected Salman to be --
 24 because he was supposed to be in his second year so
 25 I was expecting to see him in campus and I never used to

106

1 see him.
 2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So you were contacting him to say,
 3 "Where are you"?
 4 A. I contacted him a few times. Not where are you, but,
 5 "Are you on campus? Let's meet up", and stuff, because
 6 I'd just started university and I didn't have many
 7 friends.
 8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So close friendship over that period of
 9 time?
 10 A. Yes, but when I started my first year, that's like when
 11 I'd say --
 12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So September 2016 is really the end of
 13 your close friendship?
 14 A. I'd say even before then. I'd say -- no, we were still
 15 friends, I wouldn't say it was the end of the
 16 friendship, but we weren't doing things together
 17 regularly any more. We weren't --
 18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm sorry to take over.
 19 MR COOPER: Not at all, sir, absolutely.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: By the time we get to September 2016,
 21 we're getting closer to when the bombing takes place,
 22 and you'll have to bear in mind that the planning for
 23 this undoubtedly went on for some period of time
 24 beforehand.
 25 A. Yes, sir.

107

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Had he ever indicated to you that he was
 2 in effect a terrorist or he had radical views, that he
 3 hated this country and the people of this country,
 4 sufficient to blow up children?
 5 A. No, no, sir.
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Nothing at all?
 7 A. Never, no.
 8 MR COOPER: You say that the relationship between you and
 9 Salman Abedi drifted off after September 2016.
 10 I understand that's what you're saying, isn't it?
 11 A. Or even before maybe.
 12 Q. But we have, don't need to refer to it, {INQ030727/3},
 13 the intelligence that you and Salman Abedi communicated,
 14 56 calls between 20 November 2016 and 23 January 2017.
 15 So this is after the period you're telling the learned
 16 chair things calmed down a bit between you and him.
 17 56 calls. So can you help us, between 20 November 2016
 18 and 23 January 2017, what those 56 calls generally were
 19 about, of a man you say you were lessening your contact
 20 with?
 21 A. I didn't say I was lessening my contact, I didn't
 22 intentionally lessen my contact with him, I didn't see
 23 him as much, and he was a friend of mine, so those phone
 24 calls, a lot of them answered, a lot of them weren't, it
 25 was general chat.

108

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You'll have to help me because I don't
2 have the knowledge of this exhibit that you do. Are we
3 just talking about phone calls going from this witness
4 to Salman Abedi or both ways?
5 MR COOPER: As I understand it, they are both ways, but if
6 that can be clarified. As I understand it, they are
7 both ways.
8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So he is ringing you as well?
9 I understand you're trying to say, "Where are you", but
10 he rang you back from time to time?
11 A. I'm sure he did. Maybe it's to return calls, maybe -- I
12 mean, I am his friend as well, maybe he is calling to
13 ask about me.
14 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm just asking.
15 A. Yeah, yeah, like ... Sir, I don't know the specific
16 details. Obviously the records are very accurate, but
17 I couldn't tell you, my memory doesn't go that far,
18 honestly.
19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: But the suggestion is your friendship
20 went on much later and well on into 2017.
21 A. No, because I didn't really see him. I didn't have much
22 contact with him.
23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It's March 2017 you ask him to come and
24 help you with the fight you've had?
25 A. No, April.

109

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: April, thank you.
2 A. Mid-April, I think.
3 MR COOPER: We're aware and other evidence that we've seen
4 that, as time went on, Salman Abedi wasn't secretive
5 about his developing extremism concerning his attitude.
6 We've heard evidence for instance about his behaviour in
7 the mosque and how people noticed a difference. During
8 all the time you were with him, and indeed during these
9 56 calls and afterwards, did you notice any changes in
10 him?
11 A. Not really. Not in the way he was with me. But
12 he wasn't like -- he wasn't smoking any more and he
13 would go to the mosque, I think.
14 Q. I will press you a little more on this. This was a man
15 who wasn't hiding his radicalisation, according to some
16 evidence we've had. So can I suggest to you he wasn't
17 hiding it from you either.
18 A. I didn't have any idea of his views so clearly he was
19 hiding it.
20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We'll have to analyse the evidence of
21 his radicalisation, which we'll obviously do. But your
22 evidence is you had no idea, he never said anything?
23 A. He never indicated that he's, like, an extremist or --
24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And he never said things like, "It's
25 really awful, the way the allies are bombing people in

110

1 Syria", anything like that? Nothing said?
2 A. No, never.
3 MR COOPER: I'm not going to go into every single
4 communication that you had with people associated with
5 Salman Abedi, but I'm going to suggest generally first,
6 before I give you a few examples, that not only were you
7 in contact with Salman Abedi during 2016 and 2017, you
8 were also in contact with a number of people closely
9 associated with Salman Abedi and his family. Were you?
10 A. It wouldn't surprise me, yes. I don't know the specific
11 details, but...
12 Q. For instance, were you speaking to anyone in Libya
13 between 15 April 2017 and 1 May 2017, who was connected
14 to the Abedi family?
15 A. I spoke to Salman through his mum's phone directly but
16 I didn't speak to anyone from his family in Libya, no.
17 Q. Did you speak to not only Salman Abedi but Hashem Abedi
18 when they were in Libya?
19 A. No, I don't really have a relationship with Hashem.
20 Q. You spoke with Salman Abedi when he was in Libya, you've
21 given one example of the issue about sheep. What other
22 matters did you discuss with Salman Abedi when he was in
23 Libya?
24 A. I was looking through the evidence yesterday and I did
25 ask him if he was settled in or not. As a joke I said,

111

1 "Get married, mate", and stuff like that.
2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: By the time you talked to him, were you
3 aware of where the Micra was, that it was at
4 Devell House?
5 A. I knew where the Micra -- I don't know if I knew when
6 he was talking to him or not. I don't know how soon
7 I knew about the Micra.
8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I just wondered --
9 A. I think I knew about the Micra's location probably as
10 soon as he (overspeaking).
11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: As soon as he left?
12 A. Probably.
13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I just wonder whether you said to him,
14 "What's going to happen to the Micra"?
15 A. It wasn't such a concern to me, sir.
16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay.
17 MR COOPER: I'm going to come on to the Micra in a moment,
18 sir. I'm just dealing with general contacts as well of
19 people who may equally be associated with Salman Abedi.
20 Mr Abdallah was one of those. You knew that
21 Mr Abdallah knew Salman Abedi, didn't you?
22 A. Yes.
23 Q. When you saw Mr Abdallah, what did you know of the
24 relationship between Abdallah and Salman Abedi?
25 A. What, in the prison visit?

112

1 Q. Did you know they were close?
 2 A. Not really, they weren't that close. I was closer with
 3 Abdallah at the time when I went to visit him than
 4 Salman was close to him, because Abdallah is around the
 5 same age and I have known him since he was young.
 6 Q. And how did you get to know Mr Abdallah? How did your
 7 relationship with Mr Abdallah begin?
 8 A. Just the same area, same neighbourhood,
 9 South Manchester.
 10 Q. And during the time your relationship was developing
 11 with Mr Abdallah, did you know that also Salman Abedi's
 12 relationship was developing with Mr Abdallah?
 13 A. I mean, I stopped visiting Abdallah after conviction and
 14 he carried on, so clearly their relationship -- he
 15 maintained a relationship with him.
 16 Q. Is it not, I suggest, a little bit of a coincidence that
 17 both you and Salman Abedi seem to have a very close
 18 relationship with Mr Abdallah?
 19 A. Not a coincidence, no.
 20 Q. The reason it's not a coincidence is because all three
 21 of you knew full well what was going to happen on
 22 22 May?
 23 A. No.
 24 Q. No?
 25 A. No.

113

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We know Mr Abdallah was shot out in
 2 Libya when he was fighting against Gaddafi. You've
 3 already told us that within the Libyan community in
 4 Manchester, there were some pro-Gaddafi and some
 5 anti-Gaddafi; is that right.
 6 A. Yes.
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: More anti, would you say, or?
 8 A. Yeah, probably more anti because for most people, the
 9 reason they're here is because they have run away
 10 from him, kind of thing.
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So when he came back to this country,
 12 Mr Abdallah, with these awful injuries, was he a bit of
 13 a hero, particularly to the younger Libyans?
 14 A. Not really.
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You must have all felt pretty sorry for
 16 him?
 17 A. Obviously, my friend used to be able to walk, we can all
 18 walk, so I did have sympathy for him, but it wasn't like
 19 anybody in the community was looking up to this guy or
 20 anything. Many people went to fight, some died, some
 21 sustained injuries.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You're the same age as him, but
 23 of course there's a younger generation. Not even them,
 24 they didn't look up to him as a bit of a hero?
 25 A. Sir, we don't go to -- I don't know many from the

114

1 younger generation.
 2 MR COOPER: Remind me, how old are you, please?
 3 A. 29.
 4 Q. So you're much younger when you were visiting
 5 Mr Abdallah. What was it that a 19/20 year-old young
 6 man -- what was it that encouraged him to go to Belmarsh
 7 Prison to speak to a terrorist?
 8 A. I was -- I wasn't -- I don't know if you do maths --
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay, it may or may not be the best
 10 subject --
 11 MR COOPER: I always have trouble with it, Mr Taghdi.
 12 A. I wasn't 19 when I went to visit him, I was 24.
 13 MR COOPER: I didn't hear how old you were because you're
 14 mumbling a little. We'll move on.
 15 What was it of a young man at that time, with all
 16 the interests available to young people, that made one
 17 of his interests going to see a terrorist in prison?
 18 A. He was on remand, he wasn't convicted.
 19 Q. All right, going to see a terrorist.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: He's an alleged terrorist.
 21 MR COOPER: An alleged terrorist.
 22 A. He was my friend and I didn't visit him after he was
 23 convicted, not once.
 24 Q. Why not?
 25 A. Because I don't want anything to do that. I'm not proud

115

1 of anything he's done, I don't want to associate myself
 2 with these things.
 3 Q. Because of what he has been convicted of, he's an
 4 appalling man, isn't he?
 5 A. What he was convicted of is horrible and I don't want
 6 anything to do with it and I don't want to -- I'm trying
 7 to get on with my life. I don't want to get involved in
 8 any trouble, any mess.
 9 Q. When you were speaking with Mr Abdallah in Belmarsh,
 10 I think you said it was, you say that it was all general
 11 stuff and commented that there were prison guards there.
 12 A. Yes.
 13 Q. What language were you speaking with him in?
 14 A. English.
 15 Q. Are you sure it wasn't Arabic?
 16 A. I'm pretty sure we weren't allowed to talk Arabic.
 17 Q. No, but did you? But did you and he -- I ask you --
 18 A. I can't remember because it didn't really matter to me.
 19 I'll talk to him in Arabic or English, I had nothing --
 20 Q. It might not matter to you but the question is: did the
 21 prison officers (overspeaking)?
 22 A. I don't recall what language I exactly used. We use
 23 Arabic and English -- like sometimes in one sentence,
 24 sir, we'll use Arabic and English.
 25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I understand that. I'm doing the same

116

1 thing as was happening between you and Mr Cooper, I'm
2 talking over you.
3 A. Sorry.
4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It's much better if we have question and
5 answer, all right? Thank you.
6 MR COOPER: So you accept that during the course of the
7 conversation, as you've indicated, prison guards are
8 standing nearby, part of the conversation would have
9 been in Arabic?
10 A. They weren't standing nearby, they were standing right
11 next to us.
12 Q. All right. That's not my question though. Part of your
13 conversations with Mr Abdallah would be in Arabic?
14 A. Possibly.
15 Q. And it's highly likely, isn't it, I put it no higher
16 than that without knowledge, that the prison guards
17 wouldn't understand Arabic?
18 A. I don't know what the prison guards would understand or
19 not. I'm guessing the thing was recorded and a person
20 like Abdalraouf in such a high-profile prison, like —
21 would be monitored.
22 Q. I didn't mean to talk across you; I thought you'd
23 finished.
24 Let's talk about other individuals you may or may
25 not have known. What about Elyas Elmehdi? Do you know

117

1 him?
2 A. Yes.
3 Q. He's also a close associate of Salman Abedi, isn't he?
4 A. Yes.
5 Q. What do you know about Mr Elmehdi?
6 A. I knew of him. He was more — he was Salman's age
7 group. I sometimes... I wasn't very close to him, but
8 yeah, I did sometimes hang around him a few times.
9 Q. You spoke to him on the telephone, didn't you?
10 A. Yes. I would speak to him on the phone a few times,
11 yes.
12 Q. From, again, an analysis of your electronic equipment,
13 you were in touch with him via two of his numbers,
14 ending 7560 and 4234. Are those your numbers or his
15 numbers?
16 A. Ending in what?
17 Q. 7560 and 4234.
18 A. They're not my number.
19 Q. No, they're his, and you were communicating with them,
20 weren't you?
21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I doubt if he remembers the numbers.
22 A. I would have called him a few times.
23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: On two different numbers?
24 A. Perhaps he changed his number or something like that,
25 so ...

118

1 MR COOPER: What did you speak to him about?
2 A. I can't remember exactly, but it was definitely social.
3 Q. Do you know who Mohammed Suleman is?
4 A. No.
5 Q. Ever met him?
6 A. I don't know him.
7 Q. Ever spoken to him?
8 A. I don't know what he looks like, I've never spoken to
9 him, I've never met him.
10 Q. Right. I want to ask you a little about your bedroom.
11 A. My bedroom?
12 Q. Your bedroom. Various people, I don't speak for myself
13 obviously, have posters on their walls of their
14 favourite football team or their favourite singer or
15 celebrity.
16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Or the Convention of Human Rights.
17 MR COOPER: Or the Convention of Human Rights. What's not
18 to like, sir?
19 What was on the walls of your bedroom?
20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: What posters did you have on your wall?
21 A. I'm not really a poster guy.
22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: What did you have on the wall?
23 A. I didn't have any posters.
24 MR COOPER: You had ISIS flags on your wall, didn't you?
25 You had images of ISIS flags?

119

1 A. No.
2 Q. And soldiers?
3 A. No.
4 Q. I'm going to suggest to you, you did, and you are
5 denying that, are you?
6 A. I'm not denying anything, I don't have — I don't have
7 pictures —
8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Can we know the evidential basis for it?
9 MR COOPER: Of course. Can we go to an interview, which is
10 {INQ035338/11}. It's one of the interviews.
11 MR GREANEY: We don't have it in the bundle, I don't think.
12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Right, okay. I'm not sure why it's not
13 in the bundle.
14 MR GREANEY: If Mr Cooper can give the date and time of the
15 interview.
16 MR COOPER: It's {INQ035338/11}.
17 MR GREANEY: It's in divider 6. There are a number of
18 interviews in this divider. What I'm going to do is
19 to — is it just page 11?
20 MR COOPER: It's just page 11, yes.
21 (Handed)
22 MR GREANEY: Will Mr Cooper mind me identifying that this is
23 an interview of 8 June 2017, commenced at 17.34, and
24 lasted for 51 minutes?
25 MR COOPER: I'm grateful.

120

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Can I ascertain, it was in the bundle
2 that Mr Taghdi's had?
3 MR GREANEY: It was. It's a no-comment interview.
4 MR COOPER: It was in the evidence proposals as well, sir.
5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm not making any criticism.
6 I obviously need to make sure the witness had the
7 opportunity to see things.
8 MR COOPER: Indeed. Let me take you to it because on that
9 occasion, when the officer put it to you, you said, "No
10 comment". So let's give you another opportunity of
11 dealing with it. In this interview the officer says
12 this:
13 "There is a number of images on here Ahmed, do you
14 want to look through them?"
15 And you say:
16 "I've seen them."
17 The officer says:
18 "You've seen them? Okay. Can't help you out,
19 Ahmed. I mean this looks like your bedroom: ISIS flags,
20 ISIS soldiers. What's going on? What's going on?"
21 And you say, "No comment".
22 So perhaps I could invite you now to make a comment.
23 It seems that the officers have identified in your
24 bedroom, and you say, "I've seen them", so you accept
25 that you saw them, things looking like ISIS flags.

121

1 A. Sir, the officer's saying --- he goes --- so this is
2 a laptop, he's talking about a phone, there's a number
3 of images on here, "Do you want to go through them?"
4 He's not talking about my bedroom.
5 (Pause).
6 MR WRIGHT: 11 of 16 is the interview.
7 MR GREANEY: {INQ035338/11}. We can put it on the screen.
8 MR WRIGHT: It seems fairly clear that they're saying that
9 the device was found in what looks like his bedroom, not
10 that his bedroom is decked out in the way that's been
11 put.
12 MR COOPER: I take that. That may be so, sir. I certainly
13 take that observation, but I still go back, if I may, to
14 the officer's question under:
15 "I've seen them."
16 And the officer says:
17 "You've seen them. I mean this looks like your
18 bedroom, ISIS flags, ISIS soldiers. What's going on?"
19 There may well be a qualification which my learned
20 friend perfectly properly raises here, but here is the
21 officer indicating:
22 "I mean, this looks like your bedroom: ISIS flags,
23 ISIS soldiers."
24 MR GREANEY: Can I say, I'm certainly unaware of any
25 evidence that there were ISIS flags in this witness's

122

1 bedroom and whilst of course I can't say definitively,
2 I would be highly surprised if such evidence existed and
3 I didn't know of it.
4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Right. I have no doubt that this is
5 being watched by officers from GMP.
6 MR GREANEY: I have no doubt.
7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: If there is any evidence that these were
8 on the wall, we'd be grateful to hear from GMP as soon
9 as possible. Otherwise I will assume the answer is
10 right rather than the question and that these are things
11 which were on a computer found in a bedroom.
12 MR COOPER: Absolutely, but you can see from the question,
13 the way it's phrased by the officer how ---
14 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I can understand the misunderstanding,
15 but we obviously need to be fair to the witness.
16 MR COOPER: Of course. Let me move on from that subject to
17 clarification and move on now to the Micra, the
18 Nissan Micra, that you've been asked about. I want to
19 ask you a few more questions about that if I can.
20 Mr Greaney's covered, Mr Taghdi, a number of the
21 critical elements as far as that transaction is
22 concerned and you indicated that you did have suspicions
23 about this car and the purchase of it, but those
24 suspicions came after the atrocity at the arena. Do
25 I understand that correctly?

123

1 A. Yes.
2 Q. Again, during the course of you being involved with
3 getting the Micra and you were centrally involved,
4 weren't you, with the obtaining of the ---
5 A. I purchased the Micra.
6 Q. Did you get into the Micra, sit in it, touch it?
7 A. When we first purchased it, evidence showed that ---
8 I told the police that I don't remember touching it
9 because I didn't because I left (?) in my own car, but
10 everything showed I touched something in the car --- was
11 it on the exterior or something?
12 Q. When you knew that Salman and Hashem Abedi wanted to
13 purchase a car, why did you get involved?
14 A. Because they've just tried to help me with this fight
15 and I was with them after it and they were both talking
16 about buying a car, so as a return of favour, I was
17 offering them, let me buy you this car, let me buy you
18 this car. They resisted, they said to me, "We've
19 already got somebody who's going to take us". I said,
20 "No, mate, I'll take you, I'm going to do this for you",
21 that's all it was, because I was around them that day.
22 If I hadn't had a fight that day and called upon them,
23 I wouldn't have even know they wanted a car.
24 Q. You were aware at the time, weren't you, that
25 Salman Abedi and Hashem Abedi were relatively popular

124

1 people in the community?
 2 A. Not really.
 3 Q. Well, they weren't unpopular -- or were they?
 4 A. Like any other member of the community. Not everyone's
 5 together. We know that this person's from Libya, but
 6 no one's a hero, no one's popular or unpopular. We just
 7 know we're all Libyan and we live in Manchester.
 8 Q. There are a number of people, not just you, they could
 9 have asked to borrow a car off, aren't there, not just
 10 you?
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I think the point that's being made is
 12 they did have other friends apart from you, didn't they?
 13 A. I told you that day, I called them and I was around
 14 them. I think he already told me when I was trying to
 15 tell him, let me buy you the car, he was telling me, no,
 16 don't do it, like, don't buy me this car, I've already
 17 got people -- I've already got someone who will take me.
 18 But I insisted, unfortunately.
 19 MR COOPER: Did it not, and I'm not going to labour the
 20 point, it's been dealt with, so I'll leave it here: did
 21 it not strike you as a little bit excessive, however
 22 cheap the car was, simply that they were buying the car
 23 for minimal use? Did it not seem to you a little
 24 excessive?
 25 A. No, I wasn't thinking about the money of how cheap the

125

1 car was, it's like why do you even need a car, and they
 2 said obviously because their parents came over, they
 3 need to do a few things before they left to Libya, so
 4 I didn't really -- it made sense to me.
 5 Q. Let me be clear on this. What was it they said to you
 6 they needed the car for?
 7 A. I can't remember exactly, but I just know that their
 8 parents came from Libya, like, not long before that
 9 then, so I thought when you're leaving the country for
 10 good, I'm sure there's many things you need to finish
 11 and there's things you need to buy to take with you, so
 12 it was that kind of thing.
 13 Q. Didn't they even explain to you why they needed you to
 14 help getting a car?
 15 A. They didn't need me. I offered them. They didn't ask
 16 me to.
 17 Q. Whether you offered or whether they asked you to, did
 18 they give you any explanation?
 19 A. No, they just said to me, like I said, it's for the last
 20 few errands before we leave, it's to take my dad
 21 somewhere, drop him off, stuff like that, take my mum
 22 shopping, I don't know, general things.
 23 Q. Because you know now that car was used to carry certain
 24 materials which were central to this awful device?
 25 A. Yes. I didn't even know that -- when I went to check

126

1 the after the attack, I still didn't realise this was
 2 being used as a storage car. I only found that out
 3 after I was arrested and evidence was shown to me and
 4 stuff.
 5 Q. Did you know that, did you know that this car was going
 6 to be used to carry those materials?
 7 A. No.
 8 Q. You're telling the chair, are you, that you were given
 9 no explanation about the car and neither did you want
 10 one?
 11 A. I did get an explanation. They just told me that they
 12 needed it for their final few errands.
 13 Q. Was that perhaps because you'd been told by Hashem Abedi
 14 and Salman Abedi why this car was being purchased?
 15 A. Sir, what's he trying to say? I don't understand.
 16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: The answer is no, I think.
 17 A. No.
 18 MR COOPER: You went again to look for the Micra, didn't
 19 you, at 15.16 hours on 23 May --
 20 A. Yes.
 21 Q. -- 2017, attending at Devell House, and you look in the
 22 car park to see whether the Micra is still there?
 23 A. Yes.
 24 Q. Why did you say you were so interested to see whether
 25 the Micra was still there?

127

1 A. Because I just found out an hour before it that somebody
 2 I'd bought the Micra for has just done a murder, so I
 3 thought, "Has this Micra got anything to do with it?"
 4 I went there to see that the Micra was there, literally
 5 was there for 3 minutes, seen the Micra was there, felt
 6 relieved, and went back to university.
 7 Q. And when you heard of this atrocity, and we mark the
 8 timing and this is at 15.16 hours on 23 May, so very
 9 shortly after this, was that the first thing you did,
 10 was that your first reaction, to find out where the
 11 Micra was?
 12 A. No. I think -- I realised between 1 o'clock and
 13 2 o'clock, the media released the name of the
 14 perpetrator. It didn't hit me straightaway because I...
 15 I still didn't take it in, what had happened, and then
 16 a while after, it kicked in my head, this guy's got
 17 a Micra and he's left it here, that's why he's left it
 18 here.
 19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. You went to get petrol, or you
 20 stopped to get petrol, and you must have known there was
 21 a back way into the car park.
 22 A. No, I went -- I think -- I only went there because of
 23 the car to that area.
 24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay, that's why you went, you went to
 25 look at the car?

128

1 A. No, I wasn't going for (sic) the petrol station --
 2 I think probably I did need petrol as well.
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That's what I wanted to know. The
 4 purpose of your visit to that area --
 5 A. No, no, to look at -- to see if the car's there.
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Yes, okay. That's what I wanted to
 7 know. I think what people might be concerned to
 8 understand is this: you've assisted in the purchase of
 9 this car, as you've made clear, because you volunteered
 10 and you wanted to do that. But you were not suspicious
 11 about it? They said, "We've got a few chores to do",
 12 and that seemed perfectly -- don't bother to answer at
 13 the moment, we're still laying the groundwork for the
 14 question, all right? So you weren't suspicious about
 15 the fact that they just wanted it for a few things. So
 16 what made you think, why did you immediately think,
 17 after you'd heard that Salman was involved in the
 18 bombing, why did you suddenly think perhaps the Micra is
 19 involved when up until then you'd thought it was just
 20 for a few --
 21 A. Yes, I didn't have any idea these guys were going to
 22 carry out this act. So why would I -- if I didn't have
 23 a clue, why would I be concerned about the Micra? It
 24 was only after they carried out the act, I was concerned
 25 about the Micra because I thought, "I'm the person who

129

1 bought them this".
 2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. To some people it may look like
 3 that your concern about the Micra immediately after the
 4 bombing and you knew Salman was involved -- your concern
 5 might indicate that you did know beforehand what the
 6 Micra was for. Do you understand? That's what I want
 7 you to deal with.
 8 A. Yes, but I mean, I only went there after realising
 9 from -- after it was released on the news, between 1 and
 10 2 o'clock, it was released that it was Salman. And then
 11 after that, by an hour, I think an hour or two, less
 12 than 2 hours, I went to have a look at the Micra.
 13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Why would you think the Micra was
 14 involved?
 15 A. Obviously, then it was suspicious in my eyes. Clearly,
 16 this is why he let me buy this car because it's
 17 something to do with what he wanted to do. But then I
 18 went there and I seen the car, I thought, okay, the
 19 car's not involved, and I just left it. And then later
 20 on, when I was arrested, the police made me aware that
 21 this was used to store items and things like that.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay.
 23 Thank you, Mr Cooper.
 24 MR COOPER: When you heard of this atrocity for the first
 25 time and you heard, I presume, Salman Abedi's name being

130

1 connected to it; is that right?
 2 A. Yes.
 3 Q. You didn't hear about Hashem Abedi's name being
 4 connected to it?
 5 A. No.
 6 Q. Well, then, when you heard -- I'm just thinking about
 7 your initial reactions. When you heard of this
 8 atrocity, why didn't you try to ring Hashem Abedi,
 9 rather than go round and look for a car, and say,
 10 "Hashem, have you heard what's going on"?
 11 A. I didn't have a -- I... I'm not really friends with
 12 Hashem anyway and I don't think I even had his number,
 13 to be honest.
 14 Q. Or anyone in the Abedi family?
 15 A. I don't have relationships with -- I'm not close with
 16 the Abedi family. I was only close with Salman. That
 17 was my mate.
 18 Q. Can I suggest you don't have to be very close to anyone
 19 to be concerned, perhaps, that the name of the family is
 20 being used in connection with this atrocity. I'm
 21 suggesting to you -- and let me put it in stark terms --
 22 that there were far more priorities, if you have an
 23 innocent frame of mind, than going around to check on
 24 a car, weren't there?
 25 A. That's what occurred to me to do when I heard the news.

131

1 The first thing that hit me was this car and I went
 2 personally to go and check on it.
 3 Q. And the reason the first thing that came to your mind
 4 was the car was because you knew that it was heavily
 5 involved in the perpetration of this atrocity? You knew
 6 that, didn't you, and that's why it was your top
 7 priority?
 8 A. No.
 9 Q. Top priority?
 10 A. No.
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: He's given his answer. It's now for me
 12 to assess it. So let's move from that topic and I think
 13 it might be a good idea to break for lunch now if that's
 14 convenient to you.
 15 MR COOPER: Very much so, thank you.
 16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So I can give the witness some idea,
 17 do you have some idea of how much longer you're likely
 18 to be?
 19 MR COOPER: Not much longer at all, sir. In fact, as you
 20 know, sir, when I take lunch, it gets shorter and
 21 shorter in terms of --
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It has on one occasion. So just
 23 roughly?
 24 MR COOPER: Roughly, at the most, 15 minutes. It might even
 25 be less.

132

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And then?
 2 MR GREANEY: Then there is Mr Weatherby and then Mr Wright,
 3 although, as I understand it, he currently does not
 4 anticipate any or any lengthy questions.
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And Mr Weatherby?
 6 MR WEATHERBY: I anticipate no more than 15 minutes.
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you, Mr Weatherby. You'll be
 8 happy to know we can not only hear you, we can see you
 9 as well now.
 10 MR WEATHERBY: Thank you, good.
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And the poster.
 12 MR GREANEY: Sir, when we return, it's likely that another
 13 member of the counsel team will be in court because
 14 Mr de la Poer and I have to attend a meeting in
 15 connection with the inquiry.
 16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay.
 17 So we're looking at, say, another 45 minutes maybe?
 18 MR COOPER: As I say, sir, I think you'll be pleasantly
 19 surprised when I get back, but I just need to
 20 recalibrate a little .
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We'll break for lunch now for an hour.
 22 (1.26 pm)
 23 (The lunch adjournment)
 24 (2.26 pm)
 25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Cooper.

133

1 MR COOPER: Whilst I can't repeat my position on the last
 2 occasion, I can get pretty close to it .
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you, Mr Cooper.
 4 MR COOPER: Thank you, sir.
 5 Just two short issues if I can, please, Mr Taghdi.
 6 It may help for you to look at a document if it helps
 7 you to see where I'm getting this from. This is
 8 {INQ030727/3}.
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Is this in the bundle?
 10 MR COOPER: I hope it is. It's telephone evidence. I don't
 11 have the bundle, I'm afraid. I can do it without
 12 referring to it if needs be.
 13 It's simply this: from your download of your
 14 handset, Mr Taghdi, there is a message thread between
 15 you and Salman Abedi which starts on 17 January 2017 and
 16 we see it on that document, if people have it, page 3,
 17 regarding a funeral.
 18 So there's a thread of SMSs, which appears to be
 19 a discussion between you and Salman Abedi about
 20 a funeral. Do you remember that discussion?
 21 A. No.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Just hang on a minute.
 23 MS CARTWRIGHT: It doesn't appear it's in Mr Taghdi's
 24 bundle.
 25 MR COOPER: Oh. Well, certainly, sir, we gave good notice

134

1 that we were going to deal with communications and if,
 2 of course, specific reference to this paragraph is not
 3 there, then we're remiss and I apologise.
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I am reluctant for a witness not to have
 5 the opportunity to see things. Especially when we are
 6 talking about things which are quite old.
 7 MR COOPER: That's all there is, sir. There is nothing else
 8 to put to him on the point.
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Whose funeral was it, do you know?
 10 MR COOPER: This is the point I'm going to come to in
 11 a moment, sir, if I may.
 12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That may refresh his memory.
 13 MR COOPER: If I can continue, I might be able to refresh
 14 his memory.
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay, Mr Taghdi, I am sorry you haven't
 16 had it. Mr Cooper is going to try and refresh your
 17 memory as to whether you can then remember what he's
 18 talking about, all right?
 19 A. Sir, Mr Cooper's already made a few mistakes with the
 20 evidence. So can I please ...
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We'll be checking it, all right?
 22 MR COOPER: Of course. I'm not really that good at my job.
 23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It's all right, you don't need to
 24 answer. Thank you.
 25 MS CARTWRIGHT: It's not in the bundle.

135

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No? Okay.
 2 Carry on with the questions. Listen to the question
 3 and see if it comes back in your memory.
 4 A. Yes, sir .
 5 MR COOPER: Listen very carefully, Mr Taghdi, I'll try and
 6 do it, however imperfectly.
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You two stop bickering, will you?
 8 Thank you. Off we go.
 9 MR COOPER: There was a thread of discussion between you and
 10 Salman Abedi about a funeral. That discussion took
 11 place on 17 January 2017, about a funeral which was
 12 going to take place the next day. Do you remember
 13 anything about that?
 14 A. No.
 15 Q. No. Do you remember it might have been the funeral of
 16 Mansoor Al-Anezi. Because that was his funeral on that
 17 day? Do you remember that?
 18 A. I don't know who Mansoor is, but I would go to the
 19 funerals of --
 20 Q. And Salman attended that funeral, we know. Do you know
 21 who Mansoor al-Anezi was?
 22 A. No.
 23 Q. He was an extremist, wasn't he?
 24 A. I don't know who he is.
 25 Q. Involved potentially with suicide bombers and that sort

136

1 of thing?
 2 A. I've never heard of him.
 3 Q. No, you haven't, have you? But there it is,
 4 a discussion between you and Salman Abedi about
 5 a funeral on 18 January and we know that Mr al-Anezi's
 6 funeral was then. Just a coincidence, was it?
 7 A. (Overspeaking).
 8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay, you don't know anything about
 9 this? All right.
 10 A. I don't remember this, no.
 11 MR COOPER: I'm sure.
 12 A. Where was the funeral?
 13 Q. Last question. Let's see whether you remember this
 14 then.
 15 Let's take you to, please, {INQ030084/38}. It's
 16 simply this. You received, on 20 May 2017, a 57-second
 17 call from Ismail Abedi, only one of four calls between
 18 you and Ismail in 2017 from what we've seen.
 19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Could you repeat the date for my
 20 benefit?
 21 MR COOPER: Yes, 20 May 2017.
 22 You received a 57-second call from Ismail Abedi,
 23 only one of four calls, it seems, between you and Ismail
 24 in 2017.
 25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And it lasted how long?

137

1 MR COOPER: 57 seconds, sir.
 2 What was that about?
 3 A. A few days before, Ismail was -- I didn't really have
 4 a relationship with Ismail, but he would call me to ask
 5 me if I've heard anything about his brother and I said
 6 to him, "Your brother's in Libya", but Ismail wasn't
 7 being clear with me. Obviously he must have realised
 8 that something's not right because we --
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Never mind what he realised.
 10 A. He was calling me saying, "Have you seen my brother?
 11 Have you seen my brother", and I just said to him,
 12 "I haven't, isn't your brother in Libya?" But he
 13 wouldn't say yes or no and that's what it was.
 14 MR COOPER: Thank you.
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you, Mr Cooper.
 16 MS CARTWRIGHT: Could I then ask Mr Greaney Queen's Counsel
 17 to ask his questions, please.
 18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mister who?
 19 MS CARTWRIGHT: Mr Weatherby, I'm so sorry.
 20 Questions from MR WEATHERBY
 21 MR WEATHERBY: I'm flattered!
 22 Mr Taghdi, I have not many questions for you.
 23 I also represent a number of the families who lost loved
 24 ones in this outrage. So just a few points from me.
 25 At the outset of his questioning, Mr Greaney took

138

1 you to one of the images. I want to go back to that and
 2 it's in your divider 22. It's the picture of the armed
 3 fighters. Do you remember it?
 4 A. Yes.
 5 Q. Just for the record, I'm asked not to put this on the
 6 screen, so I'm going to describe what's on there
 7 instead. Just for the --
 8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Weatherby, just so everybody
 9 understands why this is, if it goes on the screen it
 10 goes on the website, it is capable of being something
 11 which could be used, say, for mindset evidence in
 12 a criminal trial and we're obviously keen that nothing
 13 should go on a website which could then be used in that
 14 way. I hope everyone understands the reasoning.
 15 MR WEATHERBY: Absolutely. I preface my questions just
 16 because I'm going to describe -- so those following can
 17 understand what the questions are about. So
 18 {INQ037645/1}, divider 22. As I said, not to be put on
 19 the screen.
 20 It is in fact, Mr Taghdi, a group of perhaps 15,
 21 maybe 20, armed men, all dressed similarly in black,
 22 with what appear to be ski masks or balaclavas; yes? Do
 23 you agree?
 24 A. Yes.
 25 Q. They're all armed with what appear to be similar

139

1 weapons, Mr Greaney's knowledge of guns is probably
 2 better than mine, he described them as AK47s. They're
 3 assault rifles of one sort or another, aren't they?
 4 A. Yes.
 5 Q. So they are a group of fighters and they have a black
 6 flag with white Arabic writing on it; yes?
 7 A. Yes.
 8 Q. Okay. It's not immediately clear where they are.
 9 There's some greenery in the background, but there's
 10 nothing immediately to illustrate where they are;
 11 is that fair?
 12 A. Yes.
 13 Q. Mr Greaney put to you that this was a group of
 14 Islamic State fighters, didn't he, and you disagreed
 15 with that?
 16 A. Yes, it's not the Islamic State flag.
 17 Q. And then you were repeatedly asked questions about it
 18 and Mr Greaney asked you at one point:
 19 "Are we looking there in the photograph at a group
 20 of Islamic extremists?"
 21 And your answer was:
 22 "I don't know what they are, it's definitely not
 23 ISIS."
 24 Yes?
 25 A. Yes.

140

1 Q. Then later on, the chair asked you:
 2 "Are you able to read the writing? Can you
 3 translate that for us? I'm afraid I can't read Arabic."
 4 You read the writing and translated it for us. And
 5 you said that it says:
 6 "No God but Allah, Mohammed is His messenger."
 7 Yes?
 8 A. Yes.
 9 Q. Did you read all of the writing?
 10 A. I don't know how I'd translated rest of it. I read what
 11 I understood.
 12 Q. The last line of it is Jabhat al-Nusra, isn't it?
 13 A. Okay, yes.
 14 Q. Yes? And you know that, don't you?
 15 A. Yes, I can read it, yes.
 16 Q. You can read it. Jabhat al-Nusra translates into
 17 English as "the al-Nusra Front", doesn't it?
 18 A. If you say so.
 19 Q. Yes. And that's the Al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria,
 20 well-known to be so, isn't it?
 21 A. I don't know.
 22 Q. You don't know?
 23 A. No.
 24 Q. Is there a reason, when you were repeatedly asked about
 25 this image, why you didn't read the whole of the Arabic

141

1 script on the flag?
 2 A. I'm not -- my Arabic is not the best. I read -- it's in
 3 front of everyone, like, I read what I understood.
 4 Q. Mr Greaney's point to you was that this is a group of
 5 Islamic, violent Islamic extremists, and you were keen
 6 to say that they weren't Islamic State and you were
 7 correct. You were less keen to agree the obvious from
 8 that, which is that they're Al-Qaeda fighters; that's
 9 the truth of it, isn't it?
 10 A. I'm... I'm not too familiar with the groups.
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Did you realise when you looked at that,
 12 that they were an Al-Qaeda group?
 13 A. No, sir. I knew that said -- I just couldn't translate
 14 it -- I translated the parts that I understood. There
 15 was many, like -- doesn't the fact that it says,
 16 "There's no God but Allah and Mohammed is His
 17 messenger", indicates that they were Muslims and they're
 18 carrying weapons, so it's a fighting Muslim group.
 19 MR WEATHERBY: I'm not going to labour this point. I'm
 20 going to move on, but the point is that you were trying
 21 to minimise, weren't you, what was on your electronic
 22 devices?
 23 A. Not trying to minimise it, I'm just translating what
 24 I've been asked to translate. It is what it is.
 25 I can't minimise it or maximise it.

142

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Weatherby, can you remind me exactly
 2 what it says? What was the rest of what you put?
 3 MR WEATHERBY: "Jabhat al-Nusra" and that translates as the
 4 al-Nusra Front.
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you very much. We need to get
 6 formal evidence of that from somebody. I'm not doubting
 7 it for a moment but we will do that.
 8 MR WEATHERBY: I'm not an Arabic speaker so I'm --
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I doubt if it came from you, but it
 10 might have done.
 11 MR WEATHERBY: The mindset evidence or the evidence about
 12 your connections to Salman Abedi and Abdalraouf, I just
 13 want to -- I don't want to go over questions that have
 14 already been asked to you, but you've been asked about
 15 your contact with Salman Abedi over a long period of
 16 time and also Abdalraouf Abdallah.
 17 When you were asked about the prison visit when
 18 he was on remand at Belmarsh, you said that the person
 19 that drove you there was one of the Forjani brothers;
 20 is that right?
 21 A. Yes.
 22 Q. The Forjani brothers, I think there are three of them,
 23 are Salman Abedi's first cousins, aren't they?
 24 A. Yes.
 25 Q. One of the Forjani brothers ran or runs a barber's shop

143

1 in Moss Side in Manchester, yes?
 2 A. Yes.
 3 Q. Was it the same brother that drove you or was it
 4 a different one?
 5 A. It was the same one.
 6 Q. Right. Mr Forjani was close with Salman Abedi, wasn't
 7 he?
 8 A. At the time -- they were cousins, they literally grew up
 9 in the same exact neighbourhood and, yes, I think they
 10 were friends since childhood, they were real childhood
 11 friends.
 12 Q. There came a point, didn't there, when they fell out?
 13 A. I'm not close with the Forjanis, so I don't know if they
 14 did or not.
 15 Q. Let me help you. During the early summer of 2016 you
 16 went with Salman Abedi and Abdalraouf Abdallah, who was
 17 then on bail, and a fourth man, who I don't think it's
 18 necessary to name, and after Friday prayers you would go
 19 to Mr Forjani's shop, wouldn't you?
 20 A. Maybe on one Friday occasionally. It wasn't something
 21 we did every week or some continuous thing.
 22 Q. Okay. Mr Forjani has provided the inquiry with
 23 a witness statement and he refers to Salman coming round
 24 every Friday after prayers, he came with
 25 Abdalraouf Abdallah, the other man that I have not

144

1 named, and he says:
 2 "Ahmed Taghdi would also come into my shop with
 3 Salman after Friday prayers with the other man and
 4 Abdalraouf Abdallah."
 5 And he goes on to say that they would talk about
 6 their political views, about Libya and Syria and
 7 goings—on in North Africa and the Middle East; yes? Has
 8 that jogged your memory?
 9 A. That's not true.
 10 Q. Okay.
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Which bit of it is not true?
 12 A. I don't recollect the exact time I went to the barber's
 13 shop, but it wouldn't surprise me if we did. But for us
 14 to go to the barber shop and sit there and discuss
 15 political views, that is not true.
 16 MR WEATHERBY: I will come back to the truth of it in
 17 a minute, but I just want to tell you the full picture
 18 of what Mr Forjani says and then I'll come back to the
 19 truth of it or not.
 20 What he says is that there was such discussion
 21 between you in front of his customers that he threw you
 22 all out.
 23 A. That's definitely not true. Mr Forjani says a lot of
 24 things, doesn't he?
 25 Q. I'll come to that in a minute. He makes clear in his

145

1 statement that he's talking about Abdalraouf Abdallah
 2 and Salman Abedi, but also about you and the other man.
 3 And he describes you as having affiliations to ISIS, is
 4 the way he puts it; yes?
 5 A. Yes, he says that. What's the question?
 6 Q. Well, the question is: is it true that you would go
 7 there after Friday prayers during this period in summer
 8 of 2016; is that true?
 9 A. No, that's not a ritual we had, that we would go to his
 10 barber's shop every Friday, that's not true.
 11 Q. Do you know of any reason why Mr Forjani should say
 12 these things about the four of you?
 13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay, I think he can only answer for
 14 himself.
 15 Do you know why he would say these things about you?
 16 A. Sir, in Forjani's statement he just makes out like he's
 17 this innocent guy and we're all like — from what I read
 18 from his evidence, it's very self-serving, even though
 19 he is Salman's childhood friend and he is Salman's
 20 cousin, Salman would probably around him more than me.
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Are you saying he is incriminating you
 22 in order to help himself?
 23 A. After I was released, after the attack, after I done my
 24 14 days, I went there again for a haircut. So if I'd
 25 been kicked out, why would I go back again for

146

1 a haircut? I only stopped going for a haircut at him
 2 when I realised what he's been writing about me and
 3 I was shocked how he just threw me under the bus for no
 4 reason, telling lies.
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Do you happen to know, Mr Weatherby,
 6 whether this statement from Mr Forjani is in the bundle?
 7 MR WEATHERBY: Tab 12 and the page I've been summarising is
 8 page 5. The reason I didn't want to put is on the
 9 screen is because of the fourth person who hasn't been
 10 named.
 11 A. The only part of that statement they gave me was the
 12 part where he's talking about his history of Salman.
 13 They didn't give me anything from the statement where
 14 he's mentioning my name or —
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That's entirely correct because I have
 16 got the same bundle and the only part of that statement
 17 in the bundle is page 3 in fact.
 18 MR WEATHERBY: I'm sorry about that.
 19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Weatherby, don't worry.
 20 It's clear you know what's in the statement.
 21 A. Yes.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: He does know so that's all right.
 23 MR WEATHERBY: We had specifically asked for page 5 to be
 24 put in the bundle. I don't know what's gone wrong
 25 there.

147

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Then it's the inquiry's job to apologise
 2 to you.
 3 MR WEATHERBY: These things happen I'm sure.
 4 So of course Abdalraouf Abdallah was subsequently
 5 convicted of terror offences and by the time Mr Forjani
 6 writes this statement, this outrage has happened and
 7 of course Salman Abedi is directly responsible for it.
 8 But why should he make up things about you?
 9 A. I don't know, I don't know, I was really surprised to
 10 see him write that. It's literal lies. We wouldn't
 11 be — we don't discuss these things anyway and why would
 12 we be discussing it in his small shop when there's other
 13 customers around? He's never kicked us out or told us
 14 to leave his shop. I just don't know why he would say
 15 that, to be honest.
 16 Q. Or is it true —
 17 A. Maybe out of fear, maybe — I don't know why he said
 18 that.
 19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You don't need to speculate. He doesn't
 20 know of any reason.
 21 MR WEATHERBY: Or is the reality that it's true and that's
 22 what you were doing at that point in 2016 with
 23 Abdalraouf Abdallah?
 24 A. Not true.
 25 Q. And Mr Abedi?

148

1 A. It's not true. It's not true.
 2 Q. You've been asked questions about the car and there's
 3 just one point that I just want to ask you about. When
 4 you obtained the car with the Abedi brothers, you had
 5 sourced the car on Gumtree; is that right?
 6 A. Yes.
 7 Q. And you'd driven them there and you'd been there when
 8 they bought the car. The inquiry has heard evidence of
 9 some calls to Mr Blidi, Elyas Blidi from a phone
 10 associated to you, and I put it that way because I think
 11 it's the phone of your mother. Okay?
 12 A. Yes.
 13 Q. One of these calls was at about the time that the Micra
 14 was purchased, okay? Now, bearing in mind that the car
 15 ends up in the car park of Mr Blidi's flat, was that you
 16 arranging not only to buy the car but also where it was
 17 going to be stored?
 18 A. That's not true.
 19 Q. Do you know of any other reason why that phone would
 20 have been calling Mr Blidi at that time?
 21 A. If you check, if this was at the same time of purchase
 22 of the car, I didn't have my mother's handset with me,
 23 I only had my handset.
 24 Q. I see.
 25 A. It could have been one of my brothers who meets with

149

1 Blidi, who called him, and I don't need to arrange that
 2 for Salman. If I did, I'd tell you. If I did arrange
 3 for the car to be stored, I would tell you. But I don't
 4 have such a relationship with Blidi to be asking him
 5 these type of favours for a friend. Salman's probably
 6 closer to Blidi than I was and Elyas Elmehdi is the
 7 closest one to Blidi, so he wouldn't need to ask me to
 8 store the car for him.
 9 Q. All right. So your evidence effectively is just
 10 a coincidence that this phone that is connected to you
 11 is calling Mr Blidi when you're in the process of
 12 helping the Abedis buy the car, which ends up in his car
 13 park space?
 14 A. Whatever it was, it had nothing to do with facilitating
 15 the storage of the car.
 16 Q. I'll move on.
 17 A. And if it did, why would I hide?
 18 Q. In terms of contact with Salman Abedi whilst he was in
 19 Libya, you've already given your evidence about the
 20 contact up to 1 May and the fact that Salman Abedi asked
 21 you to delete the number. Is it right that later on, on
 22 16 May, you took a screenshot of Salman Abedi's Libyan
 23 number from Mohammed Alzoubare's phone?
 24 A. I don't recall. Maybe I did it to get hold of Salman's
 25 phone or something, I can't remember clearly, but it

150

1 wouldn't surprise me, no, if I --
 2 Q. All right. Let me just put it this way: after 1 May
 3 when you asked you to delete his number, did you then
 4 have continuing contact with Salman Abedi whilst he was
 5 in Libya?
 6 A. The only contact I had with him was him asking me about
 7 this business that somebody out there is looking to buy
 8 sheep and then I asked him general questions about, "Is
 9 it all right over there? How's it going?" And then I
 10 asked him, "You should get married", and he was, "Laugh
 11 out loud at that, bro, I'm not interested". That's what
 12 I recall. I can't recall specific conversations.
 13 Q. Once Salman Abedi comes back to the UK on 18 May, did
 14 you have contact with him between then and when he
 15 perpetrated this bombing?
 16 A. No.
 17 Q. When you were interviewed on 6 June 2017, it was put to
 18 you that your phone had been cell sited in the general
 19 vicinity of where Salman Abedi rented a flat. Let me
 20 make it clear, I am absolutely not suggesting that the
 21 cell siting put you at that flat. But the police put to
 22 you in interview that at a time that Salman Abedi was at
 23 or close to the flat he rented in Granby Row, your phone
 24 was in the general area and you answered, "No comment".
 25 Are you able to help us now? Where were you on

151

1 21 May 2017 at the time that the police put to you
 2 in that interview? Can you help us with that?
 3 A. I can't tell you specifically where I was in that
 4 period. The only travels I'd be making is from my home
 5 to the university and from the university back home.
 6 It's within the same area, to cross over from Manchester
 7 to Salford, so... The cell siting thing has given me
 8 a lot of issues, but it's a small place.
 9 Q. Did you meet up with Salman Abedi? Is that why your
 10 phone was in the general vicinity of where he'd rented
 11 a flat?
 12 A. No.
 13 Q. Finally, I want to just --
 14 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Weatherby, before we leave that,
 15 I think we should all bear in mind what I recall of the
 16 evidence, which is that this particular cell site is
 17 close to the centre of Manchester and is quite a busy
 18 area; is that right?
 19 MR WEATHERBY: It is indeed, and on the edge of the city
 20 centre, that's entirely right. That's why I tried to
 21 put it as carefully as I could.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No, no. You absolutely did. I just
 23 think we should bear in mind the context. Thank you.
 24 MR WEATHERBY: I agree.
 25 Finally, can I go back to the Micra. You've been

152

1 asked about your trip back to look at the Micra on
 2 23 May when you realised that Salman Abedi had blown up
 3 22 — more than 22 — he had killed 22 people at the
 4 arena the previous evening. And you told us that you
 5 travelled to Devell House or to the petrol station a few
 6 hundred yards away from Devell House and you went to
 7 look at the car; yes?
 8 A. Yes.
 9 Q. You said earlier in evidence that you went to look
 10 at the car and you were only there a short period of
 11 time and then you went back to uni; yes?
 12 A. Yes.
 13 Q. That isn't in fact right, is it? Because what you in
 14 fact did is that you went from Devell House and the
 15 petrol station and you drove across to Moss Side; yes?
 16 A. Maybe I drove through Moss Side to get to university.
 17 I mean, I was with a university colleague and we were
 18 preparing for an exam, so I'm pretty sure I went to
 19 university.
 20 Q. In fact what you did is you drove to Moss Side and you
 21 were seen in the company of a number of young men that
 22 have been mentioned within this inquiry, including
 23 a number linked to Devell House. That includes
 24 Elyas Bliidi, Elyas Elmehdi, Mr Alzoubare and
 25 Abdalraouf Ali, in fact others as well. But you all met

153

1 up in a street in Moss Side, didn't you?
 2 A. Um... No, I don't think we did. I don't think we did.
 3 And if I did, it wasn't after I went to see the van.
 4 Maybe the next day or something. I don't recall.
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Weatherby, as I remember this, this
 6 comes from some CCTV that you, I think, drew to our
 7 attention.
 8 MR WEATHERBY: It's footage, yes.
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Is it in the bundle?
 10 MR WEATHERBY: I don't think it is in this bundle, no. The
 11 reason I've specifically put it to Mr Taghdi now was
 12 because of what he said about returning to university.
 13 In fact we know he didn't.
 14 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I don't have a problem with you putting
 15 it, but you'll know that he's been asked about events
 16 quite a long time ago and if he could see the footage,
 17 it would help. Can you tell us what time the footage
 18 shows him as being there?
 19 MR WEATHERBY: It's about 4 o'clock. I can give you a more
 20 exact time, but not instantly. So it is within a short
 21 period of time of (overspeaking) —
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: About 4 o'clock in the afternoon as
 23 there's a group of you?
 24 A. I thought I went earlier. I was with a university
 25 colleague, but I either went back to university or

154

1 I dropped him off and maybe went to Moss Side. I can't
 2 remember. This was 5 years ago and you're asking me
 3 about specific movements and —
 4 MR WEATHERBY: Okay, I'm not going to take it much further,
 5 Mr Taghdi, but I'm suggesting to you that you go and you
 6 check on the Micra and then you meet up with a group of
 7 people that you know who are connected to Devell House.
 8 You meet up with them about 1.5 or 2 miles away in
 9 Moss Side. Given the enormity of 22 May and the day
 10 after, which we're now talking about, can you really not
 11 now remember driving across from having checked on the
 12 Micra after the bombing and meeting up with people who
 13 included the man that lived in the flat and others that
 14 were associated to the flat? Can you not remember that?
 15 A. I might have seen them, I might have — I can't remember
 16 clearly. I was seeing them all the time in that period,
 17 like, we'd always — it's a small area, we'd always run
 18 into each other. Some of us were mates, some of us
 19 weren't.
 20 Q. Okay, but was there any particular reason why you would
 21 meet up with them in a residential street in Moss Side?
 22 A. I've been going to that street since I was young.
 23 MR WEATHERBY: I'll leave it there. Thank you very much.
 24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you very much, Mr Weatherby.
 25

155

1 Further questions from MR COOPER
 2 MR COOPER: Sir, there was one matter the family brought to
 3 my attention at lunchtime they would like me to ask one
 4 question on. Might I do that, please?
 5 It's simply this, Mr Taghdi. You have told us that
 6 you went to look for the Micra on 23 May. Did you tell
 7 the police straightaway where the Micra was?
 8 A. I didn't think the Micra was implicated in the crime.
 9 Q. Because the Micra was found by the police on 2 June.
 10 Did it cross your mind, even though your suspicions may
 11 not have been as acute, to tell the police about the
 12 Micra so they could examine it?
 13 A. The police found out about the Micra through me.
 14 Q. It was found by the police on 2 June.
 15 A. They found out about the Micra from my evidence. That's
 16 what led them to the Micra.
 17 Q. When did you tell them?
 18 A. I didn't say anything, just ...
 19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I think the chronology, Mr Cooper, may
 20 be that he exercised his right to silence in early
 21 interviews — I have just been told this — and it's at
 22 a later interview when he is actually answering
 23 questions that he gives the information.
 24 A. Sir, at the start when I first went in, I was advised by
 25 my solicitor not to reply and then when another

156

1 solicitor came, they said to me, "You need to talk", so
 2 I changed my stance.
 3 MR COOPER: It was a question one of the families put
 4 directly to me.
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: If I may say so, it's a very sensible
 6 question and one which had come up over lunch in our
 7 discussions as well.
 8 MR COOPER: Thank you for that indulgence.
 9 Further questions from MR GREANEY
 10 MR GREANEY: Sir, if I go first, it will give Mr Wright an
 11 opportunity to deal with anything else that arises.
 12 Mr Taghdi, all I want to do is to draw your
 13 attention to three passages in that witness statement
 14 that we've looked at. It's really out of fairness to
 15 you, to give you an opportunity to comment upon each of
 16 them.
 17 So we're back to divider 1 of the bundle, please,
 18 your witness statement of 28 June 2019. I should have
 19 asked you this earlier: when you gave that statement to
 20 the police, were you doing your best to give them
 21 a truthful and accurate account of what you knew?
 22 A. Yes.
 23 Q. I can see Mr Cooper looking for this. This is
 24 {INQ030658/1}.
 25 I'm going to take you to page 3 {INQ030658/3} of the

157

1 statement, please, so would you go there with me? We
 2 might as well have it on the screen, Mr Lopez.
 3 {INQ030658/3}. It's the top half of the page.
 4 You're dealing with the acquisition of the Micra and
 5 I know you've been asked many questions about this, but
 6 I just have a couple. In that witness statement you
 7 said:
 8 "I sourced the Nissan Micra online using my Gumtree
 9 account and I used my mobile phone to ring the
 10 owner/seller of the Micra."
 11 It was this sentence I wanted your help with:
 12 "I contacted the owner/seller of the Micra to
 13 arrange a viewing after Salman Abedi had called and
 14 because it seemed like the owner/seller didn't like the
 15 way Salman sounded on the phone."
 16 Which I don't think is identical to what you have
 17 told us today which is that you were doing all the
 18 running in relation to the car and you didn't mention
 19 anything about Salman Abedi having made a call and the
 20 vendor ---
 21 A. It doesn't really contradict anything I say because
 22 I did find the car and I did call and I did call and
 23 I was the one that made the call to arrange the meeting.
 24 Maybe when I found the car I gave him the number to try
 25 and call it or something, but it doesn't contradict what

158

1 I've said.
 2 Q. This is really what I want your help with, just to give
 3 you an opportunity to clear up any apparent
 4 inconsistency. Because what you seem to be saying back
 5 them to the police was that Salman had called and the
 6 reason why you called was because the vendor didn't like
 7 the way he sounded on the phone. Now you think back,
 8 is that the way in which it developed?
 9 A. I'm much better spoken than him and I would say I'm
 10 a bit more --- when I'm speaking, I'm a bit nicer. Plus
 11 I've bought cars for myself before, so I've a better
 12 idea how to do it potentially. I can't remember
 13 specific reasons.
 14 Q. It's a long time ago, as you've said many times. But do
 15 you think it's likely if you said that to the police
 16 that that was what you could remember at the time?
 17 A. Yes, yes. It'd be more accurate than what I'm saying
 18 now.
 19 Q. Thank you very much. That was the first thing.
 20 Turn over the page {INQ030658/4}, please, and
 21 Mr Lopez, if you could do the same. We're still on the
 22 Micra, but we've moved on to the issue of your knowledge
 23 of the Micra at Devell House. You told me earlier that
 24 you knew it was there because you'd seen it there
 25 yourself. I just want to draw to your attention what

159

1 you said to the police:
 2 "I was asked [and you're talking about a police
 3 interview, so we could probably go back to that source
 4 if we needed to] how I knew that the Nissan Micra was
 5 parked at Devell House. I can say that before
 6 Salman Abedi left the UK to go back to Libya, he told me
 7 that he had parked the Nissan Micra at Devell House."
 8 So can we agree again that if you said that to the
 9 police back then, even though it was 2019, that is
 10 likely to be accurate or at least more accurate than
 11 what you remember more years later?
 12 A. Yes.
 13 Q. Now I've drawn that to your attention, can you help with
 14 the purpose for which Salman Abedi told you that he had
 15 parked that vehicle, which was to contain the explosive,
 16 at Devell House?
 17 A. Well, he didn't tell me he was keeping explosives in it.
 18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No, no, the question is why did he tell
 19 you he left it at Devell House?
 20 A. I don't know, sir, like ... Maybe I'm the one who asked,
 21 "What are you doing with the car", or something like
 22 that.
 23 MR GREANEY: Let me, again out of, I hope, fairness to you,
 24 give you a chance to address what might be in some
 25 people's mind. If you were involved in the car being

160

1 placed at Devell House, so in the arrangements for that,
 2 obviously that wouldn't necessarily mean that you knew
 3 what was in the car. Let me ask you the question
 4 directly: does the fact that Salman told you where the
 5 car was going to be, does that mean that you were
 6 involved in those arrangements?
 7 A. I did not arrange for -- I don't... I don't know the
 8 guy that well to be asking him for things like this.
 9 Q. I just wanted to give you another opportunity and you've
 10 given the same reply and I'm not going to press further.
 11 The third of the three matters I was giving you
 12 a chance to help with takes us over the page to page 5
 13 {INQ030658/5}. It's the five lines between the two
 14 punch holes. It starts:
 15 "I didn't contact the police ..."
 16 Do you see that?
 17 A. Yes.
 18 Q. "I didn't contact the police after the bombing to tell
 19 them what I knew about Salman as I was advised not to by
 20 my boss, Khalid Balaam."
 21 And is that true?
 22 A. Because I was under a lot of stress at the time. It was
 23 a really confusing time for me.
 24 Q. When are you talking about?
 25 A. This whole -- the whole event was --

161

1 Q. I'm going to ask you to pause. I hope you don't think
 2 I'm being rude. I am going to give you a chance to give
 3 your explanation, I absolutely assure you. Is what you
 4 said, it would appear to the police, that you were
 5 advised not to contact the police by your boss,
 6 Khalid Balaam, is that true or false?
 7 A. Yes, it's true.
 8 Q. "A few days after the bombing, I changed my telephone
 9 number and gave my iPhone to Khalid Balaam."
 10 Again, is that true or false?
 11 A. Yes, it's true.
 12 Q. "I did this as I was getting too many calls from the
 13 media on my number, wanting to ask me about information
 14 I might have about Salman."
 15 Was that the real explanation for why you gave your
 16 phone to Khalid Balaam?
 17 A. Yes, I had lots of people from the press and media
 18 trying to contact me.
 19 Q. As you pointed out to me, and I did mean to come back to
 20 this, Khalid Balaam gave evidence on the day that you
 21 were first expected to give evidence, did he not?
 22 A. He's given evidence, I don't know what day it was.
 23 Q. It was the day that we were expecting you, 16 December.
 24 Should I understand from the fact that you were able
 25 to tell me about what he said that you've either seen

162

1 a transcript or that you watched it?
 2 A. Yes, I watched bits of it.
 3 Q. Please, I'm not criticising you for having watched
 4 evidence that's relevant to you. Again, I just want to
 5 give you an opportunity to comment on whether what he
 6 has said is right or not. I told Mr Wright before we
 7 started today that this was an issue that we might look
 8 at. In any event, the witness is obviously across it.
 9 Mr Lopez, would you go, please, to that transcript
 10 that I asked you to bring up? It's the transcript, for
 11 those who are doing it this way, of 16 December 2020,
 12 Day 50 of our oral evidence hearings. Could we have
 13 page 55?
 14 Line 11, this is the evidence of Balaam
 15 {Day50/55:11}:
 16 "Question: Would it be fair to say that you had
 17 a close relationship with the Taghdi family?
 18 "Answer: Yes, I do."
 19 Do you agree?
 20 A. Yes.
 21 Q. Ms Cartwright who was asking questions asked:
 22 "Question: You describe yourself [she's talking
 23 about his witness statement] in respect of your
 24 relationship with Ahmed Taghdi, I think who was
 25 Mr Taghdi's eldest son, as performing a father figure

163

1 role for him."
 2 And he replied:
 3 "Answer: Not fully, but I try to support as much as
 4 I can. I would not be able to reach this level [so
 5 father figure level] even if he would like to."
 6 And again, is that a fair summary of your
 7 relationship with him?
 8 A. Yes.
 9 Q. He's someone, as he was to explain, I think, who has
 10 provided you with support over the years?
 11 A. Yes.
 12 Q. Nothing wrong with that. Then go to page 59, please.
 13 He gave rather a long answer about a conversation
 14 that he had with you after the arena attack. Then
 15 at the very bottom of page 59 in that answer, line 18
 16 {Day50/59:18}:
 17 "From that respect, when he comes asking about the
 18 arena or he said to me there is media calling me or
 19 I have been asked to give interview, I have said to him,
 20 what have you done with this -- do you know that guy, oh
 21 no, because he is Libyan, but I said do you know him
 22 very well, like, and he said, yes, I know him."
 23 And so on. Is it right that you spoke to him and
 24 essentially were complaining that you were being
 25 pestered by the media?

164

1 A. Yes. I was just — it was a very odd time. It was
 2 a traumatic experience, I needed somebody to, like, talk
 3 to.
 4 Q. What was a traumatic experience?
 5 A. This whole bombing in Manchester and the fact that my
 6 mate is the one who'd done it. It was just ... It was
 7 a ... I couldn't take it in. It was baffling.
 8 Q. Then let's go to page 62, please. I don't think I'm
 9 missing out anything that's relevant.
 10 At line 3 {Day50/62:3}, he was asked:
 11 "Question: Did Ahmed Taghdi give you further
 12 information at that time [so this is the same
 13 conversation] about things he did know about
 14 Salman Abedi?"
 15 "Answer: No."
 16 "Question: Did he tell you anything about his
 17 involvement in purchasing a Nissan car with Salman Abedi
 18 on 13 April 2017 before he went to Libya?"
 19 "Answer: No."
 20 "Question: Did he tell you anything about knowing
 21 where the Nissan car was stored at Devell House?"
 22 "Answer: We did not have any conversation about any
 23 other cars or any connections with Salman Abedi, no."
 24 And so far, do you agree with the evidence that
 25 Mr Balaam gave?

1 A. Yes, I didn't speak to him about these things.
 2 Q. Ms Cartwright said:
 3 "Question: I just want to complete it because I'm
 4 going to ask you about a telephone that you took
 5 possession of for a while so I want to ask you did
 6 Ahmed Taghdi tell you anything about telephone calls
 7 that he'd made to Salman Abedi whilst he had been back
 8 home in Libya between April and May 2017?"
 9 "Answer: No."
 10 "Question: Did he tell you anything about the can
 11 fact that he had been to visit the Nissan car on 23 May
 12 at Devell House?"
 13 "Answer: No."
 14 "Question: So he gave you none of that information?"
 15 "Answer: No."
 16 And so far do you agree with him?
 17 A. Yes.
 18 Q. Then:
 19 "Question: Was there any conversation at that time
 20 with Ahmed Taghdi about whether he should be contacting
 21 the police?"
 22 "Answer: Seriously, no, there was nothing to do
 23 with — I don't have any knowledge of any communications
 24 or any connections between Ahmed Taghdi and Salman.
 25 "Question: Mr Balaam [asked Ms Cartwright] we had

1 hoped that your evidence would come after Mr Taghdi's
 2 but that's not been possible. One of the things that
 3 Mr Taghdi's witness statement tells us is that indicates
 4 that, and this is the third passage I took you to,
 5 'I did not contact the police after the bombing to tell
 6 them what I knew about Salman Abedi as I was advised not
 7 to by Khalid Balaam.'
 8 And he replied:
 9 "Answer: No seriously no."
 10 "Question: So you say that would be inaccurate?"
 11 And he went on to deny again that he had said that
 12 to you.
 13 So should I understand from what you have said to me
 14 a short time ago when you maintained that what was in
 15 your statement was correct that you disagree with what
 16 Mr Balaam has said?
 17 A. Yes, I do disagree.
 18 Q. I'm not asking you to speculate, but do you know of any
 19 reason that he might have to mislead the police about
 20 that?
 21 A. I vaguely remember saying to him, "should I contact the
 22 police", and he was like, "Why you are contacting them?"
 23 and I said, "Because I know him", and he was like,
 24 "That's not a reason to contact the police".
 25 As for my contact with — as my contact with Salman

1 and the Nissan Micra, once I've checked the Nissan Micra
 2 is there, I thought the Nissan Micra is not implicated
 3 in this and it's not something that was used for this
 4 crime. I was even reluctant to give away my phone
 5 because I wanted my phone so I can stay in touch with
 6 people, but he said, "It's a better idea for you so you
 7 can pass your exams". I don't know if he can't remember
 8 him saying that to me, but I did specifically ask him,
 9 "Should I contact the police", and he said to me, "Why
 10 are you contacting the police", and I thought, "You're
 11 right, why am I contacting the police just because I
 12 know someone?"
 13 Q. There were reasons for contacting the police, weren't
 14 there?
 15 A. Not at the time, not for me, because I thought I've got
 16 nothing to do with this. I didn't realise what the
 17 Micra was being used for.
 18 Q. Lets just think of some things you could have told them
 19 about. You could have told the police about the car,
 20 you could have told the police where it was, you could
 21 have told the police that you certainly knew when
 22 Salman Abedi was last in Libya, couldn't you?
 23 A. At the time I was very naive. I didn't think this whole
 24 thing happened, I didn't know what this guy was up to,
 25 so all I did was check the car that I bought was there

1 and I thought that's it, I'm — that's all, that's the
 2 only suspicious thing that I thought about with him.
 3 I didn't ...
 4 Q. And you could have told the police about the change that
 5 you had observed in his behaviour and attitudes,
 6 couldn't you?
 7 A. What am I going to say to them, he prays at the mosque
 8 5 days now? What do you want me to say to them?
 9 Q. Is the position that the reason you didn't contact the
 10 police is because you thought that they might think that
 11 you were something to do with all of this?
 12 A. No. No, I didn't think I'd be involved in this the way
 13 I am now. I never, ever thought that. I was arrested
 14 8 days after the crime. I was arrested at my work. So
 15 I was — I feel like I was very naive and I was very,
 16 like, in this whole thing I'm...
 17 Q. Well, I've asked my question, you have given your
 18 answer. Thank you for that. I do just want, out of
 19 fairness and balance to you, to point out that Mr Balaam
 20 was then asked about the circumstances in which he came
 21 to be in possession of your phone. And as you said to
 22 me earlier, the answer he gave was that he said to you,
 23 "Give me the phone". Page 64, line 7 {Day50/64:7}.
 24 His evidence was that he had said to you:
 25 "'Give me the phone and go and buy another phone and

169

1 at this time of the year go and focus on your study and
 2 don't waste the time of finishing your tasks', and
 3 I take the phone him off, switch it off and put it in my
 4 bag."
 5 And that's really very much what you said to me
 6 earlier is it not?
 7 A. Yes, I really didn't want to give my phone, I wanted to
 8 keep my phone, but he insisted that this is the best
 9 thing to do.
 10 MR GREANEY: Sir, do you have any questions that you have?
 11 Those are my questions and I was next going to invite
 12 Mr Wright please to pose his.
 13 Questions from MR WRIGHT
 14 MR WRIGHT: Sir, I would like to ask just a very few
 15 questions about Mr Taghdi's explanation for his visit to
 16 the Micra.
 17 Just before I do that, and on the basis that
 18 sometimes questions and their implication are better
 19 remembered than the answers, Mr Weatherby asked some
 20 questions about the coincidence between Granby House and
 21 the cell site of Mr Taghdi's phone. This was dealt with
 22 in evidence on 10 December last year, pages 89 and 90
 23 {Day47/89:1}, where Chief Superintendent Barraclough
 24 confirmed that there was no evidence that Mr Taghdi had
 25 met with Abedi on that day and dealt with the fact that

170

1 Abedi had been tracked on CCTV alone, making a hostile
 2 reconnaissance, leaving a minute before Mr Taghdi's
 3 phone used that cell site. So I just put that —
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you very much.
 5 MR WRIGHT: Thank you.
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We have lots of speeches in this
 7 hearing.
 8 MR WRIGHT: I just thought — it's not something the witness
 9 can deal with. But the implication of the questions —
 10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That's why I tried to say about the cell
 11 site too, it was a large area.
 12 MR WRIGHT: But that's the reference, pages 89 and 90 on
 13 10 December.
 14 I want to ask you some questions about the Micra and
 15 your explanation for going to visit it, putting it that
 16 way, on 23 May 2017.
 17 The word you used about your view of Abedi buying
 18 this car was that you were baffled as to why he would
 19 need it because he was leaving. Is that right?
 20 A. Yes.
 21 Q. But you weren't suspicious in thinking that he needed it
 22 for some criminal purpose; is that right?
 23 A. No.
 24 Q. And in particular not to commit terrorist atrocity;
 25 is that right?

171

1 A. Yes.
 2 Q. When you heard that he was the bomber, or suspected of
 3 being, you were not even aware that he was back in the
 4 United Kingdom; is that right?
 5 A. Yes.
 6 Q. Have I understood correctly that at that point, your
 7 bafflement as to why he'd needed the car did become
 8 suspicion as to whether that car had been used by him in
 9 the attack?
 10 A. Yes, I became suspicious but I still didn't realise that
 11 it was being used to store components. I thought he
 12 might have driven it there or something like that.
 13 Q. Your fear was it might have been used?
 14 A. Yes.
 15 Q. And your fear was compounded by the fact that you knew
 16 that car could be traced to you because you had used
 17 your own details to purchase it?
 18 A. Yes.
 19 Q. That's why you went to look at the car; is that right?
 20 A. Yes.
 21 Q. To see whether it had been used?
 22 A. Yes.
 23 Q. And on seeing it was still there, it reassured you in
 24 your own mind the two things were unconnected?
 25 A. Yes.

172

1 MR WRIGHT: That's all I wanted to ask.
 2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you very much, I'm grateful.
 3 MR GREANEY: Thank you very much, Mr Wright.
 4 Sir, again, subject to anything you wish to ask
 5 arising out of that, or more generally, that concludes
 6 Mr Taghdi's evidence. I'm told I have to ask you
 7 formally, would you please release the witness?
 8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Does anyone have any reason why
 9 I shouldn't? No, okay.
 10 Thank you very much, you are released from custody.
 11 A. Thank you, sir.
 12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And thank you for giving your evidence.
 13 (3.26 pm)
 14 (The inquiry adjourned until
 15 Monday, 25 October 2021 at a time to be determined)
 16
 17
 18
 19
 20
 21
 22
 23
 24
 25

173

I N D E X

1
 2
 3 Submissions by MR ATKINSON8
 4 Submissions by MR COOPER9
 5 Submissions by MR WEATHERBY10
 6
 7 Application re restriction order13
 8 Submissions by Mr Greaney13
 9 Submissions by MR WRIGHT16
 10 Submissions by MR DE SIMONE18
 11 Reply submissions by MR GREANEY21
 12
 13 MR AHMED TAGHDI (affirmed)24
 14 Questions from MR GREANEY24
 15 Questions from MR COOPER85
 16 Questions from MR WEATHERBY138
 17 Further questions from MR COOPER156
 18 Further questions from MR GREANEY157
 19 Questions from MR WRIGHT170
 20
 21
 22
 23
 24
 25

174

175