

OPUS2

Manchester Arena Inquiry

Day 171

November 23, 2021

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Tuesday, 23 November 2021

1 (9.30 am)

2 (Delay in proceedings)

3 (9.40 am)

4 DCS SIMON BARRACLOUGH (continued)

5 Questions from MR GREANEY (continued)

6 MR GREANEY: Mr Barraclough, before we turn to the final
7 topic that I would like to ask you about, can we clear
8 up two issues which remain from yesterday?

9 First, during the course of yesterday, you explained
10 to us that on one of the devices seized from the home of
11 Ismail Abedi, there had been found a number of religious
12 video lectures given by a person called Anwar Al-Awlaki.
13 At page 97 of your main witness statement, you explain
14 that:

15 "The speeches may be capable of providing supportive
16 evidence of an extremist mindset."

17 A. Yes, that's correct.

18 Q. Yesterday, I suggested to you that Mr Al-Awlaki was an
19 Islamic State propagandist. Is it in fact the position
20 that he is more accurately described as an Al-Qaeda
21 propagandist?

22 A. Yes, I think that's the case, yes.

23 Q. Who in fact was killed long before the declaration of
24 the caliphate in 2011?
25

1

1 A. Yes, that's right.

2 Q. Secondly, yesterday the chairman asked you questions
3 about the first illicit prison phone used by
4 Abdalraouf Abdallah. I believe you're in a position to
5 confirm that that phone was used by him no earlier than
6 2 January?

7 A. Yes, that's correct.

8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That's very helpful of you for finding
9 that. Thank you.

10 MR GREANEY: Finally then, let's turn to the
11 Didsbury Mosque, also known as the Manchester Islamic
12 Centre, and sometimes as MIC.

13 As you will appreciate, we're going to hear today
14 from Mr Fawzi Haffar, a trustee of the mosque, and
15 tomorrow we'll hear from Mr El-Saeiti, an Islamic
16 scholar and a former imam of the mosque. But what you
17 can do, Mr Barraclough, is to provide an introduction to
18 that evidence by explaining what your investigation
19 revealed in relation to the mosque. So I believe you
20 understand that we're going to hear more than you knew
21 during the course of your investigation, but your
22 investigation did reveal certain facts in relation to
23 the mosque; is that correct?

24 A. Yes, that's correct.

25 Q. Before you give us that introduction, it's important,

2

1 I'm certain you will agree, to emphasise two matters.

2 First, a point that you made yesterday, which is that no
3 single individual, organisation or event, in your view,
4 radicalised Salman and Hashem Abedi?

5 A. Yes, that's right.

6 Q. In other words, the finger should not be pointed just in
7 one direction, so we must emphasise that.

8 Secondly, although this may not be apparent to you,
9 it is plain from the witness statements of Mr Haffar and
10 Mr El-Saeiti that there are substantial and deep-running
11 disputes of fact between the two of them. But most of
12 those in the view of the inquiry legal team are
13 irrelevant to the terms of reference and we see no value
14 in going into them. The issue that the inquiry is
15 concerned with is whether the mosque was a place where
16 a worshipper was at risk of radicalisation, and if so,
17 whether that was caused or permitted by those
18 responsible for the mosque.

19 So my questions of you are focused on that issue,
20 not matters of employment dispute and also my questions
21 of the next two witnesses will be focused on that issue.
22 With that in mind, could we turn to deal briefly with
23 your investigation and what it revealed about the
24 mosque.
25

This part of your statement commences at page 82,

3

1 but I'm going to deal with this in what Mr Suter would
2 call a high-level summary. Page 82, the INQ is
3 {INQ035481U/82}.

4 First of all, Mr Fawzi Haffar, as I've said,
5 a trustee of Didsbury Mosque. Did he explain to your
6 investigation that Ramadan Abedi, the father of the
7 Abedi brothers, had attended the mosque until 2005?

8 A. That's correct, yes.

9 Q. At which time he and a number of other hard-line Libyan
10 Muslims had left on the basis that Didsbury Mosque was
11 too moderate?

12 A. That's correct, yes.

13 Q. Did Mr Haffar also explain to the investigation that he,
14 Ramadan Abedi, had brought his children to the mosque?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Did Mustafa Graf, the imam of the mosque, also provide
17 information to your investigation?

18 A. Yes, to a degree, yes.

19 Q. To a degree. Because I know ultimately he declined to
20 attend an interview --

21 A. Yes, that's correct.

22 Q. -- and that's why you qualified your answer in that way.
23 But he did nonetheless provide some information; this is
24 paragraph 345 of your statement. Did he explain that he
25 knew that Ramadan Abedi had performed the call to prayer

4

1 from the late 1990s until about 2005 or 2006?
 2 A. Yes.
 3 Q. Just pausing for a moment, because Mr Mustafa Graf is
 4 a person of potential interest to the inquiry. Was he
 5 suspended, Mr Graf, from the mosque on 26 May 2017, so
 6 a small number of days after the attack?
 7 A. Yes, that's right.
 8 Q. Because a photograph of him in combat gear in Libya had
 9 surfaced?
 10 A. Yes.
 11 Q. Because he had also been accused of harassing a Muslim
 12 neighbour when she married a Christian?
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. Is it also the position that the BBC ran a story about
 15 a sermon that Mr Graf had given at Didsbury Mosque in
 16 late 2016?
 17 A. That's correct, yes.
 18 Q. With the BBC suggesting that he had called for armed
 19 jihad?
 20 A. Yes, that's correct.
 21 Q. Dr Wilkinson, the inquiry-appointed expert, will give
 22 evidence about that sermon in due course. But is it the
 23 position that the investigation, your investigation,
 24 also sought evidence from an expert about that
 25 particular sermon?

5

1 A. That is correct, yes.
 2 Q. And did that expert conclude that in his view there had
 3 been no explicit call for military activity in the
 4 course of that sermon by Mustafa Graf?
 5 A. That's true, but if I could just clarify that.
 6 Q. Please do.
 7 A. It was not Operation Manteline that initiated that, so
 8 this was passed to a different team to actually do the
 9 investigation, so this did not form part of our
 10 investigation.
 11 Q. So it was hived off into a separate investigation --
 12 A. Yes.
 13 Q. -- to see if the sermon disclosed evidence of
 14 criminality?
 15 A. Yes.
 16 Q. And an expert in this area, I think Robert Gleave,
 17 prepared a report and it was his conclusion that there
 18 had been in the sermon no explicit call for military
 19 activity?
 20 A. Yes, that's right.
 21 Q. We'll wait to see what Dr Wilkinson's take is on that
 22 sermon. But is it the position that, in any event, your
 23 investigation established no evidence that Salman Abedi
 24 was present at that sermon?
 25 A. That's correct, yes.

6

1 Q. And at the time it was given, Hashem Abedi was out of
 2 the country?
 3 A. Yes, he was.
 4 Q. Nonetheless, the investigation, I suspect the separate
 5 investigation you have told us about, did wish to
 6 interview Mustafa Graf about that sermon?
 7 A. Yes.
 8 Q. But he declined to be interviewed?
 9 A. Yes.
 10 Q. And it was concluded that there was an insufficient
 11 basis to force him to an interview in the sense of
 12 arresting him; is that correct?
 13 A. That's correct, yes.
 14 Q. There is a separate, albeit connected, issue relating to
 15 Mr Graf that I need to ask you about and this takes us
 16 to paragraphs 380 and 381 of your statement, page 100
 17 {INQ035481U/100}.
 18 As part of the BBC reporting about Mustafa Graf, as
 19 I indicated, there was publicised a video showing
 20 Mustafa Graf in combat fatigues during 2011 in the
 21 course of the Libyan Revolution; is that correct?
 22 A. Yes, that's correct.
 23 Q. Moreover, did the BBC also broadcast footage of him
 24 speaking at the head of a protest in Manchester in 2015
 25 on behalf of a body called the 17th February Forum?

7

1 A. Yes.
 2 Q. We've used the term 17 February a number of times.
 3 That's a significant day in the history of Libya because
 4 it was the day on which the uprising started in
 5 Benghazi?
 6 A. Yes, that's correct.
 7 Q. During the course of that protest that Mr Graf was shown
 8 speaking at, did he protest about the conflict in Libya
 9 and express opposition to a prominent figure within
 10 Libya, General Haftar?
 11 A. Yes. Yes, he did.
 12 Q. Did the footage also show that later that year, in 2015,
 13 the same group was seen protesting in London?
 14 A. Yes, that's right.
 15 Q. Although it's important to emphasise that Mustafa Graf
 16 is not seen to be present at that protest; is that
 17 correct?
 18 A. Yes, that's correct.
 19 Q. And the protest was, I believe, at the embassy of the
 20 United Arab Emirates; is that correct?
 21 A. That's correct.
 22 Q. And the protest was about the detention by the UAE of
 23 two Libyan businessmen who were suspected to be linked
 24 to Islamic State?
 25 A. That's correct, yes.

8

1 Q. Was the upshot that it was clear from that video that
2 Salman Abedi was present at that protest?
3 A. Yes, that's correct.
4 Q. The footage is available to all core participants and he
5 can be seen clearly. In fact, he's wearing a red
6 T-shirt and he's quite prominent; do you agree?
7 A. He is, yes.
8 Q. Back to what your investigation established in relation
9 to the mosque. Was information provided by
10 Mohammed El-Saeiti, from whom we'll hear tomorrow, as
11 I said, the head of Sharia law and imam at
12 Didsbury Mosque?
13 A. Yes, it was.
14 Q. Did he too confirm that Ramadan Abedi had performed the
15 call to prayer?
16 A. He did.
17 Q. Did he also explain that Ismail Abedi had performed some
18 voluntary work at the Didsbury Mosque?
19 A. He did.
20 Q. Did Mr El-Saeiti go on to explain that he had himself
21 delivered a sermon at the end of 2014 which had an
22 anti-Islamic State flavour?
23 A. He did.
24 Q. And that at some later stage, he perceived that
25 Salman Abedi had reacted adversely to what he had said?

9

1 A. Yes, he did.
2 Q. Did he also tell you that he had raised concerns about
3 a relative of the Abedis, to express it in those neutral
4 terms?
5 A. Yes.
6 Q. Did a man named Adel Alrayni say that he had problems at
7 Didsbury Mosque as a result of his views against
8 extremism and that he was no longer welcome nor did he
9 attend there?
10 A. Yes.
11 Q. I'm at paragraph 363 if that helps.
12 A. Thank you.
13 Q. Finally, so far as Didsbury Mosque is concerned, as I've
14 said we will delve into the issues connected with the
15 mosque in further detail later today and tomorrow, but
16 did your investigation become aware of open source
17 reporting that Mohammed Abdallah, a convicted terrorist
18 and the brother of Abdalraouf Abdallah, and
19 Raphael Hostey, an ISIS recruiter who came from
20 Manchester, that they had each attended the mosque?
21 A. That's correct, yes.
22 Q. But was it the position that your investigation was not
23 able to reach any particular conclusion on the back of
24 that open source reporting?
25 A. That is correct, yes.

10

1 Q. At paragraphs 387 to 389, page 102 of your signed
2 witness statement, you express some conclusions on
3 radicalisation and I'm going to seek to summarise those
4 in a few propositions.
5 First of all, the view of the investigation
6 in relation to the path to radicalisation of Salman and
7 Hashem Abedi was that that was not something that
8 happened in one moment or as a result of one thing or
9 one person?
10 A. I agree.
11 Q. That the role of the father of the Abedi brothers is
12 likely to have been of some significance?
13 A. I think that's true.
14 Q. That the changes within both brothers in terms of their
15 conduct, behaviour and attitudes appear to have
16 coincided with Abdalraouf Abdallah becoming more
17 involved in their lives?
18 A. Yes, that is demonstrated.
19 Q. And what is clear is that by late 2016, both brothers
20 had become thoroughly radicalised?
21 A. Yes.
22 MR GREANEY: Mr Barraclough, thank you very much indeed.
23 Those are my questions certainly at this stage.
24 Sir, unless you have any questions at this point I'm
25 going invite Mr Weatherby to ask his questions.

11

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
2 MR GREANEY: He's joining us by the link.
3 Questions from MR WEATHERBY
4 MR WEATHERBY: Mr Barraclough, can you see and hear me?
5 A. I can, thank you, good morning.
6 Q. Good morning. You'll be pleased to know that I don't
7 have that many questions for you and mostly they are
8 filling in some details given how comprehensive
9 Mr Greaney has been in his questioning.
10 I just want to start with Ramadan Abedi and I just
11 want to fill in a few more details from the port stops,
12 first of all.
13 Yesterday, you confirmed that Ramadan Abedi was
14 subjected to port stops in November of 2011; yes?
15 A. Yes, that's right.
16 Q. And the first one of those was on 2 November and that
17 was when he was returning to the UK from Libya and he
18 was stopped at Manchester Airport; is that right?
19 A. Yes, that's correct.
20 Q. Then the second one, on 17 November, was when he was
21 leaving the country again on 17 November and he was
22 driving through Dover?
23 A. Yes, that's right.
24 Q. Just on 2 November, he was travelling under the name
25 Hannah Joseph. Am I right that the police have not

12

1 managed to work out any reason why he apparently changed
2 his name?
3 A. I know I refer to it in my statement, I probably need to
4 find the paragraph, but I think it's his sister who
5 refers to the change and the change was mentioned as
6 a result of the name being a friend that he knew at
7 school and he decided to take that name. But it's
8 specifically in a paragraph in the statement,
9 Mr Weatherby, I think.
10 Q. I think you haven't managed to establish why he changed
11 it.
12 A. I don't think we know. No, you're quite right.
13 Q. Okay, I won't take it any further. On 2 November at the
14 port stop, he told the officers that he'd taken a Jeep
15 Cherokee over to Libya and that he had travelled out
16 with Salman and Hashem Abedi, his two sons or two of his
17 sons, and he had travelled with them in the first week
18 of August of 2011.
19 A. Yes.
20 Q. Can you confirm that or will you accept that from me
21 that that's on the port stop?
22 A. If you have the document, that would be great, but that
23 sounds right to me.
24 Q. If I can give you the reference so we can move quickly.
25 I'm reading from the port stop document. It's your

13

1 tab 26 and just for the record it's {INQ042171/1}.
2 That's what's recorded by the officer. So he travelled
3 to Libya by a vehicle in the first week of August via
4 Tunisia and he also said that his wife and his other
5 children had travelled separately and he claimed that
6 he'd been on four such trips that year, taking aid and
7 supplies to the rebels. Is that right or will you
8 accept that from me?
9 A. I accept that from you, that does sound right.
10 Q. I'll be corrected if I'm wrong, of course. The reason
11 I put that early August date to you is that yesterday,
12 very helpfully, you confirmed to Mr Greaney that the
13 Operation Traverso image of, it's believed, Salman Abedi
14 in front of a 17th February Brigade banner with a rifle,
15 the metadata, you confirmed yesterday, was 17 August of
16 2011.
17 A. Yes.
18 Q. And again, just for the record, that is paragraphs 282
19 and 285 of your statement.
20 A. Yes.
21 Q. So therefore, it would appear from that that the father,
22 Ramadan, had taken two of his sons, Salman and Hashem,
23 then aged 18 and 14, to Libya in the first week of
24 August, arriving either that week or, more likely, the
25 next week as they went via Tunisia, and rather quickly,

14

1 it appears from the metadata, Salman has been initiated
2 or had some involvement with a rifle, with the
3 17th February Brigade pretty soon after; yes?
4 A. Yes, I agree, yes.
5 Q. Thank you. On the second of those port stops,
6 17 November, again [video link frozen].
7 MR GREANEY: If Mr Weatherby can hear us, we can't hear or
8 see him.
9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You froze but you have now come back to
10 life. We can see your eyelashes going, which they
11 weren't before, so you're moving now. Would you like to
12 go back to the beginning of the question?
13 MR WEATHERBY: Okay. So the second port stop, 17 November,
14 there's an officer's report regarding the download of
15 Ramadan Abedi's phone. Are you familiar with that?
16 It's your tab 26 and for the record — it's only a small
17 point. You may accept it and then, if I get it wrong,
18 you can correct me later. I don't think you need to
19 look at it. Just for the record, it's {INQ040376/1}.
20 The officer says that:
21 "At the time this download was taken, the contents
22 were shared with relevant partners."
23 We'll come back to that. I'm not interested who the
24 relevant partners were. But the videos that were
25 downloaded apparently show Ramadan Abedi with an

15

1 automatic weapon in Sabratha in Libya, okay?
2 A. Yes.
3 Q. And having port—stopped him twice within a month, CTP
4 thought, first of all, he was interesting enough to stop
5 twice in a month and, secondly, that the downloaded
6 video of him with a weapon in Sabratha should be shared
7 with "relevant partners"; is that right?
8 A. I presume if that's in the report, that's what's
9 indicated, but I don't know, Mr Weatherby.
10 Q. Fine. That is what's on the report and you'll correct
11 me later if I'm wrong.
12 A. Yes.
13 Q. So thank you for that. Just one final point on
14 Ramadan Abedi, I'm sorry to jump about here, because
15 Mr Greaney has covered the ground quite comprehensively,
16 it's just a few details I'm trying to add in.
17 Finally on Ramadan, after the bombing there was an
18 intelligence summary created by your operation, I think.
19 A. Yes.
20 Q. Just one detail from that. From social media,
21 a photograph of Ramadan Abedi in company with a group of
22 men, including Grand Mufti al-Ghariani was found.
23 That is the intelligence summary because Mr al-Ghariani
24 is, I'll put this perhaps euphemistically first of all,
25 an interesting character; would that be fair?

16

1 A. I think the view of him is — could be suggested to be
2 divided, certainly in Libya.

3 Q. Okay, but (inaudible: distorted) I think from open
4 source material, and if you can't confirm this, somebody
5 else no doubt will, but from open source material he's
6 actually banned from the UK as a so-called hate
7 preacher?

8 A. Given his views, that would not surprise me. But I know
9 in Libya itself, he's a very divisive figure, I think.

10 Q. Yes. One of the reasons for that is because he can be
11 viewed online, on video, justifying suicide bombings;
12 is that right?

13 A. I'm not sure about that. I know he has very radical
14 views, he is a radical Salafist preacher and has some
15 fairly radical views about women. I'm not sure about
16 the suicide bombing.

17 Q. No, that's fair enough, I'll ask another witness about
18 that. It is online in open source, so I'll get that
19 confirmed by another witness. I'm sorry to spring that
20 on you.

21 A. I think the trouble with open source is that there are
22 many of them and I'm not sure of the accuracy of all of
23 them. But your version might be more accurate than
24 mine, actually.

25 Q. Indeed, it's actually a video of him that I'm referring

17

1 to but I'll put it to another witness; it's unfair to
2 put it to you.

3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Weatherby, before you move on,
4 do you have any date for this photograph or video of the
5 two together?

6 MR WEATHERBY: I think I do, but it's not on this
7 intelligence summary.

8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That would be helpful. Although
9 you have told us it came to light after the bombing,
10 it would be interesting to know when the video or the
11 photograph was actually taken if we can give that
12 information.

13 MR WEATHERBY: Absolutely, yes, I think I can find that, but
14 I'm afraid I do not have it to hand.

15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Any time in the future.

16 MR WEATHERBY: I have in mind I can put this, I think, to
17 Dr Wilkinson. I'm sure he's a figure that Dr Wilkinson
18 will be familiar with, so I'll perhaps come back to that
19 later if I can.

20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.

21 MR WEATHERBY: Can I move on to Ismail now, and again you
22 were asked a lot of questions so I'll try not to repeat
23 as much as I can, but I actually want to put some images
24 to you from his downloads, just a small selection of
25 them, so we can all see the extent of some of the

18

1 material that was downloaded.

2 Just to summarise where we are at the moment, he was
3 stopped returning from Indonesia in September of 2015 on
4 a port stop, I think at Heathrow.

5 A. Yes, that's right.

6 Q. A lot of material was downloaded from his devices.

7 A. Yes, it was.

8 Q. Then later, after the bombing, some further material was
9 downloaded from his devices from his home address?

10 A. Yes, it was, in 2017.

11 Q. For present purposes I'm going to stick to the 2015
12 download.

13 A. Yes, I understand.

14 Q. That's where I'm going to concentrate with that.
15 Yesterday you gave evidence that a significant amount of
16 material, apparently supporting ISIS, was downloaded in
17 2015 from his devices; yes?

18 A. Yes, that's accurate, yes.

19 Q. In particular, Mr Greaney put to you the notorious and
20 very disturbing Facebook post of a captured Jordanian
21 pilot who IS burned to death in a cage with the caption
22 "Looking for seasoned firewood" that Ismail Abedi
23 appears to have added to the image; yes?

24 A. Yes, that's right.

25 Q. Pretty unpleasant stuff.

19

1 A. Very.

2 Q. You refer in your statement at 577 to a summary of the
3 material and it included a document which is partly
4 redacted, so I'll be careful how I refer to it, but
5 a substantial 268-page document in support of IS;
6 is that a fair description of it?

7 A. Yes, it is.

8 Q. As I say, it's sensitive so I won't take it any further.
9 There was also a book about Islamic State. There were
10 nasheeds encouraging suicide missions.

11 A. Yes, there were.

12 Q. Recruitment videos for IS and a variety of IS images of
13 fighters and flags and suchlike; yes?

14 A. That's correct, yes.

15 Q. In addition to that, I just want to show you about
16 six images because we keep talking about this, but
17 I think it's important, with the chair's leave, that we
18 just get a flavour of the Abedi boys with weapons.
19 I just want to show some of the images that were
20 downloaded from Ismail in 2015 and you can help confirm
21 who they are.

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Could we have up {INQ036527/1}, please, Mr Lopez.
24 That is a picture of Ismail Abedi in military
25 fatigues; would that be a fair description?

20

1 A. That's correct.
 2 Q. I'm not very good at weapons, but with an assault rifle,
 3 would it be?
 4 A. Yes, I think so. I'm not entirely sure what it is.
 5 I think it's an assault rifle.
 6 Q. Could we have up {INQ036588/1}, please. That's
 7 a picture of Ismail and his father, Ramadan, both with,
 8 I don't know, military grade weapons; would that be
 9 a fair description?
 10 A. I think so. I think they're classic AK47s.
 11 Q. Right. {INQ036511/1}, please. That's Ismail Abedi and
 12 another, and -- I think you referred to this
 13 yesterday -- that's him apparently with a
 14 rocket-propelled grenade, would it be?
 15 A. I think that's correct, yes.
 16 Q. {INQ036545/1}, please. This is Salman Abedi, cigarette
 17 in mouth, and a rather fearsome-looking -- I don't know
 18 what kind of weapon that would be, but it's a large
 19 military grade -- I don't know, an artillery piece,
 20 would it be?
 21 A. I think that would be a 50-calibre machine gun, so that
 22 would be the sort of machine gun that would be mounted
 23 on a vehicle usually.
 24 Q. {INQ036531/1}, please. This is just a picture of
 25 Salman Abedi again, but in what appears to be full

21

1 uniform?
 2 A. Yes, that's correct.
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Weatherby, are we aware where these
 4 photographs are taken? Are they taken in Libya?
 5 MR WEATHERBY: I don't think we are, but I think that's the
 6 presumption.
 7 A. That's the assessment that's been made by our image
 8 specialists.
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 10 MR WEATHERBY: Yes, in Libya. We don't actually have a date
 11 for them, I think, but they're downloaded in 2015; yes?
 12 A. Yes, and I think they are consistent, I think we've
 13 said, with the period that we're talking about in 2011
 14 to 2012.
 15 Q. Yes. Just two more.
 16 {INQ036529/1}. That's Hashem Abedi and again
 17 I don't know, but would you describe that as military
 18 hardware?
 19 A. So I think that would be a ground-to-air missile system
 20 for shooting down aircraft.
 21 Q. Finally, {INQ038811/1}. This is moving away from
 22 weapons, but this is Ismail apparently, do you agree, at
 23 a bookshop?
 24 A. Yes.
 25 Q. And he's pointing at a book about ISIS?

22

1 A. Yes, he is.
 2 Q. That's all the images I want to put to you. They're
 3 just a very small selection of a large amount of
 4 material, but it puts flesh on the bones of what we have
 5 been talking about in terms of the level of military
 6 hardware these boys were involved in. Would you agree
 7 with that?
 8 A. Yes. I think, if I may say so, there's probably more
 9 significance to the last picture you showed where he's
 10 pointing specifically with his index finger, which is in
 11 itself recognised as support for IS.
 12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Do we know whether the book itself is
 13 supportive of IS?
 14 A. No. I think the book is, as you'd expect on a bookshelf
 15 like that in a bookstore, is a narrative book.
 16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: But we are interpreting because of the
 17 way he's pointing at it --
 18 A. He's effectively sticking his finger in the air. It's
 19 the "One God" symbol.
 20 MR WEATHERBY: I think for completeness, the "One God"
 21 symbol goes a lot further than violent extremists. I'm
 22 not sure there's too much we can read into that, but
 23 I'll ask Dr Wilkinson to clarify that as well.
 24 A. I understand.
 25 Q. One final point on Ismail in respect of this port stop.

23

1 That is the schedule 7 interview. Again, we include at
 2 your tab 18 a small extract from the interview. I don't
 3 know whether you managed to have a look at that.
 4 A. I have. Mr Weatherby, I've had a look at all these, but
 5 if you'll forgive me, it's finding them.
 6 Q. No, no, I'm not going to ask you to find it. I'm going
 7 to put it to you -- it's a simple point and I hope you
 8 can accept it, and if I get it wrong then I will be
 9 corrected.
 10 During the schedule 7 interview, it is right, isn't
 11 it, that Ismail Abedi was asked about online material
 12 which had been accessed regarding the recruitment of IS
 13 fighters in the Caucasus and in Indonesia?
 14 A. I am sure that's right, yes.
 15 Q. He denied accessing the materials but, from the
 16 officers' questioning, the device that was used to
 17 access this material was his wife's iPad (inaudible:
 18 distorted) your recollection?
 19 A. Yes, that's right.
 20 Q. And I think that both he and his wife blamed each other
 21 for accessing the material; yes?
 22 A. I think that was the position by the end of the
 23 interview, yes.
 24 Q. Again, the significance of that is that they were
 25 actually coming back from Indonesia.

24

1 Finally, on --
 2 A. I think just to be fair, I think was that not the
 3 honeymoon that they'd been on, so they'd been away for
 4 a month and they described that as a honeymoon shortly
 5 after marriage.
 6 Q. Right.
 7 A. Only in relation -- I say that only in relation to the
 8 Indonesian connection in that that might be entirely
 9 innocuous.
 10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Just let me understand: so on this port
 11 stop there was evidence found, he may have disputed that
 12 he'd done it, indicating downloading material relating
 13 to recruitment to ISIS?
 14 A. So there was an awful lot of material on here, some of
 15 which was about ISIS, some of which was about
 16 recruitment.
 17 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Some of which was about recruitment to
 18 ISIS?
 19 A. Yes, but as a narrative, not as a -- I mean, this
 20 material has all been assessed, sir, in its entirety,
 21 and it's been assessed, as you're aware, by the Crown
 22 Prosecution Service.
 23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm not talking about a prosecution, I'm
 24 just talking about what inferences could be drawn
 25 possibly from this material being found. But it related

25

1 to ISIS and it related to recruitment?
 2 A. So the view that was taken around this is that the
 3 inferences that could be drawn could be that he had
 4 a very unhealthy interest in IS.
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay, thank you.
 6 A. And that was at one end of the spectrum, and clearly
 7 at the other end of the suspicion spectrum would be that
 8 that interest had developed into something more
 9 actionable.
 10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I well understand it and I well
 11 understand the difficulties of prosecuting so I'm not
 12 suggesting that. I'm just trying to think what should
 13 have been inferred by the authorities from what they
 14 found at that time.
 15 A. I understand, yes.
 16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 17 MR WEATHERBY: Thank you. Just for the reference for that,
 18 for anyone who wants to check what I've just put, it's
 19 your tab 18, and it's {INQ039049/15-16} and that's where
 20 the officer is putting this to Ismail Abedi.
 21 Finally on Ismail Abedi, and can I just echo what
 22 the chair has said, I'm not asking these questions
 23 remotely to do with prosecution, that's obviously beyond
 24 the scope of this inquiry, so I'm not doing that. There
 25 is one point that has caused a little bit of confusion

26

1 or concern with some of the families and that is that
 2 all of the material that I have just been referring to
 3 was downloaded and looked at apparently in 2015, and as
 4 you say, (inaudible: distorted).
 5 But we have had a further report indicating that the
 6 Ismail Abedi material has been further reviewed --
 7 A. Yes.
 8 Q. -- and there has been further consideration for
 9 prosecution in January 2021 and thereafter.
 10 A. Yes.
 11 Q. I just wonder, for the sake of the families, whether you
 12 can just clarify why that review actually took place?
 13 A. As you are aware, there are three sets, three recoveries
 14 of material in relation to Ismail Abedi, so there is the
 15 port stop material, which was examined by itself in
 16 2015. There was the material that was recovered by
 17 Operation Manteline in 2017. So this is when
 18 Ismail Abedi is arrested in connection with this
 19 investigation.
 20 As a result of that, there were things found that
 21 precipitated another investigation that was carried out
 22 by GMP and that happened in 2018, and in 2018 they made
 23 further recoveries of devices in relation to that
 24 investigation. So there are three sets.
 25 Q. Okay.

27

1 A. So the 2017 material was examined in its entirety to the
 2 nth degree. The 2015 material was examined to a degree.
 3 And the degree was thought to be the nth degree.
 4 The 2018 material, only some of that was examined
 5 for the purposes of the terrorist investigation, because
 6 of the proportionality argument. So in other words, it
 7 was recovered in relation to a non-terrorist issue, it
 8 was recovered after the event, and some devices, such as
 9 one phone that was hidden within a computer box, the
 10 actual computer station, that was deemed to be so
 11 suspicious it needed to be looked at.
 12 But if I may say so, Mr Weatherby, just to put this
 13 in perspective, this is just not like reading a book.
 14 This is like somebody giving you the keys to an enormous
 15 library and there being no librarian, no index, all the
 16 books are just piled into a great big pile, there are
 17 books within books, some of the books are damaged,
 18 they're unreadable, some of them are in languages that
 19 you cannot translate or understand. So the task
 20 in relation to Ismail Abedi is quite stunningly
 21 enormous, and you look at some of these individual items
 22 that have hundreds of thousands of files on them and
 23 you are searching, or the people who are responsible for
 24 doing this are searching, those hundreds and thousands
 25 of files for information that is deemed relevant.

28

1 Of course, what that means is you have to use
 2 software programs to do that for you. So there are
 3 software programs that do the job for you because that's
 4 the only way you can do it.
 5 Q. I see.
 6 A. Those software programs, if this is helpful, are not
 7 completely infallible. The reason they're not
 8 infallible is because quite often, the data that's in
 9 all these systems is so corrupted or is stored in a way
 10 that makes that software not work very well.
 11 Q. Right. That's helpful.
 12 A. So there is -- and I think in my statement when I gave
 13 it last time, this was before the review was complete,
 14 I did actually say the review was ongoing.
 15 Q. Yes.
 16 A. What happens with an investigation like this is you
 17 quite often find some information, so an image or
 18 a file, that raises the suspicion of the interrogator of
 19 that information and they go, "This isn't right, we need
 20 to look at something else", so the search broadens out
 21 and it continues to broaden out. I took the view --
 22 certainly when that process was happening, I took the
 23 view that we should look at all of the 2018 material
 24 regardless of the proportionality argument. So I said,
 25 because we don't know that, we don't really know what's

29

1 in this, and there's no surety about when it was
 2 downloaded or how we got it, or how it came to be on
 3 those devices. I took the view that we should review
 4 the whole lot, which is what we did.
 5 So there are stages to this process. It was
 6 a massive process, and I would hope to say now that it's
 7 as comprehensive as it possibly can be.
 8 Q. Yes, okay --
 9 A. If that answers your question.
 10 Q. -- that's helpful. Just to perhaps summarise that so
 11 that I hope I've understood it and those watching have
 12 understood it.
 13 There's a massive amount of data here. You take
 14 a proportionate approach to it and then, later, further
 15 material is spotted and the review is broadened; is that
 16 a fair summary?
 17 A. Yes.
 18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Are you able to say that, as far as is
 19 possible, all material relevant to the radicalisation of
 20 Salman Abedi and the others has now been retrieved from
 21 those downloads?
 22 A. Yes, I am.
 23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm not interested in other things, I'm
 24 just interested in --
 25 A. I cannot imagine a more thorough job on such a vast

30

1 amount of information.
 2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 3 MR WEATHERBY: When I started this section of my questions
 4 about Ismail, that's why I said I was going to
 5 concentrate on the 2015 download, Mr Barraclough. Just
 6 finally to return to that, the matters that I went
 7 through from your paragraph 577 and the downloads I've
 8 referred to, those were all downloaded at the time in
 9 2015, weren't they?
 10 A. Yes, they were.
 11 Q. Okay. Only a few more matters and moving to a different
 12 topic.
 13 Mr Greaney asked you about prison phones and contact
 14 between Salman Abedi and Abdalraouf Abdallah --
 15 A. Yes.
 16 Q. -- on the illicit prison phone and he noted with you
 17 that the calls were made at times when Mr Abdallah could
 18 have accessed the ordinary prison phone.
 19 A. Yes.
 20 Q. Am I right that in a prison, the phones that are
 21 accessible to inmates have a notice by them warning that
 22 calls may be recorded?
 23 A. That's correct, yes.
 24 Q. You discussed with Mr Greaney that Operation Manteline
 25 had considered whether Mr Abdallah was involved in the

31

1 planning or assisting the plot and you made a number of
 2 points, including that the level of direct contact with
 3 Salman Abedi was less than might be expected if
 4 Mr Abdallah had in fact had an actual involvement in the
 5 planning and assisting of the plot. Is that an
 6 accurate --
 7 A. Yes, I think that's -- yes, that's an accurate
 8 consideration.
 9 Q. Did the investigation consider whether contact between
 10 the two might have been maintained through others?
 11 A. Yes, very much so. So there was a considerable piece of
 12 work around that and that involved searching all of our
 13 numbers within all of our systems, and bearing in mind
 14 that was thousands of them, across relevant periods and
 15 interrogating that process through quite a bit of
 16 analytical time to try and ascertain whether there was
 17 a missing number, if you like.
 18 Q. Yes, indeed -- well, maybe not missing number, but
 19 yesterday we heard evidence from Alzoubare Mohammed and
 20 he, along with Mr Elmehdi, were the last two of
 21 Salman Abedi's associates with whom there is evidence of
 22 direct contact; is that right?
 23 A. Yes, Mr Alzoubare and Mr Elmehdi, yes.
 24 Q. And as we heard, Mr Alzoubare Mohammed was also in
 25 significant contact with Abdalraouf Abdallah in the few

32

1 days before and indeed on the evening of the bombing;
 2 yes?
 3 A. Yes.
 4 Q. It's right, isn't it, that there were two people who had
 5 the most contact with Mr Abdallah: Mr Alzoubare Mohammed
 6 and Abdalraouf Ali, his brother-in-law, in the period
 7 prior to the bombing?
 8 A. I think that's true, yes.
 9 Q. It's also right, isn't it, that --
 10 A. Mr Weatherby, I don't know that for sure, but if you're
 11 saying that's the case, I would accept that.
 12 Q. Again, no doubt you'll correct me in the coming days if
 13 that's wrong, but that's my understanding of the data.
 14 But it's right also that Abdalraouf Ali was associated
 15 to the Abedi brothers, Salman and Hashem Abedi, and
 16 there was a lot of call data in late 2016 and early
 17 2017, albeit that that came to an end when the Abedi
 18 brothers went off to Libya; is that right?
 19 A. Again, I would take your account as being true.
 20 MR WEATHERBY: Those are all the questions I have.
 21 Thank you very much for your help.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 23 MR GREANEY: Thank you, Mr Weatherby.
 24 Mr Jamieson next, please.
 25

33

1 Questions from MR JAMIESON
 2 MR JAMIESON: Mr Barraclough, I have the advantage of going
 3 after both Mr Greaney and Mr Weatherby, so my questions
 4 have mostly been asked already, but there are a couple
 5 of additional matters.
 6 May I also ask you just a couple of questions about
 7 Ismail Abedi's port stop in 2015. There are just
 8 a couple of facts that might help that issue that the
 9 chair was pursuing about the iPad, which was one of the
 10 items that was recovered on that occasion or perhaps
 11 more properly considered.
 12 That was the iPad, the device, that had been used to
 13 search for the information about ISIS recruitment in
 14 Indonesia?
 15 A. Yes, I think that's right.
 16 Q. And that search had taken place, as you were correct to
 17 point out, during the currency of that honeymoon while
 18 the two, Ismail and his wife, had been in Bali? The
 19 reference for this, sir, I'm not suggesting it goes on
 20 the screen, for good reason, but it's the report of that
 21 port stop is {INQ032586/1}.
 22 Just this, officer, and you told us you looked at
 23 it, perhaps you'll be able to recall this. It is true
 24 that what Mr Weatherby put to you, both the wife and
 25 Ismail effectively said, "I didn't do that search". The

34

1 wife's account was that Ismail had used the iPad to
 2 search for all sorts of things, and he said, in effect,
 3 "I never used it"; do you recall that?
 4 A. I do. I think he said, "I can't use it because
 5 effectively it will have pictures of" --
 6 Q. "There are pictures of my sisters-in-law"?
 7 A. -- "and other females on the device".
 8 Q. But this is the additional fact or additional facts that
 9 I wanted to adduce for the record. Those who conducted
 10 the port stop were able to look at the device and find
 11 some facts that pointed away from that being the true
 12 position?
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. {INQ032586/7} of that report for the record. Is it the
 15 position that email addresses of Ismail Abedi had been
 16 logged into and used on that iPad?
 17 A. I'm sure that's right. This is from recollection. I'm
 18 just re-reading page 7.
 19 Q. Was it also the case that that iPad had been used to --
 20 I'm going to get this absolutely right -- conduct
 21 conversations which had been deleted but nevertheless
 22 traces were found? To conduct conversations with names
 23 that were recorded as "honey_chick_15" and "sexaaay gyal"
 24 and FaceTime calls, and in relation to the latter one,
 25 "likle pwincess .. xsexaaay gyal", that contact had also

35

1 been in telephone contact with Ismail Abedi's personal
 2 telephone?
 3 A. Again, could you tell me where that is in the report,
 4 please?
 5 Q. It's at page 7 of 8 on the port stop {INQ032586/7}.
 6 A. I've got page 7.
 7 Q. So if you look, it's about the middle of the page, there
 8 were several contacts for females in the device that had
 9 been deleted. Then those particulars that I have just
 10 read out.
 11 A. My page 7 might be different to your page 7, I'm afraid.
 12 Q. Oh, I'm so sorry. Perhaps you'll take it from me.
 13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: This is relevant to the issue of who
 14 might have used the iPad?
 15 MR JAMIESON: Exactly, sir.
 16 A. Yes. If it helps, it would not be in doubt in my mind
 17 that he'd used it.
 18 Q. Quite.
 19 A. So I think that was a blatant lie.
 20 Q. Thank you. I simply wanted to adduce the facts
 21 supportive of that inference.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 23 MR JAMIESON: The only other thing about Ismail Abedi, just
 24 to follow on from a topic that Mr Weatherby was asking
 25 you about, because on the 2015 port stop there were some

36

1 images that went all the way back to 2011 that showed,
 2 to borrow his phrase, the Abedi boys with guns and in
 3 Libya.
 4 A. Yes.
 5 Q. In fact, when his house was searched in 2017, there were
 6 some photographs that went back even further, and again
 7 I'd just like to put those facts on the record, and
 8 we can do it in this way. Mr Lopez, it's the
 9 appendices, the combined appendices, to Mr Barraclough's
 10 first statement. {INQ034649/233}. There's nothing on
 11 this page, apart from a summary of the images, nothing
 12 sensitive, as far as I can see.
 13 As we can see, this is your appendix 12, the device
 14 is seized on that occasion, the schedule 7 -- have
 15 I given you the wrong reference? It's {INQ034649/196},
 16 Mr Lopez.
 17 There we are. These are devices seized from flat 26
 18 Royston Court. So this is in 2017, after the attack.
 19 The point that I wish to make can be made simply by
 20 looking at the description of what's come from that
 21 Samsung SATA disc. The first paragraph in italics:
 22 "Some of these images show Ismail in possession of
 23 firearms in company with the son of the Al-Qaeda
 24 commander Anas al-Libi."
 25 Somebody that you talked about yesterday with

1 Mr Greaney?
 2 A. Yes, that's correct.
 3 Q. As we look down, there are a number of images of
 4 Ismail Abedi with firearms, which are described simply
 5 by the URN and the metadata date. As we look down the
 6 list, we can see that some are as early as 2009; is that
 7 right?
 8 A. Yes. That's from the metadata, yes. That's what's
 9 recorded against them, yes.
 10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So that's Ismail?
 11 MR JAMIESON: That's Ismail. If we go to {INQ034649/197},
 12 please. We have some images of Salman Abedi which again
 13 are 2011/2012. Then underneath that, images of
 14 Hashem Abedi armed with weapons, some of these also in
 15 company with the son of Al-Qaeda commander Anas al-Libi,
 16 and those pictures of Hashem also go to 2009.
 17 A. Yes.
 18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Can you help me, how old would Hashem
 19 have been in 2009?
 20 A. Hashem would have been, in 2009, he would have been...
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We normally have about 20 people putting
 22 their hands up immediately to answer these questions.
 23 A. I would say 13, 12 or 13.
 24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 25 A. I think everybody else is doing the calculation and I'm

1 probably wrong.
 2 MR JAMIESON: I'm not brave enough to do it.
 3 It's not necessary for my purposes to go through the
 4 wider context.
 5 A. Just to differentiate between these, and I think it
 6 might help, is that I think these are just slightly
 7 different, the 2009 ones, because the 2011/2012 ones are
 8 very militaristic. The 2009 ones I would -- from my
 9 view of it, my recollection is that they are more
 10 home-based, if that makes sense.
 11 Q. But still with weapons?
 12 A. Of course, yes. Please don't think I'm diminishing
 13 that, but there is a slight difference bearing in mind
 14 that we know that, unfortunately, Libya is and has been
 15 for a very long time awash with weapons.
 16 Q. I'm going to refrain from any comment, but thank you for
 17 the clarificatory detail.
 18 MR GREANEY: He will have been 12 in 2009. He was born on
 19 8 April 1997.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you for that.
 21 MR JAMIESON: It goes without saying, I'm not going to take
 22 you through any more of this, but there was a very large
 23 quantity of what might be called mindset material
 24 recovered from that address at the time?
 25 A. Yes, a very large quantity.

1 Q. And indeed, from the former Abedi family home at
 2 Elsmore Road?
 3 A. Yes.
 4 Q. Thank you. The only other topic is something that
 5 I asked you about almost a year ago, which was the Micra
 6 at Devell House and whether or not there'd been a parcel
 7 shelf.
 8 A. Yes.
 9 Q. Just to put that in context, since I asked you those
 10 questions --
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: This issue is going to whether you could
 12 see things in the back of the car, is it?
 13 MR JAMIESON: Precisely, sir.
 14 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you. Just so I'm focusing on the
 15 right thing.
 16 MR JAMIESON: In fact, sir, the simplest way of doing that
 17 may be just to look at some of the stills of the car and
 18 of Salman Abedi going to the car and coming away from
 19 the car, which can be done.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You'll have to remind me what the answer
 21 was the last time you asked this question a year ago.
 22 MR JAMIESON: The last time was -- I was asserting to the
 23 officer that the parcel shelf was not in place,
 24 he wasn't sure, and he's gone away to show that I was
 25 not correct. That's why I want to put it right.

1 Let's look at Salman Abedi first, if we may, please.
 2 Mr Lopez, {INQ031277/1}, which is the INQ of his
 3 movements on 19 May, starting at {INQ031277/4}.
 4 8.35 in the morning. Salman Abedi leaving
 5 Granby House on 19 May with the blue suitcase going
 6 towards his taxi.
 7 We can probably turn it on one slide, please, to
 8 {INQ031277/5}, into the taxi.
 9 Then if we go, please, to {INQ031277/8}, he's
 10 walking towards the Micra, so he's travelled to
 11 Devell House by this point. The Micra is obscured
 12 behind the leaves of that tree, but he's pushing what
 13 can be seen, from the way he's handling it, to be an
 14 empty suitcase. We've all watched the CCTV as well as
 15 the stills .
 16 If we go on to {INQ31277/9}, please. What is of
 17 interest is the legend that the watcher of the CCTV has
 18 recorded, that Mr Abedi can be seen opening the boot and
 19 both side doors. We note the time, 8.53.
 20 {INQ031277/10}, please. 9.01, so something in the
 21 order of 8 minutes later, Salman Abedi walks away from
 22 the Micra and the note that's been added is:
 23 "Now appears to be dragging the suitcase along using
 24 the wheels rather than carrying it."
 25 If we could go to {INQ031277/14}, back at his

41

1 accommodation. The note has been added:
 2 "The suitcase [and we can see the size of it] now
 3 looks very heavy due to Abedi appearing to struggle to
 4 carry it."
 5 That's before and after. The state of the Micra
 6 when the police considered it is at {CPS000204/1},
 7 please. And these are the photographs that you found.
 8 They are a little difficult to look at, but we'll do our
 9 best.
 10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And not discovered until a couple of
 11 days after, am I right about that?
 12 A. That's right. So some time after, actually. I will
 13 check the date for you, sir .
 14 MR JAMIESON: It's a date in June, I think.
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 16 MR JAMIESON: I think it may be 2 June.
 17 A. Yes, I think that's right.
 18 Q. We'll just go through a couple of photographs. In this
 19 one, this is the Micra. You can just about see on the
 20 left margin of the photograph, through the rear
 21 windshield, those are the rear seats and we will see
 22 that is the parcel shelf in place.
 23 If you can go to the next photograph, please,
 24 Mr Lopez {CPS000204/3}. That is the rear seat of the
 25 vehicle, and we can see — the front passenger seat is

42

1 towards the left of the image, rear seats towards the
 2 right of the image, a number of items piled up, which
 3 includes the spare tyre on those rear seats.
 4 Picture number 5 {CPS000204/5}, please. Again,
 5 that's the rear of the vehicle and you can just about
 6 see that the parcel shelf is in place.
 7 Then page 23 {CPS000204/23}. To orientate you,
 8 there is no photograph of the boot opening but what
 9 seemed to have happened is that rather than going in
 10 through the boot, the officers have gone in through the
 11 side doors, the contents of what was on the seats has
 12 been removed, the seats have been pulled forward, the
 13 parcel shelf by this stage has been removed by the
 14 searches, and these were the items that were in the
 15 boot.
 16 A. Yes.
 17 Q. So these were the items that were in the car together
 18 with those on the back seat at the point at which the
 19 police discovered it in June. Whatever else had been in
 20 it and had been removed by Salman Abedi in his suitcase
 21 had gone, but I think the point can probably be made,
 22 without trespassing into comment, that this Nissan Micra
 23 does not have a very big boot and it appears still to
 24 have been full, such that the spare tyre was on the back
 25 seat after Salman Abedi had emptied it.

43

1 A. The Nissan Micra does not have a big boot.
 2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I think he wonders what you're getting
 3 at.
 4 MR JAMIESON: I think what I'm getting at is this, again to
 5 remind you, because it's a long time ago, last time
 6 I asked you questions about this topic we discussed that
 7 Mr Ahmed Alzilitni had been seen on the CCTV to go and
 8 look into the Micra on 7 May before it was emptied,
 9 after a phone call from Elyas Elmehdi.
 10 A. Yes.
 11 Q. And that on 21 May, after it had been emptied,
 12 Elyas Elmehdi was captured on CCTV looking into the car.
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. Something which he said in interview he had not done.
 15 A. Yes.
 16 Q. And also, Mr Alzilitni was captured having an extended
 17 look into three sides of the car, walking around it, so
 18 that's on 21 May, after it had been emptied but before
 19 the attack.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So the point is what could be seen if
 21 you looked into the car?
 22 MR JAMIESON: Exactly, sir.
 23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: There is a parcel shelf as I understand.
 24 MR JAMIESON: There was a parcel shelf —
 25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: But the question is how much it would be

44

1 covering and how much you could still see?
 2 MR JAMIESON: The question is, to put it bluntly, there was
 3 a parcel shelf but the boot was full with the remainder,
 4 so all of the bomb-making materials must either have
 5 been accommodated in the car before or, if they were
 6 in the boot, what had come out of the — the
 7 configuration of the inside of the car must have changed
 8 and significantly so between those two dates.
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. Do you agree with those comments?
 10 A. Well, there are a couple of, I suppose, difficulties
 11 that are probably our fault, actually. The first
 12 pictures that you see of the Micra are actually taken by
 13 surveillance officers. So they are the people who have
 14 been deployed into that car park to find that vehicle
 15 and then conduct an initial assessment. With the
 16 greatest of respect to those surveillance officer,
 17 they're not very good pictures.
 18 MR JAMIESON: Those were your words, not mine!
 19 A. They're not very good pictures and the purpose really is
 20 to identify that vehicle and bring that information back
 21 and have a look at what's displayed. So on the back
 22 seat, you see the spare tyre, you see a petrol canister,
 23 you see another empty container, you see the baseboard
 24 for the boot. So the baseboard for the boot, which
 25 would have covered the spare tyre in the actual well of

45

1 the boot, that's been put over whatever's behind the
 2 seats. So that's what they see. That looks to me to be
 3 quite neat, so it would be difficult, I agree, for
 4 somebody to take something out of that and then
 5 re-arrange it and make it neat.
 6 The boot, however, don't forget, would I think be
 7 extended, so there would be more space in the boot. I'm
 8 not suggesting that it would be a lot of space, but the
 9 final picture that you see is after that — is taken
 10 after that initial search.
 11 Q. Yes.
 12 A. The initial search is very much — it's a safety
 13 consideration because if you're looking for explosives,
 14 the last thing in the world you want is for this thing
 15 to blow up on you. So it's all about safety and it's
 16 not very neat.
 17 Q. No.
 18 A. So some of the mess that you see there is as a result of
 19 that search, and unfortunately, as it was after that,
 20 there is no bank of photographs and because we didn't
 21 have them, we couldn't use them at court. So there's no
 22 bank of photographs to say what you actually saw
 23 effectively as you got everything out of the vehicle.
 24 So the next set of photographs is when everything has
 25 been taken out and displayed on the tarmac.

46

1 Q. Yes.
 2 A. So that was the reason why we commissioned the cartoon
 3 that was presented at court, which effectively shows in
 4 the vehicle where everything was positioned and, as it
 5 was taken out, then where it was put on to the tarmac.
 6 I don't know whether that might be more helpful or less
 7 helpful or not make a difference.
 8 Q. The only thing, and thank you, I have understood and
 9 appreciated about the way in which the car had gone
 10 into — I didn't want to draw attention to that.
 11 The point that you made about the baseboard being in
 12 place and uncovering what's in the back seat, it's
 13 difficult, and I bow to your knowledge of the case, but
 14 if one were to go through the photographs, and perhaps
 15 we'll do that now —
 16 A. If you go back to the second or third photograph, just
 17 showing the back seat.
 18 Q. Yes. {CPS000204/3}, please, Mr Lopez.
 19 A. You have this board underneath on which you have a —
 20 you can just see the blue of a drum through a gap just
 21 there. Then you have effectively — it's almost like
 22 plyboard. So there's a board on top of that on which
 23 then you have this empty petrol can.
 24 Q. So the point that you're making is there was space
 25 underneath there for further items to be —

47

1 A. My recollection of this, and really this is just from
 2 this morning, is that that spare tyre would have been
 3 in the boot.
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It would be covered by that in the boot?
 5 A. Yes.
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It looks like it's been removed from
 7 there so something can be put in where the spare —
 8 which would keep it more hidden from people outside.
 9 A. Yes, sir, that's my recollection. By all means, I will
 10 check, but either way, that is very much what we've got.
 11 MR JAMIESON: Yes.
 12 A. Despite the size of the boot, our understanding and
 13 certainly our calculation was that what was in that
 14 suitcase could come out of that boot and clearly could
 15 go to Granby House. That was our case.
 16 Q. Oh yes, I'm not beginning to disagree with you on that.
 17 A. However suspicious that might look now, it's a view,
 18 isn't it? I think it's an opinion as to how suspicious
 19 that would look then.
 20 Q. Yes. I suppose the facts that might be built into it
 21 are the wider chronology of the 6-minute telephone
 22 call —
 23 A. Yes.
 24 Q. — with Salman Abedi and Elyas Elmehdi on 15 May and the
 25 trip of Elyas Elmehdi to see Abdalraouf Abdallah on

48

1 17 May.
 2 A. I think you can certainly build your suspicions into
 3 that and I would definitely not disagree with any of
 4 that.
 5 Q. I tried to advance that issue, I'm not sure I succeeded.
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That's fine. The reality is there are
 7 suspicions, but there haven't been prosecutions?
 8 A. No, and I think you're entitled to -- I think one is
 9 entitled to take a view on this depending on your
 10 perspective.
 11 MR JAMIESON: I thought it important to address it, given
 12 the evidence of a year ago. Thank you very much.
 13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: The cartoon, as you describe it, is
 14 showing what it looked like when the police first
 15 arrived and then taking things out?
 16 A. I think it might have been played, actually, early on
 17 in the inquiry, sir.
 18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Forgive me, it's quite a long time ago
 19 when this inquiry first started.
 20 A. Basically, it shows what is recovered from the inside of
 21 the car. It's all of those items.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It's showing the police activity
 23 after --
 24 A. No, it unpacks the car, it's quite a clever piece of
 25 animation.

49

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We'll have a look at it. Thank you.
 2 MR JAMIESON: Thank you.
 3 MR GREANEY: Thank you, Mr Jamieson.
 4 Mr Horwell, do you have any questions?
 5 MR HORWELL: I have no questions. Sir, we'll look into the
 6 cartoon. If there's anything from it which we believe
 7 is relevant to these issues, we'll let you know.
 8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It sounds like we've already got it if
 9 it's already been shown, so I will remind myself of what
 10 it looked like.
 11 MR GREANEY: We certainly have it, yes. I think
 12 Mr de la Poer played it during the course of the
 13 December evidence of the witness.
 14 Sir, that concludes the evidence of Mr Barraclough.
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Barraclough, I know you have now
 16 retired; is that right?
 17 A. No, sir, not quite yet.
 18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Sorry, I was given disinformation. But
 19 you are the person who ran Operation Manteline?
 20 A. Yes.
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And we are very grateful, from the
 22 inquiry's point of view and everybody here, for the
 23 enormous amount of hard work which has been done by the
 24 Manteline team to help us understand things, and the
 25 amount of information you've given us has been enormous.

50

1 If I'm allowed to, it would be helpful to mention
 2 Chief Inspector Russell and the amount of work which was
 3 done on the CCTV because putting that all together,
 4 I know it's not just him, but I think he led the team
 5 who did that --
 6 A. Yes.
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: -- must have been absolutely huge but it
 8 has certainly helped my understanding of what happened.
 9 So generally, we are very grateful to
 10 Operation Manteline and everyone who contributed to it.
 11 A. Thank you, sir. I'll pass that on. Thank you.
 12 MR GREANEY: Could we take a longer than usual morning break
 13 and restart at 11.30, please?
 14 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Yes, thank you.
 15 (10.58 am)
 16 (A short break)
 17 (11.45 am)
 18 MR GREANEY: Sir, the gentleman in the witness box is
 19 Mr Fawzi Haffar, who is the chairman of Didsbury Mosque.
 20 He is represented by Mr Henley, who is to my right, and
 21 I'll ask that he be sworn, please.
 22 MR FAWZI HAFFAR (sworn)
 23 Questions from MR GREANEY
 24 MR GREANEY: Would you begin, please, by telling us your
 25 full name?

51

1 A. My name is Fawzi Haffar.
 2 Q. Mr Haffar, are you currently the chairman of
 3 Didsbury Mosque?
 4 A. Yes, sir, I am currently the chairman of
 5 Didsbury Mosque, also known as the Manchester Islamic
 6 Centre.
 7 Q. Have you held that position since March of 2018?
 8 A. That is correct, sir.
 9 Q. Having been a trustee of the mosque since 2004?
 10 A. That is correct, sir.
 11 Q. Have you provided for the assistance of the inquiry
 12 a number of witness statements in those capacities?
 13 A. I have, sir.
 14 Q. In terms of your own personal background, have you
 15 attended the mosque since 1983?
 16 A. I have indeed.
 17 Q. Are your roots, as you describe in paragraph 3 of your
 18 first witness statement, Syrian, Kuwaiti, Lebanese and
 19 Nigeria?
 20 A. I have, sir, that's correct.
 21 Q. Do you have yourself any links with Libya?
 22 A. No, sir.
 23 Q. Next, please, some background in terms of the mosque.
 24 Is Didsbury Mosque the second oldest established mosque
 25 in Manchester?

52

1 A. You could say that, sir .
 2 Q. Does it date back to 1969?
 3 A. I understood it was dating back to 1967 when the
 4 building was purchased.
 5 Q. Right. But at any rate, the late 1960s?
 6 A. Absolutely, sir .
 7 Q. Does the mosque have some particular objects?
 8 A. I do not understand the question, sir .
 9 Q. I'm looking at paragraph 6 of your first witness
 10 statement.
 11 A. May I open my --
 12 Q. Of course, please do. If at any stage you need to refer
 13 to your witness statement, you only need to ask.
 14 At paragraph 5, you state that the Manchester
 15 Islamic Centre or Didsbury Mosque is the second oldest
 16 established mosque in Manchester, dating back, as you
 17 say there, to 1969, but we now know it's 1967.
 18 A. Yes.
 19 Q. You identify that the centre is registered as a charity
 20 and your charitable structure is a trust deed.
 21 A. Correct, sir .
 22 Q. And then at paragraph 6 you identify the objects of the
 23 mosque.
 24 A. Now I understand what you mean, I would have said
 25 objectives , but yes indeed. I've read the statement.

1 When the charity was founded, the objective was
 2 really , as I mention, the relief of poverty, advancement
 3 of education, the advancement of Islamic education, to
 4 provide or assist in the provision of facilities in the
 5 interests of social welfare, for recreation and leisure
 6 time, with the objective of improving the conditions of
 7 lives of some of the Muslims in the UK arriving at the
 8 time or still arriving now, and to also have inter-faith
 9 sessions with the wider communities and perhaps educate
 10 and give correct Islamic values to anyone who wishes to
 11 know what Islam is about.
 12 Q. I'm now at paragraph 16, page 5 of your statement. Is
 13 the congregation of the mosque mixed, with a large Arab
 14 community and other communities such as African and
 15 Pakistani communities?
 16 A. That is correct , sir . I would say South Indian, so
 17 Pakistanis, Bengalis, Indians. I would concur with
 18 that.
 19 Q. As for the Arab part of your mosque community, are some
 20 of those who attend the mosque Libyan by way of
 21 heritage?
 22 A. I would say that is true, although I would like to add
 23 that has changed over the years.
 24 Q. Changed in what way?
 25 A. Can I give a background that Didsbury Mosque and the

1 Islamic Centre was one of the few, and perhaps the only
 2 mosque in Manchester or Greater Manchester, that gave
 3 its sermon in Arabic? Of course they also gave it in
 4 English. So from what I remember and understood, when
 5 some of the Libyan community started arriving in
 6 Manchester, and the ones who wanted to attend at the
 7 mosque, they really preferred to go to a mosque where
 8 the sermons are in Arabic because some of them may have
 9 not spoken English thoroughly.
 10 Q. So we have heard evidence that it was during the 1990s
 11 that many Libyans left Libya and came to live in
 12 South Manchester. Does that accord with your
 13 recollection ?
 14 A. That is my recollection , indeed, they started coming.
 15 At the time there was trouble in Libya and we felt there
 16 were more Libyans coming in. I would say at the time
 17 perhaps in the 20s, maybe, there was about 20% of the
 18 Libyan community. We have North Africans, Moroccans,
 19 Algerians, Syrians, South Indians, and of course natives
 20 of the UK who are Muslims themselves. But I would say,
 21 as per what you said, at one time they represented maybe
 22 20%. But the situation has changed a lot in the last
 23 few years.
 24 Q. Has it changed so that there are now more persons of
 25 Libyan heritage who attend the mosque?

1 A. No, sir , it's actually much less. I could tell you from
 2 my recollection , and I do of course go to the mosque,
 3 I would say it's about 3, 4, maybe 5% maximum. Things
 4 have changed in the last few years, sir .
 5 Q. So in 2017, what percentage of your congregation were
 6 Libyans?
 7 A. From my recollection of talking to the staff and our
 8 staff, I would say perhaps 10% or 8%. I would like it
 9 to add that since 2017 many of the Libyans actually left
 10 Didsbury, they stopped attending Didsbury Mosque.
 11 Q. I was going to ask you whether you attribute the
 12 decrease in the attendance of Libyans to any particular
 13 factor .
 14 A. I would attribute -- many things happened,
 15 unfortunately, after the bombing. Because not only did
 16 Libyans stop coming to the mosque, but many of the
 17 attendees were scared, there were so many things
 18 happening, there was so much bad publicity and many of
 19 the attendees stopped coming to Didsbury Mosque. So we
 20 found that the congregation went down by maybe 50%.
 21 People were scared. There was a right wing element who
 22 came and caused problems at the mosque. So parents who
 23 used to bring their children to teach them Arabic or the
 24 Koran stopped coming and the Libyans, of course, stopped
 25 coming because they felt there was a lot of bad press

1 about every Libyan being a bad person. So that has
 2 changed a lot, indeed.
 3 Q. Does your mosque have what might be described as
 4 a membership?
 5 A. No, sir. No, sir.
 6 Q. Is it the position that, in common with most mosques,
 7 Didsbury Mosque is and was in 2017 open to anyone to
 8 come and worship within it?
 9 A. I would say that is a correct statement, absolutely.
 10 Can I also add that it's not only a mosque.
 11 Didsbury Mosque, as we refer to it, is an
 12 Islamic centre. It's not just a place to come and
 13 worship. It's a place where you can come and meet
 14 people, get educated about Islam. We have a lot of
 15 activities that go on and have been going on for many,
 16 many years. So yes, we're a mosque but we like to
 17 classify the place as an Islamic centre. For the
 18 purpose of educating yourself, we used to have and
 19 I personally used to attend to schools who used to bring
 20 children who wanted to learn more about the religion, as
 21 they did to go to churches or synagogues. So we had
 22 a lot of visitors and still do up to now.
 23 Q. It's important that we should get some idea of the
 24 number of persons who might be expected and were
 25 expected in 2017 to attend prayers. So I'm now at

1 paragraph 19 of your witness statement.
 2 For normal daily prayers, how many people would be
 3 expected to attend?
 4 A. As you are aware, sir, and as the chairman will be
 5 aware, in Islam there are five prayers. Normally, these
 6 five prayers, notwithstanding Friday, are attended by up
 7 to 20 or 30, depending on the time of the day. So the
 8 morning prayer, which is quite early, you could have
 9 maybe seven or eight people attending. Noon prayer,
 10 maybe 20, maybe 30. The time where the mosque gets
 11 extremely busy is on a Friday, which is of course the
 12 holy day in Islam, and that is the day when the mosque
 13 is at its fullest, when the centre, the buildings are
 14 absolutely heaving with attendees and worshippers.
 15 Q. During Friday prayers how many people might be expected
 16 to attend?
 17 A. Anything between 500 and 600, maybe 700. Sometimes if
 18 we can't accommodate them inside, we would put some
 19 prayer mats out and they come and pray outside. So it
 20 has reached a limit of 1,000. But we don't count, sir.
 21 That's the other thing. We feel that everyone's
 22 welcome, so there isn't a counting stage of saying it's
 23 full now. Of course we have to also respect health and
 24 safety attributes, so we also have regulations, but
 25 I would say, in answer to your question, maybe up to

1 a 1,000.
 2 Q. I'm going to be asking you questions in due course about
 3 two particular sermons that were delivered, one in
 4 October 2014 by Mr El-Saeiti and one in December 2016 by
 5 Mr Graf. Is it conventional for a sermon to be
 6 delivered by the imam in your mosque?
 7 A. Indeed. The structure we have is that we mainly have
 8 two imams who lead the prayers and who also deliver the
 9 sermons. We have a timetable for when they would
 10 actually do the sermon because we have to give the
 11 opportunity for the younger Muslims to become
 12 knowledgeable on how to deliver a sermon. So both
 13 Mr El-Saeiti and Mr Graf were the main imams and they
 14 were the main priests or imams, as we said, who
 15 delivered the sermon on a Friday. There are others as
 16 well.
 17 Q. Is the content of a sermon left entirely up to the imam
 18 or do the trustees or other senior figures within the
 19 mosque have some control over what they deliver their
 20 sermon upon?
 21 A. We do not have control. However, we have policies. As
 22 a trustee, as the guardians of the centre we have
 23 policies and we have a convention with the imams on what
 24 can be said and what cannot be said. We tend to move
 25 away and stay away from politics or anything happening

1 outside in the world in terms of politics unless it's
 2 of course an area where there's poverty and there's need
 3 to raise awareness, that something is going on abroad
 4 and perhaps we need to raise some money.
 5 So both imams write their own, but they have their
 6 boundaries, they can know exactly what can be said and
 7 what cannot be said. And we — as trustees, we have to
 8 make sure that if at any instance something is said,
 9 then the imam has to be reminded, perhaps reprimanded,
 10 perhaps even told to step aside while we investigate why
 11 he has said this.
 12 Q. And we're going to perhaps return to that issue when we
 13 look at the 2016 sermon of Mr Graf. But you said that
 14 the mosque had policies which, as you put it, set
 15 boundaries for the content of a sermon. In December of
 16 2016, was there a written policy within the mosque that
 17 addressed what should and should not be within a sermon?
 18 A. No, sir, not at that time.
 19 Q. So how would an imam in December of 2016 have known what
 20 the boundaries were?
 21 A. Both imams are matured imams, they have graduated from
 22 good universities of Islamic studies. Both are aware of
 23 what we, the trustees, want the worshippers and the
 24 outer world to hear in terms of specifically talking
 25 about the religion, the values, so we don't give them

1 any bullet points of saying you can say and you cannot
 2 say because these are mature imams who we of course work
 3 with and we have meetings with quite often.
 4 Q. Yes.
 5 A. Both of them have been at the centre for many, many
 6 years and they've been giving sermons over many years
 7 and we did not feel, sir, that there was any time where
 8 anything abnormal, shall I say, was said.
 9 Q. The reason I was pressing you on this was because you
 10 used the term policy. Would a more accurate way of
 11 putting it, as of December 2016, be that there was no
 12 formal policy as to what ought to be within a sermon but
 13 you relied upon the experience of the imams?
 14 A. I would say that is a correct statement, sir.
 15 Q. A short time ago, you reminded me that the Islamic
 16 Centre is not only a mosque but engages with other
 17 activities too. That's a topic you address at page 2,
 18 paragraph 7 of your first witness statement.
 19 You explain that the main activities of the centre
 20 are congregational prayer services, five times a day,
 21 and the Friday prayer service; is that correct?
 22 A. That is correct, sir.
 23 Q. And you also have, and had in 2017, services for the
 24 teaching of how to read the Koran in Arabic and the
 25 basic tenets of the faith?

61

1 A. That is correct, sir.
 2 Q. Mainly for children, but also for adults?
 3 A. I can elaborate on that if you wish.
 4 Q. If you think it's helpful for you to do so, please.
 5 A. As I mentioned earlier on, Mr Chairman, the mosque and
 6 the centre is frequented by Arabs and non-Arabs. For
 7 the South Indian or South Asian community, their
 8 pronunciation of the Arabic when they read the Koran is
 9 very important and it's very important that when the
 10 Koran is being studied or being read, it has to be read
 11 in the right way. Therefore, lessons in Arabic for
 12 children and for adults were made available because when
 13 the Koran is read, out of respect for the Koran, the
 14 words have to be pronounced precisely as
 15 a mispronunciation can change the meaning of the word.
 16 Therefore, we had lessons in Arabic for both the elders,
 17 the seniors, as well as the children.
 18 Q. In that same paragraph, you express a view or a position
 19 about the nature of the mosque and I'm going to read out
 20 the relevant part and invite you to confirm that it's
 21 correct and then ask you a few questions.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Which paragraph are you at?
 23 MR GREANEY: Paragraph 7, sir.
 24 You observe:
 25 "Didsbury Mosque is diverse, pluralistic and

62

1 representative of Muslims in the UK. Our congregation
 2 is made up of various ethnicities and different schools
 3 of thought. It has been our long-established policy to
 4 accommodate all these schools of thoughts without
 5 differentiating between them, nor preferring one over
 6 another. We follow the basic Islamic teachings which
 7 are common to all Sunni schools of thought."
 8 Is that correct?
 9 A. That is correct. I would say we are a
 10 middle-of-the-road mosque and Islamic centre.
 11 Q. For reasons you will understand I need to press you
 12 in relation to that and see whether there's anything
 13 further you wish to add. As a Muslim, how would you
 14 describe the concept of Salafism?
 15 A. Sir, the word Salafism, and I don't want to give
 16 a lesson, with respect to anyone, in Arabic --
 17 Q. Just in a few sentences.
 18 A. In a few sentences, Salafism is actually the time after
 19 Islam was established and when Islam was being practised
 20 in a very fundamental, correct way. Over the years, in
 21 my opinion, some Muslims may have changed their thoughts
 22 and they are described as Salafist because they want to
 23 take the religion to times which is not within our
 24 current time.
 25 As an example, a Salafist would not allow me to be

63

1 a trustee of a mosque if I don't have a long beard,
 2 which is 30 centimetres, if I don't wear a skull hat, if
 3 I don't wear a kaftan.
 4 So if you ask a current Salafist, if they describe
 5 themselves as a Salafist, they will say, Mr Haffar
 6 shouldn't really be a trustee, he's not a proper Muslim.
 7 I am not, of course, giving any criticism to
 8 Salafists, they may feel that they are the ones who are
 9 practising better than myself. I say we are middle of
 10 the road and the Salafists have different ways of
 11 interpreting Islam.
 12 Q. Let me just make sure I've understood that. Would it be
 13 right to summarise the position in this way: Salafism is
 14 the idea that the most authentic and true Islam is to be
 15 found in the lived example of the early generations of
 16 Muslims?
 17 A. That is how they describe themselves, sir. That is how
 18 they describe themselves.
 19 Q. And is the Manchester Islamic Centre a Salafi mosque?
 20 A. No, sir. Absolutely not.
 21 Q. In 2015 to 2017, was it a Salafi mosque?
 22 A. The Manchester Islamic Centre has never been a Salafi
 23 mosque or any other mosque. We are a Sunni,
 24 middle-of-the-road mosque, sir. I can confirm that
 25 100%.

64

1 Q. Do you exclude Salafis from attendance at your mosque?
 2 A. No, sir. As I mentioned at the beginning, the mosque is
 3 open to everyone, to every single Muslim, whether they
 4 are Sunnis, Salafis, even if they are Shi'ites. If they
 5 want to come and pray they are most welcome. The mosque
 6 is an inclusive mosque for all Muslims and non-Muslims,
 7 of faith or no faith. If they want to come and pray,
 8 they are most welcome.
 9 Q. In short, therefore the Manchester Islamic Centre is
 10 middle of the road, mainstream in terms of its approach
 11 to Islam?
 12 A. Very much, sir.
 13 Q. Is not and has never been a Salafi mosque?
 14 A. Absolutely correct.
 15 Q. What does the term Muslim Brotherhood mean to you?
 16 A. Again, this is something which goes back many years.
 17 The Muslim Brotherhood is an organisation, a Muslim
 18 organisation, that was founded by Mr al-Banna in Egypt
 19 many years ago. He was a Muslim. He had different ways
 20 of thoughts in terms of being inclusive, the way he
 21 thought that perhaps the way some governments should be.
 22 He maybe wanted to bring in Sharia law in certain areas.
 23 So they have their own thoughts, which personally
 24 speaking, you know, is not wrong, but I differ with
 25 their thoughts. That's another area, if I can say, sir,

65

1 that we, by the press, have always been unfortunately —
 2 well, addressed as a Salafi mosque or a Brotherhood
 3 mosque. I can tell you, sir, we are
 4 a middle-of-the-road mosque. We do not allow groups to
 5 come and hijack the mosque.
 6 No one can say, this mosque is that, this mosque
 7 is that, to be honest with you. We are very clear, even
 8 through our imams, that we are a mainstream mosque,
 9 welcoming all Muslims, but we are in the middle of the
 10 road. We follow the sunna, which is what the Prophet,
 11 peace be upon Him, had taught us through the Koran.
 12 Q. So it's obvious from your answer, and indeed from your
 13 witness statements, that you appreciate that within the
 14 media many things have been said about your mosque.
 15 A. Yes.
 16 Q. That it is a Salafi mosque, which you have roundly
 17 rejected, and you'll also be aware that in some circles
 18 it is suggested there's a strong connection between
 19 Manchester Islamic Centre and the Muslim Brotherhood?
 20 A. I have heard that, sir, but I have read that in the
 21 papers, frankly speaking. Myself, amongst my fellow
 22 trustees and my employees and even among the attendees,
 23 I have never heard that. I do know people say that
 24 about us, people say many things about us, but I can
 25 assure you, I can assure everyone, the Manchester

66

1 Islamic Centre is a middle-of-the-road, mainstream
 2 mosque.
 3 Q. Next I want to ask you about something else that
 4 you will know has been spoken about within the media.
 5 In particular, there was an article in the
 6 Financial Times on 27 May 2017, indicating that your
 7 centre has strong ties to Libya. Sir, this is
 8 paragraph 10 of the witness statement.
 9 Is that correct?
 10 A. No, sir. We have no ties to Libya, no ties to Libyan
 11 groups. I can categorically tell you here and now, and
 12 I'm under oath, there are no ties to Libya or any Libyan
 13 groups.
 14 Q. Are any of the trustees Libyan?
 15 A. No, sir. We have never had any Libyan trustees at the
 16 centre.
 17 Q. And have you or, so far as you know, any of your fellow
 18 trustees ever visited Libya?
 19 A. Not as far as I'm concerned. As far as I remember, none
 20 of them have.
 21 Q. Nonetheless, are and were in 2017 some of the staff of
 22 the mosque of Libyan heritage?
 23 A. Yes, sir, up until now I can say, absolutely.
 24 Q. Was one of the people falling into that category the
 25 imam Mustafa Graf?

67

1 A. Yes, sir, I can confirm Mustafa has been an imam and
 2 employed by the centre and he is of Libyan heritage.
 3 Q. Did you become aware of an occasion upon which he went
 4 to Libya and then spent a period incarcerated?
 5 A. Yes, I do remember that period. I do remember it very
 6 well.
 7 Q. Are you aware that it was reported and has been reported
 8 since that he had been fighting in Libya?
 9 A. I read it in the papers, sir. To be honest with you,
 10 at the time when he was incarcerated, the British
 11 Government, our local MPs, councillors, were actually
 12 seeking the help of the UK Government to get him out of
 13 Libya. Therefore, in my opinion, if he was really
 14 fighting there, I don't think the security services
 15 would have cared. He was there to visit, as far as
 16 I know, his family and he was incarcerated, like many
 17 others.
 18 Q. So your belief is that he did not go to fight but went
 19 to Libya for some reason connected with his family;
 20 is that a fair summary?
 21 A. Yes, sir.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Do we have a date for this?
 23 MR GREANEY: I'm sure we do have a date but I don't have it
 24 immediately to hand.
 25 What's your recollection of the period during which

68

1 Mr Graf was incarcerated?
 2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Give us your estimate, we can check.
 3 A. It was maybe 2014, maybe 2015. But I do remember when
 4 he went there, we were surprised to hear through his
 5 wife, because he'd left his wife and children in the UK,
 6 that the Libyan authorities had decided to arrest him
 7 for some reason. We do not know why. Frankly speaking,
 8 because we have a good relationship with the security
 9 services, the police, our councillors, our MPs, we --
 10 I can use the word -- lobbied to get him out of there
 11 because his family were missing him and we were worried
 12 about it. At the end of the day he was an employee of
 13 the mosque and we wanted him to be back in the UK.
 14 That's what I remember.
 15 MR HENLEY: I don't think if this helps, and it's easy to
 16 get confused over dates, but it was reported that he was
 17 back in Manchester having spent time incarcerated in
 18 Libya in October 2011.
 19 MR GREANEY: That's extremely helpful, thank you.
 20 A. Thank you, sir, thank you very much.
 21 Q. You remember 2014/2015?
 22 A. That's what I remember. So many things have happened
 23 over the years.
 24 Q. Of course. And that was a period of conflict in Libya
 25 which is maybe why you thought it was then.

69

1 A. Indeed.
 2 Q. Equally, we know 2011 was also a period of conflict.
 3 A. Yes.
 4 Q. Have you ever seen a photograph of Mustafa Graf wearing
 5 military fatigues?
 6 A. I did see that in the papers, yes. I saw that a few
 7 days after the bombing, I seem to remember, yes.
 8 Q. Bearing in mind that your understanding was that he had
 9 not gone to Libya in order to fight, did you ask him
 10 what that photograph was to do with?
 11 A. Indeed, sir. At the time, I can again elaborate. The
 12 first reaction by the trustees was to dismiss him. We
 13 dismissed him as an imam and as an employee to
 14 investigate what was he doing this, why was he in
 15 military fatigues because he had not told us that. We
 16 also informed the police to investigate the situation.
 17 We have a very close relationship with the police. So
 18 we immediately spoke to the police and of course when we
 19 suspended him, we brought an independent person,
 20 a consultant, to investigate, to talk to him, and we
 21 said to him, you'll stay away from the centre until
 22 you're investigated and until we find out from the
 23 authorities that they are comfortable that you were
 24 there as per what you have said you were there helping
 25 on a medical and spiritual basis. Because that is the

70

1 answer he gave us on the day, "What were you doing
 2 there, Abu Omar?", as we refer to him. "I was there
 3 helping in a spiritual way", "Why were we not
 4 informed?", "It didn't happen". He was suspended, sir.
 5 Q. What was your and what is now your understanding of why,
 6 if he was there for a spiritual purpose, he was dressed
 7 in what appear to be military fatigues?
 8 A. Very good question, sir. That is exactly what I asked
 9 him. He was told by the military people who were there
 10 that in order for you to blend in the right way, it is
 11 advisable that you go into military fatigues.
 12 I accepted that. I accepted he was saying the truth,
 13 but I said to him, nevertheless, this does not look good
 14 to us as the trustees, therefore thank you for the
 15 answer, but you are suspended, sir.
 16 Q. After a period of suspension, did he leave the mosque or
 17 return to his duties as imam?
 18 A. Having investigated him ourselves and having heard from
 19 the consultant, and having myself talked to the police
 20 personally and get the nod and the green light from them
 21 that it's okay for him to come back, we decided to ask
 22 him and invite him back. We did so.
 23 Q. When you say the consultant, are you talking about
 24 Mr Jahangir Mohammed?
 25 A. That is correct, sir, Mr Jahangir Mohammed.

71

1 Q. I have no doubt you'll be asked further questions about
 2 that report by others in due course.
 3 Still on this broad topic of any connection between
 4 the mosque and Libya, I'm going to take you next to
 5 paragraph 12 of your first statement, where you observe:
 6 "The mosque has no knowledge of or any association
 7 with any attendees who may have gone to Libya to fight."
 8 A. Absolutely, sir. We have absolutely no idea.
 9 Q. "We do not encourage anyone to get involved with wars
 10 abroad, which would be in contradiction of our charity
 11 objects."
 12 A. Absolutely, sir.
 13 Q. Are you aware of suggestions that the following three
 14 individuals were attendees at your mosque?
 15 Mohammed Abdallah, who is currently serving a sentence
 16 for terrorist offences. Abdalraouf Abdallah, who again
 17 has been convicted of terrorist offences. And a man
 18 called Raphael Hostey, who went to fight in Syria, then
 19 became a propagandist for Islamic State, and was killed
 20 in a drone strike. Do those three names, any of them,
 21 mean anything to you?
 22 A. They do not mean anything to me as far as them attending
 23 the mosque.
 24 I have read about them in the papers, but I did not
 25 know them and have never heard of them before the

72

1 atrocities , to be honest with you. I can confirm I am
 2 not aware whether they attended or not. As I said
 3 earlier on, we do not screen every person that comes, we
 4 do not have a window into their heart or their
 5 conscience. So we have no idea. But I can confirm
 6 I do not know those three individuals at all .
 7 Q. So before the attack, you personally were unaware of
 8 whether they did or did not attend the mosque on any
 9 occasion?
 10 A. I can confirm that I was not aware at all before the
 11 attack.
 12 Q. Have you conducted any enquiries to establish whether
 13 any other member of staff at the mosque is or is not
 14 aware of their attendance?
 15 A. We did ask the question after the attack had happened.
 16 When we started seeing their names in the papers, we
 17 started asking our employees, "Have you heard of these
 18 people?" And no one said they knew them and no one said
 19 whether they know whether they come in because as
 20 I said, there's no membership, they can come in, they
 21 go, we don't even know what they look like, to be honest
 22 with you. But yes, to answer your question, I did ask
 23 and everyone denied they knew them.
 24 Q. So, so far as you can say, they may have attended, you
 25 simply don't know for certain one way or another?

73

1 A. I do not know, sir, I do not know.
 2 Q. At paragraph 13 you inform the inquiry that currently,
 3 so as of the date of that particular statement, which
 4 was February of 2020, at that stage you had 18 staff, of
 5 whom six were of Libyan origin?
 6 A. That's right.
 7 Q. Three of the imams, including Mr Graf, were of Libyan
 8 origin; is that right?
 9 A. That is correct, yes.
 10 Q. And were those three imams long-serving members of staff
 11 who were very familiar with the politics of Libya?
 12 A. I would think they are. They are Libyans and they know
 13 what was going on in their original country, I would
 14 say, yes.
 15 Q. In your judgement, as of 2017, were they sufficiently
 16 experienced to be able to deal with matters of extremism
 17 and radicalisation?
 18 A. I would say 100% that statement is correct, because one
 19 of the first things we all agree on is radicalisation
 20 has no place in Islam or in our mosque.
 21 Q. Were you yourself or you as trustees aware in 2017 of
 22 any particular issue with extremism and/or
 23 radicalisation within the South Manchester Libyan
 24 community?
 25 A. I wasn't at all, sir. I didn't even think it existed

74

1 until the papers and the bombing happened.
 2 Q. Were you aware, during the period leading up to 2017,
 3 from 2011, of young men and some older men travelling
 4 from that community in South Manchester to Libya in
 5 order to fight against Gaddafi?
 6 A. I read in the papers that there were young men
 7 travelling out of the UK, but frankly speaking I cannot
 8 recall whether the articles mentioned South Manchester.
 9 But I used to read that people were travelling abroad,
 10 whether to North Africa or even Syria, I used to read it
 11 in the paper like everybody else. But I can't recall
 12 whether I actually saw anything specifically to
 13 South Manchester to be honest with you.
 14 Q. From your own observations and experiences during that
 15 time, were you observing or being told by people that
 16 members of the Libyan community were going back to Libya
 17 to fight?
 18 A. Frankly, not at all, not at all. Can I mention if
 19 I may, sir, being a trustee, I was also a member of the
 20 independent advisory group at our local police station
 21 and I personally would attend meetings at the IAG, which
 22 stands for the independent advisory group. So we
 23 collaborated, I'm not sure that's the right word, we
 24 cooperated, shall we say, with the police and I attended
 25 meetings and we had a very good relationship with the

75

1 police. They used to come to the mosque for the purpose
 2 of giving advice, they came for recruitment, so had
 3 there been anything negative, and I used to really
 4 liaise and talk to the officers, they would have told
 5 me: please, Mr Haffar, be careful, please, Fawzi, be
 6 careful of so—and—so. I never knew at all that there
 7 was anything negative happening in South Manchester or
 8 even at our mosque.
 9 Q. So in the period before May 2017, it's clear from what
 10 you have said, you were unaware of any particular issue
 11 with people going to fight in Libya and coming back?
 12 A. That's correct, sir.
 13 Q. No doubt you were aware of the emergence of
 14 Islamic State or ISIS —
 15 A. Or Daesh, as we call them.
 16 Q. — within certain parts of the world, in particular
 17 Syria and Iraq, and did you become aware of the
 18 declaration of the caliphate by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in
 19 2014?
 20 A. I didn't follow it thoroughly but I was reading the
 21 papers, UK papers, worldwide papers, whether it's
 22 Al Jazeera or CNN, I was aware of what was going on. As
 23 I mentioned earlier on, my roots are from Syria, I have
 24 relatives in Syria, my family originates from Damascus.
 25 So it was in my interests to know that things are not

76

1 going from bad to worse, so I was reading what was going
 2 on.
 3 That particular statement you mentioned I do not
 4 recall it. There was so much going on in the time in
 5 the eastern part of Syria and in Iraq and, frankly
 6 speaking, I'm a busy person, I'm a businessman, so
 7 I didn't rally have time to look at everything, but
 8 I was aware of what was going on, absolutely.
 9 Q. Did you become aware in the period after the declaration
 10 of the caliphate and before May 2017 of people
 11 travelling to Syria from the United Kingdom for
 12 extremist purposes?
 13 A. No, sir, but again I read in the papers people were
 14 travelling. As far as I was concerned, charities were
 15 travelling to take food and take anything that is
 16 helpful. I was never aware of anything that was being
 17 done in an evil way. I read it in the paper, but was
 18 not aware.
 19 I was definitely aware of many British charities
 20 travelling to northern parts of Syria, taking food,
 21 taking clothing, et cetera. But we read in the papers
 22 so many things going on, but we don't believe everything
 23 that is said in the papers, sir.
 24 Q. I think from what you've said to us, you don't recall
 25 personally being aware of a problem with people

1 travelling from the UK to Syria --
 2 A. Not at all, sir.
 3 Q. -- and elsewhere for extremist purposes?
 4 A. Not at all.
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Something we have heard of, and you must
 6 tell us whether you had, the setting-up of the caliphate
 7 led to bombing in Syria --
 8 A. Absolutely, yes, Mr Chairman.
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: -- and lots of Muslims being killed,
 10 including young Muslims being killed as a result. Were
 11 you aware of people in your community being upset at
 12 that?
 13 A. Upset, yes, I would say, because many people were seeing
 14 the atrocities being done in the name of our religion.
 15 And many of us were critical, very critical, still, of
 16 IS or Daesh, as we call them. So we were aware of what
 17 was going on. But frankly, Mr Chairman, we were not
 18 aware of anyone leaving Manchester or the UK. We were
 19 reading many things in the papers. It was surprising to
 20 us because, again, the mosque I go to, which I still do,
 21 as far as I am concerned, all the attendees are
 22 middle-of-the-road people who are wise and who have been
 23 taught Islam in the correct way, not to pack their stuff
 24 and go and fight. That is not my belief and that's not
 25 the belief of most Muslims.

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Is the setting up of a caliphate part of
 2 the belief of most Muslims?
 3 A. No, sir.
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 5 A. It's a minority. I can confirm that to you.
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you very much.
 7 MR GREANEY: So if the position is that from July 2014 there
 8 was a developing and serious problem with people
 9 becoming more extreme, becoming adherents to
 10 Islamic State, travelling to Syria for that purpose, and
 11 if, moreover, the problem involved the thought that
 12 Islamic State in Syria was seeking to direct attacks
 13 upon the United Kingdom, that appears to have passed you
 14 by personally?
 15 A. Absolutely, sir. Yes, indeed, I was never aware of
 16 anything like that happening. Again, you have to
 17 remember, I'm a UK citizen. The UK is my country. Yes,
 18 my roots may be Syrian, Kuwaiti, Nigerian. I'm
 19 a British citizen, I'm a British Muslim citizen, and
 20 therefore --
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I don't think anyone is suggesting that
 22 you had those thoughts. It's whether you were aware
 23 in the community.
 24 A. Indeed, sorry to interrupt you, but it's in my interests
 25 as a trustee to make sure that, if we do hear anything,

1 we report it to the authorities. We have
 2 a responsibility on our shoulder being trustees or as
 3 being elders in the community.
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 5 MR GREANEY: As a trustee over this period, 2014 to 2017,
 6 were you aware of any particular need for those working
 7 within the mosque to keep an eye out for signs of
 8 extremism?
 9 A. Okay, so in terms of the teachings that went on at the
 10 mosque, as I mentioned earlier on, we taught Arabic, we
 11 taught the Koran and sometimes Islamic studies in
 12 accordance with the Koran. The teachers and the persons
 13 who used to come and teach would be vetted, first of all
 14 we would have a DBS or as it used to be known, something
 15 else. So they would be vetted, they would be
 16 interviewed, and we made sure that when we interviewed
 17 them that they are here for the purpose of teaching
 18 Arabic, Koran and the reading of the Koran and Islamic
 19 studies in accordance with GCSE curriculum because
 20 that is where the students eventually would be examined.
 21 You could say that we knew more or less who we were
 22 dealing with, but as I said earlier on, sir, I don't
 23 have a window into the hearts or the minds of
 24 individuals. I cannot say I'm 100% sure he or she has
 25 no extreme thoughts. It's very difficult for us, sir.

1 Q. As of May 2017, and in the years before that, did the
2 mosque have any formal policy dealing with the risk of
3 and how to address radicalisation and extremism?
4 A. I wouldn't say we had a policy as such, sir. But
5 I would like to add, if I may, that prior to 2017, in
6 fact starting in 2015, again we had brought
7 a consultant, not Mr Jahangir Mohammed, where we were
8 restructuring the mosque in a variety of ways of how to
9 educate, of the responsibilities, of the motto, of the
10 values. So there were a lot of things we were trying to
11 change in a positive way. Everything was fine as far as
12 we were concerned, but there was no reason why we could
13 not change it more into a positive way.
14 Again, because we knew the imams, we knew who was
15 lecturing there, we never thought that there might be
16 anyone who may have any radical thoughts, and we knew
17 for sure there was nobody there who would be teaching
18 any radicalism because that's again against our
19 ideology. So therefore, I would say we were doing our
20 best to make sure there isn't anything going on over
21 there, and as far as I'm concerned, there was no
22 radicalisation, sir.
23 Q. Looking back now, do you think it would be a fair
24 observation to say that the Didsbury Mosque was not
25 doing enough to assess whether members of its

81

1 congregation were being radicalised?
2 A. No, sir, I would disagree with the statement, absolutely
3 not. You could not say that, sir. As trustees, as
4 management, we were all doing our best, we were always
5 working to make sure that we were in the middle of the
6 road. We vetted the imams, we vetted any invited
7 visiting imams who sometimes would come and give
8 a sermon. So we made sure over the years radicalism and
9 radical people have no place in our mosque.
10 Q. I'm certain in this context that you will be aware of
11 what has been said by Mr El-Saeiti, one of your imams.
12 A. Yes.
13 Q. And you'll have read his witness statements, I am sure
14 with care.
15 A. I have indeed.
16 Q. And in your own second witness statement you address
17 much of what he says. I'm going to refer to just two
18 aspects of what he has had to say. Do you have his
19 statements available to you there?
20 A. The ones from today or the ones from earlier?
21 Q. It's his very first.
22 A. Would that be in the bundle, sir?
23 Q. I don't have the bundle you have. It's the statement of
24 23 September 2020. It runs to 13 pages. I will
25 summarise what he says, in any event. I'm at page 12,

82

1 paragraph 27. {INQ035979/12}.
2 I'm sure you'll remember this passage, he observes,
3 and I'll quote him — do you now have that, Mr Haffar?
4 A. I don't for some reason, I'm sorry.
5 Q. If at any stage you're disadvantaged by not having it,
6 you really must tell me because it's no part of my
7 purpose to seek to take advantage.
8 A. That's okay.
9 Q. What he observes is:
10 "Since the second wave of the civil war in Libya,
11 which erupted in 2014, ISIS and Al-Qaeda related groups,
12 as well as the Libyan Shield, and other extreme groups,
13 were fighting side by side against the majority of the
14 inhabitants of Benghazi. The groups were perpetrating
15 typical terrorist crimes such as beheadings,
16 assassinations and suicide bombings. During that
17 period, regular meetings were held at the Manchester
18 Islamic Centre by supporters of this coalition who were
19 afforded the facilities to meet throughout 2015 and
20 2016. When some concerned members of the congregation
21 raised the issue with me, I discussed it with
22 Mr Khayat..."
23 Was he a fellow trustee of yours?
24 A. He was a fellow trustee and still is a fellow trustee.
25 Q. "His response was that, 'The brothers had asked for

83

1 a venue for their activities and we allowed them."
2 And he goes on at paragraph 29 to say:
3 "Many believe that such activities in a sacred
4 religious place to be not only wrong but serve to
5 encourage a breeding ground for radicalisation."
6 And it's important I should ask you about this
7 because certainly others would wish to. What is your
8 reaction to what Mr El-Saeiti has said in that part of
9 his first statement?
10 A. Frankly speaking, sir, if he has mentioned this to my
11 fellow trustee, my fellow trustee would have shared the
12 information immediately. I have my... I have my fear
13 that Mr El-Saeiti has a different agenda. I do not want
14 to go into it, this is not the place to go into it,
15 I know the chair has mentioned a few things in the last
16 few days.
17 I disagree with the statement, sir, fully. I cannot
18 say, but I do not know if Mr El-Saeiti was in the circle
19 and was listening to what they were saying. I would
20 trust my trustee more than I would Mr El-Saeiti because
21 my trustee, in my opinion, is wiser.
22 I would also like to raise, if I may, sir, why
23 suddenly in the last few months, after Mr El-Saeiti
24 became redundant, has all this information suddenly
25 started coming out in the open? Again, this is not the

84

1 place for me to discuss what's happening over there and
 2 forgive me if I've gone and said this.
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You've been asked why he may be saying
 4 it or to comment on it, so you're perfectly entitled to
 5 do that.
 6 A. I would say he's holding a grudge against the trustees
 7 and the centre, sir.
 8 MR GREANEY: It's important that we should secure --
 9 A. Absolutely, and I would stand in court under oath and
 10 say it again and again, sir.
 11 Q. Just so that I can be clear, is it the position that you
 12 do not accept that meeting space was given to people
 13 with extremist views between 2014 and 2016?
 14 A. We never give space, sir, to anybody. It's very
 15 unfortunate that members of the inquiry have not been
 16 able to visit the mosque. But if one does, one would
 17 see we have open spaces and there are no areas for
 18 meetings, sir. We forbid any meetings of any groups.
 19 It is not allowed.
 20 Permit me for saying, and I say it with respect to
 21 everyone here, Mr El-Saeiti is a liar.
 22 Q. That's clear and you don't accept such meetings took
 23 place --
 24 A. Absolutely not, sir.
 25 Q. -- and you believe Mr El-Saeiti has made that suggestion

1 up because he bears a grudge?
 2 A. Absolutely, sir.
 3 Q. As I have said, that has the benefit of clarity.
 4 A. Thank you.
 5 Q. I am nonetheless going to ask you about one further
 6 aspect of what Mr El-Saeiti has had to say, and again
 7 for the recording I'm going to be asking you about
 8 paragraphs 3 and 4 of his first witness statement, so
 9 {INQ035979/2-3}.
 10 At paragraph 3 -- again, if you need to look at
 11 this, you only need to say, but I'm quite certain you'll
 12 remember it -- he explains that:
 13 "With the emergence of ISIS in some Arab countries
 14 in general, and in Libya in particular, I delivered
 15 a number of sermons warning against this evil ideology.
 16 In my sermon on 3 October 2014, I was more explicit and
 17 mentioned some terrorist groups by name, to which some
 18 individuals objected."
 19 He goes on to talk about a particular individual
 20 amongst the congregation taking the microphone from its
 21 stand and addressing the congregation, effectively
 22 accusing him of meddling.
 23 At paragraph 4, he goes on to describe the attitude
 24 of the trustees to what had occurred, and I'll read out
 25 the passage:

1 "Shockingly, the attitude of the trustees in respect
 2 of the content of my sermon was objectionable. During
 3 a meeting with Mr Khayat, he expressly stated that
 4 he was acting on behalf of the other trustees [and he
 5 names them, including you]. Furthermore, they were
 6 unanimous in their opinion that my speaking up against
 7 terrorist groups would inevitably provoke those who
 8 support or sympathise with the groups and their
 9 ideologies."
 10 May I ask you a series of questions about that.
 11 First of all, do you accept that Mr El-Saeiti delivered
 12 sermons that were anti-Islamic State?
 13 A. I did not attend every Friday sermon when Mr El-Saeiti
 14 used to deliver them. On the occasions when I did, he
 15 would speak badly of what was happening in North Africa,
 16 Libya, and in Syria, and naturally he would criticise
 17 IS, Daesh, et cetera. No problem, you know. I would
 18 agree that I've heard that from him. But I do want to
 19 go back to one point. That's very important, sir, when
 20 you mentioned -- I wasn't there at that particular
 21 sermon if I may add, sir. My colleagues --
 22 Q. The October 2014?
 23 A. Indeed, where it was said why he was giving the sermon
 24 and, if I'm not mistaken, someone grabbed the
 25 microphone.

1 Q. Yes.
 2 A. The way it works -- and I say that with respect to
 3 anyone who's not been to the mosque and to a Friday
 4 sermon -- is when the Friday sermon goes on and it's
 5 finished and we have to do a prayer, so the sermon has
 6 to be finished, then the prayer is done. After that,
 7 there will be some reminders about activities or
 8 fund-raising, et cetera, and then everything goes quiet.
 9 It is at that stage when a person walked to the front,
 10 borrowed the microphone, which was there, and said what
 11 he did say. So he did not snatch the microphone during
 12 a sermon or immediately after a sermon. It was when the
 13 prayer was over or the activities were announced and
 14 this person -- and he is wrong, we do not allow such
 15 a thing. He took the microphone and said that such
 16 a sermon is not correct.
 17 But he was not criticising what Mr El Saeiti was
 18 saying. Mr El Saeiti in that sermon, and he fails to
 19 tell you, was talking a lot of politics because as some
 20 of you -- well, you may not know that. Mr El-Saeiti
 21 belongs to a particular tribe. Mr El-Saeiti -- by the
 22 way, his father was a diplomat for Gaddafi, I would like
 23 to reiterate this. So Mr El-Saeiti has loyalty, in my
 24 opinion, and he comes from an area of Tripoli -- sorry,
 25 of Libya, which is different to many of the other

1 attendees. So when he starts talking tribal things,
2 they will object.
3 Q. Can I just unwrap some of that?
4 A. Please.
5 Q. Let me try to make sure that I understand your position
6 in relation to this. It sounds as if at the time, or
7 shortly afterwards, you became aware of an incident in
8 which the microphone had been taken up, to put it
9 neutrally, after a sermon had been delivered by
10 Mr El-Saeiti?
11 A. That's right.
12 Q. So you became aware at the time that something had
13 happened?
14 A. My colleague, Mr Khayat, who is another trustee, was
15 there and immediately he tried to calm the situation
16 down, spoke to this person and said, "This is not the
17 place to air your politics".
18 Q. Let me just understand. You accept that Mr El-Saeiti
19 had said during the sermon something that you understood
20 to be political. It would not surprise you if the
21 position was that he was expressing anti-Islamic State
22 views in his sermon?
23 A. It's possible. That is really -- that has many ways of
24 substantiating or making you understand.
25 Q. I am going to ask you about that in a moment.

89

1 A. Okay.
2 Q. There was an adverse reaction from some within the
3 congregation to what he had said?
4 A. That's correct.
5 Q. But your understanding is that they were not angered by
6 the fact that he had expressed anti-Islamic State views,
7 they were angered more generally by the fact that he was
8 delving into politics?
9 A. I would concur and say that is the exact statement.
10 That's why I think later on, I could elaborate further.
11 Q. As you'll appreciate, I don't want to get too much into
12 the dispute between the mosque and Mr El-Saeiti,
13 although I've probably gone too far already. But do you
14 accept that the trustees of the mosque were themselves
15 critical of Mr El-Saeiti for what he had said during the
16 course of that sermon?
17 A. I would not say that, sir. I would not say we were
18 critical. I would say we were critical for him to go
19 into the politics. All of us criticise and hate what
20 Daesh or IS are doing everywhere in the world. There is
21 no way a good, proper Muslim would not say that. So
22 I would say that Mr El-Saeiti's words have not been very
23 clear in the way he's put his statement. He may have
24 criticised Islamic State, we all do, but that is not the
25 reason that members of the congregation were angered.

90

1 We are all against IS, sir, all of us in the
2 congregation, whichever tribe we belong to.
3 Q. Let me try and summarise that in a couple of sentences.
4 My understanding of what you have just said is that you
5 accept that there was criticism directed towards
6 Mr El-Saeiti by the trustees because of that sermon, but
7 the criticism was not because of what he had said about
8 ISIS, the criticism was because he had been delivering
9 a sermon that was political in tone and nature?
10 A. Correct, sir.
11 Q. Obviously, we'll see what he has to say about that --
12 A. Absolutely, sir.
13 Q. -- in due course. But the upshot of all of this is that
14 you, speaking on behalf of the trustees, do not accept
15 that any safe space was given to those who sympathised
16 with Islamic State during this period, and you do not
17 accept that Mr El-Saeiti was criticised for expressing
18 anti-Islamic State statements?
19 A. That's correct, absolutely.
20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I wonder whether you can actually
21 divorce the politics in quite the way you said. Help
22 me, because I don't know much about the politics in
23 Libya. You have two groups of Libyans, some of whom
24 come to your mosque --
25 A. That's correct, sir.

91

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: -- with differing views?
2 A. That's correct, sir.
3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: There was a civil war going on at the
4 time.
5 A. There was, yes.
6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And some of your congregation, if that's
7 the appropriate word, and forgive me if it's not --
8 MR GREANEY: It's the word the witness uses in his
9 statement.
10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you. Some of them would be
11 supporting one side in the civil war?
12 A. That's right.
13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Others supporting the other side?
14 A. That's right, sir.
15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: IS were clearly involved in Libya at the
16 time. Were they supporting one of those two sides?
17 A. No, this is where the issue is. IS did not support
18 either of them. IS wanted to disrupt Libya and turn it
19 into an Islamic State state, shall we say. So
20 basically, as far as I understand, I'm not Libyan, as
21 I mentioned, I do read what's going on, I have many
22 Libyan friends, but as far as I understand,
23 Islamic State wanted destruction, wanted to turn it into
24 part of the caliphate, which is what you said earlier
25 on. Absolutely, sir.

92

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm not expecting you to be an expert on
 2 Libya either, but you and the trustees, that is how you
 3 understood the position at the time?
 4 A. We did understand it at the time, indeed, and we tried
 5 our best, as I said earlier on, to keep the politics
 6 outside.
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 8 MR GREANEY: I'm going to move away from Mr El-Saeiti as
 9 your position is clear.
 10 I'm going to ask you next about Mr Graf's sermon in
 11 December 2016, 16 December. This takes us to
 12 paragraphs 29 and 30 of your first witness statement.
 13 {INQ031291/8}.
 14 On 16 August 2018, did a BBC report allege that your
 15 imam, Mustafa Graf, had called for an armed jihad in
 16 Syria during the course of a sermon that he'd given
 17 at the mosque?
 18 A. No, sir.
 19 Q. Could you explain?
 20 A. Again, for the purpose of the chair and all the
 21 respected people here, the word jihad is misinterpreted
 22 in the West, sir. I'm a native Arabic speaker --
 23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm really sorry, you can give your
 24 explanation in a moment. I think what's being suggested
 25 at the moment is: do you agree that the BBC did report

93

1 what was being suggested?
 2 A. The BBC reported it. Thank you, Mr Chairman.
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We'll go to the next stage now.
 4 MR GREANEY: I promise you'll be given your opportunity to
 5 express your view about the meaning of that word.
 6 So there was a report about the sermon. The effect
 7 of it was that Mr Graf had called for armed jihad, and
 8 I'm using that term deliberately because I do understand
 9 that jihad is capable of meaning a number of things, as
 10 Dr Wilkinson explained to us. Had the BBC, as you
 11 understood the report, been provided with a copy of that
 12 sermon?
 13 A. This is a controversial matter, sir: how did that
 14 sermon, which was recorded on Mr Graf's phone, get to
 15 the BBC or to the police? It did not --
 16 Q. Can I stop you because I'm very anxious to get through
 17 my questions within the time that has been allocated to
 18 me. There may well be, I have no idea, an issue about
 19 how the BBC got a copy of the sermon. But was it your
 20 understanding that they did get a copy of it?
 21 A. From what I read in the press, yes.
 22 Q. And in the press, do you recall it was, and I'm reading
 23 from your statement, also alleged that the sermon was
 24 essentially brainwashing the congregation to go and wage
 25 military jihad abroad?

94

1 A. That is not true, sir.
 2 Q. But that was what was alleged?
 3 A. I agree with what you're saying, but I disagree with the
 4 allegations.
 5 Q. I know you disagree and I'm effectively just going to go
 6 through paragraphs 29 and 30, which contain your own
 7 view.
 8 A. Yes.
 9 Q. But I am then going to press you on some aspects of it.
 10 A. Sure.
 11 Q. As a result of the reports, did the trustees decide to
 12 commission an independent investigation into the sermon
 13 and, moreover, as we discussed earlier, his, Mr Graf's,
 14 role, if any, in the Libyan conflict? You decided to
 15 commission a report?
 16 A. We did decide to commission a report, indeed we did.
 17 Q. It might be helpful if you just followed the statement
 18 at page 9. I don't mean that in any way offensively.
 19 A. No problem.
 20 Q. Did the trustees commission that report on their own
 21 accord and to fulfil their obligations, as they
 22 understood them to be, under the charity law?
 23 A. That is correct, sir.
 24 Q. Moreover, did you want to establish whether any
 25 wrongdoing had taken place?

95

1 A. Indeed, sir.
 2 Q. And I believe you sought advice before you did that in
 3 order to commission an appropriate expert?
 4 A. That is correct, yes.
 5 Q. As a result, you did make an appointment of an expert;
 6 is that correct?
 7 A. That is correct.
 8 Q. Were you as trustees keen to investigate the matters
 9 that were being raised in the BBC report but also did
 10 you want the expert to highlight any failings?
 11 A. Would you mind repeating this last question, please?
 12 Q. Of course. You tell us in your statement:
 13 "As well as to investigate the matters raised, the
 14 trustees wanted the report to highlight any failings."
 15 A. Indeed, yes, sir.
 16 Q. Was a report then produced, which made a number of
 17 recommendations for the future?
 18 A. Yes, sir, that's correct.
 19 Q. Did you act upon those recommendations?
 20 A. We did act on that report, yes, sir.
 21 Q. As you say in the statement:
 22 "For example, imams are no longer allowed to make an
 23 appeal for any charity."
 24 Is that the position?
 25 A. That is correct, sir.

96

1 Q. Did you hear the sermon at the time?
 2 A. I didn't, sir, it was actually the Christmas period. My
 3 family and I were on holiday. There was only two of my
 4 fellow trustees at the time, which was 2016,
 5 Christmastime.
 6 Q. Have you subsequently been able to hear a recording or
 7 read the transcript of the sermon?
 8 A. Both, sir, both of them.
 9 Q. You have done both?
 10 A. Yes.
 11 Q. What is your take on it?
 12 A. Okay, sir. Again, I don't want to go into politics and
 13 take time. In December 2016, the Assad regime of Syria
 14 was bombing an area of Northern Syria called Aleppo and
 15 he was throwing dynamite and barrels into population --
 16 heavily populated areas. And the news from everywhere,
 17 CNN, BBC, was bringing grim news about what was going
 18 on. Muslims, Arab, natives, Christians were all
 19 absolutely diabolical with what's going on. So Mr Graf
 20 thought that on that particular day, it was a holiday
 21 period, the mosque was full and that was the time he
 22 thought would be a good time to ask people to dig deep
 23 into their pockets and donate as much as they can for us
 24 to pass on to the charities we work with, approved
 25 charities.

97

1 That's what happened. He of course got very
 2 emotional, I heard it, he did use the word jihad, but
 3 again I will only elaborate on that when the chair
 4 allows me to. His --
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm absolutely not stopping you.
 6 MR GREANEY: I'm going to ask you to pause because the word
 7 jihad was used and, as you will appreciate, a number of
 8 people, the expert that you commissioned, Robert Gleave,
 9 an expert commissioned by the police, and Dr Wilkinson,
 10 an expert commissioned by the inquiry, have all been
 11 asked their view about the meaning of the word jihad in
 12 the context used by Mr Graf. Having listened to it,
 13 what is your view about what Mr Graf intended to
 14 communicate by using that word in that context on that
 15 occasion?
 16 A. In my opinion, it's an opinion shared by many, many
 17 people, he was saying -- whether he used the word jihad
 18 or not, in this case he did -- is to struggle, strive,
 19 use your efforts to dig deep into your pockets and
 20 donate money, donate clothing, donate whatever you can.
 21 I'll tell you, sir, on that particular day we raised
 22 £6,000. That was a Friday. We have never raised more
 23 than £1,000 in donations. That particular day, sir, we
 24 raised £6,000, which was given to the charities approved
 25 by the UK who will distribute food and clothing to the

98

1 people of Aleppo and Idlib.
 2 Q. So you are very firmly on the Gleave side of this
 3 argument, that you consider that Mr Graf was not
 4 intending to communicate encouragement to armed jihad in
 5 what he said?
 6 A. I agree with the statement, sir.
 7 Q. So that's your position?
 8 A. Yes.
 9 Q. And I understand it.
 10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Before you carry on, I understand what
 11 you say about jihad and the different meanings it can
 12 have. Was it a good word for Mr Graf to have used?
 13 MR GREANEY: Can I ask the witness not to answer that
 14 question, sir?
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Just tell me why you're objecting to my
 16 questions.
 17 MR GREANEY: There is a particular document that I'm going
 18 to explore that I think may be a more contemporaneous
 19 answer to the point.
 20 MR COOPER: If it assists, that's certainly a topic we're
 21 minded to cover as well.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I will try and keep quiet.
 23 MR GREANEY: I didn't mean it in that way, as you'll know.
 24 I'm just keen this develops in the most helpful way for
 25 the inquiry.

99

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Absolutely.
 2 MR GREANEY: Do you remember, and do you accept, that at the
 3 time, there was, notwithstanding your interpretation,
 4 concern about what Mr Graf had said?
 5 A. Would you repeat the question, sir?
 6 Q. Yes. What you have said is, now you've listened to the
 7 sermon, you accepted the word jihad was not used in any
 8 offensive way. But what I'm inviting you to accept
 9 is that at the time, in December of 2016, there was
 10 concern on the part of the trustees about what Mr Graf
 11 had said?
 12 A. We were concerned, sir. We were concerned and we
 13 followed the next day via an email to him to show our
 14 concern.
 15 Q. Exactly.
 16 A. Absolutely.
 17 Q. This is really the document that I wanted the chairman
 18 to see. We can have it on the screen. I'm just going
 19 to check it first of all.
 20 (Pause)
 21 We'll just have it on the screen, I'm sure there'll
 22 be no problem. Could we have on the screen, please,
 23 {INQ029134/29}.
 24 This is a page of the consultant that you
 25 commissioned's report. His name is Jahangir Mohammed.

100

1 This is an email sent, as you correctly stated, the
 2 following day, 17 December 2016, to Mustafa Graf from
 3 Mr Khayat, your fellow trustee, and it was in Arabic,
 4 but has been translated.
 5 I'll read it out to you and then I'll ask you some
 6 questions about it:
 7 "In reference to the speech of yesterday, Friday,
 8 with what it includes of advice and encouragement to do
 9 the good and to elevate the efforts to the level of the
 10 calamity that has befallen the nation, while I seek the
 11 help of Allah, I comment in sincerity and as an advice
 12 to you for the sake of Allah and for preserving this
 13 blessed centre. The term 'jihad in the path of Allah'
 14 was repeated several times during the speech, which is
 15 the peak of Islam and no fair believer would doubt this.
 16 But what I mostly fear is that one of the common
 17 brothers would commit an act which would have adverse
 18 consequences as a result of their misunderstanding of
 19 the true and full meaning of this term, and our centre
 20 might be burdened with the result of such act, God
 21 forbid.
 22 "Therefore, please classify the term jihad under
 23 sensitive matters that, if used in speeches or
 24 supplications, to be explained precisely with clear
 25 emphasis on what is meant so as not to give the wrong

1 impression or wrong meaning to the common Muslims as
 2 mentioned earlier. And I believe and see that we who
 3 are living in Europe are permitted to perform all the
 4 different acts of jihad except the act of fighting
 5 because, as you know, this is Islamically prohibited
 6 except by the order of the head of state or in
 7 self—defence of life and property."
 8 First, do you accept that that is an accurate
 9 translation of the message in Arabic sent to Mr Graf the
 10 day after his sermon?
 11 A. No, sir.
 12 Q. You don't? In what way do you regard it as inaccurate?
 13 A. The translation — I have seen the Arabic verse and
 14 I have mentioned to everyone I'm an Arabic speaker.
 15 This was translated by a company, we don't need to
 16 mention their name. The Arabic language is very
 17 sophisticated and there are some words which translators
 18 use which don't really give its proper meaning.
 19 When I read the Arabic version, Mr Khayat was not
 20 trying to say that the meaning would be used by some
 21 radicals to get on the plane and travel and fight.
 22 That is what I disagree with, sir.
 23 Q. Right. We might need to get someone to look at that
 24 because if that's right, there's been quite
 25 a significant translation error made, because the effect

1 of the translation that we have here, and I'm not saying
 2 it is or isn't accurate, the effect of it is that the
 3 use of the word in the context of that sermon was
 4 capable of being understood by some as an encouragement
 5 to armed jihad.
 6 A. I think my fellow trustee, Mohammed Khayat, was
 7 naturally asking Abu Omar — Abu Omar is also, of
 8 course, Mustafa Graf — not to use the word because it
 9 could be misinterpreted and it is wrong to use it for
 10 people who do not understand the word properly.
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That's what it appears to say, the
 12 translation, to me.
 13 A. Mr Chair, the Arabic words which were used were slightly
 14 different, I beg to say.
 15 MR GREANEY: Was the concern that this gentleman was seeking
 16 to express on behalf of the trustees, was the concern
 17 that some who had heard that sermon might interpret what
 18 was said as an encouragement, not just to struggle but
 19 to violent jihad. Was that the concern?
 20 A. I would say that was indeed the concern.
 21 Q. Was that a consistent problem with the sermons of
 22 Mr Graf?
 23 A. No, sir. This is the first time and the last time we
 24 ever had to reprimand him or say to him, "Don't do this
 25 again". His sermons have always been absolutely

1 middle — he's a very much—loved person at the centre, a
 2 very much—loved person. He's very middle of the road,
 3 quite an inspiring person for the youth. So this was
 4 the first and the last time, I would say, sir.
 5 Q. Did you as trustees do anything after this occasion in
 6 December 2016 to keep tabs on Mr Graf and what he was
 7 saying in his sermons?
 8 A. Apart from the email that my colleague had sent. So my
 9 colleague, Mohammed Khayat also spoke to him personally
 10 and tried to explain why he had written this email, and
 11 Mustafa had accepted and agreed that perhaps, on that
 12 day, he had watched the news the night before, he'd seen
 13 what was happening, and he was very emotional and he
 14 said, "I promise you, I will not say anything which will
 15 give mixed feelings".
 16 Q. Okay. The trustees were recognising a risk that, as you
 17 understood the sermon, it might be misinterpreted by
 18 others. Were any steps taken to communicate to the
 19 congregation what Mr Graf had meant, so saying to the
 20 congregation, "Look, it's very important you don't
 21 misunderstand what Mr Graf was getting at, in no sense
 22 was he encouraging and in no sense do we encourage armed
 23 jihad"?
 24 A. No, sir, we did not because we thought by raising that
 25 matter again would maybe inflame the situation.

1 Everyone knew what was going on in Northern Syria that
 2 week and there was no need for us to say anything
 3 because we had told everyone how much money we had
 4 raised for the charities . So there was no point going
 5 over it again.
 6 Q. I'm just going to ask you about one final connected
 7 issue, although I know full well what your answer will
 8 be, and then I'll suggest to the chairman that we break
 9 for lunch.
 10 You, I'm certain, will be aware, as I have mentioned
 11 myself, that the inquiry has commissioned Dr Wilkinson
 12 to prepare reports in this case on a number of issues,
 13 but including upon the mosque and this aspect of the
 14 mosque, the sermon.
 15 A. That is right, sir .
 16 Q. So you will know that his analysis is, and I quote:
 17 "In short, while the primary purpose of the sermon
 18 was to encourage the congregation to give charitable
 19 humanitarian financial assistance to Aleppo, my reading
 20 of Mustafa Graf's sermon of 16 December 2016 also
 21 encourages support for armed jihad in Syria and other
 22 parts of the Muslim world."
 23 But from what you have said, you would strongly
 24 disagree with that?
 25 A. I would disagree with his view, and I say with all due

1 respect to Dr Wilkinson, why did he not talk to us and
 2 come and see us? He has never been to the mosque, he
 3 has never spoken to the trustees. Why? Why don't you
 4 come and hear the other side? Why just rely on
 5 Mr El-Saeiti's notes?
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It may be that in relation to this
 7 letter in any event he was just looking at the letter
 8 and making his own assessment, which is what he would
 9 have been asked to do rather than to come and talk to
 10 you about what it meant.
 11 A. Thank you, Mr Chair, but I beg to differ because some of
 12 us know that he has relied a lot on the witness
 13 statement of Mr El-Saeiti.
 14 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I was just talking actually about the
 15 interpretation of this letter .
 16 A. That's fine .
 17 MR GREANEY: In fact, the passage I put referred to the
 18 sermon itself and his interpretation .
 19 You have expressed your strong view that you
 20 disagree with him?
 21 A. Absolutely.
 22 Q. And you would be moreover entitled to observe that
 23 Robert Gleave, another expert, came to the view that
 24 there was no encouragement to military activity.
 25 A. Thank you, sir.

1 Q. So after lunch, if the chairman agrees to break, I'm
 2 going to deal with one final topic, which is what steps
 3 were taken after the arena attack to establish whether
 4 Salman Abedi had been a worshipper at the mosque.
 5 A. Thank you, sir.
 6 MR GREANEY: That won't take very long, but as you'll
 7 appreciate, you will be asked questions by others.
 8 Sir, would that be a convenient moment for lunch?
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It would. One hour, please.
 10 (1.05 pm)
 11 (Lunch Adjournment)
 12 (2.05 pm)
 13 (Delay in proceedings)
 14 (2.18 pm)
 15 MR GREANEY: Mr Haffar, I indicated before lunch that I had
 16 just one final topic, which is the knowledge of the
 17 mosque in relation to Salman Abedi, but in fact I have
 18 been asked to deal with one other short topic before we
 19 get to that and that topic relates to the Charity
 20 Commission.
 21 Did the Charity Commission visit the mosque on 9 and
 22 10 April 2018?
 23 A. That's correct, sir . The Charity Commission contacted
 24 us, saying that they would like to send a team to visit
 25 and to ask questions and we welcomed that. They did

1 come for 2 days.
 2 Q. In due course, did they provide you with something
 3 called an action plan?
 4 A. That is correct, sir . That was provided later on, after
 5 they visited .
 6 Q. So we'll see the date in one moment, I think it's
 7 August 2018. We'll put it on the screen.
 8 {INQ029133/1}.
 9 So you will be able to confirm, this is the action
 10 plan to which I have just referred and, yes, the date of
 11 issue is 9 August 2018.
 12 A. That's correct, sir .
 13 Q. Did this come to your attention on or shortly after
 14 9 August 2018?
 15 A. I think on the day of 9 August, yes.
 16 Q. Could we go to {INQ029133/2}, please:
 17 "The commission is issuing the trustees of the
 18 Manchester Islamic Centre with regulatory guidance
 19 in the form of an action plan..."
 20 And then the statutory provision is given:
 21 "The tasks in the action plan set out and explain
 22 the measures aimed at ensuring the trustees comply with
 23 their legal duties and responsibilities to act in the
 24 best interests to the charity and to facilitate and
 25 encourage the better administration of the charity. If

1 the trustees do not take these steps they risk being in
 2 breach of their legal duties as trustees in
 3 administration of the charity."

4 And another warning was given. So when you received
 5 this, by you I mean you as an individual and you as
 6 trustees, did you welcome this action plan?

7 A. Yes, we did welcome the plan. Very much so.

8 Q. Did you take it seriously?

9 A. We did take it very seriously in fact.

10 Q. So:

11 "Issue: safeguarding.
 12 "Legal requirement or good practice: Legal duty.
 13 "Requirement: By law, a charity that works with
 14 children or vulnerable groups must safeguard them from
 15 harm."

16 We're going to come on to read the balance of this
 17 in a moment. But the timescale of completion was
 18 6 months from the date of issue, so 9 January 2019. Did
 19 you understand from that that you were required to do
 20 what was identified here by that particular date?

21 A. That's correct, sir.

22 Q. "Charity trustees have a legal duty to act prudently and
 23 this means that they must take all reasonable steps
 24 within their power to ensure that this does not happen.
 25 It is particularly important, but not limited to,

109

1 beneficiaries that may be vulnerable persons or children
 2 in the community. Trustees are expected to find out
 3 what the relevant law is, how it applies to their
 4 organisation, and to comply with it where appropriate.
 5 They should also adopt best practice as far as
 6 possible."

7 Then there is an observation about the current
 8 safeguarding policy of the mosque:

9 "The current safeguarding policy only covers basic
 10 elements of safeguarding children and should be reviewed
 11 and enhanced."

12 Your attention was then drawn to the commission's
 13 guidance, "Safeguarding Children and Young People":
 14 "The trustees should appoint a designated
 15 safeguarding lead, which could be a trustee or senior
 16 [over to the next page, please {INQ029133/3}] employee
 17 to take responsibility for safeguarding within the
 18 charity (including the policy, the investigation of
 19 incidents and the reporting to relevant authorities).
 20 The trustees should consider dedicated safeguarding
 21 training and advice which is available via the local
 22 authority designated officer."

23 So a few questions arising out of that. First of
 24 all, can we go back to the preceding page and the bottom
 25 of that page, please {INQ029133/2}?

110

1 First of all, did you update your safeguarding
 2 policy?

3 A. Yes, sir, we did, we invited a consultant to help us
 4 update policies.

5 Q. Did you do that by 9 January 2019?

6 A. From memory, I seem to remember, yes, but I'm not 100%
 7 sure, sir. I'll be honest with you, I'm not 100% sure.

8 Q. In the preparation of the updated policy, did you
 9 consider and apply the guidance issued by the Charity
 10 Commission?

11 A. That is correct, sir.

12 Q. Did you appoint a designated safeguarding lead?

13 A. That is correct, sir.

14 Q. Did you do that by 9 January 2019?

15 A. That is correct, sir.

16 Q. So do you now have in place mechanisms that seek to
 17 identify whether any person attending the mosque is
 18 vulnerable to extremism?

19 A. That's correct, sir.

20 Q. And dealing with that situation if it's identified?

21 A. Absolutely, sir, and I can expand if you want me to on
 22 this and I can tell what you we did if it's of interest
 23 to the inquiry.

24 Q. If it would be helpful, by all means do so.

25 A. The trustees, along with the support of the Greater

111

1 Manchester Police, and I commend them and thank them, as
 2 well as the safeguarding at the Manchester City Council,
 3 arranged for us a variety of courses which we as
 4 trustees — and by the way I was the lead safety officer
 5 as far as the trustees, okay? We attended many courses
 6 in Manchester at the police headquarters in
 7 East Manchester as well as Elizabeth Slinger Street. We
 8 had members of the Manchester City Council visit us
 9 every now and then. And then we, as trustees, appointed
 10 one of the teachers to be a lead safeguarding person
 11 within the school at the centre.

12 We learnt a lot. Many of my trustees and I learned
 13 quite a lot. As I say, the police, GMP, and the
 14 City Council were very helpful. We learnt a lot, I'll
 15 be honest with you.

16 Q. First of all, would you accept that what has happened is
 17 a change for the better?

18 A. Absolutely, 100%.

19 Q. Wherever a change for the better is made by an
 20 organisation, it gives rise to or may give rise to the
 21 question, why was that change not made sooner? If
 22 I pose that question to you as a trustee for the mosque,
 23 what is your answer?

24 A. In short, the world has changed in the last 10 years:
 25 terrorism has become quite a lot, the internet came and

112

1 brought a lot of bad things with it. So we had woken up
 2 that there are things that are happening and we should
 3 really move with the times, and therefore it's only
 4 right that obviously we listen to the Charity
 5 Commission.
 6 Why did we not listen before? We weren't really
 7 given any instructions. We felt under control, you
 8 know, the mosque, the centre, was under control and we
 9 saw no reason why we should change things. There were
 10 no incidents, there was no problems as far as we're
 11 concerned.
 12 Q. The world has, as you rightly observe, changed a lot in
 13 the last 10 years, but it might be suggested that it had
 14 changed a lot between July 2014 and May 2017. So I'll
 15 pose the question again. During that period, 2014 to
 16 2017, why had the change for the better that has now
 17 been made not been made?
 18 A. I cannot answer that question, sir. We did not see any
 19 reason or could not sense anything wrong at the time.
 20 Q. I am now going to turn finally to the topic of the
 21 knowledge the mosque had in relation to Salman Abedi,
 22 sir, unless you had any questions in relation to that
 23 topic.
 24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No, thank you.
 25 MR GREANEY: In the aftermath of the arena attack, with all

113

1 of the reporting that was going on about the mosque, did
 2 the trustees take steps to consider themselves and also
 3 to ask staff if any person had known Salman Abedi?
 4 A. I would like you to ask the question again.
 5 Q. It was a rather clumsily expressed question, I'll agree
 6 with that.
 7 In the aftermath of the arena attack, obviously
 8 there was adverse reporting in relation to the mosque.
 9 You're nodding your head. I fully appreciate that that
 10 had some very unpleasant consequences, for example
 11 far right people camping outside the mosque. But did
 12 the trustees want to know whether Salman Abedi had been
 13 someone who had attended the mosque as a worshipper?
 14 A. Yes, indeed.
 15 Q. So did each trustee consider whether he had any
 16 knowledge that was relevant to that?
 17 A. We did ask each other the question on the day or the
 18 second day of the bombing when the press came in, yes.
 19 Q. Did you also ask all of the staff of the mosque, I think
 20 you told us 18 earlier, whether any of them had
 21 knowledge in relation to Salman Abedi?
 22 A. That is correct, yes.
 23 Q. And at paragraph 27 of your statement you set out what
 24 the outcome of those enquiries was. I'm going to seek
 25 to summarise the position. Was it the position that

114

1 with one exception, to which I'll turn, the trustees and
 2 staff had no recollection of Salman Abedi attending the
 3 mosque as an adult?
 4 A. This is what I was told during my time, yes.
 5 Q. So people remembered him attending as a child, but not
 6 as an adult?
 7 A. That's correct.
 8 Q. Although would it be fair to observe that, as you said
 9 earlier in relation to the other three individuals that
 10 I mentioned, such is the approach that the mosque adopts
 11 that you cannot say for certain that he was not someone
 12 who attended?
 13 A. I cannot say for certain.
 14 Q. Mr Graf in particular reported that Salman Abedi, so far
 15 as he could recall, had never attended any of his
 16 activities and that he didn't recall seeing him
 17 attending his sermons; am I right?
 18 A. That is what he said, that's correct, yes.
 19 Q. And that perhaps in particular, he had no recollection
 20 of, as he reported, Salman Abedi attending his lecture
 21 on 16 December 2016.
 22 A. That is what he told us, that's correct.
 23 Q. Was the one exception to whom I've referred
 24 Mr El-Saeiti? This is paragraph 27(f) of your
 25 statement.

115

1 A. I would like to clarify that.
 2 Q. Please do.
 3 A. On the second day of the bombing, that's when the press
 4 came in big numbers to the centre. We were gathered to
 5 decide how we will face the press and personally I was
 6 shocked when Mr El-Saeiti walked into the area and said
 7 to me and to my colleagues, "Oh, I have seen this
 8 person". Frankly speaking, it was a shock to us. We
 9 said, "You saw him when?" He said, "I've seen him on
 10 such-and-such a date". We honestly did not know -- this
 11 was the first time we heard about that. And
 12 unfortunately, he had already spoken to the press and
 13 told them that.
 14 Q. So this is very shortly after the arena attack?
 15 A. This was on the next morning, as a matter of fact,
 16 Tuesday the 23rd.
 17 Q. So at that stage, the dispute between Mr El-Saeiti and
 18 the mosque that you believed has caused him to lie about
 19 certain things, at that stage that dispute did not
 20 exist? Have I understood correctly?
 21 A. Absolutely, there was no dispute whatsoever.
 22 Q. So have I also correctly understood that at that stage,
 23 on 23 May, you are unaware of any reason why he would be
 24 lying or exaggerating?
 25 A. I do not want to accuse him of lying, but it was news to

116

1 us that the perpetrator had visited the mosque because
 2 all morning we were trying to find out who is this
 3 person. And then he comes in and says, "I've seen him,
 4 I've told the press", so we were shocked. To be honest
 5 with you, we were shocked.
 6 Q. In due course you very helpfully provided some emails
 7 about this topic, which we've seen today. I'm not
 8 criticising you in any way by saying that. In due
 9 course, on 25 November 2019, Mr El-Saeiti sent an email
 10 to the mosque in which he said about this topic:
 11 "I saw Salman at the mosque occasionally and he
 12 attended some of my sermons. After my sermon on ISIS
 13 and Al-Qaeda-related terrorist groups back in the end of
 14 2014, Salman gave me hateful looks. Some serious
 15 threats were also made against me by unknown individuals
 16 on social media which were reported to the police
 17 immediately. The last time I saw Salman at the mosque
 18 was roughly in 2016; I don't recall the exact date.
 19 Salman's father left the mosque about 10 years ago."
 20 A. Me personally and my fellow trustees do not believe this
 21 statement. I further say if he did, why did he not tell
 22 us the second day after the bombing, third day, fourth
 23 day? Why did he leave it until when there were issues
 24 in the mosque between him and his employers?
 25 Q. No doubt he can be pressed upon that.

117

1 A. Indeed.
 2 Q. The position is that certainly in the immediate
 3 aftermath of the bombing, he did tell you that he had
 4 seen Salman Abedi at the mosque?
 5 A. As I said earlier on, he said that the next day, on
 6 Tuesday the 23rd in the morning.
 7 Q. Here in November 2019, he's referring to the hateful
 8 looks and so on, and the point that you're making
 9 is that he did not report that matter or those
 10 additional factors back in May of 2017?
 11 A. Absolutely, as far as we're concerned -- or to the
 12 police for that matter.
 13 Q. Well, I suppose you can speak for yourself and the
 14 trustees.
 15 A. Absolutely.
 16 Q. But no doubt you'd agree that you shouldn't speak for
 17 others?
 18 A. Absolutely.
 19 Q. So that was where you reached in relation to
 20 Salman Abedi. But did the work that the trustees
 21 undertook in asking themselves questions and the staff
 22 questions also establish that something was known about
 23 relatives of Salman Abedi? You're looking quizzical.
 24 Let me explain.
 25 A. Could you rephrase the question, please?

118

1 Q. I'll put it more specifically. Did the work that you
 2 were doing in the aftermath of the bombing establish
 3 that the father of Salman Abedi, Ramadan Abedi, that
 4 he had made the call to prayer in the mosque for
 5 a period of time?
 6 A. From what I understood later on, when we were asking
 7 questions, this is what we were told by some of the
 8 employees of the mosque. Let me make it clear to
 9 everyone, I have never met the father or the mother or
 10 the children. I have never known the Abedi family as
 11 a trustee.
 12 Q. What you discovered was that he had stopped making the
 13 call to prayer around 2005 or 2006?
 14 A. Again, this is what I was told by the employees. But
 15 can I also say, sir, the calling of the prayer can be
 16 done by any volunteer. From what we subsequently
 17 understood, he was there as a volunteer and there are
 18 many people who volunteered to come and do the cleaning,
 19 the washing, even the calling of the prayer, because
 20 from what I was told, he had a pleasant voice. So when
 21 they had to call for the prayer, they would invite him
 22 and say, "Ramadan", or Abu Ismail, "please call for the
 23 prayer". I personally have never heard him call for the
 24 prayer.
 25 Q. This was just what I wanted to be clear about. Because

119

1 by 2005/2006 you had been a trustee for a period of
 2 time?
 3 A. That's correct.
 4 Q. And you had been attending the mosque itself for over
 5 20 years by that stage?
 6 A. Absolutely.
 7 Q. Are you able to help with why in those circumstances you
 8 never encountered Ramadan Abedi making the call to
 9 prayer?
 10 A. Whenever I used to go to the mosque in those days,
 11 I would attend the Friday prayer and that was the main
 12 prayer which every Muslim should really attend. During
 13 the daytime, I live quite far away from the mosque,
 14 I have a mosque which is nearer to me, so if I wanted to
 15 attend any daytime prayer I would actually go to the
 16 closer mosque. To be honest with you, I never really
 17 mixed, and I say that with respect, I never mixed with
 18 the Libyan community. And I say that with respect,
 19 that's all. I mixed with other ethnic backgrounds.
 20 I never knew him, I never knew anybody who was Libyan
 21 there. I used to see them there. Yes, I was a trustee
 22 by 2005, but I never really mixed that much, I never
 23 socialised.
 24 Q. We have heard evidence that he would make the call to
 25 prayer over a period from the late 1990s until the

120

1 mid–2000s. Did you ever hear of his name during that
 2 period?
 3 A. I'll be honest with you, never, honestly. I say that
 4 sincerely. I have never known him, seen him, anything.
 5 It was news to me.
 6 Q. Did you ever hear anything about the LIFG in the mosque?
 7 A. No, no. What's that?
 8 Q. The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.
 9 A. No.
 10 Q. Is that a phrase that I'm telling you about for the
 11 first time?
 12 A. Maybe I've heard something, Libyan -- say that again?
 13 Q. Libya or Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.
 14 A. I don't know who they are, sir.
 15 Q. Did you ever hear any talk of the fact that within the
 16 Libyan members of the congregation there were people who
 17 were associated with that group?
 18 A. No, sir. Not at all.
 19 Q. At all events, what you did discover in the aftermath of
 20 the attack is that it appeared to be the case that the
 21 father of the bomber had attended the mosque and made
 22 the call to prayer during that period?
 23 A. Indeed, yes.
 24 Q. And did you also discover, I'm at paragraph 27(h), that
 25 Salman Abedi's older brother, Ismail, appeared to have

121

1 a connection with your mosque?
 2 A. Again, sir, I've learned about this later on, that there
 3 was a connection, that he used to help as a volunteer at
 4 the school to help in any capacity that the headteacher
 5 wanted help. Again, I never knew the person, I never
 6 knew actually that he was employed there. Yes, I was
 7 a trustee but I didn't really go into every detail that
 8 went there. We had a CEO and therefore I never knew him
 9 to be honest with you.
 10 Q. But what you were able to discover, and have described
 11 in your statement, is that according to staff at the
 12 school or madrassah, for a time between February 2014
 13 to July 2017, he volunteered to assist teachers with
 14 Koran reading in Arabic?
 15 A. That is what I was told at the time, sir, yes.
 16 Q. But your understanding was that he had never actually
 17 worked in the madrassah; is that correct?
 18 A. Sir, in the past 3 years there was so much conflicting
 19 reports going on, emanating from the staff and from
 20 people. When I prepared my statement, naturally
 21 I prepared it in good faith. Since then I've heard
 22 a lot of things, I've gone back, we've spent a lot of
 23 hours talking to people. I have come to learn that he
 24 may have volunteered more than what I had thought in
 25 terms of perhaps teaching Arabic if a teacher was ill or

122

1 maybe doing the roll call, maybe chasing the parents for
 2 the tuition fees. That's what I came to learn in the
 3 aftermath when I actually spent more time trying to find
 4 out who this person is.
 5 Q. And do you remember him from that period of time?
 6 A. I do not, sir. I never met him. I sincerely tell you,
 7 I never met him.
 8 Q. Had you ever heard his name?
 9 A. No, sir.
 10 Q. Or heard anything about his attitudes towards politics
 11 and religion?
 12 A. No, sir. Our meetings were -- purely were the
 13 headteachers, the mainstream teachers who were there
 14 permanently. I have never met him.
 15 Q. Did you also learn in this period after the bombing that
 16 Salman Abedi's and Ismail Abedi's mother seemed to have
 17 worked at your mosque between May and November 2014 as
 18 a teacher?
 19 A. Again, I would say what I said a few minutes ago: over
 20 the last few months when we dug very deep and when I was
 21 talking to a variety of teachers and employees, I have
 22 come to learn that she may have taught Arabic or Koran
 23 for a short time. Prior to me preparing the statement
 24 I had very little knowledge. It was only later when
 25 I found out from colleagues and from trustees that she

123

1 may have been doing some voluntary work over there.
 2 Q. Did you learn as well, it seems for the first time in
 3 this period, that she had been assisted by one of her
 4 daughters, so one of the sisters of the Abedi brothers?
 5 A. That I was not aware at all, actually, sir. That's news
 6 to me.
 7 Q. Well, I'm reading from your statement, paragraph 27(h):
 8 "Ismail's mother worked..."
 9 A. That's correct.
 10 Q. -- "at the mosque between May 2014 and November 2014 as
 11 a teacher and was assisted by her daughter at that
 12 time."
 13 A. I must admit I can't remember when I wrote that, but
 14 when I looked at my statements again, I may have been
 15 given the wrong information to answer you.
 16 Q. Let's just restrict it to the mother of Salman Abedi.
 17 Do you have any recollection of her over that period of
 18 time?
 19 A. No, sir, I have never met her.
 20 MR GREANEY: Mr Haffar, thank you very much indeed for
 21 answering my questions.
 22 Subject to any questions the chairman has at this
 23 stage, I'm going to invite Mr Cooper to pose his.
 24 A. Sir, can I ask a question? Is that permitted?
 25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You can do. Whether we answer it or not

124

1 may be another matter.
 2 A. It's to do with my last statement before we broke for
 3 lunch with regards to the Mustafa Graf issue. As I was
 4 reviewing my thoughts when I was having my lunch,
 5 I remembered an item which could be important in terms
 6 of when you had mentioned why my colleague, Mr Khayat,
 7 had emphasised to Mustafa Graf about the use of the
 8 jihad word.
 9 MR GREANEY: Yes.
 10 A. I wanted to mention to the inquiry the reason -- one of
 11 the reasons which we discussed and we emphasised is the
 12 centre has a broadcasting station which broadcasts
 13 within a 5-mile radius and that can be listened to by
 14 anybody. We provide radios -- the police station at
 15 Elizabeth Slinger Street have a receiver so they can
 16 hear what's going on. So there's nothing we want to
 17 hide.
 18 The reason on that day Mohammed Khayat mentioned to
 19 Mustafa -- he said, "Maybe we're not worried about our
 20 congregation but if this speech is being heard by people
 21 who do have some radical thoughts, what do you think
 22 would happen?" And that is why we want to make sure,
 23 because we always broadcast our sermons, we don't hide
 24 anything. That was the main point I remembered we
 25 discussed, that it's not -- I'm not worried about my

1 congregation, we know who's here, we're under control
 2 here, but we have no control if there are people there,
 3 Muslims or not, right wing or not, listening to this.
 4 So this is point I really wanted to bring up to the
 5 chair.
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 7 MR GREANEY: Thank you very much. May I just ask you
 8 in relation to that, the concern was that others who
 9 were listening on the radio might hear this and
 10 interpret it as an encouragement to violent jihad --
 11 A. Absolutely.
 12 Q. -- or armed jihad?
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. And so if it were to be suggested that that was all the
 15 more reason to put people right, what would your
 16 reaction be? So to make a broadcast saying: hang on,
 17 we're very keen that no one, whether listening on the
 18 radio or attending in person, should imagine for
 19 a second that Mr Graf is encouraging armed jihad?
 20 A. Thank you for asking the question. It's a difficult
 21 question for me to answer because it's just so difficult
 22 for me to think what people's thoughts are and whether
 23 there was any point for us to go back and correct maybe
 24 a statement which wasn't wholly correct. We wouldn't do
 25 that because then we are -- it's as if what we were

1 saying was completely wrong. So we wouldn't have done
 2 that, I would disagree in doing that.
 3 Q. So if it were to be suggested that you had identified
 4 a risk that was important and that you didn't then do
 5 anything to address that risk, would you regard that as
 6 a fair criticism?
 7 A. I wouldn't think that we did something wrong at the
 8 beginning and I would say that the interpretation can be
 9 open to anything. That's what I would say, sir.
 10 MR GREANEY: Again, thank you very much for answering my
 11 questions.
 12 Mr Cooper will next ask you questions.
 13 Questions from MR COOPER
 14 MR COOPER: Let me follow on from that logically. You have
 15 just told Mr Greaney that you were concerned that people
 16 outside of the mosque, some potentially extremist people
 17 perhaps, may misinterpret that sermon, yes?
 18 A. Perhaps.
 19 Q. Not perhaps, I think you just said it a minute ago; yes?
 20 A. Yes, maybe.
 21 Q. Yes. So why didn't you do something to neutralise it?
 22 A. We did not see a point of neutralising it and raising
 23 the subject again because then it would appear as
 24 if we did something very wrong. We did not do anything
 25 wrong, we just -- in my opinion, we just reminded the

1 imam that perhaps the word he's used could be
 2 misinterpreted.
 3 Q. It may not be a matter, can I suggest to you, whether
 4 you did anything right or wrong; I'm going to come on to
 5 that later. But here was something that could be
 6 misinterpreted. Were you more worried about the
 7 reputation of the mosque of not being seen to be doing
 8 anything wrong rather than protecting the public and
 9 saying, "Don't misinterpret this sermon, if you do,
 10 you're wrong and we're wrong for giving that
 11 impression"? Could you not have said that?
 12 A. I wasn't there at the time, sir, I was away.
 13 Q. Or were you more concerned about your reputation?
 14 A. I was away at the time so I couldn't have done anything
 15 about it. That's all I can say about it.
 16 Q. I'm going to press you. I suggest it is not all you can
 17 say. You're in a senior position in the mosque and I'm
 18 going to ask you more generally about the mosque's
 19 attitude to getting this out there and saying this is
 20 wrong. Were you, and I mean the mosque, more concerned
 21 about your reputation than about correcting something
 22 that could be highly dangerous?
 23 A. I'm concerned about our reputation, of course, I'm very
 24 concerned about our reputation. Naturally, I'm more
 25 concerned about what someone with a devilish mind would

1 interpret that word, but the press has already
 2 interpreted that word and said it already before me.
 3 Why would I go and correct it when the press has been
 4 hammering the Islamic Centre and using those words any
 5 way?
 6 Q. All the more reason to correct it.
 7 A. I didn't see the point, sir. That's your opinion, but
 8 I don't see the point.
 9 Q. I presume the mosque are opposed, Didsbury Mosque, to
 10 violence and any use of violence to pursue religious or
 11 political ends?
 12 A. That's correct, sir.
 13 Q. And have you stated that in writing anywhere?
 14 A. There is no need for us to state it because the Koran
 15 says it.
 16 Q. Is it in your website? We looked at your website --
 17 A. No, sir, it is in the Koran.
 18 Q. On your present website, your present mosque website, is
 19 there anything on that website to say that the mosque
 20 are opposed to violence and its use to pursue religious
 21 and political ends?
 22 A. There's no need for us to say that because our motto and
 23 our values oppose what you just said.
 24 Q. For everyone to know and understand the position of the
 25 mosque, because I want to put to you why you haven't

129

1 done that in a minute, but for everyone to know that the
 2 mosque's position on something which every right-minded
 3 person would agree with, of whatever belief, that
 4 you are opposed to the use of violence to pursue
 5 religious or political ends? Why not put that -- the
 6 last time I'll ask you it -- why not put that on your
 7 website? It's not even there now.
 8 A. I do not see a reason for putting that. Why would
 9 I talk about a negative? We are a positive-driven
 10 mosque. We are a positive-driven religion. We would
 11 say positive things. Why would we say or negate
 12 a negative? We're not negative, we're positive.
 13 Q. What's negative about saying that you are opposed to
 14 violence to pursue religious or political ends?
 15 A. Why should the public think that we're not?
 16 Q. But making it clear to people.
 17 A. I don't see the reason.
 18 Q. Fair enough.
 19 A. No, sir, I do not see the reason at all.
 20 Q. Is it because you don't particularly want to offend
 21 different strands of people that use your mosque?
 22 A. No, sir, we have no reason to think about that. As
 23 I said earlier on, we welcome every aspect of any sect
 24 of Islam. We have no problem.
 25 Q. Because there are mixed views, I suggest to you, of

130

1 people that use your mosque, are you very nervous about
 2 not offending any constituency?
 3 A. I would say I'm not really nervous or afraid. I don't
 4 bring in politically correct statements either. There's
 5 nothing for me to fear. I fear Allah, God, that's all
 6 I fear.
 7 Q. Effectively, you -- and I keep saying "you" but I mean
 8 the board -- do not want to antagonise people in the
 9 mosque who may hold more extremist views than you?
 10 A. There might be some people in the mosque who may hold
 11 certain views, but I have never thought about not
 12 antagonising them. We are, as I said earlier on, a
 13 mainstream, middle-of-the-road mosque, that's who
 14 we are. If you like us, come and pray here; if you
 15 don't like us, pray at home.
 16 Q. You have repeated, and that is the 14th time you've
 17 repeated your mainstream middle of the road and we get
 18 that, that's what you are saying --
 19 A. Yes.
 20 Q. -- but I'm not asking you about that. I'm suggesting to
 21 you that you are trying to juggle with a varied
 22 constituency in the mosque, some of whom you know hold
 23 more extreme views than you're admitting to today.
 24 A. I refute the statement, sir, and you don't know what my
 25 thoughts are. Do you have a window into my mind and my

131

1 heart?
 2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay, he is only asking the questions.
 3 He may sound like he is making statements, but actually
 4 he's asking questions --
 5 A. I say it with respect, Mr Chairman.
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: -- and it's your answers which are
 7 important.
 8 A. I say it with respect. Mr Cooper, please don't take
 9 offence.
 10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: All advocates do it all the time, so
 11 I am not criticising you particularly.
 12 MR COOPER: If I took offence 30 years ago, I wouldn't be
 13 doing it.
 14 A. Not a problem, sir.
 15 MR COOPER: Nothing personal between us, please understand
 16 that.
 17 A. I do.
 18 Q. I should have said at the start of my asking questions,
 19 I represent the families and you'll understand these are
 20 questions that we need to ask you.
 21 A. Absolutely.
 22 Q. It's no disrespect to you and certainly no disrespect to
 23 you or the mosque or anyone in it.
 24 A. None taken, thank you very much, sir.
 25 Q. I'll come back to that in context a little later, but

132

1 I want to go back to the start if I can and just deal
 2 with your experience. You say you're in business;
 3 is that right?
 4 A. I am indeed.
 5 Q. What sort of business is that?
 6 A. I trained as a textile engineer. I would describe
 7 myself as a textile trader.
 8 Q. Thank you. You have been involved in some form or
 9 attending at Didsbury Mosque since about 1983?
 10 A. I was indeed, when I was a student, yes.
 11 Q. You have been a trustee there since 2004?
 12 A. That's correct.
 13 Q. And chairman since March 2018?
 14 A. That's correct, sir.
 15 Q. How many trustees are there?
 16 A. Seven.
 17 Q. How are they chosen or elected? Is it a general vote of
 18 those that attend or is it a vote at all? How are the
 19 trustees selected?
 20 A. Okay. Indeed you have said the right word. It is by
 21 order of a selection. What the trustees tend to do over
 22 the years is select members of the youth. We have
 23 a youth club and we have a youth foundation. We select
 24 youth who we find have similar thoughts to ours,
 25 mainstream as I mentioned, sorry to repeat it again, who

133

1 have their heart on the mosque, who are very
 2 well-educated professionals and could become a trustee
 3 and a guardian of the centre, like we were chosen years
 4 before. So we bring them up, they join us for a number
 5 of 6 months, 8 months, et cetera, and once we are happy
 6 with them, we make them official trustees, we amend the
 7 Charity Commission's website, et cetera. That's how
 8 they are selected.
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: The trustees select other trustees?
 10 A. Indeed.
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So there's no democratic process?
 12 A. Indeed.
 13 MR COOPER: It is effectively by invitation?
 14 A. It is by invitation, you can say that, sir.
 15 Q. And the chair, how is the chair empanelled? Is the
 16 chair voted in or is it by ---
 17 A. We have a process, sir, where seven of us are there and
 18 we write ballot papers and an independent person will
 19 come and open the ballot papers and see who has had the
 20 most votes to be the chair for the next 3 years, for
 21 example.
 22 Q. And is the ballot conducted amongst the trustees and
 23 purely the trustees?
 24 A. Absolutely, yes.
 25 Q. Finally this, simply on the procedure and the structure

134

1 of governance. How long are the trustees in position
 2 for?
 3 A. Until the time they are ready to retire.
 4 Q. So it could be a job for life?
 5 A. It could be a job for life.
 6 Q. Is there any overall assessment of their performance or
 7 are they monitored in their performance in any way? How
 8 are they dismissed from the board?
 9 A. We have had dismissals. They are dismissed if we feel
 10 their behaviour and the values of which they represent
 11 and we represent are no longer the same. We've had two
 12 trustees in the last 5 years dismissed and that's it,
 13 they're gone. So until we are ready to bring more of
 14 the youth, then --- I'm ready to leave whenever I can,
 15 but I have to make sure that as I was given
 16 the guardianship of that centre I have to hand it over
 17 to someone who I believe has similar thoughts and
 18 similar values and similar responsibilities as I do.
 19 Q. I understand. Just so I can understand the diversity of
 20 experience on the board, are there any women?
 21 A. Not currently, no. We have invited in the past and
 22 unfortunately it didn't work out.
 23 Q. But they are able to join the board?
 24 A. We prefer, in an ideal world, a multitude of
 25 backgrounds, South Asians, women, Arabs, English.

135

1 The job of being a trustee, Mr Chair, is a difficult
 2 job. It's a volunteering job. We work sometimes day
 3 and night. Unfortunately, it's so difficult sometimes
 4 to find --- and I'm not trying to blow my trumpet here ---
 5 people who are willing to come and work with us. We've
 6 had many people who came and worked with us for a month
 7 or two or three and they apologised and said, thank you
 8 very much, we can't handle it.
 9 Q. Thank you. Moving on to a different topic. You are
 10 a man who, both in your business experience and indeed
 11 in your experience at the mosque, knows Manchester well?
 12 A. I know Manchester very well.
 13 Q. And you would be aware, for instance, even if you
 14 weren't actively involved, as of course you've given
 15 evidence to this effect, you would be aware of the
 16 Libyan community, for instance, the large Libyan
 17 community in Manchester?
 18 A. That's correct, sir.
 19 Q. You would also generally be aware of the news, as
 20 you have told us, of the problems in Libya, the
 21 extremism that was manifesting itself in Libya; correct?
 22 A. Yes, sir.
 23 Q. And you would be aware that young UK men and some women
 24 were going to Libya to fight?
 25 A. I wouldn't be aware of the latter, sir.

136

1 Q. In the news?
 2 A. I would hear things like that, but I have no evidence
 3 because the news can say so many things. But I accept
 4 what you're saying. I wasn't personally aware.
 5 Q. I quite understand you say you weren't personally aware;
 6 very few of us are. But in mainstream news portals it
 7 was being reported by reputable outlets that young UK
 8 men, and some women, were going to Libya to fight. You
 9 were aware of that, weren't you?
 10 A. I've heard it on the news, yes.
 11 Q. And you believed it, I presume?
 12 A. Not all the time. I don't believe everything I read.
 13 Q. No?
 14 A. No, sir. If you'd read the Daily Mail, you can't
 15 believe everything they say.
 16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I shouldn't take on any particular
 17 newspaper if I were you. They'll be reporting on your
 18 evidence.
 19 MR COOPER: Absolutely.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Your background is Syria, partly, do
 21 I understand that?
 22 A. It is partly. It's sophisticated because I have never
 23 lived there, sir. My parents were born in Nigeria.
 24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: But you have an interest in Syria?
 25 A. I have an interest in Syria, yes, sir.

137

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Even more young people, I think, than
 2 went to Libya to fight went to Syria to fight.
 3 Presumably there are people within your mosque, young
 4 people, who have a Syrian heritage as well?
 5 A. Very little. The Syrian community, except in the last
 6 few years, are very little in Manchester, sir.
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: But were you concerned about some of the
 8 young people of Syrian heritage perhaps getting
 9 involved, maybe being tempted to go out there and, if
 10 so, what did you do about it?
 11 A. I would say to start with very little because I know the
 12 Syrians, I know that though they fear and have their
 13 heart on what's happening over there, the majority who
 14 came to the UK would not go back there. They would not
 15 want to get engaged in the fighting. What did we do?
 16 To be honest with you, the Syrian community were quite
 17 small and most of the people I knew were educated like
 18 myself, who had educated their children and sent them to
 19 university and did the best thing for them. You cannot
 20 go and fight, you are British, you live in this country.
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay, thank you.
 22 MR COOPER: You're aware of the large Libyan community in
 23 Manchester, aware of the problems that were going on in
 24 Libya. Let's put it this way, you were aware of news
 25 coming out that young UK men and women were going to

138

1 Libya to fight. Whether you agreed with it or not,
 2 you're aware of that?
 3 A. Yes.
 4 Q. As a result of all that information you were gathering
 5 what particular steps did you put in place in the
 6 mosque, you and your trustee colleagues, to monitor and
 7 perhaps just keep an eye on young people that were
 8 attending the mosque to see whether they were showing
 9 signs of radicalisation or inclinations to do this sort
 10 of thing? What did you put in place?
 11 A. To start with, we do not allow congregational meetings,
 12 shall we say, of any youth without subject to going back
 13 to the management or not being under the umbrella of the
 14 mosque.
 15 So when the prayer is finished generally, and there
 16 are five prayers a day, most people would vacate the
 17 mosque. We would not allow any youth, except the
 18 official youth club we have — we know who runs it,
 19 because we part run it — so we would disallow any
 20 congregation of youth and if we suspected youth are
 21 there talking some evil talk we would definitely break
 22 it up and ask them to leave.
 23 After every prayer, people normally greet each
 24 other, they say hello and they leave. I can assure you
 25 the compound of the mosque does not allow for any hidden

139

1 people or anyone to be hidden, talking, without CCTV
 2 cameras we have. We have a very sophisticated system.
 3 So we made sure that the cameras there covered every
 4 particular part to really avoid any of those meetings.
 5 Q. Were there meetings taking place, separate meetings,
 6 amongst people in the mosque, maybe not young people but
 7 just general attendees at the mosque?
 8 A. Social meetings, I would say, but that would happen
 9 immediately after the prayer, for 5 minutes they would
 10 greet each other and then they would leave.
 11 Q. Simply social meetings, greeting and talking about
 12 general matters?
 13 A. I wouldn't listen in, but sometimes I'm passing by,
 14 they're talking about politics, talking about how
 15 expensive it is to live in the UK. I've heard some
 16 titbits now and then.
 17 Q. General discussion, nothing to do with politics or
 18 anything like that as far as you're aware?
 19 A. As far as I'm concerned no, sir.
 20 Q. Let me be clear: your evidence is that as far as the
 21 mosque is concerned there were no separate meetings that
 22 were taking place between any attendees of whatever age
 23 except simply casually meeting up as they're leaving the
 24 mosque and exchanging pleasantries?
 25 A. I would agree with the statement as far as I am

140

1 concerned, yes, sir .

2 Q. Let me look at just two references these on this.

3 Real time, today, page 83, please, Mr Lopez, lines 10 to

4 19 {Day171/85:11}. Mr Greaney asks you:

5 "Question: Just so that I can be clear, is it the

6 position that you don't accept that meeting space was

7 given to people with extremist views between 2014 and

8 2016?"

9 "Answer: We never give space, sir, to anybody.

10 It's very unfortunate that members of the inquiry have

11 not been able to visit the mosque. But if one does, one

12 would see we have open spaces and there are no areas for

13 meetings, sir. We forbid any meetings of any groups.

14 It is not allowed. Permit me for saying, and I say it

15 with respect to everyone here, Mr El-Saeiti is a liar."

16 And you stand by that evidence, do you?

17 A. I do indeed, sir .

18 Q. And indeed it's a repetition of what you have just said

19 to me.

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Can we look please at {INQ029134/1}, which is the

22 independent report commissioned by you. {INQ029134/12},

23 please. Paragraph 3.39. That's not the document.

24 {INQ029134/12}.

25 Paragraph 3.39. This is that independent report

141

1 commissioned by the mosque:

2 "The BBC report also claims that Mustafa Graf is

3 a leader of the group 17th February Forum. I asked

4 Mustafa Graf about this and he pointed out this is not

5 a group, it is a discussion forum of concerned Libyans,

6 and it has no leader, it has met only a few times, and

7 any Libyan can call a meeting when concerned about any

8 Libyan issues. The date 17 February is synonymous with

9 the start of the Libyan Revolution in 2011."

10 Did Mustafa Graf have meetings of the 17th February

11 forum on mosque premises?

12 A. No, sir. No, sir .

13 Q. Looking at paragraph 3.39 again:

14 "The BBC report claims that Mustafa Graf is a leader

15 of the group of the 17th February Forum. I asked him

16 about this and he pointed out that this is not a group,

17 it is a discussion forum of concerned Libyans and it has

18 no leader, it has met only a few times, and any Libyan

19 can call a meeting when concerned about any Libyan

20 issues."

21 Is he right about that at least?

22 A. Anyone can call for any meeting.

23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Sorry, do you know about this group?

24 A. I do not know about the group, sir. If Mr Cooper is

25 asking me about the group, I do not know about the

142

1 group, sir .

2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Sorry, Mr Cooper, we're going to have

3 a general answer, I think, about anyone being able to

4 call any group any time and I don't think that is going

5 help me.

6 MR COOPER: If it won't help you, sir — but simply while

7 I'm on the subject of that group, and again it touched

8 on questions put to you by Mr Greaney, were you aware

9 that Mustafa Graf had attended any such group meetings?

10 A. I'm not aware of any meetings, not even aware whether

11 they were held at the compound.

12 Q. Were you aware that at one of those meetings

13 Salman Abedi was present?

14 A. No, sir, this is news to me.

15 Q. With hindsight — and we'll build a picture of

16 Mustafa Graf as we go along, this is not my only

17 question on him.

18 A. Sure.

19 Q. With hindsight, are we building a picture now, would you

20 agree, that Mustafa Graf was perhaps a little more of

21 concern or should have been a little more of concern to

22 you than he was now we know a little more about him?

23 A. I would disagree, sir, I would disagree. I can expand

24 on that, Mr Cooper, but I would disagree with what you

25 said.

143

1 MR HENLEY: I hesitate to interrupt, but part of the

2 question was, did Mr Haffar know that Salman Abedi

3 attended one of those meetings. If there is information

4 about the meetings, surely to that extent there must be

5 some information about where it was held.

6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I think we've already had it. In fact

7 it was in London, it was a demonstration.

8 MR HENLEY: So not in Manchester and not in the mosque.

9 MR GREANEY: Your understanding is correct: it was at the

10 UAE embassy.

11 MR COOPER: As I made clear, this was a separate meeting of

12 the 17th February — and I made it clear it was a

13 separate meeting.

14 Let's go back to the question because we don't want

15 to be thrown from the question we're asking you. The

16 question was, and I will repeat the question again:

17 given what we know about Mustafa Graf now, putting it

18 all together, and we'll go back to it, would you now

19 say, if you'd known that then, this was a man that might

20 have caused us more concern than he did?

21 A. I would disagree with the statement and I can expand on

22 that, Mr Chair.

23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay.

24 A. Because we are in touch always with the Greater

25 Manchester Police and we were in touch with more than

144

1 the Greater Manchester Police. And if we had any
 2 concerns about anybody, Mr Cooper, we would report it,
 3 and I would report that as my duty. We had no concerns
 4 about him.
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Let me take a slightly different angle
 6 on it. You have within your community, within your
 7 mosque, a number of Libyans and they come from — they
 8 are opposed Libyans.
 9 A. That's right.
 10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You have two imams there, again who are
 11 opposed imams with radically different views. Were you
 12 trying to keep everybody happy?
 13 A. I was trying to keep — personally trying to keep the
 14 politics out of the mosque and I kept telling both of
 15 them: we do not discuss politics, you are here as
 16 a spiritual leader, you talk about Islam, you talk about
 17 Muslims, you can talk about the different ideologies,
 18 you can give and take, politics is out of this building.
 19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I understand that. It may be they were
 20 appointed before you came, so there's nothing you can do
 21 about it, but actually, there are presumably imams who
 22 could be found in Manchester who don't have strong
 23 political views as these two had. Could you not have
 24 found people without those sort of views?
 25 A. Both imams, Mr Chair, were liked, one was liked by 50%

145

1 of the congregation and the other imam was liked by the
 2 other 50%.
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Because of their differing views?
 4 A. Not necessarily Libyans, because they had different
 5 views. Mr Mustafa Graf was liked by many people, and so
 6 was Mr El-Saeiti. Remember, sir, Mr El-Saeiti was the
 7 head of the Sharia, so he was in charge of solving
 8 problems, divorces, et cetera. So Mustafa had a
 9 different ideology slightly than Mr El-Saeiti. I am
 10 sure Mr El-Saeiti will speak for himself tomorrow.
 11 MR COOPER: We've made the suggestion to you and, on the
 12 back of the chair's question to you, I make the
 13 suggestion to you again. One of the reasons you might
 14 be perceived as being quite passive about this is
 15 because you didn't want to antagonise or offend
 16 different constituencies in the mosque.
 17 A. I don't want to stir any trouble, sir.
 18 Q. Exactly.
 19 A. Not antagonise. We have a passive, as you rightly said,
 20 a passive congregation. Why stir trouble? We have
 21 different ideology. I could be a hard labour or
 22 a militant labour or a liberal labour. I could be
 23 a conservative equally. So that's what was happening
 24 at the mosques, ladies and gentlemen.
 25 Q. Effectively trying to please everyone?

146

1 A. Absolutely. It's a difficult task.
 2 Q. Thank you.
 3 A. Thank you.
 4 Q. Going back to Mustafa Graf though, and I'm building
 5 a picture about him now and I think you may have
 6 misinterpreted my question, not your fault, mine. I was
 7 asking you about now, using the wisdom of hindsight, now
 8 what we know of Mustafa Graf. We'll go through it
 9 again. Should not have alarm bells have been ringing
 10 about him? I have put to you the 17 February issue.
 11 You've answered that. Let's go back to him.
 12 On top of that, what you did know at the time was
 13 that he was discovered in Libya in military uniform,
 14 Mr Greaney's asked you about. Do you remember that line
 15 of questioning? You are not a naive man, are you,
 16 you're a businessman, you're an articulate, intelligent
 17 man, if I may say so. You're not naive, are you?
 18 A. No, sir.
 19 Q. No. So when you were told that the reason he was
 20 wearing combat military uniform in a civil war zone and
 21 were told, well, that was so he could blend in, did you
 22 question that answer?
 23 A. I did, sir.
 24 Q. Who did you question of it?
 25 A. Him.

147

1 Q. What did he say?
 2 A. He explained what he told me. At the time I was
 3 convinced.
 4 Q. That he said no more, no less, than it was to enable him
 5 to blend in?
 6 A. Absolutely, sir. Absolutely. I believed him. I think
 7 in my view, he came across as being very honest. It was
 8 an honest answer.
 9 Q. It's a cumulative line of questioning on Mustafa Graf
 10 I'm asking you about, whether even now with hindsight
 11 I'm asking you now, even now with hindsight whether you
 12 can have the insight to say to yourself, well, yeah,
 13 I should have seen that at the time. Let's carry on
 14 with that line of questioning. Because I'm going to
 15 suggest to you that was, at the very least, naive of
 16 you, to be told that a man in a civil war zone who holds
 17 certain views, nothing wrong with that, is standing
 18 there in military combat uniform. At the very least it
 19 was naive of you, wasn't it, to accept that?
 20 A. Sir, when I questioned him, I also contacted my liaison
 21 officer at the Greater Manchester Police, the chief of
 22 police at the Greater Manchester Police. I had his
 23 mobile number and when you speak to the chief of police
 24 and you say to him, sir, should I have any concerns
 25 about our Mustafa Graf, and he says no —

148

1 Q. Who was that chief of police?
 2 A. I cannot name people here, but I have spoken to various
 3 officers —
 4 Q. Why not?
 5 A. There are reasons. We had contact with Elizabeth
 6 Slinger Street.
 7 Q. Because you know, if you gave us a name, even in
 8 private, we could ask that person whether you did.
 9 A. Some of the chiefs have actually retired. I have a list
 10 in my office and I can give you the names later on.
 11 Q. And they can be asked whether you had this conversation?
 12 A. Absolutely.
 13 Q. And what advice they gave you?
 14 A. We have no issues with Mustafa Graf. If there were
 15 issues, he would be under arrest.
 16 Q. Let's be clear about this because we don't want to
 17 trouble you again. You say you spoke to senior police
 18 officers and said that Mustafa Graf was in Libya,
 19 wearing combat uniform and he said he was wearing it so
 20 he could blend in, the police officer said to you,
 21 "That's all right that's not a problem"?
 22 A. I did not elaborate on what he was wearing. If you
 23 permit me, sir, when that video was published, it was
 24 seen by everyone, including the police, MI5, MI6,
 25 et cetera. My liaison officer was told, do we need to

149

1 worry about what has been published by BBC in terms of
 2 that video and Mr Graf being seen in military fatigue?
 3 Nothing to worry about.
 4 Q. So you did tell them he was seen in military fatigues?
 5 A. Yes. But he did not come back to me and say, oh yes,
 6 Mr Haffar, we have seen in him in the military fatigue
 7 and there is nothing for you to worry about. I stated
 8 that.
 9 And we actually, if I may say, Mr Cooper, we
 10 actually suspended Mr Graf and we did not bring him back
 11 until we were satisfied that both our investigation and
 12 the police's investigation, which is more important for
 13 us...
 14 Q. Again, knowing now what you know about him, military
 15 fatigues, the 17th February Forum, I know you didn't
 16 know that at the time but you know it now, are you
 17 saying to yourself now, yeah, that's something we should
 18 have been watching out for here? No, nothing worries
 19 you?
 20 A. No.
 21 Q. All right. I've been asking you these questions so
 22 I can understand the present mindset of the mosque, not
 23 necessarily what it was then, what it is now.
 24 A. I appreciate that, sir.
 25 Q. Let's carry on. On top of that we have the sermon

150

1 issued by Mustafa Graf and you've been asked questions
 2 about it, I'm not going to repeat those questions. The
 3 question of jihad was mentioned to you and I totally
 4 accept from you that there is a learned and spiritual, a
 5 perfectly proper interpretation of jihad. I do
 6 completely understand that. But would you accept that
 7 perhaps sometimes, out there in the general public, and
 8 in the media, there's a more broad-brush attitude to
 9 jihad, which is inaccurate and misleading —
 10 A. Yes, sir.
 11 Q. — and that can misrepresent the positive benefits that
 12 the word to Muslims and not just Muslims, those that
 13 understand the religion, get?
 14 A. Yes, sir.
 15 Q. When Mustafa Graf was using the word jihad, did that not
 16 worry you in how it could be misinterpreted?
 17 A. As I mentioned earlier on, I wasn't actually at that
 18 sermon, but when my fellow trustee, Mr Khayat, sent an
 19 email to Mr Graf and spoke to him about it and shared it
 20 with us, yes, I was worried, but I also knew that on
 21 that day he was emotionally charged because of what was
 22 happening in the northern part of Syria.
 23 Q. I understand that he may have been emotionally charged
 24 and one can understand the tragic images that were
 25 coming out.

151

1 A. Yes, sir.
 2 Q. But regardless of what he was feeling, whether he was
 3 emotionally charged or not, what he was saying, the
 4 words he was using, were still powerful words that could
 5 be misinterpreted, weren't they?
 6 A. I don't think the majority of Muslims would misinterpret
 7 the word jihad.
 8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. There was clearly a possibility
 9 and that's why you said to him: please, don't use that
 10 sort of word in a sermon —
 11 A. But Mr Chair, it was for the outer — it was for the
 12 wider community, not for us.
 13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Absolutely, I understand that. It could
 14 be misunderstood by somebody who would hear it?
 15 A. It could be.
 16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Yes, okay.
 17 MR COOPER: Before we move on, let's look at one paragraph
 18 because again I'm building a picture, or trying to build
 19 a picture, of a passive attitude that you were taking
 20 towards the dangers that were reflected in the mosque.
 21 I'm putting it to you not only, as I keep repeating,
 22 then but now, seeing whether you may make a concession
 23 now. Let's look if we can very briefly at a text from
 24 that sermon. {INQ032817/1}, please.
 25 If we can just look at 07.07, if we can enhance

152

1 that, please, Mr Lopez, right at the bottom:
 2 "Brothers and sisters, be among and with the firm
 3 true believers who can't be shaken. Who don't change...
 4 They have no doubt."
 5 That's where it has started and just looking further
 6 down, the last three lines:
 7 "The whole world, including Europe, America, what is
 8 the so-called civilised world, the whole world, they
 9 know that Iran, Russia and the militias are killing
 10 humans in Syria and they do nothing. Well, in fact they
 11 helped Iranian, Russian and others to kill Muslims over
 12 there. And for us, and this is what matters for us."
 13 We've learned, and it has been a learning process
 14 for us, from Dr Wilkinson, I can't recall now whether
 15 it's evidence he's going to give or whether it's
 16 evidence he has given, but he said one of the few
 17 reasons for Muslims to actually lawfully, as it were,
 18 kill other Muslims or others is if they are perceived to
 19 be in danger or if they have been killed. That's what
 20 we have learned. Would you agree with that?
 21 A. I wouldn't agree with Mr Wilkinson's interpretation,
 22 sir, because that is open to various interpretations.
 23 Dr Wilkinson, and I don't speak for him, he will speak
 24 for himself, from what I understand he belongs to a sect
 25 of Islam that I do not associate with. He's a true

153

1 Muslim, but he is a Sufi Muslim and his interpretations
 2 will be different.
 3 Q. I don't want to go too wide because I know you refer to
 4 him as a so-called expert during the course of some of
 5 your statement. I'm simply asking this: the concept
 6 that he articulates about one of the few times when
 7 it is deemed legitimate for Muslims to kill other
 8 people, whether they be Muslims or not, is if Muslims
 9 have been killed themselves. And that therefore
 10 legitimises the infliction of death upon the
 11 perpetrators. That's what he said in his report.
 12 I paraphrase it. Do you agree with that as a general
 13 principle?
 14 A. No, sir. I do not agree. I'm a passive person and
 15 I would not agree with that.
 16 Q. I'm not suggesting you personally.
 17 A. I appreciate that, but what I'm trying to say is, again,
 18 his interpretation is not what the majority of Muslims
 19 agree with. I respect what he says.
 20 Q. If that is right -- if that is right -- that is a matter
 21 for the chair.
 22 If that is right what is being said here -- forget
 23 the use of the word jihad or otherwise -- what is being
 24 said here is that Muslims have been killed and certain
 25 countries are named, but the implication is it's the

154

1 so-called civilised word that has done it. It's not
 2 criminal, it's been deemed by the report as not being
 3 criminal, let me emphasise that. But it's highly
 4 dangerous, isn't it, at the very least, to use that
 5 language? Would you agree? Dangerous?
 6 A. Again, I say it depends how you interpret what he was
 7 saying. My interpretation, I was not there, when
 8 I heard it and I read it, he was asking for money and
 9 I said before, we had raised more money on that day than
 10 ever. Therefore, what he said and the purpose of his
 11 statement raised money for those terrible people who
 12 were dying. That's my interpretation, ladies and
 13 gentlemen.
 14 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. Let's stop for a moment. We'll
 15 find out -- and I don't think Dr Wilkinson's got to this
 16 part of his evidence yet. But my recollection of what
 17 he said about Muslims killing is very similar to our own
 18 law of self-defence, ie you can kill if it's necessary
 19 in order to defend your life. I don't remember him
 20 saying, but I could be entirely wrong, that he can say
 21 if someone kills a Muslim, you can go and kill him, but
 22 we'll check.
 23 MR COOPER: I'll have to check. I have to say, it was
 24 simply something that I recall, and it's always
 25 dangerous when you're on your feet.

155

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You may be entirely right. Can I say
 2 that:
 3 "The whole world including Europe, America, what is
 4 the so-called civilised world, the whole world. They
 5 know that Iran, Russia and the militias are killing
 6 humans in Syria and they do nothing. Well, in fact they
 7 helped Iranian, Russian and others to kill Muslims over
 8 there. And for us, and this is what matters for us."
 9 It could be quite inflammatory to a young man
 10 hearing that in the mosque coming from the preacher.
 11 A. It could be, Mr Chair, but if you read the other
 12 paragraph, he clarifies and he says:
 13 "This is what I want from you."
 14 So let's put everything into context, ladies and
 15 gentlemen.
 16 MR COOPER: I understand that and I'm going to move off it.
 17 Yes, it's all right for us to put it in context in the
 18 court and in learned discourse, but this is a sermon
 19 that's being read out and words and lines by that (sic),
 20 there's always a risk that certain people of whatever
 21 type can simply grab on to those words just for instance
 22 as the Koran is perverted by evil people, just for
 23 instance as the Bible is misinterpreted deliberately by
 24 evil people. There's always a risk, isn't there, that
 25 this section could be taken and perverted and

156

1 misinterpreted, deliberately so, to incite young men
 2 like Salman Abedi to kill 22 innocent people?
 3 A. Not by the regular congregation who comes to our
 4 mainstream mosque.
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. I think the basis of the whole
 6 question is: you've had these other things in the past,
 7 then you have this. I just wonder whether what's being
 8 suggested to you is you might have thought, actually,
 9 it would be safer to do without him.
 10 A. Without Mustafa Graf, Mr Chair?
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Yes.
 12 A. Yes. Yes.
 13 MR COOPER: And would you agree now, I'm going to move on,
 14 but would you agree now, with the benefit of hindsight,
 15 that it would have been safer to dispense with his
 16 services?
 17 A. Mr Cooper, we restructured a lot of the areas of the
 18 mosque and when we did the restructure, he was gone and
 19 so was Mr El-Saeiti.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: When did that take place?
 21 A. 2019.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You made them both redundant?
 23 A. Absolutely, sir. By restructuring rather kick them out.
 24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You said you were moving on, Mr Cooper,
 25 so I want to say this at this stage.

157

1 It's always important when allegations are made
 2 against people that if they want to have the opportunity
 3 to answer it, they do. So can I make clear that if
 4 Mr Graf wishes to write to me in response to anything
 5 that's being said, he has the opportunity to do so.
 6 Because obviously things can get reported, it can affect
 7 his reputation, and he ought to have the opportunity to
 8 answer it if he wishes.
 9 MR COOPER: And let me emphasis that these are suggestions
 10 that I am making to a witness in questions --
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm not criticising the questions.
 12 I don't like people being criticised without the
 13 opportunity of responding. It's not your fault.
 14 MR COOPER: Of course not.
 15 Can I take you to your statement, please, a small
 16 part of it, {INQ031291/1}. Paragraph 15, please.
 17 I think it's page 4 {INQ031291/4}. It's just
 18 a clarification:
 19 "The mosque has had no major incidents of extremism
 20 or otherwise, nor has it reported any incident to the
 21 Charity Commission prior to the media coverage of the
 22 Salman Abedi attacks in 2017."
 23 It does beg the question:
 24 "The mosque has had no major incidents of
 25 extremism."

158

1 Has it had any incidents of extremism?
 2 A. Good question, Mr Cooper.
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That's what he's paid for!
 4 A. Indeed. What I wanted to say, sir, is that as I said
 5 previously, we try our best not to have any politics
 6 in the mosque. On occasions, and when after prayers are
 7 finished and people are socialising with each other,
 8 sometimes people start talking about politics, like
 9 everyone does, the blood starts boiling and people start
 10 saying things. Whoever's in charge on the day would
 11 come back to these groups and say, gentlemen, if you are
 12 discussing politics and you're going to fight about it,
 13 please leave the mosque now. These are the kind of
 14 incidents, shall I say, that may have happened. The
 15 word extremist perhaps, I didn't use the correct word,
 16 but sometimes people have extreme views about which
 17 leader they follow. It could be extreme to me,
 18 Mr Chair, but not to you. This is what I meant in my
 19 statement.
 20 Q. You wrote that statement, didn't you?
 21 A. I wrote the statement with the help of my members, my
 22 board. As you know, I represent the board.
 23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It's a representative statement?
 24 A. Absolutely. We are seven trustees, we have solicitors,
 25 barristers. We were helped, of course I was.

159

1 MR COOPER: I don't need to deal with it then, because you
 2 have pre-empted a question I was going to ask you but
 3 I will reference it. {INQ041953/1}, your second
 4 statement. In that statement in parts references are
 5 made to Mr Haffar believing this and Mr Haffar believing
 6 that, and that's why I asked the question. It doesn't
 7 look like it was a statement primarily written by you,
 8 although you sign it.
 9 A. Can I clarify this, Mr Cooper? At the beginning when
 10 we were told to prepare a statement, we had actually
 11 prepared a statement on behalf of the actual mosque, on
 12 behalf of the centre. And then we were told by
 13 Mr Tim Suter that the statement has to come from
 14 a person, from myself. So as the chair of the body,
 15 I was chosen. There might have been some spelling
 16 mistakes, some paragraphs which were not corrected and
 17 I apologise for that. But I have read it and I stand by
 18 the statement.
 19 Q. I'm not criticising you at all, I have not spotted any
 20 spelling mistakes, that would be churlish. I'm just
 21 asking you how the statement was created. Did you all
 22 get round a table, as it were, and talk it through?
 23 A. Yes, sir, I would say that. On numerous days,
 24 absolutely. That's what we used to do.
 25 Q. Were there notes -- I feel like I'm in a different

160

1 tribunal now. Were there notes made of that process as
 2 to what was written down before it made it into the
 3 statement?
 4 A. I think there were emails between the trustees that
 5 perhaps the statement isn't very accurate, perhaps you
 6 need to go back and remember the facts.
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Did someone do the first draft?
 8 Drafting a statement by committee is normally quite
 9 difficult .
 10 A. We have a consultant, Mr Chair, and his name was
 11 mentioned before. He helped us write it, actually,
 12 because he knew how to write a proper statement.
 13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Once we got the structure, what's in
 14 there is discussed among you and --
 15 A. That is correct, sir .
 16 MR COOPER: I think you imply, or expressly stated, there
 17 was sometimes disagreement between you about as to what
 18 was accurate and what was inaccurate?
 19 A. Yes, there would have been disagreements and the reason,
 20 Mr Cooper, is as seven trustees, some of us live close
 21 by, some of us live far away, we are not there every
 22 day, so sometimes we have to remind each other, "Don't
 23 you remember this is what happened, not this", "Oh yes,
 24 that's what happened". So sometimes this is how the
 25 conversation was taking place during the meetings,

161

1 Mr Cooper.
 2 MR COOPER: Sir, acutely aware that I am that I'm not in the
 3 tribunal that I lapsed into a moment ago, but if you are
 4 interested in seeing what those contemporaneous notes
 5 were to see if they conflict with this statement, can we
 6 encourage the inquiry to obtain them?
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: If there are emails with those sort of
 8 discussions, please could we see them?
 9 A. Absolutely.
 10 MR COOPER: I'm grateful. I'll move on.
 11 Engagement with Prevent. Would you agree,
 12 Mr Haffar, that Prevent is the best opportunity we have
 13 at the moment to combat evil ideology?
 14 A. I, Fawzi Haffar, may accept the statement, sir, but
 15 Fawzi Haffar does not own the mosque and is one of the
 16 trustees. Therefore not everyone is on the same mind
 17 that the Prevent programme does actually work for
 18 mosques.
 19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Let's forget that for a moment if you
 20 don't mind. We're going to hear fairly shortly when
 21 there will be a review of Prevent and it's being looked
 22 at in an inquiry at the moment. The fact of the matter
 23 is, however, that it was government policy that if there
 24 were people who were susceptible to radicalisation,
 25 people like your organisation should refer them to the

162

1 police to consider Prevent and you accepted that, did
 2 you?
 3 A. Absolutely. In fact, we have attended courses where the
 4 Prevent officials were there as well. I mentioned those
 5 earlier .
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 7 MR COOPER: Because you were on the independent advisory
 8 group at your local police station?
 9 A. Yes.
 10 Q. How often did that meet?
 11 A. I would say between 2010 and 2015, it was sometimes once
 12 a month. Then things changed, people got busy,
 13 government stopped giving finance, shall we say. And
 14 the officer who used to look after us, a lady called
 15 Mazamil, I am sure her name will come later on, the
 16 whole thing stopped and then restarted again every
 17 3 months. Currently, I will tell you I have not been to
 18 one for a long time.
 19 Q. Was the committee meeting around and about the time of
 20 this atrocity, 22 May 2017?
 21 A. No, sir .
 22 Q. Do you think that around about that time, particularly
 23 as we know what the national state of alert was at the
 24 time, being severe, would it have been of assistance if,
 25 around about 2016/2017, the independent advisory group

163

1 had been sitting to give a line of communication?
 2 A. Notwithstanding those meetings, sir, I will tell you
 3 that we have a rapport going on with the Elizabeth
 4 Slinger Street Police Station all the time. We have
 5 communicated almost every 2 to 3 weeks. We're in
 6 communication, they give us a lot of support. So we
 7 don't wait for the IAG meetings to discuss because
 8 frankly, Mr Cooper, these meetings of the IAG are not
 9 only Muslims, they are Jewish faith, Christians, Hindus,
 10 LGBT+, it's just a general group that discusses things.
 11 So we, as a mosque, are always in touch with the police.
 12 We made it our -- I personally made sure I have personal
 13 contacts of the officers in case anything happens.
 14 They've given us a lot of support and we've always been
 15 in touch with them. Whenever there's an issue we talk
 16 to them.
 17 Q. Right, we will come on to that in a moment. I'm going
 18 to ask you a question now and I don't want you to answer
 19 it at the moment because I want to see whether there's
 20 any objection to it. But given that you have told us
 21 about liaison with the police, did the mosque at the
 22 time around about the time of this atrocity have any
 23 interaction with MI5 or Counter-terrorism Police? Was
 24 there an ongoing relationship whereby you are able to
 25 communicate with them, not the details of it, but was

164

1 there open line of communication between the security
 2 services and the mosque, that's MI5 or Counter-terrorism
 3 Police?
 4 If there's no objection, I'll put that question to
 5 you.
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I don't see personally why not.
 7 MR GREANEY: I don't either.
 8 MR COOPER: Excess of caution, that's all.
 9 A. We, as trustees and as the centre, had no contact with
 10 any of the security services. However, we are always in
 11 touch with our local police station. Ourselves -- MI5,
 12 MI6, security, whatever you call them, no, sir.
 13 Q. That's all I'm going to ask on that.
 14 I want to move on now, clearly, to the Abedi family
 15 and their involvement or otherwise at your mosque.
 16 You've told us as far as you're concerned, you were
 17 not --
 18 MR GREANEY: I am sorry to interrupt, but I wonder whether,
 19 if Mr Cooper is moving on to a separate topic, if this
 20 might be a time for a break.
 21 MR COOPER: It would be, yes.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Ten minutes.
 23 (3.35 pm)
 24 (A short break)
 25 (3.55 pm)

165

1 MR COOPER: I'll touch upon, because I know you've been
 2 asked a number of questions, questions concerning the
 3 Abedi family at the mosque. You have told us that you
 4 knew little of Ramadan; is that right?
 5 A. That's correct, yes.
 6 Q. Have I got his name right, it is Ramadan?
 7 A. It is Ramadan, as in the month of Ramadan.
 8 Q. He was, though, engaged at the mosque up to and around
 9 about 2006; is that your recollection?
 10 A. The information, Mr Cooper, that I gathered from the
 11 various employees is an earlier time than that. I never
 12 knew him, so I never saw him. Some employees said
 13 he was there until 2005, maybe 2004, maybe 2008.
 14 There's a conflict of reports, to be honest with you.
 15 Q. I see. But around about 2005/2006?
 16 A. I can accept that.
 17 Q. Is that around the time that a number of what I'll refer
 18 to as hard-line Libyan Muslims left your mosque or some
 19 of them did anyway, as a group?
 20 A. I'm not aware of that, Mr Cooper. Frankly I'm not
 21 aware.
 22 Q. No?
 23 A. No.
 24 Q. But would you accept that Ramadan Abedi could be
 25 described as a hard-line Libyan Muslim?

166

1 A. Again, it's only from what I have read in the press.
 2 I never really saw or spoke to the person. I can't
 3 really vouch either way. I read about him, that he was
 4 a good man, a bad man. I honestly cannot tell you,
 5 Mr Cooper.
 6 Q. As far as Ismail Abedi is concerned, he was a little
 7 more integrated into the mosque, wasn't he?
 8 A. Again, from the information I gathered, especially
 9 lately from my employees or our employees, he used to
 10 frequent the mosque more than the rest of the family and
 11 he was volunteering, as I mentioned earlier, at the
 12 Arabic school. That's what I understood.
 13 Q. Indeed, he attended, did Ismail, the mosque on the night
 14 of 22 May, didn't he?
 15 A. Again, this was told by someone who allegedly saw him.
 16 I cannot verify that, sir. Can I mention that we looked
 17 at the CCTV, but we couldn't go back. When this was
 18 reported later on, we tried to go back to see whether
 19 anyone would recognise him and unfortunately no one did.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Where does that information come from?
 21 MR COOPER: {INQ030452/1}, which is a report, I think, of
 22 investigative officer Richard Mortimer. I'll just check
 23 I got the right reference. {INQ030452/4}, paragraph 13,
 24 I think I have.
 25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We'll check it in due course.

167

1 MR COOPER: If we go to that. Paragraph 13, page 4:
 2 "Ismail Abedi and Mohammed Benjama attended
 3 Didsbury Mosque on the night of the Manchester Arena
 4 bombing on Monday, 22 May 2017."
 5 And the question asked of this witness was:
 6 "Why were they there? Was anyone else with them,
 7 did either Benjama or Abedi return to the mosque the
 8 evening of the bombing? What records, if any, are kept
 9 when members attend prayers at the mosque?"
 10 And it seems Mr Haffar answered:
 11 "No records kept of people attending prayers, but if
 12 they had booked a room there would be a record of this."
 13 I don't need to read the rest. That's where I have
 14 extracted it from.
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you very much.
 16 MR COOPER: Ismail Abedi was teaching at the mosque, wasn't
 17 he?
 18 A. He partook as a volunteer, so he wasn't a permanent
 19 teacher. From what I understood again, Mr Cooper, he
 20 helped when there was a teacher missing or when they
 21 called upon him to come and help.
 22 Q. What would he teach?
 23 A. Arabic.
 24 Q. The language or the culture?
 25 A. I beg your pardon, the Arabic language. Again, we were

168

1 told that sometimes he would teach the younger children
 2 small versions of the Koran, which are very easy to
 3 teach, shall we say.
 4 Q. When an individual teaches at the mosque, is there any
 5 vetting process or accreditation?
 6 A. Yes, sir. The first thing we do is we have a DBS check
 7 on the person, he's vetted by the headmaster of the
 8 school, we have a person who sometimes acted as an imam,
 9 he would vet him. So would the headteachers. We had
 10 two ladies who would vet him and interview him and see
 11 whether he was suitable, especially if he's teaching
 12 Arabic in a very easy way. It doesn't take a genius.
 13 Q. I'm not suggesting or not asking whether he was vetted
 14 for his ability to teach or indeed for his safety to be
 15 with young people, children, but was he vetted in terms
 16 of what his attitudes were, had he expressed extremist
 17 views, were questions asked before, and I'll use an
 18 inelegant expression, he was let loose on young people?
 19 A. Good question, sir. Our headteacher, who happens to be
 20 Libyan himself, would always make sure that he knows the
 21 background of this person, who his parents were, and
 22 whether this person is suitable to teach whatever. So
 23 he would do some kind of a background check, yes.
 24 Q. What sort of background check? One presumes if
 25 a background check had been done of Ismail Abedi, some

169

1 rather interesting reading might have been produced.
 2 A. Again, if there was information which was hidden from
 3 the public or from us, we wouldn't know much, but as far
 4 as we were concerned, again this is what I was told by
 5 the headteacher, he asked him what has he been doing,
 6 what's he been working, what's his background, and
 7 I guess he also knew his father from many, many years
 8 ago and he knew that the person is reasonably fine.
 9 Q. So he knew his father and took that as a reference, as
 10 it were, for the suitability of Ismail Abedi?
 11 A. Because there was no negative things, Mr Cooper. If
 12 there's nothing negative, why would one think anything
 13 negative? He did his due diligence, you know. There
 14 was nothing negative.
 15 Q. One of the things I'm going to suggest to you generally,
 16 I was going to suggest it at the end but I'll feed it in
 17 now, and this is an example, your whole attitude to
 18 governing the mosque when it came to people of extremism
 19 or potential extremist views was passive.
 20 Do you understand? It was to do nothing unless you
 21 absolutely have to. What do you say about that?
 22 A. I would disagree with that statement, sir. I may be
 23 a passive person myself in terms of confrontational
 24 theories, but we have always been in control of that
 25 mosque. Myself and my trustees took our job, even

170

1 though it's not a paid job, very seriously. And as
 2 I mentioned before, we wanted to make sure the mosque is
 3 frequented by anyone with normal views, what we call
 4 normal views, and really we definitely were opposed to
 5 any form of extremism.
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: This is not a criticism, but it is an
 7 observation, which you can help me with.
 8 A. Yes, sir.
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: As a result of what we now know about
 10 Ismail Abedi and what was downloaded, for example by the
 11 police in 2015, of his devices, he would appear to be
 12 someone who has a pretty extremist mental state.
 13 Whether he did anything about it or not is difficult to
 14 know, but he has things like beheadings on his phone and
 15 stuff like that. So if you'd known about that, you
 16 would undoubtedly not have had him teach very vulnerable
 17 age children in your mosque?
 18 A. Absolutely, Mr Chair. Absolutely. That's news to me.
 19 That's honestly the first time I hear what you just
 20 said.
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm slightly alarmed at that.
 22 A. I am indeed.
 23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: At least it may be that discussions
 24 needed to take place with the police about what you can
 25 do in that situation and whether, if you have someone

171

1 like that, you can make enquiries of them, not just
 2 a DBS check but actually of any radical views.
 3 A. I am glad you mentioned that because I personally asked
 4 the question before of whether we could go beyond DBS
 5 and we were told there was no reason.
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay, we will see about a recommendation
 7 in relation to that. Thank you?
 8 A. Thank you, sir.
 9 MR COOPER: Because not only was this man, Ismail Abedi,
 10 teaching young people, he was also involved with the
 11 internet and that sort of work, he maintained IT
 12 equipment at the mosque, didn't he?
 13 A. No, sir, I disagree completely with this statement,
 14 absolutely not. Absolutely not. We had an IT person
 15 who looked after all the IT, everything was done in
 16 accordance with IT regulations, each computer was not
 17 linked to the other one. He never ever, as far as I'm
 18 concerned, had any control on the IT equipment. I can
 19 definitely tell you that.
 20 Q. How do you know?
 21 A. Because I was involved with the IT, sir. Though I'm
 22 a textile person, my hobby is IT and I would make sure.
 23 Q. Excellent, because that's the first time you've really
 24 said you're involved with something, so I want to ask
 25 you about that now --

172

1 A. Please.
 2 Q. -- because on other occasions you haven't known, you
 3 didn't know, you didn't see, you didn't hear, you didn't
 4 speak, on this occasion you know something.
 5 So what is the control that the mosque have over
 6 people who use the internet or have access to their IT
 7 equipment?
 8 A. Well, to start with, we have a network, again I'm going
 9 to go into technical -- we have a network.
 10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We can cope with network.
 11 A. We have a Wi-Fi system. The Wi-Fi system will have
 12 a key. The key is only given to individual persons.
 13 The key which allows them to get on the internet is not
 14 given to any of the schoolchildren, et cetera. Each
 15 computer has a password, a user name, and I cannot go on
 16 my computer and find out about other documents on other
 17 computers in the centre. It's not as if the network was
 18 very large. There was only about three or four
 19 computers, the accountant, the CEO, the headteacher, and
 20 that was it, and we have a printer. So it's not
 21 a massive network. And we have Wi-Fi access points all
 22 over the mosque. That is it, sir.
 23 MR COOPER: Thank you. Salman Abedi was also, as we have
 24 established, I think you agree, a regular attendee
 25 at the mosque?

1 A. I'm going to disagree with that, sir. As far as I'm
 2 concerned I have never seen him, not many people saw
 3 him. Some people allegedly saw him, but I would refute
 4 that, sir.
 5 Q. How can you refute it? If people say they saw him,
 6 surely they must be taken on face value, mustn't they?
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Hang on. What was put was that he was
 8 a regular attendee and you refuted that. Are you saying
 9 he did not attend at all?
 10 A. I cannot say that. I would say he was never a regular
 11 attendee. Whether he came in one of the prayers, maybe
 12 the early morning prayers, but people would have seen
 13 him. People even allegedly said, "We think it's him, it
 14 could be his brother, we don't know".
 15 MR COOPER: Some people did see him?
 16 A. Allegedly.
 17 Q. You can't have it both ways, forgive me, Mr Haffar,
 18 where if they didn't see him, they didn't see him, but
 19 if they did see him, it's allegedly. If they saw him,
 20 would you accept that there's no reason to make it up?
 21 A. I have no reason to doubt whether they did or they
 22 didn't.
 23 Q. Thank you. Would it be right that it's possible that
 24 he was a regular attendee at the mosque until at least
 25 up until 2016?

1 A. I cannot say that, Mr Cooper, I cannot say that at all.
 2 Again when we did our questioning, many of our employees
 3 said he was never there. We have to take that at face
 4 value.
 5 Q. But some others did. All I'm simply asking you is when
 6 some say they did, did that cause you concern?
 7 A. This was after the event, sir.
 8 Q. Absolutely. Did it cause you concern --
 9 A. It caused me concern --
 10 Q. -- to learn that?
 11 A. -- because as I said to you at the earlier session, as
 12 I said to your colleague, I do not have a window -- none
 13 of use have a window into people's hearts and people's
 14 minds, we don't know what they're thinking. If we did
 15 the police would have arrested them, sir.
 16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: If you could have been able to say to
 17 the press outside your doors, "He never came here", that
 18 would have been a nice thing for you to be able to say,
 19 wouldn't it?
 20 A. Sir, on the day the press attended the mosque was an
 21 unprecedented day for all of us. Every single Press
 22 Association from the world came there. We have no or
 23 had no experience with that. It was a very difficult
 24 day for us trustees, sir.
 25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm sure, I'm sure.

1 MR COOPER: You say you don't have a window into people's
 2 minds and hearts, but there are ways of opening windows
 3 sometimes by enquiries, aren't there, and looking in?
 4 I'm suggesting to you neither you or your colleagues
 5 bothered. What do you say about that?
 6 A. I would not agree with this, sir. As I said to you at
 7 the beginning, as I said, we have total control of the
 8 mosque. We ask questions, we see people, there are
 9 other volunteers who, if they see anything that is not
 10 correct, would report it to the trustees. There's only
 11 a handful of attendees who are there all the time. It's
 12 on a Friday when you have people coming from everywhere.
 13 We cannot really recount who was there and who was not
 14 there.
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you very much. I think you put
 16 that to him quite a number of times now and I think he
 17 has --
 18 MR COOPER: Thank you, sir. I was going to go to Abdallah
 19 as well but it is the same parcel of the point unless
 20 you want me to pursue that.
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No, thank you very much.
 22 MR COOPER: What's the relationship like between your mosque
 23 and the national bodies, for instance, the Muslim
 24 Council of Britain, the British Muslim Forum, the Muslim
 25 Association of Britain? Is there interaction between

1 these national --

2 A. The MCB, Muslim Council of Britain, we are members of

3 the MCB, we have interaction. We also have another

4 body, which is the Manchester Council of Mosques, where

5 all the mosques or most of the mosques in Manchester do

6 interact. We learn from each other's experiences, we

7 talk about making sure that Ramadan starts on the same

8 day and finishes on the same day, the holy month of

9 Ramadan, and we liaise with each other. We have a good

10 relationship. Not all mosques belong to these

11 associations, various do.

12 Q. Do they give guidance and advice on spotting

13 radicalisation or potential radicalisation?

14 A. No, sir.

15 Q. Do you think perhaps they should, in the way of looking

16 forward, perhaps to help you and your colleagues and

17 mosques up and down the country?

18 A. I think a body is important to have something like that,

19 but can I say this needs funding, sir, and none of the

20 mosques in the UK get a penny from anybody.

21 Q. Thank you.

22 A. Not a penny from anybody.

23 Q. Thank you. I'm drawing to a conclusion now, but I just

24 want to ask you this. You used the expression:

25 "The world has changed in the last 10 years, we woke

177

1 up."

2 Do you remember using that expression today?

3 A. Yes, sir, I mean, again I base that on myself, on what

4 I read in the press, what's happening in Libya, in

5 Syria, as they call it the spring uprising. So there's

6 a lot of things that have been happening around the

7 world, yes. So things have changed indeed.

8 Q. When you were interviewed -- and I have cleared this,

9 sir, with Mr Greaney, I'm permitted to ask this very

10 short question -- when you were interviewed by the BBC

11 a few days after this atrocity you said that the mosque

12 had lessons to learn.

13 A. My friend Tina, a very nice lady, she came to interview

14 me -- this was a few days after the event --

15 Q. What lessons were they?

16 A. Lessons about maybe approaching and being aggressive

17 with the police and saying to them, how could you let

18 this happen, did you not know this guy was perhaps in

19 the vicinity of our area and his intentions were to do

20 that? Things like, would the security services not do

21 their homework properly? But unfortunately we cannot

22 ask these aggressive questions, sir.

23 Q. Can I suggest that the list of lessons learned then for

24 the mosque seems to be blame other people?

25 A. No, not at all, sir. I never say that we don't make

178

1 mistakes. That's why I said that to her, of course we

2 all make mistakes, I'm the first one to admit of course

3 we make mistakes.

4 Q. It shouldn't have taken this atrocity to wake the mosque

5 up, should it?

6 A. Absolutely not, sir. Absolutely. This atrocity, it's

7 abhorrent, of course it is.

8 Q. In 2014 to 2017, there were atrocities worldwide and

9 some of them in the United Kingdom --

10 A. Do you blame us for that, sir?

11 Q. -- did that not wake you up? Did that not --

12 A. Mr Cooper, blame the Didsbury Mosque for that? I do not

13 accept that, sir.

14 Q. No, of course I'm not. You're not a silly man, you're

15 an intelligent man, you know what I'm asking you. I am

16 suggesting to you that these were signals and signs,

17 of course I'm not blaming the Didsbury Mosque for it,

18 but these were signals and signs that the

19 Didsbury Mosque, and mosques up and down the country,

20 I can't comment what they were doing what they weren't

21 doing, but the Didsbury Mosque should have been on red

22 alert, shouldn't they? You didn't need the

23 Manchester Arena to wake you up.

24 A. I'll tell you what we did in 2014, sir. We speak to our

25 imams to make sure that in their sermons they wake

179

1 people up and be careful and what is happening in the

2 Middle East is wrong, those people killing Muslims or

3 non-Muslims is wrong. What's happened on 7/7, 9/11 is

4 all wrong, sir. That is what we told our preachers to

5 concentrate on, that what is happening is wrong and

6 what's happening in the spring uprising in the Middle

7 East is going to cause issues, therefore please preach

8 the correct thing, emphasise on being passive, emphasise

9 on peace, emphasise on what our Prophet taught us. This

10 is not a religious lesson, but this is what we did,

11 Mr Cooper.

12 Q. Can I suggest to you when one looks at this as a whole,

13 the mosque has exercised a dereliction of its duty in

14 protecting people and at the time they could have done

15 far more to stop Salman Abedi and his evil cohorts doing

16 what they did?

17 A. No, sir, I absolutely categorically refuse this.

18 Absolutely.

19 MR COOPER: Thank you.

20 A. My children could have been at that arena. My children

21 were 19 and 20. They wanted to go there, not

22 specifically to that event. So my children could be

23 there. I could have been there. But unfortunately,

24 it's the victims of the parents who are here. That's

25 what happened, sir. So I promise you, and I mean that

180

1 sincerely, we are parents, and we look after everyone.
 2 So what's happened on that night wasn't good.
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. Can I urge everybody, you're
 4 perfectly entitled to put the question, but not to --
 5 obviously for the mosques, there were some very bad
 6 times after this bombing took place and we certainly
 7 don't want any repetition of things like that.
 8 MR COOPER: Absolutely not, but these are questions --
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm not suggesting you were creating it
 10 but I am saying it from my perspective.
 11 MR COOPER: And I should emphasise, these are questions in
 12 many respects driven at the heart of the concerns
 13 expressed to me by the families and it was right to ask
 14 the questions.
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm not complaining about the questions,
 16 I'm just trying to make sure we keep as much calm as
 17 we can.
 18 MR COOPER: Absolutely, and we've received the answer which
 19 I have not gone back on.
 20 MR GREANEY: Sir, I'm going to ask Mr Weatherby whether he
 21 has any questions.
 22 MR WEATHERBY: No, I have no questions. Thank you very
 23 much.
 24 Further questions from MR GREANEY
 25 MR GREANEY: Thank you, Mr Weatherby. Mr Horwell was good

181

1 enough to indicate that he has no questions for the
 2 witness.
 3 Before I ask Mr Henley to pose his questions there
 4 is just one topic that I would like the opportunity to
 5 ask questions about.
 6 Mr Haffar, you explained that in the aftermath of
 7 the bombing, steps were taken by the trustees to
 8 establish to what extent Salman Abedi and his family
 9 were known within your mosque; is that correct?
 10 A. That's correct, yes.
 11 Q. And obviously, I appreciate that you could only be as
 12 good as your own personal knowledge and/or what you were
 13 told by others as to their knowledge?
 14 A. That's right.
 15 Q. But I do want to draw your attention to one thing that
 16 has been drawn to my attention, perhaps two things, and
 17 then seek your comments upon them. Before we get to
 18 that, can you give us some idea of when it was that
 19 Mustafa Graf joined the mosque as an imam?
 20 A. Do you mean, sir, what period he joined?
 21 Q. Yes. The date when his employment with the mosque
 22 commenced, I suppose, is a more accurate way of putting
 23 it.
 24 A. To be honest with you, I cannot recall precisely. I can
 25 tell you that he joined as a junior imam at the time

182

1 when the mosque had a Syrian imam and a Syrian imam took
 2 him under his wings and trained him over a period. This
 3 was in the early 1990s perhaps.
 4 Q. So a long, long time before the attack?
 5 A. Yes.
 6 Q. That is really what I was driving at. I'm going to ask
 7 that you be shown two videos, which I'm hoping are both
 8 on Magnum. I'll ask the first be shown and then I'll
 9 ask you a few questions, and then we'll show the second
 10 and then a few questions.
 11 Mr Lopez, I'm told that there is on Magnum a video
 12 with the reference {INQ038817/1}. It's 3 minutes long.
 13 We don't need to play all of it.
 14 (Video played to the inquiry)
 15 We can probably pause there unless you want to watch
 16 on. I suspect you haven't seen this, but I did let
 17 Mr Henley know I was going to ask about it.
 18 A. I have not seen it. To me, this looks like a study
 19 circle.
 20 Q. I'm going to get to that in a moment. First of all,
 21 does this show Didsbury Mosque?
 22 A. Yes, of course it does, sir, yes.
 23 Q. Is Mustafa Graf one of the people that we can see in the
 24 footage?
 25 A. It's not very well focused, but I would say yes, sir.

183

1 Q. Which person is he?
 2 A. In the middle with the white skullcap.
 3 Q. Is this a video that's showing Mr Graf recently or
 4 fairly recently, from his appearance?
 5 A. Sir, this looks pretty old. Well, not pretty old, old,
 6 and I'll tell you why, because I can't see the air
 7 conditioners which we installed 3 years ago maybe.
 8 Q. Right. A date that we have been given by GMP, which may
 9 or may not be the creation date, is 28 July 2015, and
 10 does it look to you as if this footage dates from about
 11 that time?
 12 A. It could be, it could be. It could be indeed.
 13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It's fair to say we can't -- from
 14 looking like 2015, all you know it's a time before the
 15 air conditioning was put in?
 16 A. Which was about 3 or 4 years ago.
 17 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 18 MR GREANEY: You know Mr Graf, I don't. Does he look in
 19 terms of appearance to be about 6 years younger than
 20 he is now?
 21 A. To be honest with you, the footage isn't very clear,
 22 it's a little bit out of focus.
 23 Q. Let's watch on then.
 24 A. Yes, if you don't mind.
 25 (Video playing continued)

184

1 Q. We'll pause it there. That's probably as good as it
 2 gets.
 3 As I've indicated, I am not in a position to suggest
 4 positively that this does date to or has a creation date
 5 of 28 July 2015, but does he, you tell me, does Mr Graf,
 6 so far as you can tell, look about 6 years younger than
 7 he is now or much, much younger than that?
 8 A. The last time I saw him was about 3 years ago.
 9 Q. I see.
 10 A. The issue here, Mr Graf is, with respect, a young --
 11 well, a little guy, sorry, not young, with a beard, and
 12 sometimes the facial... It's difficult to tell. It
 13 could be 6 years old, could be 7 years old. It's
 14 difficult for me to tell, I'll be honest with you.
 15 Q. Doing the best you can, that kind of age? We'll seek
 16 further help from GMP.
 17 Greater Manchester Police have assessed that one of
 18 the other two men seated at the table is Ramadan Abedi.
 19 A. I cannot say anything because I have never met him, sir.
 20 I have only seen his picture lately in the press in the
 21 last 2 years.
 22 Q. Do you recognise either of the two men sitting at the
 23 table?
 24 A. No, not at all, and I was trying to listen to the Arabic
 25 to see what he was trying to say and what he was

185

1 addressing them by, to learn who they are, but he's not
 2 come to that.
 3 Q. From your reaction, which I was able to see, if it's the
 4 position that this dates to 2015, and does show
 5 Mustafa Graf with Ramadan Abedi, that would be
 6 a surprise to you?
 7 A. A shock to me, to be honest would you, and I would ask
 8 you to please double-check because --
 9 Q. Of course we'll double-check. Because it would be
 10 a surprise?
 11 A. Yes.
 12 Q. You were asked questions both by me and then by
 13 Mr Cooper about meetings within the mosque. Are we
 14 looking in this footage at a meeting of a group of
 15 perhaps 10 people within the mosque or are we looking at
 16 something else?
 17 A. It is difficult to tell from the footage. I would say,
 18 you know, it is a meeting, but this could be a study
 19 circle equally. It's difficult to differentiate. Is it
 20 a study circle? Because Mr Graf used to give study
 21 circles all the time on a Sunday, on a variety of
 22 things, either about some prophets or the religion
 23 specifically, so I cannot differentiate to be honest
 24 with you. It could be a study circle, everyone's
 25 sitting on the ground except those two people. Why are

186

1 they sitting? I have no idea. Difficult.
 2 Q. But this is a smaller group than you'd expect to attend
 3 prayers?
 4 A. For sure, yes. I'm looking at the clock and looking at
 5 the light outside. This could be before sunset. This
 6 would be springtime perhaps because it's not dark yet.
 7 So this could be maybe July time.
 8 Q. Can I invite you to agree with this, and I'm going to
 9 seek to express myself in neutral terms: what we appear
 10 to be looking at here is a group meeting within the
 11 mosque outside of prayer times; is that fair?
 12 A. Yes, that would be fair.
 13 Q. The next video, and I should have said I'm very grateful
 14 to Ms Cartwright for drawing these to my attention
 15 in the break. The next video is {INQ038818/1}.
 16 Once we've watched, again I'm going to ask you to
 17 help me. I haven't actually had an opportunity to view
 18 this video myself, so we're probably both watching it
 19 for the first time, although I have been provided with
 20 a description of it.
 21 (Video played to the inquiry)
 22 Just pause there, please, for one moment.
 23 Are we now seeing footage of prayers?
 24 A. We are indeed. The gentleman standing is calling for
 25 the prayer. This is the new annex at the

187

1 Didsbury Mosque, so this picture would be 4 years old,
 2 5 years old.
 3 Q. That is extremely helpful. The information from GMP
 4 is that this dates to, although this need not
 5 necessarily be the creation date, it might be
 6 a modification date, for example, to again 28 July 2015.
 7 That fits broadly with the timing that you have given
 8 us. The man who is -- there are two men standing. The
 9 one in the middle of the footage is making the call to
 10 prayer? Have I understood?
 11 A. Yes, sir.
 12 Q. If I were to tell you that GMP has, as we understand it,
 13 assessed that that man is Ramadan Abedi, again would
 14 that be not only a surprise but a shock to you?
 15 A. Absolutely. Absolutely. Can I add by the way, you can
 16 see in the foreground the timings, and of course if that
 17 picture can be enhanced further, you could tell exactly
 18 what that is and what time it is, because the -- how
 19 do you call it? -- the time plate or the big frame on
 20 the wall gives the date, the time and the times of the
 21 prayer of that particular day. So that picture can be
 22 enhanced to know exactly what the date is.
 23 Q. That's extremely helpful, thank you. Again, we will
 24 check the information that we have to make sure that
 25 it's entirely accurate bearing in mind your surprise.

188

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Can I just know, did we ever see the
2 face of the man calling for prayer or has he always got
3 his back to us?
4 MR GREANEY: I haven't seen it before.
5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Could we run back to the beginning?
6 MR GREANEY: It's only 2.5 minutes long. Why don't we watch
7 the whole thing?
8 (Video played to the inquiry)
9 I am told, sir, that Laura Taylor, an important
10 member of the inquiry legal team, who has seen the
11 footage, believes that the person making the call to
12 prayer turns round at the end.
13 (Video playing continued)
14 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Perhaps we could be ready to
15 freeze—frame it when he does.
16 MR GREANEY: Thank you very much. Mr Lopez has heard that.
17 (Video playing continued)
18 Can you just go back ever so slightly and see if
19 we can capture that date?
20 A. If you actually make the image smaller, that would be
21 enhanced, by the way. That's it, yes.
22 MR GREANEY: Play on.
23 (Video playing continued)
24 A. Can you roll it further?
25 MR GREANEY: Play it through all the way.

189

1 A. Please. I just want to try and see.
2 MR GREANEY: If you could go to the end again, play it all
3 the way through and then we will try to freeze—frame it.
4 You haven't had much of a chance to look at it, but
5 did you recognise that person?
6 A. I did not recognise him and again this could be — this
7 is my opinion, he looked darker, he looked South Asian
8 rather than Libyan. His type of clothing was more Asian
9 than Libyan. That's my opinion, sir, okay? And I can
10 assure you that if you look at the — again, this is
11 with my IT cap on, you could actually find out the day
12 by looking —
13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm sure in a laboratory that could be
14 done by GMP. We'll ask them to do that.
15 A. Absolutely.
16 (Video playing continued)
17 A. It's a tough one.
18 MR GREANEY: But you don't recognise that person?
19 A. I don't recognise him for sure, but it's a tough call,
20 I'll be honest with you I looked again. It's difficult.
21 I just looked again. Is he South Asian, is he Libyan?
22 It's very difficult, I'll be honest with you.
23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We'll try and find out where the
24 information comes from.
25 MR GREANEY: We will.

190

1 You have, I think, agreed that if that does prove to
2 be Ramadan Abedi making the call to prayer in July 2015
3 or thereabouts, that would be a shock for you?
4 A. Definitely.
5 Q. You were involved in, it's my term, the investigation
6 after the bombing, which was seeking to identify any
7 connections between the Abedi family and the mosque?
8 A. Yes, sir.
9 Q. From your experience, being there at that time, do you
10 think that there is any risk that your staff were
11 downplaying the extent to which there was a link between
12 the Abedi family and the mosque?
13 A. It's a very difficult question, sir. That's really very
14 difficult. Again, I hate to say it again, I cannot read
15 their minds. At face value, everyone was upset with
16 what had happened, everyone, when I questioned them,
17 appeared sincere. It's so difficult, honestly. They're
18 not actors or actresses, but it is still difficult for
19 me to tell.
20 I take them at face value: I have known them for a
21 long time, we eat together, we pray together, so it's
22 difficult. It's a very difficult question, sir.
23 Q. I take your point and I won't press you any further.
24 A. Thank you. As I said, I am very sincere, I'd answer
25 every question, Mr Cooper, yourself — I am very sincere

191

1 because what happened was terrible.
2 MR GREANEY: Thank you very much again for answering my
3 questions.
4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Greaney, before you — I'm sure this
5 will be done, but when we do find out what the date of
6 it is, we should make some enquiries as to whether
7 Ramadan Abedi was actually in the country.
8 MR GREANEY: Certainly, yes. We need to understand the
9 basis for it. Had I known about it before, I'd have
10 made sure we knew exactly the position.
11 So as I am sure you've understood, I have tried to
12 put the position carefully to you and you have very
13 helpfully answered my questions and many thanks for
14 that.
15 Mr Henley, I'm going to invite you, please, to ask
16 your questions.
17 Questions from MR HENLEY
18 MR HENLEY: Thank you, sir.
19 On the Wednesday following the awful bombing, in
20 response to the attendance of media from all over the
21 world, is it right that a very strong and clear
22 statement was issued on the steps of the mosque
23 condemning the bombing and encouraging anybody who might
24 have information to give it immediately to the police?
25 A. Absolutely, I would say that, sir.

192

1 Q. And you were asked some -- reference was made to the
2 mosque's website. Is it right that these words appear
3 on the website of the mosque? Its vision is to be
4 a live model institution of Islam, upholding its great
5 values of tolerance, respect, transparency and good
6 citizenship. And its values are stated to be:
7 "Tolerance, transparency, respect, beneficence,
8 integrity and empowerment."
9 A. That's right, sir.
10 Q. You have talked about specific meetings with particular
11 police officers and liaison. But how integrated was the
12 mosque, would you say, within the broader community?
13 A. As I mentioned earlier on, Mr Henley, the mosque is
14 attended by a variety of men and women and children who
15 are ex-citizens of all over the world. I mentioned
16 Libyans, Egyptians, Syrians, converts, South Indians,
17 South Americans. There really is -- if that's what you
18 mean about the attendance?
19 Q. In terms of people who subscribe to the Islamic faith,
20 you have given quite a lot of information about that.
21 But in terms of the broader non-Islamic community, for
22 example contact with or the relationship with local
23 councillors and MPs, was there a relationship with those
24 people?
25 A. As a matter of fact, perhaps I should have mentioned

1 earlier on, yes, we have a good collaboration with all
2 the councillors, with the MPs. As a matter of fact the
3 MP for the area has a surgery held every first week of
4 the month at the Didsbury Mosque to invite anyone from
5 the community, if they have any grievances, any reason
6 they need to come and seek his help. So the MP,
7 the councillors of the area, our relationship with them
8 was very, very strong, not only the MP and
9 the councillors, Mr Henley, our neighbours, our
10 neighbours have such a very good relationship with us.
11 A few months ago there was an arson attack and
12 someone tried to burn -- that was on 9/11, by the way --
13 tried to burn the mosque down, the people who came to
14 quench the fire were our neighbours. The people who
15 called for a solidarity stand(?) were our neighbours,
16 Jewish people, Christian people, Hindus, non-Muslims,
17 faith, no faith, LGBT, I was there myself. They're the
18 ones who are the first to come and defend the mosque and
19 say, guys, media, Mr So--and--so, we know the people who
20 run this mosque, we know the people who attend this
21 mosque, they're good people.
22 We have inter-faith sessions, I mentioned that
23 earlier on, we have schools that visit, we have many
24 schools in the area that bring children to learn about
25 the religion. I myself at one time when I had more time

1 was in charge of giving misconceptions (sic) in Islam,
2 so we actually enjoy a very good relationship with our
3 neighbours.
4 Q. So anybody, would you say, who spends very much time at
5 all within the Didsbury Mosque, the Islamic Centre,
6 would they, do you believe, have any doubt that this was
7 a place of inclusion and tolerance and respect of
8 people, whatever their views and outlooks and religious
9 beliefs?
10 A. Yes, I would concur with that, Mr Henley.
11 Q. When the mosque was first established and in its first
12 few years of existence, compared to now, how many
13 mosques were there within the Greater Manchester area?
14 A. When the mosque was established, that was 1967, I was
15 living in Nigeria at the time. But one of the Syrian
16 traders who actually happened to have bought that
17 building was my great uncle who came to the UK in 1919.
18 He was a textile trader as well. He used to tell me
19 things have changed a lot.
20 In the first few months when that building was
21 bought, there was four people attending prayer. Four
22 people. Friday prayer was about 10 people.
23 This has changed a lot. It was just a building, a
24 one-part building -- it was, of course, a former
25 church -- and the annex, which was blocked. So things

1 have changed a lot because more Muslims started coming
2 to the UK, whether they were from South Asia or from the
3 Middle East, and then more non-Muslims became Muslims as
4 well. So things have changed quite a lot.
5 Q. And there are many more mosques in the
6 Greater Manchester area than there were back then;
7 is that right?
8 A. Again, since I'm the trustee of that mosque, I would
9 talk about my mosque as being the best mosque, but
10 of course there are other good mosques in Manchester,
11 Victoria Park Mosque --
12 Q. In terms of numbers are there more now than there were
13 then?
14 A. Definitely. I would say sure, yes.
15 Q. You told us that the Didsbury Mosque, when it was
16 established, was one of only about two in the
17 Greater Manchester area.
18 A. Indeed yes, Victoria Park mosque was established at the
19 time and it wasn't really a mosque, it was two
20 semi-detached houses and they converted them into
21 a mosque, and this one.
22 Q. So as the number of mosques in the Greater Manchester
23 area has increased, so the range of choices and also the
24 proximity of mosques to where people live has changed?
25 A. That's correct, sir.

1 Q. And you yourself live in Wilmslow and have done for
2 quite a few years. And you choose for convenience,
3 presumably, to go to a mosque local to where you live,
4 more often perhaps than you go to the Didsbury Mosque?
5 A. Absolutely, I go to the Cheadle mosque, for example,
6 which is closer to me.
7 Q. Over time one of the things the mosque has tried to
8 prioritise is binding the various different communities
9 together. And even within people of a particular
10 country of origin, there are a range of different views.
11 One of the things that the mosque tries to do is to
12 promote tolerance and understanding?
13 A. That's correct.
14 Q. And to do what it can to avoid conflict between people
15 who take different views on a range of different issues?
16 A. That's correct.
17 Q. The questions you've been asked in relation to sermons
18 really focused on just two: one given by Mustafa Graf
19 and one given by imam Mohammed El-Saeiti.
20 A. Yes.
21 Q. Those two seem to have become the focus of particular
22 interest. Are you aware of any other sermons at any
23 point during your time as a trustee generating that sort
24 of interest or controversy?
25 A. Going back to the 1980s, when I first used to attend,

197

1 and of course I don't attend every Friday, I can't
2 remember, to be honest with you. I must add as well,
3 Mr Henley, that we sometimes invite other imams to give
4 us their point of view, because they may have different
5 thoughts. But again we would vet that, we would vet
6 them, we would do due diligence to make sure we know who
7 these imams are. So every now and then we would invite
8 an imam, a South Indian, an African, an Asian, to come
9 and give a sermon because they can also explain things
10 from a different aspect than our two Libyan imams.
11 Q. In terms of those two sermons, do you agree that they
12 happened at times of great strife in particular parts of
13 the world?
14 A. Yes, yes indeed. The Arab uprising, which really
15 affected a lot of people, a lot of the attendees of the
16 mosque, it frustrated them, what was happening in their
17 original countries. So I would say, yes, that statement
18 would be a true statement, yes.
19 Q. Has the mosque at any point sought to back one side over
20 the other or to argue that violence in one particular
21 cause was justified?
22 A. We would always say violence is against our religion,
23 always.
24 Q. In relation to Libya, if I can just briefly attempt to
25 set the scene. It's already been mentioned that

198

1 Imam El-Saeiti was on one side of events, if I can put
2 it like that, in Libya, and Imam Mustafa Graf was on the
3 other side. In the conflict, it was almost like
4 a triangle, do you agree, one side was backed by the
5 West and the UN?
6 A. Yes.
7 Q. And one side was supported, the Libyan National Army,
8 which were loyal to the old Gaddafi regime, supported by
9 the Russians?
10 A. Correct.
11 Q. But what you wanted to avoid was having any of those
12 tensions brought through the doors of the mosque and
13 creating division within the mosque?
14 A. Absolutely. Absolutely.
15 Q. When I say it was like a triangle, because overlaying
16 both sides of the conflict was ISIS, who were in
17 conflict with both of those groups --
18 A. Absolutely.
19 Q. -- trying to take over the whole show, if I can put it
20 like that.
21 A. Yes.
22 Q. And your understanding, having read the sermon of
23 Mohammed El-Saeiti, was that he was expressing views
24 opposed to the groups that were backed by the UN and the
25 West --

199

1 A. That's correct.
2 Q. -- and in support of the groups supported by Russia?
3 A. Yes.
4 Q. And you put that down, to some extent, to his
5 background, his uncle had been an ambassador --
6 A. His father had been an ambassador, actually --
7 Q. His father had been an ambassador for the --
8 A. For the Gaddafi regime in Pakistan, from what we
9 understood.
10 Q. And tribally he came from the geographical part of Libya
11 that was still loyal to the old regime?
12 A. From what I understood.
13 Q. Whereas the Shura Council of Benghazi, whatever their
14 particular politics, was on the other side of the
15 conflict and were one of the groups supported at that
16 time by the West and the UN?
17 A. That's correct.
18 Q. By bringing that in and characterising one side as being
19 dogs of war and supporters of Satan, he caused a great
20 deal of upset amongst certain members of the
21 congregation?
22 A. Absolutely, exactly what you just said now.
23 Q. I don't want to put words into your mouth, it's
24 important that you disagree?
25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm quite happy for you to do so because

200

1 everybody does but don't say you don't want to!
 2 MR HENLEY: I tried to short-circuit it because it's quite
 3 complicated.
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It's perfectly all right and everybody
 5 does it.
 6 MR HENLEY: He caused a great deal of dismay and upset among
 7 certain members of the congregation that day?
 8 A. He did, actually, and we referred to this occasion when
 9 after the sermon, a member of the congregation took the
 10 microphone.
 11 Q. Do you remember whether that member of the congregation
 12 had a particular profession?
 13 A. I must admit I was not there on the day. However, my
 14 colleagues who were there did mention this particular
 15 person is a very well-known doctor, who attends and has
 16 been attending the mosques for a while. I do know of
 17 him, he's an acquaintance, you can say.
 18 Q. And he felt it was wholly inappropriate, whatever the
 19 rights or wrongs, to bring it in any shape or form
 20 within the body of a sermon on a Friday?
 21 A. That's exactly the description. He thought: this is a
 22 place to give an Islamic sermon, sometimes you may need
 23 to talk a little bit about politics, but not in the way
 24 Mr El-Saeiti did on that day.
 25 Q. So relieving humanitarian disasters, the relief of

201

1 poverty, giving aid, that's acceptable?
 2 A. Yes, yes, yes, yes.
 3 Q. But taking sides in conflicts would not be the right
 4 thing to do?
 5 A. No.
 6 Q. In that spirit, he was spoken to and emailed by
 7 Mohammed Khayat?
 8 A. My colleague who was there on the day.
 9 Q. Who talked to him about fomenting that sort of upset?
 10 A. Correct.
 11 Q. And spoke to him in person?
 12 A. Yes, he did.
 13 Q. And had a meeting that Mohammed El-Saeiti, in an email,
 14 subsequently described as a positive meeting?
 15 A. Yes.
 16 Q. And it was agreed that politics would be kept out of the
 17 sermons, whatever personal views Imam El-Saeiti might
 18 personally hold; is that fair?
 19 A. That is correct. To be fair to him, because yes, I said
 20 some words about him earlier on, but I think it was the
 21 first and the last time this has ever happened, to be
 22 fair.
 23 Q. Mohammed El-Saeiti himself, I can give the references if
 24 necessary, has provided some posts that seem to appear
 25 somewhere on Facebook from people who expressed a range

202

1 of views, some of which were very aggressive and
 2 personally aggressive towards him. But others expressed
 3 views that he was calling for division, that he was
 4 taking advantage of the kindness of people, that Friday
 5 sermons should be to gather people, not to divide them,
 6 that the mosque belongs to the Muslim community in
 7 Manchester and is not exclusive to the Libyans and they
 8 came to listen to Friday sermons which softened the
 9 hearts and linked them to God?
 10 A. Yes.
 11 Q. And what he had done was --
 12 A. Unfortunately on that day he said things he shouldn't
 13 have said.
 14 Q. But it was not a reaction against his condemnation of
 15 what ISIS was doing?
 16 A. No, sir, not at all.
 17 Q. And that wasn't the view of the mosque?
 18 A. Absolutely. It had nothing to do with ISIS. We all
 19 hate ISIS, as I mentioned earlier, Daesh, IS, him,
 20 Mustafa Graf, all of us. We do not consider them as
 21 Muslims. They are not Muslims.
 22 Q. But he was spoken to and he agreed not to make a sermon
 23 expressing those sorts of personal political opinions
 24 again?
 25 A. That's correct. Absolutely.

203

1 Q. In the same way, when Mustafa Graf gave a sermon which
 2 was felt might have got too close to the line of
 3 misunderstanding, he too was spoken to?
 4 A. Absolutely.
 5 Q. So on both occasions, the mosque was not passive, the
 6 mosque immediately dealt with both of those issues; do
 7 you agree?
 8 A. I do agree and, as I said earlier on, we have been given
 9 the guardianship and trusteeship to look over the
 10 mosque. We may be passive in our own rights as
 11 a person, but we have to make sure we follow the rules
 12 and the regulations and protect the attendees and the
 13 worshippers.
 14 Q. You have told us that you were a regular attender of
 15 meetings with the GMP liaison group, talking to them
 16 about various matters relating to the mosque. And
 17 you have talked to us in some detail about the steps you
 18 took when certain matters came to your attention
 19 in relation to Mustafa Graf, suspending him for 3 months
 20 and waiting for the police to say that it was acceptable
 21 for him to return to his previous position. As you've
 22 made clear now, both Mustafa Graf and Mohammed El-Saeiti
 23 are no longer employed by the mosque?
 24 A. That's correct.
 25 Q. Can I differentiate in this way? Did you read in the

204

1 press about certain individuals leaving South Manchester
 2 to travel to different war zones?
 3 A. I would have read in the press about some Libyans, yes.
 4 Q. Did you know anyone personally, as far as you were
 5 aware, who had done that?
 6 A. No.
 7 Q. Did the police in any of those meetings ever say to you,
 8 please can you keep an eye on this particular person,
 9 or, it's come to our attention that that particular
 10 person has travelled to warn you about that?
 11 A. This has never been mentioned to us, but frankly
 12 speaking, Mr Henley, this is not our responsibility.
 13 We have security services in the UK, best in the world.
 14 They are the ones who should be looking at that.
 15 Q. But if there was any way in which the mosque might have
 16 been able to assist or if you'd been asked to keep
 17 a particular eye on any individuals, would you have
 18 resisted that?
 19 A. No, I wouldn't have. Of course, I would be more than
 20 happy.
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Were you ever visited by
 22 Counter-terrorism Police or by any police officer to
 23 encourage the mosque to keep an eye out for young men
 24 becoming radicalised?
 25 A. No, Mr Chair.

205

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Never?
 2 A. No. The police visited us to recruit, the police came
 3 in to give advice, the police came when we asked them to
 4 talk to young men about what the police do in a very
 5 positive way. We've never been contacted.
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You say they came to recruit?
 7 A. They came to recruit young boys to go into the police
 8 force, for example. That's what I meant.
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 10 MR HENLEY: It was touched upon before about whether the
 11 mosque is a Salafi mosque. Would a Salafi mosque
 12 entertain the police recruiting to their ranks?
 13 A. No, sir. We used to have criticism from some
 14 individuals who are not Salafis and say why do we let
 15 the police in. For god's sake, we live in the UK, we
 16 don't live in downtown Libya or downtown Damascus. You
 17 know, we are in the UK and it's a democracy.
 18 Q. Just a couple more topics. You have talked about
 19 meetings. We've seen what I think you've described as
 20 probably a study circle.
 21 A. Yes.
 22 Q. When you talked about not allowing meetings, were you
 23 talking about study circles convened by the employed
 24 imams at the mosque?
 25 A. No, sir. There are groups of Muslims who have different

206

1 thoughts or different school of thoughts because in
 2 Islam we have five main -- I think they are referred to
 3 as jurisprudence -- sort of types of Islam. And some
 4 groups would like to come and talk more about Islam,
 5 talk more about Sufism, which is a spiritual type of
 6 Islam, and we discourage that, we don't like that,
 7 because we like to be known as a mainstream,
 8 middle-of-the-road mosque. So we don't allow these
 9 things.
 10 Q. Does the mosque have a policy in relation to allowing
 11 other groups to use spaces for their own meetings --
 12 A. No, sir.
 13 Q. -- within the centre?
 14 A. That is prohibited. Salafi, Brotherhood, X, Y, Z,
 15 that is not allowed. Anything that has to be done
 16 at the mosque is under the umbrella of the mosque
 17 always.
 18 Q. So spaces can't be hired by outside groups, even Muslim
 19 groups?
 20 A. The only space we can hire is when the ladies or the
 21 sisters have a wedding event, when there are times when
 22 people want to come and pay their condolences for
 23 someone who has passed away and therefore they expect
 24 a lot of people, so they can hire one of the main rooms
 25 for an hour and that is it.

207

1 Q. Is this part of a policy to ensure that the mosque
 2 doesn't and isn't seen to align itself with any
 3 particular group or appear to be giving tacit support to
 4 any particular group?
 5 A. Absolutely, and this has been going for many, many
 6 years, absolutely.
 7 Q. We all understand, particularly perhaps after Friday
 8 prayers but perhaps after any coming-together for
 9 prayers each day of the week, people may pause in the
 10 entrance area and speak to one another, converse about
 11 aspects of their lives, people they're on friendly terms
 12 with and all the rest of it. We all understand that, it
 13 might happen as people leave this room today. But in
 14 terms of groups of young men taking over spaces within
 15 the mosque to discuss extremist-type ideology, is it
 16 conceivable that anything like that could happen?
 17 A. No, sir, not at all, absolutely. As I mentioned earlier
 18 on, the way the mosque is built and the way we've formed
 19 it is that you cannot have these meetings. There's no
 20 way. To be honest with you, if the prayer finishes at
 21 1 o'clock, by 1.30 the people in charge would start
 22 asking people to start leaving, even if they are just
 23 greeting each other, "So sorry guys, we have to close
 24 the door, you can talk outside".
 25 Q. You have talked about air conditioning, but is it right

208

1 that in fact there's CCTV throughout the whole of the
2 building?
3 A. We have CCTV in every single room, absolutely. Air
4 conditioning. We fund—raise ourselves. As I said
5 earlier on, we don't get any funding from anybody. All
6 the money is raised by the worshippers, by trustees, by
7 individuals. And we do our due diligence, money has to
8 come into the mosque properly. And this was proven when
9 the Charity Commission came and spent days there looking
10 at things. They gave us a clean bill of health apart
11 from some recommendations. So we make sure things are
12 done properly.
13 Q. And before you came to this session today, is it right
14 that you wrote out a statement that you wanted to read,
15 expressing very strong support for the victims of the
16 bombing and very strong condemnation about what happened
17 on behalf of the mosque?
18 A. I wanted to do that. I was worried that I may become
19 emotional while I'm reading it. I sought permission
20 from some solicitors and they weren't very encouraging.
21 But I would ask the chair whether I would be allowed.
22 I do not want to cause any unhappiness or...
23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. I think you've expressed to
24 everyone how you feel about this. You've described it
25 as an appalling attack —

209

1 A. Absolutely.
2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: — and you are sorry for the victims.
3 A. Absolutely.
4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I think we'll leave it at that,
5 Mr Henley, if that's all right by you.
6 MR HENLEY: You're proud of the mosque's part in supporting
7 a diverse, inclusive and rich community across the whole
8 of Manchester?
9 A. Yes, sir.
10 Q. And you support people of all faiths and no faiths?
11 A. Absolutely, and I invite all members of the public to
12 come and see what we do, as we do every Sunday.
13 Anyone's allowed to come and see what we do, what
14 happens behind these walls.
15 Q. How does it —
16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm not sure I'd understand the Arabic
17 sermons though.
18 A. Sir, the Arabic sermons are translated into English,
19 absolutely, and remember a lot of the attendees now are
20 non—Arabs, so we are duty—bound to actually — the
21 prayer is in Arabic but everything is in the language of
22 the country, which is English.
23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I was lightening the tone. That was my
24 aim.
25 MR HENLEY: How does it make you feel if it's suggested or

210

1 believed that in any way the mosque was aware of
2 extremists within its midst and was wilfully,
3 deliberately blind and deliberately stood by and did
4 nothing?
5 A. It's against our ethos, against the trustees, our
6 religion, against our beliefs. How can anyone think —
7 because anything that can happen, it can happen to us.
8 As I said earlier on, my children could have been there,
9 Muslim children could be there. Whether they're Muslim
10 or not, it doesn't matter. We will do our best now and
11 in the future that if we know of anything, we will
12 report it immediately.
13 Q. In terms of Salman Abedi, he's not somebody who you ever
14 came across, and the day after the bombing you did
15 everything you could to try to establish whether he was
16 a regular attender, whether he had ever been an
17 attender, whether he was an occasional attender. Is it
18 right that what you found out was that, up until about
19 2005/2006, he came as a very young child with his
20 father?
21 A. That's what I was told, because frankly as I said
22 earlier on, I never knew him. The only picture I saw
23 was in the press and I recognised the background when
24 he was, I think, 15 or 14.
25 Q. From about 2005/2006, Ramadan Abedi started attending

211

1 a different mosque —
2 A. Yes.
3 Q. — and in 2008 he left the country.
4 A. From what we were told, again.
5 Q. To return only occasionally?
6 A. That's right.
7 Q. I think 105 days in the years that followed in the 8 or
8 9 years that followed. From your enquiries, if
9 Salman Abedi did attend the mosque, it was on a pretty
10 limited, if not fleeting, basis over the years that
11 followed?
12 A. If he did, Mr Henley, yes. It's a very big if, to be
13 honest with you. It's a very big if, I don't know.
14 Q. And certainly in relation to what Mohammed El—Saeiti now
15 says about hateful looks and any sort of confrontation,
16 that's not something that was ever reported to any
17 single trustee at the time?
18 A. It was never reported to us except 2 days after the
19 terrible events and we questioned him and said, "Why did
20 you not mention it?" I personally do not believe his
21 statement but that's up to him.
22 Q. Did he tell any of the trustees that he had agreed to be
23 interviewed by any of the newspapers?
24 A. No, sir, no.
25 Q. So you found out that he had been interviewed —

212

1 A. We found out by accident from someone else who told us
 2 the imam has been giving an interview to one of the
 3 daily tabloids. Not that we have anything to hide, but
 4 we like to do things properly. So it wasn't right what
 5 he did.
 6 Q. And at all times are you attempting to be as transparent
 7 and complete as you possibly can?
 8 A. Of course, of course.
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you, Mr Henley.
 10 MR GREANEY: Sir, can I seek to answer a point that you
 11 yourself made, and I hope Mr Haffar, you'll just bear
 12 with me for a couple of minutes. It relates to the
 13 travel of Ramadan Abedi.
 14 I wonder if we can have on the screen, please,
 15 Mr Lopez, {INQ034521/6}. Could you enlarge the top half
 16 of the page, please?
 17 Sir, you can there see -- I should say this is
 18 travel information relating to Ramadan Abedi. You can
 19 see that Ramadan Abedi departed Manchester for Istanbul
 20 on 5 February 2015. Do you see that, sir?
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I do.
 22 A. I don't see the name. I see Hannah Joseph.
 23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That's the name that he was using. Just
 24 don't worry. That is the name that Ramadan Abedi was
 25 using at the time. We don't need to trouble you with

213

1 that.
 2 MR GREANEY: Is that a name you recognise?
 3 A. No, sir.
 4 MR GREANEY: That is a name he was going by at this stage.
 5 If we go a little bit further down the page, it's
 6 still there, you can see that on 27 July 2015,
 7 Ramadan Abedi returned from Istanbul to Manchester,
 8 which is the day before the date that I have raised,
 9 based upon a schedule from Greater Manchester Police.
 10 That was 28 July.
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Which we need to check.
 12 MR GREANEY: Which we need to check, certainly, but out of
 13 fairness to the point, we need to go a little bit
 14 further down that page to see that this was not a long
 15 trip to the United Kingdom because on 5 August 2015,
 16 Ramadan Abedi again departed the United Kingdom,
 17 Manchester to Istanbul. So he was in the country on
 18 28 July, according to these records, but that of course
 19 is a date that I emphasise we must check.
 20 Mr Haffar, I have no further questions.
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you very much.
 22 A. Thank you, Mr Chair.
 23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: The questions you've been asked, if
 24 I may say so, are, in the circumstances we've heard,
 25 perfectly legitimate enquiries and I hope you'll

214

1 understand that that's why you were asked them.
 2 A. Of course, I came here to assist the inquiry, sir.
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: 9.30 tomorrow morning.
 4 (5.03 pm)
 5 (The inquiry adjourned until 9.30 am on
 6 Wednesday, 24 November 2021)
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 21
 22
 23
 24
 25

215

I N D E X

1 DCS SIMON BARRACLOUGH (continued)1
 2 Questions from MR GREANEY (continued)1
 3 Questions from MR WEATHERBY12
 4 Questions from MR JAMIESON34
 5
 6 MR FAWZI HAFFAR (sworn)51
 7 Questions from MR GREANEY51
 8 Questions from MR COOPER127
 9 Further questions from MR GREANEY181
 10 Questions from MR HENLEY192
 11
 12
 13
 14
 15
 16
 17
 18
 19
 20
 21
 22
 23
 24
 25

216

217

A	accord (2) 55:12 95:21	163:7,25	alarmed (1) 171:21	answer (26) 4:22 38:22	210:16,18,21	215:2
	accordance (3) 80:12,19	advocates (1) 132:10	alawlaki (2) 1:13,19	40:20 58:25 66:12 71:1,15	arabs (2) 62:6 135:25	assistance (3) 52:11 105:19
	172:16	affect (1) 158:6	albaghdadi (1) 76:18	73:22 99:13,19 105:7	area (15) 6:16 60:2 65:25	163:24
abdallah (14) 2:4 10:17,18	according (2) 122:11 214:18	affected (1) 198:15	albanna (1) 65:18	112:23 113:18 124:15,25	88:24 97:14 116:6 178:19	assisted (2) 124:3,11
11:16 31:14,17,25 32:4,25	account (2) 33:19 35:1	afforded (1) 83:19	albeit (2) 7:14 33:17	126:21 141:9 143:3 147:22	194:3,7,24 195:13	assisting (2) 32:3,15
33:5 48:25 72:15,16	accountant (1) 173:19	afraid (3) 18:14 36:11 131:3	aleppo (3) 97:14 99:1 105:19	148:8 158:3,8 164:18	196:6,17,23 208:10	assists (1) 99:20
176:18	accreditation (1) 169:5	africa (2) 75:10 87:15	alert (2) 163:23 179:22	181:18 191:24 213:10	areas (5) 65:22 85:17 97:16	associate (1) 153:25
abdalraouf (9) 2:4 10:18	accuracy (1) 17:22	african (2) 54:14 198:8	algerians (1) 55:19	answered (3) 147:11 168:10	141:12 157:17	associated (2) 33:14 121:17
11:16 31:14 32:25 33:6,14	accurate (11) 17:23 19:18	africans (1) 55:18	alghariani (2) 16:22,23	192:13	arena (7) 107:3 113:25 114:7	associates (1) 32:21
48:25 72:16	32:6,7 61:10 102:8 103:2	after (56) 5:6 15:3 16:17	ali (2) 33:6,14	answering (3) 124:21 127:10	116:14 168:3 179:23	association (3) 72:6 175:22
abedi (109) 1:12 3:4	161:5,18 182:22 188:25	18:9 19:8 25:5 28:8 34:3	align (1) 208:2	192:2	180:20	176:25
4:6,7,14,25 6:23 7:1	accurately (1) 1:21	37:18 42:5,11,12 43:25	allah (4) 101:11,12,13 131:5	answers (2) 30:9 132:6	arent (1) 176:3	associations (1) 177:11
9:2,14,17,25 11:7,11	accuse (1) 116:25	44:9,11,18 46:9,10,19	allegations (2) 95:4 158:1	antagonise (3) 131:8	argue (1) 198:20	assure (4) 66:25,25 139:24
12:10,13 13:16 14:13	accused (1) 5:11	49:23 56:15 63:18 70:7	allege (1) 93:14	146:15,19	argument (3) 28:6 29:24	190:10
15:25 16:14,21 19:22	acusing (1) 86:22	71:16 73:15 77:9 84:23	alleged (2) 94:23 95:2	antagonising (1) 131:12	99:3	atrocities (3) 73:1 78:14
20:18,24 21:11,16,25	acquaintance (1) 201:17	88:6,12 89:9 102:10 104:5	allegedly (5) 167:15	antiislamic (5) 9:22 87:12	arising (1) 110:23	179:8
22:16 24:11 26:20,21	across (4) 32:14 148:7 210:7	107:1,3 108:4,13 116:14	174:3,13,16,19	89:21 90:6 91:18	armed (10) 5:18 38:14 93:15	atrocious (5) 163:20 164:22
27:6,14,18 28:20 30:20	211:14	117:12,22 123:15 139:23	alibli (2) 37:24 38:15	anwar (1) 1:13	97:7 99:4 103:5 104:22	178:11 179:4,6
31:14 32:3 33:15,15,17	acted (1) 169:8	140:9 159:6 163:14 172:15	allocated (1) 94:17	anxious (1) 94:16	105:21 126:12,19	attack (14) 5:6 37:18 44:19
35:15 36:23 37:2	acting (1) 87:4	175:7 178:11,14 181:1,6	allow (7) 63:25 66:4 88:14	anybody (10) 85:14 120:20	army (1) 199:7	73:7,11,15 107:3 113:25
38:4,12,14 40:1,18	action (5) 108:3,9,19,21	191:6 201:9 208:7,8	139:11,17,25 207:8	125:14 141:9 145:2	around (12) 26:2 32:12	114:7 116:14 121:20 183:4
41:1,4,18,21 42:3 43:20,25	109:6	211:14 212:18	allowed (8) 51:1 84:1 85:19	177:20,22 192:23 195:4	44:17 119:13 163:19,22,25	194:11 209:25
48:24 107:4,17 113:21	actionable (1) 26:9	aftermath (7) 113:25 114:7	96:22 141:14 207:15	209:5	164:22 166:8,15,17 178:6	attacks (2) 79:12 158:22
114:3,12,21 115:2,14,20	actively (1) 136:14	118:3 119:2 121:19 123:3	209:21 210:13	anyone (19) 26:18 54:10	arranged (1) 112:3	attempt (1) 198:24
118:4,20,23 119:3,3,10	activities (8) 57:15 61:17,19	182:6	allowing (2) 206:22 207:10	57:7 63:16 72:9 78:18	arrest (2) 69:6 149:15	attempting (1) 213:6
120:8 124:4,16 143:13	84:1,3 88:7,13 115:16	afterwards (1) 89:7	allows (2) 98:4 173:13	79:21 81:16 88:3 132:23	arrested (2) 27:18 175:15	attempting (23) 4:20 10:9 54:20
144:2 157:2 158:22 165:14	activity (4) 6:3,19 49:22	again (85) 12:21 14:18 15:6	almost (4) 40:5 47:21 164:5	140:1 142:22 143:3 167:19	105:6 25 57:19 25 58:3,16	73:8 75:21 87:13
166:3,24 167:6 168:2,7,16	106:24	18:21 21:25 22:16 24:1,24	199:3	168:6 171:3 194:4 205:4	120:11,12,15 133:18 168:9	174:9 187:2 194:20 197:25
169:25 170:10 171:10	actors (1) 191:18	33:12,19 36:3 37:6 38:12	along (4) 32:20 41:23 111:25	211:6	198:11	198:1 212:9
172:9 173:23 180:15 182:8	actresses (1) 191:18	43:4 44:4 65:16 70:11	143:16	anything (42) 50:6 58:17	articles (1) 75:8	attendance (5) 56:12 65:1
185:18 186:5 188:13	acts (1) 102:4	72:16 77:13 78:20 79:16	alqaeda (4) 1:21 37:23 38:15	59:25 61:8 63:12 72:21,22	articulate (1) 147:16	73:14 192:20 193:18
191:2,7,12 192:7	actual (4) 28:10 32:4 45:25	81:6,14,18 84:25 85:10,10	83:11	75:12 76:3,7 77:15,16	articulates (1) 154:6	attended (20) 4:7 10:20
211:13,25 212:9	160:11	86:6,10 93:20 97:12 98:3	alqaedarelated (1) 117:13	79:16,25 81:20 104:5,14	artillery (1) 21:19	52:15 58:6 73:2,24 75:24
213:13,18,19,24 214:7,16	actually (50) 6:8 17:6,24,25	103:25 104:25 105:5	alrayni (1) 10:6	105:2 113:19 121:4,6	ascertain (1) 32:16	112:5 114:13 115:12,15
abedis (8) 10:3 15:15 32:21	18:11,23 22:10 24:25	113:15 114:4 119:14	already (9) 34:4 50:8,9 90:13	128:4,8,14 129:19 140:18	asia (1) 196:2	117:12 121:21 143:9 144:3
34:7 36:1 121:25	27:12 29:14 42:12	121:12 122:2,5 123:19	116:12 129:1,2 144:6	158:4 164:13 170:12	asian (5) 62:7 190:7,8,21	163:3 167:13 168:2 175:20
123:16,16	45:11,12 46:22 49:16	124:14 127:10,23 133:25	198:25	171:13 176:9 185:19	198:8	193:14
abhorrent (1) 179:7	56:1,9 59:10 63:18 68:11	142:13 143:7 144:16	also (60) 2:11 3:20 4:13,16	207:15 208:16 211:7,11	asians (1) 135:25	attendee (2) 173:24 174:24
ability (1) 169:14	75:12 91:20 97:2 106:14	145:10 146:13 147:9	5:11,14,24 7:23 8:12 9:17	213:3	aside (1) 60:10	attendees (14) 56:17,19
able (18) 10:23 30:18 34:23	120:15 122:6,16 123:3	149:17 150:14 152:18	10:2 14:4 20:9 32:24	anyway (1) 166:19	ask (61) 1:8 7:15 11:25	58:14 66:22 72:7,14 78:21
35:10 74:16 85:16 97:6	124:5 132:3 145:21 149:9	154:17 155:6 163:16	33:9,14 34:6 35:19,25	anywhere (1) 129:13	17:17 23:23 24:6 34:6	89:1 140:7,22 176:11
108:9 120:7 122:10 135:23	150:9,10 151:17 153:17	167:1,8,15 168:19,25	38:14,16 44:16 52:5 54:8	apart (3) 37:11 104:8 209:10	51:21 53:13 56:11 62:21	198:15 204:12 210:19
141:11 143:3 164:24	157:8 160:10 161:11	170:2,4 173:8 175:2 178:3	55:3 57:10 58:23,24 59:8	apologise (1) 160:17	64:4 67:3 70:9 71:21	attender (6) 174:8,11 204:14
175:16,18 186:3 205:16	162:17 172:2 187:17	187:16 188:6,13,23	61:23 62:2 66:17 70:2,16	apologised (1) 136:7	73:15,22 84:6 86:5 87:10	211:16,17,17
abnormal (1) 61:8	189:20 190:11 192:7	190:2,6,10,20,21	75:19 84:22 94:23 96:9	appalling (1) 209:25	89:25 93:10 97:22 98:6	attending (16) 56:10 58:9
abroad (4) 60:3 72:10 75:9	195:2,16 200:6 201:8	191:14,14 192:2 196:8	103:7 104:9 105:20 110:5	apparent (1) 3:8	99:13 101:5 105:6 107:25	72:22 111:17
94:25	210:20	198:5 203:24 212:4 214:16	114:2,19 116:22 117:15	apparently (6) 13:1 15:25	114:3,4,17,19 124:24	115:2,5,17,20 120:4
absolutely (81) 18:13 35:20	acutely (1) 162:2	against (16) 10:7 38:9 75:9	118:22 119:15 121:24	19:16 21:13 22:22 27:3	126:7 127:12 128:18 130:6	126:18 133:9 139:8 168:11
51:7 53:6 57:9 58:14 64:20	add (9) 16:16 54:22 56:9	81:18 83:13 85:6 86:15	123:15 136:19 142:2	appeal (1) 96:23	132:20 139:22 149:8 160:2	195:21 201:16 211:25
65:14 67:23 72:8,8,12 77:8	57:10 63:13 81:5 87:21	87:6 91:1 117:15 158:2	148:20 151:20 170:7	appear (9) 11:15 14:21 71:7	164:18 165:13 172:24	attends (1) 201:15
78:8 79:15 82:2 85:9,24	188:15 198:2	198:22 203:14 211:5,5,6	172:10 173:23 177:3	127:23 171:11 187:9 193:2	176:8 177:24 178:9,22	attending (8) 47:10 108:13
86:2 91:12,19 92:25 97:19	added (3) 19:23 41:22 42:1	age (3) 140:22 171:17	196:23 198:9	202:24 208:3	181:13,20 182:3,5	110:12 182:15,16 187:14
98:5 100:1,16 103:25	addition (1) 20:15	185:15	although (10) 3:8 8:15 18:8	appearance (2) 184:4,19	183:6,8,9,17 186:7 187:16	204:18 205:9
106:21 111:21 112:18	additional (4) 34:5 35:8,8	aged (1) 14:23	54:22 90:13 105:7 115:8	appeared (3) 121:20,25	190:14 192:15 209:21	attitude (6) 86:23 87:1
116:21 118:11,15,18 120:6	118:10	agenda (1) 84:13	160:8 187:19 188:4	191:17	73:17 86:7 103:7 118:21	128:19 151:8 152:19
126:11 132:21 134:24	address (7) 19:9 39:24 49:11	aggressive (4) 178:16,22	always (18) 66:1 82:4 103:25	appearing (1) 42:3	114:3,4,17,19 124:24	170:17
137:19 147:1 148:6,6	61:17 81:3 82:16 127:5	203:1,2	125:23 144:24 155:24	appears (7) 15:1 19:23 21:25	126:7 127:12 128:18 130:6	126:18 133:9 139:8 168:11
149:12 152:13 157:23	addressed (2) 60:17 66:2	ago (17) 40:5,21 44:5	156:20,24 158:1 164:11,14	41:23 43:23 79:13 103:11	132:20 139:22 149:8 160:2	195:21 201:16 211:25
159:24 160:24 162:9 163:3	addresses (1) 35:15	49:12,18 61:15 65:19	165:10 169:20 170:24	appendices (2) 37:9,9	164:18 165:13 172:24	attends (3) 11:15 123:10
170:21 171:18,18	addressing (2) 86:21 186:1	117:19 123:19 127:19	189:2 198:22,23 207:17	appendix (1) 37:13	176:8 177:24 178:9,22	110:12 182:15,16 187:14
172:14,14 175:8 179:6,6	adduce (2) 35:9 36:20	132:12 162:3 170:8	alzilitni (2) 44:7,16	applies (1) 110:3	181:13,20 182:3,5	204:18 205:9
180:17,18 181:8,18	adel (1) 10:6	184:7,16 185:8 194:11	alzoubare (4) 32:19,23,24	apply (1) 111:9	183:6,8,9,17 186:7 187:16	attitude (6) 86:23 87:1
188:15,15 190:15 192:25	adherents (1) 79:9	195:13,14 162:11 173:24	33:5	appointed (2) 110:14 111:12	190:14 192:15 209:21	128:19 151:8 152:19
197:5 199:14,14,18 200:22	adjourned (1) 215:5	176:6 187:8 198:11 199:4	ambassador (3) 200:5,6,7	appointed (1) 96:5	73:17 86:7 103:7 118:21	170:17
203:18,25 204:4	adjournment (1) 107:11	204:7,8	amend (1) 134:6	appreciate (9) 2:13 66:13	119:6 126:20 131:20	attitudes (3) 11:15 123:10
208:5,6,17 209:3	administration (2) 108:25	agreed (6) 104:11 139:1	america (2) 153:7 156:3	90:11 98:7 107:7 114:9	132:2,4,18 142:25 144:15	169:16
210:1,3,11,19	109:3	191:1 202:16 203:22	americans (1) 193:17	150:24 154:17 182:11	147:7 148:10,11 150:21	attributed (2) 56:11,14
abu (5) 71:2 76:18 103:7,7	admit (3) 124:13 179:2	212:22	among (4) 66:22 153:2	approach (3) 30:14 65:10	154:5 155:8 160:21 169:13</	

211:1
awareness (1) 60:3
awash (1) 39:15
away (15) 22:21 25:3 35:11
 40:18,24 41:21 59:25,25
 70:21 93:8 120:13
 128:12,14 161:21 207:23
awful (2) 25:14 192:19

B

back (57) 9:8 10:23
 15:9,12,23 18:18 24:25
 37:1.6 40:12 41:25
 43:18,24 45:20,21
 47:12,16,17 53:2,3,16
 65:16 69:13,17 71:21,22
 75:16 76:11 81:23 87:19
 110:24 117:13 118:10
 122:22 126:23 132:25
 133:1 138:14 139:12
 144:14,18 146:12 147:4,11
 150:5,10 159:11 161:6
 167:17,18 181:19
 189:3,5,18 196:6 197:25
 198:19

backed (2) 199:4,24
background (11) 52:14,23
 54:25 137:20
 169:21,23,24,25 170:6
 200:5 211:23
backgrounds (2) 120:19
 135:25

bad (7) 56:18,25 57:1 77:1
 113:1 167:4 181:5

badly (1) 87:15

bakr (1) 76:18

balance (1) 109:16

bali (1) 34:18

ballot (3) 134:18,19,22

bank (2) 46:20,22

banned (1) 17:6

banner (1) 14:14

barracough (10) 1:5,7 2:17
 11:22 12:4 31:5 34:2
 50:14,15 216:3

barracoughs (1) 37:9

barrels (1) 97:15

barristers (1) 159:25

base (1) 178:3

baseboard (3) 45:23,24
 47:11

based (1) 214:9

basic (3) 61:25 63:6 110:9

basically (2) 49:20 92:20

basis (6) 4:10 7:11 70:25
 157:5 192:9 212:10

bbc (16) 5:14,18 7:18,23
 93:14,25 94:2,10,15,19
 96:9 97:17 142:2,14 150:1
 178:10

bear (1) 213:11

beard (2) 64:1 185:11

bearing (4) 32:13 39:13 70:8
 188:25

bears (1) 86:1

became (5) 72:19 84:24
 89:7,12 196:3

become (10) 10:16 11:20
 59:11 68:3 76:17 77:9
 112:25 134:2 197:21
 209:18

becoming (4) 11:16 79:9,9
 205:24

befallen (1) 101:10

before (45) 1:7,24 2:25
 15:11 18:3 29:13 33:1 42:5
 44:8,18 45:5 72:25 73:7,10
 76:9 77:10 81:1 96:2 99:10
 104:12 107:15,18 113:6
 125:2 129:2 134:4 145:20
 152:17 155:9 161:2,11
 169:17 171:2 172:4
 182:3,17 183:4 184:14
 187:5 189:4 192:4,9
 206:10 209:13 214:8

beg (4) 103:14 106:11
 158:23 168:25

begin (1) 51:24

beginning (7) 15:12 48:16
 65:2 127:8 160:9 176:7
 189:5

behalf (7) 7:25 87:4 91:14
 103:16 160:11,12 209:17

behaviour (2) 11:15 135:10

beheadings (2) 83:15 171:14

behind (3) 41:12 46:1 210:14

being (51) 13:6 25:25 28:15
 33:19 35:11 47:11 57:1
 62:10,10 63:19 65:20
 75:15,19 77:16,25
 78:9,10,11,14 80:2,3 82:1
 93:24 94:1 96:9 103:4
 109:1 125:20 128:7 136:1
 137:7 138:9 139:13 143:3
 146:14 148:7 150:2
 154:22,23 155:2 156:19
 157:7 158:5,12 162:21
 163:24 178:16 180:8 191:9
 196:9 200:18

belief (5) 68:18 78:24,25
 79:2 130:3

beliefs (2) 195:9 211:6

believe (15) 2:4,19 8:19 50:6
 77:22 84:3 85:25 96:2
 102:2 117:20 135:17
 137:12,15 195:6 212:20

believed (5) 14:13 116:18
 137:11 148:6 211:1

believer (1) 101:15

believers (1) 153:3

believes (1) 189:11

believing (2) 160:5,5

bells (1) 147:9

beneficiaries (1) 110:1

benefit (2) 86:3 157:14

benefits (1) 151:11

bengalis (1) 54:17

benghazi (3) 8:5 83:14
 200:13

benjama (2) 168:2,7

best (13) 42:9 81:20 82:4
 93:5 108:24 110:5 138:19
 159:5 162:12 185:15 196:9
 205:13 211:10

better (5) 64:9 108:25
 112:17,19 113:16

between (29) 3:11 31:14
 32:9 39:5 45:8 58:17 63:5
 66:18 72:3 85:13 90:12
 113:14 116:17 117:24
 122:12 123:17 124:10
 132:15 140:22 141:7
 161:4,17 163:11 165:1
 176:22,25 191:7,11 197:14

beyond (2) 26:23 172:4

bible (1) 156:23

big (7) 28:16 43:23 44:1
 116:4 188:19 212:12,13

bill (1) 209:10

binding (1) 197:8

bit (6) 26:25 32:15 184:22
 201:23 214:5,13

blame (3) 178:24 179:10,12

blamed (1) 24:20

blaming (1) 179:17

blatant (1) 36:19

blend (4) 71:10 147:21 148:5
 149:20

blessed (1) 101:13

blind (1) 211:3

blocked (1) 195:25

blood (1) 159:9

blow (2) 46:15 136:4

blue (2) 41:5 47:20

bluntly (1) 45:2

board (8) 47:19,22 131:8
 135:8,20,23 159:22,22

bodies (1) 176:23

body (5) 7:25 160:14
 177:4,18 201:20

boiling (1) 159:9

bomber (1) 121:21

bombing (26) 16:17 17:16
 18:9 19:8 33:1,7 56:15
 70:7 75:1 78:7 97:14
 114:18 116:3 117:22 118:3
 119:2 123:15 168:4,8
 181:6 182:7 191:6
 192:19,23 209:16 211:14

bombings (2) 17:11 83:16

bombmaking (1) 45:4

bones (1) 23:4

book (6) 20:9 22:25
 23:12,14,15 28:13

booked (1) 168:12

books (4) 28:16,17,17,17

bookshelf (1) 23:14

bookshop (1) 22:23

bookstore (1) 23:15

boot (17) 41:18
 43:8,10,15,23 44:1
 45:3,6,24,24 46:1,6,7
 48:3,4,12,14

born (2) 39:18 137:23

borrow (1) 37:2

borrowed (1) 88:10

both (30) 11:14,19 21:7
 24:20 34:3,24 41:19 59:12
 60:5,21,22 61:5 62:16
 97:8,8,9 136:10 145:14,25
 150:11 157:22 174:17
 183:7 186:12 187:18
 199:16,17 204:5,6,22

bothered (1) 176:5

bottom (2) 110:24 153:1

bought (2) 195:16,21

boundaries (3) 60:6,15,20

bow (1) 47:13

box (2) 28:9 51:18

boys (4) 20:18 23:6 37:2
 206:7

brainwashing (1) 94:24

brave (1) 39:2

breach (1) 109:2

break (8) 51:12,16 105:8
 107:1 139:21 165:20,24
 187:15

breeding (1) 84:5

briefly (3) 3:22 152:23
 198:24

brigade (2) 14:14 15:3

bring (11) 45:20 56:23 57:19
 65:22 126:4 131:4 134:4
 135:13 150:10 194:24
 201:19

bringing (2) 97:17 200:18

britain (3) 176:24,25 177:2

british (6) 68:10 77:19
 79:19,19 138:20 176:24

broad (1) 72:3

broadbrush (1) 151:8

broadcast (3) 7:23 125:23
 126:16

broadcasting (1) 125:12

broadcasts (1) 125:12

broaden (1) 29:21

broadened (1) 30:15

broadens (1) 29:20

broadier (2) 193:12,21

broadly (1) 188:7

broke (1) 125:2

brother (3) 10:18 121:25
 174:14

brotherhood (5) 65:15,17
 66:2,19 207:14

brotherinlaw (1) 33:6

brothers (10) 4:7
 11:11,14,19 33:15,18
 83:25 101:17 124:4 153:2

brought (5) 4:14 70:19 81:6
 113:1 199:12

build (3) 49:2 143:15 152:18

building (10) 53:4 143:19

145:18 147:4 152:18
 195:17,20,23,24 209:2

buildings (1) 58:13

built (2) 48:20 208:18

bullet (1) 61:1

bundle (2) 82:22,23

burdened (1) 101:20

burn (2) 194:12,13

burned (1) 19:21

business (3) 133:2,5 136:10

businessman (2) 77:6 147:16

businessmen (1) 8:23

busy (3) 58:11 77:6 163:12

C

cage (1) 19:21

calamity (1) 101:10

calculation (2) 38:25 48:13

caliphate (6) 1:25 76:18
 77:10 78:6 79:1 92:24

call (31) 4:2,25 6:3,18 9:15
 33:16 44:9 48:22 76:15
 78:16 119:4,13,21,22,23
 120:8,24 121:22 123:1
 142:7,19,22 143:4 165:12
 171:3 178:5 188:9,19
 189:11 190:19 191:2
 199:23 72:18 93:15 94:7
 97:14 108:3 163:14 168:21
 194:15

calling (5) 119:15,19 187:24
 189:2 203:3

calls (3) 31:17,22 35:24

calm (2) 89:15 181:16

came (35) 10:19 18:9 30:2
 33:17 55:11 56:22 76:2
 106:23 112:25 114:18
 116:4 123:2 136:6 138:14
 145:20 148:7 170:18
 174:11 175:17,22 178:13
 194:13 195:17 200:10
 203:8 204:18 206:2,3,6,7
 209:9,13 211:14,19 215:2

cameras (2) 140:2,3

camping (1) 114:11

canister (1) 45:22

cannot (26) 28:19 30:25
 59:24 60:7 61:1 75:7 80:24
 84:17 113:18 115:11,13
 138:19 149:2 167:4,16
 173:15 174:10 175:1,1
 176:13 178:21 182:24
 185:19 186:23 191:14
 208:19

cant (17) 15:7 17:4 35:4
 58:18 75:11 124:13 136:8
 137:14 153:3,14 167:2
 174:17 179:20 184:6,13
 198:1 207:18

cap (1) 190:11

capable (3) 1:16 94:9 103:4

capacities (1) 52:12

capacity (1) 122:4

caption (1) 19:21

capture (1) 189:19

captured (3) 19:20 44:12,16

car (14) 40:12,17,18,19
 43:17 44:12,17,21
 45:5,7,14 47:9 49:21,24

care (1) 82:14

care'd (1) 68:15

careful (4) 20:4 76:5,6 180:1
 180:17

carefully (1) 192:12

carried (1) 27:21

carry (4) 42:4 99:10 148:13
 150:25

carrying (1) 41:24

cartoon (3) 47:2 49:13 50:6

cartwright (1) 187:14

casually (1) 140:23

categorically (2) 67:11
 180:17

category (1) 67:24

caucasus (1) 24:13

cause (5) 175:6,8 180:7
 198:21 209:22

caused (8) 3:17 26:25 56:22
 116:18 144:20 175:9
 200:19 201:6

caution (1) 165:8

cctv (9) 41:14,17 44:7,12
 51:3 140:1 167:17 209:1,3

centimetres (1) 64:2

centre (41) 2:12 52:6
 53:15,19 55:1 57:12,17
 58:13 59:22 61:5,16,19
 62:6 63:10 64:19,22 65:9
 66:19 67:1,7,16 68:2 70:21
 83:18 85:7 101:13,19
 104:1 108:18 112:11 113:8
 116:4 125:12 129:4 134:3
 135:16 160:12 165:9
 173:17 195:5 207:13

ceo (2) 122:8 173:19

certain (19) 2:22 3:1 65:22
 73:25 76:16 82:10 86:11
 105:10 115:11,13 116:19
 131:11 148:17 154:24
 156:20 200:20 201:7
 204:18 205:1

cetera (8) 77:21 87:17 88:8
 134:5,7 146:8 149:25
 173:14

chair (26) 26:22 34:9 84:15
 93:20 98:3 103:13 106:11
 126:5 134:15,15,16,20
 136:1 144:22 145:25
 152:11 154:21 156:11
 157:10 159:18 160:14
 161:10 171:18 205:25
 209:21 214:22

chairman (15) 2:2 51:19
 52:2,4 58:4 62:5 78:8,17
 94:2 100:17 105:8 107:1
 124:22 132:5 133:13

chairs (2) 20:17 146:12

chance (1) 190:4

change (11) 13:5,5 62:15
 81:11,13 112:17,19,21
 113:9,16 153:3

changed (21) 13:1,10 45:7
 54:23,24 55:22,24 56:4
 57:2 63:21 112:24
 113:12,14 163:12 177:25
 178:7 195:19,23
 196:1,4,24

changes (1) 11:14

character (1) 16:25

characterising (1) 200:18

charge (4) 146:7 159:10
 195:1 208:21

charged (3) 151:21,23 152:3
 58:18 75:11 124:13 136:8
 137:14 153:3,14 167:2
 174:17 179:20 184:6,13
 198:1 207:18

charity (19) 53:19 54:1
 72:10 95:22 96:23
 107:19,21,23 108:24,25
 109:3,13,22 110:18 111:9
 113:4 134:7 158:21 209:9

chasing (1) 123:1

cheadle (1) 197:5

check (18) 26:18 42:13 48:10
 69:2 100:19 155:22,23
 167:22,25 169:6,23,24,25
 172:2 188:24 214:11,12,19

cherokee (1) 13:15

chief (4) 51:2 148:21,23
 149:1

chiefs (1) 149:9

child (2) 115:5 211:19
 167:20 168:21 186:2

children (24) 4:14 14:5
 56:23 57:20 62:2,12,17
 69:5 109:14 110:1,10,13
 119:10 138:18 169:1,15
 171:17 180:20,20,22
 193:14 194:24 211:8,9

choices (1) 196:23

choose (1) 197:2

chosen (3) 133:17 134:3

160:15

christian (2) 5:12 194:16

christians (2) 97:18 164:9

christmas (1) 97:2

christmastime (1) 97:5

chronology (1) 48:21

church (1) 195:25

churches (1) 57:21

churlish (1) 160:20

cigarette (1) 21:16

circle (6) 84:18 183:19
 186:19,20,24 206:20

circles (3) 66:17 186:21
 206:23

circumstances (2) 120:7
 214:24

citizen (3) 79:17,19,19

citizenship (1) 193:6

city (3) 112:2,8,14

civil (5) 83:10 92:3,11
 147:20 148:16

civilised (3) 153:8 155:1
 156:4

claimed (1) 14:5

claims (2) 142:2,14

clarification (1) 158:18

clarifactory (1) 39:17

clarifies (1) 156:12

clarify (5) 6:5 23:23 27:12
 116:1 160:9

clarity (1) 86:3

classic (1) 21:10

classify (2) 57:17 101:22

clean (1) 209:10

cleaning (1) 119:18

clear (22) 1:8 9:1 11:19 66:7
 76:9 85:11,22 90:23 93:9
 101:24 119:8,25 130:16
 140:20 141:5 144:11,12
 149:16 158:3 184:21
 192:21 204:22

cleared (1) 178:8

clearly (6) 9:5 26:6 48:14
 92:15 152:8 165:14

clever (1) 49:24

clock (1) 187:4

close (4) 70:17 161:20 204:2
 208:23

closer (2) 120:16 197:6

clothing (4) 77:21 98:20,25
 190:8

club (2) 133:23 139:18

clumsily (1) 114:5

cnr (2) 76:22 97:17

coalition (1) 83:18

cohorts (1) 180:15

coincided (1) 11:16

collaborated (1) 75:23

collaboration (1) 194:1

colleague (6) 89:14 104:8,9
 125:6 175:12 202:8

colleagues (7) 87:21 116:7
 123:25 139:6 176:4 177:16
 201:14

combat (6) 5:8 7:20 147:20
 148:18 149:19 162:13

combined (1) 37:9

come (52) 15:9,23 18:18
 37:20 45:6 48:14
 57:8,12,13 58:19 65:5,7
 66:5 71:21 73:19,20 76:1
 80:13 82:7 91:24 106:2,4,9
 108:1,13 109:16 119:18
 122:23 123:22 128:4
 131:14 132:25 134:19
 136:5 145:7 150:5 159:11
 160:13 163:15 164:17
 167:20 168:21 186:2
 194:6,1

conditioners (1) 184:7
conditioning (3) 184:15
 208:25 209:4
conditions (1) 54:6
condolences (1) 207:22
conduct (4) 11:15 35:20,22
 45:15
conducted (3) 35:9 73:12
 134:22
configuration (1) 45:7
confirm (13) 2:5 9:14 13:20
 17:4 20:20 62:20 64:24
 68:1 73:1,5,10 79:5 108:9
confirmed (4) 12:13
 14:12,15 17:19
conflict (11) 8:8 69:24 70:2
 95:14 162:5 166:14 197:14
 199:3,16,17 200:15
conflicting (1) 122:18
conflicts (1) 202:3
confrontation (1) 212:15
confrontational (1) 170:23
confused (1) 69:16
confusion (1) 26:25
congregation (27) 54:13
 56:5,20 63:1 82:1 83:20
 86:20,21 90:3,25 91:2 92:6
 94:24 104:19,20 105:18
 121:16 125:20 126:1
 139:20 146:1,20 157:3
 200:21 201:7,9,11
congregational (2) 61:20
 139:11
connected (4) 7:14 10:14
 68:19 105:6
connection (6) 25:8 27:18
 66:18 72:3 122:1,3
connections (1) 191:7
conscience (1) 73:5
consequences (2) 101:18
 114:10
conservative (1) 146:23
consider (8) 32:9 99:3
 163:1 203:20
considerable (1) 32:11
consideration (3) 27:8 32:8
 46:13
considered (3) 31:25 34:11
 42:6
consistent (2) 22:12 103:21
constituencies (1) 146:16
constituency (2) 131:2,22
consultant (7) 70:20
 71:19,23 81:7 100:24
 111:3 161:10
contact (11) 31:13
 32:2,9,22,25 33:5 35:25
 36:1 149:5 165:9 193:22
contacted (3) 107:23 148:20
 206:5
contacts (2) 36:8 164:13
contain (1) 95:6
container (1) 45:23
contemporaneous (2) 99:18
 162:4
content (3) 59:17 60:15 87:2
contents (2) 15:21 43:11
context (9) 39:4 40:9 82:10
 98:12,14 103:3 132:25
 156:14,17
continued (9) 1:5,6 184:25
 189:13,17,23 190:16
 216:3,4
continues (1) 29:21
contradiction (1) 72:10
contributed (1) 51:10
control (10) 59:19,21
 113:7,8 126:1,2 170:24
 172:18 173:5 176:7
controversial (1) 94:13
controversy (1) 197:24
convened (1) 206:23
convenience (1) 197:2
convenient (1) 107:8
convention (1) 59:23

conventional (1) 59:5
conversation (2) 149:11
 161:25
conversations (2) 35:21,22
converse (1) 208:10
converted (1) 196:20
converts (1) 193:16
convicted (2) 10:17 72:17
convicted (1) 148:3
cooper (65) 99:20 124:23
 127:12,13,14 132:8,12,15
 134:13 137:19 138:22
 142:24 143:2,6,24 144:11
 145:2 146:11 150:9 152:17
 155:23 156:16
 157:13,17,24 158:9,14
 159:2 160:1,9 161:16,20
 162:1,2,10 163:7 164:8
 165:8,19,21 166:1,10,20
 167:5,21 168:1,16,19
 170:11 172:9 173:23
 174:15 175:1 176:1,18,22
 179:12 180:11,19
 181:8,11,18 186:13 191:25
 216:10
cooperated (1) 75:24
cope (1) 173:10
copy (3) 94:11,19,20
core (1) 9:4
correct (113) 1:18 2:7,23,24
 4:8,12,21 5:17,20 6:1,25
 7:12,13,21,22
 8:6,17,18,20,21,25 9:3
 10:21,25 12:19 15:18
 16:10 20:14 21:1,15 22:2
 31:23 33:12 34:16 38:2
 40:25 52:8,10,20 53:21
 54:10,16 57:9 61:14,21,22
 62:1,21 63:8,9,20 65:14
 67:9 71:25 74:9 18 76:12
 78:23 88:16 90:4
 91:10,19,25 92:2 95:23
 96:4,6,7,18,25 107:23
 108:4,12 109:21
 111:11,13,15,19 114:22
 115:7,18,22 120:3 122:17
 124:9 126:23,24
 129:3,6,12 131:4
 133:12,14 136:18,21 144:9
 159:15 161:15 166:5
 176:10 180:8 182:9,10
 196:25 197:13,16 199:10
 200:1,17 202:10,19 203:25
 204:24
corrected (3) 14:10 24:9
 160:16
correcting (1) 128:21
correctly (3) 101:1 116:20,22
corrupted (1) 29:9
coultdnt (3) 46:21 128:14
 167:17
council (7) 112:2,8,14
 176:24 177:2,4 200:13
councillors (6) 68:11 69:9
 193:23 194:2,7,9
count (1) 58:20
counterterrorism (3) 164:23
 165:2 205:22
counting (1) 58:22
countries (3) 86:13 154:25
 198:17
country (12) 7:2 12:21 74:13
 79:17 138:20 177:17
 179:19 192:7 197:10
 210:22 212:3 214:17
couple (9) 34:4,6,8 42:10,18
 45:10 91:3 206:18 213:12
course (55) 1:10 2:21 5:22
 6:4 7:21 8:7 14:10 29:1
 39:12 50:12 53:12 55:3,19
 56:2,24 58:11,23 59:2 60:2
 61:2 64:7 69:24 70:18 72:2
 90:16 91:13 93:16 96:12
 98:1 103:8 108:2 117:6,9
 128:23 136:14 154:4
 158:14 159:25 167:25

179:1,2,7,14,17 183:22
 186:9 188:16 195:24
 196:10 198:1 205:19
 213:8,8 214:18 215:2
courses (3) 112:3,5 163:3
cover (1) 99:21
coverage (1) 158:21
covered (4) 16:15 45:25 48:4
 140:3
covering (1) 45:1
covers (1) 110:9
cps0002041 (1) 42:6
cps00020423 (1) 43:7
cps0002043 (2) 42:24 47:18
cps0002045 (1) 43:4
created (2) 16:18 160:21
creating (2) 181:9 199:13
creation (3) 184:9 185:4
 188:5
crimes (1) 83:15
criminal (2) 155:2,3
criminality (1) 6:14
critical (5) 78:15,15
 90:15,18,18
criticise (2) 87:16 90:19
criticised (3) 90:24 91:17
 158:12
criticising (5) 88:17 117:8
 132:11 158:11 160:19
criticism (7) 64:7 91:5,7,8
 127:6 171:6 206:13
crown (1) 25:21
ctp (1) 16:3
culture (1) 168:24
cumulative (1) 148:9
currency (1) 34:17
current (4) 63:24 64:4
 110:7,9
currently (6) 52:2,4 72:15
 74:2 135:21 163:17
curriculum (1) 80:19

D

d (1) 216:1
daesh (5) 76:15 78:16 87:17
 90:20 203:19
daily (3) 58:2 137:14 213:3
damaged (1) 28:17
damascus (2) 76:24 206:16
danger (1) 153:19
dangerous (4) 128:22
 155:4,5,25
dangers (1) 152:20
dark (1) 187:6
darker (1) 190:7
data (4) 29:8 30:13 33:13,16
date (30) 14:11 18:4 22:10
 38:5 42:13,14 53:2
 68:22,23 74:3 108:6,10
 109:18,20 116:10 117:18
 142:8 182:21 184:8,9
 185:4,4 188:5,6,20,22
 189:19 192:5 214:8,19
dates (5) 45:8 69:16 184:10
 186:4 188:4
dating (2) 53:3,16
daughter (1) 124:11
daughters (1) 124:4
day (45) 8:3,4 58:7,12,12
 61:20 69:12 71:1 97:20
 98:21,23 100:13 101:2
 102:10 104:12 108:15
 114:17,18 116:3
 117:22,22,23 118:5 125:18
 136:2 139:16 151:21 155:9
 159:10 161:22
 175:20,21,24 177:8,8
 188:21 190:11 201:7,13,24
 202:8 203:12 208:9 211:14
 214:8
day1718511 (1) 141:4
days (14) 5:6 33:1,12 42:11
 70:7 84:16 108:1 120:10
 197:23 178:11,14 209:9
 212:7,18
daytime (2) 120:13,15

dbcs (4) 80:14 169:6 172:2,4
dcs (2) 1:5 216:3
de (1) 50:12
deal (9) 3:22 4:1 74:16
 107:2,18 133:1 160:1
 200:20 201:6
dealing (3) 80:22 81:2
 111:20
dealt (1) 204:6
death (2) 19:21 154:10
december (13) 50:13 59:4
 60:15,19 61:11 93:11,11
 97:13 100:9 101:2 104:6
 105:20 115:21
decide (3) 95:11,16 116:5
decided (4) 13:7 69:6 71:21
 95:14
declaration (3) 1:24 76:18
 77:9
declined (2) 4:19 7:8
decrease (1) 56:12
dedicated (1) 110:20
deed (1) 53:20
deemed (4) 28:10,25 154:7
 155:2
deep (3) 97:22 98:19 123:20
deepunning (1) 3:10
defend (2) 155:19 194:18
definitely (7) 49:3 77:19
 139:21 171:4 172:19 191:4
 196:14
degree (6) 4:18,19 28:2,2,3,3
delay (2) 1:3 107:13
deleted (2) 35:21 36:9
deliberately (5) 94:8 156:23
 157:1 211:3,3
deliver (4) 59:8,12,19 87:14
delivered (7) 9:21 59:3,6,15
 86:14 87:11 89:9
delivering (1) 91:8
delve (1) 10:14
derving (1) 90:8
democracy (1) 206:17
democratic (1) 134:11
demonstrated (1) 11:18
demonstration (1) 144:7
denied (2) 24:15 73:23
departed (2) 213:19 214:16
depending (2) 49:9 58:7
depends (1) 155:6
deployed (1) 45:14
derecognition (1) 180:13
describe (9) 22:17 49:13
 52:17 63:14 64:4,17,18
 86:23 133:6
described (10) 1:21 25:4
 38:4 57:3 63:22 122:10
 166:25 202:14 206:19
 209:24
description (6) 20:6,25 21:9
 37:20 187:20 201:21
designated (3) 110:14,22
 111:12
despite (1) 48:12
destruction (1) 92:23
detail (5) 10:15 16:20 39:17
 122:7 204:17
details (4) 12:8,11 16:16
 164:25
detention (1) 8:22
devell (2) 40:6 41:11
developed (1) 26:8
developing (1) 79:8
develops (1) 99:24
device (6) 24:16 34:12
 35:7,10 36:8 37:13
devices (9) 1:11 19:6,9,17
 27:23 28:8 30:3 37:17
 171:11
devilish (1) 128:25
diabolical (1) 97:19
didnt (29) 34:25 46:20 47:10
 71:4 74:25 76:20 77:7 97:2
 99:23 115:16 122:7
 127:4,21 129:7 135:22
 146:15 150:15 159:15,20

167:14 172:12 173:3,3,3,3
 174:18,18,22 179:22
didsbury (34) 2:11 4:5,10
 5:15 9:12,18 10:7,13 51:19
 52:3,5,24 53:15 54:25
 56:10,10,19 57:7,11 62:25
 81:24 129:9 133:9 168:3
 179:12,17,19,21 183:21
 188:1 194:4 195:5 196:15
 197:4
differ (2) 65:24 106:11
difference (2) 39:13 47:7
differed (33) 6:8 31:11
 36:11 39:7 63:2 64:10
 65:19 84:13 88:25 99:11
 102:4 103:14 130:21 136:9
 145:5,11,17 146:4,9,16,21
 154:2 160:25
 197:8,10,15,15 198:4,10
 205:2 206:25 207:1 212:1
differentiate (4) 39:5
 186:19,23 204:25
differentiating (1) 63:5
differing (2) 92:1 146:3
difficult (25) 42:8 46:3 47:13
 80:25 126:20,21 136:1,3
 147:1 161:9 171:13 175:23
 185:12,14 186:17,19 187:1
 190:20,22
 191:13,14,17,18,22,22
difficulties (2) 26:11 45:10
dig (2) 97:22 98:19
diligence (3) 170:13 198:6
 209:7
diminishing (1) 39:12
diplomat (1) 88:22
direct (3) 32:2,22 79:12
directed (1) 91:5
direction (1) 3:7
disadvantaged (1) 83:5
disagree (19) 48:16 49:3
 82:2 84:17 95:3,5 102:22
 105:24,25 106:20 127:2
 143:23,23,24 144:21
 170:22 172:13 174:1
 200:24
disagreement (1) 161:17
disagreements (1) 161:19
disallow (1) 139:19
disasters (1) 201:25
disc (1) 37:21
disclosed (1) 6:13
discourage (1) 207:6
discourse (1) 156:18
discover (3) 121:19,24
 122:10
discovered (4) 42:10 43:19
 119:12 147:13
discuss (4) 85:1 145:15
 164:7 208:15
discussed (7) 31:24 44:6
 83:21 95:13 125:11,25
 212:13 213:22,24,25
discusses (1) 164:10
discussing (1) 159:12
discussion (3) 140:17
 142:5,17
discussions (2) 162:8 171:23
disinformation (1) 50:18
dismay (1) 201:6
dismiss (1) 70:12
dismissals (1) 135:9
dismissed (4) 70:13
 135:8,9,12
dispense (1) 157:15
displayed (2) 45:21 46:25
dispute (5) 3:20 90:12
 116:17,19,21
disputed (1) 25:11
disputes (1) 3:11
disrespect (2) 132:22,22
disrupt (1) 92:18
distorted (3) 17:3 24:18 27:4
distribute (1) 98:25
disturbing (1) 19:20
diverse (2) 62:25 210:7

diversity (1) 135:19
divide (1) 203:5
divided (1) 17:2
division (2) 199:13 203:3
divisive (1) 17:9
divorce (1) 91:21
divorces (1) 146:8
doctor (1) 201:15
document (7) 13:22,25
 20:3,5 99:17 100:17
 141:23
documents (1) 173:16
does (33) 14:9 52:23 44:1
 53:7,7 55:12 57:3 65:15
 71:13 85:16 109:24 139:25
 141:11 158:23 159:9
 162:15,17 167:20
 183:21,22 184:10,18
 185:4,5,5 186:4 189:15
 191:1 201:1,5 207:10
 210:15,25
doesnt (4) 160:6 169:12
 208:2 211:10
dogs (1) 200:19
doing (22) 26:24 28:24 38:25
 40:16 70:14 71:1 81:19,25
 82:4 90:20 119:2 123:1
 124:1 127:2 128:7 132:13
 170:5 179:20,21 180:15
 185:15 203:15
donate (4) 97:23 98:20,20,20
donations (1) 98:23
done (24) 25:12 40:19 44:14
 50:23 51:3 77:17 78:14
 88:6 97:9 119:16 127:1
 128:14 130:1 155:1 169:25
 172:15 180:14 190:14
 192:5 199:1 203:11 205:5
 207:15 207:12
dont (102) 12:6 13:12 15:18
 16:9 21:8,17,19 22:5,10,17
 24:2 29:25,25 33:10 39:12
 46:6 47:6 58:20 60:25
 63:15 64:1,2,3 68:14,23
 69:15 73:21,25 77:22,24
 79:21 80:22 82:23 83:4
 85:22 90:11 91:22 95:18
 97:12 102:12,15,18 103:24
 104:20 106:3 117:18
 121:14 125:23 128:9 129:8
 130:17,20 131:3,15,24
 132:8 137:12 141:6 143:4
 144:14 145:22 146:17
 149:16 152:6,9 153:3,23
 154:3 155:15,19 158:12
 160:1 161:22 162:20
 164:7,18 165:6,7 168:13
 174:14 175:14 176:1
 178:25 181:7 183:13
 184:18,24 189:6 190:18,19
 198:1 200:23 201:1,1
 206:16 207:6,8 209:5
 212:13 213:22,24,25
door (1) 208:24
doors (4) 41:19 43:11 175:17
 199:12
doublecheck (2) 186:8,9
doubt (11) 17:5 33:12 36:16
 72:1 76:13 101:15 117:25
 118:16 153:4 174:21 195:6
doer (1) 12:22
down (13) 22:20 38:3,5
 56:20 89:16 153:6 161:2
 177:17 179:19 194:13
 200:4 214:5,14
download (4) 15:14,21 19:12
 31:5
downloaded (12) 15:25 16:5
 19:1,6,9,16 20:20 22:11
 27:3 30:2 31:8 171:10
downloading (1) 25:12
downloads (3) 18:24 30:21
 31:7
downplaying (1) 191:11
downtown (2) 206:16,16
dr (12) 5:21 6:21 18:17,17

23:23 94:10 98:9 105:11
 106:1 153:14,23 155:15
draft (1) 161:7
drafting (1) 161:8
dragging (1) 41:23
draw (2) 47:10 182:15
drawing (2) 177:23 187:14
drawn (4) 25:24 26:3 110:12
 182:16
dressed (1) 71:6
driven (1) 181:12
driving (2) 12:22 183:6
drone (1) 72:20
drum (1) 47:20
due (13) 5:22 42:3 59:2 72:2
 91:13 105:25 108:2
 117:6,8 167:25 170:13
 198:6 209:7
dug (1) 123:20
during (28) 1:10 2:21 7:20
 8:7 24:10 34:17 50:12
 55:10 58:15 68:25 75:2,14
 83:16 87:2 88:11 89:19
 90:15 91:16 93:16 101:14
 113:15 115:4 120:12
 121:1,2 152:4 161:25
 197:23
duties (3) 71:17 108:23
 109:2
duty (4) 109:

86:6 87:11,13 88:20,21,23 89:10,18 90:12,15 91:6,17 93:8 106:13 115:24 116:6,17 117:9 141:15 146:6,9,10 157:19 197:19 199:1,23 201:24 202:13,17,23 204:22 212:14 elsaeitis (2) 90:22 106:5 else (10) 17:5 29:20 38:25 43:19 67:3 75:11 80:15 168:6 186:16 213:1 elsewhere (1) 78:3 elsmore (1) 40:2 elyas (4) 44:9,12 48:24,25 email (8) 35:15 100:13 101:1 104:8,10 117:9 151:19 202:13 emailed (1) 202:6 emails (3) 117:6 161:4 162:7 emanating (1) 122:19 embassy (2) 8:19 144:10 emergence (2) 76:13 86:13 emirates (1) 8:20 emotional (3) 98:2 104:13 209:19 emotionally (3) 151:21,23 152:3 empanelled (1) 134:15 emphasis (2) 101:25 158:9 emphasise (9) 3:1,7 8:15 155:3 180:8,8,9 181:11 214:19 emphasised (2) 125:7,11 employed (4) 68:2 122:6 204:23 206:23 employee (3) 69:12 70:13 110:16 employees (10) 66:22 73:17 119:8,14 123:21 166:11,12 167:9,9 175:2 employers (1) 117:24 employment (2) 3:20 182:21 empowerment (1) 193:8 emptied (4) 43:25 44:8,11,18 empty (3) 41:14 45:23 47:23 enable (1) 148:4 encountered (1) 120:8 encourage (7) 72:9 84:5 104:22 105:18 108:25 162:6 205:23 encouragement (6) 99:4 101:8 103:4,18 106:24 126:10 encourages (1) 105:21 encouraging (5) 20:10 104:22 126:19 192:23 209:20 end (10) 9:21 24:22 26:6,7 33:17 69:12 117:13 170:16 189:12 190:2 ends (4) 129:11,21 130:5,14 engaged (2) 138:15 166:8 engagement (1) 162:11 engages (1) 61:16 engineer (1) 133:6 english (5) 55:4,9 135:25 210:18,22 enhance (1) 152:25 enhanced (4) 110:11 188:17,22 189:21 enjoy (1) 195:2 enlarge (1) 213:15 enormous (4) 28:14,21 50:23,25 enough (6) 16:4 17:17 39:2 81:25 130:18 182:1 enquiries (7) 73:12 114:24 172:1 176:3 192:6 212:8 214:25 ensure (2) 109:24 208:1 ensuring (1) 108:22 entertain (1) 206:12 entirely (6) 21:4 25:8 59:17 155:20 156:1 188:25 entirety (2) 25:20 28:1	entitled (5) 49:8,9 85:4 106:22 181:4 entrance (1) 208:10 equally (3) 70:2 146:23 186:19 equipment (3) 172:12,18 173:7 error (1) 102:25 erupted (1) 83:11 especially (2) 167:8 169:11 essentially (1) 94:24 establish (8) 13:10 73:12 95:24 107:3 118:22 119:2 182:8 211:15 established (10) 6:23 9:8 52:24 53:16 63:19 173:24 195:11,14 196:16,18 estimate (1) 69:2 et (8) 77:21 87:17 88:8 134:5,7 146:8 149:25 173:14 ethnic (1) 120:19 ethnicities (1) 63:2 ethos (1) 211:5 euphemistically (1) 16:24 europa (3) 102:3 153:7 156:3 even (22) 37:6 60:10 65:4 66:7,22 73:21 74:25 75:10 76:8 119:19 130:7 136:13 138:1 143:10 148:10,11 149:7 170:25 174:13 197:9 207:18 208:22 evening (2) 33:1 168:8 event (9) 3:3 6:22 28:8 88:25 106:7 175:7 178:14 120:23 206:23 events (3) 121:19 199:1 212:19 eventually (1) 80:20 ever (17) 67:18 70:4 103:24 121:1,6,15 123:8 155:10 172:17 189:1,18 202:21 205:7,21 211:13,16 212:16 every (21) 57:1 65:3 73:3 87:13 112:9 120:12 122:7 130:2,23 139:23 140:3 161:21 163:16 164:5 175:21 191:25 194:3 198:1,7 209:3 210:12 everybody (7) 38:25 50:22 75:11 145:12 181:3 201:1,4 everyone (20) 51:10 65:3 66:25 73:23 202:102:14 105:1,3 119:9 129:24 130:1 141:15 146:25 149:24 159:9 162:16 181:1 191:15,16 209:24 everyones (2) 58:21 186:24 everything (13) 46:23,24 47:4 77:2,22 81:11 88:8 137:12,15 156:14 172:15 210:21 211:15 everywhere (3) 90:20 97:16 176:12 evidence (23) 1:17 2:18 5:22,24 6:13,23 19:15 25:11 32:19,21 49:12 50:13,14 55:10 120:24 136:15 137:2,18 140:20 141:16 153:15,16 155:16 evil (7) 77:17 86:15 139:21 156:22,24 162:13 180:15 exact (2) 90:9 117:18 exactly (11) 36:15 44:22 60:6 71:8 100:15 146:18 188:17,22 192:10 200:22 201:21 exaggerating (1) 116:24 examined (5) 27:15 28:1,2,4 80:20 example (11) 63:25 64:15 96:22 114:10 134:21 170:17 171:10 188:6 193:22 197:5 206:8 excellent (1) 172:23	except (7) 102:4,6 138:5 139:17 140:23 186:25 212:18 exception (2) 115:1,23 excess (1) 165:8 exchanging (1) 140:24 excitizens (1) 193:15 exclude (1) 65:1 exclusive (1) 203:7 exercised (1) 180:13 exist (1) 116:20 existed (1) 74:25 existence (1) 195:12 expand (3) 111:21 143:23 144:21 expect (3) 23:14 187:2 207:23 expected (6) 32:3 57:24,25 58:3,15 110:2 expecting (1) 93:1 expensive (1) 140:15 experience (7) 61:13 133:2 135:20 136:10,11 175:23 191:9 experienced (1) 74:16 experiences (2) 75:14 177:6 expert (13) 5:21,24 6:2,16 93:1 96:3,5,10 98:8,9,10 106:23 154:4 explain (12) 1:14 4:5,13,24 9:17,20 61:19 93:19 104:10 108:21 118:24 198:9 explained (5) 1:10 94:10 101:24 148:2 182:6 explaining (1) 2:18 explains (1) 86:12 explanation (1) 93:24 explicit (3) 6:3,18 86:16 explore (1) 99:18 explosives (1) 46:13 express (7) 8:9 10:3 11:2 62:18 94:5 103:16 187:9 expressed (8) 90:6 106:19 114:5 169:16 181:13 202:25 203:2 209:23 expressing (5) 89:21 91:17 199:23 203:23 209:24 expression (3) 169:18 177:24 178:2 expressly (2) 87:3 161:16 extended (2) 44:16 46:7 extent (5) 18:25 144:4 182:8 191:11 200:4 extract (1) 24:2 extracted (1) 168:14 extreme (6) 79:9 80:25 83:12 131:23 159:16,17 extremely (4) 58:11 69:19 188:3,23 extremism (12) 10:8 74:16,22 80:8 81:3 111:18 136:21 158:19,25 159:1 170:18 171:5 extremist (11) 1:17 77:12 78:3 85:13 127:16 131:9 141:7 159:15 169:16 170:19 171:12 extremists (2) 23:21 211:2 extremisttype (1) 208:15 eye (5) 80:7 139:7 205:8,17,23 eyelashes (1) 15:10	fair (19) 16:25 17:17 20:6,25 21:9 25:2 30:16 68:20 81:23 101:15 115:8 127:6 130:18 184:13 187:11,12 202:18,19,22 fairly (3) 17:15 162:20 184:4 fairness (1) 214:13 faith (8) 61:25 65:7,7 122:21 164:9 193:19 194:17,17 faiths (2) 210:10,10 falling (1) 67:24 familiar (3) 15:15 18:18 74:11 families (4) 27:1,11 132:19 181:13 family (13) 40:1 68:16,19 69:11 76:24 97:3 119:10 165:14 166:3 170:10 182:8 191:7,12 far (36) 10:13 30:18 37:12 67:17,19,19 68:15 72:22 73:24 77:14 78:21 81:11,21 90:13 92:20,22 110:5 112:5 113:10 114:11 115:14 118:11 120:13 140:18,19,20,25 161:21 165:16 167:6 170:3 172:17 174:1 180:15 185:6 205:4 father (14) 4:6 11:11 14:21 21:7 88:22 117:19 119:3,9 121:21 170:7,9 200:6,7 211:20 fatigue (2) 150:2,6 fatigues (8) 7:20 20:25 70:5,15 71:7,11 150:4,15 fault (3) 45:11 147:6 158:13 fawzi (9) 2:14 4:4 51:19,22 52:1 76:5 162:14,15 216:8 fear (6) 84:12 101:16 131:5,5,6 138:12 fearsomelooking (1) 21:17 february (14) 7:25 8:2 14:14 15:3 74:4 122:12 142:3,8,10,15 144:12 147:10 150:15 213:20 feed (1) 170:16 feel (7) 58:21 61:7 64:8 199:23 191:25 209:24 210:25 feeling (1) 152:2 feelings (1) 104:15 fees (1) 123:2 feet (1) 155:25 fellow (12) 66:21 67:17 83:23,24,24 84:11,11 97:4 101:3 103:6 117:20 151:18 felt (5) 55:15 56:25 113:7 201:18 204:2 females (2) 35:7 36:8 few (32) 11:4 12:11 16:16 31:11 32:25 55:1,23 56:4 62:21 63:17,18 70:6 84:15,16,23 110:23 123:19,20 137:6 138:6 142:6,18 153:16 154:6 178:11,14 183:9,10 194:11 195:12,20 197:2 fight (16) 68:18 70:9 72:7,18 75:5,17 76:11 78:24 102:21 136:24 137:8 138:2,2,20 139:1 159:12 fighters (2) 20:13 24:13 fighting (7) 68:8,14 83:13 102:4 121:8,13 138:15 figure (3) 8:9 17:9 18:17 figures (1) 59:18 file (1) 29:18 files (2) 28:22,25 fill (1) 12:11 filling (1) 12:8 final (7) 1:7 16:13 23:25 46:9 105:6 107:2,16 finally (9) 2:10 10:13 16:17 22:21 25:1 26:21 31:6 113:20 134:25 finance (1) 163:13	financial (2) 67:6 105:19 find (17) 13:4 18:13 24:6 29:17 35:10 45:14 70:22 110:2 117:2 123:3 133:24 136:4 155:15 173:16 190:11,23 192:5 finding (2) 2:8 24:5 fine (5) 16:10 49:6 81:11 106:16 170:8 finger (3) 3:6 23:10,18 finished (4) 88:5,6 139:15 159:7 finishes (2) 177:8 208:20 fire (1) 194:14 firearms (2) 37:23 38:4 firewood (1) 19:22 firm (1) 153:2 firmly (1) 99:2 first (55) 1:10 2:3 3:2 4:4 11:5 12:12,16 13:17 14:3,23 16:4,24 37:10,21 41:1 45:11 49:14,19 52:18 53:9 61:18 70:12 72:5 74:19 80:13 82:21 84:9 86:8 87:11 93:12 100:19 102:8 103:23 104:4 110:23 111:1 112:16 116:11 121:11 124:2 161:7 169:6 171:19 172:23 179:2 183:8,20 187:19 194:3,18 195:11,11,20 197:25 202:21 fits (1) 188:7 five (5) 58:5,6 61:20 139:16 207:2 flags (1) 20:13 flat (1) 37:17 flavour (2) 9:22 20:18 fleeting (1) 212:10 flesh (1) 23:4 focus (2) 184:22 197:21 focused (4) 3:19,21 183:25 197:18 focusing (1) 40:14 following (7) 36:24 63:6 66:10 76:20 127:14 159:17 204:11 followed (5) 95:17 100:13 212:7,8,11 following (3) 72:13 101:2 192:19 fomenting (1) 202:9 fool (3) 77:15,20 98:25 footage (11) 7:23 8:12 9:4 183:24 184:10,21 186:14,17 187:23 188:9 189:11 forbid (3) 85:18 101:21 141:13 force (2) 7:11 206:8 foreground (1) 188:16 forget (3) 46:6 154:22 162:19 forgive (5) 24:5 49:18 85:2 92:7 174:17 form (5) 6:9 108:19 133:8 171:5 201:19 format (2) 61:12 81:2 formed (1) 208:18 former (3) 2:16 40:1 195:24 forum (8) 7:25 142:3,5,11,15,17 150:15 176:24 forward (2) 43:12 177:16 found (16) 1:12 16:22 25:11,25 26:14 27:20 35:22 42:7 56:20 64:15 123:25 145:22,24 211:18 212:25 213:1 foundation (1) 133:23 founded (2) 54:1 65:18 four (4) 14:6 173:18 195:21,21 fourth (1) 117:22 frame (1) 188:19 frankly (12) 66:21 69:7	75:7 78 77:5 78:17 84:10 116:8 164:8 166:20 205:11 211:21 freezeframe (2) 189:15 190:3 frequent (1) 167:10 frequented (2) 62:6 171:3 friday (18) 58:6,11,15 59:15 61:21 87:13 88:3,4 98:22 101:7 120:11 176:12 195:22 198:1 201:20 203:4,8 208:7 friendly (1) 208:11 friends (1) 92:22 front (3) 14:14 42:25 88:9 froze (1) 15:9 frozen (1) 15:6 frustrated (1) 198:16 fulfil (1) 95:21 full (8) 21:25 43:24 45:3 51:25 58:23 97:21 101:19 105:7 fullest (1) 58:13 fully (2) 84:17 114:9 fundamental (1) 63:20 funding (2) 177:19 209:5 fundraise (1) 209:4 fundraising (1) 88:8 further (27) 10:15 13:13 19:8 20:8 23:21 27:5,6,8,23 30:14 37:6 47:25 63:13 72:1 86:5 90:10 117:21 153:5 181:24 185:16 188:17 189:24 191:23 214:5,14,20 216:11 furthermore (1) 87:5 future (3) 18:15 96:17 211:11 G gaddafi (4) 75:5 88:22 199:8 200:8 gap (1) 47:20 gather (1) 203:5 gathered (3) 116:4 166:10 167:8 gathering (1) 139:4 gave (10) 19:15 29:12 55:2,3 71:1 117:14 149:7,13 204:1 209:10 gcse (1) 80:19 gear (1) 5:8 general (10) 8:10 86:14 133:17 140:7,12,17 143:3 151:7 154:12 164:10 generally (6) 51:9 90:7 128:18 136:19 139:15 170:15 generating (1) 197:23 generations (1) 64:15 genius (1) 169:12 gentleman (3) 51:18 103:15 187:24 gentlemen (4) 146:24 155:13 156:15 159:11 geographical (1) 200:10 get (29) 15:17 17:18 20:18 24:8 35:20 57:14,23 68:12 69:10,16 71:20 72:9 90:11 94:14,16,20 102:21,23 107:19 131:17 138:15 151:13 158:6 160:22 173:13 177:20 182:17 183:20 209:5 gets (2) 58:10 185:2 getting (5) 44:2,4 104:21 128:19 138:8 give (33) 2:25 5:21 13:24 18:11 54:10,25 59:10 60:25 63:15 69:2 82:7 85:14 93:23 101:25 102:18 104:15 105:18 112:20 141:9 145:18 149:10 153:15 164:1,6 177:12 182:18 186:20 192:24 198:3,9 201:22 202:23 206:3	given (33) 1:13 5:15 7:1 12:8 17:8 37:15 49:11 50:18,25 85:12 91:15 93:16 94:4 98:24 108:20 109:14 124:15 135:15 136:14 141:7 144:17 153:16 164:14,20 173:12,14 184:8 188:7 193:20 197:18,19 204:8 gives (2) 112:20 188:20 giving (11) 28:14 61:6 64:7 76:2 87:23 128:10 163:13 195:1 202:1 208:3 213:2 172:3 glad (1) 172:3 gleave (4) 6:16 98:8 99:2 106:23 gmp (8) 27:22 112:13 184:8 185:16 188:3,12 190:14 204:15 god (5) 23:19,20 101:20 131:5 203:9 gods (1) 206:15 goes (9) 23:21 34:19 39:21 65:16 84:2 86:19,23 88:4,8 going (102) 2:13,20 3:14 4:1 11:3,25 15:10 19:11,14 24:6,6 31:4 34:2 35:20 39:16,21 40:11,18 41:5 43:9 56:11 57:15 59:2 60:3,12 62:19 72:4 74:13 75:16 76:11,22 77:1,1,4,8,22 78:17 81:20 82:17 86:5,7 89:25 92:3,21 93:8,10 95:5,9 97:17,19 98:6 99:17 100:18 105:1,4,6 107:2 109:16 113:20 114:1,24 122:19 124:23 125:16 128:4,16,18 136:24 137:8 138:23,25 139:12 143:2,4 147:4 148:14 151:2 153:15 156:16 157:13 159:12 160:2 162:20 164:3,17 165:13 170:15,16 173:8 174:1 176:18 180:7 181:20 183:6,17,20 187:8,16 192:15 197:25 208:5 214:4 gone (12) 40:24 43:10,21 47:9 70:9 72:7 85:2 90:13 122:22 135:13 157:18 181:19 good (31) 12:5,6 21:2 34:20 45:17,19 60:22 69:8 71:8,13 75:25 90:21 97:22 99:12 101:9 109:12 122:21 159:2 167:4 169:19 177:9 181:2,25 182:12 185:1 193:5 194:1,10,21 195:2 196:10 governance (1) 135:1 governing (1) 170:18 government (4) 68:11,12 162:23 163:13 governments (1) 65:21 grab (1) 156:21 grabbed (1) 87:24 grade (2) 21:8,19 graduated (1) 60:21 graf (4) 4:16 5:3,5,15 6:4 7:6,15,18,20 8:7,15 59:5,13 60:13 67:25 69:1 70:4 74:7 93:15 94:7 97:19 98:12,13 99:3,12 100:4,10 101:2 102:9 103:8,22 104:6,19,21 115:14 125:3,7 126:19 142:2,4,10,14 143:9,16,20 144:17 146:5 147:4,8 148:9,25 149:14,18 150:2,10 151:1,15,19 157:10 158:4 182:19 183:23 184:3,18 185:5,10 186:5,20 197:18 199:2 203:20 204:1,19,22 grafs (4) 93:10 94:14 95:13 105:20
--	--	---	--	---	---	---

granby (2) 41:5 48:15
grand (1) 16:22
grateful (4) 50:21 51:9
162:10 187:13
greaney (74) 1:6,7 2:10
11:22 12:2,9 14:12 15:7
16:15 19:19 31:13,24
33:23 34:3 38:1 39:18
50:3,11 51:12,18,23,24
62:23 68:23 69:19 79:7
80:5 85:8 92:8 93:8 94:4
98:6 99:13,17,23 100:2
103:15 106:17 107:6,15
113:25 124:20 125:9 126:7
127:10,15 141:4 143:8
144:9 165:7,18 178:9
181:20,24,25 184:18
189:4,6,16,22,25
190:2,18,25 192:2,4,8
213:10 214:2,4,12
216:4,9,11
greaney (1) 147:14
great (7) 13:22 28:16 193:4
195:17 198:12 200:19
201:6
greater (12) 55:2 111:25
144:24 145:1 148:21,22
185:17 195:13 196:6,17,22
214:9
greatest (1) 45:16
green (1) 71:20
greet (2) 139:23 140:10
greeting (2) 140:11 208:23
grenade (1) 21:14
grievances (1) 194:5
grim (1) 97:17
ground (3) 16:15 84:5
186:25
groundtoair (1) 22:19
group (28) 8:13 16:21
75:20,22 121:8,13,17
142:3,5,15,16,23,24,25
143:1,4,7,9 163:8,25
164:10 166:19 186:14
187:2,10 204:15 208:3,4
groups (25) 66:4 67:11,13
83:11,12,14 85:18 86:17
87:7,8 91:23 109:14
117:13 141:13 159:11
199:17,24 200:2,15 206:25
207:4,11,18,19 208:14
grudge (2) 85:6 86:1
guardian (1) 134:3
guardians (1) 59:22
guardianship (2) 135:16
204:9
guess (1) 170:7
guidance (4) 108:18 110:13
111:9 177:12
gun (2) 21:21,22
guns (1) 37:2
guy (2) 178:18 185:11
guys (2) 194:19 208:23
gyal (2) 35:23,25

H

haffar (26) 2:14 3:9 4:4,13
51:19,22 52:1,2 64:5 76:5
83:3 107:15 124:20 144:2
150:6 160:5,5
162:12,14,15 168:10
174:17 182:6 213:11
214:20 216:8
hafter (1) 8:10
half (1) 213:15
hammering (1) 129:4
hand (3) 18:14 68:24 135:16
handful (1) 176:11
handle (1) 136:8
handling (1) 41:13
hands (1) 38:22
hang (2) 126:16 174:7
hannah (2) 12:25 213:22
happen (9) 71:4 109:24
125:22 140:8 178:18
208:13,16 211:7,7

happened (23) 11:8 27:22
43:9 51:8 56:14 69:22
73:15 75:1 89:13 98:1
112:16 159:14 161:23,24
180:3,25 181:2 191:16
192:1 195:16 198:12
202:21 209:16
happening (18) 29:22 56:18
59:25 76:7 79:16 85:1
87:15 104:13 113:2 138:13
146:23 151:22 178:4,6
180:1,5,6 198:16
happs (4) 29:16 164:13
169:19 210:14
happy (4) 134:5 145:12
200:25 205:20
harassing (1) 5:11
hard (2) 50:23 146:21
hardline (3) 4:9 166:18,25
hardware (2) 22:18 23:6
harm (1) 109:15
hashem (11) 3:4 7:1 11:7
13:16 14:22 22:16 33:15
38:14,16,18,20
hat (1) 64:2
hate (4) 17:6 90:19 191:14
203:19
hateful (3) 117:14 118:7
212:15
havent (8) 13:10 49:7
129:25 173:2 183:16
187:17 189:4 190:4
having (12) 16:3 44:16 52:9
69:17 71:18,18,19 83:5
98:12 125:4 199:11,22
head (5) 7:24 9:11 102:6
114:9 146:7
headmaster (1) 169:7
headquarters (1) 112:6
headteacher (4) 122:4
169:19 170:5 173:19
headteachers (2) 123:13
169:9
health (2) 58:23 209:10
hear (23) 2:13,15,20 9:10
12:4 15:7,7 60:24 69:4
79:25 97:1,6 106:4
121:1,6,15 125:16 126:9
137:2 152:14 162:20
171:19 173:3
heard (25) 32:19,24 55:10
66:20,23 71:18 72:25
73:17 78:5 87:18 98:2
103:17 116:11 119:23
120:24 121:12 122:21
123:8,10 125:20 137:10
140:15 155:8 189:16
214:24
hearing (1) 156:10
heart (5) 73:4 132:1 134:1
138:13 181:12
hearts (4) 80:23 175:13
176:2 203:9
heathrow (1) 19:4
heavily (1) 97:16
heaving (1) 58:14
heavy (1) 42:3
hed (7) 13:14 14:6 25:12
36:17 69:5 93:16 104:12
held (5) 52:7 83:17 143:11
144:5 194:3
hello (1) 139:24
help (23) 20:20 33:21 34:8
38:18 39:6 50:24 68:12
91:21 101:11 111:3 120:7
122:3,4,5 143:5,6 159:21
168:21 171:7 177:16
185:16 187:17 194:6
helped (6) 51:8 153:11 156:7
159:25 161:11 168:20
helpful (17) 2:8 18:8 29:6,11
30:10 47:6,7 51:1 62:4
69:19 77:16 95:17 99:24
111:24 112:14 188:3,23
helpfully (3) 14:12 117:6
192:13

helping (2) 70:24 71:3
helps (3) 10:11 36:16 69:15
henley (23) 51:20 69:15
144:1,8 182:3 183:17
192:15,17,18 193:13 194:9
195:10 198:3 201:2,6
205:12 206:10 210:5,6,25
212:12 213:9 216:12
here (27) 16:14 25:14 30:13
50:22 67:11 80:17 85:21
93:21 103:1 109:20 118:7
126:1,2 128:5 131:14
136:4 141:15 145:15 149:2
150:18 154:22,24 175:17
180:24 185:10 187:10
215:2
heritage (6) 54:21 55:25
67:22 68:2 138:4,8
hes (31) 9:5,6 12:2 17:5,9
18:17 22:25 23:9,17,18
40:24 41:9,10,12,13 64:6
85:6 90:23 104:1,2 118:7
128:1 132:4 153:15,25
159:3 169:7,11 186:1
201:17 211:13
hesitate (1) 144:1
hidden (5) 28:9 48:8 139:25
140:1 170:2
hide (3) 125:17,23 213:3
highlevel (1) 4:2
highlight (2) 96:10,14
highly (2) 128:22 155:3
hijack (1) 66:5
himself (5) 9:20 146:10
153:24 169:20 202:23
hindsight (6) 143:15,19
147:7 148:10,11 157:14
hindus (2) 164:9 194:16
hire (2) 207:20,24
hired (1) 207:18
history (1) 8:3
hived (1) 6:11
hobby (1) 172:22
hold (4) 131:9,10,22 202:18
holding (1) 85:6
holds (1) 148:16
holiday (2) 97:3,20
holy (2) 58:12 177:8
home (4) 1:11 19:9 40:1
131:15
homebased (1) 39:10
homework (1) 178:21
honest (25) 66:7 68:9
73:1,21 75:13 111:7
112:15 117:4 120:16 121:3
122:9 138:16 148:7,8
166:14 182:24 184:21
185:14 186:7,23 190:20,22
198:2 208:20 212:13
honestly (5) 116:10 121:3
167:4 171:19 191:17
honeychick15 (1) 35:23
honeymoon (3) 25:3,4 34:17
hope (5) 24:7 30:6,11 213:11
214:25
hoping (1) 183:7
horwell (3) 50:4,5 181:25
hostey (2) 10:19 72:18
hour (2) 107:9 207:25
hours (1) 122:23
house (5) 37:5 40:6 41:5,11
48:15
houses (1) 196:20
however (6) 46:6 48:17
59:21 162:23 165:10
201:13
huge (1) 51:7
humanitarian (2) 105:19
201:25
humans (2) 153:10 156:6
hundreds (2) 28:22,24

idea (7) 57:23 64:14 72:8
73:5 94:18 182:18 187:1
ideal (1) 135:24
identified (3) 109:20 111:20
127:3
identify (5) 45:20 53:19,22
111:17 191:6
ideologies (2) 87:9 145:17
ideology (6) 81:19 86:15
146:9,21 162:13 208:15
idlib (1) 99:1
ie (1) 155:18
ill (42) 14:10 16:24 17:17,18
18:1,18,22 20:4 23:23
51:11,21 83:3 86:24 98:21
101:5,5 105:8 111:7
112:14 113:14 114:5 115:1
119:1 121:3 122:25 130:6
132:25 155:23 162:10
165:4 166:1,17 167:22
169:17 170:16 179:24
183:8,8 184:6 185:14
190:20,22
illicit (2) 2:3 31:16
im (181) 3:1 4:1 10:11
11:3,24 13:25 14:10 15:23
16:11,14,16
17:13,15,19,22,25
18:14,17 19:11,14 21:2,4
23:21 24:6,6 25:23,23
26:11,12,22,24 30:23,23
34:19 35:17,17,20
36:11,12 38:25
39:2,12,16,21 40:14 44:4
46:7 48:16 49:5 51:1 53:9
54:12 57:25 59:2 62:19
67:12,19 68:23 72:4 75:23
77:6,6 79:17,18,19 80:24
81:21 82:10,17,25 83:2,4
86:7,11 87:24 92:20
93:1,8,10,22,23 94:8,16,22
95:5 98:5,6 99:17,24
100:8,18,21 102:14 103:1
105:6,10 107:1 111:6,7
114:24 117:7 121:10,24
124:7,23 125:25
128:4,16,17,23,23,24
131:3,20,20 135:14 136:4
140:13,19 143:7,10 147:4
148:10,11,14 151:2
152:18,21 154:5,14,16,17
156:16 157:13 158:11
160:19,20,25 162:2,10
164:17 165:13 166:20,20
169:13 170:15 171:21
172:17,21 173:8 174:1,1
175:5,25,25 176:4 177:23
178:9 179:2,14,15,17
181:9,15,16,20
183:6,7,11,20
187:4,8,13,16 190:13
192:4,15 196:8 200:25
209:19 210:16
image (7) 14:13 19:23 22:7
29:17 43:1,2 189:20
images (12) 18:23
20:12,16,19 23:2
37:1,11,22 38:3,12,13
151:24
imagine (2) 30:25 126:18
imam (25) 2:16 4:16 9:11
59:6,17 60:9,19 67:25 68:1
70:13 71:17 93:15 128:1
146:1 169:8 182:19,25
183:1,1 197:19 198:8
199:1,2 202:17 213:2
imams (26) 59:8,13,14,23
60:5,21,21 61:2,13 66:8
74:7,10 81:14 82:6,7,11
96:22 145:10,11,21,25
179:25 198:3,7,10 206:24
immediate (1) 118:2
immediately (11) 38:22
68:24 70:18 84:12 88:12
89:15 117:17 140:9 192:24
204:6 211:12

implication (1) 154:25
imply (1) 161:16
important (20) 2:25 8:15
20:17 49:11 57:23 62:9,9
84:6 85:8 87:19 104:20
109:25 125:5 127:4 132:7
150:12 158:1 177:18 189:9
200:24
impression (2) 102:1 128:11
improving (1) 54:6
inaccurate (3) 102:12 151:9
161:18
inappropriate (1) 201:18
inaudible (3) 17:3 24:17 27:4
incarcerated (5) 68:4,10,16
69:1,17
incident (2) 89:7 158:20
incidents (6) 110:19 113:10
158:19,24 159:1,14
incite (1) 157:1
inclinations (1) 139:9
include (1) 24:1
included (1) 20:3
incomes (2) 43:3 101:8
including (10) 16:22 32:2
74:7 78:10 87:5 105:13
110:18 149:24 153:7 156:3
inclusion (1) 195:7
inclusive (3) 65:6,20 210:7
increased (1) 196:23
independent (9) 70:19
75:20,22 95:12 134:18
141:22,25 163:7,25
index (2) 23:10 28:15
index (3) 54:16 62:7 198:8
indians (3) 54:17 55:19
193:16
indicate (1) 182:1
indicated (4) 7:19 16:9
107:15 185:3
indicating (3) 25:12 27:5
67:6
individual (6) 3:3 28:21
86:19 109:5 169:4 173:12
114:24 117:7 121:10,24
80:24 86:18 115:9 117:15
205:1,17 206:14 209:7
indonesia (4) 19:3 24:13,25
34:14
indonesian (1) 25:8
inelegant (1) 169:18
inevitably (1) 87:7
infallible (2) 29:7,8
inference (1) 36:21
inferences (2) 25:24 26:3
inferred (1) 26:13
inflame (1) 104:25
inflammatory (1) 156:9
inflation (1) 154:10
inform (1) 74:2
information (27) 4:17,23 9:9
18:12 28:25 29:17,19 31:1
34:13 45:20 50:25
84:12,24 124:15 139:4
144:3,5 166:10 167:8,20
170:2 188:3,24 190:24
192:24 193:20 213:18
informed (2) 70:16 71:4
inhabitants (1) 83:14
initial (3) 45:15 46:10,12
initiated (2) 6:7 15:1
inmates (1) 31:21
innocent (1) 157:2
innocuous (1) 25:9
inquis (2) 4:2 41:2
inq0291331 (1) 108:8
inq0291332 (2) 108:16
110:25
inq0291333 (1) 110:16
inq0291341 (1) 141:21
inq02913412 (2) 141:22,24
inq02913429 (1) 100:23
inq0304521 (1) 167:21
inq0304524 (1) 167:23
inq0312771 (1) 41:2
inq03127710 (1) 41:20

inq03127714 (1) 41:25
inq0312774 (1) 41:3
inq0312775 (1) 41:8
inq0312778 (1) 41:9
inq0312911 (1) 158:16
inq0312914 (1) 158:17
inq0312918 (1) 93:13
inq0325861 (1) 34:21
inq0325867 (2) 35:14 36:5
inq0328171 (1) 152:24
inq0345216 (1) 213:15
inq034649196 (1) 37:15
inq034649197 (1) 38:11
inq034649233 (1) 37:10
inq035481u100 (1) 7:17
inq035481u82 (1) 4:3
inq03597912 (1) 83:1
inq03597923 (1) 86:9
inq0365111 (1) 21:11
inq0365291 (1) 20:23
inq0365311 (1) 21:24
inq0365451 (1) 21:16
inq0365881 (1) 21:6
inq0388111 (1) 22:21
inq0388171 (1) 183:12
inq0388181 (1) 187:15
inq0390491516 (1) 26:19
inq0403761 (1) 15:19
inq0419531 (1) 160:3
inq0421711 (1) 14:1
inq0312779 (1) 41:16
inquiry (23) 3:12,14 5:4
26:24 49:17,19 52:11 74:2
85:15 98:10 99:25 105:11
111:23 125:10 141:10
162:6,22 183:14 187:21
189:8,10 215:2,5
inquiryappointed (1) 5:21
inquiries (1) 50:22
inside (3) 45:7 49:20 58:18
insight (1) 148:12
inspector (1) 51:2
inspiring (1) 104:3
installed (1) 184:7
instance (6) 60:8 136:13,16
156:21,23 176:23
institution (1) 193:4
instructions (1) 113:7
insufficient (1) 167:18
integrated (2) 7:17 193:11
integrity (1) 193:8
intelligence (3) 16:18,23
18:7
intelligent (2) 147:16 179:15
intended (1) 98:13
intending (1) 99:4
intentions (1) 178:19
interact (1) 177:6
interaction (3) 164:23
176:25 177:3
interest (9) 5:4 26:4,8 41:17
111:22 137:24,25
197:22,24
interested (4) 15:23
30:23,24 162:4
interesting (4) 16:4,25 18:10
170:1
interests (4) 54:5 76:25
79:24 108:24
interfaith (2) 54:8 194:22
internet (4) 112:25 172:11
173:6,13
interpret (4) 103:17 126:10
129:1 155:6
interpretation (9) 100:3
106:15,18 127:8 151:5
153:21 154:18 155:1,2
interpretations (2) 153:22
154:1
interpreted (1) 129:2
interpreting (2) 23:16 64:11
interrogating (1) 32:15
interrogator (1) 29:18
interrupt (3) 79:24 144:1
165:18

interview (11) 4:20 7:6,11
24:1,2,10,23 44:14 169:10
178:13 213:2
interviewed (7) 7:8 80:16,16
178:8,10 212:23,25
into (50) 3:14 6:11 10:14
23:22 26:8 28:16 35:16
41:8 43:22 44:8,12,17,21
45:14 47:10 48:20 49:2
50:5 67:24 71:11 73:4
80:23 81:13 84:14,14
90:8,11,19 92:19,23 95:12
97:12,15,23 98:19 116:6
122:7 131:25 156:14 161:2
162:3 167:7 173:9 175:13
176:1 196:20 200:23 206:7
209:8 210:18
introduction (2) 2:17,25
investigate (6) 60:10
70:14,16,20 96:8,13
investigated (2) 70:22 71:18
investigation (30) 2:18,21,22
3:23 4:6,13,17 5:23,23
6:9,10,11,23 7:4,5 9:8
10:16,22 11:5 27:19,21,24
28:5 29:16 32:9 95:12
110:18 150:11,12 191:5
investigative (1) 167:22
invitation (2) 134:13,14
invite (11) 11:25 62:20 71:22
119:21 124:23 187:8
192:15 194:4 198:3,7
210:11
invited (3) 82:6 111:3 135:21
inviting (1) 100:8
involved (14) 11:17 23:6
31:25 32:12 72:9 79:11
92:15 133:8 136:14 138:9
172:10,21,24 191:5
involvement (3) 15:2 32:4
165:15
ipad (7) 24:17 34:9,12
35:1,16,19 36:14
iran (2) 153:9 156:5
iranian (2) 153:11 156:7
iraq (2) 76:17 77:5
irrelevant (1) 3:13
isis (17) 10:19 19:16 22:25
25:13,15,18 26:1 34:13
76:14 83:11 86:13 91:8
117:12 199:16
203:15,18,19
islam (21) 54:11 57:14
58:5,12 63:19,19 64:11,14
65:11 74:20 78:23 101:15
130:24 145:16 153:25
193:4 195:1 207:2,3,4,6
islamic (39) 1:20 2:11,15
8:24 20:9 52:5 53:15
54:3,10 55:1 57:12,17
60:22 61:15 63:6,10
64:19,22 65:9 66:19 67:1
72:19 76:14 79:10,12
80:11,18 83:18 90:24
91:16 92:19,23 108:18
121:8,13 129:4 193:19
195:5 201:22
islamically (1) 102:5
ismail (40) 1:12 9:17 18:21
19:22 20:20,24 21:7,11
22:22 23:25 24:11
26:20,21 27:6,14,18 28:20
31:4 34:7,18,25 35:1,15
36:1,3 23:7 22 38:4,10,11
119:22 121:25 123:16
167:6,13 168:2,16 169:25
170:10 171:10 172:9
192:22
ismails (1) 124:8
isnt (13) 24:10 29:19 33:4,9
48:18 58:22 81:20 103:2
155:4 156:24 161:5 184:21
208:2
issued (3) 111:9 151:1
192:22
issues (12) 1:9 10:14 50:7
105:12 117:23 142:8,10

149:14,15 180:7 197:15
204:6

issuing (1) 108:17

istanbul (3) 213:19 214:7,17

italics (1) 37:21

item (1) 125:5

items (7) 28:21 34:10
43:2,14,17 47:25 49:21

its (175) 2:25 8:15 13:4,7,25
14:1,13 15:16,16,19 16:16
17:25 18:1,6 20:8,17
21:5,18 23:18 24:5,7
25:20,21 26:18,19 28:1
30:6 33:4,9,14 34:20
36:5,7 37:8,15 39:3 42:14
44:5 46:12,15,15 47:12,21
48:6 51:7,18 49:18,21,22,24
50:9 51:4 53:17 55:3
56:1,3 57:10,12,13,23
58:13,22 60:1 62:4,9,20
65:10 66:12 69:15 71:21
76:9,21 79:5,22,24 80:25
81:25 82:21,23 83:6 84:6
85:8,14 86:20 88:4 89:23
92:7,8 98:16 102:18
104:20 108:6 111:20,22
113:3 125:2,25
126:20,21,25 129:20 130:7
132:6,22 136:2,3 137:22
141:10,18 147:1 148:9
153:15,15 154:25
155:1,2,3,18,24 156:17
158:1,13,17,17 159:23
162:21 164:10 167:1 171:1
173:17,20 174:13,19,23
176:11 179:6 180:13,24
183:12,25 184:13,14,22
185:12,13 186:3,19 187:6
188:25 189:6
190:17,19,20,22
191:5,13,17,21,22
193:3,4,6 195:11 198:25
200:23 201:2,4 205:9
206:17 210:25 211:2,5
212:12,13 214:5

itself (8) 17:9 23:11,12 27:15
106:18 120:4 136:21 208:2

ive (24) 4:4 10:13 24:4 26:18
30:11 31:7 36:6 53:25
64:12 85:2 87:18 90:13
115:23 116:9 117:3,4
121:12 122:2,21,22 137:10
140:15 150:21 185:3

J

jahangir (4) 71:24,25 81:7
100:25

jamieson (23) 33:24 34:1,2
36:15,23 38:11 39:2,21
40:13,16,22 42:14,16
44:4,22,24 45:2,18 48:11
49:11 50:2,3 216:6

january (5) 2:6 27:9 109:18
111:5,14

jazeera (1) 76:22

jeep (1) 13:14

jewish (2) 164:9 194:16

jihaad (30) 5:19 93:15,21
94:7,9,25 98:2,7,11,17
99:4,11 100:7 101:13,22
102:4 103:5,19 104:23
105:21 125:8 126:10,12,19
151:3,9,15 152:7 154:23

job (9) 29:3 30:25 135:4,5
136:1,2,2 170:25 171:1

john (167) 2:8 12:1 15:9
18:3,8,15,20 22:3,9
23:12,16 25:10,17,23
26:5,10,16 30:18,23 31:2
33:22 36:13,22
38:10,18,21,24 39:20
40:11,14,20 42:10,15
44:2,20,23,25 45:9 48:4,6
49:6,13,18,22
50:1,8,15,18,21 51:7,14
62:22 68:22 69:2 78:5,9

79:1,4,6,21 80:4 85:3
91:20 92:1,3,6,10,13,15
93:1,7,23 94:3 98:5
99:10,15,22 100:1 103:11
106:6,14 107:9 113:24
124:25 126:6 132:2,6,10
134:9,11 137:16,20,24
138:1,7,21 142:23 143:2
144:6,23 145:5,10,19
146:3 152:8,13,16 155:14
156:1 157:5,11,20,22,24
158:11 159:3,23 161:7,13
162:7,19 163:6 165:6,22
167:20,25 168:15
171:6,9,21,23 172:6
173:10 174:7 175:16,25
176:15,21 181:3,9,15
184:13,17 189:1,5,14
190:13,23 192:4 200:25
201:4 205:21 206:1,6,9
209:23 210:2,4,16,23
213:9,21,23 214:11,21,23
215:3

join (2) 134:4 135:23

joined (3) 182:19,20,25

joining (1) 12:2

jordanian (1) 19:20

joseph (2) 12:25 213:22

judgement (1) 74:15

juggle (1) 131:21

july (11) 79:7 113:14 122:13
184:9 185:5 187:7 188:6
191:2 214:6,10,18

jump (1) 16:14

june (3) 42:14,16 43:19

junior (1) 182:25

jurisprudence (1) 207:3

justified (1) 198:21

justifying (1) 17:11

K

kaftan (1) 64:3

keen (3) 96:8 99:24 126:17

keep (16) 20:16 48:8 80:7
93:5 99:22 104:6 131:7
139:7 145:12,13,13 152:21
181:16 205:8,16,23
181:16 205:8,16,23

kept (4) 145:14 168:8,11
202:16

key (3) 173:12,12,13
115:23 116:9 117:3,4

keys (1) 28:14

khayat (11) 83:22 87:3 89:14
101:3 102:19 103:6 104:9
125:6,18 151:18 202:7

kick (1) 157:23

kill (7) 153:11,18 154:7
155:18,21 156:7 157:2

killed (7) 1:24 72:19 78:9,10
153:19 154:9,24

killings (4) 153:9 155:17
156:6 180:2

kills (1) 155:21

kind (4) 21:18 159:13 169:23
185:15

kindness (1) 203:4

kingdom (5) 77:11 79:13
179:9 214:15,16

knew (26) 2:20 4:25 13:6
73:18,23 76:6 80:21
81:14,14,16 105:1
120:20,20 122:5,6,8
138:17 151:20 161:12
166:4,12 170:7,8,9 192:10
211:22

know (109) 4:19 12:6
13:3,12 16:9 17:8,13 18:10
21:8,17,19 22:17 23:12
24:3 29:25,25 33:10 39:14
47:6 50:7,15 51:4 53:17
54:11 60:6 65:24 66:23
67:4,17 68:16 69:7 70:2
72:25 73:6,19,21,25
74:1,11,12 76:25 84:15,18
87:17 88:20 91:22 95:5
99:23 102:5 105:7,16
106:12 113:8 114:12

116:10 121:14 126:1
129:24 130:1 131:22,24
136:12 138:11,12 139:18
142:23,24,25 143:22
144:2,17 147:8,12 149:7
150:14,15,16,16 153:9
154:3 156:5 159:22 163:23
166:1 170:3,13 171:9,14
172:20 173:3,4 174:14
175:14 178:18 179:15
183:17 184:14,18 186:18
188:22 189:1 194:19,20
198:6 201:16 205:4 206:17
211:11 212:13

knowing (1) 150:14

knowledge (9) 47:13 72:6
107:16 113:21 114:16,21
123:24 182:12,13

knowledgeable (1) 59:12

known (15) 2:11 52:5 60:19
80:14 114:3 118:22 119:10
121:4 144:19 171:15 173:2
182:9 191:20 192:9 207:7

knows (2) 136:11 169:20

koran (17) 56:24 61:24
62:8,10,13,13 66:11
80:11,12,18,18 122:14
123:22 129:14,17 156:22
169:2

kuwaiti (2) 52:18 79:18

L

la (1) 50:12

laboratory (1) 190:13

labour (3) 146:21,22,22

ladies (5) 146:24 155:12
156:14 169:10 207:20

lady (2) 163:14 178:13

language (5) 102:16 155:5
168:24,25 210:21

languages (1) 28:18

lapsed (1) 162:3

large (8) 21:18 23:3 39:22,25
54:13 136:16 138:22
173:18

last (27) 23:9 29:13 32:20
40:21,22 44:5 46:14 55:22
56:4 84:15,23 96:11
103:23 104:4 112:24
113:13 117:17 123:20
125:2 130:6 135:12 138:5
153:6 177:25 185:8,21
202:21

late (6) 5:1,16 11:19 33:16
53:5 120:25

lately (2) 167:9 185:20

later (19) 8:12 9:24 10:15
15:18 16:11 18:19 19:8
30:14 41:21 90:10 108:4
119:6 122:2 123:24 128:5
132:25 149:10 163:15
167:18

latter (2) 35:24 136:25

laura (1) 189:9

lawfully (1) 153:17

lead (5) 59:8 110:15 111:12
112:4,10

leader (6) 142:3,6,14,18
145:16 159:17

leading (1) 75:2

learn (11) 57:20 122:23
123:2,15,22 124:2 175:10
177:6 178:12 186:1 194:24

learned (7) 112:12 122:2
151:4 153:13,20 156:18
178:23

learning (1) 153:13

learnt (2) 112:12,14

least (6) 142:21 148:15,18
155:4 171:23 174:24

leave (10) 20:17 71:16
117:23 135:14 139:22,24
140:10 159:13 208:13
210:4

leaves (1) 41:12

leaving (6) 12:21 41:4 78:18
140:23 205:1 208:22

lebanese (1) 52:18

lecture (1) 115:20

lectures (1) 1:13

lecturing (1) 81:15

led (2) 51:4 78:7

left (10) 4:10 42:20 43:1
55:11 56:9 59:17 69:5
117:19 166:18 212:3

legal (7) 3:12 108:23
109:2,12,12,22 189:10

legend (1) 41:17

legitimate (2) 154:7 214:25

legitimises (1) 154:10

leisure (1) 54:5

less (5) 32:3 47:6 56:1 80:21
148:4

lesson (2) 63:16 180:10

lessons (6) 62:11,16
178:12,15,16,23
143:20,21,22 166:4 167:6
184:22 185:11 201:23
214:5,13

live (12) 55:11 120:13
138:20 140:15 161:20,21
193:4 196:24 197:1.3
206:15,16

lived (2) 64:15 137:23

lives (3) 11:17 54:7 208:11
162:19 184:23

letter (3) 106:7,7,15

level (3) 23:5 32:2 101:9

light (2) 164:10 194:17

liaise (2) 76:4 177:9

liaison (5) 148:20 149:25
164:21 193:11 204:15

liar (2) 85:21 141:15

liberal (1) 146:22

librarian (1) 28:15

library (1) 28:15

libya (59) 5:8 8:3,8,10 12:17
13:15 14:3,23 16:1 17:2,9
22:4,10 33:18 37:3 39:14
52:21 55:11,15
67:7,10,12,18 68:4,8,13,19
69:18,24 70:9 72:4,7 74:11
75:4,16 76:11 83:10 86:14
87:16 88:25 91:23
92:15,18 93:2 121:13
136:20,21,24 137:8
138:2,24 139:1 147:13
149:18 178:4 198:24 199:2
200:10 206:16

libyan (45) 4:9 7:21 8:23
54:20 55:5,18,25 57:1
67:10,12,14,15,21 68:2
69:6 74:5,7,23 75:16 83:12
92:20,22 95:14 120:18,20
121:8 182:12,13,16 136:16,16
138:22 142:7,8,9,18,19
166:18,25 169:20
190:8,9,21 198:10 199:7

libyans (17) 55:11,16
56:6,9,12,16,24 74:12
91:23 142:5,17 145:7,8
146:4 193:16 203:7 205:3

lie (2) 36:19 116:18

life (5) 15:10 102:7 135:4,5
155:19

lift (1) 121:6

light (3) 18:9 71:20 187:5

lightening (1) 210:23

like (58) 1:8 15:11 23:15
28:13,14 29:16 32:17 37:7
47:21 48:6 49:14 50:8,10
54:22 56:8 57:16 68:16
73:21 75:11 79:16 81:5
84:22 88:22 107:24 114:4
116:1 131:14,15 132:3
134:3 137:2 138:17 140:18
157:2 158:12 159:8
160:7,25 162:25 171:14,15
172:1 176:22 177:18
178:20 181:7 182:4 183:18
184:14 199:2,3,15,20

207:4,6,7 208:16 213:4

liked (4) 145:25,25 146:1,5

likely (2) 11:12 14:24

like (1) 35:25

limit (1) 58:20

limited (2) 109:25 212:10

line (6) 147:14 148:9,14
164:1 165:1 204:2

lines (3) 141:3 153:6 156:19

link (3) 12:2 15:6 191:11

linked (3) 8:23 172:17 203:9

links (1) 52:21

list (3) 38:6 149:9 178:23

listen (5) 113:4,6 140:13
185:24 203:8

listened (3) 98:12 100:6
125:13

listening (4) 84:19
126:3,9,17

little (17) 26:25 42:8 123:24
132:25 138:5,6,11
143:20,21,22 166:4 167:6
184:22 185:11 201:23
214:5,13

live (12) 55:11 120:13
138:20 140:15 161:20,21
193:4 196:24 197:1.3
206:15,16

lived (2) 64:15 137:23

lives (3) 11:17 54:7 208:11
162:19 184:23

living (2) 102:3 195:15

lobbied (1) 69:10

local (7) 68:11 75:20 110:21
163:8 165:11 193:22 197:3

logged (1) 35:16

logically (1) 127:14

london (2) 8:13 144:7

long (14) 1:24 39:15 44:5
49:18 64:1 107:6 135:1
145:1,2 148:21,22 168:3
177:4,5 179:23 185:17
191:21 214:14

longer (5) 10:8 51:12 96:22
135:11 204:23

longestablished (1) 63:3

longserving (1) 74:10

look (41) 15:19 24:3,4 28:21
29:20,23 35:10 36:7 38:3,5
40:17 41:1 42:8 44:8,17
45:21 48:17,19 50:1,5
60:13 71:13 73:21 77:7
86:14,22 68:16 69:22
77:19,22 78:13,15,19 84:3
88:25 89:23 92:21
98:16,16 112:5,12 119:18
133:15 136:6 137:3 146:5
170:7,7 174:2 175:2
181:12 192:13 194:23
195:12 196:5 208:5,5
129:16 162:21 167:16
172:15 190:7,20,21
looking (21) 19:22 37:20
44:12 46:13 53:9 81:23
106:7 118:23 142:13 153:5
176:3 177:15 184:14
186:14,15 187:4,4,10
190:12 205:14 209:9
looks (9) 42:3 46:2 48:6
117:14 118:8 180:12
183:18 184:5 212:15
loose (1) 169:18
lopez (11) 20:23 37:8,16
41:2 42:24 47:18 141:3
153:1 183:11 189:16
213:15
lot (37) 18:22 19:6 23:21
25:14 30:4 33:16 46:8
55:22 56:25 57:2,14,22
81:10 88:19 106:12
112:12,13,14,25
113:1,12,14 122:22,22
157:17 164:6,14 178:6
193:20 195:19,23 196:1,4
198:15,15 207:24 210:19
lots (1) 78:9
loyal (2) 199:8 200:11
loyalty (1) 88:23
lunch (7) 105:9

107:1,8,11,15 125:3,4

lying (2) 116:24,25

M

machine (2) 21:21,22

madrasah (2) 122:12,17

magnum (2) 183:8,11

mail (1) 137:14

main (8) 1:14 59:13,14 61:19
120:11 125:24 207:2,24

mainly (2) 59:7 62:2

mainstream (10) 65:10 66:8
67:1 123:13 131:13,17
133:25 137:6 157:4 207:7
maintained (12) 12:10 172:11

major (2) 158:19,24

majority (4) 83:13 138:13
152:6 154:18

makes (2) 29:10 39:10

making (13) 47:24 89:24
106:8 118:8 119:12 120:8
130:16 132:3 158:10 177:7
188:9 189:11 191:2

man (16) 10:6 72:17 136:10
144:19 147:15,17 148:16
156:9 167:4,4 172:9
179:14,15 188:8,13 189:2

managed (3) 13:1,10 24:3
management (2) 82:4
139:13

manchester (59) 2:11 7:24
10:20 12:18 52:5,25
53:14,16 55:2,2,6,12
64:19,22 65:9 66:19,25
69:17 74:23 75:4,8,13 76:7
78:18 83:17 108:18
112:1,2,6,7,8 136:11,12,17
138:6,23 144:8,25
145:1,2 148:21,22 168:3
177:4,5 179:23 185:17
191:13 196:6,10,17,22
203:7 205:1 210:8 213:19
214:7,9,17

manifesting (1) 136:21

manteline (6) 6:7 27:17
31:24 50:19,24 51:10
129:23 35:10 36:7 38:3,5
40:17 41:1 42:8 44:8,17
45:21 48:17,19 50:1,5
60:13 71:13 73:21 77:7
86:14,22 68:16 69:22
77:19,22 78:13,15,19 84:3
88:25 89:23 92:21
98:16,16 112:5,12 119:18
133:15 136:6 137:3 146:5
170:7,7 174:2 175:2
181:12 192:13 194:23
195:12 196:5 208:5,5
march (2) 52:7 133:13
margin (1) 42:20
marriage (1) 25:5
married (1) 5:12
massive (3) 30:6,13 173:21
material (27) 17:4,5
19:1,6,8,16 20:3 23:4
24:11,17,21
25:12,14,20,25
27:2,6,14,15,16 28:1,2,4
29:23 30:15,19 39:23
materials (2) 24:15 45:4
mats (1) 58:19
matter (12) 94:13 104:25
116:15 118:9,12 125:1
128:3 154:20 162:22
193:25 194:2 211:10
matters (14) 3:1,20 31:6,11
34:5 64:16 96:8,13 101:23
140:12 153:12 156:8
204:16,18
mature (1) 61:2
matured (1) 60:21
maximum (1) 56:3
maybe (29) 32:18 55:17,21
56:3 20 58:9,10,10,17,25
65:22 69:3,3,25 104:25
121:12 123:1,1 125:19
126:23 127:20 138:9 140:6

166:13,13 174:11 178:16
184:7 187:7

mazamil (1)

32:3,10 34:8 36:11,14
 39:6,23 47:6 48:17,20
 49:16 57:3,24 58:15 81:15
 95:17 101:20 102:23
 103:17 104:17 113:13
 126:9 131:10 144:19
 146:13 157:8 160:15
 165:20 170:1 188:5 192:23
 202:17 204:2 205:15
 208:13
militant (1) 146:22
militaristic (1) 39:8
military (21) 6:3,18 20:24
 21:8,19 22:17 23:5 70:5,15
 71:7,9,11 94:25 106:24
 147:13,20 148:18
 150:2,4,6,14
militias (2) 153:9 156:5
mind (13) 3:22 18:16 32:13
 36:16 39:13 70:8 96:11
 128:25 131:25 162:16,20
 184:24 188:25
mindful (1) 99:21
minds (4) 80:23 175:14
 176:2 191:15
mindset (3) 1:17 39:23
 150:22
mine (3) 17:24 45:18 147:6
minority (1) 79:5
minute (2) 127:19 130:1
minutes (7) 41:21 123:19
 140:9 165:22 183:12 189:6
 213:12
misconceptions (1) 195:1
misinterpret (3) 127:17
 128:9 152:6
misinterpreted (10) 93:21
 103:9 104:17 128:2,6
 147:6 151:16 152:5 156:23
 157:1
misleading (1) 151:9
mispronunciation (1) 62:15
misrepresent (1) 151:11
missile (1) 22:19
missing (4) 32:17,18 69:11
 168:20
missions (1) 20:10
mistaken (1) 87:24
mistakes (5) 160:16,20
 179:1,2,3
misunderstand (1) 104:21
misunderstanding (2) 101:18
 204:3
misunderstood (1) 152:14
mixed (7) 54:13 104:15
 120:17,19,22 130:25
mobile (1) 148:23
model (1) 193:4
moderate (1) 4:11
modification (1) 188:6
mohammed (21) 9:10 10:17
 32:19,24 33:5 71:24,25
 72:15 81:7 100:25 103:6
 104:9 125:18 168:2 197:19
 199:23 202:7,13,23 204:22
 212:14
moment (18) 5:3 11:8 19:2
 89:25 93:24,25 107:8
 108:6 109:17 155:14
 162:3,13,19,22 164:17,19
 183:20 187:22
monday (1) 168:4
money (8) 60:4 98:20 105:3
 155:8,9,11 209:6,7
monitor (1) 139:6
monitored (1) 135:7
month (8) 16:3,5 25:4 136:6
 163:12 166:7 177:8 194:4
months (9) 84:23 109:18
 123:20 134:5,5 163:17
 194:11 195:20 204:19
more (67) 1:21 2:20 11:16
 12:11 14:24 17:23 22:15
 23:8 26:8 30:25 31:11
 34:11 39:9,22 46:7 47:6
 48:8 55:16,24 57:20 61:10

79:9 80:21 81:13 84:20
 86:16 90:7 98:22 99:18
 119:1 122:24 123:3 126:15
 128:6,13,18,20,24 129:6
 131:9,23 135:13 138:1
 143:20,21,22 144:20,25
 148:4 150:12 151:8 155:9
 167:7,10 180:15 182:22
 190:8 194:25 196:1,3,5,12
 197:4 205:19 206:18
 207:4,5
moreover (5) 7:23 79:11
 95:13,24 106:22
morning (11) 12:5,6 41:4
 48:2 51:12 58:8 116:15
 117:2 118:6 174:12 215:3
moroccans (1) 55:18
mortimer (1) 167:22
mosque (296)
 2:11,14,16,19,23
 3:15,18,24 4:5,7,10,14,16
 5:5,15 9:9,12,18
 10:7,13,15,20 51:19
 52:3,5,9,15,23,24,24
 53:7,15,16,23
 54:13,19,20,25 55:2,7,7,25
 56:2,10,16,19,22
 57:3,7,10,11,16 58:10,12
 59:6,19 60:14,16 61:16
 62:5,19,25 63:10
 64:1,19,21,23,23,24
 65:1,2,5,6,13
 66:2,3,4,5,6,6,8,14,16
 67:2,22 69:13 71:16
 72:4,6,14,23 73:8,13 74:20
 76:1,8 78:20 80:7,10
 81:2,8,24 82:9 85:16 88:3
 90:12,14 91:24 93:17
 97:21 105:13,14 106:2
 107:4,17,21 110:8 111:17
 112:22 113:8,21
 114:1,8,11,13,19 115:3,10
 116:18
 117:1,10,11,17,19,24
 118:4 119:4,8
 120:4,10,13,14,16
 121:6,21 122:1 123:17
 124:10 127:16 128:7,17,20
 129:9,9,18,19,25
 130:10,21
 131:1,9,10,13,22 132:23
 133:9 134:1 136:11 138:3
 139:6,8,14,17,25
 140:6,7,21,24 141:11
 142:1,11 144:8 145:7,14
 146:16 150:22 152:20
 156:10 157:4,18 158:19,24
 159:6,13 160:11 162:15
 164:11,21 165:2,15
 166:3,8,18 167:7,10,13
 168:3,7,9,16 169:4
 170:18,25 171:2,17 172:12
 173:5,22,25 174:24 175:20
 176:8,22 178:11,24
 179:4,12,17,19,21 180:13
 182:9,19,21 183:1,21
 186:13,15 187:11 188:1
 191:7,12 192:22
 193:3,12,13
 194:4,13,18,20,21
 195:5,11,14
 196:8,9,11,15,18,19,21
 197:3,4,5,7,11 198:16,19
 199:12,13 203:6,17
 204:5,6,10,16,23
 205:15,23 206:11,11,11,24
 207:8,10,16,16
 208:1,15,18 209:8,17
 211:1 212:1,9
mosques (21) 57:6 128:18
 130:2 146:24 162:18
 177:4,5,5,10,17,20 179:19
 181:5 193:2 195:13
 196:5,10,22,24 201:16
 210:6
most (13) 3:11 33:5 57:6

64:14 65:5,8 78:25 79:2
 99:24 134:20 138:17
 139:16 177:5
mostly (3) 12:7 34:4 101:16
mother (4) 119:9 123:16
 124:8,16
motto (2) 81:9 129:22
mounted (1) 21:22
mouth (2) 21:17 200:23
move (11) 13:24 18:3,21
 59:24 93:8 113:3 152:17
 156:16 157:13 162:10
 165:14
movements (1) 41:3
moving (6) 15:11 22:21
 31:11 136:9 157:24 165:19
mp (3) 194:3,6,8
mps (4) 68:11 69:9 193:23
 194:2
ms (1) 187:14
much (42) 11:22 18:23 23:22
 32:11 33:21 44:25 45:1
 46:12 48:10 49:12 56:1,18
 65:12 69:20 77:4 79:6
 82:17 90:11 91:22 97:23
 105:3 109:7 120:22 122:18
 126:20 126:7 127:10
 132:24 136:8 168:15 170:3
 176:15,21 181:16,23
 185:7,7 189:16 190:4
 192:2 195:4 214:21
muchloved (2) 104:1,2
mufti (1) 16:22
multitude (1) 135:24
muslim (25) 5:11 63:13 64:6
 65:3,15,17,17,19 66:19
 79:19 90:21 105:22 120:12
 154:1,1 155:21 166:25
 176:23,24,24 177:2 203:6
 207:18 211:9,9
muslims (38) 4:10 54:7
 55:20 59:11 63:1,21 64:16
 65:6 66:9 78:9,10,25 79:2
 97:18 102:1 126:3 145:17
 151:12,12 152:6
 153:11,17,18
 154:7,8,8,18,24 155:17
 156:7 164:9 166:18 180:2
 196:1,3 203:21,21 206:25
must (14) 3:7 45:4,7 51:7
 78:5 83:6 109:14,23
 124:13 144:4 174:6 198:2
 201:13 214:19
mustafa (46) 4:16 5:3 6:4
 7:6,18,20 8:15 67:25 68:1
 70:4 93:15 101:2 103:8
 104:11 105:20 125:3,7,19
 142:2,4,10,14 143:9,16,20
 144:17 146:5,8 147:4,8
 148:9,25 149:14,18
 151:1,15 157:10 182:19
 183:23 186:5 197:18 199:2
 203:20 204:1,19,22
mustnt (1) 174:6
myself (15) 50:9 64:9 66:21
 71:19 105:11 133:7 138:18
 160:14 170:23,25 178:3
 187:9,18 194:17,25

N

n (1) 216:1
naive (4) 147:15,17
 148:15,19
name (23) 12:24 13:2,6,7
 51:25 52:1 78:14 86:17
 100:25 102:16 121:1 123:8
 149:2,7 161:10 163:15
 166:6 173:15 213:22,23,24
 214:2,4
named (2) 10:6 154:25
names (5) 35:22 72:20 73:16
 87:5 149:10
narrative (2) 23:15 25:19
nasheeds (1) 20:10
nation (1) 101:10

national (4) 163:23 176:23
 177:1 199:7
native (1) 93:22
natives (2) 55:19 97:18
naturally (4) 87:16 103:7
 122:20 128:24
nature (2) 62:19 91:9
nearer (1) 120:14
neat (3) 46:3,5,16
necessarily (3) 146:4 150:23
 188:5
necessary (3) 39:3 155:18
 202:24
need (32) 7:15 13:3 15:18
 29:19 53:12,13 60:2,4
 63:11 80:6 86:10,11
 102:15,23 105:2 129:14,22
 132:20 149:25 160:1 161:6
 168:13 179:22 183:13
 188:4 192:8 194:6 201:22
 213:25 214:11,12,13
needed (2) 28:11 171:24
needs (1) 177:19
negate (1) 130:11
negative (10) 76:3,7
 130:9,12,12,13
 170:11,12,13,14
neighbour (1) 5:12
neighbours (5)
 194:9,10,14,15 195:3
neither (1) 176:4
nervous (2) 131:1,3
network (5) 173:8,9,10,17,21
neutral (2) 10:3 187:9
neutralise (1) 127:21
neutralising (1) 127:22
neutrally (1) 89:9
never (53) 35:3 64:22 65:13
 66:23 67:15 72:25 76:6
 77:16 79:15 81:15 85:14
 98:22 106:2,3 115:15
 119:9,10,23
 120:8,16,17,20,20,22,22
 121:3,4 122:5,5,8,16
 123:6,7,14 124:19 131:11
 137:22 141:9 166:11,12
 167:2 172:17 174:2,10
 175:3,17 178:25 185:19
 205:11 206:1,5 211:22
 212:18
nevertheless (2) 35:21 71:13
news (14) 97:16,17 104:12
 116:25 121:5 124:5 136:19
 137:1,3,6,10 138:24
 143:14 171:18
newspaper (1) 137:17
newspapers (1) 212:23
next (18) 3:21 14:25 33:24
 42:23 46:24 52:23 67:3
 72:4 93:10 94:3 100:13
 110:16 116:15 118:5
 127:12 134:20 187:13,15
nice (2) 175:18 178:13
nigeria (3) 52:19 137:23
 195:15
nigerian (1) 79:18
night (5) 104:12 136:3
 167:13 168:3 181:2
nissan (2) 43:22 44:1
nobody (1) 81:17
nod (1) 71:20
nodding (1) 114:9
nonarabs (2) 62:6 210:20
none (4) 67:19 132:24
 175:12 177:19
nonetheless (4) 4:23 7:4
 67:21 86:5
nonislamic (1) 193:21
nonmuslims (4) 65:6 180:3
 194:16 196:3
nonterrorist (1) 28:7
noon (1) 58:9
nor (3) 10:8 63:5 158:20
normal (3) 58:2 171:3,4
normally (4) 38:21 58:5
 139:23 161:8

north (3) 55:18 75:10 87:15
northern (4) 77:20 97:14
 105:1 151:22
note (3) 41:19,22 42:1
noted (1) 31:16
notes (4) 106:5 160:25 161:1
 162:4
nothing (18) 37:10,11
 125:16 131:5 132:15
 140:17 145:20 148:17
 150:3,7,18 153:10 156:6
 170:12,14,20 203:18 211:4
notice (1) 31:21
notorious (1) 19:19
notwithstanding (3) 58:6
 100:3 164:2
november (14) 1:1
 12:14,16,20,21,24 13:13
 15:6,13 117:9 118:7
 123:17 124:10 215:6
nth (2) 28:2,3
number (24) 1:12 4:9 5:6
 8:2 32:1,17,18 38:3 43:2,4
 52:12 57:24 86:15 94:9
 96:16 98:7 105:12 134:4
 145:7 148:23 166:2,17
 176:16 196:22
numbers (3) 32:13 116:4
 196:12
numerous (1) 160:23

O

oath (2) 67:12 85:9
object (1) 89:2
objected (1) 86:18
objecting (1) 99:15
objection (2) 164:20 165:4
objectionable (1) 87:2
objective (2) 54:1,6
objectives (1) 53:25
objects (3) 53:7,22 72:11
obligations (1) 95:21
obscured (1) 41:11
observation (3) 81:24 110:7
 171:7
observations (1) 75:14
observe (5) 62:24 72:5
 106:22 113:12 115:8
observes (2) 83:2,9
observing (1) 75:15
obtain (1) 162:6
obvious (1) 66:12
obviously (7) 26:23 91:11
 113:4 114:7 158:6 181:5
 182:11
occasion (8) 34:10 37:14
 68:3 73:9 98:15 104:5
 173:4 201:8
occasional (1) 211:17
occasionally (2) 117:11
 212:5
occasions (4) 87:14 159:6
 173:2 204:5
occurred (1) 86:24
oclock (1) 208:21
october (4) 59:4 69:18 86:16
 87:22
offence (2) 132:9,12
offences (2) 72:16,17
offend (2) 130:20 146:15
offending (1) 131:2
offensive (1) 100:8
offensively (1) 95:18
office (1) 149:10
officer (14) 14:2 15:20 26:20
 34:22 40:23 45:16 110:22
 112:4 148:21 149:20,25
 163:14 167:22 205:22
officers (10) 13:14 15:14
 24:16 43:10 45:13 76:4
 149:3,18 164:13 193:11
official (2) 134:6 139:18
officials (1) 163:4
often (5) 29:8,17 61:3
 163:10 197:4

oh (5) 36:12 48:16 116:7
 150:5 161:23
okay (28) 13:13 15:13 16:1
 17:3 26:5 27:25 30:8 31:11
 45:9 71:21 80:9 83:8 90:1
 97:12 104:16 112:5 132:2
 133:20 138:21 144:23
 152:8,16 155:14 157:5
 172:6 181:3 190:9 209:23
old (10) 38:18 184:5,5,5
 185:3,7,18 153:10 156:6
 200:11
older (2) 75:3 121:25
oldest (2) 52:24 53:15
omar (3) 71:2 103:7,7
once (4) 134:5 161:13
 163:11 187:16
onepart (1) 195:24
ones (9) 39:7,7,8 55:6 64:8
 82:20,20 194:18 205:14
ongoing (2) 29:14 164:24
online (3) 17:11,18 24:11
open (16) 10:16,24
 17:3,5,18,21 53:11 57:7
 65:3 84:25 85:17 127:9
 134:19 141:12 153:22
 165:1
opening (3) 41:18 43:8 176:2
operation (7) 6:7 14:13
 16:18 27:17 31:24 50:14,15
 51:10
opinion (12) 48:18 63:21
 68:13 84:21 87:6 88:22
 98:16,16 127:25 129:7
 190:7,9
opinions (1) 203:23
opportunity (9) 59:11 94:4
 158:2,5,7,13 162:12 182:4
 187:17
oppose (1) 129:23
opposed (8) 129:9,20
 130:4,13 145:8,11 171:4
 199:24
opposition (1) 8:9
order (8) 41:21 70:9 71:10
 75:5 96:3 102:6 133:21
 155:19
ordinary (1) 31:18
organisation (6) 3:3 65:17,18
 110:4 112:20 162:25
orientate (1) 43:7
origin (3) 74:5,8 197:10
original (2) 74:13 198:17
originates (1) 76:24
others (18) 30:20 32:10
 59:15 68:17 72:2 84:7
 92:13 104:18 107:7 118:17
 126:8 153:11,18 156:7
 175:5 177:6 182:13 203:2
otherwise (3) 154:23 158:20
 165:15
ought (2) 61:12 158:7
ours (1) 133:24
ourselves (3) 71:18 165:11
 209:4
outcome (1) 114:24
outer (2) 60:24 152:11
outlets (1) 137:7
outlooks (1) 195:8
outside (11) 48:8 58:19 60:1
 93:6 114:11 127:16 175:17
 187:5,11 207:18 208:24
over (37) 13:15 46:1 54:23
 59:19 61:6 63:5,20
 69:16,23 80:5 81:20 82:8
 85:1 88:13 105:5 110:16
 120:4,25 123:19 124:1,17
 133:21 135:16 138:13
 153:11 156:7 173:5,22
 183:2 192:20 193:15 197:7
 198:19 199:19 204:9
 208:14 212:10
overall (1) 135:6
overlying (1) 199:15
own (13) 52:14 60:5 65:23
 75:14 82:16 95:6,20 106:8

155:17 162:15 182:12
 204:10 207:11

P

pack (1) 78:23
pages (1) 82:24
paid (2) 159:3 171:1
pakistan (1) 200:8
pakistani (1) 54:15
pakistanis (1) 54:17
paper (2) 75:11 77:17
papers (16) 66:21 68:9 70:

85:12 93:21 97:22 98:8,17 99:1 103:10 110:13 114:11 115:5 119:18 121:16 122:20,23 125:20 126:2,15 127:15,16 130:16,21 131:1,8,10 136:5,6 138:1,3,4,8,17 139:7,16,23 140:1,6,6 141:7 145:24 146:5 149:2 154:8 155:11 156:20,22,24 157:2 158:2,12 159:7,8,9,16 162:24,25 163:12 168:11 169:15,18 170:18 172:10 173:6 174:2,3,5,12,13,15 176:8,12 178:24 180:1,2,14 183:23 186:15,25 193:19,24 194:13,14,16,16,19,20,21 195:8,21,22,22 196:24 197:9,14 198:15 202:25 203:4,5 207:22,24 208:9,11,13,21,22 210:10	perverted (2) 156:22,25 petrol (2) 45:22 47:23 phone (9) 2:3,5 15:15 28:9 31:16,18 44:9 94:14 171:14 phones (2) 31:13,20 photograph (10) 5:8 16:21 18:4,11 42:20,23 43:8 47:16 70:4,10 photographs (8) 22:4 37:6 42:7,18 46:20,22,24 47:14 phrase (2) 37:2 121:10 picture (16) 20:24 21:2,7,24 23:9 43:4 46:9 143:15,19 147:5 152:18,19 185:20 188:1,17,21 211:22 pictures (6) 35:5,6 38:16 45:12,17,19 piece (3) 21:19 32:11 49:24 pile (1) 28:16 piled (2) 28:16 43:2 pilot (1) 19:21 place (29) 3:15 27:12 34:16 40:23 42:22 43:6 47:12 57:12,13,17 74:20 82:9 84:4,14 85:1,23 89:17 95:25 111:16 139:5,10 140:5,22 157:20 161:25 171:24 181:6 195:7 201:22 plain (1) 3:9 plan (6) 108:3,10,19,21 109:6,7 plane (1) 102:21 planning (2) 32:1,5 plate (1) 188:19 play (4) 183:13 189:22,25 190:2 played (5) 49:16 50:12 183:14 187:21 189:8 playing (5) 184:25 189:13,17,23 190:16 pleasant (1) 119:20 pleasantries (1) 140:24 please (60) 6:6 20:23 21:6,11,16,24 33:24 36:4 38:12 39:12 41:1,7,9,16,20 42:7,23 43:4 47:18 51:13,21,24 52:23 53:12 62:4 76:5,5 89:4 96:11 100:22 101:22 107:9 108:16 110:16,25 116:2 118:25 119:22 132:8,15 141:3,21,23 146:25 152:9,24 153:1 158:15,16 159:13 162:8 173:1 180:7 186:8 187:22 190:1 192:15 205:8 213:14,16 pleased (1) 12:6 plot (2) 32:1,5 pluralistic (1) 62:25 plyboard (1) 47:22 pm (6) 107:10,12,14 165:23,25 215:4 pockets (2) 97:23 98:19 poer (1) 50:12 poined (4) 3:6 35:11 142:4,16 pointing (3) 22:25 23:10,17 points (3) 32:2 61:1 173:21 police (58) 12:25 42:6 43:19 49:14,22 69:9 70:16,17,18 190:5,18 201:15 202:11 204:11 205:8,10 personal (7) 36:1 52:14 132:15 164:12 182:12 202:17 203:23 personally (22) 57:19 65:23 71:20 73:7 75:21 77:25 79:14 104:9 116:5 117:20 119:23 137:4,5 145:13 154:16 164:12 165:6 172:3 202:18 203:2 205:4 212:20 persons (5) 55:24 57:24 80:12 110:1 173:12 perspective (3) 28:13 49:10 181:10	111:2,8 162:23 207:10 208:1 political (8) 89:20 91:9 129:11,21 130:5,14 145:23 203:23 politically (1) 131:4 politics (23) 59:25 60:1 74:11 88:19 89:17 90:8,19 91:21,22 93:5 97:12 123:10 140:14,17 145:14,15,18 159:5,8,12 200:14 201:23 202:16 populated (1) 97:16 population (1) 97:15 port (16) 12:11,14 13:14,21,25 15:5,13 19:4 23:25 25:10 27:15 34:7,21 35:10 36:5,25 portals (1) 137:6 portstopped (1) 16:3 pose (4) 112:22 113:15 124:23 182:3 position (34) 1:20 2:4 5:14,23 6:22 10:22 24:22 35:12,15 52:7 57:6 62:18 64:13 79:7 85:11 89:5,21 93:3,9 96:24 99:7 114:25,25 118:2 128:17 129:24 130:2 135:1 141:6 185:3 186:4 192:10,12 204:21 positioned (1) 47:4 positive (7) 81:11,13 130:11,12 151:11 202:14 206:5 positivedriven (2) 130:9,10 positively (1) 185:4 possession (1) 37:22 possibility (1) 152:8 possible (4) 30:19 89:23 110:6 174:23 possibly (3) 25:25 30:7 213:7 post (1) 19:20 posts (1) 202:24 potential (3) 5:4 170:19 177:13 potentially (1) 127:16 poverty (3) 54:2 60:2 202:1 power (1) 109:24 powerful (1) 152:4 practice (2) 109:12 110:5 practised (1) 63:19 practising (1) 64:9 pray (6) 58:19 65:5,7 131:14,15 191:21 58:8,9,19 61:20,21 88:5,6,13 119:4,13,15,19,21,23,24 120:9,11,12,15,25 121:22 139:15,23 140:9 187:11,25 188:10,21 189:2,12 191:2 195:21,22 208:20 210:21 prayers (16) 57:25 58:2,5,6,15 59:8 139:16 159:6 168:9,11 174:11,12 187:3,23 208:8,9 preach (1) 180:7 preacher (3) 17:7,14 156:10 preachers (1) 180:4 preceding (1) 110:24 precipitated (1) 27:21 precisely (4) 40:13 62:14 101:24 182:24 preempted (1) 160:2 prefer (1) 135:24 preferred (1) 55:7 preferring (1) 63:5 premises (1) 142:11 preparation (1) 111:8 prepare (2) 105:12 160:10 prepared (4) 6:17 122:20,21 160:11 preparing (1) 123:23 present (8) 6:24 8:16 9:2 19:11 129:18,18 143:13	150:22 presented (1) 47:3 preserving (1) 101:12 press (24) 56:25 63:11 66:1 94:21 22 95:9 114:18 116:3,5,12 117:4 128:16 129:1,3 167:1 175:17,20,21 178:4 185:20 191:23 205:1,3 211:23 pressed (1) 117:25 pressing (1) 61:9 presumably (3) 138:3 145:21 197:3 presume (3) 16:8 129:9 137:11 presumes (1) 169:24 presumption (1) 22:6 pretty (6) 15:3 19:25 171:12 184:5,5 212:9 prevent (6) 162:11,12,17,21 163:1,4 previous (1) 204:21 previously (1) 159:5 priests (1) 59:14 primarily (1) 160:7 primary (1) 105:17 principle (1) 154:13 printer (1) 173:20 prior (4) 33:7 81:5 123:23 158:21 prioritise (1) 197:8 prison (5) 2:3 31:13,16,18,20 private (1) 149:8 probably (11) 13:3 23:8 39:1 41:7 43:21 45:11 90:13 183:15 185:1 187:18 206:20 problem (10) 77:25 79:8,11 87:17 95:19 100:22 103:21 130:24 132:14 149:21 problems (6) 10:6 56:22 113:10 136:20 138:23 146:8 procedure (1) 134:25 proceedings (2) 1:3 107:13 process (9) 29:22 30:5,6 32:15 134:11,17 153:13 161:1 169:5 produced (2) 96:16 170:1 profession (1) 201:12 professionals (1) 134:2 programme (1) 162:17 programs (3) 29:2,3,6 prohibited (2) 102:5 207:14 prominent (2) 8:9 9:6 promise (3) 94:4 104:14 180:25 promote (1) 197:12 pronounced (1) 62:14 pronunciation (1) 62:8 propagandist (3) 1:20,22 72:19 proper (5) 64:6 90:21 102:18 151:5 161:12 properly (6) 34:11 103:10 178:21 209:8,12 213:4 property (1) 102:7 61:4,9,15,23 62:2,4,18 63:11,17 64:12,19,21 65:1,9,13,15 66:12,16 67:3,14,17,21,24 68:3,7,18 69:21,24 70:2,4,8 71:5,16,23 72:1,9,13 73:7,12,24 74:2,7,10,15,21 75:2,14 76:9,13,16 77:9,24 78:3 81:1,23 80:13,16,21,23 83:5,9,25 85:11,22,25 86:3,5 87:22 88:1 89:3,5,12,18,25 90:2,5,11 91:3,11,13 93:19 94:16,22 95:2,5,9,11,17,20,24 96:2,5,8,12,16,19,21 97:1,6,9,11 99:2,7,9 100:6,15,17 102:12,23 103:21 104:5,16 105:6,16 106:22 107:1	108:2 125:14 provided (7) 9:9 52:11 94:11 108:4 117:6 187:19 202:24 providing (1) 1:16 provision (2) 54:4 108:20 provoke (1) 87:7 proximity (1) 196:24 prudently (1) 109:22 public (5) 128:8 130:15 151:7 170:3 210:11 publicised (1) 7:19 publicity (1) 56:18 published (2) 149:23 150:1 pulled (1) 43:12 purchased (1) 53:4 purely (2) 123:12 134:23 purpose (10) 45:19 57:18 71:6 76:1 79:10 80:17 83:7 93:20 105:17 155:10 purposes (5) 19:11 28:5 39:3 77:12 78:3 pursue (5) 129:10,20 130:4,14 176:20 pursuing (1) 34:9 pushing (1) 41:12 puts (1) 23:4 putting (8) 26:20 38:21 51:3 61:11 130:8 144:17 152:21 182:22 pwincness (1) 35:25	108:2,6,13,16 109:8,10,22 111:5,8,12,14,16,20,24 112:16,19 113:12,20 114:5,15,19,23 115:5,8,14,19,23 116:2,14,17,22 117:6,25 118:2,7,13,16,19 119:1,12,25 120:4,7,24 121:6,8,10,13,15,19,24 122:10,16 123:5,8,10,15 124:2,7,10,16 126:12,14 127:3,19,21 128:3,13,16 129:6,9,13,16,18,24 130:13,16,18,20,25 131:7,16,20 132:18,22,25 133:5,8,11,13,15,17 134:15,22,25 135:4,6,19,23 136:9,13,19,23 137:1,5,11,13 139:4 140:5,11,17,20 141:2,18,21 142:13 143:12,15,19 146:18,25 147:2,4,19,24 148:1,4,9 149:1,4,7,11,13,16 150:4,14,21,25 151:11,15,23 152:2 154:3,16,20 159:20 160:19,25 163:10,19,22 164:17 165:13 166:6,8,15,17,22,24 167:6,13 168:22,24 169:4,13,24 170:9,15 172:20,23 173:2 174:5,17,23 175:5,8,10 177:12,15,21,23 178:8,15,23 179:4,8,11,14 180:12 182:11,15,21 183:4,6,20,23 184:1,3,8,23 185:1,9,15,22 186:3,9,12 187:2,8,13 188:3,12,23 191:5,9,23 193:1,10,19 195:4,11 196:5,12,15,22 197:1,7,14,17,21 198:11,19,24 199:7,11,15,19,22 200:2,4,7,10,13,18,23 201:11,19,24 202:3,6,9,11,13,16,23 203:11,14,17,22 204:1,5,14,25 205:4,7,15 206:18,22 207:10,13,18 208:1,7,25 209:13 210:10,12,21 211:3,25 212:3,5,7,14,22,25 213:6 qualified (1) 4:22 quantity (2) 39:23,25 quench (1) 194:14 question (51) 15:12 30:9 40:21 44:25 45:2 53:8 58:25 71:8 73:15,22 96:11 99:14 100:5 112:21,22 113:15,18 114:4,5,17 118:25 124:24 126:20,21 141:5 143:17 144:2,14,15,16,16 146:12 147:6,22,24 151:3 157:6 158:23 159:2 160:2,6 164:18 165:4 168:5 169:19 172:4 178:10 181:4 191:13,22,25 questioned (3) 148:20 191:16 212:19 questioning (6) 12:9 24:16 147:15 148:9,14 175:2 questions (83) 1:6 2:2 3:19,20 11:23,24,25 12:3-7 18:22 26:22 31:3 33:20 34:1,3,6 38:22 40:10 44:6 50:4,5 51:23 59:2 62:21 72:1 87:10 94:17 99:16 101:6 107:7,25 110:23 113:22 118:21,22 119:7 124:21,22 127:11,12,13 132:2,4,18,20 143:8 150:21 151:1,2 158:10,11	166:2,2 169:17 176:8 178:22 181:8,11,14,15,21,22,24 182:1,3,5 183:9,10 186:12 192:3,13,16,17 197:17 214:20,23 216:4,5,6,9,10,11,12 quickly (2) 13:24 14:25 quiet (2) 88:8 99:22 quite (3) 9:6 13:12 16:15 28:20 29:8,17 32:15 36:18 46:3 49:18,24 50:17 58:8 61:3 86:11 91:21 102:24 104:3 112:13,25 120:13 137:5 138:16 146:14 156:9 161:8 176:16 193:20 196:4 197:2 200:25 201:2 quizzical (1) 118:23 quote (2) 83:3 105:16
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R

131:3 140:4 167:2,3 171:4 172:23 176:13 183:6 191:13 193:17 196:19 197:18 198:14 rear (6) 42:20,21,24 43:1,3,5 rearrange (1) 46:5 reason (28) 13:1 14:10 29:7 34:20 47:2 61:9 68:19 69:7 81:12 83:4 90:25 113:9,19 116:23 125:10,18 126:15 129:6 130:8,17,19,22 147:19 161:19 172:5 174:20,21 194:5 reasonable (1) 109:23 reasonably (1) 170:8 reasons (6) 17:10 63:11 125:11 146:13 149:5 153:17 rebels (1) 14:7 recall (13) 34:23 35:3 75:8,11 77:4,24 94:22 115:15,16 117:18 153:14 155:24 182:24 received (2) 109:4 181:18 receiver (1) 125:15 recently (2) 184:3,4 recognise (7) 167:19 185:22 190:5,6,18,19 214:2 recognised (2) 23:11 211:23 recognising (1) 104:16 recollection (15) 24:18 35:17 39:9 48:1,9 55:13,14 56:2,7 68:25 115:2,19 124:17 155:16 166:9 recommendation (1) 172:6 recommendations (3) 96:17,19 209:11 record (8) 14:1,18 15:16,19 35:9,14 37:7 168:12 recorded (6) 14:2 31:22 35:23 38:9 41:18 94:14 recording (2) 86:7 97:6 records (3) 168:8,11 214:18 recount (1) 176:13 recovered (6) 27:16 28:7,8 34:10 39:24 49:20 recoveries (2) 27:13,23 recreation (1) 54:5 recruit (3) 206:2,6,7 recruiter (1) 10:19 recruiting (1) 206:12 recruitment (8) 20:12 24:12 25:13,16,17 26:1 34:13 76:2 red (2) 9:5 179:21 redacted (1) 20:4 redundant (2) 84:24 157:22 refer (10) 13:3 20:2,4 53:12 57:11 71:2 82:17 154:3 162:25 166:17 reference (11) 3:13 13:24 26:17 34:19 37:15 101:7 160:3 167:23 170:9 183:12 193:1 references (3) 141:2 160:4 202:23 referred (7) 21:12 31:8 106:17 108:10 115:23 201:8 207:2 referring (3) 17:25 27:2 118:7 refers (1) 13:5 reflected (1) 152:20 refrain (1) 39:16 refuse (1) 180:17 refute (3) 131:24 174:3,5 refuted (1) 174:8 regard (2) 102:12 127:5 regarding (2) 15:14 24:12 regardless (2) 29:24 152:2 regards (1) 125:3 regime (4) 97:13 199:8 200:8,11 registered (1) 53:19 regular (8) 83:17 157:3 173:24 174:8,10,24 204:14 211:16 regulations (3) 58:24 172:16 204:12 regulatory (1) 108:18 reiterate (1) 88:23 rejected (1) 66:17 related (3) 25:25 26:1 83:11 relates (2) 107:19 213:12 relating (4) 7:14 25:12 204:16 213:18 relation (28) 2:19,22 9:8 11:6 25:7,7 27:14,23 28:7,20 35:24 63:12 89:6 106:6 107:17 113:21,22 114:8,21 115:9 118:19 126:8 172:7 197:17 198:24 204:19 207:10 212:14 relationship (11) 69:8 70:17 75:25 164:24 176:22 177:10 193:22,23 194:7,10 195:2 relative (1) 10:3 relatives (2) 76:24 118:23 relevant (12) 15:22,24 16:7 28:25 30:19 32:14 36:13 50:7 62:20 110:3,19 114:16 relied (2) 61:13 106:12 relief (2) 54:2 201:25 relieving (1) 201:25 religion (11) 57:20 60:25 63:23 78:14 123:11 130:10 151:13 186:22 194:25 198:22 211:6 religious (8) 1:12 84:4 129:10,20 130:5,14 180:10 195:8 rely (1) 106:4 remain (1) 1:9 remainder (1) 45:3 remember (25) 55:4 67:19 68:5,5 69:3,14,21,22 70:7 79:17 83:2 86:12 100:2 111:6 123:5 124:13 146:6 147:14 155:19 161:6,23 178:2 198:2 201:11 210:19 remembered (3) 115:5 125:5,24 remind (4) 40:20 44:5 50:9 161:22 reminded (3) 60:9 61:15 127:25 reminders (1) 88:7 remotely (1) 26:23 removed (4) 43:12,13,20 48:6 repeat (5) 18:22 100:5 133:25 144:16 151:2 repeated (3) 101:14 131:16,17 repeating (2) 96:11 152:21 repetition (2) 141:18 181:7 rephrase (1) 118:25 report (34) 6:17 15:14 16:8,10 27:5 34:20 35:14 36:3 72:2 80:1 93:14,25 94:6,11 95:15,16,20 96:9,14,16,20 100:25 118:9 141:22,25 142:2,14 145:2,3 154:11 155:2 167:21 176:10 211:12 reported (13) 68:7 69:16 94:2 115:14,20 117:16 137:7 158:6,20 167:18 212:16,18 reporting (7) 7:18 10:17,24 110:19 114:1,8 137:17 reports (4) 95:11 105:12 122:19 166:14 represent (4) 132:19 135:10,11 159:22 representative (2) 63:1 159:23 represented (2) 51:20 55:21 reprimand (1) 103:24 reprimanded (1) 60:9	reputable (1) 137:7 reputations (6) 128:7,13,21,23,24 158:7 required (1) 109:19 requirement (2) 109:12,13 rereading (1) 35:18 resisted (1) 205:18 respect (19) 23:25 45:16 58:23 62:13 63:16 85:20 87:1 88:2 106:1 120:17,18 132:5,8 141:15 154:19 185:10 193:5,7 195:7 respected (1) 93:21 respects (1) 181:12 responding (1) 158:13 response (3) 83:25 158:4 192:20 responsibilities (3) 81:9 108:23 135:18 responsibility (3) 80:2 110:17 205:12 responsible (2) 3:18 28:23 rest (3) 167:10 168:13 208:12 restart (1) 51:13 restarted (1) 163:16 restrict (1) 124:16 restructure (1) 157:18 restructured (1) 157:17 restructuring (2) 81:8 157:23 result (12) 10:7 11:8 13:6 27:20 46:18 78:10 95:11 96:5 101:18,20 139:4 171:9 retire (1) 135:3 retired (2) 50:16 149:9 retrieved (1) 30:20 return (6) 31:6 60:12 71:17 168:7 204:21 212:5 returned (1) 214:7 returning (2) 12:17 19:3 reveal (1) 2:22 revealed (2) 2:19 3:23 review (6) 27:12 29:13,14 30:3,15 162:21 reviewed (2) 27:6 110:10 reviewing (1) 125:4 revolution (2) 7:21 142:9 rich (1) 210:7 richard (1) 167:22 rifle (4) 14:14 15:2 21:2,5 rightly (2) 113:12 146:19 rightminded (1) 130:2 rights (2) 201:19 204:10 ringing (1) 147:9 rise (2) 112:20,20 risk (9) 3:16 81:2 104:16 109:1 127:4,5 156:20,24 191:10 road (7) 40:2 64:10 65:10 66:10 82:6 104:2 131:17 robert (3) 6:16 98:8 106:23 rocketpropelled (1) 21:14 role (2) 11:11 95:14 roll (2) 123:1 189:24 room (3) 168:12 208:13 209:3 rooms (1) 207:24 roots (3) 52:17 76:23 79:18 roughly (1) 117:18 round (2) 160:22 189:12 roundly (1) 66:16 royston (1) 37:18 rules (1) 204:11 run (3) 139:19 189:5 194:20 runs (2) 82:24 139:18 russell (1) 51:2 russia (3) 153:9 156:5 200:2 russian (2) 153:11 156:7 russians (1) 199:9	s sabratha (2) 16:1,6 sacred (1) 84:3 saceti (2) 88:17,18 safe (1) 91:15 safeguard (1) 109:14 safeguarding (12) 109:11 110:8,9,10,13,15,17,20 111:1,12 112:2,10 safer (2) 157:9,15 safety (5) 46:12,15 58:24 112:4 169:14 sake (3) 27:11 101:12 206:15 salafi (9) 64:19,21,22 65:13 66:2,16 206:11,11 207:14 salafis (3) 65:1,4 206:14 salafism (4) 63:14,15,18 64:13 salafist (5) 17:14 63:22,25 64:4,5 salafists (2) 64:8,10 salman (52) 3:4 6:23 9:2,25 11:6 13:16 14:13,22 15:1 21:16,25 30:20 31:14 32:3,21 33:15 38:12 40:18 41:1,4,21 43:20,25 48:24 107:4,17 113:21 114:3,12,21 115:2,14,20 117:11,14,17 118:4,20,23 119:3 121:25 123:16 124:16 143:13 144:2 157:2 158:22 173:23 180:15 182:8 211:13 212:9 salmons (1) 117:19 same (8) 8:13 62:18 135:11 162:16 176:19 177:7,8 204:1 samsung (1) 37:21 sata (1) 37:21 satan (1) 200:19 satisfied (1) 150:11 saunders (167) 2:8 12:1 15:9 18:3,8,15,20 22:3,9 23:12,16 25:10,17,23 26:5,10,16 30:18,23 31:2 33:22 36:13,22 38:10,18,21,24 39:20 40:11,14,20 42:10,15 44:2,20,23,25 45:9 48:4,6 49:6,13,18,22 50:1,8,15,18,21 51:7,14 62:22 68:22 69:2 78:5,9 79:1,4,6,21 80:4 85:3 91:20 92:1,3,6,10,13,15 93:1,7,23 94:3 98:5 99:10,15,22 100:1 103:11 106:6,14 107:9 113:24 124:25 126:6 132:2,6,10 134:9,11 137:16,20,24 138:1,7,21 142:23 143:2 144:6,23 145:5,10,19 146:3 152:8,13,16 155:14 156:1 157:5,11,20,22,24 158:11 159:3,23 161:7,13 162:7,19 163:6 165:6,22 167:20,25 168:15 171:6,9,21,23 172:6 173:10 174:7 175:16,25 176:15,21 181:3,9,15 184:13,17 189:1,5,14 190:13,23 192:4 200:25 201:4 205:21 206:1,6,9 209:23 210:2,4,16,23 213:9,21,23 214:11,21,23 215:3 saw (16) 46:22 70:6 75:12 113:9 116:9 117:11,17 166:12 167:2,15 174:2,3,5,19 185:8 211:22 saying (33) 33:11 39:21 58:22 61:1 71:12 84:19 85:3 20 88:18 95:3 98:17 103:1 104:7,19 107:24 117:8 126:16 127:1 128:9,19 130:13 131:7,18 137:4 141:14 150:17 152:3 155:7,20 159:10 174:8 178:17 181:10 scared (2) 56:17,21 scene (1) 198:25	schedule (4) 24:1,10 37:14 214:9 scholar (1) 2:16 school (7) 13:7 112:11 122:4,12 167:12 169:8 207:1 schoolchildren (1) 173:14 schools (6) 57:19 63:2,4,7 194:23,24 scope (1) 26:24 screen (7) 34:20 73:3 100:18,21,22 108:7 213:14 search (8) 29:20 34:13,16,25 35:2 46:10,12,19 searched (1) 37:5 searches (1) 43:14 searching (3) 28:23,24 32:12 seasoned (1) 19:22 seat (7) 42:24,25 43:18,25 45:22 47:12,17 seated (1) 185:18 seats (6) 42:21 43:1,3,11,12 46:2 second (14) 12:20 15:5,13 47:16 52:24 53:15 82:16 83:10 114:18 116:3 117:22 126:19 160:3 183:9 secondly (3) 2:2 3:8 16:5 section (2) 130:23 153:24 sect (2) 31:3 156:25 secure (1) 85:8 security (7) 68:14 69:8 165:1,10,12 178:20 205:13 see (80) 3:13 6:13,21 12:4 15:8,10 18:25 29:5 37:12,13 38:6 40:12 42:2,19,21,25 43:6 45:1,12,22,22,23,23 46:2,9,18 47:20 48:25 63:12 70:6 85:17 91:11 100:18 102:2 106:2 108:6 113:18 120:21 127:22 129:7,8 130:8,17,19 134:19 139:8 141:12 162:5,8 164:19 165:6 166:15 167:18 169:10 172:6 173:3 174:15,18,18,19 176:8,9 183:23 184:6 185:9,25 186:3 188:16 189:1,18 190:1 210:12,13 213:17,19,20,22,22 214:6,14 seeing (6) 73:16 78:13 115:16 152:22 162:4 187:23 seek (10) 11:3 83:7 101:10 111:16 114:24 182:17 185:15 187:9 194:6 213:10 seeking (4) 68:12 79:12 103:15 191:6 seem (4) 70:7 111:6 197:21 202:4 seemed (2) 43:9 123:16 seems (3) 124:2 168:10 178:24 seen (31) 8:13,16 9:5 41:13,18 44:7,20 70:4 102:13 104:12 116:7,9 117:3,7 118:4 121:4 128:7 148:13 149:24 150:2,4,6 174:2,12 183:16,18 185:20 189:4,10 206:19 208:2 selected (3) 1:11 37:14,17 select (3) 133:22,23 134:9 selected (2) 133:19 134:8 selection (3) 18:24 23:3 133:21 selfdefence (2) 102:7 155:18 semidetached (1) 196:20 send (1) 107:24 senior (4) 59:18 110:15 128:17 149:17 seniors (1) 62:17 sense (5) 7:11 39:10 104:21,22 113:19	sensitive (3) 20:8 37:12 101:23 sent (6) 101:1 102:9 104:8 117:9 138:18 151:18 sentence (1) 72:15 sentences (3) 63:17,18 91:3 separate (8) 6:11 7:4,14 140:5,21 144:11,13 165:19 separately (1) 14:5 series (2) 79:8 117:14 seriously (3) 109:8,9 171:1 sermon (74) 5:15,22,25 6:4,13,18,22,24 7:6 9:21 55:3 59:5,10,12,15,17,20 60:13,15,17 61:12 82:8 86:16 87:2,13,21,23 88:4,4,5,12,12,16,18 89:9,19,22 90:16 91:6,9 93:10,16 94:6,12,14,19,23 95:12 97:1,7 100:7 102:10 103:3,17 104:17 105:14,17,20 106:18 117:12 127:17 128:9 150:25 151:18 152:10,24 156:18 198:9 199:22 201:9,20,22 203:22 204:1 sermons (21) 55:8 59:3,9 61:6 86:15 87:12 103:21,25 104:7 115:17 117:12 125:23 179:25 197:17,22 198:11 202:17 203:5,8 210:17,18 serve (1) 84:4 service (2) 25:22 61:21 services (9) 61:20,23 68:14 69:9 157:16 165:2,10 178:20 205:13 servicing (1) 72:15 session (2) 175:11 209:13 sessions (2) 54:9 194:22 set (5) 46:24 60:14 108:21 114:23 198:25 sets (2) 27:13,24 setting (1) 79:1 setup (1) 78:6 seven (5) 58:9 136:16 134:17 159:24 161:20 several (2) 36:8 101:14 severe (1) 210:12,13 sexaa (1) 35:23 shaken (1) 153:3 shall (7) 61:8 75:24 92:19 139:12 159:14 163:13 169:3 shape (1) 201:19 shared (5) 15:22 16:6 84:11 98:16 151:19 sharia (3) 9:11 65:22 146:7 shelf (8) 40:7,23 42:22 43:6,13 44:23,24 45:3 shield (1) 83:12 shiites (1) 65:4 shock (4) 116:8 186:7 188:14 191:3 shocked (3) 116:6 117:4,5 shockingly (1) 87:1 shooting (1) 22:20 short (9) 51:16 61:15 65:9 105:17 107:18 112:24 123:23 165:24 178:10 shortcircuit (1) 201:2 shortly (5) 25:4 89:7 108:13 116:14 162:20 should (37) 3:6 16:6 26:12 29:23 30:3 57:23 60:17,17 65:21 84:6 85:8 110:5,10,14,20 113:2,9 120:12 126:18 130:15 132:18 143:21 147:9 148:13,24 150:17 162:25 177:15 179:5,21 181:11 187:13 192:6 193:25 203:5 205:14 213:17 shoulder (1) 80:2	shouldnt (6) 64:6 118:16 137:16 179:4,22 203:12 show (11) 8:12 15:25 20:15,19 37:22 40:24 100:13 183:9,21 186:4 199:19 showed (2) 23:9 37:1 showing (6) 7:19 47:17 49:14,22 139:8 184:3 shown (4) 8:7 50:9 183:7,8 shows (2) 47:3 49:20 shura (1) 200:13 sic (2) 156:19 195:1 side (15) 41:19 43:11 83:13,13 92:11,13 99:2 106:4 198:19 199:1,3,4,7 200:14,18 sides (4) 44:17 92:16 199:16 202:3 sign (1) 160:8 signals (2) 179:16,18 signed (1) 11:1 significance (3) 11:12 23:9 24:24 significant (4) 8:3 19:15 32:25 102:25 significantly (1) 45:8 signs (4) 80:7 139:9 179:16,18 silly (1) 179:14 similar (5) 133:24 135:17,18,18 155:17 simon (2) 1:5 216:3 simple (1) 24:7 simplest (1) 40:16 since (12) 40:9 52:7,9,15 56:9 68:8 83:10 122:21 133:9,11,13 196:8 sir (431) 2:8 11:24 12:1 15:9 18:3,8,15,20 22:3,9 23:12,16 25:10,17,20,23 26:5,10,16 30:18,23 31:2 33:22 34:19 36:13,15,22 38:10,18,21,24 39:20 40:11,13,14,16,20,24 42:10,13,15 44:2,20,22,23 45:9 48:4,6,9 49:6,13,17,18,22 50:1,5,8,14,15,17,18,21 51:7,11,14,18 52:4,8,10,13,20,22 53:1,6,8,21 54:16 56:1,4 57:5,5 58:4,20 60:18 61:7,14,22 62:1,22,23 63:15 64:17,20,24 65:2,12,25 66:3,20 67:7,10,15,23 68:1,9,21,22 69:2,20 70:11 71:4,8,15,25 72:8,12 74:1,25 75:19 76:12 77:13,23 78:2,5,9 79:1,3,4,6,15,21 80:4,22,25 81:4,22 82:2,3,22 84:10,17,22 85:3,7,10,14,18,24 86:2 87:19,21 90:17 91:1,10,
--	---	--	--	---	---

129:7,12,17 130:19,22	108:2 118:22 121:12	start (11) 12:10 132:18	subjected (1) 12:14	71:4,15 150:10	tend (2) 59:24 133:21	theories (1) 170:24
131:24 132:2,6,10,14,24	127:7,21,24 128:5,21	133:1 138:11 139:11 142:9	subscribe (1) 193:19	suspending (1) 204:19	tenets (1) 61:25	thereabouts (1) 191:3
133:14 134:9,11,14,17	130:2 150:17 155:24	159:8,9 173:8 208:21,22	subsequently (3) 97:6	suspension (1) 71:16	tensions (1) 199:12	thereafter (1) 27:9
136:18,22,25	172:24 173:4 177:18	started (11) 8:4 31:3 49:19	119:16 202:14	suspicion (2) 26:7 29:18	term (8) 8:2 61:10 65:15	thered (1) 40:6
137:14,16,20,23,24,25	186:16 212:16	55:5,14 73:16 84:25	substantial (2) 3:10 20:5	suspicious (2) 49:2-7	94:8 101:13,19,22 191:5	therefore (16) 14:21
138:1,6,7,21 140:19	sometimes (20) 2:12 58:17	153:5 196:1 211:25	substantiating (1) 89:24	suspicious (3) 28:11 48:17,18	terms (25) 3:13 10:4 11:14	62:11,16 65:9 68:13 71:14
141:1,9,13,17	80:11 82:7 136:2,3 140:13	157:9 196:1 211:25	succeeded (1) 49:5	suter (2) 4:1 160:13	23:5 52:10,23 60:1,24	79:20 81:19 101:22 113:3
142:12,12,23,24	151:7 159:8,16	161:17,22,24 163:11	starts (3) 89:1 159:9 177:7	sworn (3) 51:21,22 216:8	65:10 80:9 122:25	122:8 154:9 155:10 162:16
143:1,2,6,14,23 144:6,23	161:17,22,24 163:11	169:1,8 176:3 185:12	stated (6) 87:3 101:1 129:13	symbol (2) 23:19,21	125:5 150:1 169:15 170:23	180:7 207:23
145:5,10,19 146:3,6,17	169:1,8 176:3 185:12	198:3 201:22	150:7 161:16 193:6	sympathise (1) 87:8	184:19 187:9 193:19,21	therell (1) 100:21
147:18,23 148:6,20,24	198:3 201:22	somewhere (1) 202:25	4:24 7:16 11:2 13:3,8	sympathised (1) 91:15	196:12 198:11 208:11,14	theres (33) 15:14 23:8,22
149:23 150:24 151:10,14	somewhere (1) 202:25	son (2) 37:23 38:15	14:19 20:2 29:12 37:10	synagogues (1) 57:21	211:13	30:1,13 37:10 46:21 47:22
152:1,8,13,16 153:22	son (2) 37:23 38:15	sons (3) 13:16,17 14:22	52:18 53:10,13,25 54:12	synonym (1) 142:8	terrible (3) 155:11 192:1	50:6 60:2,2 63:12 66:18
154:14 155:14 156:1	soon (1) 15:3	sooner (1) 112:21	57:9 58:1 61:14,18 67:8	syria (26) 72:18 75:10	212:19	73:20 102:24 125:16
157:5,11,20,22,23,24	sophisticated (3) 102:17	sophisticated (3) 102:17	72:5 74:3,18 77:3	76:17,23,24 77:5,11,20	terrorism (1) 112:25	129:22 131:4 134:11
158:11 159:3,4,23 160:23	137:22 140:2	137:22 140:2	82:2,16,23 84:9,17 86:8	78:1,7 79:10,12 87:16	terrorist (8) 10:17 28:5	145:20 151:8 156:20,24
161:7,13,15 162:2,7,14,19	sort (12) 21:22 133:5 139:9	165:6,12,22 167:16,20,25	90:9,23 92:9 93:12 94:23	93:16 97:13,14 105:1,21	72:16,17 83:15 86:17 87:7	164:15,19 165:4 166:14
163:6,21 164:2	165:6,12,22 167:16,20,25	168:15 169:6,19 170:22	95:17 96:12,21 99:6	137:20,24,25 138:2 151:22	117:13	170:12 174:20 176:10
165:6,12,22 167:16,20,25	168:15 169:6,19 170:22	171:6,8,9,21,23	106:13 114:23 115:25	153:10 156:6 178:5	text (1) 152:23	178:5 208:19 209:1
167:6,8,13,21 173:10,22	171:6,8,9,21,23	172:6,8,13,21 173:10,22	117:21 122:11,20 123:23	syrian (9) 52:18 79:18	textile (4) 133:6,7 172:22	theyd (2) 25:3,3
174:4,7,17	172:6,8,13,21 173:10,22	174:4,7,17	124:7 125:2 126:24 131:24	138:4,5,8,16 183:1,1	195:18	theyll (1) 137:17
175:7,15,16,20,24,25	174:4,7,17	175:7,15,16,20,24,25	140:25 144:21 154:5	195:15	thank (84) 2:9 10:12 11:22	theyre (16) 21:10 22:11 23:2
176:6,15,18,21 177:14,19	175:7,15,16,20,24,25	176:6,15,18,21 177:14,19	155:11 158:15	syrians (3) 55:19 138:12	12:1,5 15:5 16:13 18:20	28:18 29:7 45:17,19
178:3,9,22,25	176:6,15,18,21 177:14,19	178:3,9,22,25	159:19,20,21,23	193:16	22:9 26:5,16,17 31:2	135:13 140:14,23 175:14
179:6,10,13,24	178:3,9,22,25	179:6,10,13,24	160:4,4,7,10,11,13,18,21	system (4) 22:19 140:2	33:21,22,23 36:20,22	191:17 194:17,21 208:11
180:4,17,25 181:3,9,15,20	179:6,10,13,24	180:4,17,25 181:3,9,15,20	161:3,5,8,12 162:5,14	173:11,11	38:24 39:16,20 40:4,14	211:9
182:20 183:22,25	180:4,17,25 181:3,9,15,20	182:20 183:22,25	170:22 172:13 192:22	systems (2) 29:9 32:13	42:15 47:8 49:12 50:1,2,3	theyve (2) 61:6 164:14
184:5,13,17 185:19 188:11	182:20 183:22,25	184:5,13,17 185:19 188:11	198:17,18 209:14 212:21	tab (4) 14:1 15:16 24:2	51:11,11,14 69:19,20,20	thing (17) 11:8 36:23 40:15
189:1,5,9,14 190:9,13,23	184:5,13,17 185:19 188:11	189:1,5,9,14 190:9,13,23	statements (9) 3:9 52:12	26:19	71:14 79:4,6 80:4 86:4	46:14,14 47:8 58:21 88:15
191:8,13,22 192:4,18,25	189:1,5,9,14 190:9,13,23	191:8,13,22 192:4,18,25	66:13 82:13,19 91:18	tab (3) 160:22 185:18,23	92:10 93:7 94:2 106:11,25	138:19 139:10 163:16
193:9 196:25 200:25 201:4	191:8,13,22 192:4,18,25	193:9 196:25 200:25 201:4	124:14 131:4 132:3	tablets (1) 213:3	107:5 112:1 113:24 124:20	169:6 175:18 180:8 182:15
203:16 205:21	193:9 196:25 200:25 201:4	203:16 205:21	125:12,14 163:8 164:4	tabs (1) 104:6	126:6,7,20 127:10 132:24	189:7 202:4
206:1,6,9,13,25 207:12	203:16 205:21	206:1,6,9,13,25 207:12	165:11	tacit (1) 208:3	133:8 136:7,9 138:21	thinking (1) 175:14
208:17 209:23	206:1,6,9,13,25 207:12	208:17 209:23	statutory (1) 108:20	taken (21) 13:14 14:22 15:21	147:2,3 163:6 168:15	third (2) 47:16 117:22
210:2,4,9,16,18,23 212:24	208:17 209:23	210:2,4,9,16,18,23 212:24	stay (2) 59:25 70:21	18:11 22:4,4 26:2 34:16	172:7,8 173:23 174:23	thorough (1) 30:25
213:9,10,17,20,21,23	210:2,4,9,16,18,23 212:24	213:9,10,17,20,21,23	step (1) 60:10	45:12 46:9,25 47:5 89:8	176:15,18,21 177:21,23	thoroughly (3) 11:20 55:9
214:3,11,21,23 215:2,3	213:9,10,17,20,21,23	214:3,11,21,23 215:2,3	steps (9) 104:18 107:2	95:25 104:18 107:3 132:24	180:19 181:22,25 184:17	76:20
sister (1) 13:4	214:3,11,21,23 215:2,3	214:3,11,21,23 215:2,3	109:1,23 114:2 139:5	156:25 174:6 179:4 182:7	188:23 189:16 191:24	though (6) 138:12 147:4
sisters (3) 124:4 153:2	sister (1) 13:4	sisters (3) 124:4 153:2	182:7 192:22 204:17	18:11 22:4,4 26:2 34:16	192:2,8 206:9 213:9	166:8 171:1 172:21 210:17
207:21	sisters (3) 124:4 153:2	207:21	stick (1) 19:11	45:12 46:9,25 47:5 89:8	214:21,22	thought (16) 16:4 28:3
sistersinlaw (1) 35:6	207:21	sistersinlaw (1) 35:6	sticking (1) 23:18	77:20,21 86:20 140:5,22	thats (197) 1:18,23	49:11 63:3,7 65:21 69:25
sitting (4) 164:1 185:22	207:21	sitting (4) 164:1 185:22	still (13) 39:11 43:23 45:1	152:19 161:25 202:3 203:4	2:1,7,8,24 3:5 4:8,12,21,22	79:11 81:15 97:20,22
186:25 187:1	207:21	186:25 187:1	54:8 57:22 72:3 78:15,20	208:14	5:17,10,20 6:5,20,25	104:24 122:24 131:11
situation (6) 55:22 70:16	207:21	situation (6) 55:22 70:16	83:24 152:4 191:18 200:11	talk (20) 70:20 76:4 86:19	7:13,22 8:3,6,14,18,21,25	157:8 201:21
89:15 104:25 111:20	207:21	89:15 104:25 111:20	214:6	106:1,9 121:15 130:9	9:3 10:21 11:13	thoughts (17) 63:4,21
171:25	207:21	171:25	214:6	139:21 145:16,17	12:15,19,23 13:21 14:2	65:20,23,25 79:22 80:25
six (2) 20:16 74:5	207:21	six (2) 20:16 74:5	214:6	160:22 164:15 177:7 196:9	16:8,8 17:17 19:5,14,18,24	81:16 125:4,21 126:22
size (2) 42:2 48:12	207:21	size (2) 42:2 48:12	214:6	201:23 206:4 207:4,5	20:14 21:1,6,11,13,15	131:25 133:24 135:17
skull (1) 64:2	207:21	skull (1) 64:2	214:6	208:24	22:2,5,7,7,16 23:2	198:5 207:1,1
skullcap (1) 184:2	207:21	skullcap (1) 184:2	214:6	talked (8) 37:25 71:19	24:14,19 26:19,23	thousands (3) 28:22,24
slide (1) 41:7	207:21	slide (1) 41:7	214:6	193:10 202:9 204:17	29:3,8,11 30:10 31:4,23	32:14
slight (1) 39:13	207:21	slight (1) 39:13	214:6	206:18,22 208:10,11 40:25	32:7,7 33:8,11,13,13 34:15	threats (1) 117:15
slightly (6) 39:6 103:13	207:21	slightly (6) 39:6 103:13	214:6	208:14	35:17 38:2,8,10,11 40:25	three (13) 27:13,13,24 44:17
145:5 146:9 171:21 189:18	207:21	145:5 146:9 171:21 189:18	214:6	talk (20) 70:20 76:4 86:19	41:22 42:5,12,17 43:5	72:13,20 73:6 74:7,10
189:15 196:25 200:25 201:4	207:21	189:15 196:25 200:25 201:4	214:6	106:1,9 121:15 130:9	44:18 46:1,2 48:9 49:6	115:9 136:7 153:6 173:18
203:16 205:21	207:21	203:16 205:21	214:6	139:21 145:16,17	52:20 58:21 61:17 65:25	through (22) 12:22 31:7
206:1,6,9,13,25 207:12	207:21	206:1,6,9,13,25 207:12	214:6	160:22 164:15 177:7 196:9	69:14,19,22 74:6 75:23	32:10,15 39:3,22 42:18,20
208:17 209:23	207:21	208:17 209:23	214:6	201:23 206:4 207:4,5	76:12 78:24 81:18 83:8	43:10,10 47:14,20 66:8,11
210:2,4,9,16,18,23 212:24	207:21	210:2,4,9,16,18,23 212:24	214:6	208:24	85:22 87:19 89:11 90:4,10	69:4 94:16 95:6 147:8
213:9,10,17,20,21,23	207:21	213:9,10,17,20,21,23	214:6	talked (8) 37:25 71:19	91:19,25 92:2,6,12,14	160:22 189:25 190:3
214:3,11,21,23 215:2,3	207:21	214:3,11,21,23 215:2,3	214:6	193:10 202:9 204:17	96:18 98:1 99:7,20 102:24	199:12
sister (1) 13:4	207:21	sister (1) 13:4	214:6	206:18,22 208:10,11 40:25	103:11 106:16 107:23	throughout (2) 83:19 209:1
sisters (3) 124:4 153:2	207:21	sisters (3) 124:4 153:2	214:6	208:14	108:12 109:21 111:19	throwing (1) 97:15
207:21	207:21	207:21	214:6	talk (20) 70:20 76:4 86:19	115:7,18,22 116:3	thrown (1) 144:15
sistersinlaw (1) 35:6	207:21	sistersinlaw (1) 35:6	214:6	106:1,9 121:15 130:9	120:3,19 123:2 124:5,9	ties (4) 67:7,10,10,12
sitting (4) 164:1 185:22	207:21	sitting (4) 164:1 185:22	214:6	139:21 145:16,17	127:9 128:15 129:7,12	tim (1) 160:13
186:25 187:1	207:21	186:25 187:1	214:6	160:22 164:15 177:7 196:9	131:5,13,18 133:12,14	time (118) 4:9 7:1 15:21
situation (6) 55:22 70:16	207:21	situation (6) 55:22 70:16	214:6	201:23 206:4 207:4,5	134:7 135:12 136:18	18:15 26:14 29:13 31:8
89:15 104:25 111:20	207:21	89:15 104:25 111:20	214:6	208:24	141:23 145:9 146:23	32:16 39:15,24 40:21,22
171:25	207:21	171:25	214:6	talked (8) 37:25 71:19	149:21,21 150:17 152:9	54:6,8 55:15,16,21 58:7,10
six (2) 20:16 74:5	207:21	six (2) 20:16 74:5	214:6	193:10 202:9 204:17	153:5,19 154:11 155:12	68:10 69:17 70:11 75:15
size (2) 42:2 48:12	207:21	size (2) 42:2 48:12	214:6	206:18,22 208:10,11 40:25	156:19 158:5 159:3	77:4,7 89:6,12 92:4,16
skull (1) 64:2	207:21	skull (1) 64:2	214:6	208:14	165:2,8,13 166:5 167:12	93:3,4 94:17
skullcap (1) 184:2	207:21	skullcap (1) 184:2	214:6	talk (20) 70:20 76:4 86:19	168:13 171:18,19 172:23	97:1,4,13,21,22 100:3,9
slide (1) 41:7	207:21	slide (1) 41:7	214:6	106:1,9 121:15 130:9	179:1 180:24 182:10,14	103:23,23 104:4 113:19
slight (1) 39:13	207:21	slight (1) 39:13	214:6			

176:11 180:14 182:25
183:4 184:11,14 185:8
186:21 187:7,19
188:18,19,20 191:9,21
194:25 195:4,15 196:19
197:7,23 200:16 202:21
212:17 213:25
times (17) 8:2 31:17 61:20
63:23 67:6 101:14 113:3
142:6,18 154:6 176:16
181:6 187:11 188:20
198:12 207:21 213:6
timescale (1) 109:17
timetable (1) 59:9
timing (1) 188:7
timings (1) 188:16
tina (1) 178:13
titbits (1) 140:16
today (9) 2:13 10:15 82:20
117:7 131:23 141:3 178:2
208:13 209:13
together (7) 18:5 43:17 51:3
144:18 191:21,21 197:9
told (44) 7:5 13:14 18:9
34:22 60:10 70:15 71:9
75:15 76:4 105:3 114:20
115:4,22 116:13 117:4
119:7,14,20 122:15 127:15
136:20 147:19,21 148:2,16
149:25 160:10,12 164:20
165:16 166:3 167:15 169:1
170:4 172:5 180:4 182:13
183:11 189:9 196:15
204:14 211:21 212:4 213:1
tolerance (4) 193:5,7 195:7
197:12
tomorrow (5) 2:15 9:10
10:15 146:10 215:3
tone (2) 91:9 210:23
too (9) 4:11 9:14 23:22
61:17 90:11,13 154:3
204:23
took (13) 27:12 29:21,22
30:3 85:22 88:15 132:12
170:9,25 181:6 183:1
201:9 204:18
topic (19) 1:8 31:12 36:24
40:4 44:6 61:17 72:3 99:20
107:2,16,18,19 113:20,23
117:7,10 136:9 165:19
182:4
topics (1) 206:18
total (1) 176:7
totally (1) 151:3
touch (6) 144:24,25
164:11,15 165:11 166:1
touched (2) 143:7 206:10
tough (2) 190:17,19
towards (8) 41:6,10 43:1,1
91:5 123:10 152:20 203:2
traces (1) 35:22
trader (2) 133:7 195:18
traders (1) 195:16
tragic (1) 151:24
trained (2) 133:6 183:2
training (1) 110:21
transcript (1) 97:7
translate (1) 28:19
translated (3) 101:4 102:15
210:18
translation (5) 102:9,13,25
103:1,12
translators (1) 102:17
transparency (2) 193:5,7
transparent (1) 213:6
travel (4) 102:21 205:2
213:13,18
travelled (6) 13:15,17 14:2,5
41:10 205:10
travelling (10) 12:24 75:3,7,9
77:11,14,15,20 78:1 79:10
traverso (1) 14:13
tree (1) 41:12
trespassing (1) 43:22
triangle (2) 199:4,15
tribal (1) 89:1

tribally (1) 200:10
tribe (2) 88:21 91:2
tribunal (2) 161:1 162:3
tried (10) 49:5 89:15 93:4
104:10 167:18 192:11
194:12,13 197:7 201:2
tries (1) 197:11
trip (2) 48:25 214:15
tripoli (1) 88:24
trips (1) 14:6
trouble (6) 17:21 55:15
146:17,20 149:17 213:25
true (13) 6:5 11:13 33:8,19
34:23 35:11 54:22 64:14
95:1 101:19 153:3,25
198:18
trumpet (1) 136:4
trust (2) 53:20 84:20
trustee (34) 2:14 4:5 52:9
59:22 64:1,6 75:19 79:25
80:5 83:23,24,24
84:11,11,20,21 89:14
101:3 103:6 110:15 112:22
114:15 119:11 120:1,21
122:7 133:11 134:2 136:1
139:6 151:18 196:8 197:23
212:17
trustees (73) 59:18 60:7,23
66:22 67:14,15,18 70:12
71:14 74:21 80:2 82:3 85:6
86:24 87:1,4 90:14 91:6,14
93:2 95:11,20 96:8,14 97:4
100:10 103:16 104:5-16
106:3 108:17,22
109:1,2,6,22 110:2,14,20
111:25 112:4,5,9,12
114:2,12 115:1 117:20
118:14,20 123:25
118:15,19,21
134:6,9,9,22,23 135:1,12
159:24 161:4,20 162:24
165:9 170:25 175:16
176:10 182:7 209:6 211:5
212:22
trusteeship (1) 204:9
truth (1) 71:12
try (10) 18:22 32:16 89:5
91:3 99:22 159:5
190:1,3,23 211:15
trying (18) 16:16 26:12
81:10 102:20 117:2 123:3
131:21 136:4 145:12,13,13
146:25 152:18 154:17
181:16 185:24,25 199:19
tshirt (1) 9:6
tuesday (3) 1:1 116:16 118:6
tuition (1) 123:2
tunisia (2) 14:4,25
turn (8) 1:7 2:10 3:22 41:7
92:18,23 113:20 115:1
turns (1) 189:12
twice (2) 16:3,5
type (3) 156:21 190:8 207:5
types (1) 207:3
typical (1) 83:15
tyre (5) 43:3,24 45:22,25
48:2

U

uae (2) 8:22 144:10
uk (26) 12:17 17:6 54:7
55:20 63:1 68:12 69:5,13
75:7 76:21 78:1,18
79:17,17 98:25 136:23
137:7 138:14,25 140:15
177:20 195:17 196:2
205:13 206:15,17
ultimately (1) 4:19
umbrella (2) 139:13 207:16
un (3) 199:5,24 200:16
unanimous (1) 87:6
unaware (3) 73:7 76:10
116:23
uncle (2) 195:17 200:5
uncovering (1) 47:12

underneath (3) 38:13
47:19,25
understand (47) 2:20 19:13
23:24 25:10 26:10,11,15
28:19 44:23 50:24 53:8,24
63:11 89:5,18,24 92:20,22
93:4 94:8 99:10 103:10
109:19 129:24 132:15,19
135:19,19 137:5,21 145:19
150:22 151:6,13,23,24
152:13 153:24 156:16
170:20 188:12 192:8
208:7,12 210:16 215:1
understanding (12) 33:13
48:12 51:8 70:8 71:5 90:5
91:4 94:20 122:16 144:9
197:12 199:22
understood (22) 30:11,12
47:8 53:3 55:4 64:12 89:19
93:3 94:11 95:22 103:4
104:17 116:20,22 119:6,17
167:12 168:19 188:10
192:11 200:9,12
undertook (1) 118:21
undoubtedly (1) 171:16
unfair (1) 18:1
unfortunate (2) 85:15 141:10
unfortunately (11) 39:14
46:19 56:15 66:1 116:12
135:22 136:3 167:19
178:21 180:23 203:12
unhappiness (1) 209:22
unhealthy (1) 26:4
uniform (5) 22:1 147:13,20
148:18 149:19
united (6) 8:20 77:11 79:13
179:9 214:15,16
universities (1) 60:22
university (1) 138:19
unknown (1) 117:15
unless (6) 11:24 60:1 113:22
170:20 176:19 183:15
unpacks (1) 49:24
unpleasant (2) 19:25 114:10
unprecedented (1) 175:21
unreadable (1) 28:18
until (17) 4:7 5:1 42:10
67:23 70:21,22 75:1
117:23 120:25 135:3,13
150:11 166:13 174:24,25
211:18 215:5
unwrap (1) 89:3
update (2) 111:1,4
updated (1) 111:8
upholding (1) 193:4
upon (14) 59:20 61:13 66:11
68:3 79:13 96:19 105:13
117:25 154:10 166:1
168:21 182:17 206:10
214:9
uprising (4) 8:4 178:5 180:6
198:14
upset (6) 78:11,13 191:15
200:20 201:6 202:9
upshot (2) 9:1 91:13
urge (1) 181:3
urn (1) 38:5
used (43) 2:3,5 8:2 24:16
34:12 35:1,3,16,19
36:14,17 56:23
57:18,19,19 61:10 75:9,10
76:1,3 80:13,14 87:14
98:7,12,17 99:12 100:7
101:23 102:20 103:13
120:10,21 122:3 128:1
160:24 163:14 167:9
177:24 186:20 195:18
197:25 206:13
user (1) 173:15
uses (1) 92:8
using (10) 41:23 94:8 98:14
129:4 147:7 151:15 152:4
178:2 213:23,25
usual (1) 51:12
usually (1) 21:23

V

vacate (1) 139:16
value (5) 3:13 174:6 175:4
191:15,20
values (8) 54:10 60:25 81:10
129:23 135:10,18 193:5,6
varied (1) 131:21
variety (6) 20:12 81:8 112:3
123:21 186:21 193:14
various (7) 63:2 149:2
153:22 166:11 177:11
197:8 204:16
vast (1) 30:25
vehicle (8) 14:3 21:23 42:25
43:5 45:14,20 46:23 47:4
venue (1) 84:1
verify (1) 167:16
verse (1) 102:13
version (2) 17:23 102:19
versions (1) 169:2
vet (4) 169:9,10 198:5,5
vetted (7) 80:13,15 82:6,6
169:7,13,15
vetting (1) 169:5
via (4) 14:3,25 100:13
110:21
vicinity (1) 178:19
victims (3) 180:24 209:15
210:2
victoria (2) 196:11,18
video (24) 1:13 7:19 9:1 15:6
16:6 17:11,25 18:4,10
149:23 150:2 183:11,14
184:3,25 187:13,15,18,21
189:8,13,17,23 190:16
videos (3) 15:24 20:12 183:7
viewed (1) 17:11
views (32) 10:7 17:8,14,15
85:13 89:22 90:6 92:1
130:25 131:9,11,23 141:7
145:11,23,24 146:3,5
148:17 159:16 169:17
170:19 171:3,4 172:2
195:8 197:10,15 199:23
202:17 203:1,3
violence (7) 129:10,10,22
130:4,14 198:20,20
violent (3) 23:21 103:19
126:10
vision (1) 193:3
visit (7) 68:15 85:16
107:21,24 112:8 141:11
194:23
visited (5) 67:18 108:5 117:1
205:21 206:2
visiting (1) 82:5
visitors (1) 57:22
voice (1) 119:20
voluntary (2) 9:18 124:1
volunteer (4) 119:16,17
122:3 168:18
volunteered (3) 119:18
122:13,24
volunteering (2) 136:2
167:11
volunteers (1) 176:9
vote (2) 133:17,18
voted (1) 134:16
votes (1) 134:20
vouch (1) 167:3
vulnerable (4) 109:14 110:1
111:18 171:16

W

wage (1) 94:24
wait (2) 6:21 164:7
waiting (1) 204:20
wake (4) 179:4,11,23,25
walked (2) 88:9 116:6
walking (2) 41:10 44:17
walks (1) 41:21
wall (1) 188:20
walls (1) 210:14
wants (1) 26:18

war (7) 83:10 92:3,11 147:20
148:16 200:19 205:2
warn (1) 205:10
warning (3) 31:21 86:15
109:4
wars (1) 72:9
washing (1) 119:19
wasnt (15) 40:24 74:25
87:20 126:24 128:12 137:4
148:19 151:17 167:7
168:16,18 181:2 196:19
203:17 213:4
watch (3) 183:15 184:23
189:6
watched (3) 41:14 104:12
187:16
watcher (1) 41:17
watching (3) 30:11 150:18
187:18
wave (1) 83:10
way (58) 4:22 23:17 29:4,9
37:1 8 40:16 41:13 47:9
48:10 54:20,24 61:10
62:11 63:20 64:13
65:20,21 71:3,10 73:25
77:17 78:23 81:11,13
88:2,22 90:21,23 91:21
95:18 99:23,24 100:8
102:12 112:4 117:8 129:5
135:7 138:24 167:3 169:12
177:15 182:22 188:15
189:21,25 190:3 194:12
201:23 204:1,25 205:15
206:5 208:18,18,20 211:1
ways (6) 64:10 65:19 81:8
89:23 174:17 176:2
weapon (3) 16:1,6 21:18
weapons (7) 20:18 21:2,8
22:22 38:14 39:11,15
wear (2) 64:2,3
wearing (6) 9:5 70:4 147:20
149:19,19,22
weatherby (30) 11:25 12:3,4
13:9 15:7,13 16:9
18:3,6,13,16,21 22:3,5,10
23:20 24:4 26:17 28:12
31:3 33:10,20,23 34:3,24
36:24 181:20,22,25 216:5
website (9)
129:16,16,18,18,19 130:7
134:7 193:2,3
wedding (1) 207:21
wednesday (2) 192:19 215:6
wee (1) 206:17
week (8) 13:17 14:3,23,24,25
105:2 194:3 208:9
weeks (1) 164:5
welcome (7) 10:8 58:22
65:5 109:6,7 130:23
welcomed (1) 107:25
welcoming (1) 66:9
welfare (1) 54:5
welleducated (1) 134:2
wellknown (1) 201:15
went (14) 14:25 31:6 33:18
37:1,6 56:20 68:3,18 69:4
72:18 80:9 122:8 138:2,2
werent (9) 15:11 31:9 113:6
136:14 137:5,9 152:5
179:20 209:20
west (4) 93:22 199:5,25
200:16
weve (19) 8:2 22:12 41:14
48:10 50:8 117:7 122:22
135:11 136:5 144:6 146:11
153:13 164:14 181:18
187:16 206:5,19 208:18
214:24
whatever (11) 43:19 98:20
130:3 140:22 156:20
165:12 169:22 195:8
200:13 201:18 202:17
whatever (1) 46:1
whats (26) 14:2 16:8,10
29:25 37:20 38:8 45:21
47:12 68:25 85:1 92:21

93:24 97:19 121:7 125:16
130:13 138:13 157:7
161:13 170:6,6 176:22
178:4 180:3,6 181:2
whatsoever (1) 116:21
wheels (1) 41:24
whenever (3) 120:10 135:14
164:15
whereas (1) 200:13
whereby (1) 164:24
whenever (1) 112:19
whichever (1) 91:2
white (1) 184:2
whoevers (1) 159:10
whose (13) 30:4 153:7,8
156:3,4 157:5 163:16
170:17 180:12 189:7
199:19 209:1 210:7
wholly (2) 126:24 201:18
whom (6) 9:10 32:21 74:5
91:23 115:23 131:22
whos (2) 88:3 126:1
wide (1) 154:3
wider (4) 39:4 48:21 54:9
152:12
wife (6) 14:4 24:20 34:18,24
69:5,5
wives (2) 24:17 35:1
wifi (3) 173:11,11,21
willfully (1) 211:2
wilkinson (10) 5:21 18:17,17
23:23 94:10 98:9 105:11
106:1 153:14,23
wilkinsons (3) 6:21 153:21
155:15
willing (1) 136:5
wilmslow (1) 197:1
window (6) 73:4 80:23
131:25 167:12,13 176:1
windows (1) 176:2
windshield (1) 42:21
wing (2) 56:21 126:3
wings (1) 183:2
wisdom (1) 147:7
wise (1) 78:22
wiser (1) 84:21
wish (5) 7:5 37:19 62:3
63:13 84:7
wishes (3) 54:10 158:4,8
witness (26) 1:14 3:9 11:2
17:17,19 18:1 50:13 51:18
52:12,18 53:9,13 58:1
61:18 66:13 67:8 82:13,16
86:8 92:8 93:12 99:13
106:12 158:10 168:5 182:2
187:2 205:16
witnesses (1) 3:21
woke (1) 177:25
woken (1) 113:1
women (7) 17:15 135:20,25
136:23 137:8 138:25
193:14
wonder (5) 27:11 91:20
157:7 165:18 213:14
wonders (1) 44:2
wont (5) 13:13 20:8 107:6
143:6 191:23
work (16) 9:18 13:1 29:10
32:12 50:23 51:2 61:2
97:24 118:20 119:1 124:1
135:22 136:2,5 162:17
172:11
worked (4) 122:17 123:17
124:8 136:6
working (3) 80:6 82:5 170:6
works (2) 88:2 109:13
world (22) 46:14 60:1,24
76:16 90:20 105:22 112:24
113:12 135:24 153:7,8,8
156:3,4,4 175:22 177:25
178:7 192:21 193:15
198:13 205:13
worldwide (2) 76:21 179:8
worried (6) 69:11 125:19,25
128:6 151:20 209:18
worries (1) 150:18
worry (5) 150:1,3,7 151:16

213:24
worse (1) 77:1
worship (2) 57:8,13
worshipper (3) 3:16 107:4
114:13
worshippers (4) 58:14 60:23
204:13 209:6
wouldnt (11) 81:4 126:24
127:1,7 132:12 136:25
140:13 153:21 170:3
175:19 205:19
write (5) 60:5 134:18 158:4
161:11,12
writing (1) 129:13
written (4) 60:16 104:10
160:7 161:2
wrong (3) 14:10 15:17
16:11 24:8 33:13 37:15
39:1 65:24 84:4 88:14
101:25 102:1 103:9 113:19
124:15 127:1,7,24,25
128:4,8,10,10,20 148:17
155:20 180:2,3,4,5
wrongdoing (1) 95:25
wrongs (1) 201:19
wrote (4) 124:13 159:20,21
209:14

X

x (2) 207:14 216:1
xsexaay (1) 35:25

Y

y (1) 207:14
yeah (2) 148:12 150:17
year (5) 8:12 14:6 40:5,21
49:12
years (41) 54:23 55:23 56:4
57:16 61:6 63:20
65:16,19 69:23 81:1 82:8
112:24 113:13 117:19
120:5 122:18 132:12
133:22 134:3,20 135:12
138:6 170:7 177:25
184:7,16,19
185:6,8,13,13,21 188:1,2
195:12 197:2 208:6
212:7,8,10
yesterday (13) 1:9,10,19 2:2
3:2 12:13 14:11,15 19:15
21:13 32:19 37:25 101:7
yet (3) 50:17 155:16 187:6
you'd (7) 23:14 118:16
137:14 144:19 171:15
187:2 205:16
youll (20) 12:6 16:10 24:5
33:12 34:23 36:12 40:20
66:17 70:21 72:1 82:13
83:2 86:11 90:11 94:4
99:23 107:6 132:19 213:11
214:25
young (24) 75:3,6 78:10
110:13 136:23 137:7
138:1,3,8,25 139:7 140:6
156:9 157:1 169:15,18
172:10 185:10,11 205:23
206:4,7 208:14 211:19
younger (5) 59:11 169:1
184:19 185:6,7
youre (36) 2:4 13:12 15:11
25:21 33:10 44:2 46:13
47:24 49:8 70:22 83:5 85:4
95:3 99:15 114:9 118:8,23
128:10,17 131:23 133:2
137:4 138:22 139:2 140:18
147:16,16,17 155:25
159:12 165:16 172:24
179:14,14 181:3 210:6
yours (1) 83:23
yourself (9) 52:21 57:18
74:21 118:13 148:12
150:17 191:25 197:1
213:11
youth (11) 104:3
133:22,23,23,24 135:14
139:12,17,18,20,20

youve (19) 50:25 77:24 85:3
 100:6 131:16 136:14
 147:11 151:1 157:6 165:16
 166:1 172:23 192:11
 197:17 204:21 206:19
 209:23,24 214:23

Z

z (1) 207:14
 zone (2) 147:20 148:16
 zones (1) 205:2

0

0707 (1) 152:25

1

1 (3) 208:21 216:3,4
 10 (10) 56:8 67:8 107:22
 112:24 113:13 117:19
 141:3 177:25 186:15
 195:22
 100 (7) 7:16 64:25 74:18
 80:24 111:6,7 112:18
 1000 (3) 58:20 59:1 98:23
 102 (1) 11:1
 105 (2) 107:10 212:7
 1058 (1) 51:15
 1130 (1) 51:13
 1145 (1) 51:17
 12 (6) 37:13 38:23 39:18
 72:5 82:25 216:5
 127 (1) 216:10
 13 (6) 38:23,23 74:2 82:24
 167:23 168:1
 130 (1) 208:21
 14 (2) 14:23 211:24
 14th (1) 131:16
 15 (3) 48:24 158:16 211:24
 16 (5) 54:12 93:11,14 105:20
 115:21
 17 (10) 8:2 12:20,21 14:15
 15:6,13 49:1 101:2 142:8
 147:10
 17th (8) 7:25 14:14 15:3
 142:3,10,15 144:12 150:15
 18 (5) 14:23 24:2 26:19 74:4
 114:20
 181 (1) 216:11
 19 (5) 41:3,5 58:1 141:4
 180:21
 1919 (1) 195:17
 192 (1) 216:12
 1960s (1) 53:5
 1967 (3) 53:3,17 195:14
 1969 (2) 53:2,17
 1980s (1) 197:25
 1983 (2) 52:15 133:9
 1990s (4) 5:1 55:10 120:25
 183:3
 1997 (1) 39:19

2

2 (10) 2:6 12:16,24 13:13
 42:16 61:17 108:1 164:5
 185:21 212:18
 20 (7) 38:21 55:17,22
 58:7,10 120:5 180:21
 2004 (3) 52:9 133:11 166:13
 2005 (5) 4:7 5:1 119:13
 120:22 166:13
 20052006 (4) 120:1 166:15
 211:19,25
 2006 (3) 5:1 119:13 166:9
 2008 (2) 166:13 212:3
 2009 (7) 38:6,16,19,20
 39:7,8,18
 2010 (1) 163:11
 2011 (11) 1:25 7:20 12:14
 13:18 14:16 22:13 37:1
 69:18 70:2 75:3 142:9
 20112012 (2) 38:13 39:7
 2012 (1) 22:14
 2014 (20) 9:21 59:4 69:3
 76:19 79:7 80:5 83:11

85:13 86:16 87:22
 113:14,15 117:14 122:12
 123:17 124:10,10 141:7
 179:8,24

20142015 (1) 69:21

2015 (29) 7:24 8:12

19:3,11,17 20:20 22:11
 27:3,16 28:2 31:5,9 34:7
 36:25 64:21 69:3 81:6
 83:19 163:11 171:11
 184:9,14 185:5 186:4
 188:6 191:2 213:20
 214:6,15

2016 (21) 5:16 11:19 33:16
 59:4 60:13,16,19 61:11
 83:20 85:13 93:11 97:4,13
 100:9 101:2 104:6 105:20
 115:21 117:18 141:8
 174:25

20162017 (1) 163:25

2017 (31) 5:5 19:10 27:17
 28:1 33:17 37:5,18 56:5,9
 57:7,25 61:23 64:21
 67:6,21 74:15,21 75:2 76:9
 77:10 80:5 81:1,5
 113:14,16 118:10 122:13
 158:22 163:20 168:4 179:8

2018 (11) 27:22,22 28:4
 29:23 52:7 93:14 107:22
 108:7,11,14 133:13

2019 (6) 109:18 111:5,14

117:9 118:7 157:21

2020 (2) 74:4 82:24

2021 (3) 1:1 27:9 215:6

205 (1) 107:12

20s (1) 55:17

21 (2) 44:11,18

218 (1) 107:14

22 (4) 157:2 163:20 167:14

168:4

23 (4) 1:1 43:7 82:24 116:23

23rd (2) 116:16 118:6

24 (1) 215:6

25 (2) 117:9 189:6

26 (4) 5:5 14:1 15:16 37:17

268page (1) 20:5

27 (4) 67:6 83:1 114:23

214:6

27f (1) 115:24

27h (2) 121:24 124:7

28 (5) 184:9 185:5 188:6

214:10,18

282 (1) 14:18

285 (1) 14:19

29 (3) 84:2 93:12 95:6

3

3 (14) 52:17 56:3 86:8,10,16

122:18 134:20 163:17

164:5 183:12 184:7,16

185:8 204:19

30 (6) 58:7,10 64:2 93:12

95:6 132:12

335 (1) 165:23

339 (3) 141:23,25 142:13

34 (1) 216:6

345 (1) 4:24

355 (1) 165:25

363 (1) 10:11

380 (1) 7:16

381 (1) 7:16

387 (1) 11:1

389 (1) 11:1

4

4 (7) 56:3 86:8,23 158:17

168:1 184:16 188:1

5

5 (9) 43:4 53:14 54:12 56:3

135:12 140:9 188:2 213:20

214:15

50 (3) 56:20 145:25 146:2

500 (1) 58:17

503 (1) 215:4

50calibre (1) 21:21

51 (2) 216:8,9

577 (2) 20:2 31:7

5mile (1) 125:13

6

6 (7) 53:9,22 109:18 134:5

184:19 185:6,13

600 (1) 58:17

6000 (2) 98:22,24

6minute (1) 48:21

7

7 (12) 24:1,10 35:18

36:5,6,11,11 37:14 44:8

61:18 62:23 185:13

700 (1) 58:17

77 (1) 180:3

8

8 (6) 36:5 39:19 41:21 56:8

134:5 212:7

82 (2) 3:25 4:2

83 (1) 141:3

835 (1) 41:4

853 (1) 41:19

9

9 (9) 95:18 107:21

108:11,14,15 109:18

111:5,14 212:8

901 (1) 41:20

911 (2) 180:3 194:12

930 (3) 1:2 215:3,5

940 (1) 1:4

97 (1) 1:14