

New era of terror threat: ASIO boss



ASIO director-general Duncan Lewis. Picture: Kym Smith

[Rachel Baxendale](#), [Jacquelin Magnay](#), The Australian, 12:00AM May 26, 2017

Australia's fight against Islamic terrorism was entering a crucial new phase, [ASIO director-general Duncan Lewis said last night](#) as Britain widened its search for suspects in the Manchester bombing. Mr Lewis said the world was not at the "beginning of the end" of the Islamic terrorist threat, but at the "end of the beginning".

He warned that despite coalition military success in Iraq and Syria, the "seemingly inevitable collapse" of the so-called Islamic State caliphate was unlikely to be clinically clean or follow a definite timeline. "Because of these things we assess that well beyond the physical existence of this so-called caliphate, the threat of terrorism and the threat of a terrorist attack against Australians and Australian interests will continue," Mr Lewis told a Senate estimates hearing. "This is not the end, it's not the beginning of the end, it's more like the end of the beginning. We don't see this finishing any time soon."

[Home terror 'just beginning'](#)

Mr Lewis's comments came as Manchester bomber Salman Abedi's entire family was being investigated for links to a global terror network, with fears they might have connections to the Paris and Brussels attacks.

His younger brother was planning a suicide bombing in Tripoli, Libyan authorities allege; his father has links to jihadist groups; and his nuclear scientist mother, whom Salman called 15 minutes before blowing himself up, is friends with the family of a dead terrorist.

Abedi's sister, Jomana, defended her brother days after he slaughtered 22 people at an Ariana Grande concert, saying he wanted "revenge" for the deaths of Muslim children.



Suicide bomber Salman Abedi.

Police arrested another two people last night, bringing to eight the number in custody. British authorities are under pressure to explain how the 22-year-old student dropout was waved back into Britain without raising any flags in recent weeks after spending time in Libya. He was able to return to his home in Manchester's Fallowfield, which he shared with brother Ismail, where police uncovered a bomb-making factory with stockpiles of chemicals.

A relative had warned authorities he was "dangerous", his support for terrorism was reported this year to the security services, and friends had called the anti-terrorist hotline five years ago, reporting him for violent views, including a claim being a suicide bomber was OK. It has now emerged that Salman Abedi had spent time fighting alongside his father in a militia called the Tripoli Brigade, in the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime six years ago. A family friend revealed to The Telegraph that - Salman, then 16, and Ramadan fought in the western mountains of Libya, which helped bring about the fall of Tripoli to the rebel forces during the Arab Spring.

Salman returned to Britain in 2014 and studied business administration at a Manchester college before dropping out, at odds with his father's claim that he finished his degree with A grades.

Libya's Special Deterrence Force arrested Ramadan and Salman's younger brother Hashim, while British police question his second brother Ismail, who was once reported to police for his extremist teachings at the Didsbury mosque in Manchester.

The Libyan authorities revealed Hashim, who had posed with heavy weapons, had been under surveillance in that country for the past six weeks for Islamic State links. Libyan authorities believe he was planning a suicide attack in the capital, Tripoli. He was receiving money from Salman.

The Libyans say Hashim was fully aware of the intent of his older brother to explode a bomb at the Ariana Grande concert, targeting mainly young girls and their mothers. Hashim also revealed how the two brothers would study Islamic State videos online since 2015, including ones explaining how to make a bomb.

The bomb that exploded in Manchester was particularly sophisticated, as it had a back-up mechanism if the first attempt failed, and resembled a design used in last year's Brussels attacks.

Salman's bomb comprised a powerful battery with a remote mobile phone detonator to explode the metal container stuffed with bolts and nails. He had travelled to Dusseldorf four days before the attack, heightening concerns he may have received help from radicals there.

In interviews before his arrest, Ramadan protested his son's innocence, claiming there were "hands that were hidden" and expressing anger at the British police who "attacked the house", exploding the front door and "frightening the neighbours". Libyan officials say Ramadan, who used to work at Manchester airport as a security officer, is now a member of the Salafi jihadi movement. On social media he supported the group formerly known as the al-Nusra Front, the Syrian branch of al-Qa'ida. Ramadan claimed to support, but not be a member of, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. His friends from that group in Manchester included bombmaker Abd al-Baset Azzouz.

Investigators are also exploring the history of Salman's mother, Samia, who is a nuclear scientist and friends with the family of Abu Anas al-Libi, the al-Qa'ida computer expert involved in the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya that killed more than 200 people.

A Libyan government spokesman told the BBC one of Salman's final acts before the murders was to ring his mother. The spokesman said: "His brother felt there was something going on there in - Manchester and he thought his brother would do something like bombing or attack. So after that, he told us: 'Having internet, I see the attack in Manchester and I knew that's my brother'."

British counter-terror police and intelligence agencies are trying to find the bomb-maker, fearing more attacks, and are looking at his family links in particular. The Abedi family claimed asylum in Britain after Ramadan initially fled to Saudi Arabia, fearing for his life after tipping off Islamists about upcoming raids by the Gaddafi forces. Ramadan and Samia returned to Libya with their two youngest children in 2011, after Gaddafi was overthrown.

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