

# David Shayler, 'Tunworth' and the LIFG

## Nick Must

**I**n his book *Manufacturing Terrorism*,<sup>1</sup> T. J. Coles mentions that ex-MI5 officer David Shayler has recently claimed that Ramadan Abedi (the father of Manchester Arena suicide bomber, Salman Abedi) was the MI6 asset who had previously been identified solely with the cypher 'Tunworth'.

Shayler first mentioned Tunworth in the late 1990s, when he and Annie Machon (his then partner, who also quit working for MI5) began briefing the media. At that time, much was made by Shayler and Machon of MI6 involvement with an Islamic terrorist organisation, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). Via media interviews after he quit MI5, Shayler said the LIFG was the organisation that had, in the mid-1990s, been chosen by MI6 to be the recipients of a financial encouragement to assassinate Muammar Gaddafi.

MI5 had become aware of this when Shayler was a desk officer in the section of MI5 known as G9 – G Branch being the section dealing with international terrorist threats to the U.K., G9 specifically working against middle-east terrorism. Shayler regularly attended joint MI5/MI6 meetings on middle-east terrorism and thus became aware of the apparent MI6/LIFG plot.

### **What exactly has Shayler now claimed?**

**T**he current claim by David Shayler that Ramadan Abedi is Tunworth has only been made on the Richie Allen podcast.<sup>2</sup> I had not heard of Richie Allen before researching this article but I have heard of the website that was hosting the podcast in June of 2017, when Shayler first made the allegation re Ramadan Abedi. That is the website of David Icke – yes, he of the 'secret lizard illuminati' (as opposed, one supposes, to the 'open lizard illuminati').

David Shayler has been interviewed multiple times on the Richie Allen show and he has stated his allegation about Ramadan Abedi more than once, most recently on 22 May 2018. During that interview, Richie Allen says he has

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<sup>1</sup> Reviewed at <https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster77/lob77-manufacturing-terrorism.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Available at <https://www.podomatic.com/podcasts/richieallen>

shared Shayler's allegation that Ramadan Abedi was Tunworth with every major media organisation and nothing has happened '. . . even though they must know, now, that this is factual'. A mere statement by Shayler, apparently, making it a fact. Shayler, however, has an explanation for this lack of response: '. . . the dark elite are, essentially, trying to airbrush me from history.' Shayler's most powerful piece of evidence for this? His articles on <NeonNettle.com> have been deleted!

Other strange Shayler behaviour during his interview with Richie Allen was: discussing the Novichok attack in Salisbury and *continually* mispronouncing the name of the Skripals as 'Skirpals' – even though the host pronounces the Skripal name correctly; claiming that the Novichok attack was an attempt by a 'third party' to 'stoke up the third World War between Russia and the UK' (Russia *might* want to destabilise the EU by manipulating the UK to exit the EU but a hot war with just the UK? What would be the point?); and, in the final part of the interview (a discussion that is much longer than that about Ramadan Abedi), David Shayler espouses his latest pet theory: that the Earth is flat.

## **The MI6 Islamic terrorist 'plot'**

**D**avid Shayler and G9 first had knowledge of the MI6 plot in the summer of 1995 – approximately eight to nine months before the assassination attempt took place. There were subsequently a number of intelligence coordination meetings between MI5 and MI6 where Shayler says mentions were made of progress – e.g. funding being in place. Annie Machon's book on their experiences working for (and then campaigning against) MI5<sup>3</sup> has it that, in the early spring of 1996, intelligence reports stated that there had been a failed attempt to kill Gaddafi:

' . . . reports [from Morocco and Egypt] indicated that the attackers had tried to assassinate Gaddafi when he was part of a motorcade but failed as they had targeted the wrong car. As a result of the explosion and the ensuing chaos in which shots were fired, civilians and security police were maimed and killed.'<sup>4</sup>

At the liaison meeting with MI6 after these reports emerged, it was stated that this had been the MI6/LIFG plot in action. Shayler took MI6 at their word and had no basis for this belief (that the LIFG were responsible) other than the fact that it was MI6 officer 'PT16B' – now known to be David Watson – who had

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<sup>3</sup> Annie Machon, *Spies, Lies and Whistleblowers: MI5, MI6 And the Shayler Affair* (East Sussex: The Book Guild, 2005)

<sup>4</sup> Machon p. 172.

told him so. When Panorama broadcast an interview with Shayler in 1998, the BBC's Mark Urban noted: 'It is true of course that Shayler's knowledge of this affair depends entirely on what the SIS man PT16B told him at their meetings.'<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, in their *Defending the Realm: MI5 and the Shayler Affair* Mark Hollingsworth and Nick Fielding point out that the *Mail on Sunday* (which had been serialising Shayler's revelations) had somewhat similar reservations:

'The *Mail on Sunday* editor Jonathan Holborow had baulked at publishing the [MI6/LIFG Ghadaffi assassination plot] story because it had not come directly from Shayler's own experience.

In contrast to other material Shayler had provided, the substance of the allegation was effectively hearsay. Shayler had been told of the plot by his counterpart in MI6, but had no personal knowledge of, or planning role, in the incident.'<sup>6</sup>

## **Was the LIFG a terrorist organisation in 1996?**

This apparent conspiracy by MI6, using an Islamic extremist group to assassinate a foreign leader, was the moral tipping point for Shayler: 'I joined the service to stop terrorism and prevent the deaths of innocent people, not to get involved in these despicable and cowardly acts.'<sup>7</sup> Shayler rails against MI6 being in cahoots with an Islamic terrorist organisation. Although certain U.S. government departments had declared the LIFG to be terrorists in December of 2004<sup>8</sup> (and Ms Machon's book was published the following April<sup>9</sup>), the UK government did not proscribe the LIFG until October of 2005.<sup>10</sup> So the LIFG were not viewed as terrorists in 1996. Nor is it the analysis of the U.S.

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<sup>5</sup> See the transcript at <<https://tinyurl.com/yx8m2uf4>> or <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/audio\\_video/programmes/panorama/transcripts/transcript\\_07\\_08\\_98.txt](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/audio_video/programmes/panorama/transcripts/transcript_07_08_98.txt)>. Mark Urban did later independently confirm through his own intelligence sources that the plot existed but my point is that David Shayler did not seek any such third party verification.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Hollingsworth and Nick Fielding, *Defending the Realm: Inside MI5 and the War on Terrorism* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1999) p. 207.

<sup>7</sup> Machon (see note 3) p. 165, giving a direct quote from Shayler.

<sup>8</sup> Both the U.S. Department of Treasury and the Department of State listed the LIFG as a terrorist organisation from December 2004 to December 2015. See <<https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>>.

<sup>9</sup> Specifically 28 April 2005. See <<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Spies-Lies-Whistleblowers-Shayler-Affair/dp/185776952X>>.

<sup>10</sup> <<https://tinyurl.com/y28tdugn>> or <[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/795457/Proscription\\_website.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/795457/Proscription_website.pdf)>

military's Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point today.

'Although the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) traveled in similar ideological circles as al-Qa`ida, it did not appear to condone the group's broader strategy of targeting the West. The LIFG's central leadership never publicly supported Usama bin Ladin's vision of global jihad.

[. . . .] Furthermore, the LIFG never congratulated al-Qa`ida on attacks they conducted such as the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings, the USS Cole bombings, or even the 9/11 attacks. Rather, the LIFG only commented on the U.S. retaliation in Sudan and Afghanistan for the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings. Moreover, LIFG leaders reportedly broke with Bin Ladin in a 2000 meeting in Kandahar, cautioning the latter against staging a large-scale attack [i.e. the plan for 9/11] against the United States.'<sup>11</sup>

Research carried out at Stanford University has shown that, before 1995, the LIFG were solely an underground group.<sup>12</sup> Tunworth's first contact with MI6 was in the summer of 1995 when they had only just grown strong enough to publicly acknowledged their own existence. Shayler (via Machon) details how, during those early meetings with MI6, Tunworth was keen to tell all about the LIFG:

'The MI6 agent Tunworth admitted his connections with Islamic extremists and Al Qaeda members during a debrief with his MI6 handler, David Watson, in late 1995....'<sup>13</sup>

Once again here, I believe that Shayler is being credulous that what MI6 told him was an accurate record of what had been said by Tunworth. Even if Tunworth had said words to that effect, who is to say that they were true anyway? He may well have been simply boasting about his connections and his groups abilities to secure the vital funding – which had been the sole reason he took the huge risk<sup>14</sup> to contact MI6 in the first place.

## **Shayler's knowledge of Tunworth**

**Media interviews with Shayler in the initial period after he first went public do**

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<sup>11</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin and Andrew Lebovich, 'Assessing Al-Qa`ida's Presence in the New Libya', *CTC Sentinel* (Vol. 5, Issue 3), March 2012

<<https://ctc.usma.edu/assessing-al-qaidas-presence-in-the-new-libya/>>.

<sup>12</sup> See the profile of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group in the *Mapping Militant Organizations* section of the Stanford University website at

<<http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/675>>.

<sup>13</sup> Machon (see note 3) p. 166.

<sup>14</sup> Machon states that Tunworth's initial contact had been as a 'walk-in' at the U.K. Embassy in Tunis, where he asked to see the resident MI6 officer! (This is on page 168.)

include references to Tunworth and his involvement with the LIFG. However, at no point then did Shayler indicate publicly that he knew the real name of Tunworth. In her book, Machon makes reference to David Shayler both knowing and not knowing the real name. The chronology of these references in the book is back to front, and the second one relates to Shayler's work at MI5. This comes on page 168:

' . . . PT16/B told David that the Libyan was codenamed Tunworth. At some point in the following weeks David briefly saw the printout of MI6's record of him. It contained around two or three separate mentions. They supported his claim to be a senior member of Libyan military intelligence but were not detailed. David checked the Libyan's name against Durbar and STAR, MI5's records, but the service had no trace of him. *David did not make any effort to remember the name* because he believed that the whole thing would come to nothing as other MI6 plots had done.'<sup>15</sup>  
[Emphasis added.]

Two pages before this, Machon clarifies that Shayler had current knowledge (at that time in mid-2000s) of Tunworth's name from a new source:

'Despite the then Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's denials in 1998, I have now found out that intelligence officer ██████████ [footnote] was MI6's man Tunworth.'<sup>16</sup>

The footnote provided for the redaction states, 'MI5 and MI6 censorship still prevents me from naming Tunworth.'

What one can do, however, is use the length of the redaction to give an approximate indication of the number of letters in the name.<sup>17</sup> Doing this we can see that the redaction is between fourteen letters (at minimum) and fifteen letters (at maximum). Thus we can also tell that the name of Ramadan

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<sup>15</sup> Machon (see note 3) p. 168. I have added the emphasis to raise an interesting point. I am prepared to give Shayler the benefit of the doubt that in the late '90s – within a couple of years of resigning his post – he could have remembered specific details (like names and cyphers) from secret papers he had seen whilst still at MI5. What I am not able to be so generous about is the possibility that today – more than twenty years since he first went public – he claims to still have accurate recall of that same information. In the intervening time he can not have had the access to secret material on which these recent claims are founded. Also in that intervening time, much has happened to Mr Shayler that would indicate to me that his detailed memory of random facts from the late '90s is not something upon which one can rely very much.

<sup>16</sup> Machon (see note 3) p. 166 – this is a direct quote from Shayler.

<sup>17</sup> This is the same technique I used to make an educated guess at some of the redacted names on the papers of the Western union Clandestine Committee. See <https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster75/lob75-uk-foia.pdf>.

Abedi fits into *less* than the redacted space. This is important because memoirs written by ex-spies are prepared just like all other books. They are fully paginated first and then submitted for approval by government. If (when) the censor wields their redaction marker, the blacked out space has to fit within the other words already presented on the page. The redaction is always, therefore, of a specific length that is in direct relation to the word being censored. I do not know of any instance where such censorship is used to obfuscate the length of the words being redacted by making them seem to be longer than they are. If the name being censored *were* that of Ramadan Abedi, then the redaction would actually be slightly shorter.

### **Mr Shayler 'big-up' Mr Shayler**

**I** feel I should point out that David Shayler has some form for being mendacious and opaque when discussing his career as a spook with journalists. In a 2001 interview with *The Socialist* he stated:

'I can put my hand on my heart and say that I never investigated subversives. Indeed, I did the opposite and closed down *the study* of the Communist Party of Britain and Class War. Most of the work I did was against terrorism.'<sup>18</sup> [Emphasis added]

In a brief email discussion about this, Garrick Alder pointed out to me how Shayler here had used the term '*the study* of the Communist Party of Britain and Class War' (hence the emphasis) and that he would seem to have been careful not to use the term 'surveillance'. What is also immediately obvious is that any decision to have 'closed down the study of the Communist Party of Britain and Class War' would not have been made by Shayler himself. It would have been made at a pay grade much higher than Mr Shayler ever reached during his employment by MI5. He would merely have been following the instructions of one of his superiors.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Inside Britain's Secret State: Interview with David Shayler, *The Socialist*, 29 June 2001 <<https://tinyurl.com/y2kbgu8q>> or <<https://socialistparty.org.uk/articles/8611/29-06-2001/inside-britains-secret-state-interview-with-david-shayler>>

<sup>19</sup> Note, also, how one might think he accidentally missed out the word 'Great' when he said 'Communist Party of Britain' - i.e. that he really meant 'Communist Party of Great Britain' (CPGB). The Communist Party of Britain (CPB) is a different - and even smaller - entity. Shayler would have been well aware of this and he may have been making a subtle distinction rather than an error. Indeed chapter 4 of *Defending the Realm: Inside MI5 and the War on Terrorism* (see note 6) states that in late 1991 MI5's F Branch were targeting the 'Communist Party of Britain (an offshoot of the original CPGB)'. As regards the CPB, an assessment by *The Financial Times* scathingly said that it currently has 'no more than a thousand' members. See Joshua Chaffin, 'Communist Party of Britain embraces comrade Corbyn' in the FT, 10 May 2018.

What is also obvious is that the monitoring was closed down because those kind of targets had become extremely unimportant. When he was ordered to close down some political spying, such activity was already well on the way out. Machon even states in her book they were told during recruitment that 'MI5 was no longer obsessed with "reds under the bed".<sup>20</sup> This indicates that David Shayler was given something of a paper-pushing task, just to keep him busy.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps MI5's counter accusation that he was not that good an intelligence officer might be true?

## **Resurrection**

**F**inally, there is one thing that is ultimately most strange – that makes me sincerely doubt Shayler's claim about Ramadan Abedi. This is that, in her book, Annie Machon stated that Tunworth was dead:

'Our recent enquiries with Swallow Tail, a former intelligence officer who cannot be named for fear of reprisals, have confirmed that the man caught by the Libyans in the attack was the agent Tunworth. This is further confirmation that an MI6 agent, whom we know was working to Watson in London, was involved in the plot. The officer [i.e. Swallow Tail] also confirmed that ██████████ was either killed during the attack that February or shortly after. This rather undermines the claims of ministers that they banned the story in order to protect national security, since the agent [i.e. Tunworth] was clearly no longer at risk of reprisal and was not then providing intelligence to the British services.'<sup>22</sup>

I suppose that if one believes David Shayler's other major recent claim – that he is the Messiah of the Second Coming – then this feat of resurrection is not that impossible.

## **Epilogue – Contact with Shayler**

**I** contacted both David Shayler (by direct message on Twitter) and Annie Machon (via email) for comment. I received no response from Machon but Shayler did, initially, seem keen to engage. In my first message, on 5 April 2019, I put it to him that Machon's book would seem to indicate that Tunworth

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<sup>20</sup> Machon (see note 3) p. 20.

<sup>21</sup> Jestyn Thirkell-White, who now works for UBS in Zürich, was previously an MI5 desk officer contemporaneous to Shayler and left the service at about the same time (see his LinkedIn page at <<https://www.linkedin.com/in/jestyn>>). Speaking in support of Shayler in 2000, Thirkell-White detailed how working at MI5 often involved pointless paper pushing: 'A lot of officers were asked to write endless briefings, just to generate work.' See <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/jul/22/davidshayler>>.

<sup>22</sup> Machon (see note 3) p. 254.

died in the spring 1996 attack on Gaddafi. His response was prompt:

'It is clear from the draft that the source misled Annie. The issue can be decided one way or the other by looking at the name on the CX report.'

He then sent me links to two articles. The first, from Cryptome,<sup>23</sup> is mainly written by Shayler himself and rehashes the MI6/LIFG story. The second is an anonymous piece (the translator is credited but not the source) from the Voltaire Network.<sup>24</sup> From the date of this (25 May 2017) it would seem to be the very first time that Ramadan Abedi was linked to the Libyan Intelligence Services and MI6 – but not, N.B., outed in any way as Tunworth.

Subsequent to that, he sent me another message, stating: 'I remembered the name after my memory was jogged by an article.' The implication being, therefore, that the Voltaire article had prompted his recall that Tunworth's real name was Ramadan Abedi. His reliance on the Voltaire article to support his thesis is flawed because the article's timeline for Ramadan Abedi's involvement with MI6 contradicts that laid out by Machon in her book. There she states that, in 1995, Tunworth had travelled north-west along the African coast from Libya to Tunisia to make his initial contact with MI6 via the resident officer at the UK embassy in Tunis.<sup>25</sup> The Voltaire article, would, however, have it that Ramadan Abedi had been an MI6 asset since 1992.<sup>26</sup>

After a couple of days, I sent him a further message. I queried his statement that it was 'clear [. . .] that the source misled Annie' as I could find nothing in the book that would suggest that. I also asked him how 'The issue can be decided one way or the other by looking at the name on the CX report'. I clarified that I was confused about what he meant by 'the name on the CX report' because, regarding that report (CX 95/53452), he had previously been quoted as saying:

'The name of the agent and the fact that he was involved in the plot were not made clear in the CX report as is usual in such cases.'<sup>27</sup>

Plus, the only two names not censored on the publicly available version of CX 95/53452 are that of Colonel Gaddafi himself and Musa Qadhaf Al-Dam (who was 'murdered by coup plotters in June').

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<sup>23</sup> <<http://cryptome.org/shayler-gaddafi.htm>>

<sup>24</sup> <<https://www.voltairenet.org/article196455.html>>

<sup>25</sup> See footnote 14.

<sup>26</sup> Ramadan Abedi might well be an MI6 asset but, on the basis of what is said in the Voltaire article, he logically can't be Tunworth.

<sup>27</sup> See <<http://cryptome.org/shayler021600.htm>>.

'How, then, [I asked him] can "looking at the name on the CX report" help with establishing either: (i) your claim re Ramadan Abedi or (ii) that the source "Swallow Tail" misled Annie Machon?'

Shayler's reply:

'Normally mi6 hide the involvement of their agents making out they are just reporting on coup plots, for example. That was how I remembered it at the time. The CX report however specifically says "in which he was involved" confirming that agent is involved not just reporting on plot. The name of the agent, ramadan abeidi,<sup>28</sup> is obscured by the words "removed to protect tunworth's identity". Any enquiry can confirm from the original document that Ramadan Abeidi's name is on it

Swallow Tail seems to be suggesting that abdullah radwan was the agent tunworth and that he died in the attack to deflect attention from him.'

Seeking clarification, I messaged him again:

'Hi David.

Thank you for yet another quick response. [. . .]

I'm afraid that this might be quite long but I do have a couple more things to run past you. . . .

In your latest reply, you say: "Any enquiry can confirm from the original document that Ramadan Abeidi's name is on it."

As far as I am aware, an unredacted version of CX 95/53452 has never been available in the public domain. To whom, therefore, might a member of the public make such an "enquiry"?

Secondly, you said: "Swallow Tail seems to be suggesting that abdullah radwan was the agent tunworth and that he died in the attack to deflect attention from him."

I follow what you are saying here, as the previous page in the book mentions Libyan TV footage of the attack on Colonel Gadaffi and that this footage focused on the principal attacker who was named as being Abdullah Radwan.

Earlier in Annie's book (on page 166) a direct attempt to give the real name of Tunworth is censored with the usual solid block redaction. I have always thought this type of censoring – where just a few words or, even worse, a single word are blacked out – is slightly counter productive. The

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<sup>28</sup> N.B. that Shayler has misspelt the last name of 'Ramadan Abedi' as 'Abeidi'. Similar to the comment I made on Mr Shayler's mispronunciation of 'Skripal' as 'Skirpal' (see earlier in this article) this would seem to indicate that David Shayler is not very good on the detail.

fact that one can see roughly how many letters are missing can sometimes give an indication as to what the censored information might be.

At the beginning of my first message to you, I mentioned that I occasionally write for Robin Ramsay's Lobster Magazine. I am presuming that you know of it. I have previously had a trio of articles in Lobster that detailed an FOIA request I made to the FCO for papers from 1949-50 that were the minutes of the Western Union Clandestine Committee (which set up the nascent 'Gladio' networks in Europe). The only thing that the FCO insisted on redacting from those minutes were the names of the participants . . . but they left their military ranks, etc, unredacted! I was thus able to make an educated guess as to who some of those participants were.

Here is the link to the article in question. Reading it will probably give you a much better understanding of what I am trying to explain! <https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster75/lob75-uk-foia.pdf> . . .

With that in mind, I can see from page 166 of Annie's book that the redaction, censoring the direct attempt to name Tunworth, is about 15 letters long. This prompts me to suggest that, if the name being redacted were "Ramadan Abedi", then the blacked out space would be slightly shorter but a backed out space of fifteen letters would be a perfect fit for the name "Abdullah Radwan".

I have attempted to contact Annie by email <annie@anniemachon.ch> but have not yet had a reply. Are you possibly still in contact with her and, if so, could you ask if she is also willing to comment?

Thanks in advance for any further reply you can give. Nick'

I did not receive a reply to this message and, since then, there has been no further contact.