



# COUNTER TERRORISM POLICING

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NORTH WEST

## OPERATION ITONIA

A summary of the key findings of the  
police investigation into the explosion  
outside the Liverpool Women's Hospital  
on 14th November 2021

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## INTRODUCTION

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Operation Itonia is the investigation into the explosion which occurred outside the entrance to the Liverpool Women's Hospital on Sunday 14 November 2021.

Emad Jamil Salman Al Swealmeen, aged 32, was the rear seat passenger in a taxi in which an improvised explosive device detonated, resulting in his death.

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## SUMMARY OF INCIDENT

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During the morning of Sunday 14 November 2021, several events were being held across Liverpool city centre to mark Remembrance Sunday, with a large service being held at Liverpool Cathedral.

At 10:44 am, a telephone call was made to Delta Taxis by a male caller asking for a taxi to pick him up from Rutland Avenue, Liverpool. The caller stated that he needed the taxi urgently.

At 10:50 am, Delta Taxi driver David Perry selected a fare from his electronic booking system and attended Rutland Avenue to collect the passenger. On arrival, the passenger walked from the direction of a house on Rutland Avenue, entered the rear nearside of the taxi and asked to be taken to the Liverpool Women's Hospital. This was the only communication between the passenger and Mr. Perry during the short journey. Mr. Perry later described the passenger as Asian, aged in his 30's and wearing a surgical mask.

At 10:55 am, as the Delta taxi approached the entrance to Liverpool Women's Hospital, passing the ambulance bays on the left, the vehicle exploded.

Mr. Perry escaped from the burning vehicle assisted by hospital security and later received medical treatment from hospital staff for his injuries.

At 10:59 am, Merseyside Police were notified of the explosion outside the entrance to the hospital. Merseyside Fire and Rescue appliances were quickly on the scene and extinguished the burning vehicle.

The rear seat passenger of the Delta taxi vehicle was found to be deceased. Small steel ball bearings were later identified at the scene suggesting that the explosion had been caused by an improvised explosive device (IED) containing shrapnel.

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## INITIAL INVESTIGATION BY MERSEYSIDE POLICE AND CTPNW

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Fast track inquiries conducted by Merseyside Police into the telephone number used to call the taxi company provided an initial potential identification of the bomber as Emad Jamil Salman Al Swealmeen, a 32 year old asylum seeker, residing at an address on Sutcliffe Street, Liverpool.

The address on Sutcliffe Street was swiftly secured and later subjected to an extended search. Four persons present at the address were initially arrested under the Terrorism Act but released without charge the next day after it was established that they had not been involved in the attack.

A second address was identified for Al Swealmeen later that day on Rutland Avenue, Liverpool. This was a privately rented flat for which Al Swealmeen had been paying cash to the landlord on a monthly basis. This was later found to be location where he had manufactured the improvised explosive device.

All three scenes – the Women's Hospital, Sutcliffe Street and Rutland Avenue were the subject of exhaustive forensic examinations over the days which followed with the assistance of specialists from across the country. The findings of these examinations are reported below.

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## BACKGROUND OF AL SWEALMEEN

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### 1. Family history and entry to the UK

Emad Al Swealmeen was born in 1989 in Baghdad, Iraq.

He lived in Iraq with his family until the early 1990's when they relocated to Jordan due to the outbreak of the Gulf War. The family remained in Jordan until 2000 before moving to the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

On 19 December 2013, Al Swealmeen attended the British Embassy in Abu Dhabi and applied for a visa to visit the UK. He claimed that he wanted to travel to the country for a two-week holiday to watch the television programme 'Britain's Got Talent' being recorded in Belfast.

Al Swealmeen travelled directly from the UAE and entered the United Kingdom legally through London Gatwick Airport on 30 April 2014. He travelled using a genuine Jordanian Passport endorsed with a UK visitor visa, valid for travel between 31 December 2013 and 30 June 2014.

### 2. Asylum claim

On 6 May 2014, six days after arriving in the UK, Al Swealmeen claimed asylum and attended the Asylum Screening Unit in Croydon where he was interviewed by Home Office officials.

During the interview, Al Swealmeen falsely claimed to be a Syrian national, stating that he had fled the country due to the ongoing conflict. He added that he had lived with his family in Syria until the age of 10 before being sent to live with an aunt in the UAE. He returned to Syria in September 2013 to ensure his family were safe and remained in the country for 3 months.

Al Swealmeen claimed that his father had arranged a false Jordanian passport for him which allowed him to leave Syria. He used this to then return to the UAE, obtain a visa and travel onwards to the UK.

During a Home Office interview in June 2014, Al Swealmeen was challenged over his claim to be a Syrian national after being linguistically assessed to originate from Iraq. Whilst his claim was being processed, he was housed in accommodation provided by the Home Office on Pansy Street, Liverpool.

In November 2014, Al Swealmeen was informed that his asylum claim had been rejected and the decision had been made to remove him from the UK, although he did have a right of appeal.

In April 2015, Al Swealmeen's appeal was considered by the immigration court in Manchester and rejected. A second appeal was considered by the Upper Tribunal on 18 August 2015 which was also dismissed. Al Swealmeen was notified of this decision on 21 August.

According to Home Office records, all appeal rights had been exhausted by 9 September 2015 and Al Swealmeen should have left the UK.

In the summer of 2015, Al Swealmeen began a conversion to Christianity, attending Bible study groups and an Alpha Course (evangelistic course which seeks to introduce the basics of the Christian faith) at Christ Church, Liverpool. He was baptised at Liverpool Cathedral on 1 November and received a certificate of Confirmation in March 2017.

In April 2017, Al Swealmeen moved into the home of a couple who worked at Liverpool Cathedral. On 4 May, he changed his name by deed poll to Enzo Almeni, a Christian name adopted to reflect the change in his faith.

Al Swealmeen requested and received various letters of support from members of the church community attesting to the strength of his Christian faith. These documents were forwarded to the Home Office in a batch of further submissions to support his asylum claim in October 2017.

These submissions were accompanied by statements from Al Swealmeen in which he declared that his life would be in danger if he returned to Syria following his conversion to Christianity. He continued to dispute his Iraqi nationality but added that his life would be at risk in any event as a Christian if he were returned to Iraq or Jordan. This formed the basis for his new and revised asylum claim.

Al Swealmeen was interviewed by Home Office officials in relation to this revised claim in June 2019.

In January 2020, a letter was prepared by the Home Office which notified Al Swealmeen that his latest asylum claim had also been rejected. This was based on the assessment that he had not truly accepted the Christian faith and rejected others. The sending of this letter was delayed pending assessment of his medical history. The letter was sent to solicitors acting for Al Swealmeen in December 2020. An appeal was immediately lodged on his behalf. This appeal was still under consideration at the time of his death in November 2021.

### **3. Medical history**

From first arriving in the country, Al Swealmeen referred to his struggles with his mental health when speaking to professionals. He made regular visits to the GP throughout his time in the UK referring to low mood, anger, depression and anxiety and was prescribed anti-depressant medication on a regular basis.

It is apparent from Al Swealmeen's medical notes, that the deterioration in his mental health coincided with key developments in his asylum case. For example, on 21 August 2015 he attended the emergency department at Liverpool Hospital following an overdose and this was the same day he had been notified that his appeal had been rejected for a second time. In December 2020, he visited his GP claiming of feeling suicidal after learning that the Home Office had rejected his latest asylum claim.

The first rejection of Al Swealmeen's asylum application occurred in November 2014. This appeared to prompt a significant deterioration in his mental health. In February 2015, he was detained by police under the Mental Health Act after being found wandering in the road in a confused state. Later in the month he was arrested after carrying a knife openly in public. During the arrest, he tried to escape from officers and jump over a motorway flyover. He was later sectioned under the Mental Health Act and spent a number of weeks in a psychiatric unit. During his detention, he managed to leave the unit and was apprehended close to the railway line after being spotted on the track by a passing train driver.

After showing signs of improvement, Al Swealmeen was released from detention under the Mental Health Act but continued to visit his GP and take medication for depression until the time of the attack. His last GP consultation took place in August 2021.

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## **FINDINGS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

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### **1. Liverpool Women's Hospital**

The scene at the hospital was examined in detail by experts over several days. Fragments of the device were recovered for specialist analysis and further assessment was conducted of the damage caused to the taxi and to the outside of the hospital building.

The device is believed to have been housed in a black plastic case containing home-made explosive and several hundred metal ball bearings. Pieces of fabric and fragments of a zip fastener recovered at the scene indicate that the plastic case may have been placed inside a sling bag. It appears that the home made explosive only partially detonated as small quantities of unexploded material were found at the scene.

## **2. Flat on Rutland Avenue**

Al Swealmeen rented a flat privately from April 2021 and paid cash each month to the landlord. It is believed that he took the flat in order to build his explosive device without fear of detection by the authorities. He did not pay for any utilities at the premises, nor did he have any mail sent there. There was no official trace of him at this address and his links to it were only discovered following his request to Delta Taxis to collect him from this location on 14th November.

When police gained entry to the flat, it quickly became apparent that this is where the device had been constructed. Mixing bowls containing residues, Ziploc bags containing powder, grinding tools, scales, electrical equipment, filter papers and a variety of other components were found lying on the floor on open display. A small number of ball bearings were also recovered during a deeper search. Subsequent testing of recovered substances identified the presence of a chlorate-based improvised explosive and hexamine-based improvised explosive material.

A Qur'an and prayer mat were recovered from the flat. No items relating to Christian worship were found at this address or in Al Swealmeen's room on Sutcliffe Street.

## **3. Sutcliffe Street**

Al Swealmeen had been registered at an address on Sutcliffe Street since October 2019. He had his own room in the house which he shared with other asylum claimants in accommodation provided by SERCO on behalf of the Home Office.

A thorough search was conducted of Al Swealmeen's room which led to the recovery of a number of items concealed under the floorboards which had been wrapped in newspaper and polythene.

When unwrapped, the items were found to comprise two unfinished improvised firearms, 11 magazine clips in 9 mm and .45 calibre, over 90 9mm and .45 calibre dummy cartridges, a cartridge loading device and an improvised silencer.

A rucksack was also found under the stairs in the communal area of the house which was later established to belong to Al Swealmeen. The rucksack contained several tools and other equipment assessed to have been used in the manufacture of the improvised firearms.

## **4. Online purchases**

There are two distinct periods of online purchase activity which provide an understanding of Al Swealmeen's changing aspirations between March 2020 and November 2021.

Between March and July 2020, Al Swealmeen's efforts were focused on the acquisition of tools and materials to manufacture improvised firearms and ammunition. He initially purchased quantities of inert ammunition which he had delivered to the Sutcliffe Street address. These were followed by the purchase of metal box section piping, welding equipment, assorted tools, chemicals to make gunpowder and soundproofing material. Al Swealmeen did take some steps to conceal his identity and used the alias 'Wade McCloud' as his online name, creating linked email addresses in support of his false identity.

From 7 August 2020, Al Swealmeen's attention clearly shifted to the acquisition of materials to manufacture an improvised explosive device.

In addition to quantities of chemicals, Al Swealmeen, also purchased other items for use in the assembly of the IED including filter papers, chemistry flasks and electrical circuitry and testing equipment. The final online purchase made on 1st November 2021 was for a large quantity of steel ball bearings. These were not delivered until 10th November, just four days before the attack.

## **5. Digital evidence**

The investigation established that Al Swealmeen went to considerable lengths to obfuscate his activities in preparing for the attack.

A mobile phone was found on the floor of the Rutland Avenue address amongst the mixing bowls and bags of explosive mixture. The contents of this phone had been mostly erased although some images of a mobile phone screen were recovered which contained step by step instructions on how to make explosives.

Several applications were installed on the phone in an effort to enhance online security and conceal his activities.

A second mobile phone was found on Al Swealmeen's bed in Rutland Avenue which appeared to have been used by him for standard purposes. He used this phone to call the taxi firm and also to arrange rent payments to his landlord.

A third mobile phone was found in a desk drawer in the Rutland Avenue flat. This was registered in an alias name and was only used during a three-week period in the lead up to the attack. This phone was used with anonymous web-browsing software and was used in the procurement of a number of items in the final stages of the device construction.

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## CONCLUSIONS

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The intended target of the attack is still unclear. However, there is no information to suggest that Al Swealmeen planned to detonate his device anywhere other than the Liverpool Women's Hospital.

The device has been described by experts as an anti-personnel device and the use of several hundred ball bearings as shrapnel, designed to be ejected outwards, suggests an intention to inflict multiple casualties.

Expert opinion suggests that the configuration of the device was unstable and is therefore likely to have exploded earlier than planned.

Al Swealmeen's plans to conduct an attack were in train for a 20-month period between March 2020 and November 2021. His attempts to manufacture improvised firearms and ammunition did not progress much beyond the prototype stage and it is believed that his technical skills fell short in trying to achieve his objective. The intended target of any firearms attack is unknown.

The precise motive for the attack remains unknown. There is no evidence that Al Swealmeen held extremist views of any kind. We know that Al Swealmeen suffered from mental ill health before arriving in the UK and that this was likely exacerbated by factors in his life here, including his failed asylum claim and the absence of protective factors, such as close family, around him.

It seems most likely that Al Swealmeen's grievance against the British state for failing to accept his asylum claim compounded his mental ill health which in turn fed that grievance and ultimately a combination of those factors led him to undertake the attack. Al Swealmeen went to considerable lengths in his efforts to stay in this country including his conversion to Christianity (although the authenticity of this conversion is in doubt) but was refused multiple times. His avenues of appeal were becoming exhausted and he faced deportation.

Al Swealmeen also took precautions to conceal his true intentions and to wipe any traces of his online activities. Consequently, we will never truly know why Al Swealmeen took the actions that he did that led to the explosion outside the Liverpool Women's Hospital.

From the very outset, the investigation has focused on establishing whether any other individuals were involved in the preparation of this attack or had knowledge of it. There is not a single piece of information to suggest that this was the case.

All the indications are that Al Swealmeen acted alone in manufacturing his IED and setting out to conduct his attack on Sunday 14 November 2021.