



In the Central Criminal Court

Rex

v

Muhammad Billal

Sentencing Remarks

Facts

1. Muhammad Billal, you fall to be sentenced for six offences. Counts 1 and 2 are offences of preparation of terrorist acts, contrary to s. 5 of the Terrorism Act 2006. Counts 3 to 6 are offences of collecting information, contrary to s. 58(1)(c) of the Terrorism Act 2000. The indictment records that all six offences arose from your support for Islamic State and from your progression from extremist interest, to extremist commitment, to practical preparation for acts of terrorism. There has been no trial and so these sentencing remarks must be full enough for you and the public to understand the basis upon which you are being sentenced.
2. You were born on 24 August 2006. You were 17 for much of this offending. You turned 18 on 24 August 2024. Counts 3 to 6 were committed while you were still 17. Count 1 straddled your 18th birthday. Count 2 was committed shortly after you had turned 18. Your age is a matter of real importance in this sentencing exercise, but it does not diminish the gravity of what you did.
3. The evidence recovered from your mobile telephone showed that from late 2023 you were accessing material supportive of the ideology and methods of Islamic State. You watched Islamic State nasheeds, material about Raqqa in Syria, videos of scholars and clerics supporting jihad and calling on their followers to “*rise up against the infidels*”. You searched for Islamic State leaders, maps, jihadist material, ISIS logos and groups associated with Salafi-jihadist ideology.
4. By January 2024 your searches had become more focused. You searched for “ISIS in Africa”, “how do you join ISIS?”, “how does ISIS recruit” and “how to buy an ISIS flag”. You accessed material about foreign volunteers who had fought for ISIS and maps showing locations where terrorist groups operated. You purchased a balaclava.

5. On 23 January 2024, using the username “Truth Hurts Hypocrites”, you engaged in a Discord conversation with another user who labelled you a terrorist because you were defending Islamic State. Your answer was: “I’m defending the ideas of protect the Muslims and fight their enemies.” During that conversation you sent an Islamic State “Just Terror Tactics” video concerning the use of vehicles to target large numbers of victims and an Islamic State nasheed video. You said, “It’s been 3 years I hate Europe and America” and “For you they are terrorists, for me they are fighters of justice and truth.” During the same discussion you searched for “rewards of a martyr in Islam.”
6. From February 2024 you began to take steps to avoid detection. You searched for VPNs and whether they prevented tracking. You searched for how police can find a person. You purchased a new SIM card. You subscribed to a VPN. You downloaded and used Threema, an encrypted instant messaging application which does not require a telephone number or email address to create an account. You used that application from February to November 2024.
7. Count 1 concerns your preparation for a terrorist attack in the United Kingdom between 1 February and 5 October 2024. The indictment particularises that you conducted research into accessible shooting ranges, researched the purchase of chest rigs designed to hold ammunition, conducted online reconnaissance of potential attack locations, researched the purchase of a firearm and sought illicitly to purchase a firearm.
8. On 16 March 2024 you searched how to buy a gun and visited websites offering guns for sale in the UK, including Gunstar. You browsed semi-automatic rifles and AK47-style weapons costing around £850. On 20 March you recorded an audio message proclaiming support for Islamic State and “death to America”. The same day you searched for “big dagger” and viewed websites selling hunting knives. On 25 March you again searched for firearms and military knives. On 30 March you searched on Google Maps for military bases in the UK.
9. On 12 April you searched for military knives, daggers and public places in Nelson. On 17 April you searched for “shooting range”, “gun clubs” and “firearms academy”. On 22 April you researched sentences of imprisonment in the Netherlands for radicalisation and for participating in a terrorist organisation, before returning to searches for shooting ranges in Manchester.
10. Counts 3 to 6 concern your accessing of four issues of *Rumiyah*, an official Islamic State publication. Count 3 relates to *Rumiyah* Issue 2. Count 4 relates to Issue 3. Count 5 relates to Issue 5. Count 6 relates to Issue 9. The indictment records that those documents were records of information of a kind likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism.
11. Issue 2 contained a “Just Terror Tactics” article giving advice on knife attacks. It gave guidance on knife selection, target selection and where on the body to strike. It stated that the objective was to kill and that the attacker should target major organs. It

referred to attaining a “reasonable kill count” and to inflicting terror on civilians. You accessed Issue 2 on 27 April 2024 and again on 11 May, 16 June, 31 July and 4 August.

12. On 11 May you downloaded and accessed Issues 3, 5 and 9. Issue 3 gave guidance on vehicle attacks and identified types of targets, including outdoor conventions, congested pedestrian streets and parades. It advised possession of a secondary weapon. Issue 5 provided guidance on arson attacks, including the use of Molotov cocktails and napalm. Issue 9 provided guidance on hostage-taking and stated that the aim was to kill as many non-believers as quickly as possible before the initial police response, while keeping some victims alive as human shields.
13. This material was not isolated from your other conduct. You were accessing it while researching weapons, targets, shooting ranges, public places and methods of concealment. On 4 July you searched for primary and secondary schools in the Colne area. On 1 September you searched for highly populated locations, including night clubs, busy streets, Manchester Victoria and Piccadilly railway stations, Manchester Cathedral, the AO Arena and other open events. You searched for churches, the Trafford shopping centre, Manchester Convention Centre, Old Trafford, local universities and synagogues.
14. On 22 September you searched for chest rigs. Around the same time you were engaged in cryptocurrency transactions and sought information on “how to send crypto anonymously”. You purchased access to a VPN and created an account with a virtual phone number provider. On 26 September you paid £1,150 to a cryptocurrency exchange to purchase Bitcoin.
15. On 30 September you searched for a school in Colne and then searched “how full is a mag of AK47”. On 4 October you searched for local shooting ranges. On 5 October, using the name “Abu Hasan Al Athari”, you communicated with a contact called Abu Sayf ar-Rumi on SimpleX Chat. This is a private, encrypted app which doesn’t require any user id. You said you had spent your savings and had done something which made it hard to hide. When asked what you had bought, you sent a gun emoji. You said you were “not hundred percent sure” it was real but were waiting for delivery. You sent a link to a Telegram firearms marketplace. You had paid £660 in Bitcoin and expected to pay £600 cash on delivery.
16. You then discussed an alternative course: hijrah, or travel to Islamic State territory. Abu Sayf told you that “hijrah to somal is open rn”. You asked about the cost. You searched for flights from Manchester to Somalia. You discussed whether the “Feds” would know about you and said you would delete everything from your phone to be safer. Abu Sayf told you that a young male travelling alone to Somalia would be suspicious and that you should create a fake plan of places to visit. You discussed shaving your beard. You were told you would undertake “3 months training there”.

17. I accept that your decision to cancel the firearm order means that Count 1 was not carried through to an attack in the UK. It is, however, important to be clear: that was not because you abandoned terrorism. You changed route. You moved from preparation for a domestic terrorist attack to preparation for travel abroad to join Islamic State and to receive training.
18. Count 2 concerns your preparation between 7 October and 20 November 2024 to travel to Somalia to join Islamic State. The indictment particularises that you sought advice and guidance on how to leave the UK without arousing suspicion, altered your appearance, deleted Islamic extremist content from your mobile phone, purchased clothing and equipment, purchased airline tickets and obtained a visa to enter Ethiopia to facilitate crossing into Somalia.
19. On 7 October you discussed travel options to Somalia with Abu Sayf, including flying via Dubai to make it appear you were taking a holiday. On 8 October you said, "I think I'm ready, I got 1367." You told him the firearms dealer had given you a partial refund. Abu Sayf sent you details for a "trusted contact", described as a "sister in dawlaah". You searched how to apply for an Ethiopian visa and made notes about hiding money in socks or shoes.
20. On 7 November you were contacted by "Hablos" on SimpleX Chat. Hablos questioned you about your age, experience, ideological commitment, whether you had ever been arrested, whether any family members were connected to police or armed forces, and whether anyone knew of your plans. You gave your age as 18 and said you had found out about "Dawla" 11 months earlier. You said you had no experience with weapons but had watched videos. You confirmed you were ready "to move direct".
21. Hablos advised you how to obtain an Ethiopian visa, how to complete the application, how to alter your appearance, how to pack and how to clean your device. You shaved your beard and sent photographs of yourself and your passport. When you had difficulty paying for the visa, Hablos paid for you. You were advised to obtain waterproof mountain sandals. You were told that once you arrived in Somalia your charger and power bank would be removed for safety. You were told to leave nothing "from Islam" on your phone and to put music and footballers on it.
22. On 18 November your Ethiopian visa was approved. You immediately informed Hablos. You booked flights from Manchester to Dubai and from Dubai to Addis Ababa. You booked a hotel in Addis Ababa to support your cover story. At around 03:30 on 20 November you booked a taxi from a mosque in Nelson to Manchester Airport. You were intercepted at the airport that morning.
23. After your arrest, you attempted to minimise your conduct. You claimed you had been travelling to Ethiopia for sunshine. You denied radicalisation. You said you had downloaded Islamic State publications out of curiosity. You described the officers as "disbelievers" whose "sense of right and wrong is just made up" and described democracies as "filthy".

24. In April 2025, while on remand at HMP Wormwood Scrubs, officers searched your cell. They found a drawing of an ISIS flag and handwritten material glorifying Islamic State. The notes included the statement that “we will fight them by the permission of Allah till religion and obedience is for Allah alone... till the Shariah of Allah is ruling everywhere and every head of Kufr is massacred.” They also found a note referring to Anjem Choudhary at HMP Milton.
25. Those facts demonstrate the gravity of this offending overall. What the court has to take from them is that this was not mere curiosity. It was not merely the immature consumption of offensive material. It was, unfortunately, ideological commitment, increasingly practical preparation, concealment, target research, an attempt to acquire a firearm, and then steps to travel to join Islamic State abroad.

Chronology

26. On 20 November 2024 you were detained at Manchester Airport under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000. You were intending to board a flight to Dubai. Your Apple iPhone, JMC/1, was seized. You provided biometric details to allow access to it. You were released at 11:15 and returned to the area of your home address in Nelson, Lancashire. Later that day, at around 17:30, you were arrested at Nelson railway station. You were interviewed with legal representation and answered “no comment” to all questions. You were released on bail pending further investigation.
27. Further analysis of your telephone revealed the conduct which forms Counts 1 and 2. You were arrested again on 11 February 2025 and declined legal representation. During interview you declined to answer some questions but answered others. You were charged and remanded in custody.
28. You first appeared before the Magistrates’ Court on 12 February 2025. You were unrepresented. The case was adjourned for the prosecution to obtain the consent of the Attorney General. You were remanded in custody. On 19 February 2025 the case was listed, but you refused to appear by video-link. On 5 March 2025 the case was listed again, but you again refused to cooperate. On 7 March 2025 you again refused to participate. You refused to recognise the court, saying that you believed only Allah could judge you. The District Judge authorised a hearing from your cell using a mobile telephone, and the case was sent to the Crown Court.
29. The case was listed before this court for a preliminary hearing on 28 March 2025. You refused to attend. The court adjourned the case to a preparatory hearing on 18 July 2025 and directed that you must attend. On 18 July 2025 you attended court in person, without representation. You were arraigned and pleaded guilty to all six counts. You expressed a wish to be represented at sentence, and you are now represented by solicitors and counsel.
30. On 23 January 2026 you submitted an application to vacate your guilty plea to Count 1. That application was accompanied by the psychological report of Dr Timothy Carrington Green dated 2 January 2026. At a hearing on 30 January 2026 the

application was abandoned. I treat your guilty pleas as pleas entered at the first hearing at which you substantively engaged with these proceedings. However, they were not entered at the very first stage of the proceedings. I also take account, to a limited extent, of the fact that you later sought to vacate your plea to Count 1, although that application was abandoned.

Who are you Muhammad Billal?

31. In order to understand as much about you as possible, I have read the pre-sentence report prepared by Jessica Stephen, dated 5 May 2026. I have also re-read Dr Green's report. I have considered the defence sentencing note and the prosecution materials. I have read the statements from your mother and older brother.
32. You are 19 years old. You are an Italian national. Your parents are from Pakistan. You were born in Italy and moved to the United Kingdom when you were about 13. You have lived with your parents in Nelson, Lancashire. You have no previous convictions or cautions. You told the probation officer that you had experienced discrimination in Italy and then again in the United Kingdom after arriving with limited English. You described yourself as isolated. You said you were always in your room and had never explored Nelson or the surrounding area. You did not pass most GCSEs, although you passed some subjects, and you dropped out of further education because of anxiety.
33. You reported that you had very few or no close friends and no intimate relationships. You described feeling that you did not belong in Italy, England or Pakistan. The probation officer considered that this absence of belonging was a significant factor in your radicalisation and that you were seeking brotherhood, identity and community online. You told the probation officer that your engagement with extremist material began after exposure to nasheeds and related content on TikTok while in Pakistan in 2023. The algorithm then provided more such content. You began to access Islamic State propaganda, including material from "Ajnad Nasheeds" and Archive.org. You said that ISIS propaganda appealed to you because the men wore balaclavas, had guns and "acted tough".
34. You described moving from social media content to original propaganda, lectures and materials promoting jihad. By December 2023 you had joined an Instagram group. In January 2024 that group moved to Telegram. You said that group comprised about 25 people who held extremist ideology and gave you access to thousands of PDFs. You told the officer you explored that material for around five hours a day, listened to propaganda all day and listened to "ISIS music to go to sleep". You described becoming immersed in a binary worldview: extremists who shared your ideology were to be loved; everyone else, including your parents, was to be hated. You said you stopped attending the mosque because the Imam was not extreme enough. You said you privately pledged allegiance to Islamic State and that you took that allegiance seriously.

35. You also described a long-standing wish to die. You told the probation officer that you had experienced suicidal ideation since the age of 16. As you became radicalised, death in the cause of Islamic State became appealing because it promised martyrdom. You said that part of your motivation for trying to buy the gun was the hope that you would be seen as a threat and shot by law enforcement. The PSR records your own description of the domestic plan. You accepted that you researched locations for a terrorist attack, including train stations. You accepted that at the time you intended to kill members of the public in the hope of being killed by police. You said you had not selected a final location because you were waiting to receive the gun. You could not say with certainty that you would not have gone through with the attack if you could.
36. As to Count 2, you told the probation officer that the opportunity to travel to Islamic State territory felt like a “life or death opportunity”. Travelling was more appealing because you were “about to commit an act of terrorism in the UK” but could achieve martyrdom abroad. You said that after being stopped at the airport you tried immediately to book another flight, and that only lack of a bank card prevented you from doing so. You said that had you reached Somalia, you would have killed innocent people, and that you are now happy you were arrested because it prevented you from “becoming a murderer”.
37. Dr Green diagnosed Autism Spectrum Disorder, Level 1, requiring support. He found clinically significant difficulties in social communication and interaction, restricted interests, sensory sensitivities, limited social understanding, reduced flexibility and limited tolerance of ambiguity. He considered that individuals with ASD may be more susceptible to social manipulation or misjudging social cues and that your condition may have relevance to your understanding, intent or ability to respond adaptively to complex or stressful social situations.
38. Dr Green also identified anxiety difficulties. Psychometric testing showed you had severe anxiety, elevated obsessive-compulsive symptoms and high impulsiveness. His report records that you are of average intelligence overall, although with some difficulties in language, attention and concentration. He did not suggest that your condition absolves you of responsibility. He did suggest that it may mitigate your culpability and help explain vulnerability to manipulation.
39. The author of the PSR recorded that actuarial tools which are of limited use in terrorism cases because they do not give weight such matters as your identification with Islamic State, your commitment to the ideology, the duration of the offending or the speed with which risk escalated, suggested low general likelihood of reoffending.
40. The report assesses you currently as posing a very high risk of causing serious harm to the general public. Risk factors include your high level of ideological commitment, your use of extremist networks, your access to operational terrorist material, your attempted firearm purchase, your target research, your plan to travel for jihad, your persistence after arrest and the post-arrest material found in your cell.

41. There are also positive features. You have now engaged with the prison Imam in a Theological and Ideological intervention programme undertaking 16 sessions since November 2025 and a Desistance and Disengagement Programme. The PSR records that such intervention before sentence is unusual but appears to have had a positive impact. You now express remorse. You say you wish to continue with intervention. The probation officer describes this as the beginning of a journey towards potential desistance, but she is cautious about the speed of your claimed change and the fact that your internal controls are not yet tested. The court commends Jessica Stephen for her report.
42. Your mother has also noticed changes in you since she was able to visit you in custody. She has formed the impression that you are not the same person you were when “brainwashed” by the ideology you had adopted, which your family abhor. She says that you have come back to your senses, you see that what you were doing was wrong and you regret it deeply. You want to fix your life and do something useful. Your brother shares this impression.
43. I accept that you are a young man with vulnerabilities. I accept that ASD, anxiety, isolation, social naivety and your desire for belonging helped to make you susceptible to extremist influence. I also accept that you have taken some important first steps to move away from your previous ideology. But your progress is recent, early and untested. It must be weighed against the seriousness and practical nature of what you did and planned to do.

The submissions of the prosecution

43. The prosecution submits that Count 2 should be treated as the lead offence because you abandoned the preparations reflected in Count 1 in favour of travel to join Islamic State in Somalia. Mr Morris on your behalf agreed in writing although he made some oral submissions contrary to that position. I think the prosecution’s approach is correct and I will proceed in that way.
44. For Count 2, the prosecution submits that the offence falls within Culpability B and Harm Category 2 of the guideline for preparation of terrorist acts because you played a significant role in terrorist activity where preparations were complete or so close to completion that, but for apprehension, the activity was very likely to have been carried out. The Crown relies on the visa, the flight tickets, your travel to the airport, your contact with extremist facilitators, your expectation of three months’ training and your intention to support Islamic State terrorist activity.
45. They say Harm Category 2 applies because involvement in combat operations on behalf of Islamic State risked multiple deaths, but given the point reached — before any training or combat — such deaths were not very likely to be caused. A B2 offence carries a starting point of custody for life with a minimum term of 15 years and a range of minimum terms between 10 and 20 years.

46. For Count 1, the prosecution submits that Culpability C and Harm Category 2 apply. It accepts that you acted alone and voluntarily desisted from the domestic attack plan, but your preparations were advanced: you had researched targets and attempted to purchase a firearm. A C2 offence has a starting point of 15 years' detention with a range of 10 to 20 years.
47. For Counts 3 to 6, it is said that Category B2 applies. You viewed information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism and that you had terrorist connections and motivations. The material provided instruction for specific terrorist activity endangering life, although harm was not very likely to be caused by the mere viewing of the material. Each such offence carries a starting point of four years, with a range of three to five years.
48. The prosecution relies on aggravating features: communication with extremist contacts; deliberate use of encrypted communications; attempts to disguise your identity through false names; steps to conceal or delete material; use of cryptocurrency; target reconnaissance; and the post-arrest material found in custody. On the other hand your youth, lack of maturity and absence of previous convictions are mitigating factors. It leaves to the court the extent to which your responsibility is reduced by virtue of mental disorder.
49. On dangerousness, the court must apply s. 308 of the Sentencing Act 2020 and determine whether there is a significant risk to members of the public of serious harm occasioned by further specified offences. Counts 1 and 2 are Schedule 19 offences, serious terrorism offences and specified offences.
50. The prosecution submits that the court must consider, in sequence, custody for life, a serious terrorism sentence, an extended sentence and, if none of those applies, the special sentence for offenders of particular concern. It submits that if the court finds dangerousness but does not impose custody for life or a serious terrorism sentence, the court should impose an extended sentence.
51. The prosecution relies on cases with similar elements. *R v Boular* [2019] 2 Cr. App. R. (S.) 41 is relevant to the categorisation of preparation offences and to dangerousness. The Court of Appeal held that culpability must be assessed by reference to what the offender was planning to do and how close and determined the offender was, and that the fact an attack would be prevented by law enforcement does not reduce culpability. It also held that where expert or other reports point in different directions, dangerousness remains ultimately a decision for the judge. In *R v Suleman* [2024] 2 Cr. App. R.(S.) 38 the Court upheld a B2 categorisation for an offender who travelled to join Islamic State with an ambition to become a sniper. The Court held that Harm Category 2 concerns whether multiple deaths were risked, not whether multiple deaths were very likely actually to occur. It also observed that the reason the B2 range begins with a life sentence is that an offender in that category is very likely to satisfy dangerousness.

52. In particular the court's attention has been drawn to *R v Khan* [2025] EWCA Crim 294, which concerned preparation for travel to Afghanistan to join Islamic State. It was held that immaturity and dangerousness are not mutually exclusive; immaturity may increase risk. A finding of dangerousness was upheld despite defence submissions relying on youth, immaturity and the PSR author's more favourable assessment.
53. Finally, the prosecution applies for a Serious Crime Prevention Order and forfeiture of mobile telephone JMC/1. The proposed SCPO seeks restrictions and notification requirements concerning communication devices, email accounts, instant messaging, social networking, online usernames, internet access, VPNs/proxies, virtual currency accounts and engagement with Counter Terrorism Police offender management.

The defence submissions

54. The defence accepts that Count 1 falls within Culpability C and Harm Category 2. Attention, is drawn however, to the guideline observation that where an offender voluntarily desisted at an early stage, a larger reduction may be appropriate, potentially going outside the category range. The argument is that the viability of the Count 1 plan was limited. You did not know whether the gun was real, did not receive it and expressed uncertainty in the SimpleX chat. I agree that all this is relevant to the seriousness of the intended domestic attack and to the likelihood of harm.
55. The submissions go on to dispute the prosecution categorisation of Count 2. It is said that the plan to travel to Somalia was not complete or close to complete because there were many unknown steps after arrival in Ethiopia. You were immature, naïve and heavily guided by online contacts whose identities and reliability were unknown. You were travelling with a school backpack containing limited clothing and sandals, and that you had never previously travelled alone outside the United Kingdom. Attention is drawn to the fact that, beyond inference, there is no evidence that Hablos was genuinely connected to Islamic State, that there was an ISIS camp accessible to you, or that you would ever have reached Somalia. Mr Morris submits that the statement about three months' training came from an online contact and cannot establish that such training would in fact have occurred.
56. Finally, on count 2 the communications with Hablos demonstrate grooming, exploitation and your immaturity it is suggested, eg in your immediate compliance with requests for your passport, photograph and email address, and what Mr Morris describes as the childish quality of some of the exchanges, including discussion about whether dates and nuts would be allowed in hand luggage. There is no dispute that Counts 3 to 6 are Category B2.
57. The central mitigation is that your age and maturity should substantially reduce the sentence. Five of the six offences were committed entirely or commenced when you were under 18, and the other, Count 2, was committed only shortly after your 18th birthday. Turning 18 is not a cliff edge that emotional and developmental maturity

may be at least as important as chronological age. Mr Morris reminds the court of case-law on the special care required when sentencing offenders of your age including *R v Peters & Others* [2005] EWCA Crim 605, *R v Matthews* [2005] EWCA Crim 2399 and *R v Kamarra-Jarra* [2024] EWCA Crim 198 and the guideline on Sentencing Children and Young People. In *Kamarra-Jarra*, the Court of Appeal emphasised that “it is never just a question of mathematical age” and that age governs the normal starting point but not the assessment of culpability by reference to maturity.

58. Other principles drawn from the guideline which I have well in mind include that children and young people are not fully developed, may be susceptible to peer pressure and external influences, and may not appreciate the effect of their actions. When considering the relevant adult guideline, a sentence for someone convicted when under 18 (which is not your position) broadly half to two-thirds of the adult sentence may be appropriate for those aged 15 to 17, although that is only a rough guide and must not ever be applied mechanistically. The defence also relies on *Boular*, particularly the reduction in Safaa Boular’s minimum term because insufficient weight had been given to youth and radicalisation from a young age.
59. In this context Mr Morris submits that you were affected by ASD and anxiety, and that your responsibility was substantially reduced by mental disorder. He relies on Dr Green’s diagnosis and on his evidence that your social understanding, flexibility and tolerance of ambiguity are limited, and that you may be vulnerable to manipulation or misjudging social cues. These features are relevant also to dangerousness and indicates that the statutory criteria are not met. Counter-indications are in your early guilty pleas, your remorse, your engagement with DDP, the absence of previous convictions, your rapid radicalisation, your vulnerability and the fact that you have not had an earlier opportunity for diversion through Prevent or Channel. There are prospects for change and any risks can be managed through rehabilitation in custody and licence conditions.
60. The imposition of a Serious Crime Prevention Order is opposed. I am asked to adjourn the consideration of a SCPO until later in the year once the impact of the sentence I impose has been felt and I will do so.

Dangerousness

61. I turn to dangerousness. A central issue in the case. The statutory question is whether there is a significant risk to members of the public of serious harm occasioned by the commission by you of further specified offences. That is a forward-looking assessment. It is not answered simply by asking whether you are now remorseful, whether you have begun to engage with intervention, or whether rehabilitation is possible. It requires the court to consider all available information about the nature and circumstances of the offences, and all relevant information about you.

62. I have taken full account of your youth. The law requires me to do so. I accept that at 17 and 18 you were still developing. I accept that you were socially isolated, inexperienced, anxious and affected by ASD. I accept that you were vulnerable to find attractive online relationships and to a degree, influence. I accept that your wish for belonging and brotherhood was a powerful factor. But youth and dangerousness are not mutually exclusive. Nor are immaturity and dangerousness. In some cases, immaturity may reduce culpability but increase risk. *Khan* is an important reminder of that point. The Court of Appeal expressly rejected the proposition that youth and immaturity necessarily point away from dangerousness, observing that immaturity may increase the risk posed by an offender.
63. There is, in this case, a real inconsistency between the defence submission that dangerousness is not made out and the assessment in the pre-sentence report. The defence note relies on your youth, ASD, susceptibility, remorse and engagement with DDP. Those matters are important. But the PSR, while recognising those matters, assesses you as posing a very high risk of serious harm to the general public and states that unless you engage meaningfully in long-term interventions, your likelihood of terrorism-related reoffending is high.
64. I accept the PSR author's careful distinction between general reoffending and terrorism-related risk. The actuarial tools suggest a low risk, but they do not capture the particular features of this case: the depth of ideological commitment, the rapid escalation, the practical preparation, the extremist associations, the concealment, or the post-arrest material. I also bear in mind *Boular*. The Court of Appeal held that even where reports point in different directions, the ultimate decision on dangerousness is for the judge. That is the responsibility I must discharge.
65. I find the dangerousness threshold established for the following reasons. First, your offending moved well beyond passive consumption. You accessed operational terrorist material repeatedly while also researching weapons, tactics and targets. Second, you were motivated by Islamic State ideology and by a desire for martyrdom. You privately pledged allegiance to Islamic State. You adopted extremist online identities. You recorded support for Islamic State and "death to America". Third, you prepared to kill members of the public in the United Kingdom. You researched schools, railway stations, arenas, shopping centres, religious buildings and other public places. You sought to purchase a firearm and researched ammunition-carrying equipment and shooting ranges. Four, by your own account to the probation officer, you intended to kill members of the public and hoped to be killed by police. You could not say with certainty that you would not have gone through with the attack.
66. Five, I am sure that your change of plan was not a withdrawal from terrorist intent. It was a decision to pursue terrorism abroad rather than in the United Kingdom. You took practical steps to travel, including obtaining a visa, booking flights, altering your appearance, removing extremist material from your phone and formulating a cover story. Six, you persisted after intervention. After being stopped at the airport, you

attempted to book another flight. Your own account is that you were stopped only because you did not have a bank card to purchase it.

67. Seven, after remand you continued to possess material indicating commitment to Islamic State. The notes and ISIS flag recovered from your cell in April 2025 show that extremist thinking continued after arrest. Eight, your present progress, although encouraging, is recent and untested. The PSR describes you as being at the beginning of a journey towards possible desistance. That carefully expressed optimism does not remove the significant risk.
68. What follows from that conclusion? I do not impose custody for life. These offences are grave, but I do not consider that their seriousness in your case is such as to make a life sentence necessary or proportionate. Your age, immaturity, ASD, anxiety, vulnerability, lack of previous convictions, absence of actual physical harm and emerging engagement with intervention all weigh heavily against a discretionary life sentence.
69. I do not impose a serious terrorism sentence. Counts 1 and 2 are serious terrorism offences, but I do not find the risk of multiple deaths condition satisfied in the statutory sense. My finding under the guideline is that multiple deaths were risked, but were not very likely to be caused. That approach: places Counts 1 and 2 in Harm Category 2, not Harm Category 1.
70. I am satisfied, however, that an extended sentence is necessary. A determinate sentence alone would not be sufficient to protect the public. You require a substantial custodial term during which specialist work can take place, followed by an extended licence period during which your ideology, associations, internet use, emotional state, relationships, susceptibility to influence and risk factors can be monitored.

Sentence and ancillary orders

72. I take Count 2 as the lead offence because it represents your final course of conduct and the offence interrupted at the airport. I accept the prosecution categorisation of Count 2 as Culpability B and Harm Category 2. Your preparations were close to completion in the relevant sense: you had obtained a visa, booked flights, altered your appearance, cleaned your phone, prepared a cover story and travelled to the airport. The intended activity risked multiple deaths through involvement with Islamic State, but at the stage you were stopped those deaths were not very likely to be caused.
73. I categorise Count 1 as Culpability C and Harm Category 2. You had advanced a plan to acquire a firearm and attack people in the United Kingdom, but you desisted from that plan before apprehension and redirected your intent towards travel abroad.
74. Counts 3 to 6 fall within Category B2. The material was operationally useful terrorist information. You accessed it with terrorist motivation and in the context of practical preparation, but the harm from mere possession or viewing was not itself very likely to occur.

75. I start from the adult guideline because Count 2 was committed when you were 18 and the offences are to be sentenced now in the Crown Court. I do not apply that guideline mechanistically. I make a reduction for your relative youth, immaturity and neurodevelopmental vulnerability. Much of the offending occurred when you were 17. You had turned 18 soon before the most serious elements of this offending was committed and I have taken account of your age in drawing back from a life sentence. Your ASD and anxiety reduced your resilience to manipulation and your ability to judge complex social situations. But I do not find you to be someone who was groomed and exploited into committing these offences, you started off on this track entirely yourself. I find, of varying significance, the following aggravating features: extremist communications; encrypted applications; false or ideological usernames; target research; research into firearms and ammunition equipment; use of cryptocurrency; attempted concealment; persistence after intervention; and the post-arrest material in custody.
76. I take account of the following mitigating features: your age; lack of previous convictions; guilty pleas; ASD; anxiety; isolation; susceptibility to the attraction of joining a brotherhood; lack of real-world experience; absence of actual physical harm; and your recent engagement with the Imam and DDP.
77. Reflecting the totality of your offending in Count 2, if not facing a life sentence a fully mature adult with mitigation and aggravation referable to this case, would have been sentenced towards the top end of the range of sentence in the category for that offence that I have reached. Before credit for plea, the appropriate custodial term for someone of your age and other characteristics would be 18 years. Giving credit for your guilty plea the custodial term is 13 ½ years' detention in a young offender institution. Because you are dangerous and because a determinate sentence alone would not adequately protect the public, I impose an extended sentence with an extension period of 5 years.
78. On Count 1, the sentence is 6 years' detention concurrent. On Counts 3, 4, 5 and 6, the sentence on each count is 3 years' detention concurrent. These sentences are concurrent because the offences arise from the same course of radicalisation and overlapping preparation. The sentence on count 2 reflects the totality of your offending.
79. The sentence of the court is therefore an extended sentence on Count 2 of 18 ½ years, comprising a custodial term of 13 ½ years and an extension period of 5 years, with concurrent sentences on the remaining counts.
80. You will serve the custodial part in accordance with the statutory regime applicable to this sentence. When released, you will remain on licence for the extension period, subject to conditions and recall. The days spent on remand will count in accordance with the usual statutory provisions.

81. The notification requirements under Part 4 of the Counter-Terrorism Act 2008 apply. As the term of detention is for a term of more than 10 years, the notification period will be 30 years.

82. I order forfeiture of the mobile telephone JMC/1 pursuant to section 23A of the Terrorism Act 2000. It was used for the purposes of terrorism.

Mrs Justice Cheema-Grubb DBE

2 July 2026