

Massive police operation follows deadly attack on Munich shopping centre

Our reporters
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German security forces have been conducting a huge anti-terror operation in the city of Munich, after several people were shot dead in a shopping centre near the Olympic Park last night.

At the time of writing, the exact circumstances of the attack remain unclear. According to police, shots were fired at a McDonald's store across from the shopping mall on Friday, at around 6:00 pm. According to the latest reports, 10 people have been killed and at least 21 injured. Witnesses reported they had seen three men with guns.

Munich police labelled the events “an acute terror situation” and took unprecedented security measures. For hours Munich was under virtual police lockdown. Police urged people to stay at home and avoid all public places. Public transport was suspended and Munich's central railway station evacuated.

Shortly after the reported attack, police helicopters flew over the city and additional security forces were deployed. The media also reported GSG9 German elite counterterrorism units arriving in several more helicopters.

Lynn Stein, who was inside the shopping centre at the time of the attack, told CNN: “I was in a neighbouring store when shots were fired. People started running. More shots were fired. People were screaming. Then I heard several shots at the parking station next to the mall. I went back inside the mall, to check on my co-workers. There were a couple of people coming in towards me, and I told them to leave as I continued towards my store. A man told me he saw a gunman. I ran outside, and police told me to leave, which I did. This was about 15 minutes after it happened, and then I was evacuated.”

Local residents described the massive security operation that followed the horrifying event. “Those people told us that there was a shooting outside and so the security closed the door of this mall and asked everybody to go upstairs to the fifth floor,” someone told the BBC. A man

working at a petrol station in the Bavarian capital said: “We see just ambulances and firemen and police, but all of this area is evacuated, all the streets. Now [there] are no cars, only on the side of the streets. All of the streets are blocked. I see that the people are scared. Everybody is running around.”

Munich police initially claimed they did not know who and where “the perpetrators” were. “Look after yourselves and avoid public places,” read a message sent out to residents. Police also urged people to avoid “speculation” and to desist from posting photos or videos of police operations online.

However, following the recent attacks in Nice and on a train in Bavaria, German and international media pundits, security advisors and politicians were quick to “speculate” that this was yet another terrorist attack conducted by ISIS.

Raffaello Pantucci, the director of international security studies at the Royal United Services Institute in London, claimed on German TV that Islamic State had Germany high on its agenda as a target. “They see it as one of the countries fighting in the alliance against them; it's a country with a lot of attention around immigration and it's a major European power.”

In an official statement, the Obama White House condemned, “in the strongest terms the apparent terrorist attack that has claimed innocent lives in Munich.” It threatened to step up the so-called “war on terror,” that is, the imperialist destruction of the Middle East. The statement continued, “The resolve of Germany, the United States, and the broader international community will remain unshaken in the face of acts of despicable violence such as this.”

Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump, who had promised to destroy Islamic State “now” and “fast” in his presidential nomination acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention on Thursday night,

likewise issued a statement, declaring, “This cannot continue. The rise of terrorism threatens the way of life for all civilized people, and we must do everything in our power to keep it from our shores.”

A number of German politicians also sought to exploit the events for reactionary political ends. Defence spokesman for the CSU, Florian Hahn, wrote on Twitter, “To restore public order we have to rely on the Bundeswehr [German army] in the coming days.” Dr. Maximilian Krah, a member of Chancellor Angela Merkel's CDU in Dresden, tweeted, “I am in Munich. This must be the turning point. The welcoming culture [towards refugees] is deadly. It's about our country!”

Notwithstanding these pronouncements, it is becoming increasingly unlikely that the perpetrator had an Islamist terrorist background.

At a press conference early Saturday, Munich police chief Hubertus Andrae identified the gunman as an 18-year-old German-Iranian, who had been living in Munich for more than two years. Andrae said the perpetrator had killed himself, and that police did not believe he had any accomplices. His motive for the attack was still unclear.

Other evidence pointed to a right-wing anti-Islamic background. In a video posted on social media, a man can be heard insulting the suspected gunman in a car park. The man tells the attacker to lower his weapon and calls him names. At this point the gunman attempts to defend himself, declaring that he is a German national. He shouts: “I’m a German”. The man shouts back in abusive language, whereupon the gunman tells him to “shut your trap”. Then he fires more shots. The rest of the conversation is incomprehensible.

Various media have noted that yesterday marked the fifth anniversary of the murder of 77 people at the hands of right-wing Norwegian terrorist, Anders Behring Breivik. On July 22, 2011, Breivik killed eight people in Oslo and 69 more at a youth summer camp on Utoeya Island in Norway.



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