

Explosion kills, wounds dozens at pop concert in Manchester

Our reporters
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An explosion just after 10.33 p.m. outside the foyer of the Manchester Arena concert hall, in northern England, has killed at least 19 people and wounded 59. According to witnesses, the blast occurred just minutes after American pop singer Ariana Grande had finished performing and thousands of concert-goers were making their way toward the exits. Most of those attending the event were young people in their 20s and teenagers, with some as young as 12.

Emergency wards throughout the city were placed on standby, while nearby Victoria Station was evacuated and train and light rail services were suspended. Six hospitals are reportedly treating the injured.

In an outpouring of solidarity, Manchester residents rallied to assist the thousands of young people stranded in the city due to the closure of public transport. Locals in the area invited people to wait in their homes and assisted in contacting their families. Nearby hotels and clubs took in dozens of youth. Taxi drivers rushed into the area to offer free rides home.

Heavily-armed police have taken up positions surrounding the arena and across central Manchester. Stepped-up police operations are expected at landmarks throughout the United Kingdom over the coming days.

While authorities have not—as of the time of writing—released information on the nature of the blast, they have announced it is being treated as an act of terrorism. British Prime Minister Theresa May, in her first statement, said the explosion was “being treated by the police as an appalling terrorist attack.”

The official statement of the Greater Manchester Police declared it was “working closely with the national counter-terrorism policing network and UK intelligence partners”—a reference to American agencies in particular.

To this point, no terrorist organisation, including

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or Al Qaeda, has claimed responsibility.

Witnesses spoke of panic and terror inside Manchester Arena, which is among the largest indoor concert facilities in Europe, capable of holding some 21,000 patrons.

One man, Andy, told BBC5 that he was waiting for his wife and daughter in the foyer when he was hurled to the ground by the impact of the explosion. “When I get up and look round,” he recounted, “there’s just bodies everywhere. I reckon 20–30 bodies. I can’t say if some of them were dead but they looked dead. They were covered in blood and were really seriously hurt.

“The first thing I did was I ran into the arena trying to find my family. I couldn’t find them, so I pulled back to where everyone was injured, to physically look at people to see if it was my family. At the same time, I started helping the emergency services as best I could, while I was trying to get hold of my family.”

A woman, Emma, told Manchester Radio that she and her husband were waiting for their 17-year-old son and 15-year-old daughter when the blast took place. “It was definitely a bomb. It was definitely in the foyer—about 15 feet away,” she said. “We stood at the top of the stairs and the glass exploded... The whole building shook. There was a blast and then a flash of fire afterwards.

“We obviously then ran to try and find our children and fortunately for us we were all safe to tell the story.”

David, who chaperoned his 13-year-old daughter to the concert, told Manchester News: “The lights came on after the gig and people were starting to leave. As I turned to the left there was an explosion. It was about 40 feet behind us, near one of the exits. We thought it was just people messing about then it happened again. Another explosion...”

“Then we saw smoke. Everyone just fled. Some people were injured. We saw blood on people when we got outside.”

At 1.30 a.m., a police bomb squad carried out what they described as a “controlled explosion” of a suspected bomb in Cathedral Gardens, a parkland and meeting place to the south of the arena. Shortly after, the suspected device was confirmed to have been a pile of abandoned clothing.

CNN subsequently reported that it had already been informed, by an unnamed “law enforcement” source, that the explosion was detonated by a male “suicide bomber.” Unconfirmed reports in British newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* have alleged the explosion was a “nail bomb.” Paramedics also reportedly told the BBC that some of the wounded had “shrapnel-like injuries.”

Ben Wallace, security minister in May’s Conservative government, issued a late-night statement calling for people across the country to be “vigilant” and “if you see anything suspicious call the anti-terrorist hotline.”

The carnage and terror in Manchester has taken place barely 17 days before Britain votes in the snap June 8 national election. It will be exploited by large sections of the political establishment and the media to elevate terrorism and national security to the centre of the campaign, as took place in France, after an extremist, who was known to the authorities, shot police in Paris on the eve of the first round of that country’s presidential election in April.

Prime Minister May’s office has announced that she will chair an “emergency” cabinet meeting in the morning, to discuss the government’s response. The Conservative Party, the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National Party have already announced that they are “suspending” their election campaigns.



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