

Bomb attack on London Underground sets stage for further state repression

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The explosion of a suspected homemade bomb on a packed Underground commuter train in southwest London Friday morning has become the occasion for a massive police and intelligence operation.

Before anything about the origins of the attack aboard a train at Parsons Green station had officially been made public, the government called a meeting of its COBRA emergency committee. The meeting was convened in the afternoon amid speculation that the UK's terrorism threat level could be raised from "severe" to "critical"—the highest level. Late Friday evening, Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May announced in a televised statement that the threat level was being raised to critical for an undefined period.

She stated, "For this period, military personnel will replace police officers on guard duties at certain protected sites that are not accessible to the public," adding, "The public will see more armed police on the transport network and on our streets..." Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner Mark Rowley said this would free up 1,000 armed police officers for use on the streets.

Earlier, May seized the opportunity to push for more surveillance powers, declaring, "[W]e are looking very carefully at the powers that our police and security service have to make sure they have the powers they need," while "working with the Internet companies."

She also announced a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron "to talk about what more we can be doing to ensure that we deal with the terrorist propaganda, with the extremist propaganda, with the hatred that is put out across the Internet."

During the evening, Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack via its news agency.

The rush hour attack appears to have been deliberate and indiscriminate. Passengers close by reported hearing a loud bang and seeing a "wall of flame" coming down the train. A number of people suffered burns, while others were injured in the panicked rush that followed the explosion, as commuters scrambled to exit the station.

The London Ambulance Service reported that 29 people were taken to hospital, mostly with flash burns. As of early Friday evening, 21 were still receiving treatment at Imperial, Chelsea and Westminster, and St George's hospitals.

One passenger spoke of seeing a burning "white builder's bucket" in a supermarket bag, with "a lot of wires hanging out of it." Images and videos circulating on social media appeared to confirm this.

The *Daily Mail* and other sources said the wires appeared to be fairy lights, which have been used in homemade explosive devices in the past. It appears that the "bucket bomb" device did not explode as intended. Later reports stated the device had a timer of some sort, and a circuit board was recovered from the scene.

Another eyewitness heard a "large bang on the other side of the tube train," then a "really hot, intense fireball" flew above his head, singeing his hair. He saw people with facial burns.

Another told the *Guardian*: "Suddenly there was panic, lots of people shouting, screaming, lots of screaming." He continued, "I saw crying women, there was lots of shouting and screaming, there was a bit of a crush on the stairs going down to the streets. Some people got pushed over and trampled on."

A woman, Emma Stevie, who was on the train when the explosion happened, described being caught in a "human stampede" as people tried to escape from the train. "I wedged myself in next to a railing, I put myself in the fetal position. There was a pregnant woman underneath me, and I was trying really hard not to crush her. I saw a poor little boy with a smashed-in head and other injuries. It was horrible."

Transport services were badly disrupted. Train service on the District Line, which crosses the entire width of London, was suspended between Wimbledon and Edgware Road stations. The entire line was subsequently shut down. Roads around Parsons Green station were closed, and bus routes terminated.

Police immediately launched a major operation with a

huge manhunt. The incident, initially handled by the British Transport Police, was handed over to the Metropolitan Police's SO15 anti-terror unit and declared to be terrorist-related. Police, including heavily armed and protected Counter Terrorist Specialist Firearms Officers, were deployed on the streets, a cordon was thrown up around the area, and houses and flats near the station were evacuated by the police. Helicopters circled overhead.

Shortly before midday, Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner Mark Rowley announced that "hundreds of detectives" were "involved looking at CCTV, forensics work and speaking to witnesses." Rowley reported that the security service MI5 and the GCHQ spy network were "bringing their intelligence expertise to bear on the case."

The *Guardian* reported Friday evening that the police have obtained CCTV images that capture the bomber as he boarded the train with the bomb.

As with all such outrages, there is no reason to assume that the attack comes as a surprise to the British intelligence agencies.

An indication that the security services know more about whoever carried out the attack than they are letting on came in the form of a tweet put out by US President Donald Trump, who called the perpetrators "sick and demented people who were in the sights of Scotland Yard. Must be proactive!"

Asked about Trump's tweet, Prime Minister May rebuked the US president, saying, "I never think it's helpful for anybody to speculate on what is an ongoing investigation." The Metropolitan Police described Trump's comment as "pure speculation."

The truth is that over the past decade, most terror attacks in Britain and Europe have been carried out by individuals, often radicalised Islamists, who were known to the state, had been monitored for years, and whose associations were of direct use to the major powers in their neo-colonial wars in Africa and the Middle East.

Similar statements were made by May and the British police after the May 22 Manchester Arena suicide bombing attack in which 22 people died. This was in response to US intelligence sources revealing, within hours, the identity of the bomber, Salman Abedi, and the fact that he was well known to British intelligence.

It is now established fact that that Abedi did not act alone, but was part of wider network that had been monitored and allowed to operate by British intelligence for years.

Similarly, the June 3 attack on London Bridge and Borough Market, which killed eight people and injured 48, was perpetrated by three individuals all of whom were well known to the intelligence services and police.

This is the fourth time that the threat level has been placed

at "critical" in the past 11 years. The last occasion was following Manchester attack, amid official warnings that another assault was "imminent." Nearly 1,000 armed troops were mobilised and put onto the streets, mainly in London, to reinforce counterterrorism officers.

The June deployment was in line with Operation Temperer, a covert plan devised by David Cameron's Conservative government, when May was home secretary.

Temperer followed a series of terror attacks in France by known intelligence assets and informers in 2015. These were seized on by the French state to implement Operation Sentinelle, which deployed 10,000 troops and imposed emergency powers allowing indiscriminate searches and arrests without judicial consent and increased surveillance. Presented as anti-terror measures, the emergency powers are still in effect two years later, to be used against social opposition in the working class.

Temperer was "accidentally" made public when minutes associated with it were uploaded to the National Police Chiefs' Council website earlier this year. The minutes revealed plans for up to 5,100 troops to be placed on the streets to "augment armed police officers engaged in protective security duties."

The *Daily Mail* noted that Temperer could be triggered by the COBRA committee following terrorist attacks, and that the military top brass recognised that the "Army played an important part in national resilience and supported the work going forward."

"National resilience" could mean almost anything, and makes clear that Temperer is in place to back up the police with the army as and when required. Temperer was kept secret at the time because, according to the *Daily Telegraph*, then-Prime Minister David Cameron was concerned that comparisons would be made with British Army operations in Northern Ireland during the "Troubles," the decades-long dirty war against Irish republicans.



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