



People yesterday observe a minute of silence for the victims of the Manchester Arena attack, in St Ann's Square, in central Manchester, Britain.

PHOTO: REUTERS

MANCHESTER TERROR ATTACK WHAT WE KNOW

Britain has raised its terror alert to the maximum level and ordered troops to protect strategic sites after 22 people were killed in a suicide bomb attack on a Manchester pop concert. Here is what we know so far about Monday's attack, the deadliest in Britain since 2005.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Police said they were called at 10:33pm Monday after an explosion at Manchester Arena during a concert by US pop star Ariana Grande, who is popular with teenagers and pre-teens. Witnesses described a "huge bomb-like bang" and scenes of panic as young fans rushed out and parents waiting outside searched frantically for their children. The bomber used an improvised explosive device apparently packed with nails and other metal objects outside one of the exits at the 21,000-capacity arena.

WHO IS BEHIND IT?

The suspected bomber has been identified as 22-year-old Salman Abedi, a British student dropout born to Libyan parents who fled the regime of slain dictator Muammar Gaddafi. Interior minister Amber Rudd confirmed on Wednesday that Abedi was known to intelligence services. A total of 10 people are being held in Britain and Libya over the bombing since Tuesday, including Abedi's father and brother in Libya. Libyan authorities said Abedi's brother had been aware of the attack plan. Abedi's father was once part of a Libyan militant group with alleged ties to al-Qaeda, a Libyan security source said yesterday. French Interior Minister Gerard Collomb said Abedi had become radicalised after a trip to Libya and probably Syria as well. The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility.



WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

Twenty-two people were killed and 116 injured, 75 of whom remain in hospital. Twenty-three of the injured remain in critical care. Eight-year-old Saffie Rose Roussis is so far the youngest named victim. She attended the concert with her mother and older sister, who were both injured.

SECURITY MEASURES

Prime Minister Theresa May on Tuesday placed the country on its highest level of terror alert -- "critical" -- meaning a new attack is believed to be imminent. Soldiers have been sent to assist armed police to protect strategic sites. The last time troops were deployed on British streets was in 2007.

OTHER ATTACKS ON UK SOIL

The Manchester bombing is Britain's second terror attack in two months. On March 22, five people were killed and more than 50 injured when a man ploughed into pedestrians on Westminster Bridge in central London. The attacker, 52-year-old Khalid Masood, fatally stabbed a police officer before being shot dead by police outside parliament. The deadliest bomb attack on British soil took place in July 2005 when four British suicide bombers inspired by Al-Qaeda attacked London's transport system, killing 52 people and wounding 700. SOURCE: AFP

This isn't fair Trump scolds Nato on spending, urges it to do more on terror

AFP, Brussels

US President Donald Trump on Thursday berated Nato allies for not doing enough on terrorism and spending, while stopping short of the public commitment to collective defence they had hoped for.

Trump's broadside at fellow leaders during his first NATO summit came as he unveiled a 9/11 memorial at the alliance's new \$1.2 billion headquarters in Brussels which is meant to highlight allied unity and purpose.

Trump said the bombing in the British city of Manchester on Monday, claimed by the Islamic State group, showed that "terrorism must be stopped in its tracks."

"The Nato of the future must include a great focus on terrorism and immigration as well as threats from Russia and Nato's eastern and southern borders," the president said.

Trump denounced allies for not paying their fair share, saying that even if they met a commitment to allocate two percent of GDP to defence, it would still not be enough to meet the challenges.

"Twenty-three of the 28 member nations are still not paying what they should be paying and what they're supposed to be paying for their defence," the president said.

"This is not fair to the people and taxpayers of the United States. Many of these nations owe massive amounts of money from past years," repeating a charge he had raised constantly on the campaign trail.

TRUMP IN BRUSSELS

EU's Tusk says no 'common position' on Russia, climate with Trump

Nato to join anti-IS coalition as leaders to urge Trump to offer support

The surprising mention of immigration was in line with one of Trump's key election promises to build a wall to keep out immigrants crossing into the United States from Mexico, a plan widely derided in Europe.

Trump's harsh words came despite Nato saying it would formally endorse joining the US-led coalition against IS at the summit, in the face of reservations in France and Germany about getting involved in another conflict.

Trump's carefully choreographed visits to the EU and Nato in Brussels had been designed to heal divisions caused by the billionaire's harsh campaign criticisms of both institutions on the campaign trail.

He called Nato "obsolete" and praised Britain's Brexit vote to leave the EU.

But differences immediately emerged after his talks with the European Union's top officials Donald Tusk and Jean-Claude Juncker on climate change, trade, and above all Russia.

"I'm not 100 percent sure that we can say today -- 'we' means Mr President and myself -- that we have a common position, common opinion about Russia," former Polish prime minister Tusk said.

Trump on the campaign trail made restoring relations with Russia a key promise but he has faced bitter opposition in Washington and has since become embroiled in a scandal over alleged links to Moscow.

Tusk also called for "Western values" to be promoted, challenging former tycoon Trump's world view that self-interested deals best settle international problems.

Trump came to Brussels direct from a meeting with Pope Francis at the Vatican, after visiting Saudi Arabia, Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

MANCHESTER TERROR ATTACK UK authorities missed several opportunities to stop attacker

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

British counter-terror agencies missed several chances to stop Salman Abedi before he carried out the Manchester Arena bombing, it has emerged.

Two people who knew the 22-year-old at college called the anti-terror hotline after he told them "being a suicide bomber was okay".

The calls are thought to have been made five years ago, after Abedi left school.

Two community leaders also reported Abedi over his extremist views.

Mohammed Shafiq, chief executive of the Ramadhan Foundation, told The Daily Telegraph Abedi was reported two years ago "because he thought he was involved in extremism and terrorism".

Abedi was also reported to the authorities after he confronted an Imam who was delivering an anti-extremist sermon at Didsbury Mosque.

Akran Ramadan, who is part of the Libyan community in south Manchester, said he understood Abedi had been placed on a "watch list" after the mosque banned him and reported him to the authorities for his extremist views.



Officials scouring the background of the British-born bomber said he was likely part of a wider terrorist network.

Several arrests have been made in both Britain and Libya after the bombing, which killed 22 people and wounded 64 more. Eight men have been taken into custody in the UK, while the bomber's father and younger brother have been arrested in Libya, the latter of whom confessed to knowing "all the details" of the terror plot.

Before becoming increasingly religious as his radicalisation deepened, Abedi drank and took drugs.

The Times reported that Abedi was also known to security services as an associate of IS recruiter Raphael Hostey, also from Manchester, who was killed in a drone strike in Syria last year.

British authorities were probing whether Abedi had ties to other cells across Europe and North Africa, two anonymous officials familiar with the case told the Associated Press.

Abedi is known to have returned from a visit to Libya just days before the Manchester attack, and it is feared he may have travelled to terrorist strongholds in Syria.

BALLISTIC MISSILES PROGRAMME

Iran says it built third underground plant

AFP, Tehran

Iran has built a third underground plant to manufacture ballistic missiles, the head of its Revolutionary Guards aerospace division General Amir-Abdollahzadeh said yesterday.

The announcement came as US President Donald Trump makes a maiden foreign tour in which Saudi and Israeli concerns about Iran have loomed large as it is likely to stoke new tensions with Washington.

"Step by step, we are developing our defensive capability and I announce today that in recent years we have built a third underground factory for the manufacture of missiles," Iran's Fars news agency quoted Abdollahzadeh as saying.

"We are going to develop our ballistic power. It's normal that our enemies, that is to say the United States and Israel, are angry when we show off our underground missile bases because they want the Iranian people to be in a position of weakness," he added.

In October 2015, state television aired footage for the first time of a base that Abdollahzadeh said was 500 metres (1,600 feet) underground and stocked with a range of different missiles.

The United States says Iran's missile programme is a breach of international law because the missiles could carry nuclear warheads in the future. Iran denies ever seeking nuclear weapons and says the missiles are designed to carry conventional warheads only and are a legitimate part of its defensive capabilities.

The Trump administration imposed fresh sanctions on Iran following a missile test in late January.

It added more last week at the same time as it renewed a waiver of sanctions related to Iran's nuclear programme.

In Saudi Arabia on Saturday, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson urged newly re-elected Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to end ballistic missile testing.

Net migration to UK falls in 2016

AFP, London

Net migration to Britain fell to its lowest level in more than two-and-a-half-years in 2016, official data showed yesterday, driven in part by an increase in the number of European Union citizens leaving the country.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said net migration to Britain in the year to December 2016 was 248,000, down 84,000 on the previous year and the lowest estimated level since the year to March 2014.

Concerns about immigration played a big role in Britain's vote in last June's referendum to leave the EU. The government has repeatedly failed to meet a pledge to reduce the net annual level to below 100,000.



Smoke rises near a public market after military attack helicopters fired rockets on the positions of Muslim extremists in Marawi City, on the southern island of Mindanao on May 25, 2017. Inset, Troops in action during the ongoing fight against militants.

PHOTO: REUTERS

WAR ON IS IN PHILIPPINES

Troops bomb Islamist militants in Marawi

AFP, Marawi

Philippine security forces bombed residential areas in a southern city yesterday as they battled Islamist militants who were holding hostages and reported to have murdered at least 11 civilians.

An initial rampage by gunmen, who have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group, through the mainly Muslim city of Marawi on Tuesday prompted President Rodrigo Duterte to impose martial law across the southern third of the Philippines.

Authorities said ending the crisis was proving extremely hard because, although there were only 30 to 40 remaining gunmen, the militants were moving nimbly through homes, had planted bombs in the streets and were holding hostages.

Intense gunfighting could be heard constantly throughout the day, according to an AFP reporter in the city, and the military said it had dropped bombs on residential neighbourhoods.

Most of Marawi's 200,000 residents had fled the city, which is about 800 kilometres south of Manila, but Herrera said those who remained had been warned to get out of the areas where there was bombing and fighting.

Five soldiers, two policemen and 26 militants have died in the three days of fighting, according to authorities. Thirty-nine soldiers have been wounded, the military said.

The fighting erupted on Tuesday after security forces raided a house where they believed Isnilon Hapilon, a leader of the infamous Abu Sayyaf kidnap-for-ransom gang and Philippine head of IS, was hiding.

The United States regards Hapilon as one of the world's most dangerous terrorists, offering a bounty of \$5 million for his capture.

The raid went spectacularly wrong as dozens of gunmen emerged to repel the security forces, then went on a rampage across the city while flying black IS flags.

Egypt cracks down on news websites

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's government, already accused of muzzling freedom of expression and opposition to President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, has blocked access to a host of news websites including Qatar's Al-Jazeera.

Around 20 websites based in Qatar and Egypt have been inaccessible since Wednesday night, including the Doha newspapers Al-Watan and Al-Raya, the Muslim Brotherhood's Ikhwan Online and Egypt-based Al-Sharq television which is close to the outlawed group.

Independent sites such as Mada Masr, which takes a strong stand against corruption, and Huffpost Arabi, the Arabic edition of the Huffington Post, have also been cut for Egyptian web surfers.

It is not the first time that Al-Jazeera has run foul of Sisi's administration.

Cairo has accused the network of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood which it blames for violence after Sisi ousted the movement from power in 2013.

Timothy Kaldas, a non-resident fellow at the Washington-based Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, said the latest crackdown appeared to be aimed at curbing discontent in Egypt and enacted without fear of consequences.

"More and more people are frustrated in Egypt in general. So they want to stop the critical information which could increase the frustration," he said.

An anti-terrorism law, adopted in August 2015, lays down stiff penalties for publishing "false information" on attacks in Egypt that contradicts official reports from the country's defence ministry, stirring condemnation from rights groups.

A growing list of media personalities have since either decided to down tools and stay silent or run into trouble with the judiciary.