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Issue Brief

The Manchester Attack

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Britain has decided to deploy military personnel at public events in the aftermath of a monstrous suicide attack which had hit the foyer area of the Manchester Arena on May 22, 2017. The threat level in the United Kingdom has been raised from 'severe' to 'critical', and more Manchester-like incidents are anticipated.

The unfortunate carnage took place at the end of a concert by a popular young singer Ariana Grande in Manchester. The Arena is one of the largest music venues in Europe with a capacity to hold 21,000 people. Apart from the 22 killed, 75 people hurt in the attack are being treated for life-threatening injuries. The death toll is the second worst of its kind Britain has suffered since the 7/7 bombing in 2005, when London transport network was bombed and 52 people were killed. Salman Abedi, a Briton of Libyan descent has been identified as the suicide bomber. Abedi studied business at Salford University but dropped out before completing his degree.

The bombing at the Manchester Arena is the fourth deadliest terror attack in Western Europe since 2015. Theresa May has called it a "callous attack carried out with cold calculation". Similarly, the Queen has condemned it as an "act of barbarity" that has "shocked nation". Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has strongly condemned the attack. Foreign Office spokesperson Nafees Zakaria while speaking to Radio Pakistan said, "Pakistan, itself has been victim of terrorism and denounces terrorism in all forms and manifestations."

Although, the British government did not make any immediate comment on the claim of responsibility by the Islamic State, the group has claimed responsibility for the inhuman attack. Most of the terrorist attacks in Western Europe recently have had some link to the so-called Islamic State. Two of the deadliest in November 2015 in Paris and in Brussels in March 2016, were directed by the Islamic State, carried out by operatives who had trained with the group in Iraq and Syria. The ISIL supporters have hailed the bombing in Manchester as a victory against "the crusaders" of the West, and have claimed it as revenge against UK's bombing on the children of Raqqa and Mosul in Iraq and Syria.

The attack came less than three weeks before Britain's general election on June 8, 2017. It has happened despite years of warnings and tightening of security, especially around crowded places. Earlier, the British authorities claim to have foiled numerous terrorist plots and maintained the nation's

threat at the second highest level of severity for months. That means the authorities considered an attack “highly likely”.

Home to non-violence from the times of suffragette movement, vegetarianism for cruelty-free lifestyle across the UK and beyond, and the discovery of electronic strength of graphene more than steel, Manchester has the honour of having an immense historic sense of confidence. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen how successful has been the incident in sowing fear and division among the diverse community of Manchester?

The theory of safety in numbers seems to have lost its luster. Early evidence suggests that the suicide bomber sought to maximise suffering by lying in wait between the Manchester Arena and Victoria train station, and timed the explosion to coincide with those leaving the venue. Similarly, the attack against concert-goers and those partying into the night fits a growing trend of soft targets. In 2006, an al-Qaeda related plot



targeted the Ministry of Sound, a multimedia entertainment group based in London, and in 2007 the Tiger Tiger nightclub in Haymarket was the target of a failed car bomb.

The multi-layered and multi-purpose factors of terrorism are contradictory and complex. The ego, identity and anger are certainly innate which form the '*dictates*' of individuals, societies and nations. Milo Yiannopoulos, the ultra-conservative British media personality in the US, has prompted outrage on social media and criticised singer Ariana Grande for being "ferociously pro-Islam" and "pro-immigrant", less than a day after the terror attack at her Manchester concert. He is a prominent figure of America's "alt-right" movement and has attacked the singer in a series of posts on Facebook. Hence, from self-radicalised wolf attacks of the individuals to the cultivation of the groups of militants, ISIL has become a reality, threatening individuals, societies, nations and the world order.

The time chosen to manifest its power coincided with President Trump's first visit to Saudi Arabia and then Jerusalem for the resolve of joint efforts to counter terrorism and militancy. Nevertheless, the direction chosen in Trump's meeting with the leaders of the Muslim states is significantly polarizing. The strategy chosen is purely confrontational with no avenues for any diplomatic conciliation. On the other

hand, Israel's investment in its conflict with Palestine not only underscores peace and security, but also equally threatens the international political order. Lumping freedom movement with violence as done by Trump during his speech at Jerusalem by bracketing Hamas together with Islamic State, Al-Qaeda and Hizbollah as terrorist groups is regretted by Barhoum. He calls it a "total bias to the Zionist bloc".¹In the absence of correct identification of the cause and continuation of contradictory exercise of any joint efforts to counter violence effectively is less likely to bear fruit. The Manchester attack, therefore, could be interpreted as a message to any coalition effort made to resolve the Middle Eastern regional issue.

¹ Julien Barnes Dacey, "Trump's Saudi Speech hints at new risks", *European Council on Foreign Relations*, www.ecfr.eu