

OPUS2

Manchester Arena Inquiry

Day 118

June 17, 2021

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Thursday, 17 June 2021

(2.00 pm)

Comments by THE CHAIRMAN

SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Today I am publishing the first volume of my report into the Manchester Arena bombing on 22 May 2017. My report when finished will consist of three volumes. The first considers the security arrangements at the arena, both generally and in particular on the night of the Ariana Grande concert, and whether they were adequate in view of the risk at the time of the terrorist attack occurring.

I set out in the report the circumstances in which the attack happened and I consider what more could and should have been done to improve security.

As everyone knows, a suicide bomber evaded the security outside the arena and detonated his bomb just as the concert was coming to an end, killing 22 people and injuring many, many more.

It should not be necessary to have security to protect us from murderers who have formed the intention to kill innocent members of the public, including children, in pursuit of their distorted beliefs, but while the terrorist threat remains, and it shows no signs of going away, we do need to have in place protective measures which provide security against the

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threat, but do not prevent us enjoying the freedoms which are part of our way of life.

The inquiry has examined in detail the security provision against terrorist attacks at the Manchester Arena and in the City Room on 22 May 2017. I heard evidence from 53 witnesses over a period of 32 days lasting 154 hours and considered over 1,000 documents.

For many of those witnesses, giving evidence was a very stressful experience and involved reliving what for them had been a deeply distressing event in their lives. I am grateful to them all for giving evidence and to the Greater Manchester Resilience Hub who have provided support to many witnesses.

It has been stressful and painful for the families of the deceased and those who survived this attack to hear this evidence and I am grateful for their patience and for the dignity which they have shown in their approach to this difficult process.

Having considered the totality of that evidence, and the submissions which have been made to me, both orally and in writing, by all those involved in this part of the inquiry, I have concluded that there were serious shortcomings in the security provided by those organisations which had responsibility for it and also failings and mistakes by some individuals.

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When the mistakes and shortcomings set out in the report are considered, it needs to be at the forefront of that consideration that responsibility for what happened and for causing so many deaths and serious injuries lies with Salman Abedi, the suicide bomber, and his brother Hashem, who assisted with the preparations. Hashem Abedi is now serving sentences of life imprisonment for offences including the murders of 22 people.

The brothers intended to cause as much harm as they could. No other person or organisation acted with the intention of causing any injury or with any idea their actions or lack of action would or could assist a suicide bomber carrying out his evil intentions.

There will be those who consider that I have been overcritical in reaching the conclusions that I have. They will suggest that I have used hindsight in reaching my decisions and have made scapegoats of some individuals. Others may consider that I have not been critical enough.

In reaching my conclusions, I have considered all of the evidence. There are not many people who, like me, have heard it all. I have tried to avoid any impermissible use of hindsight and above all I have tried to be fair.

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I was urged by everybody to avoid looking for scapegoats. I have not looked to blame anyone, but where, having considered the evidence, I considered that individuals have fallen below a proper standard in carrying out their important roles in protecting concertgoers, I have said so.

It should be remembered in relation to a number of the individuals who are subject to criticism that once the bomb had been detonated, they went as quickly as they could into the City Room where the bomb had detonated and did what they could do to assist the victims.

Some will say that if you look at any incident such as this in the degree of detail that I have, you will inevitably find things that have gone wrong. That may be so, but when you are considering an event which has caused as much harm and suffering as this attack, it is only right that the circumstances should be scrutinised with the greatest care.

An important part of the report deals with what are called missed opportunities. There were a number of opportunities to identify Salman Abedi's activities as being suspicious on the night before he detonated his bomb. What I cannot say with any certainty is what would have happened if those opportunities had not been

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1 missed. Salman Abedi might have been deterred from
 2 committing this outrage or might have done the same
 3 thing elsewhere. He might have detonated his bomb
 4 earlier in a different location, in or close to the
 5 City Room.
 6 The report deals in details with the shortcomings in
 7 security. I will not go into detail now and I invite
 8 those interested to read that detail in the report
 9 before forming a judgement. For now I will talk only
 10 about some of my overriding impressions.
 11 On 22 May 2017 the threat level set by the Joint
 12 Terrorism Analysis Centre was severe. That meant that
 13 a terrorist attack was highly likely. Whilst the threat
 14 was not specific to any particular premises, the arena
 15 was always a possible target for a terrorist. There had
 16 been previous attacks in Paris and Bavaria which had
 17 shown that popular music events such as those held at
 18 the arena could be a target.
 19 Everybody concerned with security at the arena
 20 should have been doing their job in the knowledge that
 21 a terrorist attack might occur on that night. They
 22 weren't. No one believed it could happen to them.
 23 The threat level had been at severe for a period in
 24 excess of two and a half years and it is difficult to
 25 maintain a level of preparedness over a long period.

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1 That is not a criticism of the threat level: while the
 2 threat was high, the level needed to be at severe.
 3 It was the responsibility of managers to ensure that
 4 the message that the threat level was severe was
 5 refreshed in such a way that people did not become
 6 complacent about it.
 7 The essential message is that all employees need to
 8 be on the lookout for suspicious behaviour which, when
 9 they see it, they should report to their relevant
 10 supervisor. Employees must know how to identify
 11 suspicious behaviour, be encouraged to report it, and
 12 not feel that they may be criticised if it turns out to
 13 be a false alarm.
 14 Further, there was insufficient sharing of
 15 information between those people concerned with security
 16 at the arena. Another recurring theme in this inquiry
 17 is the need to efficiently share information with
 18 partners and neighbours. The effect of this will be to
 19 greatly increase the efficacy of the response.
 20 I will now briefly say something about the
 21 recommendations that I have made in my report. I have
 22 made a number of recommendations which, if accepted,
 23 will, I hope, bring about changes which will make
 24 a further attack less likely.
 25 Central to my recommendations has been consideration

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1 of a Protect duty. The idea of a Protect duty has been
 2 around for some time, but it has been given new impetus
 3 by the hard work of Figen Murray, whose son was one of
 4 the victims of this outrage.
 5 A government consultation is ongoing, and people
 6 need to understand how important a Protect duty will be
 7 if introduced and the wide range of people who will be
 8 affected by the proposal. I would encourage people to
 9 participate in the consultation if they have not already
 10 done so. There is limited time to respond. The
 11 consultation ends on 2 July of this year.
 12 I have concentrated on considering a Protect duty
 13 for large premises such as the arena. I fully support
 14 the introduction of such a duty. I have not dealt with
 15 the other categories of a Protect duty proposed by the
 16 government because I have not heard evidence relating to
 17 them and very different issues arise.
 18 In relation to premises like the arena, I have
 19 recommended that the requirements of the duty are
 20 stringent. There seems to me to be no reason why large
 21 commercial organisations should not take all reasonable
 22 precautions to protect their customers from a terrorist
 23 attack.
 24 There will be different views as to how stringent
 25 the duty should be, and ultimately it is for Parliament,

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1 representing the public, to decide the appropriate,
 2 proportionate level.
 3 Having heard about the effect of the deaths of the
 4 22 people who died on their families and friends and the
 5 effect on those left permanently injured, I consider
 6 that a rigorous duty is appropriate.
 7 I hope that the consultation will lead to a lively
 8 debate on what is an important matter and that it will
 9 be possible for it to be passed into law quickly.
 10 I will not deal with my other recommendations as
 11 they are set out in my report. As the inquiry will
 12 continue to hear evidence until the end of this year,
 13 I hope that I will be able to review the progress that
 14 has been made on those of my recommendations that are
 15 accepted.
 16 I am grateful to the Chairman of the Manchester
 17 Bench and the Clerk to the Justices for allowing us to
 18 use part of their court. I am very grateful to all the
 19 core participants and counsel and solicitors to the
 20 inquiry for their hard work and for the assistance which
 21 they have given me. It has not always been an easy
 22 process, particularly as it has taken place during the
 23 COVID pandemic.
 24 I am grateful to all those who provided the
 25 equipment and the expertise which enabled us to keep

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1 going even when we were only permitted to have a limited 1
2 number of people in the hearing room. I am grateful for 2
3 the tolerance of those who have been put to 3
4 inconvenience as a result of the alterations that we 4
5 have had to make due to the pandemic. 5
6 We will continue next week with our hearings into 6
7 the adequacy of the emergency response, which will form 7
8 the subject matter of the volume 2 report. 8
9 Finally, we will deal with the radicalisation of 9
10 Salman Abedi and what the intelligence services and 10
11 counter-terrorism police knew and in the light of that 11
12 what, if anything, they could and should have done to 12
13 prevent the attack. 13
14 My conclusions on those matters will form volume 3. 14
15 I will see some of you at 9.30 on Monday morning. 15
16 Thank you. 16
17 (2.14 pm) 17
18 (The hearing adjourned until Monday, 21 June 2021 at 18
19 9.30 am) 19
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3 Comments by THE CHAIRMAN1 3
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