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EX POST PAPER
STUDY VISIT: Responding to crisis — Building resilience, Manchester, United Kingdom

Crisis response: Lessons from the Manchester Arena bombing of 2017

On 21 and 22 March 2019, RAN visited Manchester for an inspiring study visit. Meeting with local actors and communities, RAN learnt how communities in the city and the surrounding county have been responding to and recovering from the Manchester Arena attack at an Ariana Grande concert on 22 May 2017.

Actors from a large variety of municipality- and community-led response mechanisms showcased Manchester’s impressive joint effort for community cohesion and resilience as well as the implicit and explicit principles underpinning this ongoing course of action.
Study visit context

Two years have passed since the horrific attack at the Manchester Arena which left 22 people dead (excluding the attacker) and hundreds physically and mentally injured. The city’s remarkable immediate and long-term response to this tragedy has received international recognition. RAN organised a multi-agency study visit to Manchester, hoping to learn from the related experiences of the city and region. Over the course of two days, educational, security and government sector representatives met with study-visit participants from across the EU. Exploring technical and societal questions linked to the successful response to crisis in general and terrorist attacks in particular, participants sought to understand the outcomes and the processes which unfolded in Manchester after the attack.

MANCHESTER: MULTICULTURAL METROPOLIS AND SITE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Manchester is a large city of more than half a million people, situated in North West England. It forms part of the county of Greater Manchester, whose inhabitants number 2.8 million, and is governed by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). Manchester is a multicultural city, home to people of European, Asian, Arab, African and Chinese descent, among many others. Just under half of the Mancunian population identifies as Christian, followed by about a quarter of inhabitants not adhering to any religious belief, and about 16% of Muslim faith. In recent years, the city has undergone significant change in its religious demographics: a drop in the Christian proportion of at least 22%, a rise in non-religious citizens by over 58%, and an even higher increase of the Muslim proportion, of 73.6%. Furthermore, Manchester is home to the largest Jewish community in Britain outside London (0.5% of the population). More than 78,000 students attend the city’s two universities.

Violence in Manchester in the wake of the Northern Ireland conflict

Ever since the late 1800s, Manchester has experienced outbursts of political violence, mostly fuelled by the Irish nationalist struggle and by groups using terrorism for their cause. However, the most devastating attacks on the city and its inhabitants up to this point, came only in the 1990s. At the start of this decade (3 December 1992), two bombs planted by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) at two locations in the city centre wounded 65 people and caused substantial damage to buildings.

PIRA’s 1990s bombing campaign: Between 1977 and 1989, PIRA’s attacks in England never exceeded four days per year. This changed in 1990, when the organisation carried out 19 days of attacks within a single year; 1992 saw a new record of 47 days of attacks in England. This was when PIRA also commenced a campaign against the City of London.

Only four years after these attacks, on 15 June 1996, Manchester’s Corporation Street, located right in the city’s centre, was devastated by PIRA’s 1500 kg truck bomb which injured 212 people and caused an estimated GBP 700 million in damages, leading to extensive reconstruction of the city centre. The fact that nobody was killed has been attributed chiefly to the excellent response of emergency services: they succeeded in evacuating more than 75,000 persons from the city centre after the PIRA warning about the bomb, issued 90 minutes prior to its explosion. The emergency personnel — still dubbed ‘the 999 heroes’ by local news, even 20 years later — had been aware of possible threats to the city around that period, given the high-profile football match set to take place there the day after the attack as part of the Euro 1996 football championship the day after the attack. Thanks to the vigilance around these threats, emergency personnel had recently received bomb training, which was a contributing factor to the successful evacuation.

The Manchester Arena Bombing

On 22 May 2017, after over two decades of relative peace in the city, Manchester was struck by its first Islamist-inspired terrorist attack, carried out by a 22-year-old Mancunian. The target was a concert by American singer

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1 A native or inhabitant of Manchester, or something relating to Manchester.
Ariana Grande at the Manchester Arena, directly adjacent to Manchester’s Victoria Station, one of the city’s most important transportation hubs. In addition to the 22 people who were killed, at least 800 further people suffered physical and/or mental injuries, and many of them continue to do so. The following sections will summarise the key response mechanisms and the principles on which they are based.

**Principle 1: Fostering resilience — learning from the past**

Building proper resilience for a city and its surrounding region calls for all types of past experiences to be taken into account. Building resilience in terms of terrorism, for example, means considering not only past incidents of terrorism but other types of crises, too: natural disasters such as floods; public health crises such as pandemic flus; industrial accidents; and smaller, seemingly less significant events such as heat waves or cold spells and snowfall. While local context and environmental and social background are key considerations in this process, experiences from different places and settings should likewise be taken into account. In this sense, this paper and Manchester’s experience offer insight into the underlying principles of resilience and response action.

'We foster the resilience of the city region: a place where individuals, communities, institutions, businesses and systems survive, adapt and grow, no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience.'

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

In Greater Manchester, the resilience strategy is based on four chief pillars.

1. **Building cohesive, healthy, and resilient communities.**
2. **Leadership: Shaping resilience within Greater Manchester, i.e. defining visions and allocating funds.**
3. **Foundation: Being ready for future challenges.**
4. **Discovery: Advancing resilience understanding.**

Applying an adapted combination of these four pillars helps to ensure that a given municipality is resilient — not only at one specific point in time, but also dynamically, in understanding changing contexts and the subsequent change in potential future challenges. Consequently, the dangerous complacency about immunity to this kind of violence, as expressed in the statement ‘It will never happen here, is highly unsustainable. Only if authorities and communities remain constantly aware of potential threats and challenges, can they attempt to prepare for any imminent problems. Authorities must remain vigilant and aware of the possibility that a terrorism- or extremism-related incident might affect their own community. While the possibility of a high-profile attack as in Manchester seems unlikely for smaller towns, they may suffer from smaller scale attacks, with knives, for instance. Authorities should also remain aware of the fact that individuals in their communities may well be affected by attacks elsewhere. In the case of the Manchester bombing, for example, the audience hailed from across England and the United Kingdom.

Building long-term and sustainable resilience across society with a strategy based on all four pillars is key — but this cannot be achieved without due consideration for the second principle.

**Principle 2: Working cross-organisationally and cross-culturally**

When faced with crisis in the form of a terrorist attack, Manchester has shown that the various forms of response must share one common feature: they must be cross-organisational and cross-cultural.

This applies to several actions, such as:

- immediate recovery action (e.g. Operation Newtown in Manchester)
- long-term victim support
- long-term trust-building between authorities and communities.
Immediate recovery action

Operation Newtown was the central recovery action operation following the attack. It kicked off an intensive 9-day, 24/7 response characterised by shared leadership of the multi-agency response system, strong support for local authority leadership as well as place- and community-based leadership. For all of these elements, long-standing partnership and trust were key to successful cooperation between all agencies involved. At the end of these nine days, a comprehensive recovery plan had been formulated and approved by the national government.

The plan was divided into six key workstreams:

- welfare and health
- community recovery
- business and economic recovery
- communications
- finance
- debrief and learning.

One of the key lessons learned from this recovery plan was that the widely publicised 'honeymoon period', spotlighting a shared sense of survival and a strong community, was at odds with the situation on the ground. Over time, feelings of disappointment, anger, frustration and exhaustion, among many others, became increasingly evident across various sectors of society and in numerous people affected by the attack.

Well-organised and cross-organisational victim support, as well as existing trust between authorities and communities, can help many overcome such societal disillusionment.

Long-term victim support

The Manchester Attack Support Programme was founded in support of those affected by the attack. The programme addressed five key areas of action:

1. Assessment of the humanitarian impact
2. establishment of a focal point for addressing needs
3. providing targeted and specialist support
4. sustaining ongoing outreach
5. enhancing community resilience, support and solidarity.

All actions under this framework were developed and carried out by a large variety of organisational and institutional stakeholders, working jointly towards all five goals. One such stakeholder was the Tim Parry Johnathan Ball Peace Foundation, a longstanding provider of victim support. This non-governmental organisation has been running a Survivors Assistance Network, working directly with survivors and/or bereaved families and offering individual support. Within the first week after the attack, the foundation received between 200 and 300 cases, an impossible case load for the 2 practitioners tasked to support them.

It became clear, however, that for many, perceived support, i.e. the knowledge that someone is available in case they need assistance, is adequate. The social workers of the Peace Foundation in turn also work with the Manchester Resilience Hub, a service that coordinates the mental health support and advice for those affected by the attack — once again proving the importance of cross-organisational partnership.

Long-term trust-building between authorities and communities

Individuals and communities are affected by terrorist attacks in a number of different ways. On the one hand, the direct victims of such attacks feel injured, bereaved and traumatised. On the other, especially in times of increasing societal polarisation, communities or groups considered to be linked to the perpetrator or the act of terrorism in some way may become targets for reprisal and resentment. The latter occurred in Manchester in 2017 with the Mancunian Muslim population in general and with the Libyan community in particular (the perpetrator was a member of this community). Following the attack, hate crime against people perceived to be Muslim increased by 505 %.
This shows that it is necessary not only to provide direct victim support, but also to counter further extremist activity that may try to capitalise on such tragedies. In order to prevent such community tensions and offset drivers which might ultimately contribute to further extremism, Manchester City Council and the Greater Manchester Police set up the RADEQUAL campaign and grant programme in 2016. They had the clear objective of building community resilience and challenging hate, prejudice, and extremism.

This (ideally) deep-rooted, authentic type of cooperation that is long-term and forward-looking offers great potential for achieving positive impact, possibly even more so than P/CVE and community cohesion and resilience projects set up in response to incidents.

When working with communities that have been the target of unjustified social (or even violent) backlash, not only the cross-organisational, but most importantly, the cross-cultural dimension of responses to and preparations for terrorist attacks become apparent. In Manchester, parts of the Libyan population felt unjustly targeted and stigmatised by the police, who had carried out numerous raids on some of their members. A long-standing community of Manchester that feared for the loss of its loved ones, just as other Mancunian communities did following the attack, had suddenly become a target. To a large number of young people, this seemed and felt like police reprisal.

Many of the young men supporting this viewpoint attended Burnage Academy for Boys. The Peace Foundation, the City Council, and the school, who were aware of the potential risk of radicalisation if these boys were left without support, devised a support programme for the young men they assessed as most at risk. This programme, made possible thanks to the long-established good relations between all three stakeholders, included outreach to parents, and it prioritised this outreach: bringing the school to the parents. This meant enabling parents, including non-native English speakers, to engage with the school and affiliated social workers in a meaningful way. This outreach was vital, because parents are very often deliberately kept in the dark by their children.

However, building trust and meaningful relationships with migrant and other minority groups should be a priority — not only for schools and the educational system, but also for the larger government and especially security services. These relationships cannot be cultivated overnight or just in the aftermath of critical incidents. Trust-building, especially between government authorities and security services and historically marginalised groups, may take years or even decades, if it is to be a reliable support in times of crisis. At the same time, trust-building requires both parties to engage: minority groups and their representatives must also work proactively on fostering good relations with authorities and other demographic groups.

Manchester’s Khizra Mosque demonstrates an exemplary approach to such relationship- and trust-building. The mosque has long worked towards becoming an inclusive social space — for not only the Muslim community but also opening its doors to others in need, aiming to foster peace and friendship. Together with the City Council and its representatives, the mosque and its members have worked to bridge societal divides and tackle prejudice for years. During the night of the Arena attack, the mosque opened its doors to frightened families awaiting news of their loved ones and provided food, drink and emotional support. It has since continued to engage with victims of the attack: one victim’s family has even donated an olive tree for the mosque’s peace garden. This experience once again highlights the importance of long-term engagement: the mosque has been cultivating a relationship with the City Council for over 35 years.

**Principle 3: Allow for informal, emotional reactions**

The power of kind, spontaneous gestures illustrates another seemingly small yet important principle that response plans should take into account: the impact of informal and emotional reactions aiming to achieve public and community healing. Fostering emotional cohesion among members of a community struck by a terrorist attack plays a crucial role in the long-term healing process of a population. As City Council officials noted, many of the public reactions following the bombing had not formed part of the official recovery plan. These reactions included the following:

- a vigil for the victims at Albert Square on 23 May 2017, less than 24 hours after the attack
- tributes for the victims at St. Ann’s Square
- the One Love Manchester solidarity concert on 4 June 2017, proceeds of which benefited the *We Love Manchester Emergency Fund*.

However, not all such actions have proved helpful: families of victims have described certain experiences as overwhelming and unhelpful for their healing process. Therefore, authorities and civil society initiatives must consider carefully whether the actions are appropriate: whether the survivors’ perspective has been taken into
account, whether families might feel pressured to engage in certain situations at a highly charged time. When drafting response plans to potential attacks, authorities and initiatives should remain aware of such aspects by consulting survivors’ organisations such as Survivors Against Terror. Extending small but practical gestures of support to families (e.g. providing phone chargers) may have a more lasting impact than symbolic gestures, which tend to have a positive long-term impact on the larger community. While both types of action serve their purpose, they need to be carefully balanced so as to prevent them invalidating each other.

RAN would like to extend its gratitude to the City of Manchester, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, and all other partners in and around Manchester for the invitation and for providing participants with such an insightful opportunity to learn.

10 key points: Preparing response and recovery for terrorist attacks

1. Accept the possibility of an attack within your area of responsibility.
2. Take past, present, local and international experiences of crises of all varieties into account.
3. Ensure cooperative leadership is in place that will design and implement visionary plans.
4. Work cross-organisationally to involve all relevant actors on site, both governmental and non-governmental.
5. Work cross-culturally to involve all societal stakeholders within your community, to prevent hate crime and foster cohesion.
6. Support local cultural and social groups and communities, and build deep-seated trust between them and government bodies and representatives (especially the police).
7. Ensure long-term victim support from the start. Include both social work and mental health support options for direct victims, and remember to provide youth work and youth care for all, including marginalised groups.
8. Do not forget practicalities during the immediate response: survivors, frightened and waiting families and friends need food, drinks, blankets, phone chargers, etc.
10. Plan all these elements before an attack occurs.