2 killed, 4 seriously injured in Yom Kippur attack at UK synagogue; terrorist shot dead

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Two people were killed and four seriously injured when a man drove a car into people outside a packed synagogue in Manchester, northern England, on Thursday and then began stabbing them, in a terror attack on Yom Kippur.

Police shot and killed the suspect outside Heaton Park Hebrew Congregation Synagogue in the Crumpsall neighbourhood, said Greater Manchester Police (GMP). It took law enforcement a number of hours to confirm the man was dead because of concerns he had an explosive device on him.

GMP Chief Constable Sir Stephen Watson confirmed that two Jewish people were killed in the attack. He also said the suspect was “wearing a vest that appeared to be a suicide device.” Officers said later that the device was “not viable.”

Police said a large number of people had been worshipping inside the synagogue at the time and prevented the terrorist from entering. The building was subsequently evacuated.

A video shared on social media showed police shooting a man inside the synagogue’s perimeter, while another man, apparently a congregant, lay on the floor in a pool of blood.

Footage from the scene at the time of the attack also showed an officer yelling for onlookers to clear the area as the suspect “has a bomb.”

A bystander could be heard on the video saying that the terrorist had a bomb and was trying to detonate it. When he tried to stand up, a gunshot rang out and he fell to the ground.

An image on social media appeared to show the assailant wearing white objects around his waist.

Britain’s most senior counter-terrorism officer, Laurence Taylor, said the attack had been declared a terrorist incident based on what investigators knew, and that two people had been arrested.

He said investigators believed they knew the identity of the attacker but were not able to confirm it yet.

The attack took place as people gathered at the Orthodox synagogue on Yom Kippur, the day of atonement and holiest day in the Jewish calendar.

**‘He tried to break into the synagogue’**

Chava Lewin, who lives next to the synagogue, said she heard a bang and thought it might be a firework until her husband ran inside their house and said there had been a “terrorist attack.”

She said she had been told that the car had been driving erratically before crashing into the gates of the synagogue.

“The second he got out of the car, he started stabbing anyone near him. He went for the security guard and tried to break into the synagogue,” she told British media.

“Someone barricaded the door. Everyone is in utter shock,” Lewin said.

Other witnesses were quoted specifying that the synagogue’s rabbi, Daniel Walker, barricaded the door.

In a series of posts on X, Greater Manchester Police said they were called to the Heaton Park synagogue shortly after 9:30 a.m.

The caller said he witnessed a car being driven toward members of the public and that one man had been stabbed.

Minutes later, police fired shots, saying they believed they had hit the suspect.

Neighbour Angela Crawshaw told Reuters she had seen three policemen aiming guns at the terror suspect in the car park of the synagogue, telling him: “Stay down, don’t move or we’ll shoot.”

“Then they did shoot, and he fell to the floor. Then he tried getting up again and moving again, and they shot him again. And then it was just panic … just noise and panic.”

After the attack, police were seen ushering a large group of mostly Jewish elderly men — some in tears, many looking shocked — away from the synagogue. Some were wearing white robes, others were in suits and wearing a skullcap.

Crawshaw said she saw about 30 people being taken out, including three young children.

“There were a large number of worshippers attending the synagogue at the time of this attack, but thanks to the immediate bravery of security staff and the worshippers inside, as well as the fast response of police, the attacker was prevented from gaining access,” said Watson, the GMP police chief.

“We are grateful to the member of the public whose quick response to what they witnessed allowed our swift action, and as a result the offender was prevented from entering the synagogue,” a police spokesperson said.

Police later confirmed that two further suspects had been arrested in relation to the attack.

Police said a “loud noise” at the scene a number of hours after the attack was due to “specialist resources” breaking into the suspect’s vehicle “as a precaution,” an apparent reference to bomb disposal teams.

Counterterrorism officer Taylor told reporters: “Communities across the UK who would normally be marking this holy day are now grieving, and worried about their safety. I want to be clear: UK policing is mobilizing. And mobilizing fast.”

**Authorities declare an emergency**

Immediately after the attack, police declared “Plato,” the national code-word used by police and emergency services when responding to a “marauding terror attack.”

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said he was appalled by the attack and additional police officers would be deployed at synagogues across the UK.

He flew home early from a summit of European leaders in Copenhagen, Denmark, to chair a meeting of the government’s emergency committee.

“The fact that this has taken place on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, makes it all the more horrific,” Starmer said on the X platform.

King Charles III said he and Queen Camilla were “deeply shocked and saddened″ to learn of the attack “on such a significant day for the Jewish community.″

“Our thoughts and prayers are with all those affected by this appalling incident and we greatly appreciate the swift actions of the emergency services,’′ he said on his social media feed.

Israel’s embassy in the UK said it was “abhorrent and deeply distressing” that “such an act of violence should be perpetrated on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar.”

“The safety and security of Jewish communities in the United Kingdom must be guaranteed,” it added on X.

Antisemitic incidents in the UK have soared following Hamas’ devastating October 7, 2023, attack that sparked the war in Gaza, according to Community Security Trust, a security and advocacy group for British Jews.

More than 1,500 incidents were reported in the first half of the year, the second-highest reported since the record set a year earlier.

British synagogues and Jewish sites have high levels of security, both from community guards and policing, as well as physical defenses.