

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Possible Terror Link As Gunman Kills 50 People At Gay Nightclub In Orlando

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A gunman killed 50 people and wounded at least 53 after opening fire at a gay nightclub Orlando, Florida called Pulse, early Sunday, in what is now the worst mass shooting incident in American history. Law enforcement officers described the slaughter as an act of terrorism.

The gunman, Omar Mateen, lives in Port. St. Lucie, Florida, according to federal law enforcement officers.

The mass murderer charged the Pulse nightclub armed with an assault rifle and a handgun — investigators were still looking into the possibility that he had explosives — at

about 2:00 a.m., when more than 300 people were inside dancing and drinking, said Orlando Police Chief John Mina.

The killer exchanged fire with an off-duty police officer, who was working security at the nightclub. The shooter then opened rapid fire on a crowd of patrons, sending hundreds more fleeing down a darkened street of the neighborhood that surrounds the nightclub.

The gunman had held hostage dozens of people, some hiding in the facility's restrooms, calling for help, until police, using an armored vehicle and stun grenades, assaulted and killed him.

"It appears he was organized and well-prepared," Chief Mina said, adding that the raid saved the lives of about 30 people.

At a news conference, Ronald Hopper, an assistant agent in charge of the F.B.I.'s Tampa Division, raised the possibility that the killer was an Islamist radical, and law enforcement officials said they were investigating the slaughter as an act of terrorism.

"We do have suggestions that that individual may have leanings towards that, that particular ideology," Mr. Hopper said. "But right now we can't say definitively, so we're still running everything around."

Federal law enforcement officials said they had found no indication so far that the attacker was linked to any wider organization, though they and the police were investigating several possible terrorism angles, both overseas and in the United States. Past terrorist attacks, like the massacre in December in San Bernardino, Calif., were carried out in the name of Islam by people who were "self-radicalized," apparently having no direct ties to any organization but inspired by groups like the Islamic State and Al Qaeda.

Terrorist groups have not claimed responsibility for the Orlando shooting as yet, but a social messaging account linked to the Islamic State gloated about the attack, according to The New York Times.

The toll of dead and injured far exceeded the [32 people killed at Virginia Tech](#) in 2007, and the 26 gunned down at an elementary school in Newtown, Conn., in 2012.

Clubgoers streamed out of the Pulse into a chaotic situation with little idea of where to go. "Cops were saying, 'Go, go, clear the area,'" Christopher Hansen told an Orlando television station. "You don't know who's what and who's where."

As the sun came up, helicopter-shot video showed a situation that seemed to be under control, although windows on one side of the club appeared to be shot out.

According to The New York Times, phone camera videos shot at the scene show police cars, ambulances and other emergency vehicles outside the club on South Orange Avenue in downtown Orlando. Streets around the club were shut down for several blocks.

In one video, The Times said, shots could clearly be heard as men and women ran from Pulse. Some of the clubgoers told local television reporters that the music was so loud it

was difficult, at first, to distinguish the shots from the pulsing beat.

Many of the wounded were taken to Orlando Regional Medical Center, about three blocks from the club, which was placed on lockdown after receiving several gunshot victims. “Only essential workers are being allowed access into the building,” the hospital said in a statement.

“Out of an abundance of caution, Arnold Palmer Hospital and Winnie Palmer Hospital have also been placed on lockdown,” the statement added.

On Pulse’s Facebook page, club officials [promised to post updates as they came in](#): “As soon as we have any information, we will update everyone.”

“Please keep everyone in your prayers as we work through this tragic event,” the nightclub post said. “Thank you for your thoughts and love.”

Local television stations broadcast interviews with people outside the club and the Orlando Regional Medical Center, about three blocks away from the club, anxiously waiting to hear from people who they said were still inside.

WKMG and WESH broadcast interviews with the crowds milling outside the hospital. One woman said she rushed to the area after she got a call from her daughter, who said, “Please come get us and come get us now.”

The club, which calls itself “Orlando’s Latin Hotspot,” hosts an “Upscale Latin Saturdays” party on Saturday night with three D.J.s and a midnight show.

Sources: The New York Times, CNN.