

UK Threat Monitor Monthly Report

August 2017



Executive Summary

- ◆ No change to UK threat levels or significant security incidents affecting the retail sector were recorded in the UK over the past month, although the likelihood of further terrorist plots and militant activity, including potential attacks against retail centres remains credible.
- ◆ Various incidents were recorded across Europe which continue to demonstrate the vulnerabilities faced by commercial centres and areas frequented by large numbers of civilians. Most notably, a knife attack was committed at a branch of Edeka, Germany's largest supermarket chain, in northern Hamburg on 28 July. The attacker, a 26 year-old-known Islamist identified as Ahmad A, entered the store at approximately 0300hrs local time and began to stab customers indiscriminately. One person was killed and six others wounded in the attack. The suspect was later apprehended by authorities after fleeing the scene.
- ◆ Also in Germany, in the early hours of 30 July, a gunman entered a nightclub in Konstanz and shot dead a security guard. Three others were also injured in the shooting, which has been ascribed to personal dispute rather than an act of terrorism, before police intercepted the suspect. In the UK, a truck attack was conducted on Well Street, near the Arndale shopping centre in Manchester, on 24 July. Rather than targeting pedestrians indiscriminately however, as was seen in the vehicle attacks of Westminster and London bridge, this incident appears to have been a deliberate assault against an individual, which investigators have claimed was linked to organised crime. On the same day, an assailant carried out a chainsaw attack in a bookshop/office building in the Swiss city of Schaffhausen, injuring at least five people (two seriously). The motives behind the attack remain unknown, but Swiss authorities are not treating it as an act of terrorism.
- ◆ Over the summer holiday period, attacks in tourist destinations are also deemed at higher risk, given their attractiveness to jihadists wishing to cause mass casualties. A terror suspect of Moroccan descent was arrested in Majorca in late June with three other men for allegedly plotting to perpetrate a knife attack against tourists in a popular market, similar to the 3 June Borough Market attack in London.
- ◆ Vehicle and knife attacks have risen in frequency over the past couple of years following Islamic State communiqués urging followers to use whatever means available to them in the perpetration of acts of terrorism. Heightened activity across Europe was observed in June during Ramadan, when militants called on sympathisers to intensify their insurgency. Whilst July has been comparatively quieter, UK authorities announced that multiple plots were thwarted over the past few weeks. Furthermore, ten terror-related arrests were made in the month of July alone, indicating a high intent remains amongst radical groups and individuals to conduct acts of terrorism in the UK.
- ◆ Although increased security measures have been implemented at key sites and shopping centres, conditions are expected to remain heightened over the summer period. The current UK government threat level for international terrorism remains at "SEVERE", meaning that an attack is assessed as highly likely. Indiscriminate attacks against civilians in crowded shopping and commercial centres are amongst key targets, alongside those at sporting and music venues, as well as tourist sites.

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UK Threat Levels

Threat Type	Location	Capability	Intent	Threat
Direct attack by terrorist/ militant group in AO.	United Kingdom	Medium	High	HIGH
	London	Medium	High	HIGH
Kidnap threat to client personnel by terrorist and militant groups in AO.	United Kingdom	Low	Low	LOW
	London	Low	Low	LOW
Violent criminal attack against client personnel in AO.	United Kingdom	Low	Low	LOW
	London	Medium	Low	LOW
Petty criminal activity against client personnel in AO.	United Kingdom	Low	Medium	MEDIUM
	London	Medium	Medium	MEDIUM
General threat of public disorder/ civil unrest in AO.	United Kingdom	Low	Medium	LOW
	London	High	Medium	MEDIUM
Public disorder/ civil unrest – specifically directed against client personnel and locations.	United Kingdom	Low	Low	LOW
	London	Low	Low	LOW

Outlook & Analysis

The Hamburg knife attack of 28 July is highly indicative of the threat posed to civilians by militants opting for a low-tech approach, as seen in the Westminster and Borough Market attacks in March and June respectively. The assailant, Ahmad A., a failed asylum seeker from the UAE, was registered on a German Islamist database, but was not known to have any links to terrorism. Eye witnesses reported he entered into a frenzy when he began to stab supermarket customers, shouting ‘Alluha Akbar’. He was however also known to suffer from mental health problems.

UK authorities remain in a heightened state of alert following the Manchester bombing and London vehicle and knife attacks of the past few months. Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick announced that counter-terrorism forces have thwarted five attacks in the past few weeks, some of which were reportedly minutes away from being executed, indicating that a high threat persists. It is also envisaged that the increasing difficulty for Jihadis travelling to Syria or Iraq will result in heightened activity on home soil. The latest attacks in the UK have largely seen a shift away from the organised, highly trained groups which found success in previous years, such as the 2005 London suicide bombers who were reportedly directed by al Qaeda and trained in Pakistan. Recent plots by comparison have been low tech and required little to no planning, as observed in Hamburg, and have furthermore been inspired remotely, making them difficult for security services to trace and prevent. The one exception is the Manchester bombing of 22 May, in which a sophisticated IED was detonated at the Manchester Arena, killing 22 people. Whilst it was previously thought that the bomber, Salman Abedi, acted alone having received training in Libya, UK authorities increasingly suspect the involvement of a cell in the preparation of the attack. The explosive device was highly similar to those used in the 2015 Paris attacks, indicating links to foreign assistance and potentially a wider network of insurgents. Security experts suspect the same bomb-maker may actually be behind the creation of the devices used in both attacks. Given that this element remains at large, follow-up activity is assessed as likely.

Impact for the Hospitality & Shopping Sector

Of the numerous thwarted UK plots and terror-related arrests made over the past few weeks, authorities have not released information regarding their plans or intended targets, although they potentially would have been directed toward 'soft' civilian targets, as was seen in the Hamburg supermarket attack. In this instance, the perpetrator indiscriminately stabbed at customers using a 20cm long kitchen knife he removed from the shelves, highlighting an increased risk in similar stores, which stock household goods, of unarmed assailants being able to enter and acquire dangerous objects with which to stage an attack against random civilians. Similar low-tech attack methodologies are likely to be employed in the UK, and although a more complex attack is less probable, the potential existence of organised, trained cells may possess the capability or means to acquire sophisticated explosives.



Security barriers implemented at the Wimbledon Tennis Championships. (Ian Vogler/Daily Mirror)

Over the reporting period, the Wimbledon Tennis Championships was deemed a high-risk target because of the thousands of spectators that visit the grounds every day of the tournament. Security services had intercepted a pro-Islamic State social media message urging followers to commit attacks, preempting vast security measures implemented for the duration of the tournament, including security barriers to prevent vehicle attacks on spectators queuing outside, and increased numbers of armed police and plain-clothed police. Large commercial sites and shopping centres across the UK have similarly implemented improved security measures over the past few months, but remain at high risk. As demonstrated by the arrest of the four terrorists in Majorca, who were reportedly recruited by the Birmingham-based radical cleric Tarik Chadlioui, attacks on crowded commercial areas are highly attractive. Here, the group had planned on committing a knife attack in the central square of Majorca's third largest town, Inca, which is popular with tourists because of its weekly markets.

The non-terror related incidents over the reporting period further demonstrate the vulnerability of civilians in commercial areas. The Swiss chainsaw attack struck civilians in a bookshop/office building with low security, and the vehicle attack in Manchester targeted a pedestrian on a busy shopping street. Both incidents highlight the threat to exposed civilians of potential terrorist attacks, and are reminiscent of the London Bridge and Borough Market attack of 3 June. The 30 July nightclub attack in Konstanz was analogous to the Istanbul nightclub shooting of New Year's Eve 2017, apart from the motives which drove the attacks. Whilst the former resulted from a personal confrontation between the assailant and a security guard, the latter was an indiscriminate attack which left 39 civilians dead, but both demonstrate the risk to civilians and bystanders of either direct or indirect attacks in crowded bars and clubs. Although armed attacks are less likely in the UK, threats via rudimentary means persist.

Significant Incidents

- ◆ **30 July 2017 – Konstanz.** The Iraqi son-in-law of a nightclub owner shot a doorman dead at the club following an argument, injuring several others. Armed police killed the perpetrator in an armed exchange.
- ◆ **28 July 2017 – Hamburg.** An Islamist knifeman entered a supermarket in the Barmbek district of Hamburg and randomly attacked customers, killing one and injuring six. He was later apprehended by the police.

- ◆ **25 July 2017 – Coventry.** A 17-year-old girl of Moroccan descent, alleged to have married an IS militant via an online ceremony, was charged with the intention of planning to commit acts of terrorism.
- ◆ **24 July 2017 – Schaffhausen.** An individual armed with a chainsaw entered a building housing a bookshop and offices and attacked five civilians, injuring two seriously.
- ◆ **22 July 2017 – Rochdale.** 150 Britain First supporters marched through Rochdale, leading to road closures.
- ◆ **21 July 2017 – Thetford.** A suspected Islamic extremist prison inmate knifed a guard at HMP Weyland in Norfolk.
- ◆ **21 July 2017 – Europe.** Interpol listed 173 jihadists reportedly trained to mount attacks in Europe.
- ◆ **13 July 2017 – London.** Police arrested a 49-year-old man at London City Airport and a 20-year-old woman in North London on suspicion of preparation of acts to commit terrorism.
- ◆ **8 July 2017 – London.** The annual Pride parade attracted hundreds of thousands of people along the parade route, which began in Portland Place and ended in Whitehall.
- ◆ **7 July 2017 – Liverpool.** A 19-year-old man was arrested at Liverpool John Lennon Airport in connection with the Manchester bombing, bringing the total number of arrests connected with the investigation up to 23.
- ◆ **3 July 2017 – London.** A teenage terrorist, Haroon Syed, was sentenced to life imprisonment for plotting to detonate a nail bomb at a busy London venue such as Oxford Street or a pop concert.
- ◆ **1 July 2017 – London.** Approximately 10,000 people gathered in central London for an anti-government protest, marching from BBC Broadcasting House in Portland Place to Parliament Square.



Thousands of anti-government demonstrators marched through central London on 1 July. (AFP)

General Recommendations

- ◆ Confirm and ensure all emergency plans and procedures are in place and are understood by staff.
- ◆ Security systems, including vehicle security barriers, access control and CCTV where installed, offer a significant deterrent to terrorist attack and criminality. Ensure effective access control procedures are in place and security systems are fully operational.
- ◆ Awareness and effective information reporting remain effective at thwarting many criminal and terrorist acts even before they have taken place and are in the planning stages. Ensure staff understand the relevant threats and pass information on through the correct channels.
- ◆ During special events and higher profile occasions consider increasing the profile of security if feasible. This can be achieved through simple and effective measures such as implementing high profile patrols, checks and maintaining a visible presence. Often suspicious behavior is spotted first by the public and having a readily available member of staff to report to is key in this information being captured and disseminated correctly.
- ◆ Facilitate effective liaison with all parties, especially the Police, who can offer specialist and locally orientated advice.

Constellis' intelligence analysts and security consultants produce bespoke political and security reports, threat assessments and security risk assessments to inform decisions and to protect people and assets across Europe and the Middle East.



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