

# UK Threat Monitor Monthly Report

I September 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.
- ◆ In line with recent reporting, activity remained heightened across mainland Europe for a successive month, with a number of attacks directed towards civilians in busy commercial districts. The deadliest was a double attack conducted over 17-18 August on Spain's eastern coast. The first incident occurred at approximately 1700hrs local time on 17 August, when a terrorist driving a rented van deliberately crashed into pedestrians on Barcelona's busy Las Ramblas promenade (lined with shops, cafés and restaurants), killing 14 and wounding over 120. The perpetrator, Younes Abouyaaqoub, fled on foot before hijacking a vehicle and killing its owner. After a five-day manhunt, police cornered Abouyaaqoub in the town of Sant Sadurni d'Anoia and shot him dead as he threatened to detonate an explosive belt, later discovered to have been fake. Other members of Abouyaaqoub's terrorist cell committed a second vehicular attack in the early hours of 18 August, 120km southwest of Barcelona in the coastal town of Cambril. A car was driven into pedestrians, wounding four, before crashing into a police car whereupon the five militants exited the vehicle armed with knives and fake explosive belts. A woman was fatally stabbed before all of the militants were shot dead by police.
- ◆ On 25 August, a knife-wielding terrorist was shot dead by police near Brussel's second most popular shopping street. At approximately 2020hrs local time, a man in his thirties attacked and wounded two soldiers, reportedly shouting 'Allahu Akbar', in the Sainte Catherine neighbourhood of the city, known for its shops, bars and restaurants. Islamic State propagandists had only days before called on sympathisers to stage an attack in the area, and so the incident has been treated as a radical-inspired terrorist assault. Another attack in a popular commercial zone occurred in Finland at 1600hrs local time on 18 August, in the central Market Square of the city of Turku. An 18-year-old Moroccan asylum seeker, and suspected extremist, conducted a stabbing attack killing two and injuring another eight. The assailant is thought to have deliberately targeted women during his attack (eight of the victims being female), which has been described as the first terrorist incident in modern Finnish history. Police neutralised the perpetrator at the scene by shooting him in the leg.
- ◆ Footage has emerged of an Islamist attacker lighting a Molotov cocktail in a shopping centre in the Russian city of Surgut, before randomly stabbing civilians in the city's main streets. Ten people were wounded during the attack, after which police responded and shot the assailant dead. He was also reported to have been wearing a fake explosive vest. Over the month, Russian authorities thwarted a large-scale terrorist plot to bomb Moscow shopping centres and the transport network.
- ◆ As envisaged, hostile activity increased in frequency during the summer holiday period, especially in busy commercial areas also popular with tourists. Vehicle and knife attacks remain the predominant threat in such areas, in Europe as well as the UK, owing to the ease in which they can be utilised by extremist elements wishing to cause mass civilian casualties in crowded places. The current UK government threat level for international terrorism remains at "SEVERE", meaning that an attack is assessed as highly likely.

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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

All of the major terrorist-related incidents recorded in Europe over the past month employed rudimentary attack methodologies, namely the use of vehicles and bladed weapons in their perpetration. They also indiscriminately targeted civilians in crowded areas where mass casualties could be achieved. Such tactics have been increasingly prevalent in Europe over the six months, and have largely resulted as a means of bypassing counter-terrorism operations, as well as to enable radical Islamic-inspired ‘lone wolves’ to mount attacks with little-to-no planning or sophistication. Previous largescale rudimentary attacks were conducted in Nice, Berlin, Paris, Stockholm and London. The Barcelona and Cambril attacks in particular have drawn close comparisons to the 3 June Borough Market attack in London. In both instances, hired vans were used to plough into pedestrians in busy commercial areas, i.e. where shops, bars and restaurants are located. Each of the attackers were also armed with long knives, with which they used to stab civilians indiscriminately upon exiting their attack vehicles. Another direct correlation relates to the use of fake explosive vests and belts, which again were used in both attacks, and also observed in the Surgut attack. These are intended to spread panic and fear amongst the victims of an attack, thereby increasing the propensity for violence, and their use has recently grown in frequency. The mayor of Barcelona has received criticism for not bolstering anti-ram defences around Las Ramblas, after having reportedly received recommendations following the Nice and Berlin truck attacks.

Recent attacks have demonstrated increased activity amongst organised cells. The Barcelona terror cell behind the attacks in Spain opted for a low-tech approach but were also capable of mounting complex attacks. A house being used as a bomb-making factory by the group suffered an explosion prior to the attacks, where the cell was purportedly planning on executing explosive attacks against major monuments, including La Sagrada Familia Church. Similarly, counter-terrorism officers in Russia apprehended an IS-linked terror cell in Moscow that was in the final stages of planning attacks against shopping centres and the city’s transport system. The group were found to be in possession of a cache of heavy weapons and highly potent hydrogen peroxide bombs.

## Impact for the Hospitality & Shopping Sector

The nature of the terrorist incidents recorded throughout Europe over the past month bear the hallmarks of extremist Islamic-inspired attacks, and given their appetite for directing violence toward “soft” civilian targets, the hospitality and retail sector was directly impacted. Las Ramblas in Barcelona attracts thousands of visitors on a daily basis, and is lined with hundreds of stalls, shops, bars and restaurants. In the immediate aftermath of the van attack and the evacuation of the area, all commercial outlets were closed, but many were seen to open early the next day in a show of defiance that normal life would not be disrupted. In light of the lack of vehicle mitigation barriers at the site, security is currently under review. Similar high-profile sites across the UK have already implemented increased security measures, including anti-ram blockades at bridges to protect pedestrians, and anti-vehicle defences at stadiums and other venues.



Terrorist attacks police outside Buckingham Palace on 25 August. (Getty Images Europe)

The largescale plot that was thwarted in Moscow further demonstrates the attractiveness of the retail sector to militants, given the large gatherings of civilians that congregate in shopping centres and commercial districts. Additionally, the knife attacks in Brussels and Finland both occurred in central areas during busy time periods, again reflecting an inherent risk to civilians in open, unfortified pedestrian zones. On 25 August, a man from Luton was arrested at Buckingham Palace as he attempted to drive at police, before lunging at them with a 4ft sword. The use of vehicles and bladed weapons have been of high concern in the UK over recent months, particularly following the Westminster Bridge and Borough Market attacks of March and June respectively.

The retail sector constitutes a highly attractive target to extremist actors in the UK, and despite increased security measures, remains vulnerable to attack. A major counter-terror operation was conducted on 3 August at Stratford station in London, resulting in the arrest of eight individuals and the seizure of a 12-inch knife, hammer and imitation gun. Given the station’s proximity to the Westfield Shopping Centre, it is possible an attack was being planned there, although the authorities are yet to confirm this. Despite not being terror-related, a shopper was stabbed in London’s second Westfield Shopping Centre in White City on 5 August. The attack occurred at approximately 1400hrs, right in the middle of the shopping complex, and in plain sight of numerous shoppers, and is demonstrative of the ease in which knives and other bladed weapons can be infiltrated into crowded commercial sites.

The threat from Islamic terrorism remains heightened in the UK, particularly following reports of a captured IS fighter who revealed plans for a fresh wave of attacks, and the discovery of a list from an IS hideout in Mosul cataloguing almost 200 fighters ready to stage attacks in Europe. Furthermore, with the demise of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, a growing threat has been identified from Al Qaeda, who have recently called on supporters to attack railways in Britain, France and the US. Subsequent attacks planned on retail outlets and busy shopping districts cannot be discounted.

## Significant Incidents

- ◆ **25 August 2017 – Brussels.** A machete-wielding terrorist of Somalian descent attacked and wounded two soldiers in the city centre near a very popular shopping street, before being shot dead by armed police.

- ◆ **25 August 2017 – London.** A suspected terrorist drove at a police van at Buckingham palace before lunging at police officers with a sword, injuring three. Two days later a second man was detained on terrorism-related offences, reportedly part of the Buckingham Palace attacker's network.
- ◆ **21 August 2017 – Marseille.** A vehicle was deemed to have deliberately struck two bus stops, killing one person and injuring another. The attack however resulted from psychiatric issues.
- ◆ **19 August 2017 – Surgut.** A 19-year-old man armed with a knife injured seven people at random in the main streets of Surgut in Russia's central Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug region.
- ◆ **18 August 2017 – Turku.** An 18-year-old Moroccan asylum seeker stabbed several people in the central Puutori-Market Square, killing two and wounding eight, before being neutralised by police.
- ◆ **17-18 August 2017 – Spain.** A double attack was conducted by an Islamic terrorist cell in Barcelona and Cambril, using vehicles and bladed weapons against civilians, resulting in 16 deaths and over 100 injuries. Of the cell's 12 members, eight have been killed and the remainder detained.
- ◆ **14 August 2017 – Sept-Sorts.** A motorist drove into a pizzeria in the French town of Sept-Sorts, killing one civilian and wounding a further eight. The attacker was suicidal and not assessed to be a terrorist.
- ◆ **9 August 2017 – Paris.** A suspected terrorist drove a vehicle into a group of soldiers outside a military barracks, injuring six.
- ◆ **6 August 2017 – Paris.** A man brandishing a knife was arrested at the Eiffel Tower where he reportedly attempted to attack a soldier in an IS-inspired attack.
- ◆ **3 August 2017 – London.** An anti-terror operation at Stratford station result in the arrest of eight suspected terrorists and the seizure of various weapons.



An imitation gun discovered in the Stratford station anti-terror operation. (MetTaskforce)

## 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.

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