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# Intelligence Update November 2018





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# Threat Level Update

The threat to the UK from international terrorism is:

Severe

The threat to Great Britain from Northern Ireland-related terrorism is:

Moderate



## Threat Levels

Low

• an attack is unlikely

Moderate

• an attack is possible but not likely

Substantial

• an attack is a strong possibility

Severe

• an attack is highly likely

Critical

• an attack is expected imminently

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## Key Notes

The UK Threat Level is currently assessed to be **SEVERE**

The **SEVERE** level still means that a terrorist attack is highly likely and might well occur without warning.

Helen Ball, now former senior national coordinator for counter-terrorism policing, made it known in January 2015 that the authorities were running an exceptionally high number of investigations. This is unlikely to have changed in 2018. These include lone attacks and more complex conspiracies.

Despite the high threat level from terrorism and the incidents described below, the risk of the general public being caught up in a terrorist attack is very low.

## Current UK Threat Level

The current threat level for international terrorism in the UK is **SEVERE**. This means that an attack is highly likely. The threat level was reduced to **SEVERE** from **CRITICAL** on 17th September 2017, after being up-rated for a period of two days.

The level had been raised from **SUBSTANTIAL** in 2014 in response to on-going events in Iraq and Syria. The security agencies believe that al-Qaeda and its apparently well-supported and now-independent offshoot, the Islamic State, may be presently planning attacks on Western targets that might well include domestic targets in the United Kingdom

The threat level was temporarily uprated to **CRITICAL** on two occasions during 2017. It was uprated on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2017, following an attack in Manchester, before being reduced to **SEVERE** again on the 27<sup>th</sup> May 2017. It was uprated again on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 2017, following an attempt to detonate an explosive device on the London Underground. It was reduced to **SEVERE** on the 17<sup>th</sup> September.

## MI5 scrutiny of extreme right wing

It has been disclosed to public sources that it has been decided within Government that MI5, the domestic security service, will assume the lead in monitoring and working to disrupt the threat from extreme right-wing terrorism (XRW). Up until now this investigation and monitoring work well within the remit of the police, specifically Counter Terrorism Command within the Metropolitan Police and the well-established regional police counter-terrorism units. MI5 will take the intelligence lead when extreme right-wing activity is suspected of amounting to a terrorism-based threat rather than just a policing matter (for instance planned disruptions to public order).

## Current Threats

The majority of terrorist plots in the United Kingdom have been orchestrated by British nationals, radicalised by extremist propaganda and the UK's foreign policy in the Middle East over the past 15 years. While many would not have travelled to the Middle East, Libya or Afghanistan to join jihadi groups operating in those regions, there is an increasing concern for the security services of returning foreign fighters resettling back in the UK. These fighters – with newly acquired combat skills, including bomb-making – have the potential to plan attacks under direction from the Islamic State or al-Qaeda hierarchy, on their own initiative, or might radicalise others to do so.

Terrorists will continue to aim for “soft” targets in urban areas of the country – most notably in major cities – due to the greater chance of success. Past attacks and threats have centred on public transportation, the commercial aviation sector, and public buildings and venues. This will likely remain the case due to the publicity and economic damage terrorist attacks have on such targets in major cities – particularly complex attacks involving multiple terrorist operatives and coordinated to occur more-or-less simultaneously.

## **Service's remit change**

It is likely that the decision to expand the service's remit to include the extreme right-wing was made because its overall approach and the legal powers it has available will allow the relevant staff to discover more about the violent intentions of the extreme right than the police can. The new working relationship between MI5 and the police has been outlined for clarity. MI5 will take responsibility for identifying suspects and assessing what danger they pose. Police forces will have the executive lead: they will take over when, following reviews of available intelligence, it is deemed necessary for arrests to be made.

## **Westminster assailant had been subject to scrutiny**

It was disclosed to public sources that Khalid Masood, the 2017 Westminster Bridge assailant had been subject to scrutiny by the intelligence services for a total of thirteen years but was considered to be of low risk. His risk status was downgraded in 2014. Records now made public identify that the authorities were aware that he spent time in Saudi Arabia helping people to reach an al Qaeda training facility in Pakistan and whilst resident in the UK, he was known to have been in contact with persons known to be members of the now proscribed organisation al Muhajiroun.

## **Release of high-profile extremist prisoner**

Anjem Choudary, a high profile convicted extremist was released from prison on 17<sup>th</sup> October. He is known to have been involved at a high level in the now proscribed (banned) organisation al Muhajiroun. Mr Choudhury will be subject to stringent parole conditions. It is understood that if he is found to be in breach of any of these conditions he will be returned to prison. One outlet reporting on this matter has identified that his parole licence will include twenty-five separate restrictions. If this is correct then this will be the most stringent conditions ever placed on a convicted British citizen.

## **Legal challenge to license conditions expected**

It was reported that Mr Choudary, is considering a legal challenge to the conditions imposed upon him. Choudary, represented by the law firm Birnberg Peirce, is understood to have applied for legal aid funding to bring his action against Government ministers, arguing the conditions imposed upon him breach his human rights. Prisoners who feel their human rights are being violated by the rules can apply for a judicial review in order to decide whether they are fair.

## **British nationals not repatriated**

It was disclosed to an outlet during October, that the UK Government has refused to repatriate at least nine British nationals detained in Syria because of links to the so-called Islamic State. This includes seven men, two women and four children. Among the number are El Shafee El Sheikh and Alexandra Kotey, who were notorious members of one of the grouping's execution squads. The reservations concerning their repatriation are that it may not be possible for them to be adequately prosecuted in the UK. It is preferred that the above-named individuals be deported to the United States.

## **Official comment on proposed legislation**

The annual report produced by Max Hill QC, the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, included a comment on the potential effect proposed legislation to change the scope of the criminal nature of viewing terrorist material may have. It is his assertion that removing such material from some platforms will move it to more “underground” locations thereby making it more difficult to detect forms of radicalisation. The Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit presently works with online platforms to identify and remove sensitive material.

## **Academic study into radicalization reportedly blocked**

It was reported that the Ministry of Justice has blocked plans for an academic study by researchers from Oxford, Cambridge and the University of London into the radicalisation of prisoners and conversions to Islam within prisons. The proposed study, which has the support of Max Hill QC, would have spanned a three-year period. It is understood that the Joint Extremism Unit within the prison service and Home Office will carry out its own work to get a better understanding of the processes involved in conversion.

## **Reported death of Briton known to be in Syria**

A post uploaded to an English language social media page used to pay tribute to deceased militants and identified members of the so-called Islamic State in October, included a reference to British nationals Siddhartha Dhar and Nasser Muthana – both of whom have not previously been confirmed dead. There have been some indications in the past that Siddhartha Dhar (also known as Abu Rumaysah), a former associate of Anjem Choudhary, was killed in Syria last year but this should not be considered confirmation of his death. However, one source has reported that a Canadian national being held in Kurdish detention in Syria provided information that Dhar was killed in Raqqa between June and October 2017.

## **Defendant found guilty of Terrorism Act offences**

Abdulrahman al Charbati, 32, a UK resident of Syrian origin, was found guilty of six charges of encouraging acts of terrorism, offences contrary to Section 1 of the Terrorism Act 2006, by sharing sensitive content to a social media platform. His conviction followed a trial at Newcastle Crown Court. The six posts which formed the basis of the case against him were posted over the course of one day in February 2017. He was detained following a lengthy investigation by officers from the North East Counter Terrorism Unit. He is due to be sentenced on 14th December.

*There have been a number of terrorist and public order incidents over the past months, particularly aimed at the police, as well as incidents related to ongoing domestic political issues that at present appear to remain irresolvable. Security sources are advising that the threat posed by dissident republicans is presently higher than at any time since the Omagh bombing, fourteen years ago. Their targets remain the police and security services. Frequent alerts take place in urban centres upon the discovery of suspicious items and viable devices. Many alerts are hoaxes.*

*However, for many people in the Province, daily lives continue in relative safety and normality. Nevertheless, care should always be taken to avoid known strongholds of either the dissident 'Republican' or 'Loyalist' factions.*

The threat level for Northern Ireland-related terrorism is set separately for Northern Ireland and Great Britain. In Northern Ireland, it is **SEVERE** and in Great Britain **MODERATE**. The threat level reduction was decided on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2018.

**SEVERE** is defined as a terrorist attack being highly likely; **SUBSTANTIAL** that an attack is a strong possibility.

## **New advertisements planned to counter vigilante attacks across the province**

The Department of Justice commissioned adverts to be aired on television, radio and in cinemas as part of an effort to deal the increasing problem of community-based violent vigilantism by paramilitaries. These attacks, often shootings, occur as part of an ongoing form of extra-judicial community justice to deal quickly with so-called anti-social activities. There have been eighty-seven such attacks over the last twelve months. A survey commissioned by the Tackling Paramilitarism Board found that 35% of all those questioned believe this kind of attacks are justified.

## Opposition to fracking remains

Hydraulic fracturing (commonly known by the term fracking – the industrial method used to extract reserves of gas and other fuels from shale rock), remains a divisive environmental issue in the United Kingdom. As has now been well reported, on 12<sup>th</sup> October a judge at the High Court ruled against a case seeking to prevent the extraction agent Cuadrilla from beginning operations at an established site in Lancashire. The complainant argued that the local council’s emergency planning was inadequate in the event of an incident at the site. The High Court rejected a request for an injunction on the grounds that the council had not failed in its duties regarding civil contingency planning.

Frack Off London and environmental campaign group Rising Up had originally sought to protest outside the venue for a business conference entitled “Business Green”. The conference was held at commercial premises on Siemens Brothers Way, Tower Hamlets. These premises are situated in the Green Enterprise District in East London. The conference was identified as a suitable protest target because Claire Perry MP, a Minister of State at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (whose portfolio includes hydraulic fracturing) would be in attendance and would be a keynote speaker. The event was also sponsored by Centrica; Cuadrilla’s operations in two locations are financed by Centrica.

It was identified that the organisers later cancelled their plans to attend the conference. It was not clear if the organisers of the protest had been threatened with legal action if the protest went ahead or whether the proposed protest was cancelled because of a lack of support. Our scrutiny of available sources suggests that only four people showed any interest in supporting the planned protest. This may have been a reason behind why the protest was cancelled.

A further protest at the Royal Courts of Justice in support of three defendants in breach on injunction conditions at the established site of operations in Lancaster took place on 17<sup>th</sup> October. The Court of Appeal quashed their sentences and all three have been given a conditional discharge. Sir Ian Burnett, the lord chief justice, ruled that the immediate custodial sentence given to them in September was excessive.

## Legal proceedings against Tommy Robinson ongoing

Legal proceedings against Tommy Robinson, a high-profile member of the right-wing, were suspended until 23<sup>rd</sup> October. As previously reported Mr Robinson had been required to attend the Central Criminal Court on Old Bailey in the City as part of a rehearing of charges against him relating to previous cases of contempt of court. Nicholas Hillard QC, the judge hearing the case adjourned proceedings until this date in order to receive written submissions with the intention of making a ruling on whether a retrial should occur.

The city of London expected a large turnout in his support and put a significant public order operation in place with the joint support of the Metropolitan Police. It was reported that one thousand supporters of Mr Robinson’s supporters were present on Old Bailey for the duration of his appearance at court. At the time of release, a verdict or ruling Mr Robinson’s case remains outstanding. The judge released him on bail following his decision to refer the case to the Attorney General. Referring the case to a higher authority will allow for the case to be heard in what was termed an “adversarial” setting in which further evidence could be presented and witnesses cross-examined. The format of the hearing at the Old Bailey would not allow this



to take place. The judge reportedly came to this decision after receiving a statement from Robinson on 22<sup>nd</sup> October, in which Mr Robinson proposed to give evidence in his own defence.

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