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Intelligence Update January 2019





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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

Moderate

Substantial

Severe

Critical

• an attack is expected imminently



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Key Notes

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

SEVERE level still means that a terrorist attack is highly likely and it will occur without warning.

Ben Ball, now former senior operational coordinator for counter-terrorism policing, made it known in January 2015 that the authorities were running an exceptionally high number of investigations. This is likely to have changed in 2018 as 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 23rd May 2017, following an attack in Manchester, before being reduced to **SEVERE** again on the 27th May 2017. It was uprated again on the 15th September 2017, following an attempt to detonate an explosive device on the London Underground. It was reduced to **SEVERE** on the 17th September.

Current Threats

The majority of terrorist plots in the United Kingdom have been orchestrated by British nationals, radicalised by extremist propaganda and citing the UK's foreign policy in the Middle East over the past 15 years as a primary motivator. While a large proportion of radicalized individuals were unwilling to travel 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

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.

Iranian national's attack plot disrupted

Fatah Mohammed Abdullah, 33, an Iranian national was arrested on 11th December and subsequently charged with one count of engaging, between 9th April and 1st December, in the preparation of an act of terrorism, an offence contrary to Section 5 of the Terrorism Act 2006. Mr Abdullah settled in the United Kingdom in 2005 and was granted leave to remain in 2010. It had reportedly been his intention to conduct a suicide attack at a public location similar to the attack on Manchester Arena in 2017.

Information divulged by the Crown Prosecution Service alleges that Mr Abdullah bought a knife, a balaclava and items described as the precursor chemicals for the manufacture of an explosive material. Mr Abdullah is also alleged to have conducted online searches for component items for use in an improvised device including a pressure cooker. Counter-terrorism officers from Counter Terrorism Policing North East were able to confirm his intentions in part by monitoring his known associates.

Local residents evacuated on precautionary basis

During the operation to detain Mr Abdallah, Northumbria Police made the decision to evacuate residents of neighbouring properties, and, at the time, it was assumed that the Police may have feared that a specific threat to safety would have been present at the address where the arrest was made. It is now clear that officers were of the belief that some form of explosive device might well have been present at the address at which the suspect was detained. Counter-terrorism officers may well not have known whether Mr Abdullah had been able to produce a quantity of explosive material from the items he had purchased.

Arrests following investigation into right-wing activity

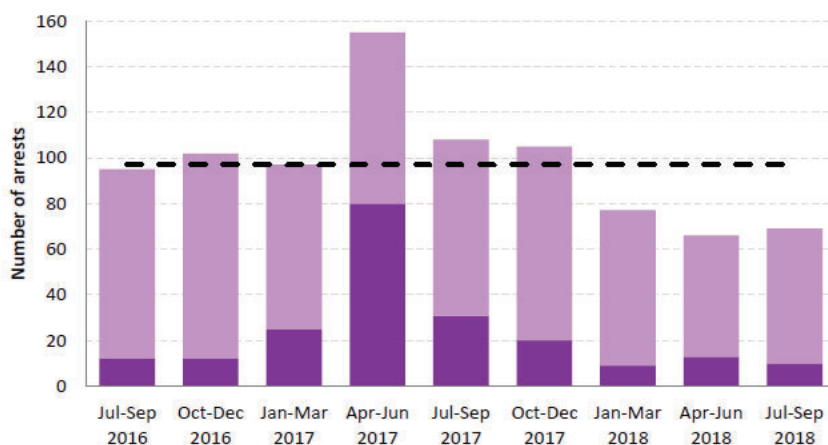
Officers from the North East Counter Terrorism Unit arrested three suspects on suspicion of terrorism offences. The arrests were made as part of an ongoing investigation into extreme right-wing activity. It was later disclosed to public sources that the suspects were detained following an investigation relating to alleged activity by a small group identifying themselves as neo-Nazi. The group reportedly labels itself the Sonnenkrieg Division and had links to another extreme right-wing group in the United States.

Those suspects detained are a 17-year-old from London and a 21-year-old from Bath, both arrested on suspicion of possessing material useful to someone preparing an act of terrorism, an offence contrary to Section 58 of the Terrorism Act 2000, and conspiracy to inspire racial or religious hatred, an offence contrary to the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006. An 18-year-old from Portsmouth has also been detained on suspicion of encouraging terrorism and dissemination of terrorist publications, offences contrary to Section 1 and 2 of the Terrorism Act 2006.

Latest counter-terrorism statistics published

The Home Office released its latest quarterly statistics regarding arrests made in connection to terrorism-related offences in the twelve months ending 30th September 2018, the most recent date for which statistics are available. There were 317 arrests (145 fewer arrests than the same reporting period a year ago; a 31% fall). The decrease in the number of arrests follows an anticipated decrease in the number of arrests that were necessary as a result of executed attacks (London and Manchester).

The below graph shows the number of arrests per quarter for last nine consecutive quarters to 30th September 2018:



However, the latest figures remain high compared with the annual average across the time series since reporting began in 2002. In each of the past six years the number of arrests have been above the average of 250 arrests per year. Of those 317 arrests made in the above twelve-month period, 113 (36%) resulted in a charge, of which, 85 were for a terrorism-related offence. 165 persons were released without charge. 17 people were released on bail pending further investigations. Of the 85 persons charged with a terrorism-related offence, 37 had been prosecuted, all of whom were convicted.

Following the release of these statistics Deputy Assistant Commissioner Dean Haydon issued a statement indicating that, although the number of arrests may have seen a decrease over several reporting periods, investigations into potential threats are at a record level (at least 700 are presently active). It is his belief that there has been a genuine step-change in terrorist activity, but equally, the authorities are meeting this with increased activity from the police and security services in order to keep the public safe. At least eighteen active plots have been disrupted since March 2017.

Arrest at Luton Airport following arrival of an inbound flight

The Metropolitan Police disclosed the arrest on 27th December of a suspect by officers from Counter Terrorism Command at Luton Airport. The arrest was made following the suspect's arrival at the airport on an inbound flight. The suspect was arrested on suspicion of preparation of terrorist acts, an offence contrary to Section 5 Terrorism Act 2006. On this occasion, the offence in question relates to an alleged act of terrorism outside of the United Kingdom, specifically acts committed as part of the ongoing conflict in Syria.

Activity undertaken in Syria and neighbouring Iraq is presently of significant concern to the counter-terrorism community. The direct combat experience gained by non-domestic insurgents in the Syrian theatre will add to the domestic terrorism threat picture for several years. The departure point of the flight on which the suspect arrived was not disclosed. However, on other occasions, British nationals returning to the United Kingdom after spending time in Syria have arrived on flights from Turkey after being detained in that country and subsequently deported.

National Action supporters sentenced

Adam Thomas, 22, and Claudia Patatas, 38, were sentenced on 18th December to six and a half years and five years in prison respectively for membership of the proscribed right-wing organisation National Action. They were among a group, of which the others were convicted of the same offence in November. Mr Thomas, previously employed as a security guard for the Amazon organisation, was a leading figure in National Action's Midlands chapter. They and six others (all now convicted) made up a West Midlands National Action cell of at least eight people, which the West Midlands Counter Terrorism Unit has now successfully dismantled.

Social media user sentenced to custodial term

Abdulrahman Alcharbati, 32, was sentenced to a seven-year custodial prison term after being found guilty of six counts of sharing terrorist material following a trial at Newcastle Crown Court. It was identified during an investigation by Counter Terrorism Policing North East that he made a series of posts on a social media account between January and February 2017 which actively sought to glorify and promote acts of terrorism committed by operatives of the so-called Islamic State.

Individual in possession of sensitive material sentenced

Sudesh Amman, 18, was sentenced to a three-year custodial term after being found guilty of six counts of collection of information of a kind likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism and seven counts of dissemination of terrorist material. Forensic specialists from the National Digital Exploitation Service, an agency within the Metropolitan Police, recovered in excess of 349,000 media files (10 terabytes of data) from Amman's digital devices. His actions were identified as a result of routine monitoring of open sources online.

ISIS supporter convicted

Mohammad Aqib Imran, 22, was convicted on 27th December, of a charge of preparing terrorist acts by seeking to join the so-called Islamic State following a trial at the Central Criminal Court. His intention to do so was identified during an investigation into Naa'imur Zakariyah Rahman who was separately found guilty of plotting to kill the Prime Minister earlier this year. Rahman reportedly helped Imran record an ISIS sponsorship video to facilitate his joining the grouping.

Total funds seized which destined for use in terrorism divulged

Scotland Yard divulged on 7th December that the National Terrorist Financial Investigation Unit within Counter Terrorism Command has successfully seized at least £5 million over the last five years. This includes funds sent to individuals identified as members of the so-called Islamic State. The unit's work has also led to 105 convictions for a range of offences including funding terrorism and fraud.

British national known to have engaged in paramilitary activity returns from Turkey

Joe Robinson, a British Army veteran, made it known during December that he had returned to the United Kingdom. He returned whilst on bail in Turkey after being convicted of membership of a terrorist organisation and subsequently sentenced to a seven-and-a-half-year custodial term in September. He may not have left Turkey surreptitiously – Turkish authorities have been known to hand back travel documents to foreign nationals in the hope they will leave the country.

Mr Robinson's offence relates to his time spent (allegedly only one month) with the People's Protection Units (locally abbreviated to YPG), a Kurdish paramilitary grouping known to be active in Syria. Mr Robinson claims that his work within the YPG was specifically to provide medical support to civilians. Turkey regards the YPG as a terrorist group. While the YPG is not a proscribed group in the UK, it has close associations with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) which is proscribed. Two Britons have been charged in the United Kingdom for having connections with the YPG.

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 1st March 2018.

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

Viable device placed in order to target police officers

An item determined to have been a viable improvised device was discovered in the Upper Dunmurry Lane area of west Belfast on 12th December. The exact composition of the device has not been divulged but a Police Service for Northern Ireland spokesperson made it known in a statement that it had been determined that the item had been designed with the intention of deliberately targeting on-duty police officers.

Petrol bomb attack on residential property in restive area of Drogheda

A petrol-bomb attack was conducted against a residential property in Drogheda, County Louth on 13th December. The item was thrown through the front room of the house. The house was occupied at the time of the incident but none of the occupants were injured. A feud involving two organised crime gangs has led to a sharp increase in violence (use of arson, placement of a pipe bomb and an abduction) in Drogheda in recent months, particularly around the Moneymore estate area where the house targeted is situated.

Arrests at pro-Brexit demonstration

There were three confirmed arrests made during a right-wing pro-Brexit demonstration in central London on 11th December. There had been some prior concern that there would be significant disruption to public order and therefore conditions were imposed upon the event through powers available under Section 12 of the Public Order Act. Those arrests were made where a small sub-group of right-wing activists sought to engage counter-protesters in an area adjacent to Trafalgar Square. One person was arrested on suspicion of assault, another was arrested for an unspecified public order offence and the third was arrested on suspicion of possessing an offensive weapon. Monitoring of the event identified that the white nationalist group Generation Identity and the anti-Islamic For Britain movement were among groups represented at the event.

Small “yellow vest” protests take place in central London

Minor protests took place in Westminster on 14th and 15th December that sought to mimic recent French protests by wearing yellow high-visibility vests. On both dates, attendees sought to temporarily obstruct the public highway. The action on 14th December was reportedly organised by the campaign group Leave.eu. The second action on 15th December seemed to have a Brexit link but was organised in order to raise awareness of the recent deaths of three people in January who were killed in a road traffic accident.

The driver found to be responsible for their deaths was sentenced to a thirteen-year custodial prison sentence. This group is campaigning for longer sentences in such cases. The maximum sentence for causing death by dangerous driving is a fourteen-year term. However, proposals have been tabled for the issue of life sentences for the most serious cases. It was not immediately clear how the themes link; potentially it may have been that certain individuals who hold pro-Brexit views who attended the protest took the opportunity to voice their concerns about Brexit.

Protest action in support of convicted Stansted activists



Fifteen activists from the campaign group End Deportations were convicted of endangering the safety of Stansted airport when, in March 2017, they blocked the take-off of a Titan Airways flight that the Home Office had chartered for the purposes of immigration removal. They were found guilty of the intentional disruption of services at an aerodrome, an offence contrary to the 1990 Aviation and Maritime Security Act.

After breaching the airport's perimeter fence, the activists used lock-on devices to secure themselves around the aircraft whilst it was parked on the airport apron. The aircraft would be used to remove undocumented migrants to Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone.

There were subsequently a number of protests in public locations to oppose their conviction, including two separate protests under the banner 'Stansted 15' in which up-to one thousand individuals congregated outside the Home Office on Marsham Street in Westminster.

The activists will be sentenced in February 2019. End Deportations, with the support of Amnesty International, released a statement immediately following the delivery of the verdict suggesting that the defendants were guilty of nothing more than intervening to prevent harm.

Ongoing climate change-themed protest

Two climate change-themed protests, organised as part of the Rising Up campaign group's Extinction Rebellion campaign, were conducted during late December. One of those actions was held at BBC Broadcasting House at Portland Place on 21st December. The BBC was a target on this occasion because it is this group's position that the broadcaster (and by extension the wider media) is complicit in the collective failure to address the climate crisis and has either allegedly ignored or downplayed the potential impact of climate change within its reporting on the matter. A further small protest was held on 26th December in Oxford Circus and organised with the aim of promoting the U.N. Sustainable Development Goal No.12 (responsible consumption and production).

Protests with a climate change theme are not generally considered unusual. However, the tactics espoused by Rising Up as part of its Extinction Rebellion campaign are noteworthy. As previously reported, it is the collective belief of this campaign's activists that acts that result in their arrest will bring their actions, and the need for greater action on climate change, into the wider public consciousness. The Metropolitan Police arrested ninety-six of this group's activists for obstruction of a public highway, an offence contrary to Section 137 of the Highways Act, during November.

Anti-Israel Protest Action targeting HSBC



Branches of the HSBC bank in Kensington High Street and on Park Row in Leeds were the target of protest on 8th December. HSBC has been identified as an ongoing target because of investments it holds in arms industry manufacturers that provide products to the Israeli military. The image, left, has been posted to an online location by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign to raise public awareness of their campaign agenda.

This action was part of an ongoing wider Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign, often referred to simply by the acronym BDS. It is an initiative established with the aim of generating public support for a boycott of Israeli goods, to persuade organisations to divest from their corporate links to Israel and to seek sanctions against the Israeli state. The campaign's primary focus is on securing a boycott of Israeli products sold by specific retailers. However, it also applies to other commercial applications.

The Palestine Solidarity Campaign stated later in December that they had received indication from HSBC that they had divested from Elbit Systems, the Israeli manufacturer that the campaign hoped to force HSBC to divest from. This has not yet been confirmed by HSBC, therefore the reason for the divestment is unknown, but the group have stated that their protest actions have resulted in a successful outcome for the campaign.

However, this may not stop further campaign action by the group targeting HSBC as the bank continues to maintain investments with a number of other companies that have previously been highlighted by the Campaign, including Caterpillar and BAE Systems. Other campaign targets by the group include sportswear manufacturer Puma, the Eurovision Song Contest and technology company Hewlett-Packard.

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