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# Intelligence Update February 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**

• 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.

## Eighteen successfully disrupted attack plots

Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu, the national head of Counter Terrorism Policing, made noteworthy public comments about the work of the UK counter-terrorism community on 22<sup>nd</sup> January. The authorities have successfully disrupted eighteen active plots since March 2017 (four far-right extremist plots and fourteen Islamist-inspired plots. This would suggest that the security service and other agencies are actively disrupting attacks on domestic targets in the UK at a rate of one every month. This detection total compares with thirty planned attacks that were successfully disrupted in the four years before March 2017 (when Khalid Massood carried out an attack in Westminster).

## Fewer leads to be investigated

This latest public campaign has been launched in part because there has been a significant reduction in the total number of leads and pieces of information passed to the police. Commissioner Basu also disclosed that in excess of 31,000 pieces of information were passed to police in 2017. In 2018 that total dwindled to 13,093. In both years, just over a fifth of the information passed on was considered “very significant”, meaning it directly led to the identification of a suspect or plot or was a small lead that helped a plot be disrupted or led to a criminal prosecution.



## **Review of UK anti-radicalisation programme to commence**

Security Minister Ben Wallace disclosed on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, that the Government will establish an independent review of the Prevent anti-radicalisation strategy. The review has been deemed necessary following concerns over the impact the strategy has on certain communities. Some parties believe that Prevent fosters discrimination against people of Muslim faith or background and inhibits legitimate expression. The review was announced after the Government accepted an amendment to the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill currently passing through Parliament. The review will begin within six months of the legislation coming into force and there will be a requirement to report back to parliament within eighteen months.

## **Home Office statistics show work of the Government's Prevent strategy**

The Home Office statistics made available show that, since 2012, more than 1,200 people had been supported by Channel, a mentoring programme that is part of the wider Prevent strategy. Of the 394 people who received Channel support in 2017/18, 179 (45%) had been referred for concerns related to Islamist extremism and 174 (44%) for concerns related to right-wing extremism. The Prevent strategy includes a statutory duty for schools, NHS trusts, prisons and local authorities to report concerns about people who may be at risk of turning to extremism. During the announcement of the review Mr Wallace indicated that he was aware of the concerns of some campaign groups and non-governmental organisations but suggested that some of their criticisms are in fact based upon a distortion of the reality of the situation and that he required solid evidence such as allegations.

## **Investigation into Greater Manchester mosque concludes**

Greater Manchester Police ended an investigation concerning alleged extremism at the Didsbury Mosque. Officers from Counter Terrorism Policing North West began an investigation into comments made by an imam concerning the term jihad. It was concluded that remarks made misconstrued the tone of the sermon delivered. The sermon in question was delivered on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2016, six months before the Manchester Arena bombing. Salman Abedi, perpetrator of the 2017 Manchester attack worshipped at the same mosque.

## **Counter-terrorism arrest at Port of Dover**

It was divulged on 21<sup>st</sup> January that Two Belgian nationals (a 38-year-old man and a 36-year-old woman) were detained at the port of Dover on 18<sup>th</sup> January, by officers from Counter Terrorism Policing South East. They were both detained on suspicion of an offence under Section 41 of the Terrorism Act as they sought to enter the country. Section 41 allows the police the power to arrest and detain a person without charge if they are suspected of an offence. Their detention until 25<sup>th</sup> January granted the following day.

## **UK authorities played a role in disruption of attack plot in Germany**

It came to light on 30<sup>th</sup> January, that Iraqi nationals resident in Germany that had been plotting an attack on an undisclosed target were in contact with a now-detained contact based in the United Kingdom. It was divulged as part of a statement by the office of the German federal prosecutor that one of the detained suspects had allegedly accessed bomb-building manuals online and asked a contact in the UK to send him a fuse, a plan that was reportedly foiled by UK-based counter-terrorism officers.

## **Syria terrorism fundraising suspect detained**

Officers from Counter Terrorism Command detained a 25-year-old man on 10<sup>th</sup> January, as part of an ongoing investigation into fundraising in support of Syria-related terrorism. The suspect, whose identity has not been divulged, was arrested after he was asked to attend a south London police station and subsequently released on bail. As part of the investigation, officers also carried out searches at an address in north London and an address in Hertfordshire. A second 25-year-old man was detained on suspicion on suspicion of being concerned in the commission, preparation and instigation of acts of terrorism (reportedly relating to planned or actual activity in Syria) on 30<sup>th</sup> January.

## **Sentencing process for terrorism fundraiser begun**

The sentencing process for Lewis Ludlow, a British-born convert to Islam, was begun after he plead guilty to charges relating to making plans to conduct a terrorist act and raising funds for the purpose of terrorism. It is understood that Mr Ludlow had been in contact with at least one operative of ISIS' East Asian affiliate based in Singapore and therefore those persons may have influenced his decision to begin planning an attack in central London. At the time of release no sentence had been passed.

## **Newcastle attack plotter charged**

Fatah Mohammed Abdullah, 33, appeared at the Central Criminal Court on 15<sup>th</sup> January, charged with preparing an act of terrorism, an offence contrary to Section 5 of the Terrorism Act 2006. The offence with which he has been charge occurred between 9<sup>th</sup> April and 11<sup>th</sup> December 2018. A provisional trial date has been set for 3<sup>rd</sup> June. As previously reported, he was detained by officers from Counter Terrorism Policing North East who had identified an ISIS-inspired plot which involved the detonation of an improvised explosive device.

## **Sentence for facilitator of Syria-based combatant**

After being found guilty of fifteen offences relating to disseminating or possessing material likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism and a further two offences of terrorist fundraising Abdurahman Kaabar, 24, was sentenced to an eight-year custodial prison term. The latter offences reportedly relate to cash sent to his brother in Syria. Co-defendant Badroddin Kazkaz was sentenced to a four-year term. They sent money to Mohammed Kaabar during a period between September 2016 and January 2017.

## **Five-year sentence for ISIS supporter**

Ahmed Hussain, 28, was sentenced to a five year and four-month custodial term for possession of a large number of terrorist documents glorifying the activity of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS). He was also convicted of the offences of encouraging terrorism and posting messages to online platforms in support of ISIS. The documents reportedly included the display of images of graphic violence and celebrated the deaths of the victims of the attacks carried out in the UK in 2017.

## **Convictions for terrorism offences following burglary investigation**

Ahmed Aweys, 33, was sentenced to a prison term of a total of two years and one month for each of three counts of dissemination of terrorist publications, an offence contrary to Section 2 of the Terrorism Act 2006. Abdulaziz Omer Abu Munye, 27, was sentenced to one year and three months for the same offence. His wife Asma Aweys, 30, was sentenced to one year and seven months for each of three counts of collection of information useful to a terrorist, contrary to section 58 of the Terrorism Act 2000. They were initially detained in relation to conspiracy to conduct a burglary of commercial premises, but the above offences were subsequently uncovered by investigating officers.

## **Man in possession of sensitive documents charged**

Mohammed Hamza Ghani, 28, was charged on 13<sup>th</sup> January (following his arrest a day earlier by officers from Counter Terrorism Command) with four counts of possession of terrorist material, an offence contrary to Section 58 and the Terrorism Act 2000. Specifically, Mr Ghani was charged with the above offences relating to his possession of four separate documents between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 and 12<sup>th</sup> January 2019 and additionally made a record of information of a kind likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism, an offence contrary to Section 58 of the Terrorism Act 2000.

## **ISIS supporter given suspended sentence**

Sajid Idris, 36 (a former activist of the now-proscribed organisation al Muhajiroun) was sentenced to a twenty-one-month custodial sentence suspended for two years. The sentence was suspended because of a delay in charging him. He previously plead guilty at Kingston Crown Court to four counts of distributing a terrorist publication. One of those items included an expression of support for the so-called Islamic State. During searches of his home receipts for special delivery items sent to Michael Adebolajo (responsible for the death of Lee Rigby) and Mohibur Rahman (convicted for plotting an attack).

## **Legal ruling finds in favour of Palestinian activist**

The High Court ruled in favour of Majed al Zeer, a British national and prominent Palestinian activist who chairs the Palestinian Return Centre, who sought to have his name removed from the World-Check database used by banks to assess the risk of so-called Politically Exposed Persons and other individuals and organisations linked to terrorism. Mr al Zeer's designation was reportedly based on an allegedly unsubstantiated claim made by the Israeli government that he was an operative of Hamas and his inclusion on the database is likely to have been a factor in the closure of three of his bank accounts between 2009-2015.

*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.

## Incident in Londonderry claimed by "IRA" group

It was claimed in a statement released following the detonation of a viable device outside a court building in Londonderry on 19<sup>th</sup> January, that a group labelling itself as "the IRA" was responsible. A spokesperson for the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has said its main line of enquiry is that a known dissident republican group, the New IRA, was responsible for the explosion. A number of dissident republican groups typically claim that label.

## Incident preceded by telephone warning call to Samaritans

It is understood that the Samaritans UK received a telephone warning of the presence of a viable device which had been placed inside a hijacked pizza delivery vehicle. It has been routine practice for dissident republicans to issue coded warnings to certain agencies. However, the statement released suggested that on future occasions no such warning would be provided. Information obtained suggests that those responsible sought to target those who seek to "collaborate" with the British state.



## Further action by union's private hire campaign branch

The Independent Workers of Great Britain union's United Private Hire Drivers branch remains committed to the campaign it began in 2018. The first of four in a series of rolling protests on Blackfriars Road were held during January. All intelligence indicates that action will continue during early 2019. The union branch opposes the congestion charge (Ultra Low Emissions Zone – ULEZ), which, it is claimed, will be unfairly levied on Private Hire drivers and to end alleged discrimination against PHV at Transport for London.

We understand that United Private Hire Drivers are led to believe that Transport for London (TfL) expects its policy to reduce congestion by only 600 cars per day or just one per cent of the private hire traffic that goes through the congestion zone. The branch is yet to have any response from City Hall and claims that the Mayor of London has chosen not to engage with the union.

This declaration of intention to protest follows the Court of Appeal's decision on 19<sup>th</sup> December to uphold the previous ruling in favour of the IWGB by the Employment Tribunal and Employment Appeal Tribunal. The body ruled that Uber had unlawfully classified Uber drivers as independent contractors rather than workers. The union argues that classifying the drivers as contractors denies them basic employment rights, including a guaranteed minimum wage and holiday pay. This ruling is likely to embolden this union's (and others) ongoing campaign to seek better conditions for those choosing to work for Uber and other private hire, ride sharing and delivery services.

## Protest over accommodation listings in allegedly illegal Israeli settlements

Amnesty International and their counterparts from other campaign groups held an anti-Israel protest outside offices of Trip Advisor at Soho Square on 30<sup>th</sup> January. Activist groups claim that online tourism companies Airbnb, Trip Advisor, Expedia and Booking.com profit by accepting accommodation and activity listings and processing reservations that are situated in allegedly illegal Israeli settlements in the in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (West Bank). Amnesty believes that the above named organisations play a significant role in driving tourism to settlement locations. It is also claimed that those organisations also knowingly mislead their customers by failing to consistently indicate when listings are located in Israeli settlements. Amnesty's position on Airbnb's policy may be incorrect as the organisation committed to remove listings in Israeli settlements situated in the West Bank in November 2018. Amnesty may well have included Airbnb in its reported comments in order to increase public awareness of which organisations have been accepting listings from such settlements.

## Pro-migrant protest at the Home Office



Following action in late 2018, a further protest was held at the Home Office on 7<sup>th</sup> January in response to the Government department's response to recent clandestine migrant arrivals on the south coast. Stand Up To Racism wishes to express solidarity with those migrants and believes that the Government's response to the arrival of one hundred such migrants over the Christmas period, by declaring a major incident, did not accurately reflect the situation. Additionally, the group collectively believes that it is the case that wider reporting of these migrants acted to dehumanise them and their personal circumstances. There were fewer activists present on Marsham Street on this occasion that sought to attend protests there in support of activists recently convicted of offences relating to a breach of security at Stansted Airport in 2017.

## Campaign Against the Arms Trade presence on Park Lane



Activists from the group Campaign Against the Arms Trade sought to oppose the Aerospace, Defence and Security (ADS) dinner which was held at Grosvenor House on Park Lane on 23<sup>rd</sup> January. ADS is the trade body which represents UK-based arms manufacturers. Activists conduct a protest at this event on a recurring annual basis but concerns on this occasion surround the UK's links to the ongoing conflict in Yemen. As the image opposite depicts officers from the Metropolitan Police were required to maintain public order outside the venue and to facilitate entry for the event's guests. Campaign Against Arms Trade currently has a court case challenging the legality of the UK's decision to grant export licenses to Saudi Arabia despite evidence that the weapons would be used to breach international humanitarian law. It will be heard at the Court of Appeal on 9<sup>th</sup> April.

## Environment-themed protest

Activists associated with well-established environment-themed campaigns intend to maintain a presence in Westminster on 15<sup>th</sup> January. A climate change-themed protest in Parliament Square was organised on the same day as well attended Brexit-themed action ahead of the House of Commons' meaningful vote on the European Union withdrawal agreement and did not result in much greater disruption than had been expected. In addition to the above a group labelling itself No To Heathrow Expansion attended the Royal Courts of Justice.

Their protest was held same time as a pre-trial hearing for a case brought by Friends of The Earth which will seek to overturn the Government's decision to allow the construction of a third runway at Heathrow. Protests with a climate change theme are not generally considered unusual and the above groups generally do not conduct significantly disruptive protests. However, intelligence available indicated that was the intention of activists associated with the Rising Up group's ongoing Extinction Rebellion environment-themed campaign to attend the above actions. As previously reported, the tactics espoused as part of this campaign are noteworthy. 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 2018. There was no such disruption reported on 15<sup>th</sup> January.

## Campaign group concerns regarding worker safety in Bangladesh



The campaign group Labour Behind The Label conducted a protest at the Bangladesh High Commission on 30<sup>th</sup> January. seek to draw attention to commitments to the safety standards of retailer garment supplier factories based in Bangladesh. A factory safety programme (the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety) begun in 2013, in which over 200 brands participated, ended in May 2018. A new Accord was drafted in order to guarantee a smooth transition to another safety programme. However, the government of Bangladesh has allegedly sought to obstruct the operation of a new accord (the 2018 – now 2019 Transition Accord). An injunction to delay the operation of the Accord was sought at the Bangladesh High Court, which was due to take effect on 30th November. In December, a hearing on whether the Accord can be put into effect was rescheduled for 18th February.

There has been no recent explicit instruction identified following the group’s communications concerning developments with the Bangladesh Accord that activists should seek to visit specific stores operated by named retailers that have previously been signatories to the Bangladesh Accord. However, it is entirely possible that, if there is a further delay to the implementation of the Accord the group will seek to raise public awareness about their concerns regarding the future of the Bangladesh Accord by undertaking protests at named retailers’ highest profile stores where they might gain the attention of several hundred customers.

## Planned activist presence in City of London during February

Communications have been noted online which suggest that activists claiming association with the Yellow Vest movement (which originated in France) intend to maintain a presence in the City on **Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> February**, as part of an action entitled “Shut Down The City”. No confirmed locations or targets for protest have been identified at this stage but we have identified that planning for this proposed action continues.

Our monitoring will seek to identify assembly points and potential targets, if it is even this grouping’s intention to identify specific targets as suitable locations for protest. There is no intelligence available which would suggest that those involved intend to be deliberately disruptive, but this will of course be subject to change. Small scale yellow vest movements have been formed by both right-wing and left-wing groups. Our understanding is that this event has been organised by left-wing activists. There is greater present concern over those right-wing activists who have chosen to use the Yellow Vest movement for its own interests. It is members of this group that have been detained on suspicion of disruptive behaviour and public order offences.

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