



UK in Focus:
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Pool Re SOLUTIONS
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Monthly *Threat* Update

February 2022

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Threat Overview

This month, Pool Re Solutions provides an overview of the current threat landscape in the UK.

This comes following a decision by the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) to lower the UK Threat Level from 'SEVERE' to 'SUBSTANTIAL' and a lack of attacks in Great Britain this year.

We also provide a roundup of significant terrorism-related events affecting advanced markets around the world. This includes the death of Islamic State's leader following a US raid in Syria and the Australian government's designation of Hamas' political wing as a terrorist organisation, amongst other incidents. Finally, we examine conviction and sentencing figures for terrorism charges in Great Britain in December and January.

UK in Focus: Threat Level lowered to 'SUBSTANTIAL'

On 09 February the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) lowered the UK Threat Level from 'SEVERE' to 'SUBSTANTIAL', meaning an attack is 'likely'. It was raised late last year following two attacks: a stabbing of a member of parliament and a bombing at a hospital in Liverpool. JTAC appears to have judged the current threat to have fallen after the festive period.

The UK Threat Level refers to the threat posed to England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland from international terrorism. There is a separate designation for terrorism in Northern Ireland. The British government introduced the scale in 2006. JTAC is based at the Security Service headquarters in London and made up of counter-terrorism experts from across government agencies. It reviews the [current threat levels](#) regularly, raising or lowering them when necessary.



Home Secretary, Priti Patel who announced on 09 February the lowering of the threat level.
Photo PA Images / Alamy Stock Photo

The UK threat landscape

The lowering of the threat level to 'SUBSTANTIAL' suggests the imminent risk of attack has decreased in the UK, but it does not mean the threat has disappeared. Home Secretary Priti Patel has urged the public not to get complacent, a statement echoed in recent discussions by the United Nations (UN).

The Under Secretary General at the UN's Office of Counterterrorism discussed the threat from Islamist groups in particular, highlighting the persistent threat to the West from groups including Islamic State and Al Qaeda. Both continue to pose a threat to UK and global security, alongside a continued threat from Islamist inspired terrorism as well. The [recent incident in Texas](#), where a British citizen took four people hostage whilst demanding the release

UK in Focus: Threat Level lowered to 'SUBSTANTIAL' (continued)

of Aafia Siddiqui, also known as 'Lady Al Qaeda', demonstrates this continued threat.

Growing concerns over far-right extremism

Additionally, there is a growing threat posed by far-right extremists in the UK. In September 2019, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Neil Basu suggested that right-wing terrorism is the UK's fastest growing terrorism threat. This has been echoed by other security officials, including the director general of MI5, who in 2021 discussed, during a threat update, the increasing number of teenagers drawn into far-right extremism.

British authorities have expressed concerns in recent weeks about individuals or groups linked to formalised far-right organisations, or sympathetic to their ideologies, travelling to Ukraine to seek weapons training. According to

The Guardian, the government stationed counter-terrorism police at a major UK airport's departure gates in mid-February after at least 'half a dozen' suspected Neo-Nazis travelled to Ukraine from the US and other European nations.

These individuals are likely attempting to exploit the conflict to join military units or militia groups on either side of the conflict to gain combat experience. Resultantly, there is a growing risk of these individuals returning to the UK with increased capabilities to carry out attacks.

Understanding the threat level

Informed and expert judgement is used to adjust the UK Threat Level, and these decisions are based on a number of factors. Available intelligence (including what is known about ongoing plots, terrorist capabilities and likely methodologies), terrorist intentions, likely timescales of attack planning and execution, and recent attacks in the UK and elsewhere all influence the raising or lowering of the UK Threat Level.

Over the past five years, JTAC has frequently changed the UK Threat Level in response to significant attacks in major British cities and events in Western Europe. For example, the threat level changed four times in 2017 in response to the Manchester Arena and Parsons Green bombings. While JTAC's lowering of the UK Threat Level is a positive step, it is important that businesses and the public remain vigilant and continue to take precautions to protect themselves and others against terrorism in the UK.

UK Threat Level changes by JTAC 2016-2022

2016	11 May Raised to SEVERE as a result of the bombing in Brussels
2017	23 May Raised to CRITICAL following the Manchester Arena bombing
	27 May Lowered to SEVERE
	15 September Raised to CRITICAL following Parsons Green bombing
2019	17 September Lowered to SEVERE
	04 November Lowered to SUBSTANTIAL
2020	03 November Raised to SEVERE following the attack in Vienna
2021	04 February Lowered to SUBSTANTIAL
	15 November Raised to SEVERE following the attack on Sir David Amess MP and the bombing in Liverpool
2022	09 February Lowered to SUBSTANTIAL

UK Terrorism Offence Data: February Update

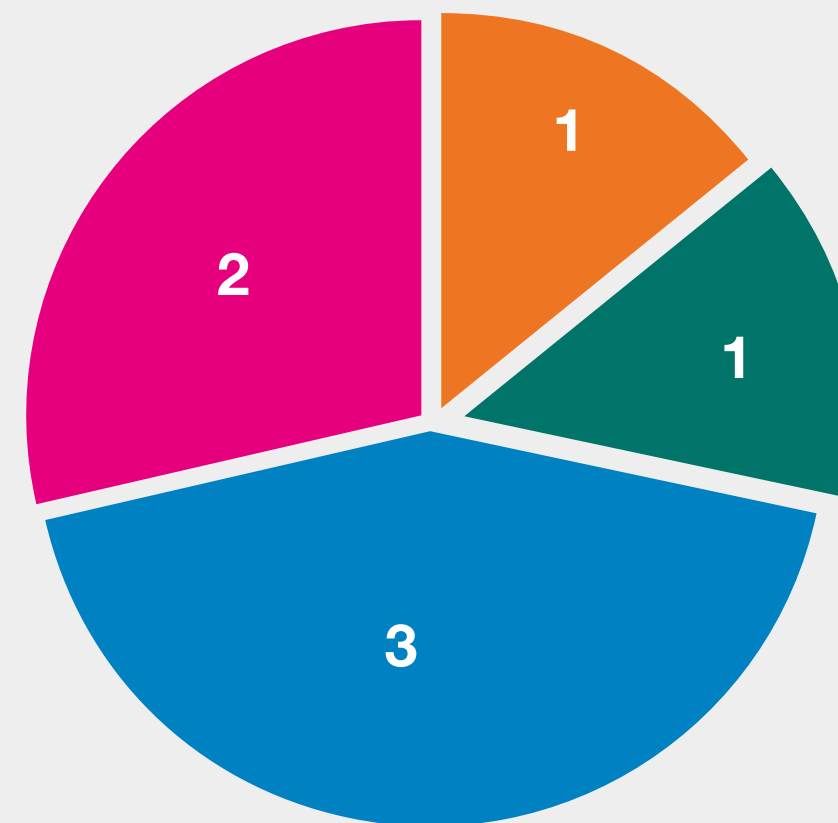
In January 2022, the authorities convicted four individuals for terrorism offences and sentenced three others in relation to terrorism convictions. This is a slight increase from December 2021, during which the authorities charged three individuals with terrorism offences and sentenced two others regarding terrorism convictions.

This slight increase is unlikely to indicate a rise in terrorist activity and is likely due to the closure of courts in December for Christmas holiday periods. Whilst the courts were closed, policing continued, producing more terrorism charges yet to reach trial.

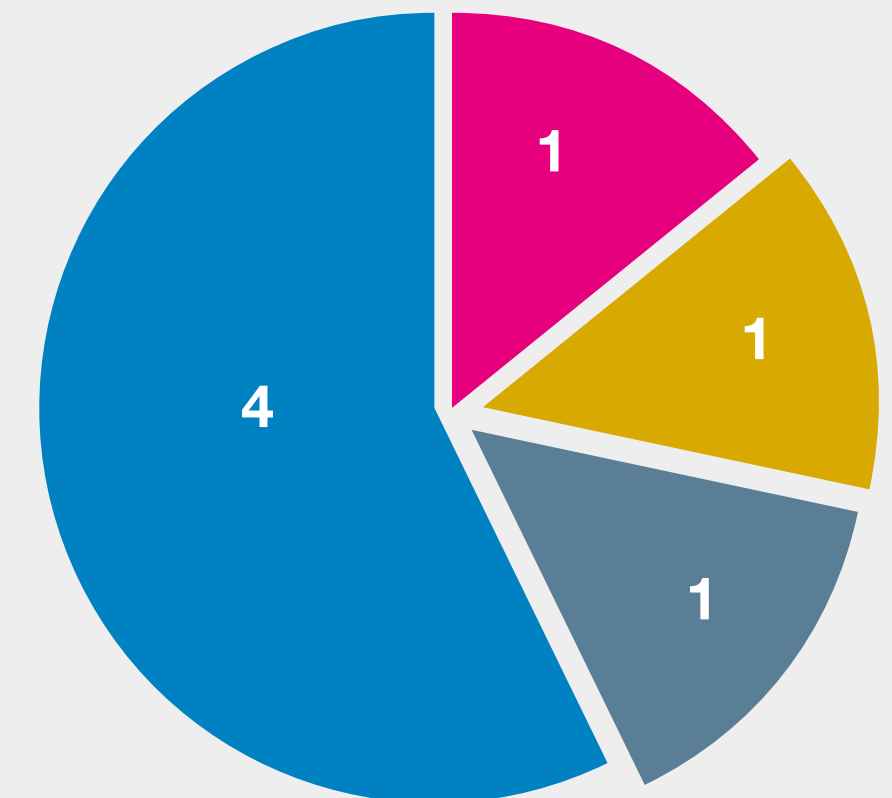
Throughout both December 2021 and January 2022, the most common offence was possession of an article for terrorist purposes in contradiction to Section 58 of the Terrorism Act 2000.

While these trends are broadly in line with pre-pandemic figures, it is still too early to understand what effects COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions may have had on these patterns. As we return to normal following the lifting of restrictions, these trends may change and will give us an indication of the potential consequences of lockdown isolation.

No. persons charged, convicted or sentenced for terrorism offences in December 2021



No. persons charged, convicted or sentenced for terrorism offences in January 2022



■ Possession of an article for terrorist purposes

■ Dissemination of a terrorist publication

■ Failure to notify changes - Counter-Terrorism order

■ Wearing an article in support of a proscribed organisation

■ Preparation of Terrorist Acts

■ Encouragement of Terrorism

Source: Pool Re internal data sources

Death of IS Leader



On 03 Feb, 2022 United States President Joe Biden speaking from the Roosevelt Room in the White House said Islamic State leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi was killed during a U.S. counterterrorism operation in northwest Syria. Credit: Al Drago/Pool via CNP/dpa/Alamy Live New.

On 04 February, the US confirmed that Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, leader of the Islamic State (IS), committed suicide following a special forces operation in Northern Syria. Al-Qurayshi became the IS leader in 2019, following the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Although IS no longer controls large areas of Syria and Iraq as it did at

the height of its power in late 2014, local and Western governments have raised concerns around the groups attempts to reconstitute itself, based on a rise in attacks and a renewed propaganda effort.

The effects of al-Qurayshi's death on the group's attempts to rebuild its capabilities domestically and abroad are so far unknown.

However, security agencies have not issued warnings of specific plots in retaliation for al-Qurayshi's death, nor has the group made explicit and public calls for affiliated groups and supporters to take action to avenge him.

Neo-Nazi teenager shares bomb-making manual online

On 04 February, a London court found Connor Burke, a 19-year-old British national,

bomb-making guides, anti-Semitic propaganda, and a video of the Christchurch attack in New



guilty of disseminating a terrorist publication online. Burke shared a bomb-making manual on a Telegram channel used by far-right sympathisers. He had disguised the file as a guide for Minecraft, a popular online game.

During a raid on Burke's home, anti-terror police found

Zealand. Burke's parents believe he was radicalised online during COVID-19 lockdowns, after becoming isolated from friends and family. Burke is the latest of a growing number of teenagers with far-right ideological leanings convicted of terrorism offences.

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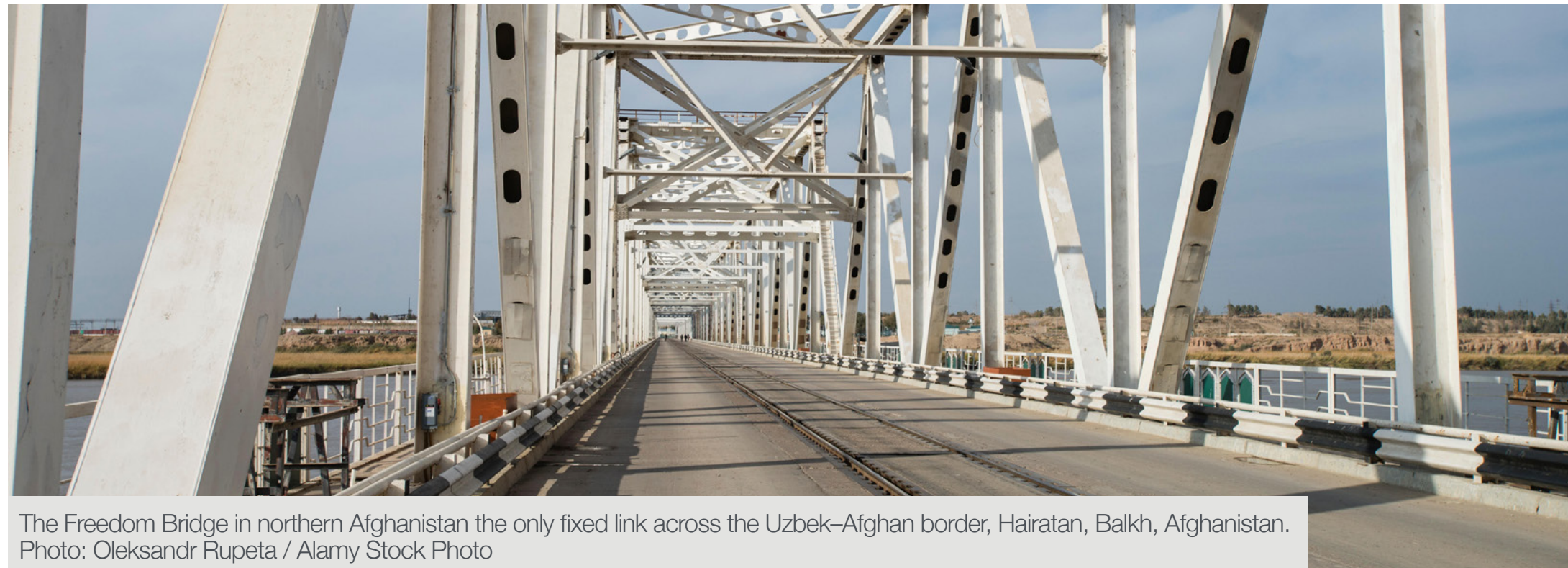
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British nationals attempt to join IS in Afghanistan



The Freedom Bridge in northern Afghanistan the only fixed link across the Uzbek–Afghan border, Hairatan, Balkh, Afghanistan.
Photo: Oleksandr Rupeta / Alamy Stock Photo

The Taliban arrested two suspected IS recruits, both carrying British passports, at the Afghanistan border in the final weeks of 2021. According to international media reports that emerged in mid-February, the men carried large amounts of cash, night-vision goggles, and combat vests. The Taliban claimed the pair were attempting to join Islamic State's

local affiliate, Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP).

The interception highlights the continued threat posed by extremists travelling overseas to join terrorist groups. Not only do these individuals threaten the security of the state they have travelled to, but they are also likely to be seeking training in order to build up their capabilities should they return to the UK.

The attempt by UK nationals to travel to join ISKP suggests the group is well-funded and able to engage in propaganda and sustained recruitment efforts targeting British citizens. It is likely that UK-based extremists will continue to travel abroad to train with, and fight for, Islamist militant groups abroad.

Anti-terror raids indicate persistent threat

On 08 February, police in Belgium arrested 13 people following an investigation into an Islamist militant network. According to media reports, the investigation was not carried out to prevent an imminent threat but to identify the group's plans and activities.

The arrests indicate the persistent threat posed by Islamist militants in Belgium. The country served

as a significant operational base for groups' conducting attacks in Western Europe throughout the 2010s. Notably, the attackers responsible for the November 2015 Paris attack plotted the assault in Belgium. The men were part of a wider network that went on to bomb the Brussels airport and metro in March 2016.



Australian Government designates Hamas' political wing as a terrorist organisation

On 17 February, Australia became the latest Advanced Market country to designate Hamas' political wing as a terrorist group. Australia already considered the group's military wing as a proscribed organisation. In addition to Hamas, the government also added Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, an Islamist militant group based in Syria, and the National Socialist Order, a far-right group in the United States, to its list.

The US, Canada, and New Zealand designate both the military and political wings of Hamas as terrorist organisations. The UK followed last year, adding the political wing of Hamas, in addition to its military wing, to its list of proscribed groups. Australia's decision means that Australian firms and citizens may be prosecuted for providing financial or material support to the organisation.



The Gaza Strip, Palestine: Members of Palestinian security forces loyal to Hamas take part in a graduation ceremony in Gaza City February 21, 2022. (Credit Image: © Mahmoud Ajjour/Quds Net News via ZUMA Press Wire)

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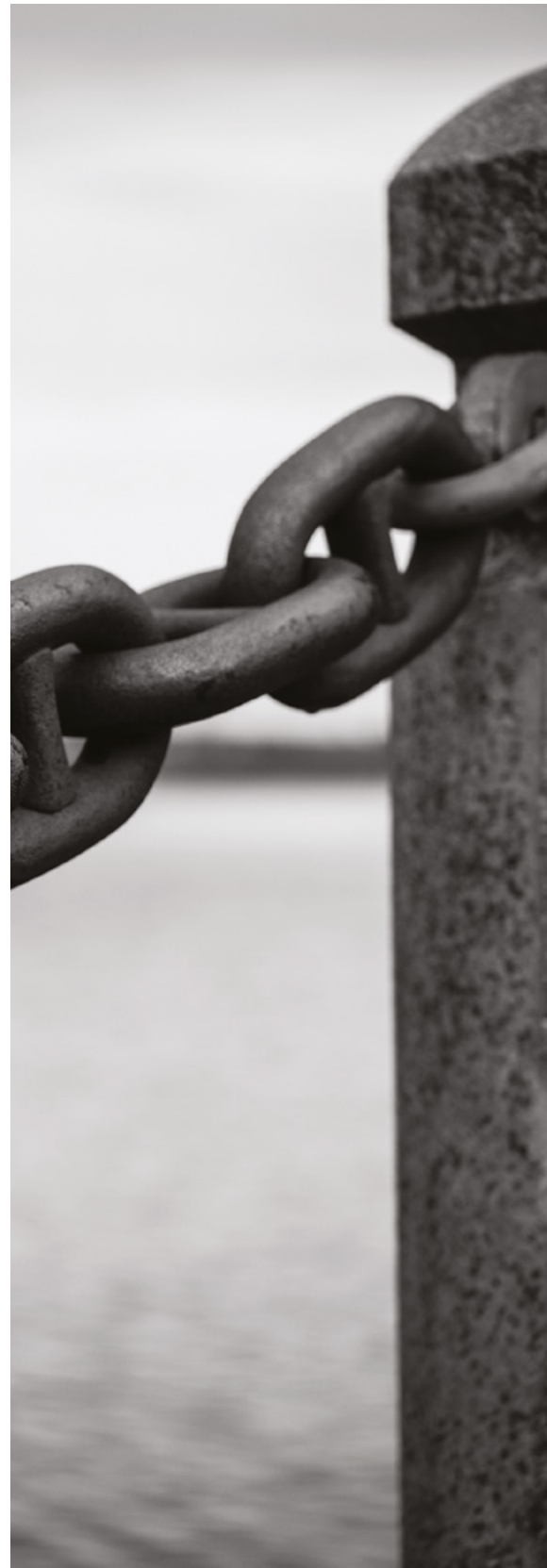
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Pool Re
SOLUTIONS
Building resilience against terrorism risk

 **Risk Awareness**

 **Risk Modelling**

 **Risk Management**

Understanding risk, enabling resilience

Whilst the human cost of terrorism is devastating, the financial impact an incident can have on communities, businesses and economies is generally greater than most realise.

At Pool Re we understand that terrorism is a significant multi-faceted peril that can expose businesses in a complex way. Like many other catastrophic perils, terrorism is a challenge which requires a collaborative approach.

We have been the UK's leading terrorism reinsurer for over a quarter of a century. During this time

our *SOLUTIONS* division have developed a specialist team of experts who can work with you to help you and your Policyholders understand and manage the terrorism threat.

We believe all organisations and businesses can benefit from a better understanding of the terrorism risk solutions available.

To find out more about Pool Re *SOLUTIONS* and how your organisation can take advantage of this service please contact us at:
solutions@poolre.co.uk

Threat level

	Critical: an attack is highly likely in the near future	Severe: an attack is highly likely	Substantial: an attack is likely	Moderate: an attack is possible but not likely	Low: an attack is highly unlikely
Threat from terrorism to the UK:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Threat from Northern Ireland related terrorism to Northern Ireland:	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Government advice

Click a logo for more information

ACT | ACTION COUNTERS TERRORISM

CPNI
Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure

CSSC
Cross-sector Safety and Security Communications

 **SECURITY SERVICE MI5**

 **UK Protect**

SEE IT. SAY IT. SORTED.

RUN HIDE TELL

 **National Cyber Security Centre**
a part of GCHQ