

Fire as a Weapon: a re-emerging threat?

UK Terrorism Offence Data: November Update

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Monthly Threat Update November 2022

Threat Overview

This month we take a look at the threat of Fire-as-a-Weapon following a recent right-wing extremist attack at the Western Jet Foil immigration centre in Dover.

Terrorism-related convictions in October remained consistent with September. However, of particular concern are two cases involving 18-year-olds and another involving a prison officer. Find out more below.

We bring you up-to-date, significant, terrorism-related news, focussing on advanced market countries:

- Dover migrant centre attack inspired by extremist right-wing ideology.
- Volume 2 of the Manchester Arena Inquiry released.
- Bomb-attack in Istanbul kills 6 and wounds 81.
- Suspected terror attack in Belgium, policeman stabbed to death.
- US-born "Empress of ISIS" sentenced for her role in ISIS.
- Islamic State supporters encourage attacks at FIFA World Cup 2022.

It is highly likely that rudimentary improvised projectiles such as Molotov Cocktails would be used as part of terrorism related fire as a weapon attacks. Image: Getty Images

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Fire as a Weapon: a re-emerging threat?

by Oliver Hair

On 30 October, a right-wing extremist attacked the Western Jet Foil immigration centre in Dover using three petrol cannisters with fireworks attached to them.¹ Although the attack did not cause any serious injuries or property damage, the event illustrates extremist actors' intent to use incendiary devices as part of their attack plans.

This month, we explore whether Fire-as-a-Weapon (FAW) could be seen as a viable standalone attack methodology or as a way of increasing the complexity of responding to a terrorist attack; whether further attacks on migrant processing and transport centres are likely; and the impact such an event could have to businesses and the public more generally.

FAW involves the deliberate use of fire within a terrorist attack, either on its own, or as a part of a complex Marauding Terrorist



The driver was seen hurling a device out the window as flames erupted behind him (Image: REUTERS)

Attack (MTA); where terrorists employ a number of different methods within the same attack. FAW is likely to be attractive to terrorists as a low-cost and low-complexity tactic that requires very little prior planning or training to execute. The ease with which terrorist actors are able to gain the materials necessary to carry out an attack using FAW also makes it difficult for security services to detect and intercept. In the attack in Dover, the perpetrator was able to purchase materials readily, over the counter, illustrating the ease at which similar low-sophistication devices could be constructed for future attacks. FAW is likely to be deployed in one or more of the following ways: to cause disruption or delay to the emergency response; to increase media coverage; to act as a distraction; to increase the damage and casualties caused by an attack; or to trigger a fire evacuation.²

Fire as a Weapon: a re-emerging threat? (continued)

The use of FAW by Extremist Actors

Extremist groups such as Islamic State (IS) have previously encouraged the use of FAW as a high-impact, low-complexity tactic. In 2020, IS encouraged its followers to use arson as a cheap and easy tactic to target forests in the US, buildings in Europe, and factories in Canada.³ The group claimed responsibility for an arson attack on government-owned boats in the Maldives in 2020, reportedly in retaliation against investigations into religious extremism within the country.⁴ In Syria and Iraq, IS also claimed responsibility for wildfires throughout both countries.⁵ It is possible that extremist actors in the UK may seek to carry out similar attacks if summer heatwaves continue, making the use of FAW more effective.

FAW remains a tactic for non-Islamist extremist actors in the UK. In 2019, a sixteen-year-old with neo-Nazi sympathies

was sentenced to six years in prison for planning to carry out an arson campaign against synagogues in Durham.⁶ In 2021, an assailant used two beer cans full of petrol in an attempt to burn down a Mosque in Manchester; likely motivated by a right-wing ideology.⁷ Environmental extremists have also used FAW. In 2013, "Angry Foxes" – an anarchist group – claimed responsibility for an arson attack at a police firearms training centre in Portishead. The attempt to burn down the £16m police training centre resulted in a claim of almost £11m – which Pool Re paid – illustrating the detrimental impact that FAW can have for property and business.⁸

Emergency Response

FAW is likely to be particularly effective when used as part of a MTA. Following the 2017 Borough Market attack – where Islamist extremists used a vehicle to ram pedestrians before continuing their assault

using bladed weapons – police found 14 petrol cans and four constructed petrol bombs in the attackers' van.⁹ Although the intended use of the devices is still unknown, it is likely that these were to be used on nearby sites, including Borough Market.

If used in an MTA, FAW may disorientate first responders, slow their response to a target, create structural hazards in the surrounding area, and potentially increase the number of casualties that need responding to before the main threat can be eliminated.¹⁰ FAW may also cause damage and casualties outside of the attack's intended target site. For example, a fire placed at the bottom of a multi-story building may leave people trapped within the structure, injured due to the panic caused, or at risk of structural collapse. Whilst the attacks of September 11, 2001 are remembered for the first use of aeroplanes as weapons, it was the resultant fires that

brought down both towers of the World Trade Centre. Clearly, FAW has the ability to cause both intended and unintended casualties and property damage and may lead to long-term interruption for impacted businesses without being the primary or sole mode of attack.

Media Coverage

FAW may also be used by extremist actors to increase media coverage of an attack. In 2008, 166 people were killed in attacks throughout Mumbai as Islamist terrorists from Lashkar-e-Taiba used improvised explosive devices (IEDs), firearms, and FAW in a combined attack.¹¹ Directing the attack from Pakistan, one of the terrorist handlers made sure to ask if the fires had been set or not, illustrating the intent to use fire as both a strategic weapon and propaganda tool.

Conclusion

It is likely that extremist actors in the UK will continue to consider

FAW when carrying out attacks in the future; particularly as UK legislation and the work of the security services inhibits the use of higher-complexity methods. A successful attack using FAW would likely cause casualties and property damage. Such an attack would also likely lead to business interruption and losses from cordons, investigations and repairs. It is recommended that staff are trained in fire safety and that the appropriate equipment and mitigations are made known to everyone within a business. Fire prevention and mitigation equipment should also be serviced and regularly reviewed, including fire extinguishers, sprinkler systems, and evacuation plans.

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UK Terrorism Offence Data: November Update

by Becca Stewart

Four individuals were charged or sentenced in relation to terrorist activity in October 2022, following the trend of decreasing numbers of charges and convictions throughout the year to date. The first quarter saw 28 individuals charged, convicted or sentenced, compared to 18 in the second quarter and 16 in the third quarter.

Insight into October's cases

In October, all cases involved charges for dissemination of

terrorist publications, including propaganda videos, images and execution videos. Three cases were related to Islamist extremism, two of which involved 18-year-old offenders. This follows an increase in the number of young people charged and convicted of terrorism offences in the past 18 months. Home Office data indicated that in the year ending June 2022, 16% of individuals arrested for terrorism offences were under the age of 18 – the highest proportion on record.¹²

One of the 18-year-olds charged this month also possessed information on how to construct explosives, specifically, the same explosives used in the Manchester arena bombing in 2017.¹³

The fourth case in October involved a 42-year-old prison officer who was charged with disseminating a terrorist document within an extreme right-wing Telegram channel linked to a neo-Nazi organisation. The infiltration of the justice system in this case by terrorist

ideology is particularly concerning. Prior research indicates prisons can become hot-beds for radicalisation amongst prisoners, however the focus has been primarily on Islamist extremism.¹⁴ This case indicates right-wing radicalisation may also be a concern within prison settings, impacting not only prisoners but also prison officers.

In his annual threat update in November, MI5 Director General Ken McCallum stated that 37 late-stage plots had been disrupted

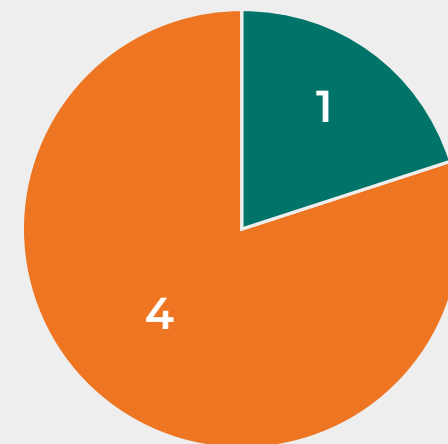
since the start of 2017, 5 of which were prevented since an update in December 2021. McCallum stated the disrupted plots were a mixture of Islamist and extreme right-wing terrorism.¹⁵ Islamist terrorism continues to dominate the workload of the security services; accounting for around three quarters of all investigations. The threat remains predominantly from self-initiated individuals planning low sophistication attacks.

The number of individuals charged, convicted or sentenced regarding terrorist activity

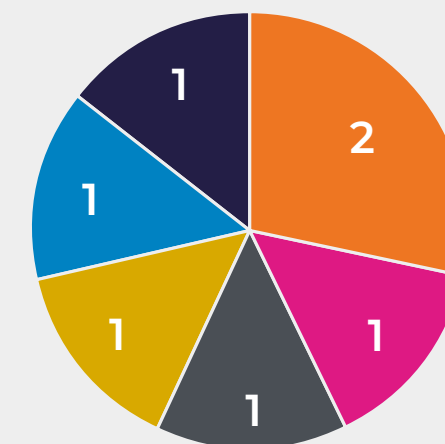
	Charged	Convicted	Sentenced	Total
October	3	0	1	4
September	3	0	1	4
August	4	1	1	6

Note:
 Several individuals in both months were involved with more than one offence so appear on the diagram multiple times.
 *Some charges have been shortened for editorial purposes
 Source: Pool Re internal database

Number of people charged, convicted or sentenced for terrorism offences in October 2022



Number of people charged, convicted or sentenced for terrorism offences in September 2022



- Breaches of a Counter Terrorism notification order
- Dissemination of a terrorist publication
- Possessing material containing information useful to terrorism*
- Entering into a funding arrangement*
- Possession of an article for terrorist purposes*
- Terrorist fund raising
- Collection of information useful to a terrorist

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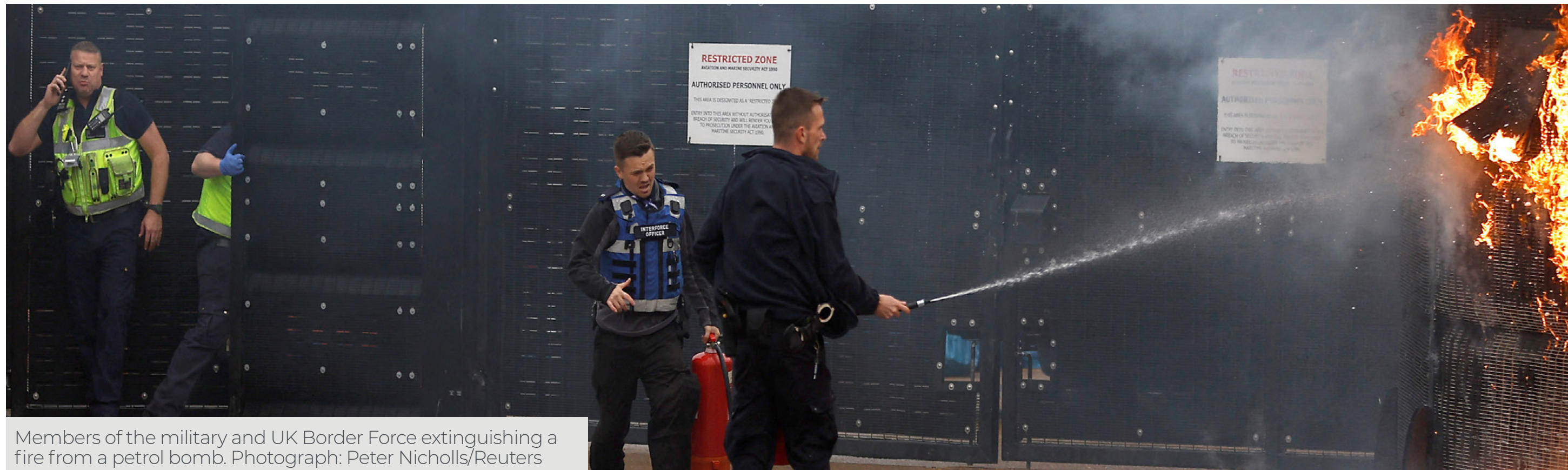
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News Roundup

by Oliver Hair

UK: Dover migrant centre attack was inspired by extremist right-wing ideology



Members of the military and UK Border Force extinguishing a fire from a petrol bomb. Photograph: Peter Nicholls/Reuters

Following a search of the Dover migrant centre attacker's now-deleted Facebook account and home, Counter Terrorism Police (CTP) allegedly found items that "suggest[ed] there was an extreme right-wing motivation behind the

attack".¹⁶ The attack illustrates the growing threat posed by individuals inspired by extremist right-wing ideologies in the UK, as CTP are now monitoring threats towards other migrant centres and hotels.¹⁷ Following the attack, several followers of

prominent extremist figures and groups called Leak a "hero" and encouraged others to "RISE UP".¹⁸ Since the start of the year, it is reported that there have been 182 visits to migrant accommodation sites by activists.¹⁹ As the UK faces a growing cost-of-living crisis,

recession, and immigration crisis, it is important that the threat posed to the UK by extremist right-wing actors remains considered. The methodology used in this attack is set out and assessed in our [lead article above](#).

UK: Volume 2 of Manchester Arena Inquiry released

On 3 November, Volume 2 of the Saunders Report – the Public Inquiry into the 2017 Manchester Arena attack – was published. On 22 May 2017, Salman Abedi detonated a Person-Borne Improvised-Explosive Device (PBIED) at the end of an Ariana Grande concert in the City Room of Manchester Arena. 22 people were killed and over 800 were injured. Volume 2 examines the emergency response to the attack and will be followed by a third volume which will consider whether the police and security agencies could or should have prevented the attack. The Inquiry's chairman, Sir John Saunders, found the emergency response to the attack to be inadequate. The emergency response faced criticism for failures to prepare, inadequacies in training, and a more general disbelief that a terrorist attack would happen at the Manchester Arena in 2017.²⁰

News Roundup (continued)

TURKEY: 6 killed and 81 wounded in Istanbul bombing



Emergency personnel secure the scene after an explosion occurred on Istiklal street, Istanbul, a busy pedestrian thoroughfare. Photo by Cem Tekkesinoglu/di images via Getty Images

On 13 November, 6 people were killed and 81 more were wounded when a bomb was detonated on a popular street in Istanbul. Although no group has claimed responsibility, Turkey's interior minister has accused militants from the Kurdistan Workers' party (PKK) in northern Syria for the attack.²¹ Istanbul police have since

made 51 arrests, with their Vice President, Fuat Oktay, saying the blast was thought to be a terrorist attack carried out by a "special intelligence officer" from the PKK.²²

The attack illustrates the continued intent and capability of terrorist actors to target Publicly Accessible Locations (PALs) in the hope

of inciting fear and causing maximum possible casualties. The alleged perpetrator is reported to have planted the bomb in a bag at the scene before leaving in a taxi shortly before the explosion. The industrial explosive, TNT, was later detected on victims of the attack and at the crime scene.²³ Due to the difficulty of acquiring similar

explosives in the UK, it is more likely that extremist actors will rely on homemade explosive devices to carry out their attacks. However, current legislation and counter-terrorism policing have made the purchase and refinement of the necessary precursor materials increasingly difficult for extremist actors in the UK.

BELGIUM: Policeman stabbed to death in suspected terror attack

A police officer was stabbed to death in Brussels in a suspected terror attack in November. The assailant stabbed the officer in the neck and stabbed another policeman in the arm outside the Gare du Nord railway station. He was then shot and later taken to hospital.²⁴ Whilst the attacker's motive is currently unknown, anti-terrorist officials have taken over the investigation.²⁵ The assailant was reportedly on a list of potentially violent extremists and entered a police station on the morning of the attack to announce that he was going to carry out an attack on officers.²⁶

The attack in Brussels illustrates the continued threat posed by Self-Initiated Terrorists using low-complexity methodologies to carry out attacks in Publicly Accessible Locations (PALs). The attack also shows that Government, Police and Military personnel will remain a target for terrorist actors in the near future.

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News Roundup (continued)

US: "Empress of ISIS" sentenced for leadership role in ISIS



Masked militants holding the ISIS black banner of Muhammad. Photograph: Alamy

Last month, a US citizen was sentenced to 22 years in prison for leading an all-female battalion on behalf of IS (also referred to as ISIS) in Syria. Allison Fluke-Ekren allegedly trained over 100 women, including her own daughter, to use assault rifles, grenades, and suicide belts in defence of IS' headquarters.²⁷ She is also reported to have recruited

a number of operatives for a potential terror attack in the US.²⁸ During the trial, Fluke-Ekren's own children stated that they had been physically and sexually abused by their own mother.²⁹

As a US-born woman who rose to a level of leadership within an otherwise male-dominated group that advances misogynistic

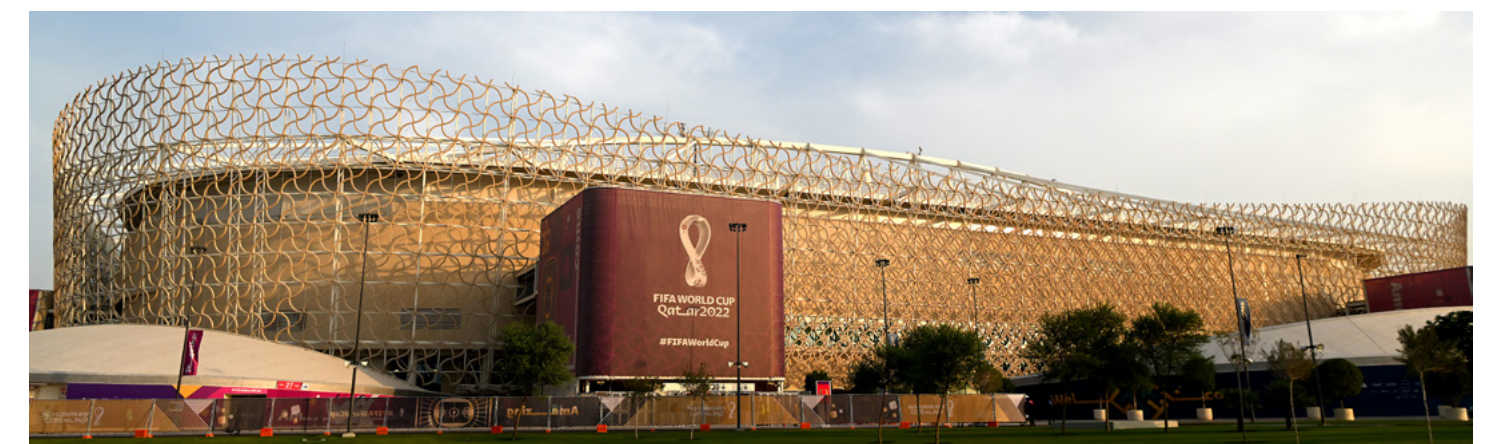
views and strict gender roles, Fluke-Ekren's case is unique. The sentencing also highlights the multiple roles women can play in acts of terrorism. While the majority of prosecuted IS-affiliates have been male, women have often played a facilitating or supporting role associated with IS leadership and fighters.

QATAR: Islamic State supporters encourage attacks at FIFA World Cup 2022

Pro-Islamic State (IS) Telegram channels have encouraged jihadists to carry out "violent and biological" attacks on spectators and players during the World Cup in Qatar.³⁰ The World Cup has been deemed a "golden opportunity" for supporters of IS to undertake attacks against countries of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. Messages suggested poisoning food, drinks, and fragrances or applying harmful substances to the handles of car doors. Belgium, Canada, and France were specifically mentioned as targets. The World Cup presents an opportunity for IS supporters to attack Western targets, exploit

busy PALs, and gain publicity via the world's media.

IS have previously sought to target stadia and major events. In 2017, Manchester Arena was attacked by an Islamist extremist suicide bomber at the end of an Ariana Grande concert. During the 2015 Paris Attacks, three suicide bombers detonated explosive belts outside the Stade de France during an international football friendly.³¹ Due to the potential for mass casualties and significant economic damages, extremist actors in the UK are likely to continue to target major events and PALs in future attacks.



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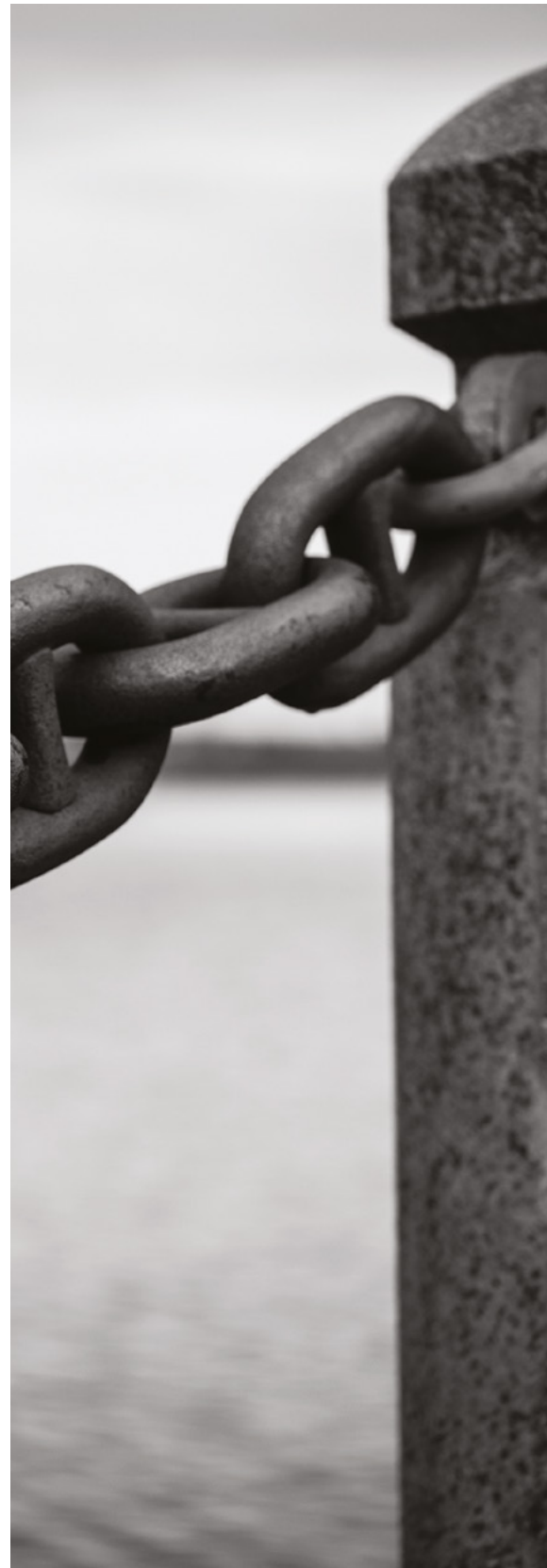
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 **Risk Awareness**

 **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.








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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:					
Threat from Northern Ireland related terrorism to Northern Ireland:					

Government advice

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