

Shopping centres



Terrorism threat to shopping centres

- It is almost certain that terrorist actors in the UK would have the intent to conduct attacks against shopping centres due to the high footfall and publicly accessible nature of shopping centres in the UK.
- It is highly likely that any terrorist attack conducted against a shopping centre in the UK would be conducted by an individual or small cell using a low sophistication methodology. E.g., Bladed or Blunt Force Weapons, Vehicle as a Weapon, or Fire as a Weapon.
- There is a realistic possibility that terrorist actors in the UK could have the capability to conduct a high-sophistication attack at a shopping centre. E.g., Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), Person Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (PBIED) or a marauding attack with Firearms. The complicated nature of plotting a high-sophistication terrorist attack makes it highly likely that there will be greater opportunity for UK police and security services to disrupt potential attacks.
- The high footfall at shopping centres in the UK almost certainly provides an attractive target for indiscriminate terrorist attacks. As such, it is likely that any terrorist attack against a shopping centre would be conducted by an Islamist inspired individual due to the ideologically driven intent to conduct indiscriminate attacks against members of the public in the UK.
- The assessments in this report were made using the PHIA Probability Yardstick, for further information please see the Assessment Methodology [section below](#).

Location based threats to shopping centres in the UK

- It is highly likely that there is a heightened terrorist threat to shopping centres in major cities and those in proximity to iconic sites and/or major transport hubs. There is a realistic possibility that shopping centres located in proximity to iconic sites and/or busy public spaces could be impacted by a Marauding Terrorist Attack in proximity to their site.
- There is a realistic possibility that terrorist actors in the UK could seek to conduct an attack against shopping centres that are located in smaller towns and cities in the UK due to the lack of other suitable targets in the nearby area.

Previous terrorist incidents related to shopping centres in the UK and overseas

- Terrorist actors have previously demonstrated the intent to conduct attacks against shopping centres in the UK, including:
 - **2019 Manchester;** An individual conducted a Bladed Weapons attack against three members of the public at the Arndale Centre, Manchester. The individual was originally held under the Terrorism Act, however, no ideological motive was found and the individual was subsequently detained under the Mental Health Act and deemed unfit for trial.¹
 - **2017 London;** Police disrupted an Islamist terrorist cell that were plotting to use children to target Westfield Shopping Centre and multiple other locations including several iconic sites in London, media stations, and two right-wing organisations. Four individuals were convicted for the plot which intended to use Firearms, Bladed Weapons, Improvised Explosive Devices, and Vehicles as Weapons.²
 - **2015 London;** Police foiled a plot to target Westfield Shopping Centre in Shepherd's Bush, London. Two individuals intended to conduct Improvised Explosive Device attacks on the 10 year anniversary of the 7/7 attacks. The individuals had reportedly stockpiled over 10kg of chemical precursor and tested explosives in their back garden on at least two occasions. Media reporting suggests that at time of arrest, one of the individuals possessed the ingredients, knowledge, and experience to construct a viable device within days.³
- Terrorist actors have previously demonstrated the intent and capability to conduct attacks against shopping centres globally, including:
 - **2022 Turkey;** Terrorist actors conducted an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attack against a busy shopping centre in the Taksim Square area of Istanbul, Turkey. Media reporting suggests that there were six fatalities and over 81 others were injured.⁴
 - **2013 Kenya;** Islamist terrorists conducted a firearms and explosives attack against Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya. There were 71 fatalities and 200 others were injured. The attack led to a four day siege.⁵
 - **2013 Northern Ireland;** An Improvised Explosive Device containing 60kg of home-made explosives, partially exploded inside a car in Belfast city centre. Individuals reportedly hijacked the car and ordered the driver to take it to a shopping centre. The device detonated as Army bomb experts prepared to examine the car left at the entrance to the shopping centre car park.⁶

Other potential threats to shopping centres in the UK

- It is highly likely that there would be a heightened threat to shopping centres at peak times and during festive periods. E.g., Shopping centres have a higher footfall during Christmas or major sales events such as Black Friday or the Boxing Day Sales. It is almost certain that the large crowds that gather for such major sales events would be an attractive target for terrorist actors in the UK.

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- It is almost certain that the publicly accessible nature of shopping centres in the UK would allow any individual with the intent to conduct terrorist attacks against, or in proximity to, shopping centres to conduct regular hostile reconnaissance undetected and have a good awareness of any security mitigations in place at any given site.
- There is a realistic possibility that the nature of any tenant’s business within a shopping centre could impact the terrorism threat to that site. For example, whilst there has not been a declared terrorist attack related to incel ideology in the UK, there is a realistic possibility that individuals who adhere to an incel ideology could seek to conduct attacks against tenants within a shopping centre that cater specifically to women.⁷
- Although it is highly unlikely that any such event would be designated as terrorism, there is a realistic possibility that Non-Violent Direct Action protest groups could have the intent to stage protests at shopping centres in the UK as a result of the nature of any tenant’s business within the site. E.g., Individuals linked to animal activism groups could seek to stage protests against tenants associated with fast fashion in a shopping centre.
- There is a realistic possibility that staff employed at shopping centres could pose an insider threat to shopping centres in the UK, including:
 - Third party security staff and/or in-house staff could enable terrorist actors in the UK to access a shopping centre with malicious items by allowing such individuals to bypass any security mitigations in place at that site.
 - Third party vendors and/or in-house staff could exploit vehicular access routes to the site available to suppliers to facilitate high-sophistication attacks.
 - Directly employed staff could grant terrorist actors access to monitored and/or restricted substances and items in particular shops, bypassing applicable restrictions on the purchase of certain materials.
- There is a realistic possibility that terrorist actors in the UK could use shopping centres to hold meetings when plotting an attack or as sites of radicalisation. For example, terrorist actors could use areas such as cinemas, food courts, bars in order to plan a terrorist attack or radicalise young adults.

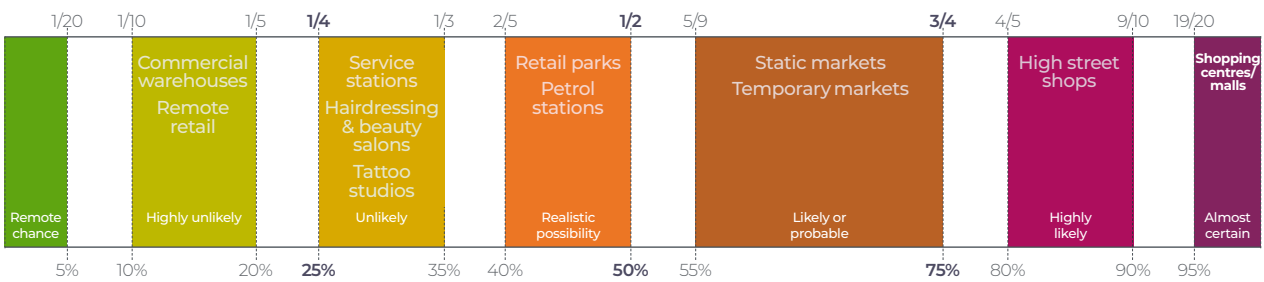
Threat visualisation

The diagram below outlines the intent of terrorist actors in the UK to conduct attacks against shopping centres within the retail & wholesale sector.

Terrorist intent can be defined as the desire and/or determination of an individual to conduct an attack against any given site.

The intent of terrorist actors to conduct an attack against the retail & wholesale sector in the UK is subject to change based on the assessments outlined in this report.

Note: The terrorism threat to any given site is not based solely on intent, but also the capability of terrorist actors in the UK as outlined in this report. Terrorism threat is also mitigated by the UK’s countrywide terrorism risk mitigation infrastructure including both public and private security and safety capabilities.



Assessment Methodology

The assessments made in this report have been made using the Professional Head of Intelligence’s “Probability Yardstick” (above). The Probability Yardstick is a standardised instrument used to provide a professional standard for intelligence assessment.

- **Almost certain:** An event has a greater than 90% chance of occurring.
- **Highly likely:** An event has a 76% to 90% chance of occurring.
- **Likely:** An event has a 55% to 75% chance of occurring.
- **Realistic possibility:** An event has a 40% to 54% chance of occurring.
- **Unlikely:** An event has a 25% to 39% chance of occurring.
- **Highly unlikely:** An event has an 10% to 24% chance of occurring.
- **Remote chance:** An event has a less than 10% chance of occurring.

Time spans

- **Short Term:** 0–6 Months.
- **In the next 12 months.**
- **Medium Term:** 12 months–5 Years.
- **Long Term:** 5+ Years.

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Intelligence cut-off date: 24 January 2024

For more information please contact solutions@poolre.co.uk

Bibliography

1. [Attacker at Arndale Centre in 2019 sentenced for stabbing five people; Greater Manchester Police - gmp.police.uk](#)
2. [Isis fanatic who tried to radicalise 'army of children' for London terror attacks jailed for life - The Independent](#)
3. [London Underground or Westfield 'bomb plot was foiled' - BBC News](#)
4. [Istanbul: Six dead, dozens wounded in Turkey explosion - BBC News](#)
5. [Westgate attack: Two jailed over Kenyan shopping mall attack - BBC News](#)
6. [Timeline of dissident republican activity - BBC News](#)
7. Short for involuntary celibate; a member of a group of people online who are unable to find sexual partners despite wanting them, a subsection of whom openly express hostility towards women. (There have currently been no incel-related terrorist attacks in the UK. However, the increasing number of self-identifying incels within the UK could be illustrative of the possible threat posed by such actors in the long term.)

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