

Art Galleries



Terrorism threat to Art galleries

- There is a realistic possibility that terrorist actors in the UK could have the intent to conduct an attack against art galleries due to their easily accessible nature and the routine gathering of people both inside and outside their sites.
- It is highly likely that any terrorist attack conducted against an art gallery 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 an art gallery in the UK. E.g., Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), Person Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (PBIED), or Firearms attack. 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 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 art galleries in the UK

- It is highly likely that there would be an increased terrorism threat to art galleries in major cities and those in proximity to iconic sites and/or major transport hubs. There is a realistic possibility that art galleries 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 art galleries that are located in smaller towns and cities in the UK due to the lack of other suitable targets in the nearby area compared to more urban environments.

Previous terrorist incidents related to art galleries in the UK and overseas

- At this time, there have been no previous terrorist attacks against art galleries in the UK.
- Terrorist actors have previously demonstrated the intent and capability to conduct attacks against art galleries globally, including:
 - **2015 Tunisia:** Two Islamist terrorists conducted a Firearms attack against the Bardo National Museum and Art Gallery in Tunis, Tunisia. There were 22 fatalities and more than 40 people were injured.¹
 - **2015 USA:** Two Islamist terrorists conducted a Firearms attack outside the Culwell Event Centre in North Gardland, Texas. The event centre was hosting a “Muhammad Art Exhibit and Cartoon Contest”. Depictions of the Prophet Mohammed are considered blasphemous by many Muslims.² Media reporting suggests that one of the perpetrators had linked himself to Islamic State (IS) in a tweet prior to the attack.³ There were no fatalities. A security guard was injured.⁴

Other potential threats to art galleries in the UK

- Dependent on the security presence and entry procedures at art galleries in the UK, there is a realistic possibility that any terrorist actor with the intent to conduct an attack against an art gallery could have open access to certain sites and the capability to conduct uninterrupted hostile reconnaissance.
- Due to the sophisticated search and screening procedures at certain art galleries in the UK, there is a realistic possibility that terrorist actors could prioritise attacks against a gallery’s external spaces, proximal locations, or at points of security challenge. E.g., Approaches to the gallery, external concourses, transport hubs, security checkpoints, etc.
- There is a realistic possibility that artists exhibiting at art galleries in the UK could be targeted by terrorist actors as a result of the nature of their work and/or exhibition. Terrorist actors have previously sought to target artists globally, including:
 - **2015 France:** Two Islamist terrorists conducted a marauding Firearms attack against the offices of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, motivated by the magazine’s artistic depiction of the Prophet Mohammed. There were 17 fatalities.⁵
 - **2010 USA:** Media reporting suggests that an American artist who drew a cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed remains in hiding as a result of terrorist threats against her life. Anwar al-Awlaki – an American-born al-Qa’ida terrorist – issued a fatwa against the artist, claiming she was a “prime target” for execution for creating blasphemous cartoons.⁶

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- There is a realistic possibility that the nature of exhibitions and/or artwork held at an art gallery could alter the intent of terrorist actors in the UK to target any given site. E.g., An art gallery exhibiting artwork associated with the LGBTQIA+ community could face a heightened threat from Islamist and/or extreme right-wing terrorists.
 - **2023 London;** Although not designated as terrorism, an individual was arrested for making a racially aggravated comment towards a police officer during a protest outside the Tate Britain during a Drag Queen Story Hour event hosted at the gallery. Media reporting suggests that right-wing protesters were met by trans-rights campaigners and political groups outside of the gallery.⁷
- There is a realistic possibility that there could be a heightened threat to art galleries in the UK hosting high-profile individuals. E.g. An extreme right-wing terrorist actor could seek to conduct an attack against a controversial pro-immigration politician visiting an art gallery.
- It is highly likely that the threat posed to any art gallery in the UK would be dynamic and dependent on the notoriety of the art gallery. E.g., It is almost certain that the National Art Gallery and Tate Modern would be more attractive to terrorist actors as high-profile sites in comparison to smaller, rural, and bespoke art galleries.
- Although it is unlikely that any such event would be designated as terrorism, it is highly likely that Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA) Protest groups would have the intent to stage protests at art galleries in the UK. NVDA Protest groups have previously demonstrated the intent and capability to target art galleries in the UK, including:
 - **2023 Coventry;** Two “Just Stop Oil” climate activists were arrested following a protest at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum. The individuals were arrested on suspicion of conspiracy to cause criminal damage.⁸
 - **2022 Glasgow;** Three “Just Stop Oil” climate activists glued themselves to a painting at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery in Glasgow. The activists also spray painted the group’s logo onto the walls and floor of the gallery.⁹
 - **2022 London;** Three “Just Stop Oil” climate activists reportedly attached themselves to a Van Gogh painting at the Courtauld Gallery, London. The trio were accused of causing £2,200 of criminal damage to the painting’s frame.¹⁰
 - **2022 Manchester;** Two “Just Stop Oil” climate activists glued themselves to the frame of a JMW Turner painting at Manchester Art Gallery.¹¹
 - **2022 London;** Five “Just Stop Oil” climate activists glued themselves to a copy of Leonardo da Vinci’s The Last Supper and spray painted the red plinth beneath the painting at the Royal Academy, London.¹²
 - **2022 London;** Two “Just Stop Oil” climate activists were charged with criminal damage after gluing themselves to a famous piece of art at the National Gallery in July 2022.¹³
 - **2022 London;** Two “Just Stop Oil” climate activists threw soup at a Van Gogh painting at the National Gallery, London, before gluing themselves to the wall below the painting.¹⁴
- There is a realistic possibility that staff employed at art galleries in the UK could pose an insider threat in several ways, including:
 - Third party security staff and/or in-house staff could enable terrorist actors in the UK to access an art gallery 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 bring in high-sophistication attack methodologies or to advance low-sophistication attack capabilities.
 - Staff employed at art galleries could facilitate terrorism financing through the theft and sale of art. For example, in April 2023, the UK Government announced a full asset freeze against an individual suspected of financing the terrorist group, Hezbollah. The individual reportedly held an extensive art collection in the UK and conducted business with multiple UK-based artists, galleries, and auction houses to launder money for the terrorist group.¹⁵

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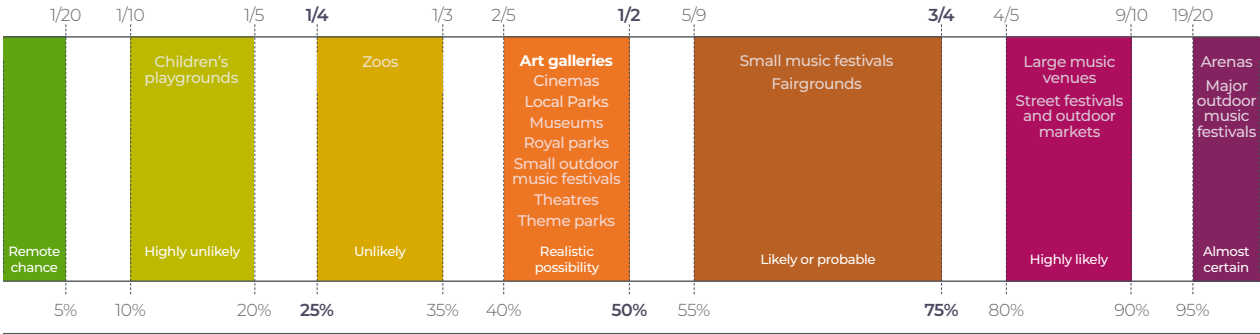
Threat visualisation

The diagram below outlines the intent of terrorist actors in the UK to conduct attacks against art galleries within the arts, culture and entertainment 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 arts, culture and entertainment 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: 26 January 2024

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

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