

Museums



Terrorism threat to Museums

- There is a realistic possibility that terrorist actors in the UK could have the intent to conduct an attack against museums 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 a museum 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 museum 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 museums in the UK

- It is highly likely that there is an increased terrorism threat to museums in major cities and those in proximity to iconic sites and/or major transport hubs. There is a realistic possibility that museums 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 museums 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 museums in the UK and overseas

- Terrorist actors have previously demonstrated the intent and capability to conduct attacks against museums in the UK, including:
 - 2018 London:** An Islamist terrorist was found guilty of plotting a terror attack against the British Museum in London. The individual was part of an all-female cell planning to conduct a Firearms and Explosives attack at the British Museum. The individual had previously attempted to travel to Syria to join Islamic State.¹
- Terrorist actors have previously demonstrated the intent and capability to conduct attacks against museums globally, including:
 - 2017 France:** An Islamist terrorist conducted a Bladed Weapons attack against a French soldier guarding the Louvre in Paris. The individual was shot by police.²
 - 2015 Tunisia:** Two Islamist terrorists conducted a Firearms attack against the Bardo National Museum in Tunis, Tunisia. There were 22 fatalities and more than 40 people were injured.³
 - 2014 Belgium:** An Islamist terrorist conducted a Firearms attack at a Jewish museum in Brussels. The perpetrator was reportedly a former member of Islamic State and had returned from fighting for the group in Syria. There were four fatalities.⁴
- Global Islamist terrorist actors have previously demonstrated the intent to target sites that maintain or promote cultural heritage. E.g., Islamic State previously placed a high emphasis on the destruction of all cultural heritage that promoted ideology unaligned to their own.⁵

Other potential threats to museums in the UK

- Dependent on the security presence and entry procedures at museums in the UK, there is a realistic possibility that any terrorist actor with the intent to conduct an attack against a museum would have open access to certain sites and the capability to conduct uninterrupted hostile reconnaissance.
- Due to the sophisticated search and screening procedures at certain museums in the UK, there is a realistic possibility that terrorist actors could prioritise attacks against a museum's external spaces, proximal locations, or at points of security challenge. E.g., Approaches to the museum, external concourses, transport hubs, security checkpoints, etc.
- There is a realistic possibility that museums in the UK could be targeted by terrorist actors as a result of the nature of their work and/or exhibition. Examples could include:
 - Military museums could be targeted by a terrorist actor in response to wider geopolitical events and/or the actions of the British Army.
 - A museum featuring a commemorative exhibition for the Holocaust could be targeted by an extreme right-wing terrorist actor.

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- An exhibition exploring the history of the LGBTQIA+ community could face a heightened threat from adherents of extreme right-wing or Islamist ideologies.
- A museum housing artefacts taken or considered stolen from other countries could face a heightened threat from individuals with terrorist intent.
- There is a realistic possibility that there could be a heightened threat to museums in the UK hosting high-profile individuals. E.g. An annual awards dinner hosted at a museum could feature contentious high-profile individuals who could be attractive targets for terrorist actors in the UK.
- It is highly likely that the threat posed to any museum in the UK would be dynamic and dependent on the notoriety of the museum. E.g., It is almost certain that the Natural History Museum and British Museum would be more attractive to terrorist actors as high-profile sites in comparison to smaller, rural, and bespoke museums.
- There is a realistic possibility that there could be a heightened threat to museums that form part of an iconic site, regardless of the museum's main function and/or purpose.
- 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 museums in the UK. NVDA Protest groups have previously demonstrated the intent and capability to target museums in the UK, including:
 - **2024 London:** Activists from Energy Embargo for Palestine and the Free Palestine Coalition conducted a "sit-in" protest at the British Museum. The individuals were demanding the British Museum to end its partnership with British Petroleum (BP).⁶
 - **2023 London:** Two "Just Stop Oil" climate activists were arrested after attempting to stage a protest at Herbert Art Gallery and Museum. The two activists were arrested by police after entering the museum's "Dippy the Diplodocus" display.⁷
 - **2022 Glasgow:** Three "Just Stop Oil" climate activists glued themselves to a painting at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum. The protesters also sprayed their logo onto the walls and floor of the Gallery.⁸
 - **2022 London:** Two "Just Stop Oil" climate activists were filmed hitting a statue of King Charles III with a cake inside Madame Tussauds. The pair were later convicted for criminal damage and ordered to pay £3,500.⁹
 - **2020 Bristol:** A statue of slave trader Edward Colston was torn down during a Black Lives Matter protest in Bristol and pushed into a nearby harbour. Although the incident did not take place in a museum, the protest demonstrates how symbols of cultural significance can attract attention from protest-affiliated actors in the UK.¹⁰
- There is a realistic possibility that staff employed at museums could pose an insider threat to museums in the UK, including:
 - Third party security staff and/or in-house staff could enable terrorist actors in the UK to access a museum 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.
 - Individuals employed at museums could facilitate terrorism financing through the theft and sale of art or historical artefacts. 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.¹¹

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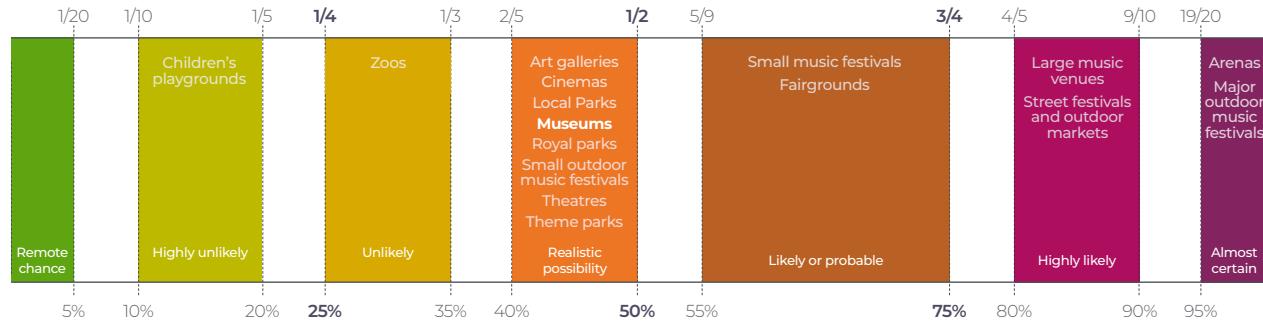
Threat visualisation

The diagram below outlines the intent of terrorist actors in the UK to conduct attacks against museums 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: 12 February 2024

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

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