

Ferry passenger terminals



Terrorism threat to ferry passenger terminals

- There is a realistic possibility that terrorist actors in the UK could have the intent to conduct attacks against ferry passenger terminals due to the publicly accessible areas of their sites which, in certain locations, attract large crowds of people.
- It is highly likely any attack conducted against a ferry passenger terminal in the UK would be conducted by a lone individual or small cell using a low sophistication methodology. E.g., Bladed or Blunt Force Weapons, Vehicle as a Weapon, Fire as a Weapon etc.
- There is a realistic possibility that terrorist actors could have the capability to conduct a high sophistication attack against a ferry passenger terminal in the UK. E.g., Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) 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.
- It is likely that any terrorist attack conducted against a ferry passenger terminal in the UK 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.
- At this time, there is a realistic possibility that there could be a heightened threat to any ferry passenger terminal facilitating the arrival or departure of migrants to/from the UK. It is almost certain that the migrant crisis will continue to emerge as a driver of UK terrorism threat in the long term.
- 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 ferry passenger terminals in the UK

- It is highly likely that there is a heightened terrorist threat to ferry passenger terminals located in the south of the UK due to their proximity to the European mainland and their comparatively higher footfall compared to northern ports. It is almost certain that these ports would be the primary route for migrant arrivals into the UK.
- It is likely that ferry passenger terminals linked to ferries from Ireland would be at a heightened risk of onboarding individuals with links to Northern Ireland Related Terrorism (NIRT). However, at this time, it is highly unlikely that NIRT actors would have the capability to conduct any significant attack against the UK mainland.

Previous terrorist incidents related to ferry passenger terminals in the UK and overseas

- At this time, there have been no terrorist attacks conducted against ferry passenger terminals in the UK.
- Terrorist actors have previously demonstrated the intent and capability to conduct attacks against ferry passenger terminals globally, including:
 - **2023 Mali;** Media reporting suggests that Islamist terrorists attacked a passenger ferry and military camp in Mali using military-style rockets. There were 64 fatalities.¹
 - **2023 USA;** An individual pled guilty to making two hoax bomb threats against a ferry. Media reporting suggests that the threats forced the evacuation of the ferry and the ferry terminal.²
 - **2004 Philippines;** Media reporting suggests that the al-Qa'ida linked group, Abu Sayyaf, conducted an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attack on a passenger ferry departing from Manila, Philippines. There were 116 fatalities.³
 - **2000 Philippines;** Media reporting suggests that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) conducted an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attack on three buses on board a ferry in the Philippines.⁴ There were 44 fatalities and 50 people were injured.⁵

Other possible threats to ferry passenger terminals in the UK

- At this time, it is highly unlikely that ferry terminals have the same level of security mitigation in place as airport or Eurostar terminals. In 2022, armed counter-terrorism officers were deployed on British cross-Channel ferries in order to mitigate against the threat from unsearched passengers and “completely unguarded” ferry terminals.⁶
- There is a realistic possibility that terrorist actors in the UK could have the intent to target ferries travelling between ports due to their busy decks, limited security and poor egress options leading to a greater number of casualties. Any attack conducted against a ferry in transit would almost certainly present a challenge for emergency services attempting to attend the incident and impact any associated passenger terminals.

Continued

- There is a realistic possibility that terrorist actors with the intent to travel by ferry to conduct a terrorist attack, or the intent to target ferries directly, could accidentally trigger sensitive Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) whilst moving through terminals. Similarly, if challenged by police, security or members of the public whilst in the terminal, there is a realistic possibility that actors could deliberately or unintentionally advance their attack plans if met with resistance.
- There is a realistic possibility that staff employed at UK ferry passenger terminals could pose an insider threat in several ways, including:
 - E.g., Staff employed at UK ferry passenger terminals could allow individuals with terrorist intent to gain access to portside areas of any ferry terminal in the UK.
 - E.g., Members of staff could gain or grant access to vessels for malicious purposes, including facilitating the movement of Improvised Explosive Devices, weaponry, or terrorist actors through a terminal.
- Due to the crowded and publicly accessible nature of ferry passenger terminals, it is highly likely that potential terrorist actors would be able to conduct hostile reconnaissance without detection and to develop an understanding of the security mitigations, best access points, and most suitable areas to target.
- There is a realistic possibility that the threat to UK ferry passenger terminals could be heightened due to the presence of high-profile individuals. E.g., Individuals with terrorist intent could seek to target high-profile individuals as they enter or leave the UK, such as politicians, celebrities, influencers, etc.
- There is a realistic possibility that there could be a heightened threat to ferry passenger terminals from individuals with terrorist intent travelling through the port system. Terrorist actors have previously demonstrated the intent and capability to travel through UK ferry ports undetected, including:
 - E.g., In 2016, the Guardian reported that an Islamic State commander who planned the 2015 Bataclan attacks in Paris travelled undetected through Dover prior to the attack. The individual was a wanted terrorist at the time of his travel and was not picked up by UK police or security services.⁷

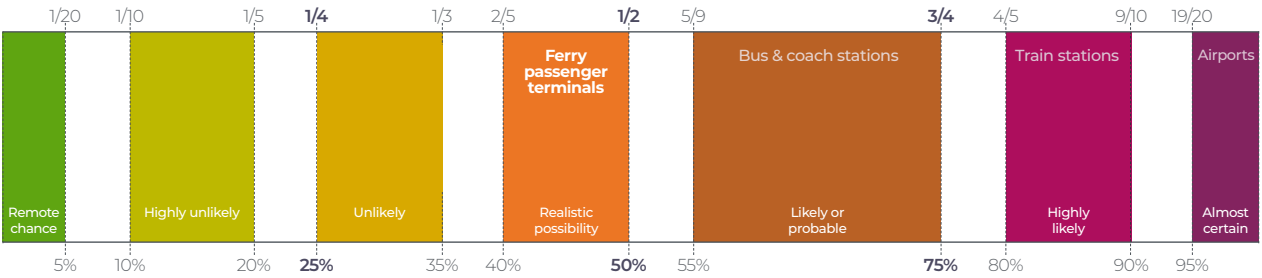
Threat visualisation

The diagram below outlines the intent of terrorist actors in the UK to conduct attacks against ferry passenger terminals within the transport 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 transport 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.

Continued

Intelligence cut-off date: 18 March 2024
For more information please contact solutions@poolre.co.uk

Bibliography

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2. [Former ferry cook pleads guilty to Bridgeport ferry terrorism - \(ctpost.com\)](#)
3. [Superferry14: The world's deadliest terrorist attack at sea - SAFETY4SEA](#)
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5. [Incident Summary for GTDID: 200002250005 - \(umd.edu\)](#)
6. [Armed counter-terrorism officers to be deployed on British cross-Channel ferries; UK security and counter-terrorism - The Guardian](#)
7. [Call for urgent security review of how Paris attacks ringleader got ferry to UK; UK security and counter-terrorism - The Guardian](#)

Pool Re Solutions Limited

Equitable House 47 King William Street London EC4R 9AF

poolre.co.uk

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