

# Synagogues



## Terrorism threat to synagogues

- It is almost certain that terrorist actors in the UK would have the intent to conduct an attack against synagogues in the UK, as highly visible and publicly accessible symbols of the Jewish faith.
- It is highly likely that any terrorist attack conducted against a synagogue 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 synagogue 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.
- It is almost certain that any terrorist attack conducted at a synagogue in the UK would be conducted by an individual inspired by an Extreme Right-Wing or Islamist ideology due to the ideologically driven intent to conduct attacks against members of the Jewish community.
- 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 synagogues in the UK

- It is highly likely that there is an increased terrorism threat to synagogues in major cities and those in proximity to iconic sites and/or major transport hubs. There is a realistic possibility that synagogues 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 synagogues 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.
- There is a realistic possibility that there could be a heightened threat to any synagogue located within a UK town or city with a history of racial and/or religious based discrimination related to the Jewish faith.

### Previous terrorist incidents related to synagogues in the UK and overseas

- Terrorist actors have previously demonstrated the intent to conduct attacks against synagogues in the UK, including:
  - **2024 Sussex:** An Extreme Right-Wing terrorist reportedly plotted to conduct an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attack against worshippers at a synagogue in East Sussex. The individual had allegedly annotated diagrams of the synagogue on his phone and held “racist and white supremacist” views, which he planned to act on when the synagogue was most busy.<sup>1</sup>
  - **2020 Durham:** An Extreme Right-Wing terrorist was sentenced to six years and eight months in prison for plotting a terrorist attack in Durham. The individual reportedly researched explosives, listed potential targets, and tried to obtain a bomb-making chemical.<sup>2</sup> Reporting suggests that during his preparations, the individual researched a number of synagogues and plotted to conduct Fire as a Weapon attacks against them.<sup>3</sup>
- Terrorist actors have previously demonstrated the intent and capability to conduct attacks against synagogues globally, including:
  - **2024 Russia:** The Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB) reportedly foiled two separate plots targeting synagogues in Moscow. One of the alleged plots reportedly involved the use of an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) during a period of significant congregation at the synagogue.<sup>4</sup>
  - **2023 Germany:** Two teenagers were arrested in Germany for allegedly plotting an Islamist-inspired terrorist attack against a synagogue and Christmas market. One of the alleged plotters reportedly declared a war on the West in an online video in which he warned of an attack.<sup>5</sup>
  - **2022 USA:** An Islamist terrorist took four people hostage at a synagogue in Texas for 10 hours, demanding the release of a Pakistani neuroscientist serving a prison term in the US for trying to kill US military officers in Afghanistan. There were no fatalities and no one was injured. The perpetrator was shot and killed by police.<sup>6</sup>
  - **2022 USA:** Two individuals were charged with making threats of a terrorist-nature towards a New York City synagogue. Reporting suggests that the two individuals “possessed a firearm, a high capacity magazine, ammunition, an 8” long military style knife, a swastika arm patch, a ski mask and a bullet proof vest”.<sup>7</sup>

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## Other terrorist threats to synagogues in the UK

- It is almost certain that the threat posed to synagogues in the UK would be subject to change in line with escalations in the Israel-Palestine debate/conflict and wider geopolitical issues. Following the 07 October 2024 Hamas attack against Israel, and subsequent Israel-Hamas conflict, it is almost certain that there is a heightened threat posed to synagogues in the UK at this time.
- There is a realistic possibility that the threat posed to synagogues in the UK could be heightened during Jewish festive periods. For example, any synagogue in the UK would likely have greater attendance during Hanukkah, Rosh Hashnah, Yom Kippur, and Passover, increasing the attractiveness of any given synagogue to individuals with terrorist intent.
- There is a realistic possibility that the presence of high-profile and/or contentious guest speakers could increase the threat posed to any synagogue in the UK. E.g. Controversial preachers or political figures.
- Although it is highly unlikely that any such event would be designated as terrorism, there is a realistic possibility that Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA) Protest groups could have the intent to stage highly disruptive protests at synagogues in the UK. There is a realistic possibility that NVDA protest action could escalate to violence, and even terrorism, in the long term.
- There is a realistic possibility that any terrorist actor with the intent to conduct an attack against a synagogue in the UK could have open access to the site and the capability to conduct uninterrupted hostile reconnaissance at certain synagogues in the UK. However, there is a realistic possibility that the security posture at UK synagogues could be heightened during periods of significant community tension.

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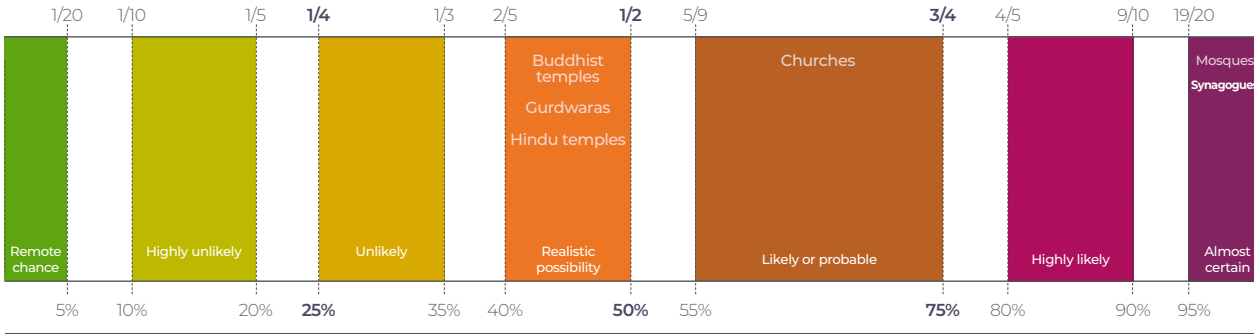
### Threat visualisation

The diagram below outlines the intent of terrorist actors in the UK to conduct attacks against synagogues within the religious sites 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 religious sites 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 April 2024

For more information please contact [solutions@poolre.co.uk](mailto:solutions@poolre.co.uk)

## Bibliography

1. [Neo-Nazi planned to blow himself up at synagogue, court hears - \(telegraph.co.uk\)](#)
2. [Terror plot: Durham teenage neo-Nazi named as Jack Reed - BBC News](#)
3. ['Neo-Nazi' teen 'listed terror attack targets' - BBC News](#)
4. [Russia says it neutralized ISIS cell plotting attack on Moscow synagogue - Reuters;](#)  
[Russia thwarts planned terrorist attack on Moscow Synagogue - The Jerusalem Post \(jpost.com\)](#)
5. [German police foil terror plot to attack synagogue and Christmas market - \(telegraph.co.uk\)](#)
6. [Texas synagogue hostage-taker was British - BBC News](#)
7. [2 men arrested, 1 with Nazi arm-band, accused of making threats to attack New York synagogue, NYPD says - CNN](#)

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