

High Street shops

Terrorism threat
Threat visualisation

Terrorism threat to high street shops

- It is highly likely that terrorist actors would have the intent to conduct attacks against high street shops in the UK due to the high footfall and publicly accessible nature of high street shops in the UK.
- It is highly likely that any terrorist attack conducted against a high street shop 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 high street shops in the UK. E.g., Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), Person Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (PBIED), or Firearms attack. The complex 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 high streets in the UK almost certainly provides an attractive target for indiscriminate terrorist attacks. As such, it is highly likely that any terrorist attack against a high street shop would be conducted by an Islamist inspired individual due to the ideologically driven intent to target 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 high street shops in the UK

- It is highly likely that there is a heightened terrorist threat to high street shops in major cities and those in proximity to iconic sites and/or major transport hubs. There is a realistic possibility that high street shops located in proximity to iconic sites and busy public spaces could be impacted by a Marauding Terrorist Attack (MTA) in proximity to their site..

Previous terrorist incidents related to high street shops in the UK and overseas

- Terrorist actors have previously demonstrated the intent and capability to conduct attacks in proximity to high street shops in the UK, including:
 - **2020 London;** On 02 February 2020, Sudesh Amman, 20, conducted a Bladed Weapons attack against members of the public on Streatham high street in South London. Amman reportedly wore a fake suicide vest and was shot dead by police. Two individuals were injured. Amman was inspired by Islamic State and had reportedly pledged allegiance to the group's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.¹
 - **2019 London;** On 06 March 2019, Lewis Ludlow, 27, was sentenced to life imprisonment after he planned a terrorist attack against Oxford Street in London. Ludlow plotted to conduct a Vehicle as a Weapon and Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) attack against members of the public on Oxford Street. Ludlow was inspired by an Islamist ideology and had pledged allegiance to Islamic State.²
 - **2014 UK;** al-Qa'ida reportedly published a manual in which it encouraged its followers to bomb British targets including high profile high street department stores, the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, and the MI5 headquarters.³
 - **1983 London;** The Irish Republican Army (IRA) detonated a bomb in a side street in proximity to Harrods in Knightsbridge, London. There were six fatalities, including three police officers, and over 75 others were injured.⁴
- Terrorist actors in the UK have previously demonstrated the intent and capability to conduct attacks in proximity to high street shops globally, including:
 - **2022 Turkey;** On 26 April 2024, Ahlam Albashire was sentenced to life imprisonment after she conducted an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attack on Istikal Avenue, a popular tourist street and one of the main roads leading to Taksim Square in Istanbul, Turkey. The attack was conducted on 13 November 2022 and killed six individuals and injured over 100 others. Turkey blamed the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) for the attack.⁵

Other potential threats to high street shops in the UK

Continued

- It is almost certain that there would be a heightened threat to high street shops at peak times and during festive periods. E.g., High streets have a higher footfall around Christmas or during major sales events such as Black Friday or Boxing Day Sales. It is almost certain that large crowds that gather for major sales events would be an attractive target for terrorist actors in the UK.
- It is almost certain that the publicly accessible nature of high street shops in the UK would allow any individual with the intent to conduct terrorist attacks against or in proximity to high streets to conduct regular hostile reconnaissance undetected and have a good awareness of the security mitigations in place at any given site.
- There is a realistic possibility that the nature of any high street shop 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 high street shops that cater specifically to women.

- Although it is 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 protests across high streets in the UK.
 - **2019 London;** Activists from Extinction Rebellion blocked parts of Central London for five days and moored a boat in the centre of Oxford Circus. The bright pink boat bore the words, "Tell the Truth". Over 680 climate activists were arrested in response to the protest.⁶
- There is a realistic possibility that staff employed at high street shops could pose an Insider Threat to high streets in the UK, including:
 - Third party security staff could enable terrorist actors in the UK to access a major high street shop with malicious items by bypassing security mitigations.
 - Third party vendors could exploit vehicle access to the site to bring high-sophistication attack methodologies or advance low-sophistication attack capabilities.
 - Directly employed staff could grant terrorist actors access to monitored and/or controlled substances, bypassing restrictions on the purchase of certain materials.

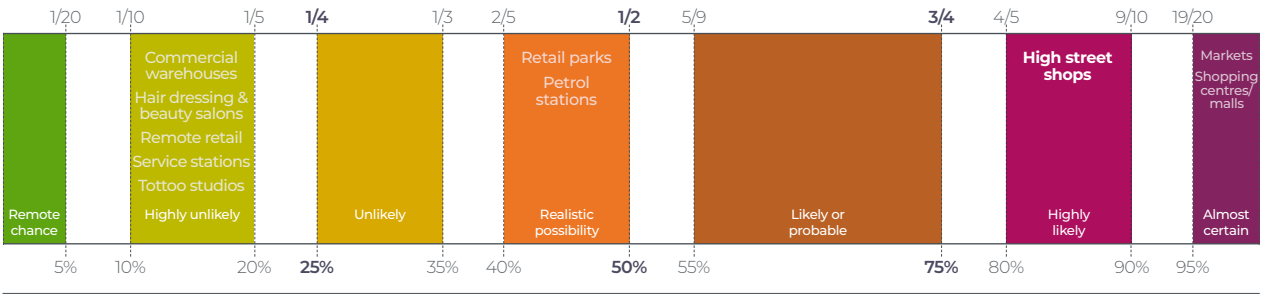
Threat visualisation

The diagram below outlines the intent of terrorist actors in the UK to conduct attacks against high street shops 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.

Continued

Bibliography

1. [Streatham terror attack: Terrorist shot dead by police after stabbing two people, UK News - Sky News](#)
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3. [Al-Qaeda manual encourages attacks on high street stores in UK](#)
4. [BBC ON THIS DAY, 17, 1983: Harrods bomb blast kills six - BBC News](#)
5. [Istanbul: Six dead, dozens wounded in Turkey explosion - BBC News](#)
[Turkish court convicts Syrian woman over Istanbul bombing - Reuters](#)
6. [Extinction Rebellion: 680 arrests as police aim for 'business as usual', UK News - Sky News](#)
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[We Were The Boat: The Inside Story of an April Icon - Extinction Rebellion UK](#)

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