

Shopping centres



Terrorism threat to shopping centres

- It is almost certain that terrorist actors in the UK would have the intent to conduct attacks against shopping centres due to the high footfall and publicly accessible nature of shopping centres in the UK.
- It is highly likely that any terrorist attack conducted against a shopping centre 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 shopping centre. E.g., Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), Person Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (PBIED) or a marauding attack with Firearms. 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 high footfall at shopping centres in the UK almost certainly provides an attractive target for indiscriminate terrorist attacks. As such, it is likely that any terrorist attack against a shopping centre 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.
- 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 shopping centres in the UK

- It is likely that there would be a heightened terrorist threat to shopping centres in major cities and those in proximity to iconic sites and/or major transport hubs. There is a realistic possibility that shopping centres 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 shopping centres that are located in smaller towns and cities in the UK due to the lack of other suitable targets in the nearby area.

Previous terrorist incidents related to shopping centres in the UK and overseas

- Terrorist actors have previously demonstrated the intent to conduct attacks against shopping centres in the UK, including:
 - 2024 East Yorkshire;** On 19 December 2024, Jordan Richardson, of Howden near Goole in East Yorkshire, UK, was arrested after he reportedly made Instagram posts expressing his support for Islamic State. On 20 December 2024, Richardson was charged with engaging in conduct in preparation of an act of terrorism. Richardson had reportedly researched potential targets, including a shopping centre. The trial remains ongoing.¹
 - 2019 Manchester;** On 11 October 2019, Raphael Chevilleau, 40, conducted a Bladed Weapons attack against three members of the public at the Arndale Centre, Manchester. The individual was originally held under the Terrorism Act, however, no ideological motive for the attack was found and Chevilleau was subsequently detained under the Mental Health Act and deemed unfit for trial.²
 - 2017 London;** On 27 March 2018, Umar Ahmed Haque, 25, was sentenced to life imprisonment after police disrupted a plot to use children to target several iconic locations in London, including Westfield Shopping Centres. Haque was inspired by an Islamist ideology and had shown Islamic State propaganda to children at Ripple Road mosque in Barking, London. Three individuals were convicted for the plot which intended to use Firearms, Bladed Weapons, Improvised Explosive Devices, and Vehicles as Weapons.³
 - 2015 London;** Police disrupted a plot to target Westfield Shopping Centre in Shepherd's Bush, London. Mohammed Rehman and Sana Ahmed Khan plotted to conduct Improvised Explosive Device attacks on the 10 year anniversary of the 7/7 London bombings. The individuals had reportedly stockpiled over 10kg of chemical precursor and tested explosives in their back garden on at least two occasions. Reporting suggests that at time of arrest, the individuals possessed the ingredients and knowledge to construct a viable device within days.⁴
 - 2004 Kent;** Police disrupted a Luton-based group who plotted to conduct a mass casualty attack against nightclubs, pubs, and shopping centres, including Bluewater Shopping Centre. Five al-Qa'ida-linked individuals were later convicted and 600kg of ammonium nitrate had been found alongside instructional materials of how to turn it into a lethal explosive. Two individuals with link to the group were later responsible for the 7/7 London bombings against the London transport system.⁵
- Terrorist actors in the UK have previously demonstrated the intent and capability to conduct attacks against shopping centres globally, including:
 - 2024 Israel;** On 03 July 2024, an individual conducted a Bladed Weapons attack at a shopping centre in the northern Israeli town of Karmiel. An Israeli soldier was killed and another was seriously wounded. Police revealed that the attacker was shot dead at the scene by one of the victims.⁶

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- **2024 Australia;** Although not designated as terrorism, on 13 April 2024, Joel Cauchi conducted a Bladed Weapons attack in the Westfield Bondi Junction shopping centre in Sydney, Australia. Cauchi fatally stabbed six people and injured 10 others in less than three minutes.⁷
- **2022 Israel;** On 22 March 2022, Muhammad Galeb Ahmad Abu Alqian conducted a Marauding Terrorist Attack (MTA) in proximity to two separate shopping centres in Israel. Three individuals were stabbed and a fourth was rammed by a vehicle. There were four fatalities, and several others were wounded. Alqian had reportedly previously been jailed for supporting Islamic State after he had planned to leave for Syria to join the group.⁸
- **2013 Kenya;** On 21 September 2013, four Islamist terrorists from the al-Qa'ida affiliate, al-Shabaab, conducted a firearms and explosives attack against Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya. There were 71 fatalities and 200 others were injured. The attack led to a four day siege. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack and claimed it carried out the attack in response to Kenyan military operations in Somalia.⁹
- **2013 Northern Ireland;** On 24 November 2013, an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) containing 60kg of home-made explosives, partially exploded inside a car in Belfast city centre. A number of individuals reportedly hijacked the car and ordered the driver to take it to a shopping centre. The device detonated as Army bomb experts prepared to examine the car left at the entrance to the shopping centre car park. There were no fatalities or injuries.¹⁰

Other potential threats to shopping centres in the UK

- It is highly likely that any terrorist actor with the intent to conduct an attack against a shopping centre in the UK would prioritise attacks against tenants and areas of the site that offer publicly accessible and crowded spaces. E.g., concourses, food courts, etc.
- It is highly likely that there would be a heightened threat to shopping centres at peak times. E.g., Shopping centres would almost certainly have a higher footfall during Christmas or during major sales events such as Black Friday. It is almost certain that the large crowds that gather for such major sales events would be an attractive target for terrorist actors in the UK.
- It is almost certain that the publicly accessible nature of shopping centres in the UK would allow any individual with the intent to conduct terrorist attacks against, or in proximity to, shopping centres to conduct regular hostile reconnaissance undetected and gain some awareness of security mitigations in place at any given site.
- There is a realistic possibility that the nature of any tenant's business within a shopping centre could impact the terrorism threat to that site. For example, tenants located within a shopping centre could provide a service that conflicts with a terrorism ideology, potentially making it the target of a malicious act.
- 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 protests at shopping centres in the UK as a result of the nature of any tenant's business within the site.
 - E.g., In December 2023, pro-Palestinian protesters reportedly disrupted customers during Boxing Day sales at Westfield shopping centre in Stratford, London. A crowd of demonstrators reportedly staged a protest outside chain stores including Zara and Starbucks. Reporting suggests that prior to this incident, pro-Palestinian protesters had similarly marched on Oxford Street, London, urging Christmas shoppers to boycott "Israeli-linked" brands.¹¹
- There is a realistic possibility that staff employed at shopping centres could pose an insider threat to shopping centres in the UK, including:
 - Third party security staff and/or in-house staff could enable terrorist actors in the UK to access a shopping centre 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 facilitate high-sophistication attacks.
 - Directly employed staff could grant terrorist actors access to monitored and/or restricted substances and items in particular shops, bypassing applicable restrictions on the purchase of certain materials.
- There is a realistic possibility that terrorist actors in the UK could use shopping centres to hold meetings when plotting an attack or as sites of radicalisation. For example, terrorist actors could use areas such as cinemas, food courts, bars in order to plan a terrorist attack or radicalise young adults.

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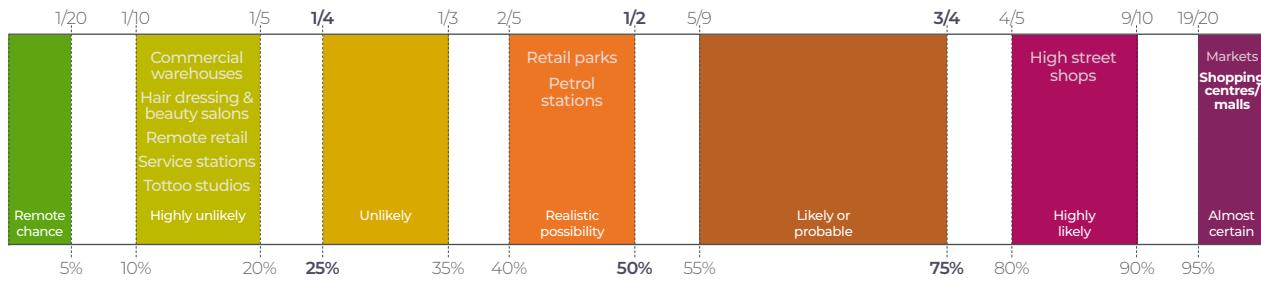
Threat visualisation

The diagram below outlines the intent of terrorist actors in the UK to conduct attacks against shopping centres 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.

Intelligence cut-off date: 28 January 2025

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

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