ProtectUK

Understanding the threat

To protect against the threat of terrorism, it is essential to understand how an attack might take place at your organisation or setting. This will assist you in proactively identifying vulnerabilities that may be exploited by terrorists and enable you to understand the potential impact.

Understanding terrorist threats

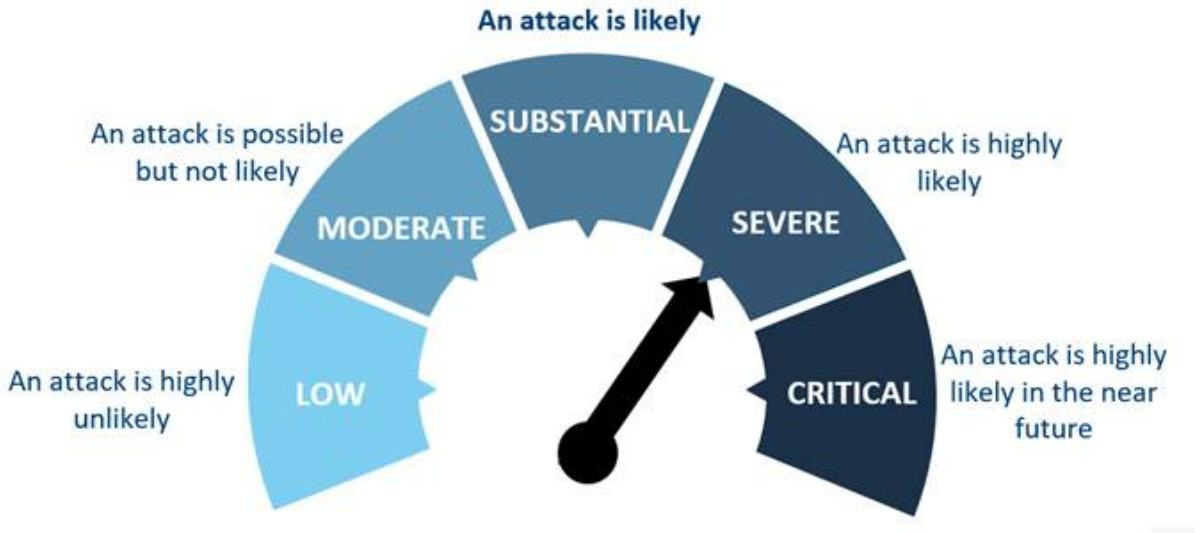
Understanding the terrorist threat requires consideration of the following elements:

UK terrorism threat level

The national threat level for the UK from all forms of terrorism is set by the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC). The national threat levels can provide you with an indication of the likelihood of a terrorist attack.

The current threat level in the UK is **SEVERE – meaning that an attack is highly likely.**

You can find more information on the MI5 website.



Previous terrorist attack records

In recent years, the UK has seen a change in the terrorist threat landscape, with a transition to individuals acting without direction or material support from terrorist organisations.

Many of these attacks have occurred in:

- Publicly accessible spaces, such as high streets, parks and communal areas
- Venues, such as businesses, public buildings, places of worship
- A combination of and between public spaces and venues

Reviewing previous terrorist attacks can help you to identify threats that are less obvious to you. Further information can be found on the Threat Analysis pages.

Attack methodologies

Understanding the key terrorist attack methodologies can help your organisation understand the threats they may be exposed to, and how they will manifest during an attack. In the UK, a variety of methodologies have been employed in terrorist attacks.

Since 2014, attacks in the UK have frequently featured simple methodologies, utilising low sophistication weapons that are more accessible to hostile actors.

ProtectUK recognises five key terrorist methodologies:



Marauding Terrorist Attacks (MTA) are fast-moving, violent incidents where attackers move through a location aiming to find and kill or injure as many people as possible.



Terrorists may use vehicles, knives, guns, explosives, fire or any combination of the above.

Vehicle As a Weapon (VAW) is the use of a vehicle to cause harm to individuals, damage to infrastructure or as part of a layered attack.

A vehicle may be driven into crowds of people to cause harm or into infrastructure or assets to cause damage or disruption.



An improvised explosive device (IED) is the general term used to refer to a bomb which can cause significant damage to people and infrastructure.

IED attacks can be varied depending on the construction of the device and where they are deployed.



Fire As a Weapon (FAW) is the deliberate use of fire within a terrorist attack with the intent to cause harm.

This may include causing harm to people, premeditated damage to property, or a combination of both.



Chemical, Biological and Radiological (CBR) encompasses a vast range of methodologies that could cause harm to people and damage to infrastructure.

CBR attacks can involve the use of corrosive or flammable chemicals, toxic materials or radioactive sources. The hazards posed by these materials varies.



You should be aware that attacks may involve the use of a single methodology or involve a combination of methodologies.

If a terrorist attack was to occur in the UK, it is more likely to be conducted by a single attacker, using a simple methodology or combination of methodologies, at a venue or a publicly accessible location.

FURTHER READING

Although the attack types outlined above represent the most likely threats, some settings might benefit from a greater understanding of more sophisticated or complex methodologies.

For more information go to our threat analysis page, which contains greater detail on all attack types including other more sophisticated methodologies which may be prudent to understand, depending on any specific vulnerabilities and the scale of your organisation.

SUMMARY

This section has provided you with an understanding of different terrorist methodologies and how they may manifest.

You should use this information as part of your risk assessment to help build meaningful risk scenarios for your organisation. For a step-by-step guide on how to assess terrorism risk, go to our risk management pages.

KEYWORDS

RISK MANAGEMENT

JOINT TERRORISM ANALYSIS CENTRE

TERRORISM THREATS

THREAT ANALYSIS

TERRORISM THREAT LEVELS