

Analysis Insights for the Christmas Period

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In this article we take an analytical look into the threat picture during the Christmas period.

Headline Assessment

Terrorist attacks can happen at any time with little to no warning. Analysis of data relating to terrorist attacks in Western Europe show there is no easily discernible seasonal pattern.

Nevertheless, the Christmas period provides terrorists with opportunities to carry out attacks, not simply because it is a public holiday, but also for it being religiously symbolic.

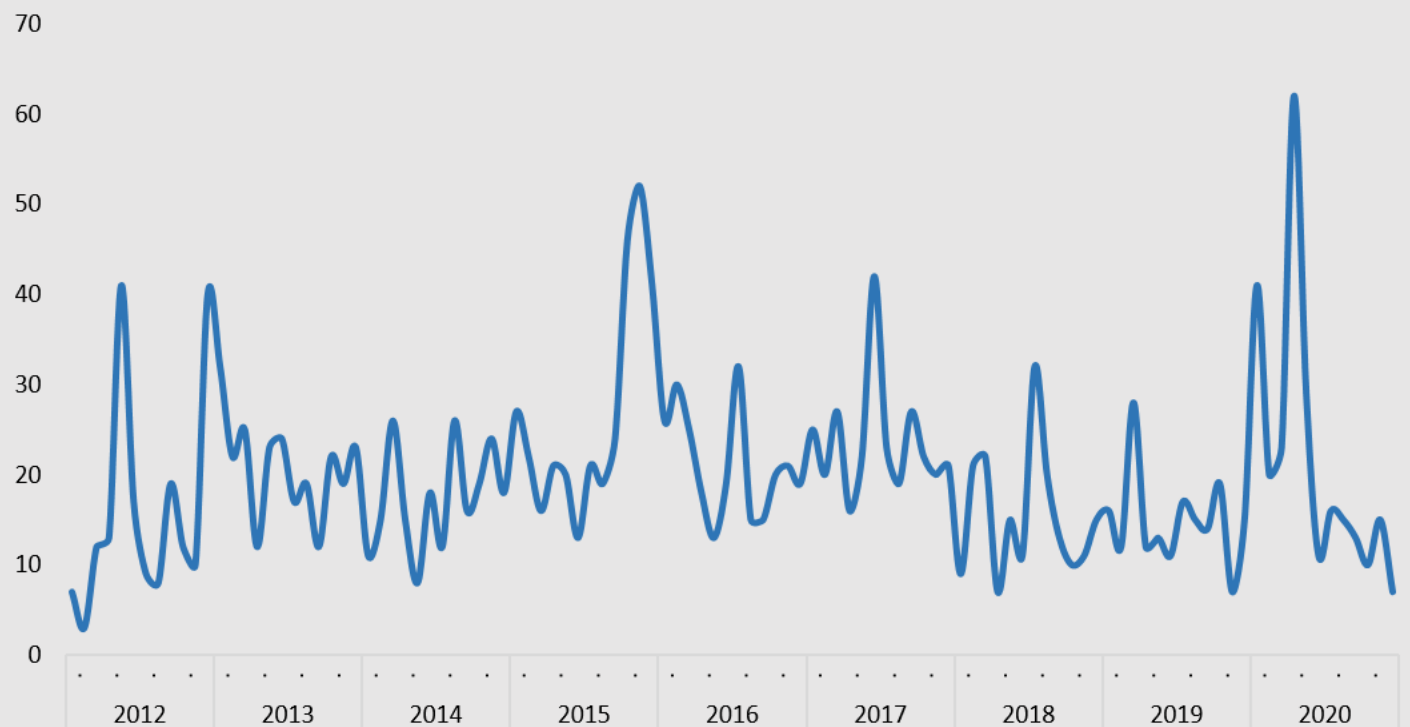
If a terrorist attack were to occur in the UK during the Christmas period, it is highly likely to be carried out by a Self-Initiated Terrorist (S-IT) using a low-sophistication methodology. Such an attack is likely to be inspired by an Islamist Terrorist ideology.

Attacks in Western Europe

Terrorist attacks can happen at any time with little to no warning. Analysis of data relating to nearly a decade (2012-2020) of terrorist attacks in Western Europe (including the UK) shows that despite several peaks, there is no easily discernible seasonal pattern. An attack is just as likely in winter as it is in the summer months.

Fig 1 - Attacks in Western Europe show no seasonal pattern

*Data Sourced from Global Terrorism Database



Nevertheless, the Christmas period provides terrorists with opportunities to carry out attacks, not simply because it is a public holiday, when places of entertainment, shopping venues and other publicly accessible locations (PALs) are busy but also for it being religiously symbolic. This will be particularly true for Islamist Terrorists who seek to target those perceived to be 'kuffar' or non-believers.

There have been a number of terrorist attacks and plots in Western Europe at Christmas. In 2016, a Tunisian male drove a truck into a Christmas market in Berlin, Germany, killing 12 and injuring a further 49. The driver had allegedly pledged allegiance to Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

On 11 December 2018, a 29-year old male armed with a firearm and a knife attacked civilians at a Christmas market in Strasbourg, France, during which five people were killed and 11 injured. The attack was later claimed by ISIL.

In 2019, Austrian authorities disrupted an ISIL-inspired bomb attack on a Christmas market in Vienna, when three Chechen plotters were arrested.

The UK Threat Picture

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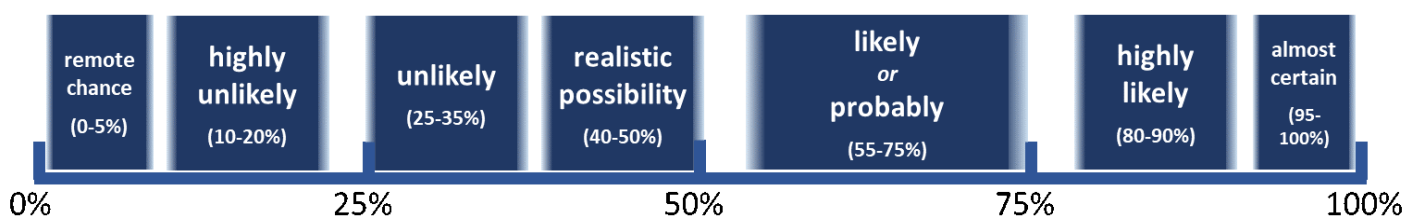
In recent years, there has only been one terrorist attack in the UK carried out during the Christmas period. On New Year's Eve 2018, a 26-year old man armed with a knife stabbed civilians at Victoria rail station in Manchester, UK, shouting "Allahu Akbar" and "Long live the caliphate". Three people, including two civilians and a police officer were injured in the attack.

Probability and Likelihood in Intelligence Assessments

When describing threats in intelligence assessments, Counter Terrorism Policing utilises the Probabilistic Yardstick.

The Probabilistic Yardstick is a tool created by the Professional Head of Intelligence Analysis (PHIA), in the UK government, to standardise the way in which we describe probability in intelligence assessments. For example, if we use the term 'likely' what we mean is 'a 55-75% chance'.

Use the scale below as a reference when reading ProtectUK Insights.



KEYWORDS

THREAT ANALYSIS

RISK

THREAT

