ProtectUK

Terrorist use of Vehicle as a Weapon (VAW)

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Vehicle as a Weapon (VAW) is the deliberate use of a vehicle to injure and kill people or damage infrastructure. ProtectUK gives an insight into terrorist use of Vehicle as a Weapon (VAW) attacks.

What is meant by Vehicle as a Weapon?

Vehicle as a Weapon (VAW) is the deliberate use of a vehicle to injure and kill people or damage infrastructure.

Headline assessment

If either an Islamist terrorist or Extreme Right-Wing terrorist attack were to occur in the UK, the use of a Vehicle as a Weapon is likely.

There is a realistic possibility that future VAW plotting in the UK will, in some instances, form part of an attack including other methodologies.

How and why do terrorists use vehicles in attacks?

Terrorists are increasingly adopting less sophisticated methodologies for carrying out attacks in the West. This has partly been driven by terrorist propaganda and instructional videos appearing online in recent years. This includes operational guidance from terrorist groups such as al-Qaida (AQ) and Daesh encouraging supporters to “wage individual jihad”.

One such methodology is Vehicle as a Weapon (VAW), which is the deliberate use of a vehicle to injure and kill people or damage infrastructure. With a plentiful supply of vehicles on our roads, and with little training required, it is within the capability of many individuals to obtain a suitable vehicle for

an attack.

VAW attacks frequently start on public roads with no warning and can often form part of a layered attack in conjunction with other methodologies such as bladed and blunt force weapons.

Does this differ between ideologies?

If either an Islamist terrorist or Extreme Right-Wing terrorist attack were to occur in the UK, the use of a Vehicle as a Weapon is likely.
A VAW attack in the UK motivated by Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue Terrorism (LASIT) ideology is unlikely.

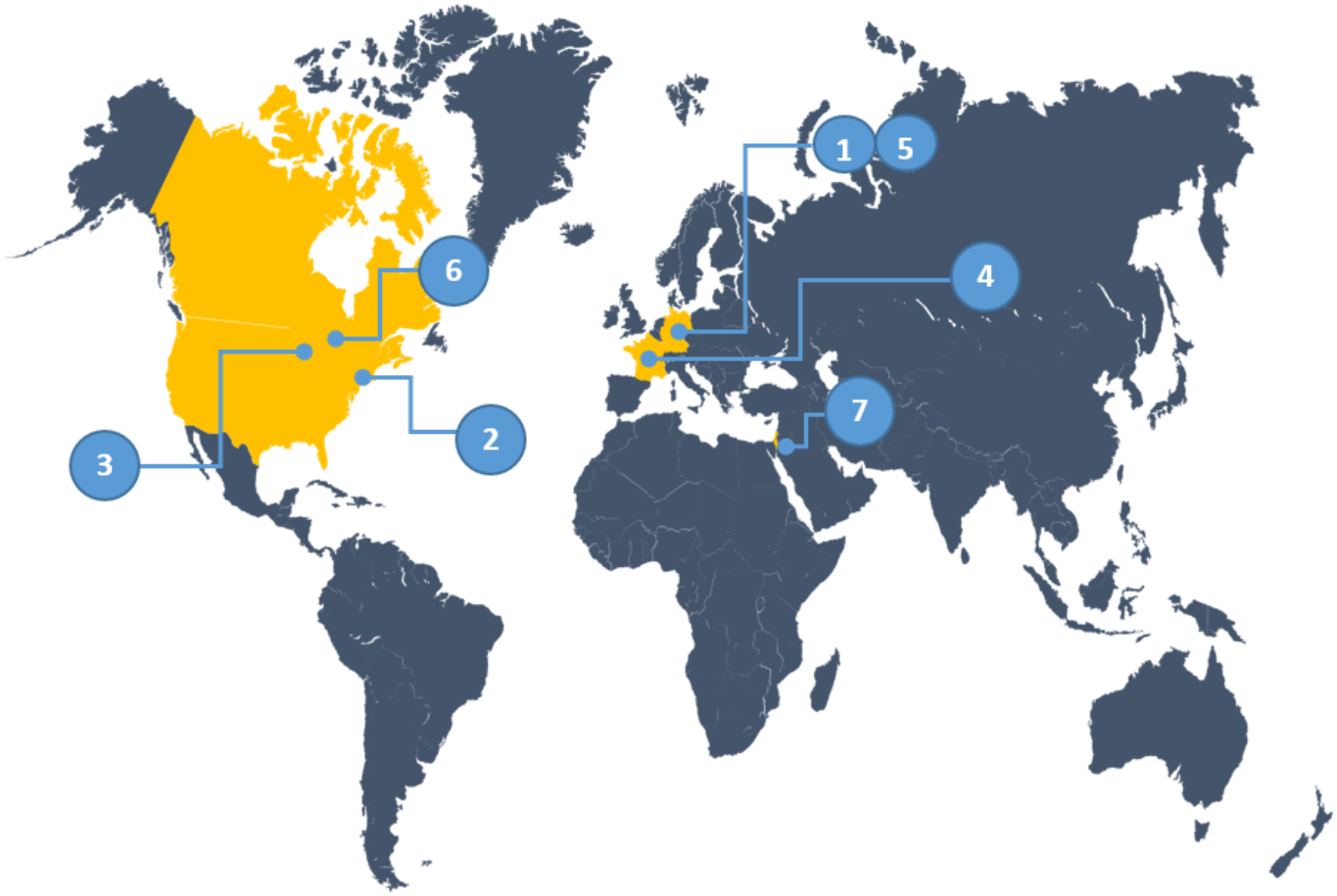
Although Islamist terrorists have accounted for nearly every attack of this type in the UK so far, the tactic has been exploited by Extreme Right-Wing Terrorists (ERWT) and at least by one Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue Terrorist (LASIT) overseas. They have likely been inspired by attacks carried out by Islamist terrorists.

When have terrorists used VAW in attacks?

Using a vehicle as a weapon is not a new phenomenon - terrorists have used vehicles as weapons for decades. In 2001, a Palestinian militant drove a bus into a group of Israeli soldiers, killing eight. In 2006, a man drove a utility vehicle through the campus of the University of North Carolina injuring nine people in an attempt to “avenge the death of Muslims worldwide”.

However, it is the 2016 attack in Nice, when a Tunisian-born Islamist terrorist drove a 19-ton truck into a crowd, killing 86 people and wounding more than 430 others that is seen as a significant change in the way terrorists perceive the effectiveness of the methodology. Since then, there have been at least a dozen VAW attacks in the West and a further two dozen in Israel.

Although the underlying motive for some attacks is unclear, they all appear to have been treated as terrorism. Nevertheless, because of different legislation in the various jurisdictions, they may not all reach the terrorism threshold in the UK. Below are some recent examples since late 2016:


1
5
6
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How does this threat manifest in the UK?

One of the earliest VAW attacks in the UK was the 2013 murder of soldier Lee Rigby by two Islamist terrorists. After driving to Woolwich in south-east London, the two perpetrators accelerated their vehicle at the victim as he crossed the road in front of them, before exiting the vehicle and stabbing him to death.

Since then, there have been four other VAW attacks;

- On 22 March 2017, a 52-year-old British male drove a hired SUV into pedestrians who were crossing Westminster Bridge, London. Three were killed at the scene and 32 were admitted to hospital, where one died later and several others were treated for life-changing injuries. The attacker then took two carving knives out of the vehicle and fatally stabbed PC Keith Palmer where he was on duty outside the Houses of Parliament.
- On 3 June 2017, three men drove a hired van into pedestrians on London Bridge, killing two people. Abandoning an unused store of Molotov cocktails and wearing dummy suicide vests they left the van, armed with large knives, which they then used on an apparently random basis to kill six more people in nearby Borough Market and in the vicinity of Borough High Street. Armed police arrived within eight minutes and shot them dead.
- Shortly after midnight on 19 June 2017, a 47-year-old British male drove a hired van into a crowd of worshippers outside the Finsbury Park Islamic Centre in London. A Muslim male, who had been taken ill and was lying on the ground, was struck by the vehicle and died soon afterwards. Ten other people received hospital treatment for injuries.
- On 14 August 2018, a Sudanese-born male carried out a premeditated and deliberate attack on civilians and police officers near Parliament Square. First, he drove at cyclists waiting at traffic lights; then he drove at police officers who were guarding the side entrance to the

Palace of Westminster. Although his actions caused widespread fear and chaos, no deaths or life-threatening injuries were caused.

As highlighted in the examples above, some VAW attacks in the UK have incorporated multiple methodologies (with more than one distinct methodology). There is a realistic possibility that future VAW plotting in the UK will, in some instances, form part of an attack including other methodologies.

What does this mean for business and the public?

As with other less sophisticated methodologies, VAW attacks can occur with little to no warning and there will likely be few, if any, indicators to look for.

However, identifying and reporting suspicious activity may assist in detecting a potential VAW attack plot.

Further guidance can be found at:

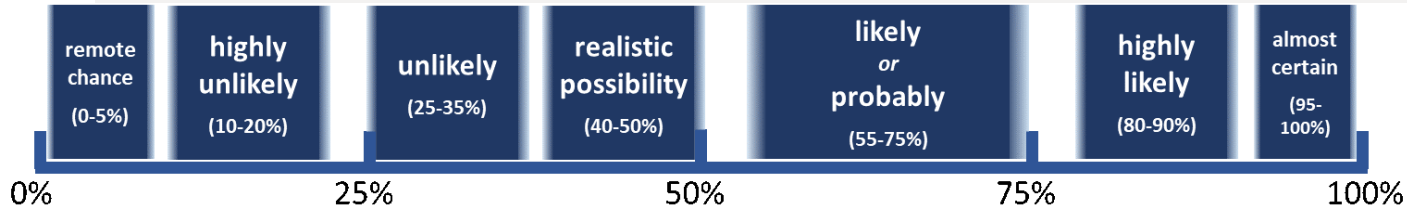
- GOV.UK Department for Transport
- Vehicle as a Weapon Detection Guidance
- Hostile Vehicle Mitigation Guidance

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
VEHICLE AS A WEAPON
HOSTILE VEHICLE MITIGATION
ATTACK
ATTACK METHODOLOGY
THREAT ANALYSIS
IDEOLOGIES
THREAT
VAW
AWARENESS
ANALYSIS
MTA
MARAUDING ATTACK
VEHICLE SECURITY BARRIERS
NATIONAL VEHICLE THREAT MITIGATION UNIT

PAGE CATEGORY
THREAT ANALYSIS