



2019 Terrorism Review in the United Kingdom

By the end of a tumultuous year, the United Kingdom has been the victim of multiple terrorist attacks. Of these, the only fatal instance occurred the 29 November 2019 when 28-year-old Usman Khan fatally stabbed Jack Meritt and Saskia Jones in Fishmonger’s Hall off London Bridge. Whilst Islamist extremism remains the primary source of terror attacks in the UK, the rise of right-wing extremism and the resurgence of dissident Republican organisations in Northern Ireland adds further dimensions to the wider threat of terrorism faced by the UK and its security services.

This release will provide a summary of the terror attacks in the UK in conjunction with security services’ counter efforts and provide statistical evidence.

Manchester Victoria Station Attack

At the turn of the year, 26-year-old Mahdi Mohamud brandishing a knife attacked three people at Manchester Victoria Station. Mohamud was quickly restrained by nearby Police and train station staff. The injuries sustained by two of three injured were serious but not considered life threatening. It is alleged that Mohamud made Islamic references and remarks as he carried out the attacks. Mohamud had reportedly suffered from a drug induced psychosis in 2015 which his defence argued was the main driver behind the attack. However, the prosecution led by Alison Morgan QC, refused to believe that Mohamud’s psychiatric condition was the cause of the attack, instead arguing it was Mohamud’s desire to commit jihad and his exposure to extremist material that spurred on Mohamud to perform the New Year’s Eve attack in 2018. Mohamud pleaded guilty to a terror offence and three counts of attempted murder, he was subsequently sentenced to a minimum of eleven in prison with part of it be served in a high security psychiatric hospital.

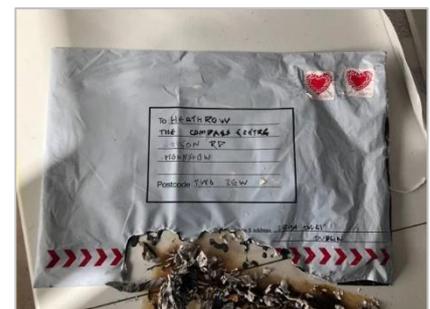
The Londonderry Courthouse Car Bomb

On the evening of 20 January 2019, a car bomb exploded outside a courthouse on Bishop Street in Londonderry, Northern Ireland. After a reconstruction of events, the Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI) established that the same evening a pizza delivery car had been hijacked by a group of four suspects. Once the improvised explosive device had been loaded into the stolen vehicle it was driven to the courthouse by one of the four suspects. Between the suspect fleeing the scene and the detonation of the device, a group of bystanders walked down Bishop Street passing by the car, however, it remains unclear if the suspects intended the attack to be casualty-free. After the device had been detonated, a number of precautionary evacuations took place within establishments and businesses in proximity to the blast. PSNI Assistant Chief Constable Mark Hamilton stated that the New IRA were suspected of carrying out the attack. In a statement, the New IRA linked the car bomb to the start of the Irish War of Independence in 1919, marking a centenary.

Dissident Republicanism poses a substantial threat to Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. Social tensions in communities across Northern Ireland have been exasperated by a lack of political directive as a result of the dissolvment of Stormont, the seat of Northern Ireland’s Assembly. Socio-political instability combined with an underperforming economy provides the ideal hotbed for extremist ideologies and involvement.

Letter Bombs Sent to London Transport Hubs and University of Glasgow

On 5 March 2019, four packages containing small improvised explosive devices were located in transport hubs in London and Glasgow. The London transport hubs targeted were Heathrow Airport, London City Airport and Waterloo Station with the University of Glasgow’s Army Career Office also being targeted. A fifth letter was reportedly unaccounted for at the time of the discoveries but was later located at a postal depot in Limerick, Republic of Ireland. Of the five packages, Heathrow Airport experienced the only detonation resulting in a small burst of flames with no injuries. All five packages were sent from the Republic of Ireland with the return address



given as a fake Dublin address. The devices were reported by an unnamed source to a Northern Ireland media outlet using specific terms and codewords- a method established during 'The Troubles' (1969-1998) allowing terrorists to formally warn security services of an imminent explosion. The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) confirmed that the devices were built with some level of sophistication but not designed to fatally injure. Moreover, the MPS confirmed similar traits between this case and the seven packages sent to Army Career Offices in various UK locations in February 2014. As a result, inquiries were directed towards Northern Irish dissident Republicans, in particular the aforementioned New IRA.

Whilst these are small scaled attacks, it displays the intent to commit cross-border terror attacks. Additionally, a more alarming aspect is the high level of experience and resources required to design a bomb small enough to, firstly, pass undetected (up to a certain point) and secondly, to gauge and control an explosion to ensure no fatalities. This raises the question of whether groups such as the New IRA have the means to produce more powerful improvised explosive devices. With the recent Police discovery of a considerable amount of ammunition along the Northern Irish border and suspect many more improvised weapons caches, it seems dissident paramilitary groups are resourceful enough and well equipped to stage a significant attack. Furthermore, the recent spate of bombings near Wattlebridge and Craigavon in August and July respectively confirms the refusal by dissident republicans to conclude their terrorist operations. It is important to note that the paramilitary groups' primary targets remain Northern Ireland based, however UK based targets are well within reach.

The Far-Right Threat

A day after a gunman attacked and killed 51 Mosque goers in Christchurch, New Zealand in March 2019, 50-year-old Vincent Fuller was arrested by Police in Stanwell, Surrey for an unprovoked knife attack on Bulgarian national Dimitar Mihaylov. Fuller had expressed his support for the Christchurch gunman on Facebook calling to "kill all the non English and get them out of our England". Vincent Fuller was handed an 18 year prison sentence with Judge Peter Lodder QC arguing that Fuller's actions were of a terrorist nature, referring to the knife attack and Fuller's shouting of "kill Muslims" as he roamed the his street in search of a victim.

2019 also saw the conclusion to Jack Renshaw's trial in which he was handed a life sentence with a minimum term of 20 years with one of the charges being preparing an act of terrorism. 23-year-old Renshaw was a member of the now banned terrorist organisation (as defined by the Government under the Terrorism Act 2000) 'National Action' and had plotted to murder Labour MP Rosie Cooper with a machete, gaining inspiration from the murder of the former Labour MP Jo Cox in 2016.

These are just two of many examples of terror-related charges handed to individuals linked to far-right views and ideologies. The Counter-Terrorism Police have confirmed one third of all terror plots foiled were associated to the far-right. One of the main problems from a policing perspective is at what point do counter-terrorism units get involved in far-right cases? In other words, when does the threat go from being a public services' operation to becoming a counter-terrorism investigation? Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu, Head of Counter-Terrorism in the UK, was asked in September 2019 what counter-terrorism strategies were in place to combat the threat of far-right extremism, he replied there was none "for a very good reason – because until they cross a criminal threshold it's not my business" adding "It isn't for policing and the security services to get involved in this conversation. It's about other public services"

The London Bridge Attack

On 29 November 2019 shortly before 1400hrs, wearing a fake bomb vest and wielding two knives affixed to his hands, Usman Khan appeared on the first floor of Fishmonger's Hall where a prison rehabilitation conference was taking place. Khan had in fact been invited to the very same conference as a model reformed prisoner to display the positive impact of a rehabilitation programmes. Khan had been sentenced for his role in plotting a substantial terrorist attack targeting the London Stock Exchange in 2012. During his time in prison he personally requested to be inducted into a deradicalization programme in an effort to distance himself from extreme Islamist ideologies.

During the attack, Khan initially met resistance on the first floor of Fishmonger's Hall when a kitchen staff confronted him with a large metal pole, then being joined by members of the conference brandishing a fire extinguisher and a narwhal tusk. The confrontation moved from

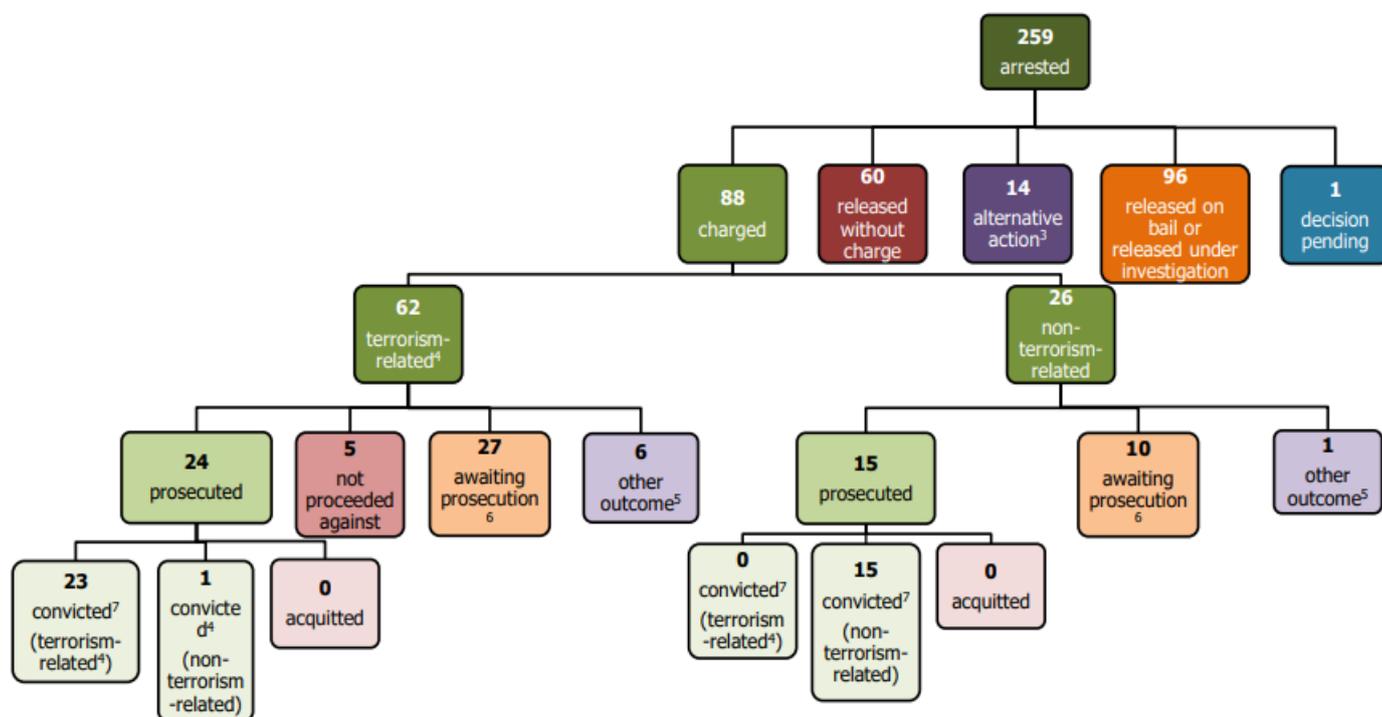


Fishmonger’s Hall to London Bridge where Police arrived at the scene. 300 seconds elapsed between the Police being first notified of a stabbing at Fishmonger’s Hall and Khan being fatally shot on London Bridge.

Radicalization has long been a contentious subject amongst policy makers– there is no ‘one size fits all’ theory that sets out to explain who is more susceptible to radicalisation and why. This can at times be very problematic and difficult to implement counter strategies. The first key component of **CONTEST**, the Government led counter-terrorism programme aimed at reducing the threat of terrorism, is **Prevent**- “prevent individuals from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism”. The strategy highlights the requirement for staff working in public sector establishments, such as schools, prisons and NHS trusts, to report individuals who are displaying symptoms of radicalisation. The Prevent strategy has come under increasing criticism, with accusations of discrimination and ostracization where critics argued the counter-strategy only served to push vulnerable individuals closer to extremism by isolating them.

Counter-Terrorism Statistics

Neil Basu stated between March 2017 and September 2019 the UK security services have foiled 22 terror attacks. Additionally, as of October 2019 there were approximately 800 live counter-terrorism investigations of which 10% came from the extreme right wing and the vast majority stemming from Islamist extremism. As a comparison, in August 2018 there were 676 live investigations involving more than 3,000 subjects of interest with an additional 20,000 individuals under review post-inquiry. Between September 2018 to September 2019, 259 arrests were made for terror-related offences, of which 96 (37%) suspects were released under bail (or without bail conditions) pending investigation. 88 cases (34%) concluded in a charge of which 62 were terror-related charges. 60 subjects (23%) were released without charge and 14 (5%) were handed alternative action, such as a Caution. Out of the 62 cases that resulted in terror-related charge(s) 24 were prosecuted and convicted, only one of these cases ended in a non-terror related conviction(s). Data covering the period for October to Decemeber 2019 is not yet available with a publication date expected to be in 2020. As of 30 September 2019, 224 individuals were being held in custody under terror-related offences. Of the 224, 77% were classed as possessing extreme Islamist ideologies, whereas 17% were prescribed as having extreme far-right views. Over the past three years, the number of individuals in custody defined as having extreme far-right views has slowly risen, explaining Neil Basu’s claim that the threat posed by the far-right was his “fastest growing problem”. However, Islamist extremism remains the leading driver behind terror-related attacks and plots in the UK.



The visual above depicts the arrests and outcomes between September 2018 and September 2019. Flow chart taken from a Counter Terrorism Home Office report published 5 December 2019.

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