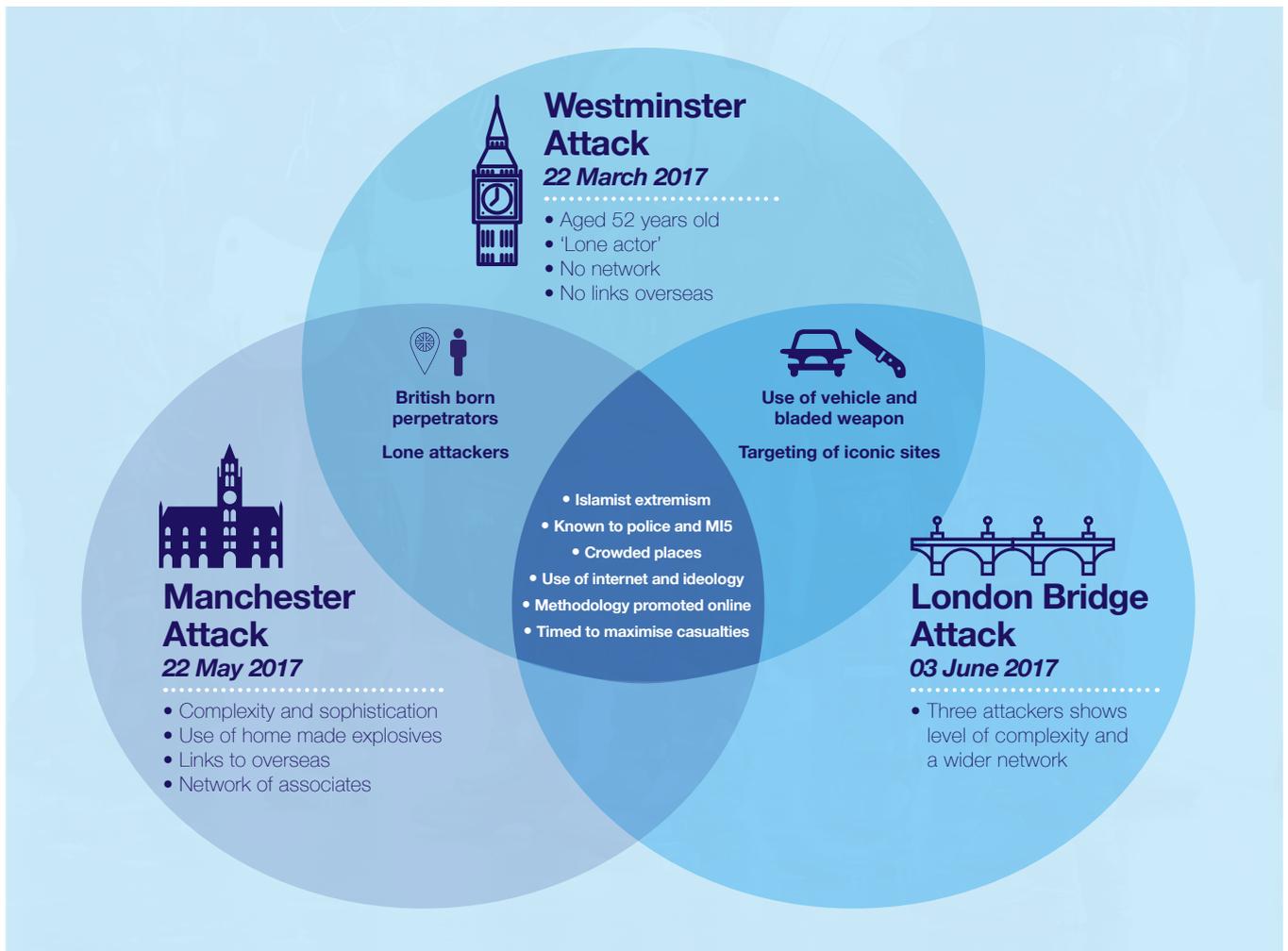


**Pool Re**

Terrorism Research and Analysis Centre

# Post Incident Report:

## Three Attacks in Three Months – Westminster, Manchester and London Bridge



**10**  
weeks

**35**  
deaths

**217**  
injuries

**5**  
terrorists

**46**  
arrests



**The United Kingdom (UK) has been attacked three times in ten weeks; 22 March in Westminster, 22 May in Manchester and 03 June at London Bridge. This level of Islamist extremism in the country is unprecedented.**

The three attacks have many common features. All of them were undertaken by Islamist extremists and claimed by Daesh, although the claims are yet to be corroborated.

Khalid Masood's attack on Westminster was conducted in a manner consistent with declared Daesh activity throughout mainland Europe and in a way promoted by extremist publications, such as Inspire and Rumiyah. Salman Abedi's travel to Libya was likely for extremist purposes and his family there were known to support extremists, particularly al Qaeda affiliated groups. It is also potentially where he gained the knowledge to build an explosive device. The attack undertaken by Youssef Zaghba, Khuram Butt and Rachid Redouane in London Bridge is also consistent with the methodology promoted by extremist publications and strong links exist between them and al Muhajiroun (ALM). The attackers were known to MI5 and the police, but the degree of interest the authorities had in them is currently unclear.

Reports that many of the terrorists were flagged to authorities in recent years are significant. The threat to the UK from Islamist extremists has been increasing since 2013, mainly due to the emergence of Daesh and its particularly brutal ideology. It seems many of the attackers came to the attention of the authorities on the periphery of investigations, at a time when major threats were posed against the homeland. For example, Junaid Hussain's incitement and encouragement of UK attacks and Anjem Choudary's leadership of ALM dominated priorities at a time when many of the attackers could have been reported to either MI5 or the police. As such, it is probable that they were initially deemed not of current interest in comparison to higher priority subjects requiring more intensive resources. In the absence of any specific new intelligence, they would have remained 'known' but not actively managed by MI5 or the police.

There is, however, the possibility the London Bridge attackers had greater current interest from MI5 and the police. The pace of the post-incident investigation has noticeably more momentum, considering the arrests made, search warrants executed, and timings of the police activity. As such, it is probable one or more members of the group had 'active measures' against them by either police or MI5, allowing the investigation to proceed considering the current knowledge held on them.

The target locations of all three attacks were crowded places, populated by civilians going about their day to day lives at tourist locations or social venues, representative of Western life. The attacks seemed timed to ensure maximum casualties, with civilians being indiscriminately targeted, regardless of age, sex or nationality. The vehicle used on London Bridge appears specifically selected for its size and it is possible a heavy load was added to maximise its kinetic energy. The Manchester bomb appears to have been a rucksack design, affording a greater quantity of explosives and shrapnel compared to a smaller suicide vest design. The rucksack would also look more natural in the environment rather than trying to conceal an explosive vest. Where knives have been used they are likely to have been sharpened kitchen implements rather than purpose bought weapons, emphasising the low complexity of the attacks. Additionally, the murder of PC Keith Palmer is consistent with the call for figures of authority to be attacked by Abu Muhammad al Adnani in 2014 which triggered a series of attacks against the police internationally.

This illustrates a further trend in the three attacks, namely how the terrorists may have been assisted by instant messenger applications and motivated by extremist ideology and post-attack propaganda spread over the internet. Many of the terrorists appear to have been active on social media platforms prior to the attacks. The mitigation of this, through measures such as bulk data collection, government capability to monitor encrypted civilian communications or social media companies engaging with authorities, remains a hotly debated subject.

## **Whilst instructions in IED construction are easy to find on the internet, the manufacture of homemade explosives to the standard seen in Manchester require a higher degree of skill, not seen in the UK since the 7/7 attacks in 2005.**

The importance of the measures, however, were emphasised by Prime Minister Theresa May in her address on 04 June, after the London Bridge attack.

The three attacks, however, also differed in many ways. The age range of the attackers varied, with all of them, except Masood, aged 30 years or under. This is significant as Masood did not adhere to the current age profile of extremists in Europe. The complexity of the attacks ranged from relatively low, using legally obtainable implements such as vehicles and knives, to quite highly sophisticated construction of a homemade improvised explosive device (IED). Whilst instructions in IED construction are easy to find on the internet, the manufacture of homemade explosives to the standard seen in Manchester require a higher degree of skill, not seen in the UK since the 7/7 attacks in 2005. It is still unclear if the Manchester device resulted from Abedi acting alone in the UK or with third party involvement. This raises the issue of the extent of the network involved in each attack.

It is likely Masood acted alone, without a wider support network. The possibility Abedi had a wider network of associates with hostile intent was a driver in the UK threat level being raised to CRITICAL, an event not seen since the car bomb attack on Glasgow Airport ten years ago. Whilst several arrests have been made in the wake of the London Bridge attack, the extent of the network

cannot be fully judged. It was also the first time the police invoked 'Run, Hide, Tell' protocols, recognising the potential for additional offenders even after the three suspects had been shot. The fact, however, the attack was perpetrated by three men is significant and indicative of a higher level of planning, coordination and support.

Potential support from overseas extremists also varies across the attacks. There appears little to indicate Masood acted with any overseas support. Abedi's travel to Libya is likely to have resulted in contact with both al Qaeda and Daesh aligned groups. Aspects of his attack also have similarities with attacks on mainland Europe, particularly the composition of the explosive used in the device. Whilst overseas links to the London Bridge attackers are yet to be understood, it is likely Zaghba featured in liaison reporting between the Italian intelligence agency and the UK Secret Intelligence Service.

The frequency of these latest attacks has similarities with the scale experienced in France in recent years. Why the UK is now experiencing such activity is complex. It may reflect a strategic shift in priorities from Daesh leadership, although this is unlikely. It may be an intentionally staged attack campaign across Europe, although this is also less probable. More likely, it may be that MI5 and the police are operating at capacity and that managing additional casework, together with prioritising new subjects of interest, is proving increasingly demanding. The UK should not be surprised by attacks in the near future, consistent with the methodology we have experienced in recent months.

# Three Attacks in Three Months: A Comparison



## Westminster

22 March 2017



## Manchester

22 May 2017



## London Bridge

03 June 2017

### Casualties



Deaths: 5



Deaths: 22



Deaths: 8



Injuries: 50



Injuries: 119



Injuries: 48

### Perpetrator

Khalid Masood, aged 52 years from Kent. Known historically to police and MI5 and had a history of violent knife crime. Lone attacker inspired online, with no support from others.

Salman Abedi aged 22 years from Manchester, of Libyan heritage. Recently returned from a trip to Libya. Known to police and MI5. Likely he received support from other UK based individuals.

Khuram Butt, aged 27 from Barking, Rachid Radouane, aged 30 from Barking, Youssef Zaghba, aged 22, Moroccan-Italian. At least two were known to police and MI5.

### Methodology

Using a vehicle against pedestrians at high speeds on Westminster Bridge, followed by a bladed attack on PC Keith Palmer.

Detonation of an improvised explosive device, consisting of homemade explosives, potentially TATP, the same explosive used in the Paris and Brussels attacks. Device was of a sophisticated design, containing shrapnel of nuts, bolts and nails.

Using a vehicle against pedestrians at high speeds on London Bridge, followed by a marauding bladed attack on civilians in and around Borough Market.

### Target and Timing

Deliberate targeting of civilians amassed outside an iconic site/government building plus violence towards police officers is consistent with Islamist extremist messaging, especially online.

Deliberately targeted young children and girls leaving a pop concert. Arena managed by private security with little if any police presence.

Deliberate targeting of civilians on a bridge and in an area popular for its bar and restaurants on a Saturday evening, without hostile vehicle mitigation measures in close proximity to crowded places.

### Related Arrests

12 people were arrested after the attack and all were released without charge, indicating he acted alone.

14 people have been arrested in relation to the attack including the perpetrator's brother and father in Libya. This indicates the perpetrator was part of a wider network of extremists with connections overseas.

15 people have been arrested so far in relation to the attack, but 12 were subsequently released.

## Three Attacks in Three Months: A Comparison continued



### Westminster

22 March 2017



### Manchester

22 May 2017



### London Bridge

03 June 2017

#### UK Threat Level

Remained at **SEVERE**, indicating he was not part of a wider network.

Threat level raised to **CRITICAL**, indicating further attacks were expected imminently.

Remained at **SEVERE**, indicating the police and MI5 believe they had accounted for all the suspects.

#### Assessment

This attack was consistent with the low sophistication methodology seen in mainland Europe and promoted by extremist media online. Due to the difficulty in acquiring firearms in the UK, the use of easy to obtain weapons (bladed article and vehicle) was typical of the contemporary threat in the UK.

This attack marks a significant change in recent UK attack methodology. Recent violent acts by extremists have been of low complexity, using easy to obtain weapons such as knives against figures of authority such as police and military figures. Believed known to both police and MI5 with suspected links to extremists overseas. This may account for the sophistication of the attack and enhances transfer knowledge through physical associations rather than virtual connections over the internet.

The involvement of three individuals in the attack is significant and indicative of a high level of planning and organisation. The sophistication remains low, using implements and weapons easy to legally obtain and use with little or no training. At least two of the suspects were known to police and MI5, which will raise questions about why there was no prior intervention.

#### Insurance Implications

Illustrates the now recognised insurance gap with business interruption arising from non-property damage. Certified as an act of terrorism by HM Treasury although Masood was inspired by a terrorist organisation rather than being a member of, or acting on behalf of, a terrorist organisation.

Property damage likely in Manchester Arena. Significant business interruption in and around the police cordon was experienced, including the closure of Manchester Victoria train station for one week. Cancellation of concerts in the Arena, evacuation of Arndale shopping centre and loss of attraction to the area.

Unknown at this time if any property damage occurred, however there were reports of damage to windows in Borough Market.

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