



# SAR Consultancy



## Special Edition

SEPTEMBER 2017

## Parsons Green, London Terror Attacks

by Senior Analyst, SAR Consultancy

**Incident Details:** On Friday, 15 September 2017, at 8.20am an explosion took place on a tube carriage at Parsons Green, London. The train was travelling towards the city at the time of the incident. The incident resulted in injuries to at least 29 people, from a fire that engulfed the carriage and while people tried to get away. The explosive device was reportedly a crude, homemade bomb. Some suspect the bomb contained TATP. From photos circulated publically, a white bucket in a supermarket freezer bag appeared to show the seat of the fire. Flames emerged from within the bucket. The bucket and bag also contained a number of wires. Media reports claim that the device had a timer connected. Police have yet to provide details on the devices components publically.

**Response:** The police responded to the incident in a controlled and measured fashion. It was a number of hours before

they declared it a terrorist incident. Later into the evening, the JTAC raised the UK security threat level to critical. Critical means an 'attack is expected imminently'. This will translate to more military personnel and armed police on the streets at critical locations.

Within hours, Islamic State reportedly claimed responsibility for the incident through Amaq news agency. The announcement claimed that 'soldiers of the caliphate' planted a number of devices, but only one detonated. An interesting element of this announcement was their reference to multiples, soldiers and bombs. That said content of previous claims is not always accurate so this may not be significant.

**Arrests:** The police arrested a man (18) in Dover on Saturday, 16 September 2017.

Police suspect him of planting the bomb. The police then searched a house in Sunbury, Surrey. Media reports claim that this is the home of the suspect. They also evacuated homes in the area, as a matter of precaution. Late Saturday night, police arrested a second man (21) in London on suspicion of involvement.

### KEY FACTORS

- This incident is the 5th terrorist attack in the UK in 2017.
- The national security threat level was raised to Critical hours after the incident.
- Police arrested a man (18) in Dover on Saturday, 16 September 2017, suspected of planting the device. They arrested a 2<sup>nd</sup> man (21) late on Saturday night.
- The device may have had a timer attached.
- Islamic State have claimed that 'soldiers of the caliphate' carried out the attack.
- At least three other security incidents took place across Europe the same day.

**Commentary:** The incident in Parsons Green tube station raises a number of interesting factors. Firstly, the perpetrator targeted transport infrastructure, a known target of terrorists. Such target selection is often preferred as it provides a large number of people contained within a station and/or mode of transport thereby resulting in significant loss of life, add the underground factor to this, the impact is likely to be multiple times greater.

Secondly, the explosive device used, albeit crude indicates some level of bomb making capability. That said the internet has made it extremely easy to access material on bomb making so this capability may not evidence significant skills or experience in this area. Despite available instructions, it can still be difficult to make a viable device. This may have been the case in this incident, as early reports indicate the device did not detonate properly. If it did, the impact could have been significant. The fact the device did not detonate fully makes it difficult to determine if Parsons Green was the desired location for detonation or was it further into the city. In addition, it is difficult to determine if the perpetrator had expected to stay with the device to its desired location, or if he/she had planned to escape, as occurred. The presence of a timer, if reports are correct, may illustrate that the perpetrator had wanted to escape prior to detonation. If this is the case, this is significantly different from the more recent explosions conducted by Islamic extremists, which have largely included a suicide dimension to the attacks. However, this may only indicate that the person had no real experience or support and accessed a 'how to make a bomb' guide on line. It is likely that those inspecting the device will be able to assess whether the device reflects online guides or if it illustrates wider training or experience. Such assessment will also help determine the associated risk.

That said raising the threat level is likely to imply that the government and security forces believed that other devices had; been planted, were available to the perpetrator or others and/or that there were others involved, possibly a bomb maker. The second arrest may support this belief, as does downgrading the threat level to severe on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> September. The national threat level is rarely raised without significant consideration that further attacks are imminent. The last time the threat level was at critical was after the attack at the Manchester Arena.

## Security Incidents in Europe

15<sup>th</sup> September

Swedish Police stopped a car containing what is believed to be a bomb in Lomma, nearly Malmo. A man in his mid-40s was arrested.

A man reportedly assaulted two people with a hammer, in Charlon-Sur-Saone, Lyon.

A man attacked a soldier in Central Chatelet Metro Station, Paris with a knife. He was arrested.



**Run** - to a place of safety. This is a better option than to surrender or negotiate. If there's nowhere to go, then...

**Hide** - Turn your phone to silent and turn off vibrate. Barricade yourself in if you can.

**Tell** - the police by calling 999 when it is safe to do so.

**You must:**

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### Thinking out loud

- It would appear that the IED did not detonate properly, if so, it is highly likely that the impact may have been far greater. While this may imply an inexperienced bomb maker, it may have been a simple error, as seen in other recent attacks across Europe.
- If TATP was used, this incident shares a key element with the majority of terror related explosions in Europe in the last 2 years.
- Raising the threat level is likely to have been influenced by suspicions that the bomb maker may have made or planted other devices, or may not be the same person as that who planted the device. Critical is likely to be maintained until JTAC are confident that the bomb maker is not still at large and there are no other devices remaining.
- Islamic State's claim is nothing new. It may indicate they were in contact with the perpetrator(s) before the attack. Another interesting aspect of this claim, is that it illustrates the group are not afraid to take responsibility for a failed attack.
- The presence of a timer is something not seen on recent IEDs detonated in the UK, which have largely been planted by Islamic extremists. That said, Damon Smith, 20, a student was found guilty of planting a homemade bomb filled with ball bearings on the tube on the 20 October 2016. He reportedly used a clock from Tesco as a timer. He is not believed to have links to IS.
- President Trump released a tweet shortly after the incident in which he stated that "these are sick and demented people who were in the sights of Scotland Yard". As details emerged of the first arrest, media reports claimed the suspected perpetrator was arrested two weeks before the incident but later released. If this is true, and if this was what Trump was referencing it may indicate that the US have once again released sensitive information in the immediate aftermath of an attack. If this is the case, this is likely to strain relationships between UK and US counter-terrorism teams. This happened previously within minutes of the Manchester Arena attack,
- The police have yet to provide any great detail on the suspect. This may be influenced by the nature of the investigation and also the age of the suspect. Given he was arrested in Dover, it is highly likely he was attempting to leave the UK by ferry. Media reports are claiming he is a refugee. This is likely to make things difficult for other refugees who are likely to be at a higher risk of assault and threatening, abusive and insulting behaviour across the UK in the short and medium term.