



Threat Levels:

The System to Assess
the Threat from
International Terrorism

July 2006

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THREAT LEVELS IN THE UK

The UK Government's counter terrorism strategy aims to reduce the risk from international terrorism, so that people can go about their business freely and with confidence. While the current terrorist threat presents many challenges, public safety is our absolute priority. The Government can never guarantee that attacks will not happen in the future, but its security effort is dedicated to reducing the risk as much as possible.

Assessments of the level and nature of the threat from international terrorism are made by the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) while the threat from Irish and other domestic terrorism is assessed by the Security Service (MI5). These include a threat level, which is a shorthand description of the overall threat, either for the UK as a whole or for a number of specific sectors, such as the Government estate or military facilities.

Threat levels in themselves do not require specific responses from the public. They are a tool for security practitioners working across different sectors of what we call the Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) and the police to use in determining what protective security response may be required. By its very nature, intelligence cannot be revealed completely and there will always be limitations to what we can say about security and the responses we have planned.

Previously, the Government has not made public the way in which this system works or the national threat level that emerges from it. Following a review, we have decided to inform the general public about the process and the national threat level, which applies to the UK as a whole. This document aims to explain what threat levels are and how they are used. Information about the national threat level will be available on the MI5 and Home Office websites from 1st August.

Dr. John Reid
Home Secretary
July 2006

WHAT ARE THREAT LEVELS

Threat levels are designed to give a broad indication of the likelihood of a terrorist attack. They are based on the assessment of a range of factors including current intelligence, recent events and what is known about terrorist intentions and capabilities. This information may well be incomplete and decisions about the appropriate security response are made with this in mind.

Together with the detailed assessments behind them, this analysis informs security practitioners in key sectors and the police of the potential threat of terrorist attack. Threat assessments are also produced as necessary for individuals and events. There are five threat levels which inform decisions about the levels of security needed to protect our Critical National Infrastructure (CNI).

- Low an attack is unlikely
- Moderate an attack is possible, but not likely
- Substantial an attack is a strong possibility
- Severe an attack is highly likely
- Critical an attack is expected imminently

HOW DO WE DECIDE THREAT LEVELS

In reaching a judgement on the appropriate threat level in any given circumstance several factors need to be taken into account, these include:

Available intelligence: It is rare that specific threat information is available and can be relied upon. More often, judgements about the threat will be based on a wide range of information, which is often fragmentary, including the level and nature of current terrorist activity, comparison with events in other countries and previous attacks. Intelligence is only ever likely to reveal part of the picture.

Terrorist capability: An examination of what is known about the capabilities of the terrorists in question and the method they may use based on previous attacks or from intelligence. This would also analyse the potential scale of the attack.

Terrorist intentions: Using intelligence and publicly available information to examine the overall aims of the terrorists and the ways they may achieve them including what sort of targets they would consider attacking.

Timescale: The threat level expresses the likelihood of an attack in the near term. We know from past incidents that some attacks take years to plan, while others are put together more quickly. In the absence of specific intelligence, a judgement will need to be made about how close an attack might be to fruition. Threat levels do not have any set expiry date, but are regularly subject to review in order to ensure that they remain current.

WHO DECIDES THREAT LEVELS

The Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) was created in 2003 as the UK's centre for the analysis and assessment of international terrorism. JTAC is responsible for setting international terrorism threat levels and Ministers are informed of its decision. It also issues warnings of threats and other terrorist-related subjects for customers from a wide range of government departments and agencies, as well as producing more in-depth reports on trends, terrorist networks and capabilities.

The Security Service is responsible for assessing the level and nature of the threat arising from domestic terrorism, principally the Irish related terrorist threat.

WHERE CAN I FIND OUT WHAT THE CURRENT NATIONAL THREAT LEVEL IS

National threat levels are continually monitored and are altered as required. We cannot anticipate how frequently they may be amended as this is dependent on available intelligence at any one time.

From the 1st August, information about the national threat level will be available on the Security Service (www.mi5.gov.uk) and Home Office (www.homeoffice.gov.uk) websites and a new government website, www.intelligence.gov.uk (which is currently being developed).

Information on the risks of terrorism for British nationals overseas can be found on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website, www.fco.gov.uk.

WHAT ARE RESPONSE LEVELS AND HOW DO THEY RELATE TO THREAT LEVELS

Response levels provide a broad indication of the protective security measures that should be applied at any particular moment. They are set by security practitioners in Government and in some Critical National Infrastructure sectors. They are informed by the threat level but also take into account specific assessments of vulnerability and risk.

Response levels tend to relate to sites, whereas threat levels usually relate to broad areas of activity.

Within response levels, there is a variety of security measures that can be applied as appropriate – the response level will not produce the same measures at every location. Many of the measures will not be obvious or visible to the public.

There are three levels of response which broadly equate to threat levels as shown below:

RESPONSE LEVEL	DESCRIPTION	RELATED THREAT LEVELS
Normal	Routine protective security measures appropriate to the business concerned	Low and Moderate
Heightened	Additional and sustainable protective security measures reflecting the broad nature of the threat combined with specific business and geographical vulnerabilities and judgements on acceptable risk	Substantial and Severe
Exceptional	Maximum protective security measures to meet specific threats and to minimise vulnerability and risk	Critical

The security measures taken to protect people and Critical National Infrastructure will not be announced publicly, to avoid informing terrorists about what we know and what we are doing about it. Because response levels are the result of detailed assessments of risk to specific elements of the Critical National Infrastructure, changes in the national threat level will not necessarily produce changes to the sector-specific response levels.

HOW THE PUBLIC SHOULD RESPOND TO DIFFERENT NATIONAL THREAT LEVELS

Public vigilance is always important regardless of the current national threat level, but it is especially important given the current national threat. Sharing national threat levels with the general public keeps everyone informed and explains the context for the various security measures (for example airport security or bag searches) we may encounter as we go about our daily lives.

If you have information about possible terrorist activity, call the **Anti-Terrorist Hotline: 0800 789 321**.

The Anti-Terrorist Hotline is for tip offs and confidential information. For warnings about possible bombs or other immediate threats please call 999.



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