

Counter terrorism

This page is from APP, the official source of professional practice for policing.

First published 23 October 2013 Updated 8 June 2023

6 mins read

Public order public safety (POPS) planners and commanders should assess the potential threat and impact of terrorism on POPS events and operations.

POPS planners and commanders should also make provisions in the event plan to mitigate potential terrorist threats and the associated impact that may be relevant to an event or operation. This plan should consider:

- the current threat picture (including attack methodologies) and the impact on the POPS event(s) or operation(s)
- the proportionate deployment of resources and tactics, including those linked with counter terrorism (CT) policing, to mitigate the threat to a POPS event or operation
- the police role in the event of an attack at a POPS event or operation and any relevant contingency plans

CT policing in the UK is delivered through a network. Information on the capabilities that each component of the network provides is available through the [Counter Terrorism Policing website](#).

POPS commanders and planners should understand the role of CT policing capabilities and how to access relevant parts of regional and/or national capability – for example, the National Coordinators Office for Protect and Prepare, and the National Counter Terrorism Security Office (NaCTSO).

Threat levels

UK threat levels from international terrorism are set by the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC). Further information on the threat levels is available through the [MI5 website](#).

Planners and commanders should be aware of the threat level and its impact on general policing preparedness and plans. For example, a higher threat level may have an impact on how an event is staged and/or the availability and deployment options associated with some police resources.

Where an event or operation also involves an armed operation, a clear command protocol should be established between the relevant disciplines.

POPS commanders and planners should assess the impact associated with the threat level. They should also access and assess the impact of Security Review Committee updates and advisory messages, as these can provide additional and more specific protective security-informed advice and guidance that can help inform planning and command activity.

Gold POPS commanders should also consider the use of specialist support in the form of a CT security coordinator (CT SecCo) or CT safety advisors (CTSA).

CT security coordinator (CT SecCO)

Some POPS events or operations may involve a CT SecCo. The role of a CT SecCo is to mitigate the threat of terrorism to an event by:

- developing a security plan that supports a gold POPS commander's overarching strategy
- coordinating all aspects of protective security (primarily from a CT perspective)
- providing specialist advice on security assets (including operational deployment) and attack methodologies

Events where a gold POPS commander should consider a CT SecCo include:

- public military events
- party political and other high-security conferences
- high-profile ceremonial and civic events
- events involving protected persons
- crowded place events, including high-profile sporting events

A gold POPS commander may also consider a CT SecCo for other events where their appointment will help support safety and security – for example, if it is proportionate to the threat level at the time.

POPS commanders and planners should consider the following, in consultation with a CT SecCo.

- The criteria for when to appoint a CT SecCo, and the process for how (this may vary across forces and regions).

- If appointed, the development of clear protocols that are understood by POPS planners, POPS commanders and the CT SecCo, such as the following.
 - Outlining the interface between CT SecCo and POPS planning. How does the security plan influence tactical and operational planning and vice-versa? It may also be appropriate for the CT SecCo to attend relevant external meetings, such as the safety advisory group (SAG).
 - Articulating the position of the CT SecCo in the chain of command. Is it a specialist advisory role to all levels of command and/or a distinct command position with allocated resources (for example, bronze security)?
- A shared understanding of the security implications of POPS tactics and capabilities.
- A shared understanding of the POPS implications of security-related tactics and capabilities (for example, impact on crowd dynamics).

Further information on CT SecCo is available via the [Knowledge Hub](#) (you will need to log in).

Counter terrorism security advisors (CTSAs)

The primary role of CTSAs is to provide help, advice and guidance on all aspects of CT protective security to specified industry sectors. CTSAs are also responsible for the provision of protective security advice to crowded places – for example, shopping centres, sporting stadiums, pubs and bars or transport hubs.

CTSAs also work with local authorities and businesses to identify and assess sites that may be vulnerable to terrorist attack. They advise them, as well as other organisations and professional bodies, about CT protective security guidance that should be incorporated into their general crime prevention plans, advice and guidance.

POPS commanders and planners should consider CTSAs, as they:

- work in support of a CT SecCo to mitigate the vulnerabilities identified in the CT SecCo plan for any event
- may have established relationships and may assist with advice and guidance that can better protect event locations
- provide specialist CT awareness training in line with existing CTSA capabilities, to increase the readiness of sites to respond appropriately to a terrorist attack and to increase vigilance

Police role in the event of an attack

Contingency plans should include the role of police if there is a terrorist attack at a POPS event or operation. All police officers involved in the operation should be briefed regarding their role and responsibilities in the event of a terrorist attack and should be aware of Stay Safe principles.

Guidance and an aide memoire are available to all police officers on College Learn (you will need to log in).

POPS commanders are responsible for ensuring that operational orders and briefings are accurate and contain all relevant information. POPS commanders should include the Stay Safe principles in operational orders and/or briefings.

POPS commanders should also be aware of CT command and control structures that cover various terrorism-related scenarios. These include CT-specific roles, such as the assistant commissioner of specialist operations (ACSO), senior national coordinator (SNC) and CT commanders.

CT-relevant engagement and communication

POPS planners should understand the extent and potential impact of any protective security measures and arrangements that owners and operators of publicly accessible locations and/or organisers may put in place for an event.

POPS planners and commanders may provide proportionate and relevant advice to organisers, owners and operators.

Engagement related to CT should be factored into the overarching engagement and communication strategy. Examples could include:

- **ProtectUK**, including the availability of information and advice on various aspects of protective security from NaCTSO
- **Action Counters Terrorism (ACT) campaign**
- the National Police Chiefs' Council's (NPCC) **Run, Hide, Tell briefings**

Tags

Public order Public safety