



SAFER CITIES

Iain Moran examines what can be done to keep the public safe from vehicle attacks in our cities

Over the past two years, Europe has experienced a series of shocking terrorist attacks. Back in 2016, Nice suffered a horrific attack that saw a lorry drive into crowds watching the Bastille Day firework display. Later that year, people in Berlin became victims when a lorry was driven into crowds at the Christmas markets. This year, the UK became the next target following the London Bridge attack. More recently there were vehicle-based attacks in both Barcelona and New York.

A clear pattern that can be seen from these appalling attacks is that vehicles are becoming the new weapon of choice for terrorists. This is presenting security forces around the world with a new and difficult challenge – to predict when and where these attacks will happen and then prevent them.

The difficulty of predicting and preventing such sporadic attacks means security forces around the

world are working around the clock to keep the general public safe from future incidents. In the UK alone this year, terror related arrests have risen by 70 percent, showing that the danger doesn't look to be slowing down.

When it comes to protecting public places against vehicle attacks, the challenge for governments is to implement security measures that cause little to no disruption to people's daily lives. But at the same time, they must still keep the public safe from any potential threat.

So, what is being done by security professionals to make public places safer? In the UK, following the attacks in Manchester and London, more police and armed response officers have been deployed across the country. In May 2017, the Government deployed 1,000 UK armed forces to support the police by taking up strategic guarding posts at Downing Street and Buckingham Palace – as the UK's threat level was raised from severe to critical.

Meanwhile, at this year's Glastonbury festival, attendees were faced with airport-styled security checks that included the use of metal detectors and detection dogs. In Hong Kong, security was also stepped up ahead of the AsiaWorld Expo, with staff conducting thorough bag inspections and using metal detectors to spot suspicious objects. Security was stepped up at the event in response to the attack that took place at Ariana Grande's music concert earlier in the year at the Manchester Arena stadium.

While greater police presences and security checks will go a long way towards preventing bomb and knife attacks, they will unfortunately do little to stop a vehicle travelling at high speed from making contact with its target. These necessary, additional security measures mean that event attendees will be queuing for extended periods of time, which makes them vulnerable given that hundreds of people will be congregated in queues. As such, governments and security leaders have recognised the need to implement physical solutions to protect key public spaces.

In London for instance, concrete barriers were erected overnight on London Bridge to segregate the pedestrian pathway from the road, following the attack earlier this year. Heavy-duty concrete blocks were also placed at either ends of the pathways. Both the concrete blocks and barriers were installed to prevent vehicles mounting the pavements and hitting pedestrians. However, while both provide a quick solution, they do cause some disruption to cyclists. Bike campaigners state that the security measures are potentially dangerous because cycle lanes have been narrowed to make room for the structures. The outcome leaves cyclists in a vulnerable position by forcing them to cycle in the road, placing them in

governments around the world are starting to invest in these security products.

However, the issue comes when these barriers are highly intrusive and disrupt our way of life. To effectively secure the perimeter of public areas, careful consideration needs to be put into how the location is used, the people who move through it, and what type of risk the place faces. This way, security measures can support and enhance the operational requirements of each individual area.

THE PERFECT FIT

Many Hostile Vehicle Mitigation (HVM) barriers have been specifically designed so they're simple and quick to install as they come in modular parts that can easily fit together. They're also friendly to both pedestrians and cyclists, allowing enough room for both to pass through without it limiting their access.

HVM barriers have the added benefit of being customisable to allow them to effectively blend into the surrounding environment. For instance, the ability to cover the barriers in sponsorships logos, or even colour coding them is a great way to make sure they don't stand out or look out of place to passers-by. This is particularly useful at sporting or music events, as barriers could be covered in the sporting colours of the teams, or images of singers and bands to help add to the experience of the event. The presence of security measures shouldn't create an anxious atmosphere that could detract from attendees' enjoyment.

Most importantly, HVM barriers have been tested to ensure they are capable of withstanding the direct impact of a vehicle crashing into them. Permanent barriers, including bollards and bollards integrated into street furniture items, are capable of withstanding impact from vehicles weighing 7,500kg travelling at up to 50mph.

Temporary vehicle impact barriers are also available and are great for use at short-term events as they can be deployed and removed quickly due to their modular design. These barriers are capable of withstanding impact from vehicles weighing up to 2,500kg travelling at 30mph, and provide an effective solution for securing the perimeter of temporary sites. As they're surface-mounted, they cause no damage to the road surface and are lightweight and easy to store for use at another event.

Depending on the building's perimeter design and requirements, installing automatic bollards that rise from the ground and are hidden when not in use could work well at protecting crucial vehicle access points across public areas on a permanent basis. But not only this, they can also be retracted into the ground and hidden when not in use, making them less intrusive than concrete barriers.

Regular checks are needed to ensure that the mechanisms of automatic bollards are working properly, but overall the maintenance is extremely low. This is ideal for busy cities where security measures need to be operational on a regular basis.

Alongside automatic bollards, city planners should consider installing removable bollards that can be lifted out of the ground (as opposed to being retracted into the ground). These security solutions come in a range of security ratings to protect against

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unnecessary danger.

It isn't just the UK Government that is undertaking security transformations. The French Government is spending €20 million on a permanent protective barrier that will be placed around the Eiffel Tower. Meanwhile the Italian Government is now also erecting large-scale concrete barriers around famous landmarks across the country to protect sites in Milan, Rome, Bologna and Turin.

While these solutions will keep people safe from vehicle attacks, the danger is that the use of large-scale and intrusive security measures can begin to create a 'fortress mentality' where people start to feel uneasy in their surroundings. These types of measures also have an aesthetic implication across our much loved and sometimes historic monuments, squares and tourist attractions.

With hostile vehicles now becoming the weapon of choice for terrorists, it is clear that security solutions are needed to mitigate against these attacks. Installing bollards and barriers is one of the most effective methods of stopping vehicles travelling at high speed from hitting pedestrians in crowded public areas – and

the level of threat the location may be subject to. The benefit of removable bollards is that they allow areas to be temporarily shut off by placing them at strategic points to restrict the access of vehicles. They can be removed when not needed so they won't disrupt regular access when it is required.

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Following the series of appalling attacks around the world, keeping the public safe within our cities is currently one of the greatest challenges facing world leaders. Given the heightened global threat level, an attack can never be ruled out. It is, therefore, critical that long-term security measures are put in place to defend our way of life.

As the threat level remains at a constant high,

governments across the world are working hard to find solutions to deter future attacks. However, reactions to attacks have been slower and governments are still playing catch up when dealing with the nature of these vehicle attacks. As a result, measures have not yet been deployed in some crucial areas – this may partly be due to operational restrictions and also a lack of funding for security measures.

Security innovations are forthcoming to counter such sporadic threats and the development of solutions to mitigate against attacks has been rapid. The focus from governments should now be to put in place a security strategy for popular public spaces and establish the most effective security designs possible. We must avoid creating a fortress mentality, but securing our cities must be of the highest importance so we can continue to enjoy the culturally diverse areas we live in without fear of attack.

There is no time to wait – given the current threat level the world faces, an attack is always likely. World leaders need to ensure the public's safety is a top priority to combat terrorism once and for all ●

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Careful consideration needs to be given to where and how security bollards are positioned

