

Monday 16 February 2015

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**Home**

**UK News**

**World News**

**Politics**

**Comment**

**Finance**

**Personal Finance**

**Culture**

**Travel**

**Lifestyle**

**Motoring**

**Cars**

**Sport**

**World Cup**

**Football**

**Fantasy Football**

**Cricket**

**Technology**

**Obituaries**

**Women**

**Men**

**Luxury**

**Jobs**

**Dating**

[Home](#) [News](#) [UK News](#) [Terrorism in the UK](#)

## How the Mumbai terror attacks changed British anti-terror tactics

Last Updated: 10:40AM BST 29/09/2010

The Mumbai terrorist attacks of 2008 caused many anti-terrorism experts to call for radical changes to the way Britain prepares for such an incident in this country.

The main points raised were that the Government needed to: better arm the police; improve border detection; and strengthen hotels.

In Mumbai, gunmen armed with AK-47 assault rifles and backpacks loaded with ammunition and grenades arrived by dinghy and spread out to the city's railway station, a cafe and the Oberoi Trident and Taj Mahal hotels, where they barricaded themselves into a siege situation.

As local special forces took several hours to arrive, virtually the entirety of the initial fightback was left to police officers armed with bolt-action rifles.

Most of the hostages who were taken in the Mumbai attacks died within 30 minutes of capture.

In the wake of the attacks, Scotland Yard's Assistant Commissioner John Yates said officers needed a boost to their firepower.

It was suggested that British police could even be armed with fully automatic Heckler & Koch assault rifles and Minimi machine guns, as used by the SAS and Royal Marines, as well as more powerful ammunition, such as the controversial hollowpoint bullets, which mushroom on impact and cause much greater internal damage to targets.

Around 2,800 officers are authorized to use firearms throughout the Metropolitan Police, which includes the Specialist Firearms Command (CO19), 350 of whom are trained on the Heckler and Koch G36 assault rifle.

However, the 5.56mm weapon is modified to currently only fire single shots, rather than the 750-rounds-per-minute capability used by the military.

The Mumbai attackers, who the sole surviving terrorist Ajmal Kasab claimed were from the Pakistani-based militants Lashkar-e-Taiba, used a rubber dinghy to get into the city.

In March, Lord West, the Security Minister, warned that rivers such as the Thames could be used by small boats to gain riverfront access to the heart of Britain's major cities.

The Government is so concerned about the threat that it set up a command centre to track suspicious boats.

Speaking at the opening of the National Maritime Information Centre in Northwood, Middlesex, Lord West said hundreds of thousands of small boats arrived in Britain unchecked every year.

"I think the public would be surprised to discover that we do not know about every single contact [with a vessel]," he said.

Anti-terrorist officers were urged to watch for any increase in people or small arms being smuggled into the UK through ports or remote airfields, where security is more lax.

British anti-terror chiefs also warned that hotels were vulnerable to attack from terrorists using automatic weapons, which marked a change in the challenge posed to the security services, which had previously focused on preventing bombings and advice was prepared on how hotels could better defend themselves.

This fear remains relevant to the security plans for the Olympics in London 2012.

One official said the Home Office was "acutely aware" that the focus on securing London ahead of the Games could "displace attacks onto other parts of the UK".

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[Back to top](#)

[Full website](#)

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