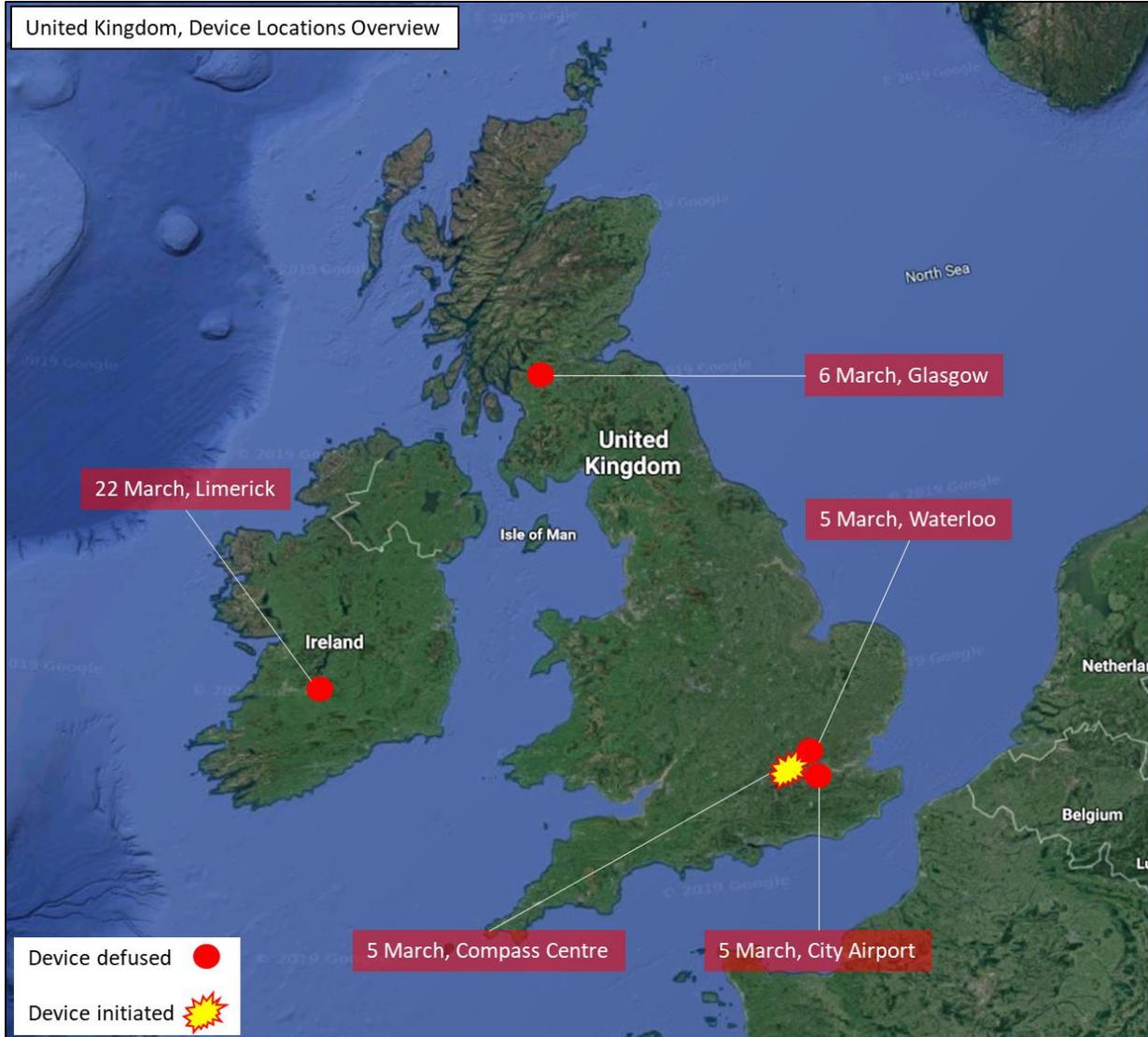




Date of Incident 5 March 2019  
Location London, United Kingdom  
Type Improvised Incendiary Devices  
Severity **MODERATE**



## Key Points

- Five improvised incendiary devices were delivered to locations across the UK.
- Four of these devices reached their destination, one was initiated with minimal damage caused.
- The New Irish Republican Army have claimed responsibility.
- The UK's proposed exit from the European Union has implications for security.

## Details

On 5 March 2019, two packages containing incendiary devices were delivered to Waterloo railway station and City Aviation House, in the vicinity of City Airport, London. These packages were discovered and made safe by the security forces. A third package that had been delivered to the Compass Centre at Heathrow Airport, London, was opened and the incendiary device it contained was initiated. There were no injuries sustained and no damage was caused as a result.



On 6 March, the security forces were alerted to a suspicious package that had been delivered to the University of Glasgow. This device was addressed to a British Army recruitment officer who worked on-campus, though did not reach its intended target and was disposed of in a controlled explosion.

Images circulated through various media outlets corroborate reports that each of these devices were packaged in commonly available A4 sized white, plastic envelopes. Each had been addressed by hand and bore distinctive stamps that had been released by the Irish An Post service in 2018; featuring a heart shaped design and the words 'Love Eire' (referring to the constitutional Irish name for the Republic of Ireland). Postmarks indicate that the packages were sent from the Republic of Ireland, with false Dublin return addresses written by hand. Reports suggest that the devices contained within the packages were crude in nature, with limited viability and potential to cause damage outside of an immediate radius.

On 11 March, a media outlet in Northern Ireland received a statement from an organisation claiming to be the catholic paramilitary group known as the Irish Republican Army (IRA), asserting responsibility for the packages. Police reports suggested that this communication had included a recognised codeword, akin to those issued by groupings claiming responsibility for attacks during the height of what is often referred to as 'the Troubles'. It was also asserted that a total of five packages had been dispatched as part of a concerted attack, with three of the intended recipients being 'commercial targets' and the remaining two directed to recruitment officers for the British army.

On 22 March, a bomb disposal team was called to the Limerick An Post depot following the discovery of a fifth parcel that closely matched the appearance of those discovered in London and Glasgow. Made safe without further incident, images circulated through various media outlets show that this package had been wrongly addressed, and so failed to reach its intended target on the UK mainland (assessed to be a British army recruitment officer) and was returned to the National Return Letter Centre, as is all of Ireland's undeliverable mail.

Statements released by An Garda Síochána (the police service of the Republic of Ireland, commonly referred to as 'the Garda'), and London's Metropolitan Police confirmed that a joint-investigation was treating all five packages as part of the same concerted attack. Advice was issued to armed forces personnel and the offices of transport providers calling for increased vigilance surrounding suspicious packages. Investigations are ongoing at the time of reporting.

### Analyst Comment

---

The IRA spearheaded a campaign against British rule in Northern Ireland that utilised paramilitary methodologies, including the deployment of explosive devices across the UK mainland, often with devastating consequences. This included the use of parcel bombs and the delivery of incendiary devices through the postal service. Although declaring themselves to be the 'IRA', the group who declared responsibility for dispatching the incendiary devices are commonly referred to as the New IRA (NIRA). Irish republican groups have been subject to a series of factions since the end of the de facto civil war that raged in Ireland from the 1960's until 1998, with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Whilst the complexities of this conflict and its driving forces require a greater depth of analysis than is afforded here, NIRA has a lineage that can be traced back to a group referred to as the Real IRA (RIRA); who were in turn formed as a result of division within the Provisional IRA (PIRA).

As the diplomatic process that led to the Good Friday Agreement strove to establish a framework for future peace and an end to the Troubles, some members of PIRA rejected the terms of the nascent cease fire. By 2012, reports suggest that these dissident members, who had been operating as RIRA,



merged with a series of smaller republican cells to form the group widely referred to as NIRA, though referring to themselves as the IRA. Known to operate out of west Belfast, NIRA espouse a goal of bringing about a united Ireland; primarily through the rejection of British rule over Northern Ireland and the employment of paramilitary violence. In 2014, British security forces confirmed that NIRA had contacted a Northern Irish media outlet, using a recognised code word to claim responsibility for seven devices sent to British Army recruitment offices across south-east England. This was the first such attack to take place on the UK mainland since 2001. The packages contained low-grade explosives and bore Dublin postmarks. Assessments provided by the security forces at the time indicated that the devices were of dubious viability, posing a low-level threat; unlikely to cause significant damage or harm.

Given the methodological similarity to past incidents and the current political climate across the UK and Ireland, it is assessed that NIRA are seeking to capitalise on an extant uncertainty surrounding the UK's exit from the European Union (EU), specifically the ramifications for the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. This border was established in 1921, when the UK government separated a predominantly Catholic southern Ireland from a majority protestant Northern Ireland. Such secular divisions added complexity to an already febrile situation. The Irish state remained a dominion of the UK until 1949, when it was officially declared the Republic of Ireland. As the Troubles escalated, the border between the regions was progressively hardened, with military check points and reconnaissance towers being established to monitor a deteriorating security situation. The framework for peace provided by the Good Friday Agreement included the removal of all such border security installations and free movement was reinstated in 1998.

With Northern Ireland remaining part of the UK and the Republic of Ireland being a member of the EU, the UK's recent drive to exit the EU will have an unavoidable impact on the relative peace that has endured since the Good Friday Agreement, particularly where the issue of the border is concerned. Whilst it is understood that Irish Republican groupings have been responsible for a series of small-arms attacks and the use of improvised explosive devices over the 21 years since the agreement, much of the violence has pivoted around criminal activities such as extortion, fuel racketeering and narcotics distribution. These activities have thus far fallen short of the levels of violence exhibited during the Troubles.

If the UK successfully negotiates an exit from the EU, the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland will become the only land border between the UK and the EU. This has implications for cross-border trade and raises concerns about attempts to circumvent trade tariffs and smuggling, issues that may only be successfully tackled if a harder border than currently exists is implemented. Such a prospect speaks to enduring cultural memories of the security infrastructure established during the Troubles and raises concerns of a return to an era of British hegemon over the region, military checkpoints and associated reactionary violence. In a bid to tackle these concerns, current negotiations between the UK and the EU contain a commit to a 'backstop' solution that seeks to guarantee the border between the regions remains free of the type of border security infrastructure that could re-ignite such violence. This, however, would tie the UK to a customs arrangement with the EU until such time as an alternative arrangement can be reached. Such an enduring, effectively open-ended attachment to the EU trading bloc has been met with opposition in the UK parliament and forms the basis of much of the debate surrounding the UK's exit from the EU.

If the threat posed by NIRA is assessed in terms of intent and capability, it is clear that there is deep-rooted intent driven by cultural memory and a drive to assert their own relevance onto a febrile political landscape. The crude nature of the devices deployed in this concerted attack suggests a



limited capability, restricted in both reach and impact. Assessed to have a limited membership at the time of reporting, capitalising on enduring cultural memory and extant political uncertainty could see the group gain support, particularly if border security infrastructure is reintroduced to the island of Ireland. This will re-shape both intent and capability. If the group seek to capitalise on the potential for cross-border smuggling and criminal activity presented by a custom agreement in flux, then they may be able to secure a level of funding that would drastically increase their capability. Such attempts to capitalise on the current political uncertainty may continue if the process of leaving the EU is protracted. If the process is concluded in a manner that leads to increased tensions on the island of Ireland, then an increased threat from NIRA driven by increased intent and capability cannot be ruled out.

Any concerns regarding any future threat potential posed by NIRA should be tempered by an understanding of a current capability that is assessed to be limited. Whilst intent is driven by complex cultural concerns that may be increased by border infrastructure developments, it is of note that the UK security forces currently assess the threat for Northern Ireland-related terrorism to be MODERATE.