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Protection Prevention Preparedness Response Resilience Recovery



CASCADING RISKS

EVOLVING OUR UNDERSTANDING

Climate & Weather | Society & Resilience
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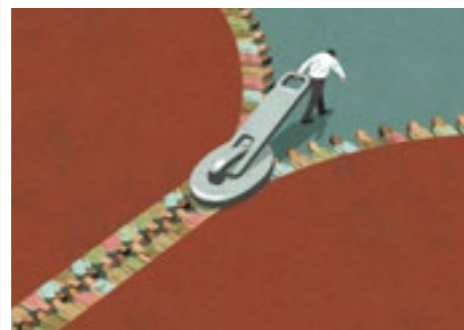
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Adobe Stock

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Gracie Broom

comment

Cascading risks are, of course, not a new concept, but we make no apology for the emblematic reminder on our front cover.



Coupled with compound risks – “physical components in the environmental domain” – many parts of the world are experiencing their devastating manifestations in real life. We are witnessing wildfires, heatwaves, flooding, disruption, discontent and geopolitical calamity, continually stalked by the malignant shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic.

All represent individual and societal tragedies; many involve extreme weather, but these cannot be blamed on ‘climate’ alone. As Milad Zamanifar says on p18, if the role of climate is emphasised in these disasters, then the: “Valid argument about the roles of policymakers and authorities in inducing a disaster might become obscured.” Political expedience, inaction or feet dragging often make a disaster worse, but it is simply easier to place the blame on climate.

Complacency is also a peril, as examined within the context of terrorism on p72 and p74. Threat fatigue and the psychological difficulty of maintaining perpetual vigilance mean that warning signs can – and have been – missed.

Are there any solutions? On p12 Gianluca Pescaroli says that this could all be the last call to shift away from the traditional approach based on single threats or drivers and outlines the benefits of stress testing. On p60 Eric McNulty reminds us that we need a mindset purpose-built for the pervasive ambiguity and tumult that will define the coming decades. And Jenifer Hesterman notes that scenario planning and extending our imaginations are essential (p8).

Mindsets must, indeed, shift, particularly with regard to societies and resilience. If programmes are imposed upon communities without them actively being involved in their leadership and formation, then they are likely to fail or, worse, cause long-lasting damage.

We also need to be wary of an impending sense of nihilism that seems to be infecting wide tranches of the world. And this means genuine empowerment, somehow uniting ruptured communities and re-establishing trust in leadership.

Addressing complacency: Staying alert is vital

Maintaining a high state of alert over a long period of time is challenging and risks missed opportunities to act if inadequate attention is paid to the threat level – a recurring theme following inquiries into responses to terrorist attacks and other crises. Here, **Andy Blackwell** examines the challenges of complacency

People tend to be at their most vigilant in the immediate aftermath of major terrorist attacks or other catastrophic events but as time passes, memories fade and security focus begins to wane. Prolonged, heightened states of alert create the risks of complacency and threat fatigue. Complacency – defined as self-satisfaction, especially when accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies – is often referred to as the biggest risk of all, and as the enemy of excellence. We see it compromising safety, security and, more recently, public health. Businesses fail and lives are lost because of it. Like any other risk, complacency needs careful, ongoing management.

Organisations and their people need to be imaginative in their approach to threat and risk management if they are to avoid complacency. The clearer they can imagine a particular risk materialising, the more likely they are able to develop robust responses to manage it. Psychologists explain that failures of imagination are down to our inability to confront threats that lie beyond our realm of experience and, since our minds have evolved to deal with imminent threats, there does not seem to be much attention to future, more abstract dangers. Leaders who fail to take risks seriously enough and do not promote a culture of safety and security, put people and their organisations at risk of harm.

Catalysts for complacency

Threat fatigue and terrorism fatigue can both be catalysts for complacency. Threat fatigue refers to a 'tiredness' owing to the volume of warnings that attacks may take place, but where none have occurred for a long period of time (which can desensitise people to the actual threat). Terrorism fatigue dispels the common assumption that more acts of terror inevitably mean people are more terrified, with research suggesting otherwise. People become numb to the violence and can no longer muster the requisite outrage or compassion to respond, finding ways to integrate and normalise such violence as part of their lives and making strategic choices to navigate threats. This, in turn, drives terrorists to become ever more creative in making their attacks spectacular and terrifying.

Without reliable methods of measurement and ongoing assurance, there is a tendency for organisations

to overrate their security performance. This false sense of security is a form of complacency that can put the organisation and the public at risk.

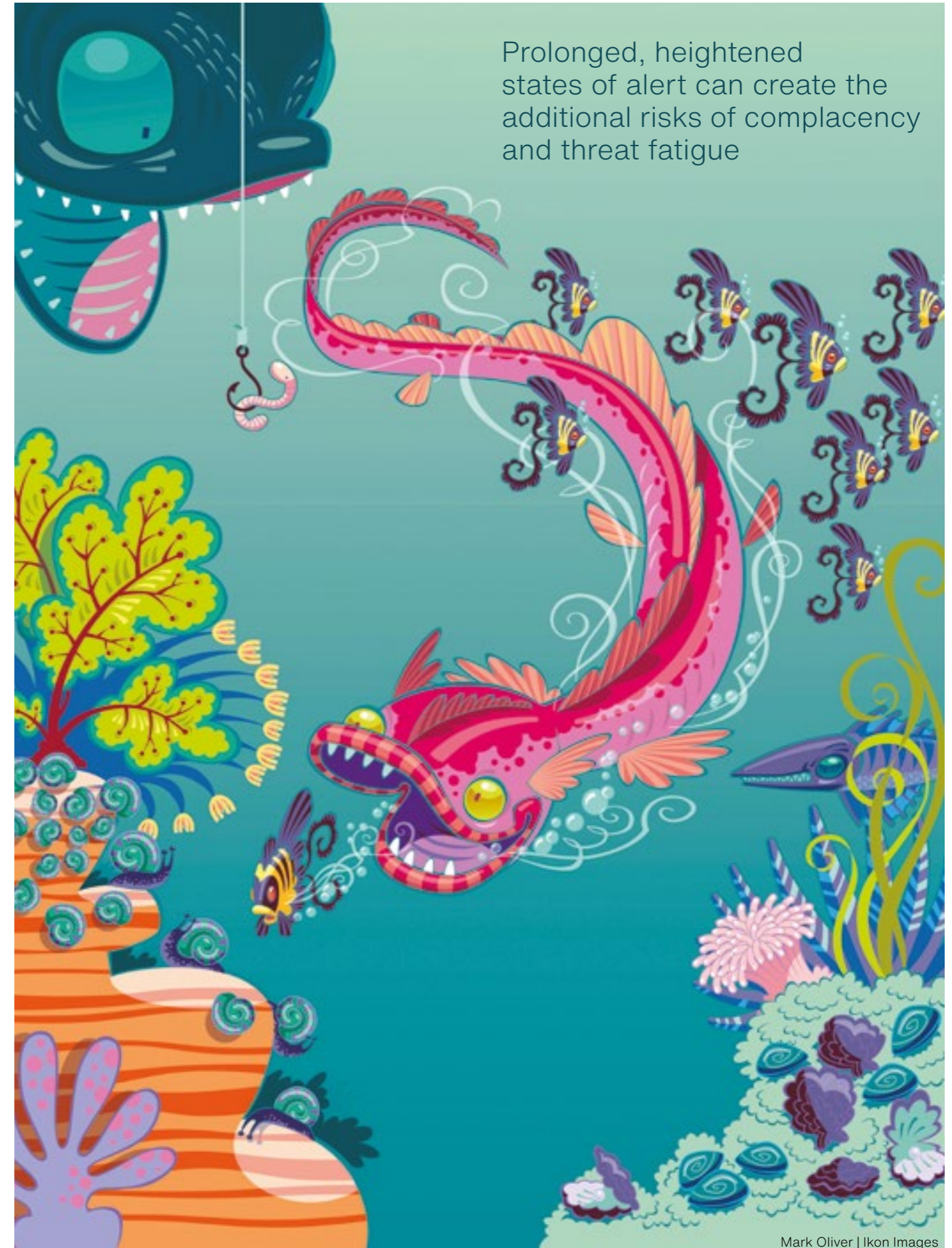
The lead up and response to the Manchester Arena attack, described by the Inquiry Chairman as a litany of failures, is the latest in a string of incidents involving complacency and missed opportunities to act. On May 22, 2017 at 20:31 hrs, Salman Abedi – inspired by the so-called Islamic State – detonated his rucksack bomb weighing more than 30 kg in the City Room, close to one of the arena's exit doors. The attack took place at the end of a concert by Ariana Grande, as concertgoers were leaving the venue. Twenty-two people were killed and hundreds more injured. The bomber also died.

The national threat level at the time of the incident was assessed by the UK's Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) as 'severe', meaning that an attack was highly likely. It had been set at severe since August 29, 2014, but it was raised to 'critical' the day after the Manchester Arena attack in 2017. However, the Westminster Bridge attack in which five innocent people were killed, had occurred just two months earlier.

Volume One of the Report of the Public Inquiry into the Manchester Arena Attack addresses the security arrangements at the concert that should have prevented or minimised the devastating impact of the attack and identifies several missed opportunities for detecting and stopping Abedi. The report provides useful insights to enable better understanding of some of the root causes of the failures. The preface to the 204-page report clearly states that the: "Responsibility for the events of May 22, 2017 lies with Salman and Hashem Abedi." However, the chairman of the inquiry, the Hon Sir John Saunders, cautioned that some individuals and companies would be the subject of criticism, because without examining what went wrong, he could not identify improvements. The aim of the report is to seek to reduce the risk of such an event happening again and, if it does, to mitigate the harm it causes.

In his report, Sir John Saunders uses the term 'missed opportunity' to indicate where he was satisfied that there was an opportunity to act that should have been taken. He said the arena's operator, SMG, security

Prolonged, heightened states of alert can create the additional risks of complacency and threat fatigue



Mark Oliver | Ikon Images

company Showsec and British Transport Police (BTP) were: “Principally responsible for the missed opportunities,” to try to stop the suicide bomber, but he said there were also failings by individuals. The missed opportunities were reported as follows.

A member of the public who had voiced concerns about Abedi to a Showsec security officer minutes before the bombing was ‘fobbed off’. Sir John said that this was the most striking missed opportunity to act. It is

The actions of another Showsec security officer were noted. He tried to use his radio to alert the security control room after concerns were raised about Abedi, but could not get through before he left the foyer, “unconcerned.” The officer told the inquiry that although he had a “bad feeling” about Abedi, he did not approach him for fear of being branded a racist.

The CCTV coverage of the arena’s operator, SMG, was inadequate and left a blind spot that allowed Abedi to hide for an hour in the foyer of the arena before detonating his device.

There was a lack of adequate security patrols by Showsec in the 30 minutes before the attack, as Abedi hid out of sight from the CCTV cameras. The egress check did not include a counterterrorism element.

A Showsec security guard had not been adequately trained, failing to notice Abedi acting suspiciously in the foyer of the arena about an hour before the attack. The inquiry chairman also noted that: “A competent BTP officer would have taken action that could have saved lives,” had one of the four officers on patrol been in the foyer, instead of leaving it unattended for half an hour before the attack.

The inquiry also identified a potential opportunity to make hostile reconnaissance more difficult by pushing out the security perimeter of the security operation.

The report mentions that it is difficult to reach a safe conclusion about what the consequences of the missed opportunities were, if any, as no-one knows what Abedi would have done had he been confronted prior to him detonating his device at 22:31 hrs.

The key security failings identified in the report, together with the responsible parties, are listed below.

■ **British Transport Police:** “Failed to properly consider terror threats at events; Failed to communicate and co-ordinate adequately with SMG and Showsec immediately before, during and after events; Failed to give adequate consideration to the threat from terrorism when assessing risks to the public when events were taking

place;” and “Failed to instil in the officers deployed to the Ariana Grande concert the need, when on duty, to be alert to the possibility of a terrorist attack.”

■ **Transport Police officers deployed at the arena:** “Took breaks substantially and unjustifiably in excess of what they were permitted to do.”

■ **SMG and Showsec:** “Failed to take steps to improve security at the arena that they should have taken.” Sir John Saunders qualified this by saying that having considered the evidence, he did not think that: “Finding that security was deliberately compromised to save money is justified, even on the balance of probability,” although he added that there was justified criticism that SMG and Showsec: “Did not take a number of necessary steps, some of which would have involved the spending of additional money, in order to provide sufficient levels of protection against the terrorist threat.”

Meanwhile, the inquiry noted, with regard to the

Counter Terrorism Security Advisor (CTSA) assigned to the area: “Did not consider and advise on what security was required to protect against an attack by a person-borne IED,” in the foyer. The report mentions that SMG needed input from an expert in security beyond that provided by the CTSA, BTP and Showsec. “Had SMG done so, it is highly likely that the security arrangements at the arena would have been improved,” the inquiry found. “Such input would probably have result in changes that could have prevented or mitigated the attack.”

The council’s licensing enforcement regime in Manchester failed to consider the risk of a terrorist attack in deciding whether to grant a new licence, or what conditions to attach to it.

An investigation into Showsec by the SIA, the regulator of the UK private security industry, failed to identify that the company was using unlicensed staff to monitor CCTV.

The inquiry also identified that inadequate attention was paid to the national terrorist threat level in the lead up to the Ariana Grande concert, and that: “None of those directly concerned with security at the arena on May 22, 2017 considered it a realistic possibility that a terrorist attack would happen there.” This is despite the fatal Westminster Bridge attack having occurred only two months earlier.

Recommendations

The inquiry set out a series of recommendations in the wake of the arena bombing, including a ‘Protect Duty’ for better security at venues. This should be written into law following a campaign led by Figen Murray, the mother of Martyn Hett, who was killed in the attack. In addition, British Transport Police was urged to address the “systemic failings” identified in the report: “So as to ensure they are not repeated.” The report went on to say that BTP and all other Home Department police services should: “Conduct a review of the areas in which jurisdiction overlaps.”

These are complex problems to solve, but a credible solution can be found in a security management system (SeMS). Complacency in the form of missed opportunities and failures is a recurring theme of inquiry reports into responses to terrorist attacks, as inadequate attention is paid to the threat level and risk management lacks robustness. This is often hampered by ineffective leadership and weak security cultures. Unfortunately, lessons identified from previous crises do not always become lessons learned and implemented.

“Doing nothing is not an option,” were the very clear words of Sir John Saunders as he demanded action to protect venues from attacks. Clearly, the systemic failings identified during the enquiry need an integrated solution that delivers security assurance and the ability for organisations to manage threats and risks proportionately and effectively. SeMS already help many organisations to do just this. For the uninitiated, SeMS is an organised, systematic approach to security management that is embedded into the day-to-day activities of an organisation. It provides the necessary structure, policies and procedures to ensure effective oversight. In summary, a SeMS is an assurance system for security. Proven in aviation but easily transferable to other sectors, it makes best use of what the organisation already has in place rather than requiring them to create something new. The SeMS components are:

- Accountability and responsibilities;
- Management commitment;
- Threat and risk management;
- Incident response;
- Resources;
- Performance monitoring, assessment and reporting;
- Security education;
- Management of change;
- Continuous improvement; and
- Communication.

Implemented correctly, these components will not only create a positive security culture, but will ensure key risks are effectively identified, mitigated and are subject to regular review.

Staying alert is as much about addressing human blind spots such as complacency, threat and terrorism fatigue, as those created by inadequate positioning of CCTV cameras. The military slogan ‘complacency kills’ has relevance to security, reminding us that if we let our guard down, innocent people may die or be seriously injured.

We owe it to the victims of the Manchester Arena attack, and others where failures and missed opportunities were identified, to ensure lessons identified become lessons learned and implemented. ‘See it, Say it, Sorted’ failed at Manchester, as the concertgoer’s report of concern was far from ‘sorted’ when he communicated it to a security officer. It is vital to maintain public confidence by responding appropriately to any such reports of suspicion.

The challenges going forward are complex, but implementing a recognised SeMS (such as CAP 1223) will provide organisations with the means to grow a positive security culture, break the recurring cycle of complacency and enable them to provide effective, efficient and assured security, using a proven framework. SeMS also provides a credible way forward for organisations seeking to fulfil their Protect Duty requirements. CRJ

Web resources

- *UK Civil Aviation Authority (Third edition, 2021):* CAP1223, Framework for an Aviation Security Management System (SeMS), caa.co.uk/CAP1223;
- *Department for Transport (2014):* Security Management System: A guidance note for Accountable Managers, gov.uk/government/publications;
- *Home Office (2021):* Manchester Arena Inquiry Volume One;
- *Security Service MI5 (2021):* MI5 Threat Levels;
- *BBC News (2020):* Manchester Arena Inquiry: ‘Terror threat ‘not adequately addressed’, bbc.co.uk;
- *Sky News (2021):* Manchester Arena Inquiry: What were the missed opportunities to stop Salman Abedi on night of attack? news.sky.com;
- *Slate (2017):* Terrorism Fatigue, slate.com;
- *CityAM (2019):* See it, say it, sorted – it’s annoying but effective, cityam.com;
- *British Transport Police: See it. Say it. Sorted*, btp.police.uk;
- *Psychology Today (2020):* Blind Spot: Failure of Imagination and Existential Threats, psychologytoday.com;
- *ITV News (2021):* Manchester Arena: How organisations implicated by damning report should have learnt from Westminster Bridge attack, itv.com/news;
- *Independent (2021):* Doing nothing is not an option, independent.co.uk/news

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Fanatic Studio | Alamy



Psychologists explain that failures of imagination are down to our inability to confront threats that lie beyond our realm of experience

ironic that: ‘See it, say it, sorted’, the promise behind the slogan pioneered by BTP, along with the Centre for the Protection of the National Infrastructure and Department for Transport as part of a campaign to increase public awareness and reporting of crime and potential terrorist acts, was not kept on this occasion, and the opportunity to act on the information provided by the concertgoer was missed. The campaign has largely been a success, but it depends on the public being confident that its concerns will be taken seriously.

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