

An International CBRNE Institute publication

# C2BRNE DIARY-2022®

December 2023

Website: www.cbrne-terrorism-newsletter.com

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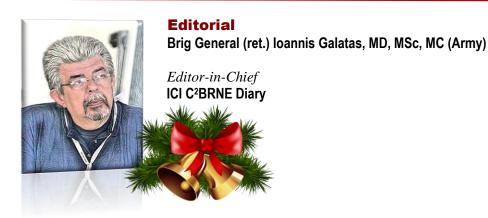




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### Dear Colleagues,

The situation remains the same: two wars (one proxy; one terrorist) – (ongoing) pandemic – growing stupidity.

**Towards the New Year 2024:** European security officials are seeing a growing risk of attacks by Islamists radicalized by the Israel-Hamas war, with the biggest threat likely to come from "lone wolf" assailants who are hard to track. More than 10 intelligence and police officials in five European countries including Britain, Germany, and France increased surveillance of Islamist militants. This will put a further burden on resources already stretched by dealing with perceived threats from Russia, China, and Iran, in what London police chief Mark Rowley calls "one of the most challenging convergence of threats I have ever seen."

**Proxy war:** (1) Russia was ready to stop the fighting had Ukraine agreed to remain neutral, but the West advised Kyiv to keep going, the head of President Vladimir Zelensky's parliamentary faction – and the chief negotiator at the peace talks in Istanbul – David Arakhamia admitted (Nov 24). During the talks, Arakhamia added, British then-PM Boris Johnson arrived in Kyiv and told Ukrainian officials to keep fighting and not sign any agreements with Moscow - in all conflicts there is always a British finger involved! (2) Former Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov said the West will continue to pump weapons into his country until Russia "shoots you in the teeth." He made the relevant statement in an interview with RIA News. Visual Capitalist media portal had previously written that since the beginning of the special military operation, Ukraine has received \$ 233 billion in aid from Western countries. One can easily imagine all the good things that could have been done in the world with \$ 233 billion instead of spending them in a no-reason proxy war. (3) The Council of the European Union approved today (28.11.2023) additional funding for the training of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, amounting to 194 million euros. This extra money from the European Union to Ukraine will be granted to Kyiv through the European Peace Fund (©EPF). The total amount of European Union aid to Kviv has now reached €255 million, to continue the large-scale training of Ukrainian armed forces personnel. To date, more than 34,000 Kyiv soldiers have been trained since the launch of the European Union Training Mission for Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine). And all that with our money. (4) It seems that the war will soon be over because all the involved parties from Ukraine's side realized that there is no point in spending money (latest demand: 400 billion USD!!! - rejected) against Russia which proved too hard for their teeth.

Parthenon Marbles: The recent incident with the postponement of the meeting of the Greek PM with the UK PM revealed that (1) once a thief [Parthenon Marbles, India's Royal Crown Diamond Koh-I-Noor, Nigeria's Bronze Sculptures, Rosetta Column with Hieroglyphics, the Chinese paint in silk "Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies"], always a thief; (2) the UK is an overt/covert ally and business partner to Turkey; (3) the UK still believes that is an empire only because is involved in all unrests around the globe. So sad! And as if this was not

enough, the Indian UK PM continues to insult Greece in the UK parliament, relentlessly supporting a thief (Thomas Bruce, 7th Earl of Elgin – aka Lord Elgin).

Al Ethics: The year 2023 ends with a personal lesson learned. Al is good; people working in Al companies are problematic when comes to ethics. My personal experience with a major UAE Al company that cost me money because they canceled our collaboration with the stupid excuse that I was over 60 (they knew my age from Day 1 [CV]), taught me that you cannot expect ethical Al products driven by non-ethical people in a company that even has a Head of Ethics and Compliance that lacked the courtesy replying to my emails explaining the situation. Most probably this lady is going shopping all day since it is only decorative. If a colleague is interested in reading the whole story with emails exchanged (to avoid repetition of the story), please contact me by email.

**Terrorism/Europe:** The head of Germany's Federal Constitutional Office claims there are calls for attacks from jihadist circles – including al-Qaeda and Islamic State. This can lead, among other things, to the radicalization of perpetrators who act alone – as "lone wolves" – attacking "soft targets" with simple means. Be prepared not only in big cities and capitals but also in smaller towns and even villages with Christmas markets. Be alert! In the meantime, Houthis launched \$20,000 drones (Shahed 136 copies) and the US/France shot them down with \$2 million missiles (SM-2; Astra 15)!

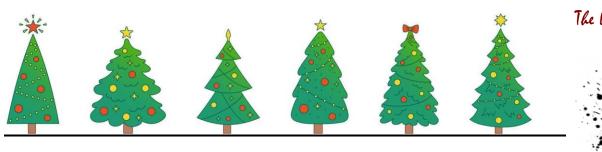
**Paris 2024:** Questions about a "plan B" were prompted by comments made by former head of national police Frédéric Péchenard, who said he was "very worried" about Olympic security after Saturday's attack. "Before October 7, the Hamas attack on Israel, I thought that the opening ceremony on the Seine could take place. But today I think it wouldn't be unreasonable to think about a Beta plan," he said. But nobody listens!

**NATO:** What exactly Turkey is providing to NATO that enables her to blackmail the Organization? Latest act: give us F-16 to sign the inclusion of Sweden. Or else ... "The US has lost Turkey. In public opinion, the US has long been our greatest enemy. If it were not for the Turkish Armed Forces, NATO would not even be a 'paper tiger' across Europe..." (journalist Özay Şendir of pro-gov Milliyet newspaper).

**Stupidity:** A kindergarten in Hamburg has decided not to decorate a Christmas tree this year, in order not to exclude any child because of their faith, "in the spirit of religious freedom". Will Al fix stupidity?

**Gaza War:** The Houthis are claiming that they're carrying out attacks on behalf of Palestinians, when the reality is that they're attacking, arbitrarily detaining, and endangering civilians on ship crews who have zero connection to any known military target. A new terrorist front in the area that might end up badly for the poor people of Yemen. Oil and gas transportation is more important than human lives and countries affected will not let it go without fighting back. Read the related article in the "T-News" section. Peace? What peace? Pakistani leaders, in or out of power, have often been speaking about Pakistan's nuclear arsenal and its willingness to go for nuclear strike if circumstances demand. The report says that Hamas leaders and Islamic scholars met in Islamabad last week and argued that "Israel's war in Gaza would end if <u>Pakistan</u>, a country armed with nuclear weapons, threatened Israel." **Breaking news:** Iran threaten to attack vessels crossing the Gibraltar Strait!

### Happy New Year to all CBRNE First Responders and their beloved ones!

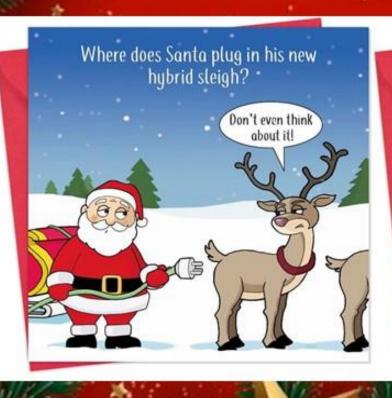


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# Health, Joy, Success, Happiness, Peace!













I AM GREEK ANDI WANT TO GO HOME

# Hamas's Useful Idiots in the U.S., Europe

By Bassam Tawil

Source: https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/20142/hamas-useful-idiots



- These demonstrators, who appear to feel so virtuous, send a message to the terrorist groups that people in the West happily support violence, terrorism and the Jihad (holy war) not only against Israel and Jews, but also against Christians, all "infidels," Europe, the United States and the West.
- Although many Palestinians in the Gaza Strip support Hamas and its genocide, many others deeply oppose Hamas. In
  recent years, thousands have fled the Gaza Strip for Europe, where they hope for a better life -- like the one the
  demonstrators enjoy -- where they will not have to fear a knock on the door at two in the morning or have their government
  lodge rocket launchers next to their playgrounds and homes. A recent video shows a Gazan woman saying, "Those bastards
  at Hamas," before a man clamps his hand over her mouth.
- Countries and groups that commit terrorist attacks view the anti-Israel demonstrations as an extension of their war against the West.
- Meanwhile, the "pro-Palestinian" demonstrators masquerade as peace-seekers. In fact, they celebrate terrorism and imperialism -- Islamic imperialism -- that seeks forcibly to expand Iran's territorial gains not only throughout Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Iraq, but through Yemen, Saudi Arabia and South America on its way to the "Big Satan," the United States. The Iranians have already infiltrated Venezuela and met in Cuba...
- Apparently not realizing how destructive these peace-loving demonstrators are to themselves and their free way of life... they do not even... bother to think for a minute what life would actually be like for them if they lived in Gaza, Beirut, Damascus or Tehran. It is easy to be a demonstrator in London, Washington DC or New York.
- Despite all the claims to the contrary, these are not pro-Palestinian rallies. These are hate marches of people seeking the destruction of Israel and the West. Make no mistake: those who are now protesting *against* Israel are advocating *for* a totalitarian way of life, for poverty -- except for the leaders, of course -- and for the same sort of utopia now being relished by the citizens of Iran, North Korea, Afghanistan, Cuba, Venezuela... and Gaza.

Nov 13 – The "pro-Palestinian" demonstrations that have taken place in the US and some European countries over the past few days are all about hating Israel and Jews, not about helping the Palestinians – especially those who have been living under the rule of the Iran-backed Hamas terrorist group in the Gaza Strip since 2007.

People who are really pro-Palestinian would be demonstrating for them to have leaders that do not siphon off <u>billions</u> in international aid, or who <u>shoot at them</u> when they try to flee to safety, or who do not store weapons and ammunition in and near their <u>homes</u> and <u>schools</u>.

Instead of supporting the eradication of Israel, the demonstrators should be calling for the eradication of Hamas, whose members are holding two million Palestinians as hostages, while their leaders are living luxuriously in <a href="https://example.com/hotels-in-Qatar">hotels-in-Qatar</a>.

Instead of calling for genocide against Jews and the destruction of Israel, the "pro-Palestinian" demonstrators should be calling for the liberation of the Gaza Strip – from Hamas, which has brought a new *nakba* (catastrophe) on two million Palestinians living there, and whose people are finally starting to speak out about their despair over their own brutal leadership there.

Disgorging hateful messages against Israel does not make one "pro-Palestinian." For decades, Hamas and other radical Palestinian groups have engaged in continuous genocidal incitement and attacks against Israel. Has this helped the Palestinians in any way? Not even a bit.

The demonstrators in the US and some European countries have repeated lies against Israel without assigning one iota of blame to Hamas, or even to its mastermind, Iran.

Such demonstrations achieve only one thing: they embolden terror-masters such as Hamas, Al-Qaeda, Islamic State -- and an Iran that is on the threshold of having nuclear bombs with which to attack or blackmail the West.

These demonstrators, who appear to feel so virtuous, send a message to the terrorist groups that people in the West happily support violence, terrorism and the Jihad (holy war) not only against Israel and Jews, but also against Christians, all "infidels," Europe, the United States and the West.

Two days after Hamas's October 7 massacre -- complete with a baby baked alive in an oven, and other children burned alive or beheaded, as well as kidnappings and mass-murder -- "pro-Palestinian" demonstrators in New York's

Times Square waved Palestinian flags and chanted, "Resistance is justified", "Globalize the intifada", "Smash the settler Zionist state" and "From the river to the sea. Palestine will be free."





These demonstrators, who appear to feel so virtuous, send a message to the terrorist groups that people in the West happily support violence, terrorism and the Jihad (holy war) not only against Israel and Jews, but also against Christians, all "infidels," Europe, the United States and the West. Pictured: Demonstrators protest against Israel on the Brooklyn Bridge in New York City on November 7, 2023. (Photo by Kena Betankur/AFP via Getty Images)

Those who chant "From the [Jordan] river to the [Mediterranean] sea, Palestine will be free" are echoing Hamas's charter, which calls for the extermination of Israel and replacing it with an Islamic state:

"The land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf consecrated for future Muslim generations until Judgement Day. It, or any part of it, should not be given up. Neither a single Arab country nor all Arab countries, neither any king or president, not all the kings and presidents... possess the right to do that." (Article 11)

Gaza has, in fact, been completely free of Jews since 2005, when it was given -- unconditionally -- to the Gazans, so they could build a "Singapore on the Mediterranean." Instead, they built a terror state.

These "pro-Palestinian" demonstrators have not even faulted Hamas for starting the war. For the demonstrators, "it all started when Israel fired back."

If the "pro-Palestinian" demonstrators really want to help the Palestinians, they can start by denouncing the war crimes committed by Hamas -- against Jews, Christians and Muslims, on October 7.

If the "pro-Palestinian" demonstrators on the streets of New York, Washington and London really wanted to help the Palestinians, they would point their bloody finger at Hamas. They would be doing an enormous favor to the Palestinians who want to live in peace and security. Although many Palestinians in the Gaza Strip support Hamas and its genocide, many others deeply oppose Hamas. In recent years, thousands have fled the Gaza Strip for Europe, where they hope for a better life -- like the one the demonstrators enjoy -- where they will not have to fear a knock on the door at two in the morning or have their government lodge rocket launchers next to their playgrounds and homes. A recent video shows a Gazan woman saying, "Those bastards at Hamas,"

before a man clamps his hand over her mouth.

Why are the demonstrators ignoring the fact that Hamas has plunged the Gaza Strip into several wars with Israel since 2007? Why are the demonstrators ignoring the fact that Hamas has turned the Gaza Strip into

an arms depot and a base for global Jihad and terrorism? Why are they ignoring the fact that instead of building hospitals and schools, Hamas has been manufacturing weapons, building a vast network of tunnels for its men, and smuggling rockets and advanced weaponry into the Gaza Strip?



October 2023, Athens, Greece – Pro-Palestinian demonstration from PAME (All Workers Militant Front)

Where were the "pro-Palestinian" activists in the US, Canada and Europe when members of Hamas committed human rights violations against their own people -- forcing them to be in the line of fire so their dead bodies can be shown to television crews? Where were the "pro-Palestinians" activists when Hamas was <u>arresting</u>, torturing and murdering Palestinian journalists and human rights advocates? Where were the demonstrators when Hamas was beating and arresting <u>hundreds</u> of Palestinians who took to the streets over the past few years to protest the economic hardship and Hamas's financial corruption? Why are the <u>three top Hamas leaders</u> -- all billionaires -- living luxuriously in five-star hotels in Qatar? Where are the "pro-Palestinian" protestors for that? Those leading Hamas, a terrorist group, are evidently so pleased with the support they are receiving from the streets of Washington, New York and London that they saw fit to issue a statement thanking the anti-Israel demonstrators:

"We, in the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), applaud the mass movement, marches and solidarity events that took place... in various American cities and Western capitals," they <u>announced</u> in a statement in late October. Hamas called on the Western demonstrators to "escalate all forms of popular resistance [against Israel]." Hamas, in short, is calling on the Western demonstrators to join them as terrorists in their Jihad against Israel and Jews. Eventually it will also be against Christians and all "infidels". "First the Saturday people," the jihadi saying goes, "then the Sunday people."

The mullahs ruling Iran, with Hamas in tow, doubtless see the demonstrations in the US, Canada and Europe only as an act of solidarity with them, support for the October 7 massacre, and for just the first step of their plan: to become the hegemon of the Middle East, before "exporting the Revolution" worldwide.

Countries and groups that commit terrorist attacks view the anti-Israel demonstrations as an extension of their war against the West. In recent weeks, Iran has carried out at least 48 attacks on US troops in Syria and Iraq. More than 46 US servicemen have been wounded, many with traumatic brain injury. Since Biden took office, Iran has launched at least 131 attacks

against US troops in Syria and Iraq (83 before March; 48 after). These assaults seem to be part of a Russian-Iranian -- and lately Communist Chinese -- plan to drive the US out of the Middle East altogether,

perhaps so its oil will remain available just to them. A few US retaliatory pinprick strikes on unmanned Iranian weapons depots do not appear to have had a deterrent effect.

Meanwhile, the "pro-Palestinian" demonstrators masquerade as peace-seekers. In fact, they celebrate terrorism and imperialism -- Islamic imperialism -- that seeks forcibly to expand Iran's territorial gains not only throughout Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Iraq, but through Yemen, Saudi Arabia and South America on its way to the "Big Satan," the United States. The Iranians have already infiltrated Venezuela and met in Cuba to discuss "confront[ing] 'Yankee Imperialism."

Apparently not realizing how destructive these peace-loving demonstrators are to themselves and their free way of life -- economically, sexually and verbally -- they do not even seem to see their own deep-seated bigotry and antisemitism, or bother to think for a minute what life would actually be like for them if they lived in Gaza, Beirut, Damascus or Tehran. It is easy to be a demonstrator in London, Washington DC or New York.

Despite all the claims to the contrary, these are not pro-Palestinian rallies. These are hate marches of people seeking the destruction of Israel and the West. Make no mistake: those who are now protesting *against* Israel are advocating *for* a totalitarian way of life, for poverty -- except for the leaders, of course -- and for the same sort of utopia now being relished by the citizens of Iran, North Korea, Afghanistan, Cuba, Venezuela... and Gaza.

Bassam Tawil is a Muslim Arab based in the Middle East.

# Islamophobia no... Islamophobia a lot, Islamophobia dangerous

By Kostas Stoupas (Capital.gr)

Source (in Greek): https://www.defence-point.gr/news/islamofovia-ochi-islamolagneia-poly-islamovlakeia-epikindyni

Nov 16 – A few days ago, the former Commissioner of Greece at the European Commission and a political figure of the Center-Left, Mrs. Anna Diamantopoulou, gave some hope that the so-called democratic and constitutional arc, wakes up from the lethargy of indifference to the danger of Europe being destroyed and altered by alien crowds and cultures... Ms. Anna Diamantopoulou stated that Europe cannot integrate large Islamic communities, as, she said, they have "their own culture and their own theocratic approach". Mrs. Diamantopoulou also mentioned that the toughest anti-immigrant party at the moment is the Social Democratic Party of Denmark and that "demographics cannot be solved with immigration", while at another point of the speech, she wondered if "it is left-wing to come out and support the Hamas".

"A few days ago, I returned from a shocking and very difficult trip to Africa. I passed through three countries, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Ghana. They are three incredibly poor countries. 80% of the population is under 35 years old. Africa is experiencing a population explosion. Nigeria alone, in 2045 will have 400 million, more than Europe. All these countries have no prospects for development and are full of young people, who have nothing to do and nothing to eat. So what I will wish for is that in 100 years, Europe will not become dark-skinned by force", he said characteristically, causing embarrassment to those present and not".

Ms. Diamantopoulou's speech surprised the audience of the "Cycle of Ideas" conference where it took place, but also more widely, as rare political figures of the "mainstream" scene, even of a conservative or right-wing orientation, are publicly positioned throughout Europe and the West similarly, for fear of being labeled as xenophobic or Islamophobic... The constant riots and rampant crime in countries such as France, Belgium, and recently Sweden (but also others) which have opened their societies uncontrollably to immigration from especially Islamic countries, have begun to shock Europeans, who often look to far-right formations for a lifeline. However, the problem with most far-right formations is that apart from immigration, which calls for deportations and stricter entry criteria, they also have a more general political agenda against democratic values and institutions. They wish to "scissor" the independence of the Judiciary, independent authorities, and the press, which in Western democracies are institutions that limit the arbitrariness of the central authority and guarantee the functioning of the democratic state... The demographic shrinkage and aging of Europe and the West in combination with the demographic explosion of Africa and South and Central Asia, create the conditions for the arrival in Europe in the coming decades of hundreds of millions of immigrants with cultural idioms completely incompatible with Europe.

If Europe does not take strict measures to limit the inflows to only those regardless of race, color, and sex who wish to adopt its values and way of life, it will collapse amid cultural clashes and chaos. The countries of Europe must not allow at the level of districts, cities, and countries the accumulation of immigrants from incompatible cultures beyond a percentage of the local population. This follows from the experience of the last decades.

These are measures that will either be taken by the parties of the Democratic and Constitutional arc in Europe, preserving the characteristics of the democratic state and open society or will be taken by extreme

parties who seek democracy and will lead the West through ethnocratic and religious introversion to suicide... With competitors such as China, India, or the hordes of Islam, which add up to populations of billions, Europe and the West as a whole can survive through political, economic, military, and above all cultural osmosis and further integration of their nation-states.

The left of the West with its policy of open doors and open borders and Islamophobia seems to be "killing itself" for the second time in a century and this time it wants to drag the whole West down with it. The left, having lost its historical working-class subject, due to the shift of the economy to services and given the coming automation revolution, is trying to survive politically by appealing to immigrants and various sexual or other gendered and non-minorities, which it wishes to reduce on the central political stage. This causes fears and reactions in society which parties with far-right symbols try to exploit. This situation polarizes and divides Western societies, which weakens them...

# The Seine closed in Paris for seven days before the opening ceremony



Nov 25 – The Seine will be closed to maritime traffic in Paris for a week before the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games on July 26, 2024.

The Seine will be closed to maritime traffic in Paris during "about seven days" Before the opening ceremony of the Olympics on July 26, 2024, in particular for the preparations for this unprecedented event, for the first time outside a stadium, the prefecture of the Ilede-France region (Prif) announced on Friday.

This closure was decided, "for the sake of transparency and to allow river stakeholders to anticipate this constraint», indicated the Prif. Nearly 300 cruise ships p through the capital daily, not counting maritime transport, with significant grain traffic.

However, the authorities continue to exchange "with the different sectors in order to find solutions for their pursuit of their activities", added the Prif.

The opening ceremony of the Olympic Games must take place between the Pont d'Austerlitz and the Pont d'Iéna in Paris, but the perimeter of the closure of the Seine has not yet been decided, according to a source close to the negotiations.

The closing time should in particular be used for the last rehearsals of the ceremony but also for the installation of the stands to accommodate the 100,000 paying spectators on the lower guays of the Seine, according to this source.

For the moment, the number of spectators able to attend the ceremony free of charge on the high banks of the Seine has not yet been officially set. Although the figure of 400,000 has been circulating for several months, it could however be revised downwards, according to several sources.

The Minister of Sports Amélie Oudéa-Castéra ured on October 26 on BFM TV that "some answers" on the question of spectator gauges on the high quays of the Seine should be brought "in November".

The arm of the Seine which crosses the Olympic village in Seine-Saint-Denis will also be closed, but during the Olympics. The traffic will then be transferred to "a secondary arm», explained the director general of Voies navigables de France (VNF) at the beginning of October. A decided closure "For safety reasons", argued the general director of the organizing committee (Cojo) Etienne Thobois when signing an agreement with VNF.

Possible compensation linked to these closures is discussed and carried out by Cojo, explained Etienne Thobois. "The idea is to disrupt river activities as little as possible.", he urged.

# Security for next year's Olympic Games will include 15,000 French soldiers, according to Paris's military governor

Source: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-24/15-000-french-soldiers-security-operation-paris-olympics/103145426



Anti-terrorist personnel already on the ground will form part of a strong military presence in Paris for next year's Olympics. (Getty Images: Pierre Crom, file photo)

Nov 24 – France's military is planning to contribute 15,000 soldiers to the security operation for next year's Paris Olympics, an army general involved in the preparations said on Thursday.

The bulk of the military force — nearly 10,000 troops — will be deployed in the Paris region, where most Olympic events will be concentrated, said General Christophe Abad, the military governor of Paris who serves as military adviser to the French capital's police chief.

Military forces will also be employed for the Games as far as 15,000 kilometres away in Tahiti, where navy vessels will safeguard the venue there for Olympic surfing. In Paris, a temporary military camp for 5,000 troops will be

set up in a park in the south-east of the capital, putting the force close to the city's Olympic sites, Abad said. The security operation for the July 26 to August 11 Olympics, and the Paralympic Games that follow,



is unprecedented in scale for France. Tens of thousands of police officers and private security staff are also being deployed. New legislation has also allowed the temporary use next year of cameras combined with artificial intelligence software to scan for security problems. Critics fear the Olympic security will erode privacy and civil liberties permanently.

In the skies, the French military is also planning to deploy Reaper surveillance drones and AWACS airspace-monitoring planes, fighter jets, airborne refuelling planes and helicopters that can carry sharpshooters and equipment to disable drones.

The military force of 15,000 nationwide will incorporate 7,000 troops already deployed on anti-terrorism patrols at transport hubs and other busy or sensitive sites, including places of worship, Abad said.

The military could also be called upon to contribute additional troops if Paris Games organisers fall short in their efforts to recruit more private security staff.

The military's Olympic preparations include training exercises to hone its readiness for potential crises during the Games. Abad said that during war games this month, he and other officials tested their capabilities for dealing with a terrorist threat, a plane crash, an attack using drones, a severe heat wave and a chemical spill.

"For the opening ceremony, there is a specific protocol with the state and the Paris City Hall. We're confident that we're on track, that we will reach our goals," Paris 2024 Security director Bruno Le Ray told reporters on Thursday.

He added that the security budget of 320 million euros (\$532.24 million) was unchanged.

"The first risk is the terrorist risk. We've integrated it, unfortunately, in all security plans," said Thomas Collomb, security executive director for Paris 2024.

Collomb was deputy head of safety and security for official sites at the Euro 2016 soccer finals seven months after the November 2015 Islamist attacks which involved a simultaneous assault by gunmen and suicide bombers on entertainment venues and cafes in Paris. "Since 2015, the terrorist risk is being taken into account. Cyber threat is the other main risk," added Collomb.

"Drones are also a subject, armies have been facing that risk for a while now. It has been in the security plan for the Games since 2019."

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** It should be kept in mind that modern detonators can be programmed a year in advance to avoid last week/month detection seal of opening/closure ceremonies and venues. Closing Seine for a week will do little good regarding preventive security.

# When the Immigration bomb goes off... the West will mourn

By Kostas Stoupas

Source (in Greek): https://www.capital.gr/o-kostas-stoupas-grafei/3751391/i-metanasteutiki-bomba/

Nov 25 – Immigration is expected to shake many governments in Western democracies in the coming years, if appropriate measures are not taken in time. Also, immigration may alter democratic polities and the character of open societies. The world is alarmed by the increased crime that accompanies uncontrolled immigration. He is also concerned about the deterioration of local communities by the unruly increase in the number of immigrants from incompatible cultures (with different customs and an absence of disposition to respect local laws and customs). Many fear that the increased births of certain categories of immigrants may at some point in the future make them a minority and foreigners in their own country...

On the other hand, Western societies need immigrants. The same people who worry and vote for far-rights who promise to seal the borders to immigration, without adding new immigrants to the workforce risk being left without pensions and the necessary supply of cheap services. But immigrants also need the rich societies and economies of Europe and the West. According to Economist data, "Incomes in the European Union are 12 times higher than in sub-Saharan Africa. No wonder so many people want to move from poor countries to rich ones."

In a world without borders we would have the movement of tens or even hundreds of millions. Rich countries would sink and deteriorate, and it is likely that the poverty of sub-Saharan Africa would spread to Europe. A society is rich or poor primarily by its ability to provide security, opportunity, and open-access institutions that allow the fittest to find their way to the top. In the real world of Africa and Europe it is easier to win the lottery than to secure a visa to work in Europe. Unfortunately, the only solution is to either move illegally within Europe or take advantage of the international legal framework on refugees and asylum since the 1950s.

It is obvious that the illegal movement to Europe and the West is not primarily chosen by parents who want to ensure a better future for their children, but by people willing to risk their lives in exchange for profit and power. Every society has a proportion of people who are willing to take risks to get rich through work,



education and business, and people who are willing to take risks to get rich through crime. It is obvious that the risk takers of the second category are easier to choose to arrive at the risk of their lives in the rich West than to stay in an area where others do not have much to take away from them...

So Europe and the West must find a way to attract those who want to work to educate and raise their children with the values of the West and to exclude those who want to drain it parasitically by increasing crime. In light of this, the biggest part of the problem is not immigration but illegal immigration. In order to control illegal immigration there should be strict control at sea and land borders. No illegals should be able to be found and circulated within western countries. For there to be immigrants, however, Western countries will have to create reception and application control stations in areas outside the West.

Western countries should choose those they think can be integrated. In order to stop the citizens of Europe from worrying there should be strict border control and a way to quickly repatriate illegals and undesirables out of Europe. Italy's intention to create accommodation structures in Albania until the applications are checked is a mistake, because they will escape from the structures and move again illegally to the neighboring countries. So is a possible will of Germany to support such centers in Greece. Detention centers for illegal entrants into Europe must be in uninhabited border areas from which it will be difficult for them to escape and move within the union...

Europe and the West should make it clear that any illegal entrants will not be able to submit any application and will be swiftly deported. On the other hand, there should be structures outside Europe where they can submit applications for asylum or immigration which will be examined quickly and those selected will start adaptation procedures. Also, the EU, and each country separately, should set immigrant quotas on local populations, within limits that will determine that immigrants can be assimilated without threatening the balance of local societies. E.g. it is unacceptable in Greek schools to have classes where two-thirds are not even able to adequately know the language in which the lesson is being taught.

Respecting the customs of local societies and accepting the law should be a condition for those who want to come, work and live in the West. In western societies women have the same rights as men and this should be respected. Also, covering the face and body in a way that is offensive to human nature and the rights and obligations of the citizen should be prohibited and punishable by deportation... If the Western democracies do not immediately handle the burgeoning immigration crisis, the situation will be exploited by far-right formations and when they take power together with the anti-immigration agenda they will also impose restrictions on the independence of the judiciary, freedom of the press, religion, etc.

# **Growing Jihad on Churches in France**

### **Bv Raymond Ibrahim**

Source: https://www.meforum.org/65244/growing-jihad-on-churches-in-france

Nov 22 – Christian churches are under attack throughout Western Europe, with very recent examples from <u>Austria</u>, <u>Germany</u>, <u>Italy</u> and <u>Sweden</u>.

No Western nation, however, seems to experience as many attacks on its churches as France, once known as the "Eldest Daughter of the Church."

Investigative journalist Amy Mek tweeted on July 1, 2023:

"Attacks on Churches are the norm in France; two Churches a day are vandalized — they are being burned, demolished, and abandoned, and their adherents are being sacrificed on the altar of political correctness. Priests are under constant threat. At what point will France's open border politicians be held responsible?"

That last question inadvertently identifies the culprits — namely, migrants from the Muslim world, where attacks on churches are not abnormal.

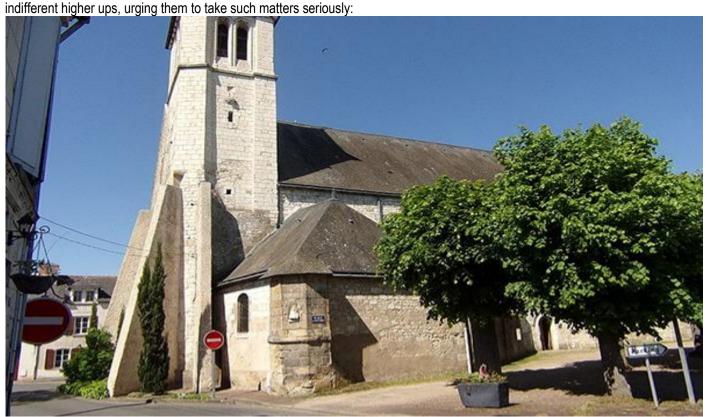
In July 2023, for instance, Muslims <u>attacked</u> and desecrated several churches in France, by breaking the doors and windows of one church and <u>spray-painting</u> anti-Jesus and pro-Muhammad graffiti on its walls. The men also torched at least two historic churches — a <u>16<sup>th</sup> century</u> church in Drosnay, and the <u>12<sup>th</sup> century</u> Saint-Georges De La Haye-Descartes church — after general riots prompted by the June 27 police shooting of Nahel Merzouk, a Muslim criminal.

Not only did French authorities pretend that these two heritage churches simply "caught fire" — "probably due to a <u>storm</u>" — but they insisted that it was the police killing that prompted otherwise peaceful Muslims to riot at all.

If this was the case, what does one make of the fact that Muslims have been attacking churches in France *for decades*? Below is a recent sampling of attacks that occurred *before* the June 27 shooting of Merzouk:

June 26: Saint-Lazare church, which stands near another church that was heavily vandalized by Muslims on July 5, was <u>desecrated and robbed</u>. June 20: A "gang of college students" <u>stormed</u> into the Saint Roch

Church in Nice, mockingly doused themselves with holy water, and began shouting "Allahu akbar," which, the <u>report</u> notes, is "regularly heard during Islamist attacks." The first deputy mayor of Nice, Anthony Borré, <u>responded</u> in a letter to his apparently indifferent higher upgaging them to take gueb metters earlies by



In July 2023, Muslims torched the 12<sup>th</sup> century Saint-Georges De La Haye church in Descartes, France. (Image source: Joël Thibault/Wikimedia Commons)

"Since October 29, 2020 and the Islamist attack on the Notre-Dame Basilica in our city [when another "Allahu akbar" yelling Muslim slaughtered two French women—one by beheading—and a man inside a church], you are not unaware of how traumatic it can be for our fellow citizens to hear such remarks within a church and the painful memories that they can revive. Faced with these attempts to destabilize society and with the attacks on our secular Republic, we must provide a strong and collective response."

June 23: Three Muslims, aged between 12 and 13, <u>barged</u> into Saint Joseph Church in Nice, during an afternoon mass, and also began shouting "Allahu akbar." Nice, it bears remembering, is also where another Muslim <u>murdered</u> 84 people in 2016.

June 12: After breaking into church property, a gang of Muslims — described only as a "group of young people" — savagely <u>beat</u> Fr. Joseph Eid of Notre-Dame-du-Liban parish and called him a "dirty Christian." While fleeing intervening passersby, they <u>spewed</u> other "anti-Christian insults."

Muslims also thrashed the 80-year-old Catholic priest of Saint Vincent de Paul in Saint-Étienne. After knocking Fr. Francis Palle to the ground, they continued beating and kicking the octogenarian, until he fell unconscious (last reported he was in critical condition). Although this attack occurred on June 30, three days after the police killing of Nahel Merzouk, the diocese <u>said</u> that it had nothing to do with the riots, but was, rather, standard fare.

June 3. The Church of Mailhac was heavily vandalized.

May 28: Several "unidentified" people broke into and <u>vandalized</u> the Saint-Laurent church in Cugnaux, which has a large Muslim presence: they defaced a crucifix, overturned candles onto the ground, and damaged icons — before setting the church aflame. A passerby, however, quickly intervened, including by calling the fire department which arrived swiftly and put out the flames. In response, Albert Sanchez, the mayor of Cugnaux, <u>called</u> for more "dialogue and understanding between the different religious and cultural communities of our city," since "diversity is our strength and our pride."

March 8: A Muslim migrant entered into the Saint-Louis church cemetery in Évreux and proceeded to break off and desecrate the crucifixes affixed to some 30 graves. May 4: "Long live Islam," as well as



Arabic writing, were <u>found</u> spray-painted on the walls of a church in Lieusaint in Seine-et-Marne. The <u>report</u> adds that "This is not the first time this church has been vandalized... Several statues had been damaged and knocked over."

March 16: A man, previously "on file for his Islamist radicalization," <u>stormed</u> the Saint-Hippolyte Church in Paris and disrupted its service. He also stole the church's six-foot-tall Plexiglas cross, which had supported a 400-year-old wooden Christ. It was later found nearby "smashed into many pieces," <u>said</u> police.

March 2: A man <u>described</u> as of an "African type," <u>vandalized</u> Saint-Eustache, one of the largest churches in Paris, in part by smashing the protective glass of an altar with a fire extinguisher. The report <u>notes</u> that "The suspect's modus operandi ... [is] comparable to that of the Saint-François-Xavier church [vandalism], where damage had been committed on Tuesday, February 28." While discussing these Paris church attacks, a March 17 <u>report</u> noted that a total of eight Parisian churches were vandalized or set on fire during the ten weeks between January and mid-March of 2023.

The above, as mentioned, are just a few examples: most attacks on churches in France are not even reported by local media. Investigative journalist Sonja Dahlmans offers more details:

"Crucifixes, organs, altars and other religious symbols are regularly destroyed or stolen [from the churches of France]. Statues of saints also suffer. In the church of Angers, seven statues of saints were beheaded or amputated in April this year. A statue of Mary was beheaded in the St. Martin's Church in Choicy-le-Roi. Stained glass windows of old churches are also regularly smashed by vandals, such as in Guerlesquin. Extreme violence was used last October in the Saint-Joseph Chapel in Saint-Pol-de-Léon. There, vandals smashed the church doors with an ax and smashed all the church windows. All crucifixes and other religious symbols were destroyed by the perpetrators.

"Church cemeteries and graves cannot escape vandals. In Velsy, this involved damaging and robbing 150 graves in June 2022. The crosses on the graves and other religious symbols were taken or destroyed by the perpetrators. Eighteen graves of the church in Rocquemont were destroyed in May of the same year. A statue of Mary at the Guignicourt-sur-Vence cemetery was stolen in August 2022."

It would seem that a full blown jihad has been declared on the churches of France, and the country's leadership is looking the other way.

A <u>map</u>, published by Christianophobie.fr, which marks with a red pin every spot where a church in France was attacked between just 2017-2018, looks like a war zone. Virtually the entire map of France is covered in red. Even Snopes, which presents itself as the final arbiter on what is real or fake news, admitted the accuracy of the map, while trying to minimize its findings:

"While this image [the map] is often shared as if it shows all of the churches that were 'destroyed' in France, this map actually documents a wide range of nefarious activity, such as vandalism, theft, and arson, that occurred at both churches and cemeteries over an apparent span of two years (not four), covering 2017 and 2018.

"It should also be noted that while this map does document some relatively serious crimes, such as arson or the toppling of church statues, many of these pins correspond to graffiti-related incidents. We also found one pin related to a person's simply interrupting a church service."

In other words, according to Snopes, having jihadist, anti-Christian graffiti spray-painted on a church, or having a church service interrupted by a Muslim intruder screaming "Allahu akbar," is not sufficiently "serious."

One wonders if they would be so casual if a Christian vandalized a mosque, or broke into a mosque while screaming Christian slogans?

It should, incidentally, be unsurprising that the official mainstream response to the jihad on French churches is one of feigned ignorance, as captured by one somewhat surreal *Newsweek* title: "Catholic Churches Are Being Desecrated Across France—and Officials Don't Know Why."

While this report does a decent job of summarizing the "spate of attacks against Catholic churches" — including through "arson," "vandalism," and "desecration" — the words "Muslim," "migrants," or even "Islamists" appear nowhere in the report. Rather, "anarchist and feminist groups," angry at churches because they are "a symbol of the patriarchy that needs to be dismantled," are alluded to. Meanwhile, even deductive reasoning makes clear that Muslims perpetrate the lion's share of attacks on churches. Dahlmans reports: "[A]ccording to a 2022 OSCE report, France is in the top five European countries with the most recorded anti-Christian hate crimes. The other countries in the top five are Spain, Germany, the United Kingdom and Sweden."

There is something else that these top five nations have in common: significantly large Muslim populations. Put differently, while Poland, Hungary and other Eastern European nations have their share of "anarchist and feminist groups," they have very few attacks on churches — and even fewer Muslims.

There are, of course, "practical" reasons why all of these Muslim attacks on French churches are massively obfuscated and dissembled. Imagine, for instance, how the tragic burning of the Notre Dame Cathedral in 2019 might be understood if it was common knowledge that countless churches in every corner of France



have been and continue to be under constant attack, including through arson, by that nation's significant Muslim population (hundreds of whom made it a point to gloat as Notre Dame went up in flames)?

**Raymond Ibrahim**, author of <u>Defenders of the West</u>, <u>Sword and Scimitar</u>, <u>Crucified Again</u>, and <u>The Al Qaeda Reader</u>, is the Distinguished Senior Shillman Fellow at the Gatestone Institute and the Judith Rosen Friedman Fellow at the Middle East Forum.

# **Iran's Controlled Escalation Against Israel, U.S.**

### By Jonathan Spyer

Source: https://www.meforum.org/65253/iran-controlled-escalation-against-israel-us

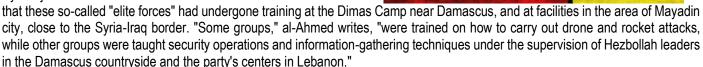
Nov 25 – The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), a research group associated with the Syrian opposition, this week reported that 700 pro-Iranian fighters have been deployed in the area adjoining the Golan Heights. The fighters, according to the SOHR report, are of "Syrian, Iraqi, Palestinian, and other nationalities." They have been deployed in the countryside of Quneitra Province, the area immediately adjacent to the Golan Heights, and in "western Rif Dimashq and parts of western Deraa countryside." The arrival of these fighters is the latest indication that Syria is becoming an active front in the war currently taking place in the Middle East. The framework for understanding this conflict in the Israeli and Western media remains that Israel is fighting Hamas in Gaza, while all sorts of minor distractions are taking place elsewhere.

The distractions, however, when taken together, are not that minor, and this view of the conflict should probably be amended.

Certainly, the various elements of the pro-Iran regional alliance have not yet launched an all-out multi-front assault on Israel and the US. But it is also the case that multiple elements of this alliance are now engaged against both countries on a near daily basis, across the region: from Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and the West Bank, as well as from Gaza.

### Iran, Hezbollah troops stationed in Syria

Regarding the latest events in Syria, SOHR reported that the 700 fighters deployed have been trained by the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and by Hezbollah. A report by Syrian journalist Samer al-Ahmad of the Middle East Institute noted



The SOHR's report contained a further interesting item – namely, that the deployment had been carried out "without any coordination with the military leadership of the Syrian regime." The Assad regime, indeed, according to several reports, has ordered its forces not to carry out any firing at the Golan – to the frustration, annoyance, and inevitable acquiescence of the regime's commanders on the ground. This latter item reflects a long-standing reality in Syria. The Assad regime, the self-proclaimed "victor" in the Syrian civil war of 2012-2019, is largely a hollow shell. Other, external powers exercise the real power in Syria.

THE REGIME, of course, does not control the entirety of Syria's territory. US-supported Kurds and Turkish-backed Islamists each maintain their own areas of control in the east and northwest of the country, respectively. But even within its own area of control, the regime is no longer at the center of events. Rather, it appears able only to look on helplessly as Iran and its proxy militias make use of Syrian territory for their own purposes.

The militia deployment toward the border has so far resulted only in sporadic attacks on Israel, most notably the drone that landed on the Tze'elim School in Eilat on November 9, which was fired from Syria by the Hezbollah-linked Imam Hussein Brigade.

The main action in which the Iran-led militias are engaged at present is the ongoing campaign of harassment of US forces in the country. This campaign also appears to be directed from within the area of exclusive Iranian control in Syria, and to be taking place Sixty-one attacks have taken place on US forces in Syria and Iraq since October 7. So far, the main bases in Syria targeted are located at the Conoco gas field and al-Omar oil field in Deir el Zur province, and positions at al-Shaddadi,

Tal Beydar, and Kharab al-Jir in Hasaka Province. The Tanf base on the Syria-Jordan border has also



been struck. So far, there has been only one fatality, a contractor who died of a heart attack during one of the incidents. More than 50 service people have been wounded, however, some of them with traumatic brain injuries.

Samer al-Ahmad and SOHR have reported on the formation of a joint operations center in Albukamal close to the Syrian-Iraqi border, the task of which is to coordinate the insurgency against the US. Albukamal lies deep within the area of de facto Iranian control, which extends from the Iraq-Syria border to the border with Israel. Under IRGC leadership, the center includes representatives of a variety of Iran-linked militias. These include Lebanese Hezbollah, a number of Iraqi Shiite militias affiliated with the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) in Iraq, and the Zeinabiyun and Fatemiyun militias. The latter comprise Pakistani and Afghan Shia recruits, respectively, and have long served as a reliable source of cannon fodder for the Iranians in the Syrian context. Regarding the Iraqis, the Kataib Hezbollah organization is emerging as the most significant and effective of the Iran-aligned forces.

According to al-Ahmad, the Albukamal operations center is set to coordinate militia activities against the US along three axes. These are, firstly, attacks using missiles and drones against US positions east of the Euphrates; secondly, similar operations directed against the Tanf base; thirdly, clandestine surveillance and other activities conducted on the ground east of the Euphrates, i.e. in the area of control of the US's Kurdish allies in the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

The third category will rely on the presence of pro-Iran militias in two of the cities in this area, namely Hasaka City and Qamishli. The forces carrying out these activities will be PMU elements and Lebanese Hezbollah-organized forces, under Haj Mahdi, the Hezbollah commander in Qamishli. All indications suggest that these forces will be used to maintain a low but constant level of harassment of <u>US forces in Syria</u> (with a parallel effort underway in Iraq) rather than to launch an all-out uprising. Such activities will be intended to bring about an American rethink of the feasibility and worth of maintaining its presence in both countries.

A US withdrawal from Syria would enable the rapid re-absorption of the 30 percent of the country currently under SDF control. While the official ruler of any reabsorbed territory would be Assad in Damascus, it is clear from the situation currently prevailing elsewhere in Syria that Iran-led forces would have primacy there. THE SITUATION in Syria, as in Iraq, Yemen, and its surrounding waterways, without the involvement of, and probably without prior consultation with, the Assad regime.

and indeed in Gaza, reflects the advantage enjoyed by an aggressor. If one side is pursuing a carefully thought out, long war strategy intended to conclude with the destruction or complete expulsion of its enemy, while the enemy simply wishes to maintain the status quo and to be left alone, then the initiative will by definition remain in the hands of the attacker.

This situation will be maintained at least until the attacked party concludes that reaction and defense are no longer adequate responses given the gravity of the threat. At that point, the attacked party will need to regain the initiative through bold and preemptive moves of its own. The US has so far hit back four times at the Iran-led controlled insurgency in Syria and Iraq. The latest counterstrike was against Kataib Hezbollah in Iraq, in the Jurf el-Sakr area on November 21. The current level of response is unlikely to be sufficient to achieve a clear decision.

**Jonathan Spyer** is director of research at the Middle East Forum and director of the Middle East Center for Reporting and Analysis. He is author of *Days of the Fall: A Reporter's Journey in the Syria and Iraq Wars* (2018).



# Hijacked Japanese Cargo Ship Puts Global Commerce at Risk

Source: https://japan-forward.com/editorial-hijacked-japanese-cargo-ship-puts-global-commerce-at-risk/

Nov 29 – A car carrier operated by NYK (Nippon Yusen KK) has been hijacked by the Houthis, a pro-Iranian militia group in Yemen. The takeover occurred while the ship was transiting the Red Sea west of the Arabian Peninsula.

A Bahamian-flagged vessel, the Galaxy Leader is owned by a British company. The car carrier had been chartered by NYK and was headed from Turkey to

India. Its 25 captured crew members were of Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Filipino, and other nationalities. Israeli media has also reported that an Israeli businessman is involved in the ownership of the ship.





Yemen's pro-Iranian Houthi militants hijacking the NYK Line-operated cargo ship. (© Houthi Media Center/Getty via Kyodo)

The Houthis issued a statement exulting that they had captured a "prize" in the form of an "Israeli ship." They also warned that any ship associated with <u>Israel</u> would be a target. The Houthis are reacting to the ongoing Israeli attack on Gaza.

### No Justification for Lawlessness

No matter what reason is offered, attacking and hijacking a civilian vessel cannot be justified. The Houthis may be one of the groups participating in the civil war in <u>Yemen</u>, but they are not a legitimate government and have no authority whatsoever to seize civilian vessels. The seizure of the vessel was an outrageous act of terrorism.



be made to bring about the release of the ship and crew.

The Galaxy Leader cargo ship is escorted by Houthi boats in the Red Sea in this photo released November 20, 2023. (©Houthi Military Media/Handout via REUTERS)

Chief Cabinet Secretary <u>Hirokazu Matsuno</u> told a press conference he could not fathom why the Houthis referred to the vessel in question as a "prize." However, he stressed that Japan "decisively condemned" the hijacking. He added that it was "working with relevant countries to secure the release of the ship and its crew as soon as possible."

Such a stance was to be expected. We hope all possible efforts will indeed



### **Risks to Global Commerce**

Current hostilities between Israel and the fundamentalist Islamic organization <u>Hamas</u> are having a severe impact on commerce. The Red Sea is a major artery for the <u>global economy</u>. Moreover, a ship operated by a Japanese company has suffered damage.

Since fighting broke out between Israel and Hamas in October, the Houthis have been attempting to attack Israel with cruise missiles and drones. <u>United States Navy</u> destroyers have also shot some of these drones down over the Red Sea.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has characterized the seizure of the *Galaxy Leader* as "one more act of terror by Iran." Although there is no evidence that Iran instigated the takeover of the ship, there is no question that Tehran has been providing the Houthis with military assistance. Moreover, it has a great deal of influence over the group.

Japan maintains good relations with <u>Iran</u>. Therefore, the <u>Kishida administration</u> should strongly urge Iran to use its influence to secure the release of the ship and crew and prevent additional illegal conduct by the Houthis.

We cannot allow terrorist acts to become widespread. "Freedom of navigation" in the Red Sea must be ensured. It is time to start examining the possibility of cooperation with the US and other military units deployed in the Red Sea. Additionally, the possibility of utilizing the Djibouti-based Self-Defense Forces should be considered.

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** As I wrote in a previous editorial, my concern is piracy in the Mediterranean Sea as a consequence of the Gaza war. It can be done and commercial ships are not prepared for that and national naval forces need some time to be engaged and SOPs to be followed etc., etc.

# **International Partnership Focuses on Insider Threats**

### By Kenny Vigil

Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20231130-international-partnership-focuses-on-insider-threats

Nov 30 – Insider threats can take many forms. They are real, and if not identified, they can be costly and damaging.

In an event aimed at counteracting such threats, in September <u>Sandia</u> hosted about 45 individuals who work at nuclear and radiological sites around the world, as well as industry regulators, for a weeklong workshop. The participants represented more than 20 countries.

As part of the workshop, participants toured the Nuclear Security Technology Complex, a mock nuclear reactor site. They observed scenarios representing risks of insider threats, including situations where proper procedures and protocols were not followed. Participants then held small group discussions to identify what went wrong.

They discussed areas of improvement for the scenarios and how they might apply better practices in their own facilities.

The workshop was part of the International Atomic Energy Agency Information Circular 908 Working Group, which comprises various organizations from around the world. The U.S. and Belgium, the co-chairs of the working group, teamed up to host the event at Sandia ahead of the <u>2024 International Symposium on Mitigating Insider Threats</u>, which will be held in Brussels, Belgium, March 5-7, 2024.

"This is the first Information Circular 908 workshop focused on creating a community of practice for insider threat mitigation practitioners," said Lauren Lockett, who works in global security at Sandia. "Sandia is uniquely positioned to host events like this due to the wide variety of expertise internally and externally through partnerships and the testing and training facilities that mimic real-world nuclear facility environments."

Before the walkthrough of the Nuclear Security Technology Complex, participants attended a series of seminars. Topics included trustworthiness and reliability of employees working in nuclear and radiological facilities, physical protection and cybersecurity. Presenters represented NNSA, Sandia, other U.S. national labs and government organizations, Belgium, Canada, Hungary and Japan.

The workshop was held to coincide with <u>Insider Threat Awareness Month</u>. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, insiders can pose a significant threat to nuclear or radiological security because they have more access, authority and knowledge than outsiders to bypass dedicated nuclear and radiological security elements.

"Participants have access to the tools, exercises and demonstrations presented at this workshop to facilitate discussions in their own facilities around insider threats and best practices, make assessments, and address the unique issues they may face," Lauren said. In an effort to boost awareness about insider threats, the <a href="Center for Development of Security Excellence">Center for Development of Security Excellence</a> has published case studies about real-life security events.

Kenny Vigil is with the Media Relations team at Sandia National Laboratories.

### Stop Venezuela's Aggression - Before It Creates a War in the Americas

Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20231130-stop-venezuelas-aggression-before-it-creates-a-war-in-the-americas



Nov 30 – Little noted between the headlines about the Hamas-Israel War, or the Russia-Ukraine War is a similar act of territorial aggression being ginned-up by the socialist Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela against the small neighboring country of Guyana. Venezuela - once the richest country in South America - has collapsed. 24 years of "socialism" and "kleptocracy" under the dictatorships of Hugo Chavez and his successor Nicolas Maduro have literally destroyed the country, with widespread starvation, poverty, malnutrition and rampant street crime.

Eight million people - of Venezuela's 25 million people - have now fled the country as refugees. To the US, Mexico, Colombia and neighboring Guyana. That is 25% of the country - now refugees - many now living in overseas tent cities as Migrants in places like NYC.

As a ploy to distract from his country's domestic collapse, Venezuela's dictator Nicolas Maduro - following the Putin and Hamas play-book - is suddenly demanding that neighboring Guyana "surrender" 2/3 of its territory - the entire western region called **Essequibo** - to him.

The border between Guyana and Venezuela was long ago settled - by a 1899 International Boundary Commission - that mapped and demarcated the border. But that doesn't bother Maduro. Guyana has found oil offshore, and Maduro wants to get his hands on it.

Venezuela is - or was - itself an oil-rich country. But Venezuela's oil production has collapsed due to the kleptocracy and mismanagement of Maduro and his regime, who has larded-up the oil workforce with his political patronage flunkies. They steal the oil revenues, and pilfer and sell-off the drilling equipment. Venezuela once produced 3,400,000 barrels of oil per day - as recently as 1997. Now it averages just 750,000 barrels per day. By contrast, Guyana, which produced no oil - zero - just four years ago, is now producing 400,000 barrels per day. And that is

projected to increase to over 2,000,000 barrels per day by 2028. That is what Maduro is after.

### ICI C2BRNE DIARY - December 2023

The US, Brazil, Colombia, CARICOM, the UK, and France (which owns nearby French Guiana) have all sent diplomatic and military missions to Guyana to show military support - and have warned Maduro to back-off.

But Maduro is ginning-up the political pressure - holding a sham "referendum" on December 3rd to claim 2/3 of the neighboring country. He's defied the World Court, telling the Court, he ignores it. Maduro's continued political aggression can only lead to war - and a war in the Caribbean - in America's backyard.

That is why the Biden administration - and the US Congress - must warn-off Maduro in the strongest possible terms. If Maduro knows that aggression will be met with resolute counterforce, he can be deterred.

We don't need a Putin or Hamas - or a war - in the Caribbean.

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** Do not forget the strong presence of Hezbollah in Latin America.

# **Greek NYPD Commander Retires Dancing Away to Greek Tunes**

By Tasos Kokkinidis

Source: https://greekreporter.com/2023/12/01/greek-nypd-commander-retires-dancing-away-to-greek-tunes/



Dec 01 – Greek NYPD commander John Pappas celebrated his retirement after a distibguished career as a police officer with Greek songs and dance outside his Transit K9 Unit on Thursday.

It was a fitting farewell for a man who wore many hats – Transit cop, canine handler, and proud American of Greek heritage. After a vaunted 26 years of service to New York, colleagues, friends, and family were there to wish him the very best in retirement.



### **Greek NYPD Commander shares traumatic moments**

Fueled by his experiences with 9/11, Lieutenant John Pappas, Canine Commanding Officer with New York City Police Department turned the ravages of the World Trade Center terrorist attacks into his unwavering motivation for attaining expertise in advanced counter terrorism tactics and deployments.

"When September 11th happened, we were very busy. We were caught up in the adrenaline rush, so it was a mix of emotions. There was anger, there was fear, there was ignorance and that gave birth to hatred on my part," he told the Widows, Orphans and Disabled Firefighter's Fund (WODFF) recently. "It affected me in a profound way."

Lieutenant Pappas says he realized those negative feelings needed to be addressed and along with many police officers, he sought treatment. He and others chose to get therapy away from the job.

"If you told the job that you had an issue, the way they reacted 21 years ago, they would take your guns away. They would put you on modified assignment and there was almost like a punishment."

After being tasked with creating a specialized Transit Bureau Canine Unit, the largest canine unit in the NYPD, Lieutenant Pappas became the commander of a highly-trained team of 54 handlers, each paired with their own K9.

The unit performs a proactive, pedestrian and rail-based patrol, in order to deter, detect, respond and mitigate an attack in the most dense urban environment in the Western Hemisphere, the New York City Transit System.

That means, "policing the busiest ferry in America....the busiest train service in America....the busiest bus service, and the oftenoverlooked busiest tram in America. So, anything that moves people is my specialty," he told WODFF.

One of the more traumatic moments in his illustrious career was when Greek American NYPD Officer <u>Anastasios Tsakos</u>, was killed in the line of duty in 2021.

"We will miss him immensely," <u>said Pappas</u>, who was close friends with Tsakos, whom he called Tasos, for 14 years. They met through the St. Paul Society, an Hellenic and Eastern Orthodox Christian Society made up of mostly Greek officers. "He was a very loving man to his friends, his family, his children," Pappas said in an interview with CBS. "And he gave of himself, and he wanted no recognition in return. That's the kind of guy he was."

# It's Time to Reconsider Turkey's NATO Membership

By **Sinan Ciddi**, an associate professor of national security studies at Marine Corps University and a nonresident senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.



Dec 06 – Joining NATO was the best foreign-policy pursuit that Turkey ever initiated in its existence as a republic. During the Cold War, its membership in the alliance kept Turkey from being overrun by the Soviet Union and helped provide space for its economic development as a Western ally.

Why, then, is the alliance constantly having to grapple with an uncooperative and at times even pugilistic Turkish leader in President Recep Tayyip Erdogan? It seems that, in every instance, Erdogan is devoted to undermining the trans-Atlantic alliance. Is it time for NATO to reconsider Turkey's membership?

It was not always like this. Turkish diplomats often like to remind their international counterparts that Turkey lives in a difficult neighborhood and the maintenance of its sovereignty is a testament to the skill of generations of Turkish statesmen who worked tirelessly to keep Ankara safe.

## Robert Jenrick accuses Rishi Sunak of breaking his word on deportations

Source: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/dec/08/robert-jenrick-accuses-rishi-sunak-of-breaking-his-word-on-deportations



De 09 – Former immigration minister says Rwanda bill will fail to end legal challenges to policy of removing people who cross Channel in small boats.

Robert Jenrick has accused the prime minister of failing to keep his word "to do whatever it takes" to "stop the boats".

The former immigration minister <u>quit his role</u> on Wednesday just hours after Rishi Sunak tabled a bill to save his Rwanda deportation policy.

Jenrick stood down after it was revealed that the legislation did not allow the government to override the international laws that have stopped it sending asylum seekers to central Africa. Rwanda had said it would pull out of the deal if the UK ignored international law and up to 10 ministers had indicated they could resign if the bill did so.

In an article for the Daily Telegraph, the MP for Newark in Nottinghamshire claimed that when he was appointed in October 2022, the Home Office was "beleaguered", with the UK "beyond breaking point" due to the number of crossings of small boats in the Channel.

He said that was compounded by the "indefensible" and "farcical" situation of hotels accommodating asylum seekers.

Jenrick wrote: "The prime minister was right, therefore, to promise to do whatever it takes to end this farce. And, until Wednesday, he had kept his word."

He added that Sunak was right to argue the new Rwanda bill went further than the previous legislation, however he said that if passed it would still fail to end the "merry-go-round of legal challenges that prevent small boat arrivals being swiftly removed in sufficient numbers to create a meaningful deterrent".

Section four of the bill allows people to lodge challenges against their individual deportation to Rwanda. Jenrick wrote: "Backlogs will likely build, and cases that would at best take months to resolve will be stayed considerably longer. Injunctions will likely follow.

"And we will begin losing bail claims, forcing us to release people from detention. People will of course abscond and disappear into communities.

"The idea, therefore, that this bill will guarantee all those arriving are detained and swiftly removed is for the birds.

"The only bill capable of delivering that is a bill that guarantees removal within days, not months, of arrival by blocking off individual challenges that would otherwise prevent that."

Jenrick wrote that he also believes that integrating people from different countries into British society is "impossible" at the current levels of immigration.

"GP services and hospitals do not grow on trees," he wrote. "Integration is impossible if you let in over 1.2 million new people as we have done over the last two years."

The Rwanda (asylum and immigration) bill stopped short of leaving the European convention on human rights and does not include the "notwithstanding clauses" that would allow ministers to circumvent the ECHR and other international treaties.

The legislation, which must be voted on by parliament, gives ministers the powers to disregard sections of the Human Rights Act. The prime minister told an emergency Downing Street press conference on Thursday that <u>he would "finish the job"</u> of getting his controversial deportation plan off the ground despite criticism from the Tory right and anxiety among centrist MPs.

# Do Christians Belong in Southeast Asia? Pew Polled Buddhists and Muslims



[UPDATED] New religion survey of 13,000 adults across six nations examines conversion, karma, and compatibility with national identity.

# Muslim pupils 'offended' by Renaissance painting of nudes to be disciplined

Source: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/12/12/france-issou-muslim-students-offended-nudes-painting/

Dec 12 – Muslim pupils who expressed outrage after their teacher presented a Renaissance painting of nude women in class will be disciplined, France's education minister has pledged.

A French teacher at the multicultural Jacques-Cartier college showed students the painting Diana and Actaeon by the Italian artist Giuseppe Cesari, which portrays a Greek mythology story in which the hunter Actaeon sees the goddess Diana and her nymphs are bathing.

The work, which depicts a naked Diana and four female companions, is held at the Louvre museum in Paris.

Sophie Vénétitay, secretary general of the Snes-FSU secondary school teachers' union, said: "During a French class, a colleague showed a 17th-century painting that showed naked women."

"Some students averted their gaze, felt offended, said they were shocked," said Ms Vénétitay, adding that "some also alleged the teacher made racist comments" during a class discussion.

A pupil's parent sent an email to the school director saying that his son was prevented from speaking during that discussion and that he would file a complaint.

"We know well that methods like that can lead to a tragedy," Ms Vénétitay told BFMTV news. "We saw it in the <u>murder of Samuel</u> Paty. Our colleagues feel threatened and in danger."

Teachers at the Issou school said that pupils admitted lying about events in their art class but that the damage had been done.



Students were shown the painting Diana and Actaeon by the Italian artist Giuseppe Cesari Credit: HERITAGE IMAGES/HULTON FINE ART COLLECTION

"We're dealing with vindictive parents who prefer to believe their children than us," they said. Gabriel Attal, the education minister, visited the school in person on Monday and later said that a disciplinary procedure would be launched "against the students who are responsible for this situation and who have also admitted the facts" A team would also be deployed to the school to ensure it adhered to the "values of the republic", he said.

Staff at the Jacques-Cartier middle school in Issou, west of Paris, refused to work on Monday, saying they feared for their safety given the <u>recent murders of two</u> teachers by jihadi terrorists.

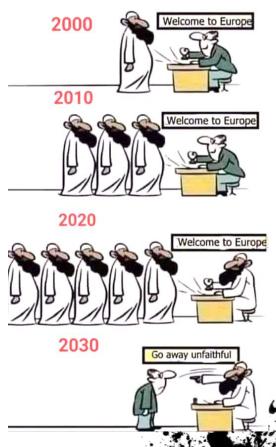
<u>Dominique Bernard was stabbed to death</u> by a Muslim man in his school's playground in the northern town of Arras in October.

In 2020 a civics teacher, <u>Samuel Paty was stabbed and beheaded</u> by a terrorist in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, 12 miles from Issou, after he showed his pupils a caricature of Mohammed in a class on free speech.

In an email sent to parents on Friday, teachers said they were exercising their right to stay away from classrooms over the "particularly difficult situation" and "an increase in cases of violence" as their daily reality.

### Deteriorating discipline at the school

The school's head teacher recently asked the education ministry for more staff and resources to deal with deteriorating discipline at the school, saying that fights and death threats and threats of rape had become common among pupils.



"We feel we are clearly in danger. We are supported by our direct superiors but not from higher up. This is a real call for help," said one teacher.

Last week <u>a Paris court convicted six teenagers</u> over their role in events that led to the beheading of Mr Paty, who was their teacher at the middle school in Conflans when he was killed by Abdoullakh Anzorov, an 18-year-old of Chechen origin.

In another sign of school-religion tensions, the state this week said it would withdraw funding for the country's biggest state-subsidised Muslim high school. In its teaching of Muslim ethics, the Averroes school, in Lille, was found to be violating French republican values. On Tuesday, Jordan Bardella, leader of the hard-Right National Rally party, warned that "freedom of expression is under threat in France from an all-conquering political Islam that is imposing on our society its laws, its way of life and its prohibitions".

# **Stricter French Immigration Bill Causes Uproar**

### By Lisa Louis

Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20231212-stricter-french-immigration-bill-causes-uproar

Dec 12 – Thousands of people marched in the streets near Montparnasse train station in southern Paris on a recent Sunday afternoon. They were holding signs proclaiming their opposition to the "Darmanin law," named after France's interior minister, Gerald Darmanin. Other placards said "Immigration is not a problem — racism is." Right at the front of the group, a megaphone in hand, was Ahmada Siby. The 33-year-old Malian arrived in France almost five years ago. Benefiting from a legal loophole, he has been using other people's papers to work as a cleaner, a chambermaid and, lately, a dishwasher.

### "We Are Doing All the Dirty Work'

Most of us undocumented immigrants are using this method, but it means we are paying social insurance fees and taxes without benefiting from services such as regular public health care like French citizens," he told DW. "President Emmanuel Macron's government treats us as if we were nothing, although we're doing all the dirty work — at construction sites, including the ones for the <u>Paris Olympics next summer</u>, in restaurants and as cleaners," he added. That's why Siby and others have banded together to protest the bill, which France's government said is a compromise including left-wing and <u>right-wing</u> measures.

### Deportations Easier, Family Reunification Harder

The draft law is set to be discussed in the National Assembly, France's lower house of parliament, starting on December 11, and could enter into force early next year. The final version of the immigration bill still needs to be pinned down, but some details are already known. The new bill is likely to fast-track asylum procedures and shorten delays for appeals, make family reunification more complicated and restrict the possibility to come to France for medical treatment. Changes also include the option of deporting people who were younger than 13 when they came to France, and deporting foreign parents whose children have French citizenship.

Paris was planning to create a one-year green card for people working in sectors with a labor shortage. But as it stands now, the decisions on these one-year permits have been left up to local authorities.

Interior Minister Darmanin brought the immigration reform bill into the Senate, but France's upper house of parliament, which has a center-right majority, recently toughened the draft considerably. And the government is expected to keep some of these changes to get the bill through the National Assembly. Macron's Renaissance party and its allies don't have an absolute majority there, and need the support of the conservative Republicans.

Since a recent <u>terror attack by a Russian immigrant on French teacher Dominique Bernard</u> in the northern town of Arras, the government has presented the law mostly as a safeguard against unwanted immigration and terrorism. Migrants, <u>refugees</u> and aid organizations are worried the new rules could lead to more stigmatization and discrimination.

### France "Passing a New Threshold of Toughness"

Lise Faron from Paris-based Cimade, an NGO providing support for refugees and migrants, is among those who are deeply concerned by the new bill. "The government had promised a balanced bill, and yet, the new rules will almost exclusively restrict immigrants' rights and make it more complicated for them to get legalized, which will result in even more undocumented migrants," she told DW. "France has voted through many immigration bills, but it feels like we are passing a new threshold of toughness with this one — for example by making it easier to expel foreign parents of French children, which was beforehand only possible if they had committed serious crimes," she added. For Vincent Tiberi, a political sociology professor at University

Sciences Po Bordeaux, the draft law reflects a general shift to the right in the political debate. "Most French

politicians are depicting immigrants as a burden and a threat. They completely forget that many migrants, also of later generations, are contributing a whole lot to our society," he told DW.

Tiberj thinks mainstream politicians are out to grab <u>right-wing votes</u>. Far-right party Rassemblement National is predicted to come first in next June's European Parliament elections, according to recent polls. "And yet, parties such as Renaissance should know this strategy doesn't work — it only legitimizes <u>far-right movements</u> and helps them gain even more ground," he said.

### Will New Immigration Rules Have an Impact?

Alexis Izard, Renaissance parliamentarian for the department of Essonne just south of Paris, said the final bill will still be balanced. "Every year, we need to expel about 4,000 illegal immigrants who have committed crimes, and that will be possible with this new law," he told DW, adding that deportation procedures would take one instead of two years after the changes.

"At the same time, we want to attract those who come here and work. This will be a highly efficient law," Izard said. Herve Le Bras, historian and demographer at the Paris-based School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences EHESS, begs to differ on that last point. He said none of the more than 100 other immigration laws since 1945 have been effective.

"The bill is completely useless and will have practically no impact on the number of migrants coming in per year. It only gives politicians, from the far-right to the far-left, a platform to express their stance," he said in a DW interview.

"If you look at the immigration figures under past governments, you'll see that they are uncorrelated to politics," he said.

Alain Fontaine, owner of the restaurant Le Mesturet in central Paris and head of French Association of Master Restaurateurs, is still hoping the initially planned one-year green card will be put back in and even extended. "Bars and restaurants won't be able to function without foreign workers who represent about a quarter of our workforce," he told DW. Some 12 out of his own 27 employees are foreigners. "We need immigrants — also since our own youth prefer to work in the digital sector or jobs linked to the protection of the environment." he said. "They no longer want to do the tough jobs."

### **Fight for a Better Future Continues**

Malian immigrant Ahmada Siby doesn't think the automatic one-year green card, even if prolonged, would be the right way forward. "It would enshrine modern slavery into law, as we would need to work in that one sector to keep it. You'd still be at the boss's mercy," he said, sitting on his bed in a 15-square-meter (161-square-foot) room in the suburb of Montreuil east of Paris, a studio flat he's sharing with an uncle and a cousin. "We want the government to legalize all of us, so that we can choose the job we'd like to do," he added. Then, Siby looked at pictures of himself five years ago, after he had reached Spain from Morocco on a small inflatable boat. He thinks of the crossing, which took almost a whole day, as "the most difficult moment in my life." Everyone on board almost died. "Once you've survived this, you don't just give up," Siby said. "I'm determined to fight for a better future."

**Lisa Louis** is a roving freelance *TV*, radio, and print journalist. This <u>article</u> was edited by Carla Bleiker, and it is published courtesy of Deutsche Welle (*DW*).

# **Are Borders Back in Europe?**

### By Todd Bensman

Source: https://www.meforum.org/65344/are-borders-back-in-europe

Dec 12 – Among the Syrians, Moroccans, and Algerians thronging the United Nations' Camp Lipa in northwestern Bosnia, I met a young Afghan man on his way to England who typified one potential problem Europe is facing amid powerfully resurgent mass illegal immigration.

The young man said in broken English that he'd not fled the Taliban, identified by the <u>U.S. Treasury Department</u> as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist Group. As a matter of fact, he carried his admiration for the Islamic militants on his quest for good-paying work in England. "Taliban good! They are good Muslim people, and I am Muslim," the immigrant said with a thumbs up gesture, when asked what he thinks of Afghan's rulers. "Very good."

Enthusiasm for the Taliban is but one troubling indicator of what's on the way to Europe these days amid expanding crowds of young male Afghans, Algerians, Tunisians, Moroccans, Syrians, Turks, and Pakistanis. They have put Europe on trajectory to match the 2014-2016 mass migration cataclysm of nearly three million, among them many dozens of violent terrorists. Huge numbers came over the so-called "Western Balkans Route" from Turkey, through Croatia and Serbia, into Hungary—until

Hungary shut it down with a long fence in 2015. But big traffic on the Balkan Route is swelling again for

new reasons, and so too is an epic political battle among the Union's 27 members about how to address it this time.



Oddly, these developments have not triggered much interest in the United States, where a mass migration crisis at the Mexican border is now completing its third year, with nearly five million people in the country. But they very much should.

Europe's approach to its mass migration crisis warrants American attention and close study, if for no other reason than that ideas for addressing common problems really matter right now. Candidates running for high office in the 2024 elections both in Europe and in the United States, including for

president, may adopt, reject, or at least consider a raft of interesting policy ideas the E.U. member states are batting around. This is also an opportunity for American campaigners to take cues from how European electorates are falling on such a similar issue. (Hint: they're all moving to the restrictionist Right.) Here's a primer.

### **Europe's New Glowstick**

Even the most liberal progressives of the E.U. states recoiled—hard—at what they had wrought by triggering the 2014-2016 mass migration crisis, which began when Germany's Angela Merkel and other leaders agreed, on moral principal, to take in several million mostly Muslim Syrian war refugees (along with hundreds of thousands of economic immigrants who tagged along with them). Hundreds of thousands came up the Balkans Route.

As in the United States, those immigrants were (and still are) irresistibly attracted to lengthy asylum-claim processes that let them live in rich countries for years on generous welfare benefits with no real threat of deportation.

In 2015, the right-leaning Hungarian government of Viktor Orbán almost single-handedly shut down the route after 400,000 had gushed through in just a few months, by building a tightly patrolled 150-mile electric fence on its borders with Serbia and Croatia. When the migrant flow diverted west to avoid the Hungarian structure, Slovenia, Austria and Slovakia built their own border fences, forcing Croatia and Serbia—stuck with the hot potato—to send those trapped behind them back south into Bosnia and Macedonia, which soon built its own border fence on the Greek border. All that pretty much put the Balkans Route out of commission.

As for the other sea routes: terror attacks, unfamiliar crime waves, riots, and assimilation resistance prompted more liberal governments to shut them down. The E.U., for instance, <u>paid Turkey</u> and some proxy North African nations (<u>and violent militias</u>) billions of Euros to stop and block immigrants. All of it brought the numbers back to pre-crisis norms. <u>Frontex reports show</u> that the 1.8 million "detections" at E.U. external borders recorded during the height of 2015's crisis fell to 204,000 for 2017, to 123,000 in 2019, and <u>124,000 after Covid</u> in 2021.

But 2022 and 2023 brought two big developments that changed everything.

On January 1, Croatia joined the E.U.'s borderless "Schengen Zone," which eliminated Croatia's border controls with Serbia (already in the zone) and Slovenia. Secondly, Serbia ended visa requirements on countries that refused to recognize Kosovo.

Suddenly, illegal immigrants from places like Cuba, Ecuador, and India flooded into Serbia while others came in from Turkey and Greece. All knew they could take highways straight into Croatia and then on through Croatia's newly abandoned land ports with Slovenia, finding no uniformed guards there to check papers. The way was suddenly clear for them to continue on without checks into more prosperous western European countries and file for asylum and public welfare, then live indefinitely with minimal threat of deportation. "This route became like a glow stick, the message that this is the most viable route and that this is what you should try,"

said Arpad Parducz, a Balkans specialist and researcher for the Budapest-based Mathias Corvinus Collegium educational institute. "They are moving toward it because once they're in Schengen they are really hard to remove because the EU's deportation schemes are very lacking." "Irregular" crossings over the E.U.'s external borders hit 330,000 with more than 962,000 asylum claims lodged in 2022—the highest



since the 2016 crisis, <u>Frontex reported</u>. The Balkans Route accounted for more than half of these numbers, with the rest crossing the Mediterranean to Italy or Spain. <u>Another 331,000 crossed</u> in the first ten months of 2023, the highest total for that period since the 2015 crisis. These developments have set off an E.U.-wide fight over what to do about it this time. Fractious E.U. members are in the throes of hammering out a union-wide strategy dubbed the "<u>New Pact on Migration and Asylum</u>."

Europe's ideas aren't fully baked yet. But this presents a natural moment for American candidates and policymakers to wake up and consider if European ideas might work with voters and eventually to close down the U.S.-Mexico border.

### What America Should Watch

The new crisis has scared liberal European governments into taking what <u>Foreign Policy Magazine called</u> "increasingly radical positions" to stave off a loss of power in next year's elections to right-wing parties that advocate migration-deterring policies. Voter support for many of those parties <u>is soaring</u> and leading to uncharacteristically tough border policies, <u>The Washington Post</u> reported. For starters, E.U. leaders successfully pressured Serbia (on threat of withdrawing some of its E.U. candidate privileges) to reinstitute visa restrictions. It did. They also pressured for a Croatian police surge along their border with Bosnia to catch immigrants and push them back. But inconsistent enforcement and unilateralism among the members has always worked to the benefit of migrants in Europe. Croatia's closest E.U. neighbor, Slovenia, just got a new liberal government, which <u>started sending the message that it welcomes</u> all comers and would even dismantle its border fence. The Slovenia lure has thwarted the crackdowns and pushbacks. It drove the immigrants to human smugglers working to move them across a narrow stretch of wooded, tough Croatian territory that separates Bosnia from the undefended Slovenian border.

Croatian police driving paddy wagons have saturated the narrow territory, hunting smugglers and immigrants with paddy wagons to be driven, as one cop reluctantly admitted, to a holding center in a tiny out-of-sight village called Dugi Dol for return to Bosnia.

None of the officers would talk on the record about these operations, smarting from <u>intense media fire</u> for their alleged brutality. But in Sarajevo, I ran across large groups of young Syrian men whose smugglers were transitioning them from one set of cars to taxis at a highway gas station. The smugglers then demanded my phone to delete the photos, but I refused and drove away.

It's unclear how well the operation is working to bring down the politically troublesome numbers. In one visible testament, a hard-used van with windows painted black stood abandoned where it came to rest after a police chase opposite the Bosnian border town of Velika Kladusa, a smuggling hotspot. The windows had been painted black on the inside, and the seatless interior was strewn with packaged food and bottled soda, much of it not consumed. A police officer said everyone inside bailed out and ran but were all caught. Additionally, Slovenia, Austria, and ten other E.U. countries <a href="supposedly instituted random border checkpoints">supposedly instituted random border checkpoints</a> in their Schengen Zone areas to intercept smuggler trucks and cars. But none of these countries have ever let on whether they were deporting anyone they caught. If Slovenia were serious about standing up checkpoints, its 2015 fence would come in handy right now. But a tour of the structure showed it to be full of unpatrolled breaches and gaps. Anyone can drive through gates left open and unattended. Back in Bosnia's Camp Lipa one recent night, the young men all knew Slovenia was the place to reach. They formed groups outside the camp and prepared to head out on foot toward the Croatia border, having restocked on supplies and money at camp stores.

When asked about the Croatian police, almost everyone in one group of nine young backpackers chuckled as they gesticulated with hands how they would go over, under, and around Croatian interceptors. "No problem!!" almost everyone in the group shouted, as they all turned and disappeared into the dark forest chanting, "Inshallah! Inshallah!" This gap in coordinated, consistent enforcement or leniency from one E.U. country to the next reflects the very same American-style, Left-Right partisan approaches that always benefit immigrants who understand how to move across such checkerboards. Right now, key policy features of the developing Pact on Migration and Asylum, which drafters hope will be approved by E.U. legislative bodies and then the member states before elections next year, is at risk of becoming just such a patchwork of inconsistent enforcement. But some of what's there might deter immigration if choice were removed from the calculus and all the countries had to detain and deport. For example, most unaccompanied minors and family units entering with children under 12 would not be detained or deported under the pact. Instead, all would be quickly welcomed and provided with accommodations. This is an American policy that's already proven an irresistible invitation to which millions who fit those profiles have responded. But in one nod to actual deterrence, immigrants from countries with a "low recognition rate," meaning that asylum claims from the country are typically declined, "could" be detained at border camps for up to 12 weeks to pre-screen an international protection claim. Authorities would have 12 more weeks to return rejected applicants to home countries. Of course, the Achilles heel is that, as the document is written, the decision whether to detain or deport is left up to individual countries

rather than universally required, which would make it truly deterring. There are other weak links at the moment. When immigrants overwhelm one of the external countries, the other members would have to accept a quota share of up to a total of 120,000 for the bloc, eventually. Any country that refuses its quota share would pay \$20,000 Euros per rejected person, an expensive penalty for not taking them in. As for



deporting those rejected for asylum, there's no language about timelines, mandates, or who pays for those. From an immigrant's standpoint, the high degree of optionality poses no serious deterring risk, only a high probability of finding incentivizing accommodations somewhere in the Union. But this is far from over. As European populations move rightward politically, the negotiations bear watching.

The pressure on Croatia and Serbia to crack down provides good reason to suspect tougher innovative ideas are coming that might interest American candidates. One example would be the intriguing new third-country arrangements the E.U. began pursuing in the new crisis. Facing massive new surges in mid-2023, the E.U. cut a <u>preliminary billion-Euro deal</u> with Tunisia to intercept and detain Europe-bound immigrants before they can board boats. The E.U. has lately reached out to Morocco, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Serbia with similar interception and detention deals. Can anyone imagine paying Panama and Costa Rica to hold back migrants moving through the Darien Gap and maybe even have those nations deport them?

Italy seemed so desperate for these to succeed that it <u>just proposed</u> transporting asylum claimants to wait out their adjudications in Albania, a non-E.U. country, rather than leave them free to disappear inside the E.U. This idea is most similar to the American "Remain in Mexico" policy under Donald Trump, which <u>proved that immigrants won't bother coming</u> if they know they can't reach their destination and will instead get stuck for years in a lesser country.

While much remains to be forged in Europe's final pact, whatever happens in Europe need not stay there.

**Todd Bensman** is a Ginsburg/Milstein Writing Fellow at the Middle East Forum and a senior national security fellow for the Center for Immigration Studies. He previously led counterterrorism-related intelligence efforts for the Texas Intelligence and Counterterrorism Division.



# The Psychological Battlefield Is Just as Important as the Military One

### By Nave Dromi

Source: https://www.meforum.org/65354/the-psychological-battlefield-is-just-as

Dec 18 – Former U.S. President and Supreme Commander of the Allies during World War Two Dwight D. Eisenhower said that "Without a doubt, psychological warfare has proven its right to a place of dignity in our military arsenal."

PSYOPS (see Dr. Ron Schleifer, <u>Psychological Operations aimed at Israel</u>) have been incorporated in one way or another in conflicts around the world. Sometimes they are simply the use of influence operations and other times they are smaller tactical events that try and attempt to demoralize the enemy.

### Ideas can be beaten if they are deprived of hope.

Over the last few weeks of Operation Iron Swords, we have seen many individual soldiers or units who have taken it on themselves to demoralize Israel's enemies, whether in Gaza or Judea and Samaria.

Many of the soldiers are acting primarily to raise the morale of the troops around them, but it is clear from Palestinian Arab social media that they are having a strong effect on the enemy.

 We witnessed early on the large amount of graffiti daubed on the walls of Gaza, recalling the purpose of this war



after the October 7th pogrom, with soldiers naming areas after the kibbutzim that bore the brunt of the monstrous bloodletting, the Nova Festival, or individual people who were murdered.

- The ubiquitous "Am Yisrael Chai!" was written everywhere, and these words alone are a defiant message for ourselves, but just as importantly, a direct answer to those who seek our genocide.
- There were social media invitations to Nova festivals in Gaza, and a date to reestablish the Gush Katif Israeli towns in the Gaza Strip forcibly removed during the Disengagement of 2005.
- The festival of Hanukkah gave the IDF soldiers a great opportunity to show that the Jewish light will not be lowered, and regardless of the danger, it is clear that the chanukiyot shone brightly across the strip for all to see.
- Even more remarkably, nineteen years after the Disengagement from Gaza, the Menorah that stood above the synagogue in Netzarim was returned to its rightful geographical location.
- The images that had a profound effect on the target audiences were those of surrendering Gazans, stripped down to their underwear handing over their weapons without a fight.

There are countless other examples, but arguably the most famous took place last week with the IDF's operations in Jenin to root out the terror network there.

After taking over a mosque that had been used for terrorist purposes, one IDF soldier decided to chant the Shema Yisrael prayer over the loudspeakers that are traditionally used by the mosque's muezzin to call Muslims to prayer.

This singular moment caused such great disturbance amongst the local Arabs that they had to set off a loud alarm throughout the area to try and drown it out. This was a moment which reverberated around the city of Jenin, a veritable viper's nest of terrorists. The Jews had come and were victorious.



### ICI C2BRNE DIARY - December 2023

The message was clear. From the very loudspeakers that Hamas spokesman Abu Obeida was allowed to invite to terror and mass murder, the IDF soldiers were now chanting Jewish prayers in defiance and boldness.

Unfortunately, not everyone saw it that way, and after the Palestinian Authority Foreign Ministry complained, the soldiers involved were court-martialed. Of course, not everything goes in war and there need to be officialdom's boundaries.

However, all these events send a very important message of resistance to those who want the Jewish People to disappear from their ancestral and indigenous homeland. The PA, no less than Hamas, would continue massacring Jews until there are none left.

Jewish pride is a form of resistance and should be a vital part of the war effort. It is a resistance to hate, to calls for genocide, and to the hope of an ultimate Palestinian Arab victory.

This needs to be prevented, not just on the battlefield, but all around it, especially in the hearts and minds of the Palestinian Arabs. As president of the Middle East Forum Daniel Pipes said: "Only when they (Palestinian Arabs) give up their war goal of eliminating Israel will the conflict come to an end. Israel must win and the Palestinians must lose."

This demands perseverance and the ability to win the war on different levels.

There is the military level, but there is also the psychological. To win the war of wills, Israel must break the Palestinian Arab will to continue fighting. It must understand that it has lost in its over 100-year-old war of violent rejectionism against Jewish sovereignty. Some commentators claim that this war can not be won, because it is a battle against an idea and not an army.

Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan during the Second World War had no less fanatical ideologies. These ideas were beaten and now these peoples no longer hold irredentist fantasies. Ideas can be beaten if they are deprived of hope.

The IDF must win on the battlefield and defeat the command structure of Hamas.

However, it must also take steps to ensure that the majorities who support Hamas, Fatah, Islamic Jihad, or any of the other terrorist organizations are also defeated, and they are forced to give up on their genocidal ideology.

This can only be achieved by convincing them that they have lost, and the Jews have won.

That is why we must continue, alongside the fighting, to display signs and take symbolic steps in the realm of psychological warfare to convince them of an Israel victory.

**Nave Dromi** is director of the Middle East Forum's office in Israel and head of the <u>Israel Victory Project</u>. She is the author of a new book, *Rifle Full of Roses*, which examines how radical agendas have influenced the IDF in recent decades.

# **Why Pakistan Is Deporting Afghan Migrants**

### By Megan Fahrney

Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20231219-why-pakistan-is-deporting-afghan-migrants

Dec 19 – Pakistan's announcement in October 2023 that it would expel all unregistered migrants has sparked fears among the country's nearly two million undocumented Afghans that they will be deported back to dangerous conditions. Pakistan says the measure is necessary to stem the growing influence of terrorist groups operating in its border region, but critics, including both the United States and Afghanistan's Taliban government, warn it could lead to further radicalization.

### What Is Pakistan's Deportation Policy?

The deportation order applies to all "unregistered foreigners" remaining in Pakistan as of November 1, 2023. Afghan citizens are most directly affected: more than 4 million reside in Pakistan, and an estimated 1.7 million are undocumented. Many have lived there for decades, having fled Afghanistan in the 1980s during the country's occupation by the Soviet Union. Smaller numbers of undocumented Somalians and Yemenis living in Pakistan are also threatened by this new policy.

To carry out the policy, Pakistan's government has had to hastily create forty-nine new deportation centers, and conditions there are <u>reportedly grim</u>. Some 15,000 Afghans are crossing the border daily and an estimated 450,000 have already left. Pakistani officials have offered assurance that Afghan residents with legal documentation will not be expelled, but there have been reports that some have been <u>targeted anyway</u>. This has led many legal residents to preemptively flee the country, fearing intimidation by Pakistani authorities and eviction by landlords. Meanwhile, the country's Supreme Court has begun hearings challenging the order.

### Why Is Pakistan Deporting Migrants?

Islamabad says the policy is mainly designed to fight terrorism. The disputed Pakistan-Afghanistan border, also known as the "Durand Line" after the British diplomat who negotiated it, has been home to an array of extremist groups for decades. These <u>include</u> the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, also known as the Pakistani



Taliban, and the Islamic State in Khorasan, an offshoot of the broader Islamic State group. Pakistani officials have blamed Afghan nationals for a sharp increase in high-profile terrorist attacks and accused Afghanistan's <u>Taliban-led government</u> of harboring militants. "A significant portion of those involved in criminal and terrorist activities are among these illegal immigrants," Pakistan's interim Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar said in November 2023.

Some analysts say Pakistan hopes to pressure the Taliban government to take terrorism more seriously. Others point to a desire to reduce the population of ethnic Pashtuns, a sizable minority to which many Afghan migrants belong, and whom Pakistan's influential military sees as a separatist threat.

This is not the first time Pakistan has cited security concerns in a migration crackdown: in 2016, it deported some <u>six hundred thousand</u> Afghan migrants. Human Rights Watch called the exodus "the world's largest unlawful mass forced return of refugees in recent times." Soon thereafter, Pakistan began building a fence along the Durand Line.



How Could Pakistan's Upcoming Election Impact the Debate?

The deportations coincide with a tumultuous political and economic outlook ahead of national elections scheduled for February 2024. Pakistan has faced intense polarization since its last elected prime minister, Imran Khan, was ousted from power in 2022 after falling out with the county's military. His removal spurred mass protests, particularly after he was arrested on charges of fraud a year later. Despite his current incarceration, Khan aims to run again, and could face another ousted prime minister: Nawaz Sharif, who fled to London in 2019 after being charged with corruption and returned in October 2023. However, experts say that the military continues to <u>call the shots</u> behind the scenes. "The military, which exerts heavy influence over the caretaker regime, is likely driving the [deportation] policy," the Wilson Center's Michael Kugelman <u>writes</u>.

Consequently, neither candidate would likely have much room to maneuver on migration, as <u>public opinion</u> remains firmly antimigrant. Khan, a Pashtun, has reportedly <u>criticized</u> the deportation policy, but as prime minister he was forced to abandon plans for a pathway to citizenship for Afghans following criticism from opposition parties. Sharif, meanwhile, oversaw the 2016 mass expulsion. Some analysts say Pakistan's <u>deepening economic crisis</u>, one of the country's worst since its independence in 1947, has contributed to anti-immigrant political sentiment. Food and fuel prices have soared, the Pakistani rupee has rapidly depreciated, and the central bank's supply of foreign exchange reserves has dwindled. Nationwide power

outages due to chronic underinvestment in the country's infrastructure have <u>further shaken the</u> <u>economy</u>; Islamabad has been forced to turn to the <u>International Monetary Fund</u> for \$3 billion in loans. The



budget crunch has reportedly led the government to charge undocumented migrants an exit fee of \$830, more than half the average annual income in Pakistan.

### What Have the International Reactions Been?

The issue has sparked criticism from the United Nations, the United States, and human rights organizations who have called on Islamabad to halt deportations and fulfill international obligations of proper treatment of refugees. Pakistan has never ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention and thus lacks domestic protections for refugees. Nonetheless, legal analysts say the deportations still violate international human rights norms against returning asylum seekers to a dangerous or oppressive situation.

Rights advocates say Afghanistan <u>certainly meets that criteria</u> as well, and the humanitarian situation has deteriorated further since the Taliban's 2021 takeover, heightening the threat for refugees in Pakistan facing deportation back to Afghanistan. U.S. officials say they are pursuing U.S. visas for at least twenty-five thousand Afghans at particular risk, including wartime allies, journalists, and women's rights activists. The deportations could also further worsen Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan, which has condemned the policy. The financial strain of hundreds of thousands of returnees could complicate aid efforts, given the ongoing Western sanctions on the Taliban. Afghanistan has called for more international assistance, alleging a <u>similar push</u> by Iran to expel its Afghan population, but many donors remain hesitant. Meanwhile, some <u>analysts say</u> that Islamabad's plan to reduce terrorist attacks by deporting migrants could backfire by fueling grievances and decreasing Kabul's willingness to cooperate.

**Megan Fahrney** is an editorial intern at *CFR*.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: Even Pakistan has an illegal immigration policy but not Greece and EU ...

## Italy: Meloni's party wants to protect Christian celebrations in schools by law

Source: https://www.tellerreport.com/news/2023-12-20-italy--meloni-s-party-wants-to-protect-christian-celebrations-in-schools-by-law.HkG0-xjlv6.html



A nativity scene in the Franciscan monastery of the central Italian municipality of Greccio: According to Meloni's party, nativity scenes in schools are in danger - Photo: Christoph Sator / dpa

Dec 20 – The party of Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni wants to protect Christmas and other Christian initiatives at schools and universities by law. The right-wing party Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy) introduced a bill in parliament to prevent Christmas celebrations from being renamed "winter festivals," the Adnkronos news agency reported. It is also intended to secure the installation of nativity scenes.

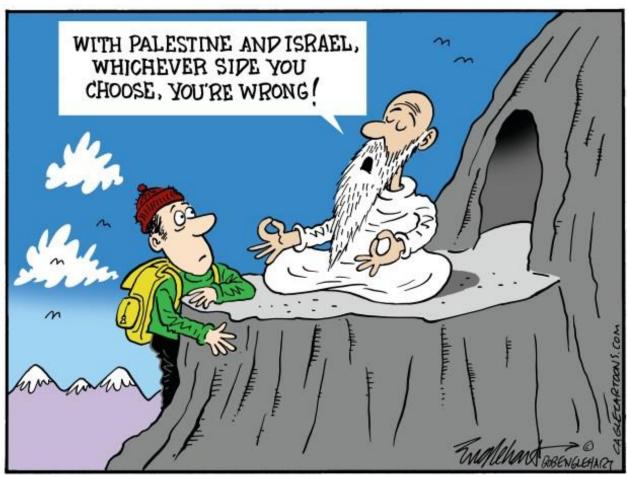
Right-wing Senator Lavinia Mennuni cited "unacceptable and embarrassing decisions by some school boards" in recent years. Out of supposed consideration for believers of other religions, the nature of the Christian Christmas is being changed, according to the MP. She also spoke of a special relationship between Christmas and Italy's "national identity". According to their ideas, similar regulations should also apply to Easter.

#### Sharp criticism from the opposition

The Fratelli d'Italia – which emerged from the post-fascist movement – is the largest party of the right-wing three-party coalition that has governed Italy since October last year. It was not initially known when the bill would be discussed in parliament. There was no comment from Meloni herself on Wednesday. Criticism and ridicule came from the ranks of the opposition, and the plans were described as "ridiculous".

The secretary of the Più Europa (More Europe) party, Riccardo Magi, called the plan hypocritical and "almost blasphemous" in view of the government's strict line on rescuing migrants at sea. He also scoffed at the fact that the Holy Family under Meloni's government would probably end up in a home for asylum seekers, the newspaper La Repubblica reported. Green MP Luana Zanella said: "They want to ban everything they don't like."

School staff associations also criticized the bill. "The traditions of the country must certainly be taken into account, but to impose them by law is out of place," Antonello Giannelli, president of the national association of school principals Anp, told the Ansa news agency.







# **Reevaluating the Threat: Terrorism in Latin America**

By Benjamin Jaimes

Source: https://theglobalamericans.org/2023/11/reevaluating-the-threat-terrorism-in-latin-america/



Nov 24 – The Israel-Hamas war has undoubtedly been a <u>reason for contention</u> across international discourse. In the Western Hemisphere, it has highlighted the intricate ties of influence, trade, and criminal activity between threat actors like transnational criminal organizations, financiers, and Iranian proxies working on both sides of the Atlantic. From <u>money laundering</u>, to <u>drug-</u>

<u>trafficking</u>, to <u>Iran-sponsored propaganda</u>, Latin American governments should beware the presence of financial and military supporters of political extremism and terrorism in their own territories more now than ever.

A poster shows Hezbollah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, and Arab leader Jamal Abdel Nasser on Dec. 7, 2006 in Beirut. (Ramzi Haidar/AFP/Getty Images)

On November 12, the Brazilian police reported having <u>arrested</u> a third individual suspected of ties to Iran-proxy, Lebanon-based militant group and <u>Hamas-ally</u> Hezbollah. The other two, arrested on November 8 with cooperation from Israeli intelligence, allegedly planned to carry out an <u>attack</u> on Israeli and Jewish targets in Brazil. Facing <u>charges</u> of formation or incorporation to a terrorist



organization and preparation of terrorist acts, the incident proved that Latin America's connections to terrorism do not exist in a vacuum.

Hezbollah, particularly, has a menacing history in the continent. In 2019, Argentina was the first Latin American country to designate the group a terrorist organization, 25 years after a suicide attack and bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires left 85 victims. To this day, none of the from Lebanon or Iran. Nonetheless, the operatives and networks that orchestrated the event were, in a rather belated aligning move,



More remarkably, the attack triggered a series of investigations. Before a timely assassination, the main prosecutor of the attack, Alberto Nisman, was able to publish a 500-page report accusing the Iranian regime of infiltrating several South American countries by "building local clandestine intelligence stations designed to sponsor, foster, and execute terrorist attacks." As pressure to arrest the mastermind of this campaign proved impossible, policymakers raised questions about the extent of Iran and Hezbollah's radical ideologies and terrorist schemes spread to the Americas.

While Argentina (alongside Paraguay, Colombia, Honduras, and Guatemala) has been clear in designating Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, the region remains far from a unanimous response to terrorist threats of this order. It was thus unsurprising that, in 2014, the government of Peru had trouble pressing charges against a Hezbollah member who tried to scheme a te rrorist attack in Lima despite detailed evidence. Two trials later, the individual served six years in prison only for fraud and was absolved this year of any terrorism charges. Peru, like Brazil, must consider following up on the terrorism designations of their neighbors, delineating limits to these criminal organizations.

Beyond designations, the role of Latin American states in sheltering extremists has been nonetheless manifest. On the one hand, the center of Hezbollah's operations since at least the 1990s has been well-known to be in the <a href="Tri-Border Area">Tri-Border Area</a> of Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil. There, a large number of Arab and Muslim immigrants are more likely to be recruited, and a free trade zone <a href="still provides">still provides</a> a lawless environment for financial crime and drug trafficking opportunities. In addition to Hezbollah, U.S. government <a href="reports">reports</a> say Al-Qaeda and Hamas have also had a presence in the region and that halted attacks on the Mexican Senate and President Vicente Fox in 2001 were plotted there.

Hezbollah still stands as a legitimate military and political actor under Lebanese law, and while they are part of Iran's network of proxies, they also have their own distinct worldview and goals. This makes the Latin American response to Hezbollah and Iran—another state with trading partners in the region—variable. In addition, connections between governments in the region and terrorist groups further complicate diplomatic collaborations and the development of solutions to the problem. For example, the Paraguayan government and banks prefer to ignore and downplay their role as a tax and money laundering haven for Hezbollah; earlier this year, Brazil allowed Iranian warships to dock in Rio; and, in 2007, Argentinian officials allegedly enabled Iran to fund their political campaigns in exchange for cover-ups of terrorism.

Maduro and several top leaders on a narcoterrorism conspiracy that involved cartels in Mexico, Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah. As illustrated, Hezbollah's interests often <u>overlap</u> with those of the cartels. Though not yet <u>designated</u> as Foreign Terrorist Organizations but sporadically <u>arrested</u> on terrorism charges and lacking



ideological motivations, drug cartels similarly wreak havoc, committing targeted murders and kidnappings. A segment from a Univision documentary in 2011 showed that Iranian extremists had been ordered to travel to Mexico to recruit members of the infamous drug cartel Los Zetas to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to Washington. Other reports from U.S. and European law enforcement in 2016 pointed to collaborations between South American cartels and Hezbollah in supplying large quantities of cocaine to the European and American drug markets, hence funding terrorist efforts.

While Iran <u>exercises</u> a significant amount of influence over Hezbollah's operations in the Middle East, there isn't any conclusive evidence that it has provided direct support or backing to Hezbollah's activities in Latin America. Latin American governments must be nonetheless reminded of Iran's record and interests in the region and act cautiously. Creating a legal framework that prosecutes terrorists head-on and investigating any <u>extremist associations</u> across government bodies and cabinets should be a priority. Furthermore, governments expose their systems to further corruption by ignoring reports of criminal associations with cartels.

Unequivocally, Israel and the United States also pose their own challenges in Latin America in promoting their interests. In responding to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, it is reasonable for Latin American governments to act in <u>support</u> of the Palestinian people and scrutinize Israel's military campaign. However, the tremendous and catastrophic impact that a terrorist attack would have anywhere in the hemisphere should not come without warning. Correspondingly, condemning Hamas' military branch as an ally of both Hezbollah and Iran could be a natural prevention measure in repelling future bad actors.

Latin American countries should take terrorism seriously. Sanctions, law enforcement investigations, and fighting disinformation campaigns could result in several positive outcomes, such as a benefit in their relationship with the European Union, the U.S., and other democratic partners. Attacking drug cartel infrastructure indirectly, creating judicial frameworks on terrorism, and raising terrorism as national security concerns—irrespective of U.S.-Israel-EU pressures—should be top of mind for Latin American governments. Terror, whether ideologically or financially motivated, only undermines democracy.

**Benjamin Jaimes** is an intern at Global Americans and a journalist for MLex Market Insight's regulatory newsroom. He holds a degree in Political Science with a specialization in Political Theory and International Relations from Columbia University.

# The Path to Peace in Gaza Lies in Defeating Hamas

By Justin Bassi

Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20231124-the-path-to-peace-in-gaza-lies-in-defeating-hamas

Nov 24 – The prospect of an exchange of hostages taken by Hamas and prisoners held by Israel, to be accompanied by a pause in fighting, is of course welcome news. It's a constructive moment in the tragic seven weeks that began on 7 October.

The question is what happens once the exchange takes place. For all the temporary relief, the so-called truce cannot be permanent given that Hamas's control of Gaza is the foremost obstacle to long-term peace. The negotiation has come about because Israel's response to the October terror attacks and hostage-taking has put Hamas under immense pressure. Indeed, this is why Hamas took the hostages—anticipating an unyielding Israeli military operation, the terror group knew it needed leverage to extract concessions from Israel such as today's hiatus in fighting and create domestic challenges for the Israeli government.

It is also why Hamas won't return all the hostages (releasing about 50 but keeping 180). It is looking to hold on to its bargaining chips in the hope that Israel will be persuaded by a global community tired of the horrors of war to extend the pause indefinitely. Indeed, once Israel resumes its operations, Hamas will no doubt claim that it's the Israelis who are restarting the conflict without justification. In pushing this strategic messaging, it will draw on the Iran-backed web of proxies to exploit the genuine global sympathy for Gazan civilians while also stoking the flammable fringes of the debate occupied by less well-meaning participants such as antisemites.

The discussion of a ceasefire inevitably appeals to our urge to find a modicum of optimism amid the carnage, but it doesn't change the reality that Israel faces: Hamas does not want peace; it wants the extirpation of the Jewish state. The group's long-term strategy is a fight to the death—backed by regional benefactors and sympathizers—to bring about the demise of the Jewish state.

A truce that leaves Hamas in control of Gaza will not be a permanent solution but merely a temporary pause in which Gazans remain controlled by a terrorist group that will abuse civilian infrastructure and resources to rebuild, rearm and return to its stated objective of destroying Israel. Most other aspects of this immensely complex political problem involve difficult, but negotiable, trade-offs in which the parties could make compromises. That goes for territorial borders, the status of refugees and even the presence or otherwise of Israeli settlements. Israel cannot continue living with a Hamas-controlled Gaza. The untenability of having Hamas on

Israel's border has long been clear. However, to dismantle and disarm the group was always going to involve grievous civilian bloodshed and the inflaming of anti-Israeli opinion—a prohibitive proposition for Israel prior to 7 October. Yet now Israel finds itself facing this task anyway, which is a reminder to the



world that tolerating the intolerable—even grudgingly, because the alternatives are too difficult—is never sustainable in the long term. This was demonstrated on 7 October.

The world should absolutely insist that Israel follow the rules of armed conflict. We should hold it to account if it fails to meet that standard. We should expect higher standards of democratic, law-abiding societies than we expect of lawless terrorists.

But we must also understand that we can't hold a law-abiding society to such a standard if that means there would be no assured pathway for it to guarantee its future security, which is what we would be doing if we ask Israel to accept the continued control of Gaza by Hamas. We would be asking Israelis to live in perpetual fear of their state—as well as themselves and their families—being attacked and wiped off the earth. We can demand that Israel minimize civilian casualties and hold it to account when it fails. (The very fact that the civilian toll is the foremost consideration serves as an important reminder that Israel is at war with Hamas, not Palestinians.) But we cannot demand that it enter a truce that relies on the word of terrorists whose raison d'être is Israel's destruction. The group that carried out the 7 October attacks is not transforming into a peace-abiding actor.

As invaluable as the laws of armed conflict are, there is no goal of international law that says a nation must accept, in perpetuity, such a grave security threat as Hamas poses to Israel.

And Israel can't keep Hamas at bay forever. Even accepting that 7 October represented a colossal intelligence failure on the part of Benjamin Netanyahu's government, the ruthless determination of Hamas will always drive it through whatever cracks it can find in Israel's defenses. And however sophisticated Israel's security apparatus might be, all armor has vulnerabilities.

Hence the pathway to long-term stability and security cannot begin with the continued rule of Gaza by Hamas.

So where does this leave us? Nobody pretends that Israel's military operation will automatically create peace.

What Israel must do is disarm Hamas and neutralize the extreme threat that it poses, while it embarks on a renewed and genuine effort at a long-term peace solution. However difficult that will be, it is the only way forward.

It needs to convince the Palestinian people and its regional neighbors that it is genuine about finding a pathway to peace. Acknowledging the anger that is building among Palestinians and Arabs as a consequence of the costs of its pursuit of Hamas, Israel will need to demonstrate a heartfelt effort that may not sit well with all individual Israeli citizens in the wake of 7 October. It will be monumental, but it is the only way. A two-state solution—however cynically it has been abandoned by some in Israel, intentionally sabotaged by Iran and its proxies including Hamas, and despairingly written off by many objective commentators—remains the best hope. There will be no quick fix. It will require Israel to work over the long term, including with the US and Arab countries, to persuade the majority of Palestinians that Hamas and its ideological confederates were only ever an obstacle to peace and, in fact, an obstacle to a Palestinian state becoming a reality. Only by neutralizing Hamas will this process have a chance.

And while many people will argue, rightly, that an ongoing conflict risks creating more extremists, terrorism, like all security threats, takes both intent and capability. Sadly, there are many people and organizations worldwide who mean harm against Israel and often the West more broadly. These individuals and groups are prevented from succeeding by being denied the capability.

To allow Hamas to control Gaza is comparable to accepting al-Qaeda's control of land in Afghanistan or Islamic State's control of territory in Syria and Iraq. There are reasons the military battles to degrade and destroy the operational capabilities of these terrorist groups were and remain so important. Allowing them to plan operations from ungoverned spaces is a fundamental obstacle to long-term peace. It is this capability that Israel must now remove while working longer term to defuse the intent. A genuine peace effort by Israel can start to erode the drivers and influence of extremists, but it needs the breathing space that Hamas's neutralization can create. We are all horrified by the death and suffering of war. For there to be less violence and bloodshed, the world needs Israel to chart a responsible course of removing Hamas and pursuing peace.

Justin Bassi is the executive director of ASPI.

# **15 years of 26/11 : Remembering the Mumbai terror attack**

Source: https://www.mypunepulse.com/15-years-of-26-11-remembering-the-mumbai-terror-attack/

Nov 26 – The Mumbai 26/11 terror attacks were as groundbreaking in the annals of terrorism as the US attacks of 9/11. While passenger planes were used as weapons of mass destruction for the first time on September 11, 2001, the Mumbai attacks saw the first instance of live operational control of terrorist acts from outside the country.

#### The Attack

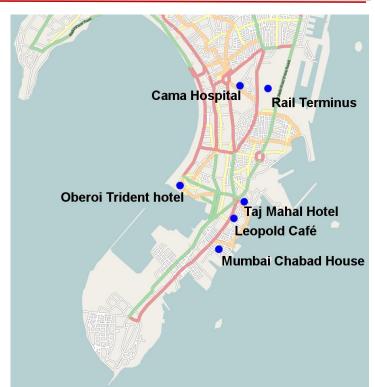
On the evening of November 26, 2008, terrorists belonging to the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terror group had made their way into Mumbai. They inflicted 300 injuries and killed 166 people.



The targets—the Taj and Oberoi Hotels, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus, the Jewish center at Nariman House, and the Leopold Cafe—were carefully selected following a survey to ensure maximum impact. These locations were frequented by Europeans, Indians, and Jews.

Here is a timeline of the attack:

- 21th November 2008 A boat carrying ten terrorists leaves Karachi, Pakistan, and travels unnoticed by the Indian Navy for about thirty-eight hours.
- 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2008 Six or seven magazines containing thirty rounds each are given to each of the ten men, in addition to 400 rounds that are not loaded into magazines. In addition, they have a supply of dried fruits, credit cards, an automatic loading revolver, an AK-47 assault rifle, and eight hand grenades.
- 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2008 Four fishermen are killed when terrorists take over the Indian trawler Kuber. The captain is forced to sail in the direction of India.
- 26th November 2008 The boat docks in Mumbai's Cuffe Parade neighborhood at Macchimar Nagar at 8:10 p.m. Here, six of the terrorists disembark, the others continuing to sail along the shore. When locals inquire about their



occupation, they respond that they are students. Another group disembarks at Colaba's Badhwar Park, Cuffe Parade, at 8.30 p.m. When fishermen who speak Marathi approach them, they tell them to mind their own business and then disperse and go in different



directions. Ten people were reportedly killed and numerous others injured at Leopold Cafe. Additionally, they detonated bombs in two taxis, which resulted in five fatalities and fifteen injuries. An additional two attackers, Ajmal Kasab and Ismail, take a taxi to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT), while four attackers enter the Taj Mahal Hotel, two enter the Oberoi Trident, and two slip into Nariman House. With



AK-47 and AK74U rifles in hand, Kasab and Ismail launched an attack at CSMT at 09.20 pm, killing 58 and wounding 104 with gunfire and grenade attacks.

#### The Counter-Attack & Catching of Terrorists

On 26th November 2008, Kasab and Ismail left for Cama Hospital at 10.30 p.m. When hospital employees notice a patient approaching, they lock their room. In an altercation, three officers and ATS chief Hemant Karkare are slain. The terrorists take over a jeep, but the Gamdevi police stop them close to Girgaum Chowpatty. Kasab is taken into custody and Ismail is killed.

On November 28, 24 bodies were found and 143 hostages were freed following the conclusion of commando operations at the Oberoi Hotel. They eliminate two terrorists.

NSG commandos are fast-roped onto Nariman House's roof at 7:30 a.m. and snipers are positioned in surrounding buildings to prevent attacks on the commandos.

At 7:30 p.m., the commandos find that the terrorists have tortured and killed all six of the hostages, including the rabbi and his wife. At 8.30 p.m., commandos opened fire in a determined battle, killing the two terrorists and announcing the end of the Nariman House operation.

On 29th November, despite continuous room-to-room searches, commandos declare control of the Taj Hotel at 8:00 a.m. There's a wild party in the streets.

The Taj Mahal Hotel is said to be fully under government control at 4:20 p.m.

#### Remembering the day after 15 years

To pay tribute to all the people who lost their lives in the 26/11 terrorist attack, in his 107th episode of "Mann ki Baat," Prime Minister Narendra Modi honored the victims of the 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai on Sunday, the 15th anniversary of the incident. The prime minister described the incident as the "most dastardly terror attack" and stated that no one can ever forget this day, November 26. The nation had suffered the most heinous act of terror on this exact day.

In memory of the police officers and jawans who were martyred in the terrorist attack on Mumbai on 26/11/2008, Maharashtra CM Eknath Shinde paid tribute by offering a wreath at the Police Memorial erected in the premises of the Mumbai Police Commissioner's office. He also paid emotional tributes to these martyrs.

As posted on CM <u>Eknath Shinde</u>'s X handle, Governor Ramesh Bais, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Mumbai Guardian Minister Deepak Kesarkar, Mumbai Suburbs Guardian Minister Mangalprabhat Lodha, Director General of Police Rajnish Sheth and Mumbai Police Commissioner Vivek Phansalkar were present on this occasion.

External Affairs Minister <u>Dr S Jaishankar</u> took it to X "It is 15 years today since the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks. Our quest to bring those responsible for planning and executing these horrific acts to justice continues."



# **Chinese Communists Enlist Islamists in War Against the West**

By Dexter Van Zile

Source: https://www.meforum.org/65265/chinese-communists-enlist-islamists-in-war



Nov 27 – This past summer, communist China, which is engaged in a campaign of cultural genocide against the Uyghur Muslims in the country's Xinjiang region, used the controversy over Qur'an burnings in Scandinavia to fuel Islamist hostility against the West.

Astonishingly enough, Islamists in the West have gone along with the campaign. And so one brand of authoritarianism enlists the help of another in the fight against the free world—all under the guise of "peace."

The campaign became evident at a press conference in Beijing in July when the regime's foreign ministry spokesman, Wang Wenbin, praised a resolution that condemned Qur'an burnings in Sweden passed by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva. The resolution passed over the objections of Western delegates who cited free speech concerns.

Mr. Wang declared that freedom of speech should not be used to stoke "conflicts and antagonism between civilizations" and that "all religious beliefs and feelings need to be respected." Ambassador Chen Xu, China's permanent representative to the United Nations Office at

Geneva, took the same line, condemning "Islamophobia" in the West.



It's rich a message coming from a regime that has forced Uyghur Muslim women whose husbands are detained in internment camps to share beds with members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The same regime destroyed thousands of monasteries in Tibet and forced remaining temples to display images of CCP officials. Moreover, the regime has even altered the text of Bibles distributed by Christians.

It's part of Beijing's "Global Civilization Initiative" that seeks to enlist the world's Muslims in a struggle against Western democracies. Two weeks after the UNHRC's vote, Mr. Wang declared that China was ready to work with its allies to "safeguard the diversity of world civilizations" and that freedom of speech "should not serve as an excuse to incite a clash of civilizations."

Chinese officials can make comments like these with straight faces in part because Western Islamists and their leftist allies let them. Islamists and leftists know that leveling chimerical accusations of "Islamophobia" against Western democracies and "genocide" against Israel generates more energy on the part of their followers than standing up to an actual genocide of Muslims in China. For these folks, attacking the West is best.

To be fair, the United States Council of Muslim Organizations (USCMO) did host a webinar in 2020 to promote a letter condemning the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) failure to oppose the CCP's oppression of the Uyghurs but has said very little about the crisis since. By way of comparison, USCMO organized an anti-Israel march attended by 35,000 people in 2020. Along these lines, it has called on Muslims to boycott France for its alleged "Islamophobia."

And, of course, the organization forcefully condemned America's vote against the UNHRC's Qur'an burning resolution, declaring that there are limits to free speech, which is exactly the line Beijing used in its anti-Western propaganda in Geneva. Predictably enough, the organization issued a statement portraying Hamas's Oct.7 massacre of 1,400 Israeli civilians as an act of self-defense.

Another Islamist organization, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), has condemned China for its mistreatment of the Uyghurs, having posted hundreds of statements and press releases about the genocide on its website. Nevertheless, the organization's website has thousands of references to the evils of Western "Islamophobia" and the alleged misdeeds of the Jewish state.

The CCP's effort to enlist Islamists in the West in its campaign to undermine Western democracies is working quite well despite its mistreatment of the Uyghurs. Echoing CCP propaganda, Islamists in America express more contempt for the United States and Israel—where Muslim populations are growing—than they do for the Chinese regime under which Muslims are brutally oppressed.

The results are potentially disastrous. Thousands of young Americans recently posted videos on the China-controlled social media platform TikTok, expressing agreement with a letter released by al-Qaeda



leader Osama bin Laden in 2002. This letter, replete with anti-Western tropes, justified the murder of almost 3,000 civilians on 9/11. These CCP puppets on TikTok are reading from an Islamist script to legitimize Hamas's violence against Israeli civilians in the Oct. 7 massacre and castigate the United States for supporting Israel in its effort to defeat its Islamist enemies. Soon, similar arguments will be used to hinder American efforts to defend itself against its enemies—again in the name of "peace." This doesn't help Muslims in the West or Palestinians in Gaza but only advances the interests of the CCP, an increasingly oppressive and aggressive regime that needs to be confronted—not collaborated with.

Dexter Van Zile is managing editor of Focus on Western Islamism.



In 2020, Irish politicians held a minute silence in the Dail for George Floyd

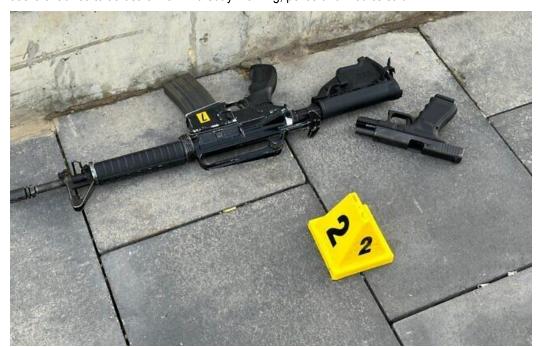
They did not hold one for the victims of the stabbing attack by an Algerian in Dublin



# Three killed, 6 injured in Hamas-claimed terror shooting at Jerusalem bus stop

Source: https://www.timesofisrael.com/three-killed-6-injured-in-terror-shooting-at-jerusalem-entrance-bus-stop/

Nov 30 – Three people were killed and six were wounded, two of them seriously, in a terror shooting attack, later claimed by Hamas, at the entrance to Jerusalem on Thursday morning, police and medics said.



The victims were named later as Livia Dickman, 24, Ashdod rabbinical judge Elimelech Wasserman, 73, and Hannah Ifergan, who was in her 60s.

A handout photo of a rifle and pistol found at the scene of a shooting terror attack in Jerusalem, November 30, 2023. (Israel Police)

According to police, at around 7:40 a.m. two Palestinian gunmen got out of a vehicle on Weizman Boulevard at the main entrance to the capital and opened fire at people at a bus stop.

Police said two off-duty soldiers and an armed civilian in the

area returned fire, killing the two terrorists. Both soldiers had been on a break from fighting in the Gaza Strip, and were heading back to the front line when the attack occurred.

The terrorists were named as brothers Murad Nemer, 38, and Ibrahim Nemer, 30, residents of the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sur Baher. According to the Shin Bet security agency, the pair were Hamas members and previously jailed for terror activity.

Murad was jailed between 2010 and 2020 for planning terror attacks under directions of terror elements in the Gaza Strip and Ibrahim was jailed in 2014 for undisclosed terror activity, the agency said. On Thursday afternoon, Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack and hailed the perpetrators as "jihad-waging martyrs."

The terror group said that the assault comes in response to Israel's war against it in Gaza and the killing of two children in the West Bank's Jenin on Wednesday. Adam Al-Ghoul (8) and Basel Abu Al-Wafa (15), as well as two senior terror commanders, were killed yesterday by Israeli forces in Jenin. Hamas claimed 15-year-old Al-Wafa as one of its

Emanuel (Mannie) Fabian @manniefabian

Surveillance camera footage shows the shooting attack at the entrance to Jerusalem this morning. Two people were killed, and at least seven others were hurt. Two off-duty soldiers and an armed civilian shot the terrorists dead. **UPDATE:** The civilian was shot dead by mistake!



8:51 AM · Nov 30, 2023 · 519.8K Views

members. The terror group also called for an "escalation of resistance" and said that "the heroes of our people are mobilizing to avenge the blood of the martyrs." Footage of the attack showed that the terrorists

The most brutal video I have ever seen in my life!

were armed with an M-16 assault rifle and a handgun. A police search of the vehicle found large amounts of ammunition. Police said officers were searching the area to rule out any additional attackers.

The Magen David Adom ambulance service said its medics declared the death of a 24-year-old woman at the scene, and were taking eight others to hospitals in Jerusalem. An elderly man and a woman, who were critically wounded, were later declared dead at a hospital in Jerusalem.

The young woman killed at the scene was named as Livia Dickman; the man was named as Ashdod rabbinical judge Elimelech Wasserman, 73; and the other woman was named as Hannah Ifergan, in her 60s.

Another two victims were listed in serious condition, three in moderate condition, and one in good condition, according to MDA. Hamas later claimed responsibility for the attack, calling the Murad brothers "jihad-waging martyrs."

Police, meanwhile, said officers raided the home of the two Hamas terrorists and arrested six of their family members, including their parents. They will be questioned by police and the Shin Bet for their suspected involvement or knowledge of the attack. The bus stop was the scene of a deadly bomb attack almost exactly a year ago.

Separately on Thursday, two reservist soldiers were lightly hurt in a car-ramming attack at a checkpoint in the northern Jordan Valley, the Israel Defense Forces said. Troops at the scene shot the suspected assailant.

Thursday's attacks came as a ceasefire between Israel and the Hamas terror group in the Gaza Strip was holding for the sixth day. Tensions in Israel and the West Bank have been high since October 7, when some 3,000 terrorists burst through the Gaza border into Israel in a Hamas-led attack, killing at least 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and seizing some 240 hostages.

Israel responded with an aerial campaign and subsequent ground operation with the goal of destroying Hamas and ending its 16-year rule over Gaza, and securing the release of the hostages.

The IDF has continued to operate throughout the West Bank and police have been on high alert in Israel, in light of concerns about a possible escalation of violence following the release of Palestinian security prisoners in the exchange for abducted Israeli hostages.



# **Are Roots of Terrorism in Religion or Politics?**

By Ram Puniyani

Source: https://www.newsclick.in/are-roots-terrorism-religion-or-politics

Nov 29 – The origins of terror groups and acts lie in deeper political issues that the media ignores.



Police personnel pay tribute to the martyrs who laid down their lives while fighting terrorists during 26/11 attack, on its 15th anniversary in Mumbai, Sunday, Nov. 26, 2023. Image Courtesy: PTI Photo/Kunal Patil

Fifteen years ago, on 26 November 2008, Mumbai witnessed a horrific terror attack. Ten terrorists, armed to the teeth, landed in the city via sea route and indiscriminately killed 166 innocent citizens. The chief of the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS), Hemant Karkare, and two other police officers were also killed in these coordinated attacks. Today, as we remember the horrors of 26/11, the impact of another act of terror by Hamas in Israel is very much in the air. The Mumbai attacks fifteen years ago were engineered by Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiaba (LeT). In all the years gone by, many parts of West Asia have witnessed terror acts, such as by the Taliban and the Islamic State or ISIS. In India, Kashmir has also suffered acts of terror, the roots of which lie in its complex political scenario.

A section of the dominant media and many political commentators present all these acts as resulting from a common thread—boundary-less religious extremism related to Islam. However, this position ignores the deeper dynamics of these painful acts. However, nothing can be further from the truth. While many terror acts and groups have in common an Islamic identity, the underlying reasons for terrorism are highly varied. The birth of Hamas lies in the injustices heaped upon Palestinians and the total violation of United Nations resolutions by Israel time and again. The issue of Kashmir has another political dynamic altogether. Al Qaeda and ISIS are products of United States-sponsored training camps in Pakistan. Therefore, rather than roots in Islam, the origins of terror acts lie in deeper political issues.

One major cause of acts of terrorism is the policies pursued by global superpowers trying to control oil wealth. The imperialists and their allies have their eyes fixed on appropriating global oil resources. In recent years, a central phenomenon that spurred the rise of terrorist groups has been the United States cultivating fundamentalist Islamist groups through the CIA in client states such as

Pakistan. The United States' goal to dominate West Asia due to its "oil hunger" has been brought out very well by many commentators. Their research based on the CIA's own documents has shown how the CIA funded the <u>training of</u> the Mujahideen, ultimately leading to the formation of Al Qaeda and later ISIS.



In his book, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror* (Harmony, 2003), Mahmood Mamdani writes that funding these outfits cost around \$8,000 million and 7,000 tons of armaments. On 19 May 2009, then-United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton admitted that her country "came in the '80s and <a href="helped build up the Mujahideen">helped build up the Mujahideen</a> to take on the Soviet Union in Afghanistan....The Soviet Union fell in 1989, and we basically said, thank you very much..."

Many commentators and the mainstream media deliberately underplay how the United States funded madrasas in Pakistan to train Al Qaeda and its clones, who later became Frankenstein monsters for the country. What is also underplayed is how these terrorist outfits have hurt Muslims around the world.

The Kashmir imbroglio has different dynamics. When the autonomy promised to Kashmir in Article 370 was undermined in the 1950s and 1960s, the disgruntled youth resorted to violent means instigated by Pakistan's ISI, which had the backing of the United States. This situation was worsened by the entry of Al Qaeda clones in the 1990s, and the resistance in Kashmir, based on Kashmiriyat, or the synthesis of the region's Buddhist, Vedantic and Sufi traditions, became a communal issue, and Kashmiri Pandits were targeted as a result. To restate: this terrorism had regional and local political undercurrents and expressed itself in the language of religion. Hamas has a different mechanism as far as its roots and origins are concerned. The Zionists initially declared an intention to settle in Palestine but began to appropriate the land. Further, they blocked any democratic expressions of resistance of Palestinians. It kept expanding the areas under occupation to the extent that, through two major expansions, its existing hyper-representation in the land (55% of land for 30% Jews) expanded the occupation to nearly 90% of Palestine.

Zionists are occupiers who constantly try to extend their hold over the Palestinian lands. They resort to ancient holy books to claim that Palestine is their land and they are its chosen people. Their expansionism has reduced the Gaza Strip to an "open prison" and forced the West Bank Arabs to live with tremendous hardships.

These three phenomena—Palestine, Al Qaeda, and the Taliban—are propagated as being due to Islamic terrorism. Nothing could be more myopic than this deliberate propaganda about 'Islamic terrorism' that the United States media has expounded in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. This propaganda allowed the United States to invade Afghanistan, where it killed 60,000 people. Its oil hunger led it to attack Iraq on the pretext that Iraq had "weapons of mass destruction", which it did not have. They repeatedly claimed that Iraqis would welcome the invasion of their country and greet the invading army "with flowers and chocolates". Instead, Iraqis resisted, and the Islamic State was eventually born.

The Mumbai terror attacks were also an outcome of sour Indo-Pak relations. As the army dominated Pakistan and was influenced by the United States, it harboured terrorist groups like the Lashkar e Taiba, which the Pakistan Army used to drive a wedge between Pakistan and India. As Pakistan's civil leadership initiated some peace manoeuvres, the generals, uncomfortable with peace efforts, would unleash trouble—as when Pervez Musharraf occupied Kargil and later came the 26/11 attack.

The 26/11 attack also led to the murder of Karkare, who was investigating terrorism cases from Malegaon to the Samjhauta Express, in which the likes of Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur, Swami Aseemanand, and Lt Col Prasad Shrikant Purohit were arrested. Sadhvi is <u>still on bail</u> in the Malegaon blast case and once said she had given a "shraap" or <u>curse to Karkare</u>.

While remembering the 26/11 tragedy of Mumbai and the killing of ordinary innocents and police personnel is very important, to think that it was due to religion is off the mark. To club all these geopolitical developments as 'boundary-less religious extremism' that is Islamic in nature serves the goals of imperialist nations and their allies who have wrought havoc in West Asia, particularly by training Al Qaeda. The media must go deeper into these developments instead of taking recourse to propaganda or easy 'answers' in blaming Muslims and Islam. Terrorism is not a religious but a political phenomenon with a range of instances from the Irish Republican Army to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and innumerable others.

# **Hezbollah's Balancing Act: Between Hamas's Ambitions and Strategic Reality**

#### By Adam Rousselle

Terrorism Monitor Volume | 21 Issue: 23

Source: https://jamestown.org/program/hezbollahs-balancing-act-between-hamass-ambitions-and-strategic-reality/

Dec 01 – Hamas has claimed responsibility for two rocket attacks on northern Israel from Lebanon this year, one of which occurred after the group's massacre of Israelis on October 7. These were launched from bases in southern Lebanon under the control of Iranian-backed militant group Hezbollah (<u>Anadolu Agency</u>, November 13). Given the ongoing war between Hamas and Israel in Gaza, these claims raise questions about a further escalation on a second front. Although Hezbollah's response to the ongoing war in Gaza has been one of relative restraint thus far, the presence of Hamas fighters in southern Lebanon

increases the chance of a second front opening. Hezbollah will likely need to carefully manage its relationship with Hamas in order to continue with its apparent strategy of limited engagement with Israel.



#### Hamas' Growing Presence in Lebanon

On November 6, the Lebanese branch of Hamas' armed militant wing, the al-Qassam Brigades, claimed to have launched 16 rockets at the northern Israeli cities of Haifa and Nahariya (Al Jazeera, November 6). The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) later claimed that some 30 rockets were fired within roughly one hour. The other 14 or so rockets presumably came from either another Palestinian faction, Hezbollah, or both (Times of Israel, November 6). This was the second series of attacks on Israel from Lebanon this year. On April 6, at least 36 low-caliber Grad-type rockets were fired at northern Israel from southern Lebanon. This was at the time the largest attack coming from Lebanon since the end of



the 2006 war. Israel launched an aerial counterattack on reported Hamas "infrastructure targets" in Lebanon the following day (Times of Israel, April 7, April 14). The most recent attacks have prompted a majority of residents in the Israeli city of Kiryat Shmona to evacuate, while at least 80 people have been killed in Lebanon due to Israeli counterstrikes to date (Times of Israel, November 6). The identity of most Hamas fighters in Lebanon is unknown to the general public, but it is possible that they were recruited from among the more than 200,000 Palestinian refugees currently living in the country, most of whom are not of Gazan origin. In 2018, Israel petitioned the United Nations to intervene in southern Lebanon, claiming to have evidence that Hamas was collaborating with Hezbollah to establish missile factories and "camps to train thousands of fighters" there (Times of Israel, June 9, 2018). Iranian influence in Lebanon has also been a source of major concern for Israeli policymakers. The unfired rockets used by Hamas in the April 6 attack were found to be of Iranian origin, and were supplied either directly by Iran or indirectly by its local Hezbollah proxies (Times of Israel, April 14).

Clashes in Lebanon's largest Palestinian refugee camp, Ein el-Hilweh, between Mahmoud Abbas's party, Fatah, and Islamist factions, such as Jund al-Sham and al-Shabab al-Moslem, started in late July and lasted until mid-September. This offered a glimpse into Hamas' growing presence in the country (<a href="The New Arab">The New Arab</a>, September 25). On September 13, the head of Hamas's International Relations Office, Moussa Abu Marzouk, met with a senior Fatah official at the Palestinian embassy in Beirut to discuss the ongoing clashes (<a href="Arab News">Arab News</a>, September 12). Despite the two leaders agreeing to a ceasefire, it was not initially upheld by the factions on the ground (<a href="Arab News">Arab News</a>, September 13).

Hamas was reportedly not directly involved in the violence, but one Palestinian official within the camp claims that the group was in contact with the Islamist forces on the ground during the fighting (<u>Times of Israel</u>, September 14). In this way, it appears likely that the clashes were, on some level, a proxy battle between Hamas and Fatah, with the former working to gain greater influence in Lebanon. On November 21, Khalil Kharez, deputy commander of the al-Qassam Brigades, was killed in an apparent Israeli airstrike near the Palestinian refugee camps in Tyre. Indeed, a tweet from Gaza Report claims that Kharez was moving between launch sites in the region, which indicates Hamas's military presence (<u>X/@Gaza Report</u>, November 21). The group's growing visibility in Lebanon is, therefore, likely indicative of Hamas' ability to recruit and train fighters among the country's large Palestinian refugee population.

#### Hezbollah's Balancing Act

Although nominally aligned with Hamas, Hezbollah's response to the war in Gaza has been one of relative restraint. Despite Hezbollah's launching of missiles against Israeli targets "in solidarity" with the Palestinians in Gaza, and the growing hostility in diplomatic exchanges, it appears that the group is avoiding committing itself to a full-scale war (Times of Israel, October 10; see TM, November 17). In a November 3 speech, for example, Hezbollah leader Syed Hassan Nasrallah stated that the October 7 attacks against Israeli civilians were "one hundred percent Palestinian in terms of both decision and execution" and that neither Hezbollah, Tehran, nor any of their other regional proxies were involved in the decision to attack (Al Jazeera, November 3). This speech and a similar one by Nasrallah on November 11 were reportedly met with disappointment among many Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon. These refugees and others in the country are frustrated with Hamas's lack of action so far in the ongoing war in Gaza. At the same time, many people in Lebanon continue to experience worsening living conditions amid Lebanon's economic crisis (Al Jazeera, November 12; Times of Israel, October 26, 2022).

Although Hezbollah's military capabilities have improved substantially since its war with Israel, fear of another full Israeli assault like that seen in 2006 is apparently causing the group to show restraint (Al Jazeera, October 16). This is likely because although Hezbollah possesses the capability to inflict severe damage on Israel, its power is more derived from the threat that it poses. This suggests that Hezbollah is only likely to commit to a full attack on Israel if it faces an existential crisis, such as an Israeli invasion of Lebanon (Israel Today, May 30).

The threat posed by Hezbollah is also a valuable tool for its Iranian patrons, who are demonstrating growing concern with the increased US military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf (Al Jazeera, August 8; Times of Israel, November 4). US activity in the Persian Gulf in



particular began to rise in August. These factors likely make Hezbollah's purported commitment to the Palestinian cause a limited one, given that it effectively faces the combined military might of Israel and the United States—a strategic concern long shared by Israel's more hostile neighbors. Hezbollah must also share its territory with a large Palestinian refugee population who are, in this instance, mostly Sunnis in the majority Shia region. These factors make Hezbollah's position on the Palestinian issue an even more challenging one to maintain domestically.

By allowing Hamas to gain a base of operations in southern Lebanon, Hezbollah is likely compensating for some of the Palestinian refugees' negative sentiments toward the group. This stems in large part from its unwillingness to escalate the conflict with Israel. Moreover, the increased presence of Hamas has apparently resulted in inter-factional conflict within the Palestinian community in Lebanon. This may have had two benefits: first, it directed refugee anger within, rather than toward Hezbollah, and second, it offered the group good publicity, as Hezbollah was able to assume the role of peacemaker once the conflict became uncontrollable (Al Jazeera, August 1). Finally, by arming Hamas in southern Lebanon, Hezbollah and Iran can control Hamas's access to the kind of low-caliber weapons that they have used in the battlefield thus far. These weapons allow the group the ability to stage limited strikes against Israel in a manner that is less likely to escalate the conflict. In this way, Hezbollah appears to be placating Hamas's ambitions while pursuing a strategy of general restraint.

#### Conclusion

Although it appears that Hezbollah is carefully managing its relationship with Hamas to avoid a full escalation with Israel, this does not preclude the possibility of a major conflict from breaking out. Israel has been aggressive in its rhetoric regarding a second front to the war, and although this has ostensibly been done as a means of deterrence, it does not necessarily discount the possibility of an Israeli first-strike, should the limited exchanges between two sides continue to intensify (Anadolu Agency, October 22). The latest killing of a senior Hamas leader in an apparent Israeli strike is evidence that an Israeli-led escalation is possible. Moreover, Hezbollah's apparent careful management of its relationship with Hamas does not account for agency among individual Hamas operatives in Lebanon. Thus, Hezbollah's ability to safeguard its own arsenal from would-be infiltrators from Hamas or other Palestinian factions is imperative to its current strategy. For this reason, the situation on the Israel-Lebanon border remains highly volatile and factors such as Hamas's capabilities and its relationship with Hezbollah will determine how the conflict evolves moving forward.

**Adam Rousselle** is an author and researcher whose areas of focus include geopolitics, political economy, and non-state actors. He is currently an editor and contributor at Militant Wire and works in financial research and analysis.

# **Bombing attack on Catholic mass in Philippines kills four**

Source: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/3/explosion-hits-university-in-philippines-three-reported-killed

Dec 03 – A bombing attack on a university gymnasium in the southern Philippines has killed four people and wounded several others.

The explosion ripped through a gymnasium at Mindanao State University in Marawi City during a Catholic mass service on Sunday morning.

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr condemned the attack and said he had instructed the police and armed forces to ensure the safety of the public.

"I condemn in the strongest possible terms the senseless and most heinous acts perpetrated by foreign terrorists," Marcos said.

"Extremists who wield violence against the innocent will always be regarded as enemies to our society."

Mamintal Alonto Adiong Jr, the governor of the Lanao

del Sur province in Mindanao, condemned the "violent bombing".

"Here in my province we uphold basic human rights, and that inc



"Here in my province, we uphold basic human rights, and that includes the right to religion," Adiong said in a statement.



"Terroristic attacks on educational insitutions [sic] must also be condemned because these are places that promote the culture of peace and mold our youth to be the future shapers of this country."

Mindanao State University said it was "deeply saddened and appalled" and had suspended classes until further notice.

"We unequivocally condemn in the strongest possible terms this senseless and horrific act and extend our heartfelt condolences to the victims and their families. We are committed to providing support and assistance to those affected by this tragedy," the university said in a statement.

A witness staying at a dormitory near the gymnasium told Al Jazeera that he heard a loud blast similar to an explosion of a power



#### transformer.

The witness told Al Jazeera that he saw several police officers and ambulances being deployed in the area of the incident inside the main campus of the university.

Police said they were investigating the explosion, including the possibility that it was carried out by pro-ISIL (ISIS) fighters. Mindanao has for decades been racked by violence amid a rebellion by armed separatist groups.

On Saturday, the Philippine military announced that it had killed 11 fighters in an operation about 200km (125 miles) from Marawi.

In 2017, Marawi was the site of an ISIL-inspired five-month siege that killed more than 1,000 people.

After decades of conflict, Manila signed a peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the largest separatist group, in 2014, but smaller separatist groups have continued to carry out attacks across the restive region.



# Man killed in terror stabbing in Paris; attacker allegedly upset over Gaza war

Source: https://www.timesofisrael.com/man-killed-in-suspected-terror-stabbing-in-paris-attacker-allegedly-upset-over-gaza/

Dec 03 — French police arrested a man who targeted passersby in Paris on Saturday night, killing a German tourist with a knife and injuring two others, France's interior minister said.

French President Emmanuel Macron said he was sending his condolences to the family of the victim and called the stabbing a terror attack.

The suspected attacker was "quickly" arrested and justice should now be done "in the name of the French people", he wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

"We will not give in to terrorism," French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne said after the attack, as anti-terror prosecutors announced they would probe the stabbing.

Police subdued the man (Armand Rajabpour-Miyandoab), a 25-year-old French citizen (of Iranian descent) who had spent four years in prison for a violent offense. After his arrest, he expressed anguish "so many Muslims are dying in Afghanistan and in

Palestine," adding that he was upset about the situation in Gaza and claimed that France was an accomplice,

French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said.

The attacker apparently cried "Allahu Akbar" (God is great), Darmanin added.

"This person was ready to kill others," Darmanin told reporters.

The attacker went after a German couple with a knife, killing the man. He then used a hammer to injure two others.

The attacker, who was not identified by name, left prison after four years in 2020 for planning another attack and was under surveillance and undergoing psychiatric treatment, the minister said, painting a brief portrait of the assailant, who was born in Neuilly-Sur-Seine, a Paris suburb.

The attacker is known to follow radical Islam, a police source told AFP.

The attack happened in the 15th district of the French capital near the Eiffel Tower, with the assailant using a knife to kill and a hammer to attack the injured. Details about the victims were not immediately known.

The attacker was stopped by police who twice fired a taser at him in the stomach, the minister said, praising the officers for their quick response and reiterating that "there would doubtless have been other dead."

The attack took place close to the Eiffel Tower during a busy late weekend night and came with France on its highest alert for attacks as tensions rise against the background of the war between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Tensions have risen in France, home to large Jewish and Muslim populations, following Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, when Palestinian terrorists who stormed the border slaughtered some 1,200 people and took around 240 hostages. In response, Israel

declared war on Hamas, launching a major military campaign in Gaza that is aimed at toppling the terror group and retrieving the hostages.

Security in Paris is also under particular scrutiny as it gears up to host the 2024 Summer Olympic Games.

In October, teacher Dominique Bernard was killed in the northern French town of Arras by a young radicalized Islamist from Russia's Caucasus region.

# Here are some other attacks that have taken place in France in recent years:

Oct 13, 2023 - One teacher was killed and another wounded in a knife attack at a high school in the northern French town of Arras on Friday.

The suspected attacker was known to law enforcement

agencies and was on a state 'Fiche S' watchlist of people known as a potential security risk.

**June 9, 2023** - A Syrian national wounded four children and two pensioners in a knife attack in the Alpine town of Annecy.









#### ICI C2BRNE DIARY - December 2023

May 22, 2023 - An assailant fatally stabbed a nurse and wounded another hospital worker with a kitchen knife in Reims.

It was one of a spate of violent incidents recently that prompted President Emmanuel Macron to denounce what he called a process of "de-civilisation" in French society.

**Jan. 11, 2023** - A man attacked and wounded six people at the Gare du Nord train station in Paris with a homemade weapon, leaving one with serious injuries, before being shot by off-duty police officers.

**Dec. 23, 2022** - A gunman killed three people at a Kurdish cultural centre and nearby Kurdish cafe in central Paris, prompting violent street protests.

Oct. 29, 2020 - An attacker with a knife killed three people and wounded several others at a church in the southern city of Nice.

Oct. 16, 2020 - Middle school teacher Samuel Paty was knifed to death on the street of a Paris suburb after showing his teenage students a cartoon lampooning the Prophet Mohammad as part of a class on freedom of expression.

**Sept. 25, 2020** - Two people were stabbed and wounded in Paris near the former offices of the Charlie Hebdo satirical magazine, where Islamist militants carried out a deadly attack in 2015. A man originally from Pakistan was arrested over the attack.

**Jan. 3, 2020** - Police shot dead a man near Paris after he went on a rampage with a knife in a park, killing one person and wounding two more.

**Oct. 3, 2019** - Mickael Harpon, 45, an IT specialist with security clearance to work in the Paris police headquarters, killed three police officers and one civilian employee before being shot dead by police. He had converted to Islam 10 years earlier.

**March 23, 2018** - A gunman killed three people in southwestern France after holding up a car, firing on police and taking hostages in a supermarket. Security forces stormed the building and killed him.

**July 26, 2016** - Two attackers killed a priest and seriously wounded another hostage in a church in northern France before being shot dead by police. François Hollande, president at the time, said the hostage-takers had pledged allegiance to Islamic State.

**July 14, 2016** - A gunman drove a heavy truck into a crowd celebrating Bastille Day in Nice, killing 86 people and injuring scores more in an attack claimed by Islamic State. The attacker was identified as a Tunisian-born Frenchman.

**June 14, 2016** - A Frenchman of Moroccan origin stabbed a police commander to death outside his home in a Paris suburb and killed his partner, who also worked for the police. The attacker told police he was answering an appeal by Islamic State.

**Nov. 13, 2015** - Paris was rocked by multiple gun and bomb attacks on entertainment sites around the city, in which 130 people were killed and 368 wounded. Islamic State said it was responsible. Two of the 10 known perpetrators were Belgian citizens and three were French.

**Jan. 7-9, 2015** - Two Islamist militant gunmen broke into satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo's offices on Jan. 7 and killed 12 people. Another militant killed a policewoman the next day and took hostages at a supermarket on Jan. 9, killing four before police shot him dead.

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** I am sick and tired of reading about terrorists "under surveillance" and "under psychiatric treatment" or with "psychiatric problems". Why do you keep them in France? Deport them, their families, and relatives yesterday! Update: The Minister of Interior <u>claimed</u> that it was not an intelligence failure but a "psychiatric care failure"! OMG – stupidity prevailed one more time!

# 'No plan B' for Paris opening ceremony after knife attack - sports minister

Source: https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/olympics-no-plan-b-paris-opening-ceremony-after-knife-attack-sports-minister-2023-12-04/

Dec 04 – There is no "plan B" for the opening ceremony of the Paris 2024 Olympic Summer Games, the French sports minister said on Monday, after a man armed with a knife and hammer killed <u>a German tourist</u> and left two people wounded near the Eiffel Tower on Saturday.

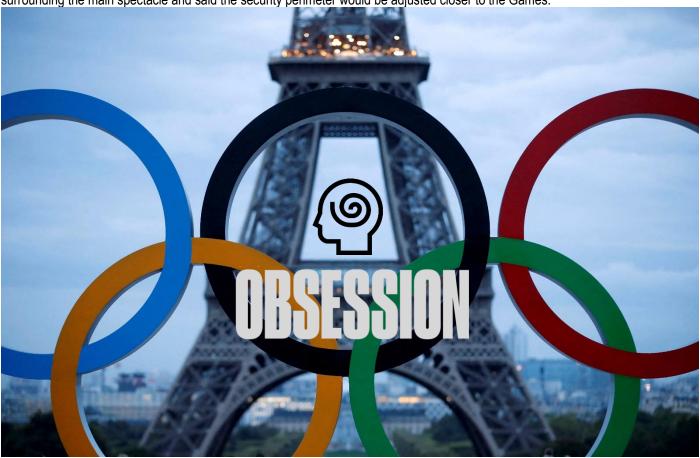
"We have no plan B, we have a plan in which there are several sub-plans with a certain number of adjustment variables," Amelie Oudea-Castera told France Inter radio.

The 26-year-old suspect, a French national arrested after the attack, had pledged allegiance to Islamic State in a video recorded beforehand, anti-terrorism Prosecutor Jean-Francois Ricard said on Sunday.

The attack occurred on the Quai de Grenelle - a spot also included in the plans for the opening ceremony. Asked if the government was mulling a change to its plan to hold the ceremony on the River Seine, with several hundred thousand spectators expected along its banks amid the security threats, the minister said: "This not something we're working with."



"We have the capacity to secure the event", she said, adding that certain details, including the number of additional cultural events surrounding the main spectacle and said the security perimeter would be adjusted closer to the Games.



Olympic rings to celebrate the IOC official announcement that Paris won the 2024 Olympic bid are seen in front of the Eiffel Tower at the Trocadero square in Paris, France, September 14, 2017. REUTERS/Christian Hartmann/File Photo Acquire Licensing Rights

France has been on high alert since raising its security threshold in October, when a Chechen-origin man with a knife killed a teacher in a school in northern France.

European security officials have warned of a growing risk of attacks by Islamist militants amid the Israel-Hamas war, with the biggest threat likely from "lone wolf" assailants who are hard to track.

Some 160 boats will set off on July 26 from the Pont d'Austerlitz for a six-kilometre journey to the Pont d'Iena in an event Tony Estanguet, the head of the organising committee, described as "unique and spectacular".

# The Timeline of a Failed Terrorist Surveillance System

#### By Zoltán Kottász

Source: https://europeanconservative.com/articles/news/the-timeline-of-a-failed-terrorist-surveillance-system/

Dec 04 – The perpetrator of the terrorist attack in Paris on Saturday, December 2nd, was clearly a dangerous criminal who many warned had the potential to commit an act of violence, but despite having him 'under surveillance,' the French authorities could not prevent him from killing.

The 26-year-old man, armed with a knife and a hammer and yelling "Allah Abkar," killed a German tourist and left two people wounded near the Eiffel Tower in Paris late on Saturday in what President Emmanuel Macron called a terrorist attack.

Armand Rajabpour-Miyandoab was born in France in 1997 to Iranian parents, in a family described by the prosecutor as having "no religious engagement." But French media have revealed how he was easily

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manipulated and radicalised as a teenager by jihadist websites and how he concealed his radicalisation while in prison. His act inevitably raises the guestion of how France monitors terrorists after their release after incarceration.

This is what we know so far:

#### 2015

Armand Rajabpour-Miyandoab converts to Islam at the age of 18 and quickly becomes radicalised by jihadist ideology, watching videos and propaganda, and making connections with jihadists active in Iraq and Syria. "His need for bearings" accelerates his radicalisation, the terror organisation Islamic State gives him the "criteria to guide his lifestyle," a psychologist later said.

#### 2016

He plans to join the Islamic State in Iraq or Syria. Later in the year, he is arrested for planning a stabbing attack in the La Défense business district, west of Paris, at the instigation of a jihadist based in Syria. He is imprisoned as a pretrial detainee.

#### 2018

He is convicted of planning a terrorist attack and is sentenced to five years imprisonment. In court, he claims to have denounced Islamism, which he said was "ruining [his] life." He claims to have taken to drinking beer and eating pork—activities which are banned for practising Muslims.

#### 2019

He undergoes psychiatric medical treatment throughout his detention, but one year before his release, he is judged to have a great potential to commit violent acts.

#### 2020

He is released from prison and left to live at home with his parents while undergoing psychiatric and neurological treatment. The young man is on a terror watch list, he has a so-called 'S file,' used by law enforcement to flag someone considered a threat to national security. He is monitored by the authorities. "The first few months are encouraging," he seems to have "detached himself from religion," a security source told AFP. However, surveillance is later increased because of his social media contacts, including with the future killer of teacher Samuel Paty.

#### 2022

His personality is deemed "very unstable" and he is a cause for concern, according to French media sources.

#### 2023

He is under compulsory psychiatric treatment for continued mental health problems until April. He is put under surveillance by the French secret services because of his Islamic fundamentalist profile. In October, his mother reports concerns about her son's behaviour and says he has become "increasingly self-isolated" and is no longer taking his medication. However, there is not enough information to allow for a new prosecution. His X social media account shows many posts about the Israel-Hamas war. In a recorded video before Saturday's attack, he swears allegiance to the Islamic State and expresses his support for jihadists all around the world.

**Zoltán Kottász** is a journalist for *The European Conservative*, based in Brussels. He worked for many years as a journalist and as the editor of the foreign desk at the Hungarian daily, *Magyar Nemzet*. He focuses primarily on European politics.

# North Korea's Support of Hamas Transcends a Purely Transactional Relationship

#### By Abraham Cooper and Greg Scarlatoiu

Source: https://themedialine.org/news/opinion/north-koreas-support-of-hamas-transcends-a-purely-transactional-relationship/

Dec 03 – The October 7 savage Hamas invasion and genocidal attack on Israeli civilians has spawned revulsion from President Biden and top European leaders. Their crimes against humanity have also earned accolades and support from Hamas' puppet master Iran, Tehran's lackeys in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq, as well as calls for declarations of war against Israel from as far away as Algeria. As pundits and media dig deeper, they discover another distant player: North Korea.

It was hard not to notice North Korea's supply of rocket-propelled grenades and other weapons deployed by Hamas. Quoting South Korea's National Intelligence Service, the Korea Broadcasting System reported: "North Korean leader Kim Jong Un instructed various agencies to find ways to comprehensively support Palestine in the war between Israel and Hamas." US-based and self-declared "pacifist" or "feminist" organizations sympathetic to the Kim regime were quick to react. Hyun-sook Cho, Cathi Choi, and Kathleen Richards, senior operatives for Women Cross DMZ/Korea Peace Now, co-signed a statement by Nodutdol condemning Israel and legitimizing Hamas. Nodutdol is a US-based pro-North Korean organization that is also rabidly antisemitic,

having condemned US and South Korean support of Israel while calling for "an end to the Zionist occupation of Palestine, once and for all."

North Korea's relationship with Hamas is long-established. In his 2018 book, *North Korea's Military Proliferation in the Middle East and Africa*, Dr. Bruce Bechtol provided a thorough record of North Korea's proliferation to Iran, Syria, and terrorist groups, including Hamas and Hizbullah.



An Israeli soldier stands near the display of a variety of weapons recovered from areas hit by Hamas gunmen, on Oct. 26, 2023. Israel's military said a portion of the weapons were made in Iran and North Korea. (Aris Messinis/AFP via Getty Images)

Bechtol identifies four categories of North Korean assistance to Iran: weapons of mass destruction and the platforms that carry them, conventional weapons sales, refurbishment of Soviet-era weapons, and military advising. Hamas has been the destination of proliferation across all categories, primarily through Iranian facilitation.

North Korea's support of Hamas is not a purely transactional matter. There are strong ideological overtones behind North Korea's assistance to anti-Israel, antisemitic groups.

Kim Jong Un's criminal rule is grounded in grandfather Kim II Sung's fundamental ideological tenets. *Kimilsungism* is essential to Kim regime preservation.

In "Under the Banner of Marxist-Leninist Proletarian Internationalism, While Holding High the Standard of the Anti-Imperialist, Anti-American Struggle, Let Us Accelerate World Revolution," Kim II Sung states:

"Israel is a Middle Eastern outpost of Anglo-American aggression, which opposes the Arab people, obstructs their progress, and threatens their safety."

In Answers to the Questions Raised by Foreign Journalists, Kim II Sung affirms:

"The Middle East crisis is the result of aggressive machinations by imperialists and their American masterminds, who have set up Jewish restorationists as shock troops to crush the rising Arab people's liberation struggle." Kim II Sung blames tensions in the region on "Israeli aggression" and Israel's "American imperialist manipulators."

In 1967, North Koreans flew alongside Syrian pilots during the Six-Day War against Israel. North Korea trained Egyptian and Syrian pilots to fight against Israel. In an October 16, 1986, interview with the Egyptian newspaper Al Massa, Kim II Sung states: "Whenever the imperialists and the Zionists provoked an aggressive war in the Middle East, the [North] Korean people stood firmly on the side of justice. [...] During the [Yom Kippur] war in October 1973, our airmen fought shoulder to shoulder with the Egyptian brothers on the same front."

Through Iran's abetment, North Korean weapons are in the hands of Hamas, Hizbullah, and the Houthis in Yemen. Iran's "indigenous" weapons systems are engineered and produced by over 1,000 Iran-based

North Korean personnel. According to a May 24, 1984 declassified CIA document, North Korean "training officers" were delivering military training to "foreign nationals" in Iran alongside "Iranian Revolutionary Guardsmen, previously trained foreigners, [and] Palestinians."

North Korea proliferates instability and violence. None of the profits go to its people. The regime runs five gulags. Around 120,000 men, women, and children face forced labor, malnutrition, and brutality. To dare be a Christian is to declare yourself an enemy of the State. Besides proliferation, the Kim regime oppresses and exploits its people at home and abroad to procure the funds needed to build its arsenal of terror. Pre-COVID, 100,000 workers were dispatched to 40 countries, one-third as construction workers in Qatar and the UAE. Most of their wages were confiscated by the regime.

Embedded in Kim II Sung thought, North Korean support of Hamas, Hizbullah, and regimes determined to extinguish Israel transcends a purely transactional relationship.

Tunnel construction, the transfer of North Korean weapons and tactical training to Hamas is, in the worldview of the Kim regime, a way of bringing its anti-American, "anti-imperialist struggle" to the greatest US ally in the Middle East. Anti-Semitism is not merely a side effect of North Korea's proliferation. Anti-Semitism and hatred of Israel and its people lie at the core of North Korea's ideology. Just as antisemitic hate crimes and invective soar to unprecedented heights in the US, the Kim regime, through its loyal followers, is adding their hatred online and on American streets.

**Abraham Cooper** is associate dean and director of global social action at the Simon Wiesenthal Center and chair of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom.

Greg Scarlatoiu is executive director of the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea.

# We can't let Islamist terror become the 'new normal'

**By Fraser Myers** 

Source: https://www.spiked-online.com/2023/12/04/we-cant-let-islamist-terror-become-the-new-normal/



Dec 04 – There used to be a time when an Islamist terror attack would make the world stand still. When the murder of innocents by religious extremists had the power to shock us. To force us to sit upright. To ask how our society has nurtured this lethal threat – and how we might best protect ourselves from it. Yet the response, or lack thereof, to this weekend's knife attacks in Paris suggests we are no longer even moved by these gruesome acts of terror. In Europe at least, they are becoming dangerously normalised.

On Sunday, a supporter of the Islamic State, named by French police as Armand R, is alleged to have fatally stabbed a German tourist near the Eiffel Tower. He then crossed to the other side of the River Seine, where he wounded two people with a hammer. As he was apprehended by police, he could be heard shouting 'Allahu Akbar'.

Yet, shockingly, this fatal attack in France has been met with barely any condemnation or even commentary from elsewhere in Europe, aside from the usual platitudes about thoughts, prayers and standing against division. Strikingly, the attack even failed to make the front pages of most UK newspapers, even though one of those wounded was a British national. Readers outside of France could be forgiven for missing the attack entirely.

After learning that one of her countrymen had been murdered, German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock insisted that 'Hate and terror have no place in Europe'. French prime minister Élisabeth Borne vowed that France 'will cede nothing in the face of terrorism. Never.' But it is hard to take these words seriously when brutal Islamist terror attacks like that in Paris now occur with stomach-churning regularity. They are now so common, in fact, that they tend to pass by largely unnoticed. In France alone, over the past decade or so, there have been attacks in Paris, Nice, Lyon, Strasbourg, Toulouse, Normandy, in large cities, small villages and suburbs across the country. I doubt anyone could name them all from memory.

Since the 7 October terror attacks in Israel, there have been two attacks in France that have had some striking – and depressing – similarities. Notably, Armand's extremist views were known to the authorities before his alleged rampage.

He was even arrested and jailed in 2016 for making plans to travel to Syria to fight with Islamic State. Since his release in 2020, he was being monitored by the security services for 'persistent radicalisation'.



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There are chilling echoes here with the knife attacks in Arras, in northern France, less than two months ago. A 20-year-old Chechen man called Mohamed Mogouchov is alleged to have stabbed a teacher to death and severely wounded two other school staff. He was also a known Islamist extremist who was under electronic and physical surveillance. More shocking still, he was even questioned by the authorities the day before his attack.

For both attacks, the authorities have not ruled out a link to events in the Middle East. Armand R is alleged to have told police that France is complicit in the deaths of civilians in Gaza. Similarly, interior minister Gérald Darmanin has suggested Mogouchov may have been motivated by Hamas's call for Muslims to take up arms in a global 'day of jihad'.

Mistakes can happen. Suspects can always slip through the net. But the sheer volume of would-be Islamist terrorists in Europe has made these tragedies almost inevitable. In 2015, Europe's deadliest year for Islamist terror, an estimated 10,000 Islamist radicals had been identified as potential security threats, appearing on France's *Fiche S* database. At least 5,000 Islamic extremists are currently believed to be at large, according to *Le Figaro*. Clearly, the task of tackling Islamist radicalism is so vast that it cannot be left to security services alone.

Yet despite the terrifying scale of the threat, and a new wave of Hamas-inspired terror potentially in the offing, we seem less willing than ever to reckon with it. In Europe, politicians are reluctant to discuss the scourge of Islamist terrorism. They refuse to say anything too confrontational about an ideology that has claimed the lives of so many innocents. Some fear being labelled racist or Islamophobic. Others fear that condemning Islamism too harshly could embolden the far right. Even to express solidarity with the victims, it seems, is now considered too provocative. It is this moral cowardice, more than any security failing, that has allowed Islamist extremism to spread, to thrive and to continue to wreak havoc.

We must refuse to let these acts of terror pass without condemnation. We must not let our leaders keep burying their heads in the sand. We must not let Islamist extremism become the 'new normal'.

**Fraser Myers** is deputy editor at *spiked* and host of the *spiked podcast*.

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** Tell this to President Macron who recently stated that "French need to learn to live with terrorism!"

# Christchurch terror attack inquest: Front-line police should be trained to go to sound of gunfire - American counter-terrorism expert

By Danielle Clent (Journalist)

Source: https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/503597/christchurch-terror-attack-inquest-front-line-police-should-be-trained-to-go-to-sound-of-gunfire-american-counter-terrorism-expert

Nov 30 – All front-line police officers should be trained to enter a scene with an active armed offender, an American expert in counter-terrorism has told the mosque attack inquest.

Dr Frank Straub began his law enforcement career in the 1980s and was involved in rescue operations in the 9/11 twin towers terrorist attack.

He is now the senior director of violence protection for a non-profit organisation.

Dr Straub, alongside Scottish counter-terrorism expert Scott Wilson, co-authored a report about the Christchurch terror attack on 15 March 2019.

Both experts gave evidence via an audio-visual link on Thursday during the <u>inquest into the deaths of 51 worshippers</u> at Al Noor Mosque and Linwood Islamic Centre.

Straub told the Coroners Court it was not possible to ever be truly desensitised to situations like the mosque shootings but training first responders in "as realistic as possible scenarios" could help them flip a switch in their brain and deal with it.

He said the United States "had to learn the hard way" how best to deal with mass casualty incidents.

School shootings, such as the tragedy at Columbine High School in 1999, had helped law enforcement improve protocols overtime, Straub said.

Nowadays, the first officer on any scene has the training required to go to the sound of gunfire and "neutralise" the assailant or assailants.

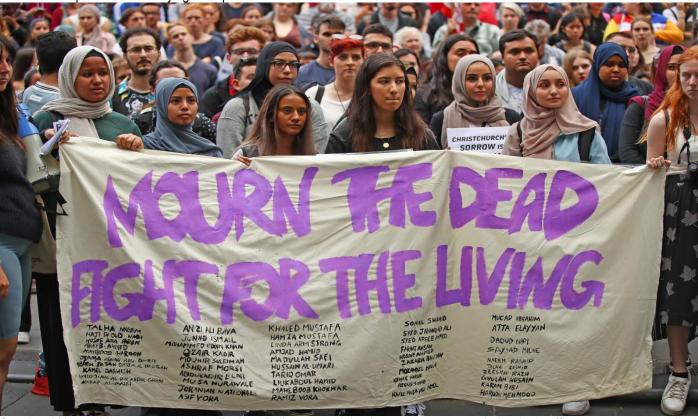


"It is our theory that we can't lose time, the shooter is on location, the shooter has time on their side and tactical advantage and it's incumbent upon us to stop that as soon as humanly possible, even if it means that we don't get to go home to our families."

Wilson said most police in the United Kingdom were not generally armed - but those that were had extensive training and were usually very quick to respond to serious situations.

He said officers first on scene could not "sit and do nothing". It would not be a good public perception if shots were still being heard

on scene and police were not trying to stop them.



Straub said he could not agree with New Zealand Police protocol that it was not recommended a single officer enter a scene with an active shooter due to the extreme risk involved.

He did not believe an unarmed officer should go into a scene - but said all needed to be trained and equipped to engage as a solo officer if necessary. Regarding the Christchurch attack, if police arrived on scene and the terrorist was still there, they should have been able to move forward straight away, Straub said.

"I believe it's law enforcement's responsibility and we take an oath to protect the lives of others. In this case, innocent individuals were being slaughtered by an individual with a high-powered rifle.

"I believe that is was law enforcement's responsibility, in that they were armed, to attempt to neutralise or contain the individual should he have been there at the time."

Straub said all first responders who attended the mosque scenes were brave and courageous, acting in a way consistent with their training. But he said learnings could come from this to strengthen any future response that "hopefully change outcomes in the future".

#### Leaving victims alone in mosque 'unacceptable'

Both experts said it was "unacceptable" the victims at Al Noor Mosque were <u>left alone for more than 10 minutes</u> after the first police team entered the building.

Wilson said he could have understood it if police skills were needed elsewhere and paramedics were left inside with them, but there was no excuse for leaving the victims with no-one.

Straub said he agreed with Wilson: "If that's the situation, it would have been unacceptable".

The experts also said community members having basic life-saving skills had proven effective in mass casualty incidents in their respective countries. Straub said the US has an "aggressive" campaign called



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Stop the Bleed where even children were taught life-saving methods. It went hand-in-hand with another campaign to teach people resuscitation

Wilson said the UK had Citizen Aid where members of the public could do "something rather than nothing".

Questioned by counsel for families Kathryn Dalziel if people from within the mosque should have been allowed back inside to help provide medical aid, both experts said it depended on the situation. The inquest earlier heard people who were at Al Noor Mosque were told to leave the grounds - and even threatened with arrest - when they asked to go back inside and help the dying. Dalziel also described a woman having to leave her husband in Linwood mosque. She said she had to ask then-prime minister Jacinda Ardern 24 hours later if she knew if her husband had survived.

Straub said he had read witness statements, and they were "heartbreaking".

"I do think that people inside the mosque being allowed in assisting with the treatment of people inside the mosque is different than people from outside the mosque coming in, or to any location, because you don't necessarily know who those people are and God forbid, they're part of the plot. "Controlling the scene is critically important to the safety of everybody inside the scene and it's also critically important to the post-incident investigation."

But unless they were interfering in the emergency response, he thought people already inside should be allowed to stay. Wilson said if they were already in the scene, they had "a part to play" but people could not start being allowed into the scene. "But if they're in the scene and they're with a loved one, I would encourage they should be there to comfort the loved one and give assistance or be with them to the end."

#### The inquest will examine the following 10 issues over six weeks:

- Events of 15 March 2019 from the commencement of the attack until the terrorist's formal interview by police
- Response times and entry processes of police and ambulance officers at each mosque
- Triage and medical response at each mosque
- The steps that were taken to apprehend the offender
- The role of, and processes undertaken by, Christchurch Hospital in responding to the attack
- Coordination between emergency services and first responders
- Whether the terrorist had any direct assistance from any other person on 15 March 2019
- If raised by immediate family, and to the extent it can be ascertained, the final movements and time of death for each of the deceased
- The cause of death for each of the victims and whether any deaths could have been avoided
- Whether Al Noor Mosque emergency exit door in the southeast corner of the main prayer room failed to function during the attack and, if so, why?

The inquest continues.

# **Why Did Hamas Attack Israel?**

#### By Philip Carl Salzman

Source: https://www.meforum.org/65306/why-did-hamas-attack-israel

Dec 05 – If Israelis expected the world to be horrified at the atrocities committed by Hamas and by Gazan civilians against Israeli citizens, they were quickly disabused of such a hope. Shockingly, celebrations of the Hamas attacks were widespread, followed by justifications of the atrocities offered by officials, politicians, academics, and mobs of Arabs, Muslims, and leftists around the world. Common to the justifications were characterizations of Israel as colonial settler state implementing apartheid and engaging in genocide against the Palestinians. These statements are the reduction of academic postcolonial theory to a few political slogans. No facts support these claims, but I will not list the realities that refute them, because these claims do not in fact refer to reality, but are shibboleths signaling identification in opposition to Israel. I will point out only that Israeli Arab citizens fly immediately into fury at any suggestion that they might wish to change boundaries and abandon Jewish Israel to live under the Palestinian Authority. Some apartheid; some genocide.

Shockingly, celebrations of the Hamas attacks were widespread, followed by justifications for the atrocities offered by officials, politicians, academics, and mobs of Arabs, Muslims, and leftists around the world.

It is worth remembering that <u>Arab culture</u>, and the Islamic culture built on it, rely on the fundamental concept of structural opposition that is at the heart of foundational Bedouin culture. The rules of Bedouin politics are twofold: Always uphold solidarity with your kin and always side with the closer relative against



the more distant. Arabs should always side with Arabs, and Muslims should always side with Muslims, no matter what. In conflict, you use whatever weapons you can. In propaganda wars, you use whatever claims advance your case. Truth doesn't come into it.



Progressives and the far left, their tribes being identity classes, have adopted these principles.

Some non-ethnic apologists for Hamas formulate general arguments. Like many "progressive" academics, Laura Mullen, chair of the literature and creative writing department at Wake Forest University, justified the atrocities this way: "So it's kind of a Duh but if you turn me out of my house plow my olive grove and confine what's left of my family to the small impoverished state you run as an open air prison I could be tempted to shoot up your dance party yeah even knowing you will scorch the earth." She went on to explain, "When 9/11 happened, I was asking myself and others, 'What did we do to make people want to come and do that to us?' That is how my mind works." Finally, Professor Mullen summed up her justification: "despair leads to violence...a human truth." Note that Professor Mullen's approach would be like asking an abused wife, "What did you do to deserve being beaten up?"

As both a general truth and as an explanation for Hamas' exterminationist antisemitism, "despair leads to violence" is profoundly inadequate. As a justification for burning families alive, beheading infants, roasting infants, and violently raping girls and women and then murdering them, it is obscene. The most superficial knowledge of history proves that the causes of violence are multiple, and that despair can lead to a variety of non-violent responses.

Let us consider a few examples of notable historical cases of violence. In 63 BC, the Romans invaded Ancient Israel and besieged Jerusalem. The indigenous population of Jews continued to resist Roman control, and for two centuries fought off and on against the Romans, ultimately losing to them and being forcibly dispersed throughout the Empire. Was this invasion the result of Roman "despair"? To suggest such a thing would be absurd. Rome was an expansionary empire, and used its power to assert control over people and resources. Remember, prior to 18th century, production was so arduous and ineffective that the easiest way to gain wealth was to take it from others. Rome collected up everything valuable, including slaves to provide cheap labor, in order to raise its own standard of living.

The many historical violent invasions, small and large scale, of tribes and empires, were all motivated, not by despair, but by strength, greed, and the desire for adventure and triumph. The Persians, the Aztecs,

the Mongols, and many others all conquered great areas and slaughtered and enslaved great numbers. There was no justice in their conquests, only the exercise of power. The historical example most pertinent to the Hamas case is the Arab Islamic Empire that conquered half the world beginning in the 7th century. (Please have patience; this is highly relevant to Hamas today.) Inspired by Islam, Bedouin armies, initially organized by tribe, invaded Persia (Iran) to the east and continued through Central Asia and to India in the south. They brought devastation, defeating local armies, executing males, and capturing women to be sex slaves and, in the case of the poorer soldiers, wives. Altogether, it is estimated that hundreds of thousands of Indian men were slaughtered and hundreds of thousands of women, including those of royalty, were enslaved.

One of the keys to military success was the Islamic belief that soldiers killed fighting for Islam would go directly to heaven, where they would be comforted by 72 virgins available to each of them. When Islamic militants say that they love death, this expectation is what they mean. Islamic Bedouin armies invaded northward and conquered the Levant, Israel/Palestine (as the Romans named it). From there they began their westward invasions, first taking control of Christian Egypt, then on to Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, imposing Arab domination, Islam, and Arabic language on the local Berbers. Next, Arab and Berber Islamic armies turned north, invading and conquering Sicily and Iberia (Spain and Portugal), defeating local armies and occupying the towns. A standard practice was turning churches into mosques. A basic military strategy was to set up forward bases on the frontier from which army units could raid and terrorize local people in the area to be invaded and occupied. As part of this strategy, they would also burn crops and buildings, kill or capture livestock, inspiring locals to abandon their territory, so that expansion into it would be easier. This was tried with France, but in 732 AD the Arab/Berber army was met at Tours and defeated by Charles "the Hammer" Martel and his army of Franks. After 700 years of Islamic dominance and occupation, in 1492 the Reconquista succeeded in driving the Muslims out of Iberia. The Normans had earlier, 1060-91, reconquered Sicily for Christianity and Europe. The invasion of the northern Middle East by Islamicized Turkish tribes from Central Asia led to a shift in power away from the Arabs. It was the Turks who invaded Greek Anatolia, and Ottoman Tribes that conquered the Byzantine Empire and occupied the capital, Constantinople, renaming it Istanbul in 1453, and turned its churches into mosques. The Ottomans then turned north, invading and conquering the Balkans.

All of these invasions and occupations were attempts, many successful, to bringing the world under the authority of Allah, as Islam demands. Through all of Arab, Berber, and Turkish Islamic conquests, the repeated strategy was establishing forward bases to terrorize local populations, softening them up for future invasion, conquest, and occupation. Hamas is such a forward base, and conquest and occupation of Israel is exactly what Hamas has promised in its <u>founding charter</u>. Hamas upholds the principle that Muslims must dominate and that there is no place for Jews in their ideal world. Hamas promises not only to destroy Israel totally, but also to murder all Jews in Israel and around the world!

Hamas' views are standard Islamic ones, based on the Koran, which states that Jews disobey God (9:29-35; 4:44-46). These views were also widespread throughout Muslim lands through the centuries, and led not only to many oppressive measures against Jews, but to sporadic bloody pogroms against Jewish populations. Mohammed himself set the standard when he murdered all of the men and captured all of the women from the Jewish Banu Qurayza tribe in Medina. Palestinian Arabs have kept up <a href="the tradition">the tradition</a>; the Hebron massacre of 1929, decades before the establishment of Israel, is only one example.

Hamas in Gaza is just one of the iterations of Islamic forward bases from which the soldiers of Islam would sally forth to conquer the world for Islam. That is why Hamas calls for jihad, holy war, as does the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Houthis in Yemen. Conquering the world for Islam is the explicit raison d'etre of the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The absurd justification for Hamas' atrocities against civilians that Hamas is fighting for land and orchards taken from them ignores the entire history of Islamic imperialism and the exterminationist approach that Muslims take toward people they define as enemies. Yes, genocide is an issue here, but it is the genocide that Hamas plans for Israelis and Jews around the world.

**Philip Carl Salzman** is an emeritus professor of anthropology at McGill University, a senior fellow at the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, a writing fellow at the Middle East Forum, and past president of Scholars for Peace in the Middle East.

# DHS outlines steps houses of worship can take to protect themselves

Source: https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/4344799-dhs-outlines-steps-houses-of-worship-protection/

Dec 06 – The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) released a new guide Wednesday with the goal of helping houses of worship — such as churches, mosques and temples — protect themselves amid a time of heightened tensions. The guidelines, released through the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), outline specific actions "faith-based communities" can take to "mitigate the threat of targeted violence and prepare for potential incidents." "In this continued heightened threat environment, the Department of

Homeland Security is committed to protecting every American's right to live, express, and worship their faith freely and in safety," DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said in a press release.

"The physical security performance goals we are releasing today provide churches, synagogues, mosques, and other faith-based institutions with cost-effective, accessible, and readily implementable strategies to enhance their security and reduce the risk to their communities," he added. David Mussington — who is in charge of infrastructure security at CISA — <u>said the 16-page document</u> is intended to be clear and "less jargon-filled," making it easier to understand and follow, <u>The Associated Press reported</u>.

Some of the actions listed in the guide include identifying someone to take charge of security-related matters; implementing additional measures through risk assessment to address security gaps and implementing a "response plan immediately to address preservation of life, incident stability, and property preservation."

"CISA remains fully committed to its longstanding partnership with faith-based leaders to advance the protection of houses of worship while preserving their open and welcoming environments," CISA Director Jen Easterly said in the release.

The release of the "Physical Security Performance Goals for Faith-Based Communities" guide comes amid a spike in reported hate crimes since the onset of the war between Israel and the militant Palestinian group Hamas, according to FBI Director Christopher Wray. "We've been opening I think 60 percent more hate crimes investigations post-Oct. 7, then compared to the comparable period pre-Oct. 7," Wray <u>said during testimony</u> before the Senate Judiciary Committee on Tuesday, referring to when Hamas launched its surprise attack on Israel. "And that's on top of that already escalating increase that I mentioned," he said, after pointing out that hate crimes reached a high in 2022. Wray also noted that "the biggest chunk of those are threats against the Jewish community, but there are of course attacks ... against others as well," pointing to attacks against Muslim targets.

## **Terrorist Use of Cryptocurrencies**

Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/terrorist-use-cryptocurrencies



Dec 06 – Given the key role of funding in supporting terrorist operations, counterterrorism finance (CTF) efforts often focus on tracking money and preventing financial transactions that might be used to support attacks and other terrorist activities. However, the success of these strategies in reducing terrorist access to official currencies has raised concerns that terrorist organizations might increase their use of such digital cryptocurrencies as Bitcoin to support their activities.

A <u>report</u> from the <u>RAND Corporation</u> notes that current cryptocurrencies are not well matched with the totality of features that would be needed and desirable to terrorist groups but might be employed for selected financial activities. The authors' research shows that, should a single cryptocurrency emerge that provides widespread adoption, better anonymity, improved security, and that is subject to lax or inconsistent regulation, then the potential

utility of this cryptocurrency, as well as the potential for its use by terrorist organizations, would increase. Regulation and oversight of cryptocurrencies, along with international cooperation between law enforcement and the intelligence community, would be important steps to prevent terrorist organizations from using cryptocurrencies to support their activities.

#### **Key Findings**

#### Factors that will increase cryptocurrency viability for terrorist organizations

- ❖ A growing market presumably will require increased reliability and more-widespread usage. As use becomes more common across the world, the current lack of acceptance of these systems especially in areas where terrorist organizations operate could disappear.
- Widespread adoption of second-generation cryptocurrencies with advanced privacy features will enable more illicit use of these systems.
- Regulatory oversight in the United States, Europe, and China makes it difficult to obtain bitcoin anonymously on an exchange. However, if trading occurs on a decentralized exchange or in a country without regulatory oversight, the transactions could become much harder to trace.
- Increased use of cryptocurrencies in complementary and adjacent markets could indicate increased viability among terrorist organizations. Some counterfeiting operations have begun to use darknet markets, and there is a significant trade in illicit drugs and stolen identities in these markets.

#### Factors that will decrease cryptocurrency viability for terrorist organizations

- Uncertainty and infighting have plagued many cryptocurrencies as they grow. This could decrease wider adoption, making cryptocurrency less viable for terrorist groups.
- Law enforcement cooperation in cybersecurity domains and cryptocurrency markets will be a critical enabler for deanonymization and tracking of funds.
- If the cryptocurrency systems that are most widely used are incorporated into the regulatory system and those that are incompatible are abandoned or remain marginal because of lack of support, then terrorist groups and other illicit actors may find that the digital world is less, not more, hospitable.
- A series of fraudulent exchanges and theft of improperly secured monies have plagued cryptocurrency since it became valuable. If similar issues continue to be discovered and exploited, trust in cryptocurrency systems will remain low.

# Israel raises threat level against travel to 80 countries due to Gaza war

Source: https://www.jpost.com/international/article-776457

Dec 04 – The threat level has been raised in 80 countries for Israelis as a result of the Gaza war, according to a new list published by the <u>National Security Council</u>. "Since the beginning of the war, we have identified increased efforts by Iran and its proxies, including Hamas and Global Jihad factions, to harm Israeli and <u>Jewish targets</u> around the world," the NSC said in a statement.

"At the same time, there is a constant and significant rise in incitement, attempted attacks, and manifestations of antisemitism in many countries," it explained. "We can't say don't go, what we can say is that Israelis should weigh where they go," an NSC official said. There is an unprecedented level of potential violence either due to terror attempts or rising antisemitism and those who travel must take that into account, the official stated.

Over 80% of the new threat warnings reflected an initial surge of danger in Level 1 countries, where "basic precautionary measures are advised, to Level 2, where travelers are to take "increased precautionary measures."

#### Major Western countries moved up a level of concern

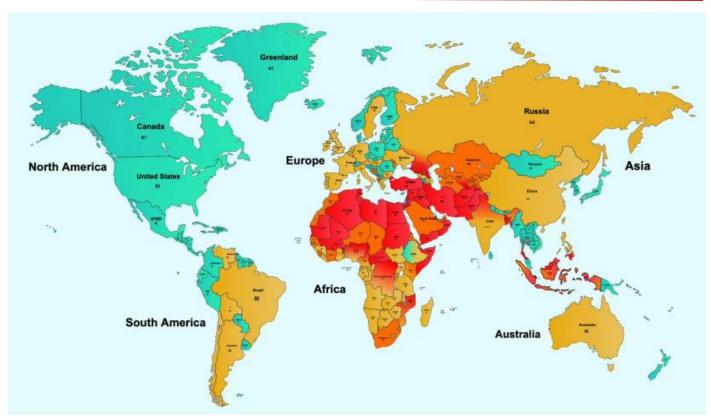
The United Kingdom and Australia were on that list, as were 17 countries on the European continent such as Germany, France, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

Countries where a more serious threat existed such as <u>South Africa</u>, Eritrea, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan were raised to a Level 3 threat, which recommends consideration of essential travel only.

Travel should be postponed for Middle Eastern countries as well as those bordering Iran and several Muslim countries in Asia, the NSC stated. Israelis should "stay away from demonstrations and protests," it said.

Travelers should also check current events in their destination spot to see if there is anti-Israeli or anti-Jewish activity, even for countries deemed largely safe. Once out of the country, travelers should "avoid exhibiting Israeli and Jewish symbols, and large gatherings of Israeli and Jewish officials."





A map detailing the threat level for traveling Israelis across the globe (photo credit: JERUSALEM POST, Maariv Online)

Those who travel should also keep the contact information of the embassy or consulate as well as emergency services with them, the NSC said.

## Inside Hamas's elaborate terror tunnel network

#### **By Alexander McDermott**

Source: https://reaction.life/inside-hamass-elaborate-terror-tunnel-network/

Dec 07 – The date is 12 September 2023. <u>James Cleverly</u> is greeted with rapturous applause by the 1,000-strong audience at Israel's Reichman University, who have gathered for the twenty-second International Institute for Counter-Terrorism Conference.

Packed into the lecture theatre is a star-studded cast of defence and military experts, including three former IDF heads, two directors of international intelligence agencies, and one Israeli defence minister. The then-Foreign Secretary's speech – stressing the value of a UK-Israel relationship in the fight against global extremism – rounded off three days of discussion between scholars and security industry leaders.

Three weeks later, Hamas sprung <u>a devastating assault</u> on southern Israel. The terrorist group bulldozed security fences, destroyed civilian homes with rocket barrages, and massacred fleeing Israelis under hails of gunfire.

Many of the ICT Conference's audience have been amongst those scrambling to direct Israeli intelligence resources towards an effective retaliation. Much of the focus has been on Hamas's "Gaza Metro" – the <u>underground tunnel network</u> below Gaza. According to Hamas, the tunnels have now reached 500km in length, roughly the distance from London to Luxembourg. Home to armouries, food warehouses, and aerial weapons factories, these tunnels are an essential part of Hamas's terror infrastructure.

Tunnel construction began after Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 but accelerated following Hamas's occupation of the Strip in 2007. Using similar techniques to Syrian rebel fighters in Aleppo and ISIS terrorists in Mosul, Hamas initially built 2.5km of underground passageways into Egypt to smuggle goods, fuel, and weapons. These tunnels have since been <u>used to kidnap IDF</u> solider Gilad Shalit – captured after Hamas entered Israel near the Kerem Shalom border crossing in 2006

and the imminence of their threat to the civilian population was realised in 2013, when a 1.6km tunnel to the Kfar Aza kibbutz was discovered.





Israeli soldiers from the Givati brigade discover the entrance to a tunnel believed to belong to Hamas in southern Israel near the border with Gaza (via IDF/Flickr)

The IDF now believe that hostages taken in the attack are being transported underground. In a media appearance last month, <u>85-year-old Yocheved Lifshitz</u> – recently released from Hamas captivity – recalled travelling through a "spider web of tunnels" towards a bunker, where she was held with twenty-five other Israelis for over two weeks.

The tunnels are also reported to house high-readiness Hamas terrorists, allowing them to quickly appear and retreat from urban battlegrounds, taking on minimal casualties. Senior Hamas leader Ali Baraka boasts that there are 40,000 fighters from the Al-Qassam Brigades – Hamas's military wing – currently "waiting for the battle" underground, with 20,000 reinforcements available from across the other cadres.

However, this is not a scenario that Israeli intelligence services will be unfamiliar with.

In July 2014, following a notable increase in the exchange of rocket fire between Hamas and Israel, the IDF launched the "Operation Protective Edge" ground offensive into Gaza. Its aim was to destroy the network of "terror tunnels" used by Hamas to cross the Israeli border. IDF forces threw smoke grenades down suspected tunnel entrances, allowing them to discover ventilation shafts, before digging down to breach the tunnel with armoured excavators and explosive charges. This method reportedly resulted in the "neutralisation" of 32 tunnels, 14 of which crossed from Gaza into Israel.

Despite this experience, tunnel warfare – and the intelligence collection which supports it – adds a new dimension to Israel's fight against Hamas. In 2021, Israel completed the installation of an underground concrete wall along the Gaza border, fitted with advanced sensors to detect tremors caused by Hamas's tunnelling. The <u>65km-long barrier</u> took three years to build, consuming \$1.1 billion, two million cubic metres of concrete, and 1,200 workers. Should it emerge that underground tunnels were used by Hamas in the October 7 attacks, it may confirm reports that the terrorists were able to dig underneath this concrete wall and bypass Israeli security systems.

It is also possible that the sensors built into the concrete wall – designed to locate cavities and track sounds of shovelling or movement – are rendered ineffective in a battlefield of explosions and rumbling armoured vehicles. <u>Geologists have</u> commented that the soft, silty lithology of Gaza allows for tunnelling to be done with hammers and chisels,

rather than electric diggers which are more likely to disturb the sensors.



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Whilst Israeli military intelligence will have to grapple with these changes to warfighting against Hamas, the infantry must also adapt to a new style of Operating in Built Up Areas (OBUA). Entrances to many tunnels are hidden in the basements of homes and medical facilities, or remote rural environments, making them hard to spot for IDF IMINT (imagery intelligence) operatives. Even if these entrances are detected, many are booby-trapped, fitted with tripwires and motion-triggered bombs. The sprawling network of tunnels, complete with narrow pathways and escape routes, also leaves Israelis vulnerable to the launch of further surprise attacks by Hamas. By fully committing to a ground operation in Gaza, the IDF will have to overcome these strategic challenges of tunnel warfare. American author Edward Luttwak writes, "standard tactics and weaponry are often not suitable inside a subterranean setting", for instance, "the sound emitted by a weapon being fired is also amplified", meaning that soldiers will need "intensified hearing protection".

"In some cases, it can be impossible to breathe without oxygen tanks in tunnels", adds John Spencer, Chair of Urban Warfare Studies at West Point's Modern War Institute. "It can also be impossible simply to see. Most military night vision goggles rely on some ambient light and cannot function when it is entirely absent. Any military navigation and communication equipment that relies on satellite or line-of-sight signals will not work underground".

Of all the operational challenges that IDF forces will face during a ground operation in Gaza, the terror tunnels are perhaps the most difficult to navigate. They will remain Israel's greatest counter-terrorism headache if IDF intelligence and infantry units cannot successfully destroy the entirety of Hamas's network. If it is not viable to blow up a 500km-long system of concrete-reinforced, well-equipped passageways, then the IDF must adapt to many onerous months of Close Quarter Battle (CQB) in a totally alien environment. Robots, sniffer dogs, and elite combat engineers from the IDF's Yahlom unit can bolster Israel's arsenal for a new kind of combat, but it remains clear that the underground fight against Hamas will be the hardest one.

It may be that Israel tries to bring its battle against Hamas entirely to the surface, slimming the terrorists' advantage. Considerations will have to be made as to whether water, sewage waste, or gas is used for flushing out the tunnels, with respect to international law and ramifications from the morality of these methods.

The terror tunnels are proving to be a wicked thorn in the side of Israel. Ultimately, whatever the IDF's next steps to defeat Hamas are, they must act intrepidly, intelligently, and innovatively.

**Alexander McDermott** is a Policy Fellow of <u>The Pinsker Centre</u>, a campus-based think tank which facilitates discussion on global affairs and free speech.

# Terror in Uganda: what's driving the Islamic State-linked rebels

#### By Stig Jarle Hansen

Source: https://theconversation.com/terror-in-uganda-whats-driving-the-islamic-state-linked-rebels-218628

Dec 07 – The Islamic State Central Africa Province recently <u>attacked</u> and killed two foreign tourists and a citizen in a Ugandan nature park. Located in the country's west near the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Queen Elizabeth National Park is about 400km from the Ugandan capital Kampala.

The attack was aimed at Uganda's most important source of foreign currency, the tourism sector. The sector generated <u>7.7% of Uganda's gross national product</u> before a slump linked to the Covid pandemic.

The attack highlights a departure from previous attacks by the armed group towards new targets: western tourists in Uganda. It also highlights how regional rivalries in the border areas of <a href="Congo-Uganda-Rwanda">Congo-Uganda-Rwanda</a> function as oxygen that has enabled the organisation to survive and grow.

#### The evolution

The group, originally known as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), was <u>formed and financed</u> by the rulers of the DRC (then Zaire) Mobutu Sese Seko, and Sudan Omar al Bashir to launch insurgent attacks on their common enemy in the mid-1990s – Uganda. The ADF was thus initially used by Mobutu and Bashir as a <u>weapon</u> in regional rivalries to check Yoweri Museveni's influence.

At the time of its formation in 1995, ADF was a rather weird merger of two vastly different organisations.

The first consisted of former members of the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda that had been based around the mainly Christian Bakonjo-Baamba people of the Rwenzori region in western Uganda, and near the border with DRC.

The second part of the organisation consisted of fighters from the Ugandan Islamic Salafi Foundation, an organisation with roots going back to protests against Uganda's <u>attempts to control</u> its Muslim congregations in the early 1990s.

Uganda forced the new group into the eastern provinces of Congo where it was supported by the Mobutu regime before its <u>overthrow in 1997</u>. It survived the fall of Mobutu by withdrawing deep into the forests and mountains in the border areas between Uganda and Congo.

Over time, ADF grew more Islamic, partly due to Ugandan amnesties that convinced several of the more moderate leaders of the ADF to defect. Signs of a more radical organisation emerging could be seen from 2011. The <u>Islamic State</u> accepted the organisation as a province in 2019. When the ADF leader <u>swore allegiance to the Islamic State</u>, there were some defections from the few remaining commanders who had National Army roots.

#### Change in strategy

Since 2021, the Islamic State Central Africa Province has launched two different types of attacks against Uganda. First, terror attacks and assassinations far from the Congolese border in places like Kampala. Second, heavy, more military-style attacks against civilians in Uganda's border with the DRC.

It's increasingly using more <u>traditional terror tools</u> and has introduced new propaganda material, such as videos with beheadings. Suicide bombings have also become part of its repertoire. The group even <u>attempted to assassinate</u> Ugandan government leaders. From 2022, the group has carried out heavier raids into Uganda, including attacking a school in <u>June 2023</u> in a town near the Uganda-Congolese border. It has also launched several attacks against <u>businesses in the border zone</u>.



Ugandan soldiers in the deep forests of eastern Democratic Republic of Congo in 2021. Alain Uaykani/Xinhua via Getty Images

#### Uganda's response

The increase in the Islamic State Central Africa Province attacks led to a Congolese-approved <u>Ugandan intervention in Congo</u> that began in December 2021. The rebel group initially withdrew into the deep forests of the Rwenzori mountains and the Ituri rainforest in the north-eastern parts of Congo. These are close to the DRC's Virunga National Park, another large area of wilderness and mountains that's perfect to hide in. This renewed pressure might have led parts of

the rebel group into Ugandan territory in the Rwenzori Mountains National Park. This isn't too far from Queen Elizabeth National Park where the recent terror attacks occurred.

This latest intervention continues a pattern of Ugandan and Congolese offensives that lead to temporary withdrawals of the rebel group into the forest and mountains around the Uganda-Congo border. These offensives usually end with the rebels returning into towns and cities upon Ugandan and Congolese withdrawals.

Importantly, the current offensive has failed to end terror attacks inside Uganda.

Adding to the complexity of the intervention are ongoing attacks from the largest guerilla group in eastern Congo, the <u>March 23</u> Movement (M23). M23 has had recent success on the battlefield, recapturing towns from government forces.

The M23 offensive takes place to the south and west of the area where the Islamic State in Central Africa Province is operating, but has repercussions for the group. First, the recent round of warfare in eastern DRC has created a record <u>6.9 million</u> refugees due to escalating violence, creating chaos that the group can take advantage of.

Second, the ongoing fighting has drawn the Congolese army away from its campaign against the Islamic State in Central Africa Province, and hinders Congolese-Rwandese cooperation against it. This is due to <a href="Rwandan support for the M23">Rwandan support for the M23</a>, which Kigali officially denies providing.

#### The way forward

The Islamic State in Central Africa Province thrives on <u>Congolese-Rwandese</u> rivalry, as well as regional mistrust dating back decades. Creating real regional cooperation and trust would be the first step toward ensuring that the Islamic State's local outfit is stopped. It would also help address nearly three decades of fighting in the Congo.

For this to happen, however, African – as well as other international actors – need to stay focused on the conflict in Congo and the unrest in the Uganda-Rwanda-DRC border areas. It's also important to actively strive for dialogue, especially <u>between Rwanda and Congo</u>.

Stig Jarle Hansen is an Associate Professor of International Relations, Norwegian University of Life Sciences.

# Holocaust Comparisons Are Overused – but in the Case of Hamas's Oct. 7 Attack on Israel, Such Comparisons May Reflect More Than Just the Emotional Response of a Traumatized People

#### By Avinoam Patt and Liat Steir-Livny

Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20231208-holocaust-comparisons-are-overused-but-in-the-case-of-hamas-s-oct-7-attack-on-israel-such-comparisons-may-reflect-mor

Dec 08 – Many observers have referred to the massacre of Israelis by Hamas on Oct. 7, 2023, as the deadliest attack against the Jewish people in a single day "since the Holocaust."

As scholars who have spent <u>decades studying the history</u> of <u>Israel's relationship with the Holocaust</u>, we have argued that the Holocaust should remain unique and not be compared with other atrocities. We have written against <u>simplistic Holocaust analogies</u>, like comparing mask and vaccine mandates during the COVID-19 pandemic to the Nazi persecution of the Jews, or the practice of labeling political opponents "Nazis." Both seem to trivialize the memory of what is known as the Shoah, the Hebrew word for "catastrophe."

But the Oct. 7 massacres perpetrated by Hamas changed our thinking.

#### Israeli Identity and the Holocaust

Over the past 75 years, the collective memory of the Shoah has assumed a central place in Israeli national identity. The memory of the Holocaust has increasingly become the prism through which Israelis understand both their past and their present relationships with the Arab and Muslim world.

Israelis saw the Holocaust's threat of annihilation echoed in many situations. In 1967, there was the waiting period before the Six-

Day War, when the Egyptian leader <u>Gamal Abdel Nasser threatened to "wipe Israel off the map.</u>" It was there in the trauma of the Yom Kippur War in 1973 and the <u>unexpected, simultaneous attacks by Egypt and Syria</u>. When <u>Israel destroyed the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981</u>, Prime Minister Menachem Begin justified it with the explanation that "there won't be another Holocaust in history."



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This association has only strengthened in the past 40 years with the 1982 Lebanon war, two Palestinian uprisings, known as intifadas, and with the present threat posed by a nuclear Iran. All these events evoke the memory of the Holocaust and are understood within the collective memory of threats of annihilation. This phenomenon represents, for many Israelis, an inability to separate their current situation from the vulnerability of the diaspora Jewish past. And this conflation of past and present continues to play a central role in Israeli politics, foreign policy and public discourse. The frequent comparisons between the Oct. 7 massacres and the Shoah are more, we believe, than just the default associations of a people submerged in Holocaust postmemory, which refers to inherited and imagined memories of subsequent generations who did not personally experience the trauma. In seeking to describe the depths of evil they witnessed on Oct. 7, Israelis were making more than just an emotional connection between the Holocaust and the Oct. 7 massacres. To help explain the logic of that connection, specific and reasonable comparisons can be made to better understand Hamas' traumatic and devastating massacre of Israelis. Below are a few of the many parallels:

#### 1. Ideology and Identification

Just as the Nazis aimed to annihilate the Jews, Hamas and affiliated terrorist organizations share the same objective: the destruction of Jews. The 1988 Hamas charter refers to "Jews" and not "Israelis" when calling for the destruction of these people. While the 2017 Hamas covenant states that Hamas does not seek war with the Jews, but instead "wages a struggle against the Zionists who occupy Palestine," the slaughter of Jews – many of whom were peace activists – in October has proven otherwise. The national struggle of Hamas is predicated upon the conquest of land and elimination of the Jews. Hamas officials have subsequently promised to repeat Oct. 7 again and again until Israel is annihilated.

#### 2. Indoctrination

While the racial antisemitism of the Nazi regime differs from the antisemitism employed in the fundamentalist Islamic version of Hamas, <u>antisemitism is a key part of the struggle for both ideologies</u>. Indoctrination from an early age aimed at the dehumanization of the Jews is a key part of both how <u>Nazis taught young German students during the Third Reich</u> and in how <u>Hamas educates</u> children in Gaza.

#### 3. Methods of Killing and Survival

The horrors of Oct. 7 echo the brutal tactics Nazis used during the Holocaust, including not only murder but cruel humiliation of the victims. The testimonies of Oct. 7 survivors reveal the torture of parents and children, sometimes in front of each other, including rape and sexual violence, mocking and lingering in the murder process as the terrorists relished the atrocities they committed. When the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto realized that the end was near, they worked for months to prepare hiding places for themselves in their homes and created improvised bunkers, doing whatever they could to avoid capture and deportation. They did not imagine that the Nazis would come to eliminate the ghetto in a different way, entering the ghetto with flamethrowers and burning down one building after another. Some Jews were burned alive, while others fled outside and fell into the hands of the Nazis.

On Oct. 7, victims in the kibbutzim and communities near Gaza hid in fortified safe rooms designed to protect them from rocket attacks. Hamas terrorists went from house to house, burning one after the other so that inhabitants would be forced to flee from their protected shelters. Others were burned in their homes.

#### 4. Using Jews in the Killing Process

On Oct. 7, Hamas terrorists took a hostage from Nahal Oz, one of the kibbutzim in the south, and <u>forced him to go from house to house to knock on doors and lure his neighbors outside</u>. Afterward, they murdered him. Holocaust scholars have described such episodes from World War II in which Jews were forced to cooperate as "choiceless choices."

#### 5. Terminology

The word Shoah is used in the Bible to describe danger from neighboring nations, signifying distress, pain, torment, calamity and a "day of destruction." While it later came to define the total Nazi extermination of Jews in the 1940s, multiple testimonies collected from survivors of the Oct. 7 massacres use the term once again today, echoing the biblical definition, to signal a day of desolation, darkness, destruction and gloom. The words used to describe events are often loaded with emotional associations; the power and meaning of words that attempt to convey the depths of traumatic experiences cannot be discounted.

#### Not the Same

There is a difference between pointing out similarities and creating shallow comparisons. We are aware of the tendency, especially in the political sphere, to resort to simplistic, symbolic and performative



comparisons to the Holocaust – such as Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, Gilad Erdan, <u>donning a yellow star with the</u> words "Never Again" on Oct. 31.

Oct. 7 is not the same as the Holocaust. Even so, we can use the study of the Holocaust to understand the traumatic and devastating encounters between Hamas terrorists and their victims on Oct. 7.

It might be a trivialization of the Holocaust to simply label Hamas as the "new Nazis," but our analysis reveals that recognizing their eliminationist antisemitism means there can be no return to the pre-Oct. 7 status quo, when <u>Israel's policy was to accommodate</u> Hamas' control of the Gaza strip.

Despite the natural tendency to turn away from the most shocking and the most horrific manifestations of human evil, there are times when gazes must not be averted, when horror must be confronted in order to understand the motivations of the perpetrators and the responses of the victims and the survivors.

In this case, at what point do we ignore analogies that seem deliberate and intentional? As Holocaust scholars, we recognize why Israelis are stuck – and struck – by the traumatic nature of Oct. 7.

**Avinoam Patt** is Director, Center for Judaic Studies, University of Connecticut. **Liat Steir-Livny** is Associate Professor of Holocaust, Film *and* cultural Studies, Sapir Academic College.

# ISIS propaganda seducing 'new generation of teenagers,' French domestic intel

By Pierre Emmanuel Ngendakumana

Source: https://www.politico.eu/article/isis-propaganda-france-intelligence-radicalisation-teenagers/

Dec 06 – A new generation of French teenagers is being wooed by the Islamic State terrorist group — infamous for its on-camera immolations of captives in Iraq — and seems ominously susceptible to the group's propaganda, according to the head of France's DGSI internal security directorate, Nicolas Lerner.



France — home to Europe's largest Jewish and Muslim populations — has suffered multiple terrorist attacks in the past few months, most recently last weekend near the Eiffel Tower in Paris when <u>a German man was killed</u> and two others were injured. A French prosecutor said the perpetrator had pledged allegiance to Islamic State. "The three attack plots foiled by the DGSI in 2023 involved individuals who were all under the age of 20," Lerner <u>said</u> in a Thursday interview with Le Monde, in which he claimed they were members of this group. Lerner used the terms Islamic State and ISIS interchangeably. "The youngest was 13 years old. Two others were 14 years old. In several of these cases ... these young people did not go to mosques or places of socialization: They structured themselves online, on social networks, through a very worrying ideological and digital confinement."

Lerner said the current conflict between Israel and Hamas has had "undeniably" direct consequences for France.

"Our analysis is that the attraction to jihadist ideology significantly diminished due to the rout of [Islamic State] in the years 2017-2018, especially among the generations that had committed themselves in the early 2010s.

"But ISIS propaganda is now coming back to seduce a new generation of teenagers who, for various reasons — a quest for identity, the echo of a discourse of victimization, or a glorification of violent impulses that they may otherwise feed — are once again showing themselves to be sensitive to this deadly ideology." EU Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson also <u>warned</u> on Tuesday of a "huge risk" of terror attacks in the bloc before Christmas, linking the threat to the ongoing Israel-Hamas war.

"Jihadist ideology is not dead," Lerner said. "ISIS has a new appeal among these younger generations."

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** Two French jokes: (1) integration; (2) multiculturalism!

# **Cracks in the Muslim World**

By Ali Imran Atta (journalist)

Source: https://dailytimes.com.pk/1150681/cracks-in-the-muslim-world/

Dec 12 – In Europe, the Catholic Church is the most predominant religious institution. Since the first century, Christians have been practising Christianity throughout Europe. Several of the Pauline Epistles were written to Christians residing in Greece and other Roman Empire territories. However, Christian Europe was split in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by the Holy Roman Empire, the warring pope and the city-states of Italy, and the nation-states of Spain, France, and England. When the Ottomans



approached the gates of Vienna, they were more hindered by Sultan Suleiman's death than by strong Christian opposition, so they were unable to band together to block their march.

Currently, the situation is flipped now. The Muslim world is the one that cannot come together to resist Western dominance. The rivalry between the papal realms of Italy and the influence of outside forces on the fate of their weak rulers are parallels to the problem that exists among Arabs, Qatar, and its GCC allies.

The Arab nations had never been expected to take a strong stance in favour of the occupied Palestinian people. Many of them have reconciled with the Zionist state of Israel. However, one had thought that the crimes that Israeli soldiers were still committing in Gaza would rouse them from their sleep. Regretfully, it has not occurred. The Muslim world decided to remain silent despite Israel's ongoing attacks on Gazan hospitals that resulted in the deaths of infants and children. The joint decision was released following the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab League's emergency summit meeting in Riyadh last month.

The Islamic world is going through a time like Europe's Dark Ages, marked by numerous conflicts and catastrophes. The Muslim world of today is extremely susceptible to outside influence and dominance. First, there is a political legitimacy dilemma in many Muslim nations. The governance institutions that were primarily left behind by the Western colonists have deteriorated. Though most of the dictatorial regimes in the Gulf and Iran are susceptible to both internally, they were not affected by the Arab Spring. democratic and ideological challenge. The rivalry between the papal realms of Italy and the influence of outside forces on the fate of their weak rulers are parallels to the problem that exists among Arabs.

Egypt is now governed by the military again. The populist leader of Turkey faces both domestic and external resistance. The result of foreign interference in Libya has been the rise of various terrorist groups, a civil war, and the jihadist Islamic State group. In a similar vein, foreign intervention and a vicious civil conflict fueled by sectarianism and ethnicity have wrecked Syria. The existence of Iranian militant organizations, US military assistance, and the fight against IS all contribute to maintaining the illusion of Iraqi unity. The Afghan government that the US installed is weak, corrupt, fragmented, and heavily weaponized. Paradoxically, Pakistan is one of the few OIC countries that maintains some semblance of democratic legitimacy despite corruption scandals.

**Second,** there is a growing violent trend among Muslims. Involved in cross-border and civil wars, transnational terrorist groups like IS (The Islamic State Khorasan Chapter), Boko Haram, also known as (Jamaat Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jih?d), the terrorist organization Al Qaeda, Al Shabab, and others pose a threat to international stability.

Muslim countries are the primary victims of international terrorism, not its primary sponsors. Certain major governments have engaged in selective warfare against terrorists, occasionally using them for political gain. There has been no attempt to combat state terrorism or distinguish between terrorist organizations and insurgencies that, such as the Afghan Taliban, have legitimate pliable, locally focused objectives.

The "root cause" of terrorism, which includes ongoing injustices against Muslim populations, such as those in Kashmir and Palestine, as well as poverty, ignorance, and social alienation that serve as recruiting grounds for terrorist organizations, particularly those operating online, are most importantly ignored.

**Third,** disagreements in the doctrine and ideology have made the conflicts inside the Islamic world worse. The division between Sunni and Shia sects is the most significant. This division was dormant before the "Islamic Revolution" in Iran in 1979. It became prominent during the Iran-Iraq War. It was evident in the Afghanistan War of Independence involving the Northern Alliance and the Afghan Taliban. Though, the US assault on Baghdad, its destruction of the army and party of Sunnis, and the holding of one-bloke, one-vote selections made possible the Iran-sponsored.

Iranian influence will spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula as well as beyond if Shia parties can seize central authority in Iraq. Saudi Arabia, the GCC, and Egypt are Iran's Sunni adversaries and are enraged by its ascent. While it has recently been forced to temper its antagonism and gain Iran's support to prevent Kurdish secession, Ankara has also been uncomfortable. Over time, Pakistan's close ties with Iran have declined for a variety of reasons, including Iran's unexpected reversal of its backing on Kashmiris in response to Delhi's "incentives," Islamabad's end of harmonious nuclear working together, rivalry for contribute to in post-Soviet Afghan, Tehran "interference" with Pakistan's Shia community, and worldwide incidents among Iranian and Pakistani Baluchistan. However, there are other ideological divisions in the Muslim world nowadays besides sectarian ones. Riyadh, Egypt, and the UAE have come to detest the Muslim Brotherhood along with its radical ideologies. Collateral harm has also been inflicted upon Hamas, the Brotherhood's Palestinian offshoot. However, Qatar even Turkey have backed Hamas and the Brotherhood, given sanctuary to their supporters, and assisted them in the civil war in Libya. The Saudi-UAE breakup with Doha was primarily caused by such

Not to mention, the weak and exposed Islamic world of today is ripe for the dominance and influence of powerful outside forces. The most recent Arab Islamic American Summit in Saudi served as a reminder of how vulnerable most of the collected Muslim nations are to United States hegemony.

divergences with Qatar.



Owning its military might and expanding influence in Syria and the surroundings, Russia is also enjoying critical influence with a few Muslim nations, such as Iran and Turkey. China has avoided getting involved in inter-Islamic disputes thus far. It wants to utilize its financial and economic might to promote stronger ties with Muslim nations.

The hard-liners' stances taken by the administration of Donald Trump on most foreign conflicts and crises, such as those involving North Korea, the South China Sea, Syria, Iran, and Syria, appear to be the most perilous for the near future. These stances, especially the creation of a relationship against Tehran, have the potential to escalate the crises impacting the Muslim world if put into action. Pakistan's primary concerns include Afghanistan, India, and the terrorism of the TTP and IS. Pakistan has difficulties in dealing with these problems.

Pakistan must act on matters concerning the Islamic world and not "play possum" when it comes to its interests. The second-biggest country in the Muslim world, its strongest armed force, and the only state with nuclear weapons should not practice such abstinence. Pakistan has repeatedly determined that the best way to further its security and national objectives is to encourage cooperation and solidarity among Muslim nations. More than ever before Pakistan must take the initiative to create workable paths for interfaith harmony and collaboration, and ideally pave the way for a movement of enlistment within the Muslim community.



# **Netherlands** raises terrorism threat level to 'substantial'

Source: https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/netherlands-raises-threat-level-sees-real-chance-attack-2023-12-12/

Dec 12 – The likelihood of a terrorist attack in the Netherlands has increased in recent months, its anti-terrorism agency said on Tuesday as it raised its threat level for the first time since 2019.

The National Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism and Security (NCTV), said in a statement it has raised the country's threat level to 4, or "substantial" on its 5-step scale, citing the conflict between Israel and Hamas.

- Level 1: Minimal: It is unlikely that a terrorist attack will occur in the Netherlands.
- Level 2: Limited: There is a slight chance of a terrorist attack in the Netherlands.
- Level 3: Significant: A terrorist attack in the Netherlands is conceivable.

• Level 4: Substantial: There is a real chance of a terrorist attack in the Netherlands.

• Level 5: Critical: A terrorist attack in the Netherlands is imminent.

# Analysis: Is the Houthi threat to world order worse than the war on Gaza?

#### By Zoran Kusovac

Source: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/13/analysis-is-the-houthi-threat-to-world-order-more-serious-than-the-war-on-gaza

Dec 13 – War in Gaza is not a major threat to world peace and international security. This statement may sound cynical, cold, possibly even ill-informed, but it is true. Except for one party outside Gaza that can make it matter to people's pockets.

On the security level, despite its intensity, cruelty and the number of civilian victims, the war in Gaza is at best a narrow regional affair with just two parties fighting seriously, mainly in the Gaza Strip. It could be argued that the occupied West Bank is increasingly becoming a battlefield but it is still a step below full escalation. Countries bordering Israel and the Palestinian territory: Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt, are balancing their rhetoric to show they support the Palestinians and their cause, but intend to stay out of the conflict. That said, Lebanon's Hezbollah is sparring with Israel on a carefully weighed and limited scale, as are several much smaller groups in Syria, but all of them are demonstrating restraint and unwillingness to allow the fighting in Gaza to flash into a wider regional war. Jordan and Egypt are staying put and it would take a very major escalation to draw them into any kind of armed action. More distant powers that have interests and influence in the region, from Saudi Arabia and Turkey to Iran and the United States and a disunited Europe, are also threading cautiously, disinclined to spread the fighting either in intensity or in scope.

On an economic level, the war in Gaza itself doesn't impact the world economy. Brutal bombing, indiscriminate targeting of unarmed citizens and civilian infrastructure, human suffering, misery, displacement, hunger and disease generate international compassion but, even if it gets worse, it is almost certain that fighting would remain contained to Gaza because business would continue as usual elsewhere.

Unless...

#### Small but determined

This precarious informal balance of interests might be upset by the actions of a small but determined group: Yemen's Houthis who endanger shipping through the strategic Bab el-Mandeb between the Red



Sea and the Indian Ocean – a narrow passage that is the world's third-largest choke point for oil shipments after the Straits of Hormuz and Malacca. More than six million barrels pass through it every day, mainly on their way to Europe.



Armed men stand on the beach as the Galaxy Leader commercial ship, seized by Yemen's Houthis last month, is anchored off the coast of as-Salif, Yemen, December 5, 2023 [Khaled Abdullah/Reuters]

For an average ship travelling at 16 knots (30km/h), passing through Bab el-Mandeb and Suez takes nine days less than going around Africa. It is also cheaper: Maritime experts estimate that the shorter route saves at least 15 percent on transport.

But there are indirect costs: Attacks on maritime traffic increase insurance rates, danger compensations to the crews and other costs. Thus, while the war in Gaza does not cost citizens of neutral countries anything, the Houthis' stance in the Red Sea could make prices soar, first that of oil but then almost everything else would follow.

Can the Houthi attacks be stopped? The first step is always diplomacy, but almost no power recognises the Houthis or talks to them, let alone has any sway. The only exception is Iran, which supports the Houthis in principle but it does not control them. Nobody knows their current relations but if Iran indeed does not want the conflict to escalate, then the Houthis might be acting against its better advice. So even Iran may not be able to do much.

Sanctions would not work as various sanctions imposed on Yemen failed to stop the fighting there for the past decade or so.

Attacks on international shipping that escalated with the kidnapping of the Galaxy Leader in November and then culminated in rocket and drone attacks against unarmed commercial cargo ships and heavily armed naval vessels of several countries are nothing new for the Houthis.

They have a history of attacking ships in the Red Sea. During their conflict with an Arab, Saudi-led coalition, in January 2017, they attacked the frigate Al Madinah using three remote-controlled unmanned explosive boats, forcing the Royal Saudi Navy to withdraw from Yemeni waters.

Encouraged by their success, in May and July 2018, they attacked two huge Saudi oil tankers with (Iranian-built) cruise missiles, similar to those used in recent attacks. Neutral-flagged ships were also attacked in

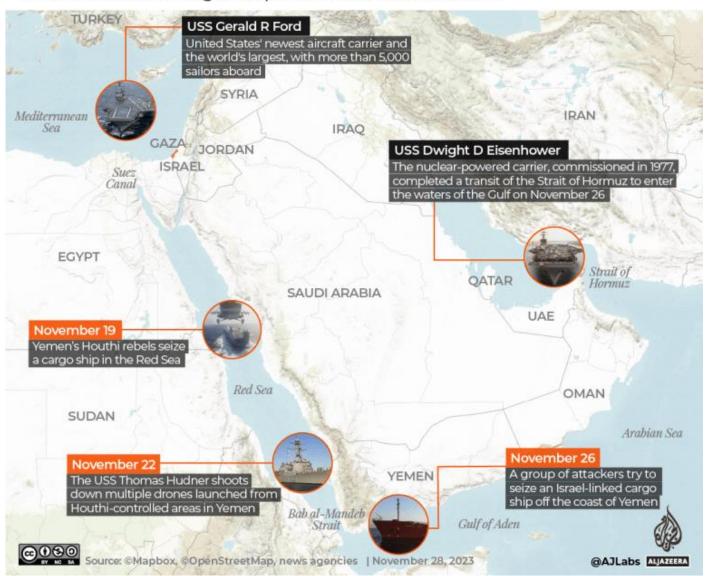


the same period. To complicate matters further, in 2021, Iran and Israel engaged in an undeclared naval conflict in the Red Sea alongside Yemeni shores.

#### ISRAEL-GAZA WAR

# US naval activity in the Middle East

The US has deployed two aircraft carriers and supporting military ships in the Middle East to deter regional spillover of the Israel-Gaza war.



Following the seizure of the Galaxy Leader, the US was reported to be considering designating the Ansar Allah, the official name of the Houthi movement, a "terror group" for involvement in "piracy of a ship in international waters". But the US trod carefully, reportedly consulting with other countries and deciding to not (yet) make the designation official. There were no reports of any talks with Tehran but they cannot be excluded as Washington certainly did not want to risk pushing the Houthis' big brother or its proxies like Hezbollah into a full war around Gaza.

Yet, after the latest missile attacks against commercial ships, Washington is reportedly trying to put together a coalition of 12 nations to counter the Houthi threat to shipping. Warships from at least four



nations' navies: US, France, United Kingdom and Israel are already active in the Red Sea and some have successfully thwarted attacks against themselves and against land targets in Israel.

With a coalition, the number of warships would increase and they could attack targets inside Yemen like launch sites, command facilities and missile storage sites.

Besides ships in the Red Sea, the Houthis continued targeting Israel, undeterred by the lack of tangible results. Israel intercepted a number of long-range missiles, some by land-based antimissile defences, others over the Red Sea south of Eilat by Israeli fighter jets. On at least one occasion, Israel's most modern plane, the F-35 was used.

Fully aware of the coalition brewing, the Houthis want to prevent it from becoming active and functional. Earlier this month, Mohammed al-Bukhaiti, member of the Houthi political bureau, warned Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates that if they joined such a coalition, the Houthis would target their oil rigs and storage facilities. The threat is realistic, both countries' oil infrastructure is well within range of Houthi missiles.

Any major attack on oil facilities on the Arabian Peninsula would be a clear escalation and a global one at that, as it would push oil prices up and raise insurance rates for international tankers loading along the shores of Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

It would be both paradoxical and cynical if the conflict with so much suffering and destruction that failed to move the world were to escalate through attacks on neutral ships.

**Zoran Kusovac** is a geopolitical and security analyst, war correspondent and producer who has been covering conflicts in Europe, Middle East, North Africa & Central Asia for nearly 4 decades.

# **Why** do we still underestimate what groups like Hamas are capable of

By Joshua Keating

Source: https://www.vox.com/world-politics/2023/12/13/23998928/hamas-taliban-isis-attacks-terrorism-extremist-groups-israel-palestine

Dec 13 – On August 6, 2001, George W. Bush was given what may be the most infamous daily intelligence brief ever received by a US president. It was titled "Bin Ladin Determined to Strike in US," and it included details on the activities of al-Qaeda operatives in the US, including threats to hijack US aircraft. In response, Bush did virtually nothing. And then, a little over a month later, those predictions came stunningly true with the 9/11 attacks.

Bush would not be the last leader to ignore such a warning. Decades into the "war on terror," it's clear that political leaders, as well as some of the world's most powerful militaries and intelligence, still underestimate the ability and ambition of extremist militant groups to carry out large-scale attacks. There have now been three major instances of such failures in the past decade.

Multiple news outlets, including the New York Times and Haaretz, have now reported that Israeli intelligence agencies had provided officials with extraordinary details about the plans for what became the October 7 attack more than a year before it was carried out. Just a day before the attack, the CIA reported unusual activity by Hamas in Gaza, suggesting an imminent military operation. Hamas militants reportedly trained for the attack in all but plain sight less than a mile from the Israeli border.

Yet Israeli officials appear to have dismissed these warnings, believing the group had scaled back its military ambitions to the occasional rocket barrage. Instead of reinforcing the border with Gaza, they chose to focus Israel's military assets on other threats, including Hezbollah in Lebanon and the increasingly restive <a href="West Bank">West Bank</a>. Ultimately, some 1,200 Israelis would pay for this miscalculation with their lives, as would thousands more Palestinian civilians in the war that has followed.

But the October 7 attack was far from the first instance of this kind of strategic surprise from an extremist militant group in recent years. In 2014, the terrorist group then known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) began taking over towns in western Iraq. Even after the group had seized the city of Fallujah, the site of the bloodiest battles of the Iraq War, President Barack Obama felt comfortable using a flip sports metaphor to dismiss ISIS as an amateur imitation of al-Qaeda. "If a jayvee team puts on Lakers uniforms that doesn't make them Kobe Bryant," he told the New Yorker that January.

Six months later, the "jayvees" had taken over Mosul, Iraq's largest city, were threatening Baghdad, and had proclaimed the establishment of a "caliphate" that, at its height, would control a territory the size of Great Britain. The US launched a military intervention to defeat the group in Iraq and eventually in Syria as well. US troops remain in both countries today — as does ISIS, which is still active, albeit much diminished.

In August 2021, the world was stunned again as the Taliban marched into Kabul, meeting almost no resistance as an Afghan state propped up with tens of billions of dollars in American funding collapsed and US personnel — along with thousands of Afghans — scrambled to evacuate.



Rescue workers at a police station that was destroyed after a battle between Israeli troops and Hamas militants on October 8, 2023, in Sderot, Israel. *Amir Levy/Getty Images* 

While an eventual Taliban victory was not shocking in itself — the group had been steadily gaining territory in the lead-up to a planned US troop withdrawal — few expected it to happen so rapidly. A month before the withdrawal, President Joe Biden told reporters at the White House that he trusted "the capacity of the Afghan military" and said he believed that the Afghan leaders "clearly have the capacity to sustain the government in place." He made these statements despite increasingly dire warnings from US intelligence agencies that the Afghan military was likely to collapse. While senior administration officials later said these assessments were made with a low degree of confidence, the reality is that the evacuation of Kabul would descend into chaos, including a bombing that killed 13 US service members and more than 160 Afghans.

These are three very different examples involving very different countries and militant groups. But in all these cases, extremist militant groups demonstrated previously unseen ambition and destructive capabilities. And in all three cases, governments ignored or dismissed warning signs of an impending catastrophe until it was too late.

Analysts and former intelligence agents who spoke with Vox say that a combination of cognitive biases, cultural prejudices, and bureaucratic inertia cause such warnings to be ignored time and again. But just because these problems are well-known does not mean they are easy to address. And given the terrible toll from fighting terror over the past two decades — in lives, dollars, and lost civil liberties, especially for Muslims — the price of success may be just as high as the cost of failure.

#### The signal and the noise

The problem of surprise isn't a new one in intelligence-gathering, nor one unique to extremist groups. In 1962, RAND Corporation analyst Roberta Wohlstetter wrote a <u>classic account</u> of the intelligence failure leading up to the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941. It concluded that, though the US military had collected abundant information suggesting an impending attack

- including intercepts of decoded Japanese diplomatic cables that indicated preparations for a major

rupture in US-Japan relations — they were hampered by diplomatic inertia and a failure to detect the relevant signals within all the noise.

"If our intelligence systems and all our other channels of information failed to produce an accurate image of Japanese intentions and capabilities, it was not for want of the relevant materials," Wohlstetter wrote. "Never before have we had so complete an intelligence picture of the enemy."

That scenario — too much information, not enough understanding of which bits are actually important — has occurred over and over again in the history of intelligence failures, from the outbreak of the Korean War to the Tet Offensive in the Vietnam War to 9/11. Erik Dahl, a former naval intelligence officer and a professor at the Naval Postgraduate School, said that the high-tech surveillance tools available to today's spies have, in some ways, only made the problem worse. According to a 2019 estimate, the National Security Agency intercepted and stored an average of 1.7 billion emails, phone calls, and other communications every day.

"We have too much information and not enough understanding of what's going on in the world," Dahl told Vox. As an example, he pointed to the failed 2009 Christmas Day "underwear bombing" attack. A White House review later concluded that intelligence analysts had collected enough data to disrupt the plot, but did not act on it because the information was "fragmentary and embedded in a large volume of other data." The plot only failed because the bomb failed to detonate.

The problem is compounded when the information counteracts a government's political preferences. Famously, the George W. Bush administration cherry-picked only the information that supported its preferred narrative when it was building the case for invading Iraq. That was a case of political leaders hearing what they want in order to hype up a nonexistent threat. But political preferences can also cause them to ignore a real one.

Obama had been elected in large part because of his pledge to take troops *out* of Iraq. Biden had vowed to bring America's long and frustrating war in Afghanistan to a close. Benjamin Netanyahu's government <a href="had argued">had argued</a> that the security threat from Hamas militants in Gaza was contained and the country could focus on other political priorities. Some Israeli officials <a href="even believed">even believed</a> there was an advantage to having a group like Hamas in power, as it reduced pressure on Israel to negotiate over the establishment of a Palestinian state. In each case, warnings of an impending attack were highly inconvenient for the government's preferred course of action — and thus, tended to be downplayed.

"Human beings are really, really good at shaping the facts to support their own opinions," said Emily Harding, a former CIA analyst now at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

#### The militant challenge

Religiously motivated, underground, non-state militant groups also pose a particular challenge when state-run intelligence agencies try to analyze their intentions.

"It is difficult for modern Western intelligence services and national security organizations, which are created and established largely to track other entities that look like themselves, to get a handle on the problem of subnation states or non-state actors," said Dahl. Shiraz Maher, co-director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation at King's College London, pointed out that religiously motivated groups often act with a different set of cost-benefit concerns than secular ones. Hamas, for instance, was willing to carry out its attacks despite every indication that it would ultimately result in massive casualties for both its own fighters and Palestinian civilians. (Israel claims to <a href="have killed 5,000 of Hamas's fighters">have killed 5,000 of Hamas's fighters</a>, while estimates are that more than twice as many Palestinian civilians have been killed. Even if the number of Hamas casualties has been exaggerated, it's safe to say the group's military losses have been substantial.)

"These are rational groups," Maher said. "But at the same time, they're rational from a completely different epistemic, sociological, philosophical, ideological premise."

Extremist militant groups, by definition underground organizations that emphasize secrecy and demand fierce adherence to their cause, are also notoriously difficult for intelligence services to infiltrate, compared with traditional national governments. They also tend to issue a lot of threats, making it difficult to know which plots they actually intend on, or are capable of, carrying out.

Harding, who served at the CIA during the rise of ISIS, says that because extremist groups don't look like traditional militaries, it's easy to believe they lack the ability to carry out grandiose plans. "The intent is always there with these groups. Its capability is what you have to measure," she said. "They look like a ragtag group of misfits. They don't look like what we think of as a very capable fighting force."

#### Overestimating your allies

In each of these cases, the failure was not only in predicting the actions of the terrorist group, but in the ability of the terrorists' opponents to meet the threat once it materialized. In Iraq and in Afghanistan, the



United States overestimated the ability of the militaries they had spent years and billions of dollars training and arming, and, perhaps even more important, the willingness of those militaries to fight back.

"The psychology and motivation of a military force: That's the most difficult thing to assess in intelligence," said Robert Grenier, former director of the CIA's Counterterrorism Center. "Anybody who tries to make a prediction about that isn't very likely to be successful."

Conversely, in the runup to the <u>war in Ukraine</u>, US intelligence agencies <u>gathered and publicized</u> what turned out to be stunningly accurate information about Russian intentions and battle plans, but failed to predict the capability and resolve of Ukrainian forces in meeting that threat.

The October 7 Hamas attacks were different, in part because Hamas is a very different group. In addition to being a militant organization, it's a governing authority that administers services for more than half a million people and has relations with multiple other states. It's also engaged in what it views as a nationalist resistance fight, unlike groups such as al-Qaeda or ISIS. Yet Israel was caught off guard by Hamas's assault, in part because in the months before October 7, Israel relocated military forces away from Gaza, counting on electronic surveillance, autonomous systems, and relatively small groups of troops to deal with whatever threats might emanate from the strip. The Israelis clearly viewed Hamas as a manageable problem, rather than the impending catastrophe it has turned out to be.

"I think it shows there's clearly a kind of arrogance on the part of the state," said Aki Peritz, a former CIA counterterrorism analyst now at American University.

#### An inconvenient threat

In an essay for Foreign Affairs written before the October 7 attacks — but published shortly after — National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan <u>described the Middle East</u> as "quieter than it has been for decades." It's a line likely to <u>age about as well</u> as Obama's junior varsity team guip about ISIS.

Sullivan's description might be wishful thinking, but the desire to focus on other priorities is hardly irrational. In recent years, leaders of both parties in the United States <u>have argued</u> that, with the threat from groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS vastly diminished, the country should shift the focus of its national security policy to "great power competition" with countries like Russia and China.

But some terrorism analysts say the attack by Hamas, a group largely written off as a serious threat by both Israel and the United States, shows that we may have been premature in dismissing the ability of groups that have threatened major attacks to actually turn those plans into reality.

"I do a lot of work with the US government, including with the intelligence community," said Colin Clarke, a terrorism analyst with the Soufan Group, a security consultancy. "We've talked a lot about ISIS, about al-Qaeda and its respective affiliates, about far-right groups, <u>QAnon</u>, you name it. I hadn't heard anybody mention the name 'Hamas' in about 10 years. It wasn't on anybody's radar."

The October 7 attack, Clarke said, was a "paradigm shift in how we think about the capabilities of these groups. He added: "We've kind of written these guys off, because the big names are gone," referring to globally famous terrorist leaders like Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Extremist militant groups certainly didn't disappear with the decimation of al-Qaeda's senior leadership and the destruction of ISIS's caliphate. In many parts of the world, they are growing rapidly. West Africa, for instance, <u>saw more than 1,800 terrorist attacks</u> resulting in nearly 4,600 deaths in just the first half of this year. But the prevailing assumption has been that these groups are mainly concerned with local conflicts rather than transnational attacks.

History has shown, however, that local threats don't always stay local. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the group's Yemeni offshoot, was largely thought of as a local group until it <u>very nearly pulled off</u> the failed "underwear bomber" plot of 2009. ISIS, at its height, carried out numerous high-profile and deadly attacks in Europe.

"We have batted zero in terms of correctly predicting when a group decides to shift from local to global," said Katherine Zimmerman, a terrorism analyst at the American Enterprise Institute.

Going forward, Israel has vowed that its massive military response to October 7 will wipe out Hamas as a military threat, but these groups can almost <u>never be eliminated entirely</u>. And senior officials, including Gen. Charles Q. Brown, America's new top military commander, <u>have expressed concerns</u> that the scale and brutality of the operation could end up creating more terrorists than it eliminates. Discussing the war in Gaza in a <u>recent CNN interview</u>, Democratic Congressman Seth Moulton cited a study commissioned by retired US Gen. Stanley McChrystal which found that for every civilian killed, about 10 future fighters are recruited.

Whatever soul searching goes on in intelligence agencies in the wake of these failures, the answer is clearly not to go straight back to a September 12, 2001, mindset. Western governments, including the United States, have very good reasons for wanting to turn the page on the war on terror. Over the past two decades, the desire to eliminate terrorist threats has led the US into long, bloody, and frustrating wars



and a troubling expansion of the surveillance state and discrimination against Muslim Americans. And it's worth remembering that for every successful attack or military offensive by an extremist militant group, there are many more that never come to fruition. It's simply neither possible nor desirable for a society to be on full alert at all times. No one wants to go back to the days of color-coded terror alerts.

But after three significant failures in the past decade to predict a major attack by an extremist militant group, it's clearly a mistake to assume that these groups are no longer capable of surprising and outwitting the world's most powerful and technologically advanced states, particularly when, as in the Israeli case, the preparations for that attack are happening in plain view of the state. And there's no reason to assume it won't happen again.

"The curse of the intelligence officer is that we constantly get blamed for bringing the doom and gloom," said Harding. "There's a piece, I think, of human psychology, where you do not want to believe that something truly bad will happen." That is one mistake that governments can't afford to keep making.

**Joshua Keating** is a senior correspondent at Vox covering foreign policy and world news with a focus on the future of international conflict. He is the author of the 2018 book, <u>Invisible Countries</u>: <u>Journeys to the Edge of Nationhood</u>, an exploration of border conflicts, unrecognized countries, and changes to the world map.

## **Can Hamas Really Be Completely "Eliminated"?**

By Cathrin Schaer (journalist)

Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20231213-can-hamas-really-be-completely-eliminated



Dec 13 – The Israeli government has been clear. The militant group Hamas will be "eliminated," many senior members of government, including the country's prime minister, have all said.

On certain Israeli television channels, slogans such as "Together we will win" appear regularly. But is it really possible to completely eliminate Hamas and "win" in a situation like this?

The short answer, as experts have repeatedly said, is no.

Israel has been bombing the Gaza Strip, home to more than two million Palestinians, since the October 7 attack on Israel by Hamas, which is classified as a terrorist organization by Germany, the European Union, the US and others. Israel has also launched a ground offensive into the Gaza Strip and is blocking the



delivery of food, water and power into the enclave. Despite this, most analysts say that it won't be possible to get rid of <u>Hamas</u> altogether, the main reason being that Hamas is more than just a militant organization.

#### Hamas as a Social Movement

Hamas has an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 fighters, Guido Steinberg, an expert on the Middle East at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, told DW recently. But, he added, "it is also a social movement with mass support in the Gaza Strip. And that is the problem in the long run."

Hamas has been in de facto control of the Gaza Strip since 2007, and as part of its social movement, there is a welfare network known as "dawah." This civilian network is thought to have between 80,000 and 90,000 members.

Dawah means "call" or "invitation" and is historically defined as a way of calling or inviting more believers to one's faith through social outreach, the Oxford Dictionary of Islam explains.

Isreal "would love to eradicate Hamas as an institution, as a political, religious and cultural structure, and as a military structure," Rashid Khalidi, a professor of modern Arab studies at Columbia University in New York told the Spanish newspaper *El Pais*, in late October. "I don't think they can do the first two things," he argued. "Whether they kill all their leaders, whether they kill all the armed militants, Hamas will remain as a political force, whether the Israelis occupy Gaza or leave. So destroying Hamas as a political institution, destroying Hamas as an idea, is impossible."

Hamas does not recognize the state of Israel. The group believes that religion should be the basis of any Palestinian government. But it is probably its self-described position as a resistance movement opposed to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories and the Gaza Strip that makes it most popular.

However, Khalidi added, what the Israelis may well be able to do is degrade Hamas' military capabilities, "but only to a limited extent and period."

#### **Destroying Hamas' Military Potential**

Israel has one of the most powerful militaries in the world, ranking 18th out of 145 nations in 2023 on Global Firepower's annual list of armed strength. For comparison, Germany sits in 25th place. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reports that last year Israel spent 4.5% of its national income on defense — that's more than the US or Germany, which spent 3.5% and 1.4% respectively. Meanwhile, Hamas' military wing operates more like a guerilla group and has smuggled most of its weapons into the Gaza Strip. So Israel certainly has the resources to degrade Hamas and hunt down its leaders. Although the numbers cannot be independently verified, the Israeli government said recently it believes it has killed between 5,000 and 7,000 Hamas fighters.

If true, this could be seen as a partial success because weakening Hamas may well be the best that can be expected. "Some Western officials believe that the Israeli offensive to date, combined with upgraded border security, has made sure that Hamas will not launch another attack like that of 7 October," experts at the think tank International Crisis Group wrote last week.

"As Hamas did after conflicts with Israel in 2009, 2012, 2014 and 2021, the group will almost certainly rearm and restore," Dennis Ross, a former US envoy to the Middle East, <u>wrote in an op-ed</u> for the *New York Times* in late October. That is why, he explained, he was against a ceasefire until Hamas had been removed from power.

#### **Very Hard to Defeat Guerilla Groups**

At the same time, very few national militaries have managed to decisively defeat guerilla organizations in the past.

Unsuccessful examples include the US efforts against the <u>Taliban in Afghanistan</u> and <u>insurgent groups in Iraq</u>. The Sri Lankan government's defeat of the separatist rebel group <u>Tamil Tigers</u> in that nation's civil war is often cited as a case where a national army did win. But, as is also often pointed out, that victory took 26 years of war, a death toll of between 80,000 to 100,000, and <u>potential</u> war crimes committed by both sides.

In fact, in some situations where an insurgent group's capabilities were degraded but it managed to survive, the group re-emerged later in a more extremist form. A common example is the brutal "Islamic State" group, which evolved out of the remnants of Al-Qaida. Israel itself has never managed to defeat Hamas conclusively, despite assassinating a number of its leaders, including two founders of the group.

#### How to Kill an Idea?

"The [Israeli] military can do the best job they can. They could eliminate the leadership. They can destroy missile launching facilities," Justin Crump, a terrorism expert who heads Sibylline Ltd, a global intelligence and risk analysis consultancy, said. "But they won't eliminate the idea of Hamas." Destroying Hamas by military means makes no sense, Crump told DW, because "while some Gazans are turning against Hamas,"



other people in Gaza sympathize with Hamas. They will resent Israel for these actions, and that is going to fuel the cycle [of violence] as it always has done — unless there is a very big change at the end of this."

"After more than two months of intense Israeli operations, it is evident that eradicating Hamas, even as a fighting force, will be a tall order and the push to do so will destroy what is left of Gaza," a policy briefing by the think tank International Crisis Group, or ICS, published on December 9, concluded.

According to the Hamas-run Gaza health ministry, over 18,000 people have been killed by Israel and over 49,500 injured in just two months; an estimated 61% of those killed are civilians, according to an analysis by Yagil Levy, a sociology professor at the Open University of Israel and cited by Israeli newspaper Haaretz. Over half of all Gaza's buildings have been destroyed, and 90% of the population is now displaced.

"Netanyahu claims that Hamas's destruction will enable the 'deradicalization' of Gaza, but the opposite is likely," ICS experts wrote. "The campaign underway and its aftermath will produce new, perhaps still more tenacious forms of militancy."

# Is Hamas Really Islamic? Is It 'Extreme' by Muslim Standards?

By Raymond Ibrahim

Source: https://www.meforum.org/65347/is-hamas-really-islamic-is-it-extreme-by-muslim



Dec 14 – Although most in the West consider Hamas, which brutally massacred some 1,400 Israelis on October 7, 2023, to be anything from a terrorist to a nationalist movement, the group sees itself first and foremost as a religious—namely, *Islamic*—movement, dedicated to enforcing the draconian dictates of Muslim law (sharia), including through jihad.

"Hamas" means "zeal" in Arabic and is an Arabic acronym from *harakat al-muqawamah al-islamiyyah* (the Islamic Resistance Movement). The group is primarily concentrated in the Gaza Strip. Created primarily by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin in 1987 as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas has the stated goal of replacing the

entire state of Israel with a Muslim state governed by sharia. Jihad and Islamist indoctrination are its two principal means of instituting this new state.

Although its official membership is around 20,000, more than 200,000—5.26 percent of the then total population of the Palestinian Territories—attended the funeral procession for Sheikh Ahmed Yassin in 2004, suggesting that its local sympathizers are 10 times its official number.

#### A Commitment to Islamic Principles

In addition to its immediate goals, Hamas' founding charter also illustrates the organization's commitment to Islamic principles in general. The slogan—"Allah is its goal [theocratic rule], the Prophet its model [importance of sunna], the Koran its Constitution [sharia], Jihad [terrorism] its path, and death [suicide-bombings] in the cause of Allah its most sublime belief" —fully demonstrates its Islamic, as opposed to territorial or nationalistic, motivations.

Though most Hamas members are Palestinian Sunni Arabs, the charter "welcomes all Muslims who share its beliefs and thinking, commit themselves to its course of action, keep its secrets and aspire to join its ranks in order to carry out their duty."

The Hamas Charter echoes the sentiment of observant Muslims in regard to the land of Palestine, all of which is believed to be "waqf land" that has belonged to Islam "since it was conquered by the Companion [Caliph Omar I] of the Prophet [c. 640]." In accordance with Islamic law, observant Muslims stress that the land of Palestine belongs to Islam and must therefore be re-conquered by Islam, not necessarily by Palestinians, but by Muslims. Hamas clearly defines "Nationalism as part and parcel of the religious faith," thereby universalizing the notion of "nationalism" to include the entire Muslim *umma*, irrespective of actual nationality. And like global jihadists, Hamas clerics have publicly expressed their support for re-establishing the Caliphate.

Based on all the above, it is unsurprising that Hamas includes statements such as the following (from Article 7 of its charter):

The Day of Judgement will not come about until Moslems fight the Jews (killing the Jews), when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say O Moslems, O Abdulla, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him. Only the Gharkad tree, (evidently a certain kind of tree) would not do that because it is one of the trees of the Jews [related by *al-Bukhari* and *Moslem*].

#### **Islamist Doublespeak**

To achieve its immediate goal of an Islamic Palestinian state, Hamas has steadfastly denounced the Oslo Accords, the Annapolis conference, and other diplomatic efforts to establish a long lasting peace in the region, referring to them as "initiatives, the so-called peaceful solutions, and the international conferences ... [which] are all contrary to the beliefs of the Islamic Resistance Movement." "The so-called peace process is futile," Hamas leader Khaled Mashal declared in 2015. "There is no peace. Only the path of jihad, sacrifice and blood."

However, when addressing Western audiences, Hamas leaders (such as Ismail Haniyeh and Khaled Meshal) have stated that they are willing to recognize Israel with pre-1967 borders, even as the organization continues to reiterate, on a regular basis, its total rejection of Israel's existence. Such doublespeak is a common Islamist tactic that finds its roots in Islam's doctrine of deception, known as taqiyya, which the various PA factions even implement against one another.

As was the case with its parent organization, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas has gained the support of the Palestinian people by providing social and welfare services and by presenting itself as Israel's implacable foe, as well as an opponent of the more corrupt, effete Fatah.

#### Imprinting the Minds of Generations of Muslims

Hamas is also steadily Islamicizing Palestinian society through indoctrination and propaganda. This method is a fundamental part of the organization's charter: "We must imprint on the minds of generations of Muslims that the Palestinian problem is a religious one," an "Islamic education based on the implementation of religious precepts [Sharia]." Hamas has gone to extreme lengths to indoctrinate young Palestinians into its beliefs, including the use of "jihadist" Mickey Mouse and Bugs Bunny lookalikes in its television programs. Hamas's principal sources of funding traditionally include Iran, which, according to the U.S. State Department, spends approximately \$100 million annually supporting Palestinian groups including Hamas; private charities, including those operating in the West (the most notorious being the Holy Land Foundation, now defunct, which channeled \$12 million to Hamas ); and individual donors from the Gulf States. Because of its refusal to normalize relations with Israel, Hamas has suffered economic setbacks since attaining power.

Between 1993 and 2009, the military wing of Hamas, the Izz ad-Din Qassam Brigades, is believed to have killed over five hundred people in more than 350 separate terrorist attacks, many of them suicide bombings. Since then, Hamas's brigades have continued to launch rocket attacks against towns in



southern Israel. By far, its most successful jihad occurred last October 7, 2023, when Hamas's jihadists slaughtered 1,400 Israelis.

**Raymond Ibrahim**, author of <u>Defenders of the West</u>, <u>Sword and Scimitar</u>, <u>Crucified Again</u>, and <u>The Al Qaeda Reader</u>, is the Distinguished Senior Shillman Fellow at the Gatestone Institute and the Judith Rosen Friedman Fellow at the Middle East Forum.

# **CEP Calls for Turley to end support for Hamas or face NATO expulsion**

Source: https://www.counterextremism.com/



Dec 14 - On Friday, Counter Extremism Project (CEP) Chief Executive Officer Ambassador Mark D. Wallace called on Turkey to end long-standing diplomatic and financial support to the terrorist group Hamas. Meanwhile, President Erdogan and the government in Ankara is allowing Hamas free reign in Turkey through explicit political cover and must correct course. Failure to do so should trigger expulsion from NATO.

On Wednesday, the U.S. and the UK rightly sanctioned several Turkey-based individuals that are helping to manage the finances of the Palestinian terrorist group. This follows U.S. sanctions in October targeting three principals of Turkey's Trend GYO company, which plays a major role in Hamas' \$700 million overseas economic empire.

However, occasional sanctions on individual Hamas operatives and entities in Turkey will not address the root of the problem until President Erdogan understands – or is forced to understand – that it is no longer acceptable to support Hamas, the group that perpeterated the atrocity of October 8 in which 1,200 people were massacred and more than 200 abducted into Hamas-controlled Gaza. Just yesterday, Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark arrested suspected Hamas operatives plotting attacks on Jewish targets.

Ambassador Wallace stated:

"Turkey's crucial support to Hamas is unacceptable. There can be no more business as usual with Turkey until it ends its political, financial and rhetorical support for Hamas. Rather than hosting and feting Haniyeh inside Turkey after October 7, President Erdogan order his immediate detention and remand him into U.S. or Israeli custody.

Likewise with other senior officials including Meshaal and al-Arouri. If Turkey will not change, then it will be incumbent upon the United States and NATO allies to enforce a change, including the threat of expulsion from NATO."



Turkey is a partner of Hamas as well as regular staging-post for meetings with senior Hamas leaders, while President Erdogan and Ismayel Haniyeh are in regular and close contact. Erdogan has additionally met former Hamas chief Khaled Meshaal and Deputy Chair of the Political Bureau Saleh al-Arouri – who like Haniyeh has a Turkish passport – many times. Hamas also operates a headquarters based in Istanbul.

Ambassador Wallace added:

"I commend this most recent round of sanctions aimed at degrading Hamas' financing. As Undersecretary Nelson noted in his comments accompanying Wednesday's designation, our NATO ally Turkey has proven itself a regrettably permissive environment for financing and otherwise supporting Hamas, notably via the terrorist group's vast real estate empire and Istanbul headquarters. However, this is only the tip of the iceberg. Turkey is home to scores of Hamas operatives providing critical revenues to the terrorist group, which continues to hold approximately 140 innocent people hostage in Gaza after the October 7 atrocity. Ankara must be held to account."

While given extensive support in countries including Turkey and Qatar – where it is not classified as a terrorist organization – Hamas is variously subject to outright or partial bans, assets freezes, and other proscriptions in the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Japan, Paraguay, and the United Kingdom.

### Leicester stadium plans approved with counter-terror conditions

Source: https://www.constructionnews.co.uk/buildings/leicester-stadium-plans-approved-with-counter-terror-conditions-15-12-2023/



Dec 15 – Leicester City's stadium expansion plans have won formal planning approval – on condition that counter-terrorism measures are incorporated into the construction phase. The football club secured initial approval for 8,000 extra seats in the East Stand of its King Power Stadium, as well as other facilities including a hotel, commercial and residential space, fan-zone area, multistorey car park and a club retail store in September 2022. That approval was subject to conditions and section 106 agreements that have been concluded this week. Among the conditions is that before new external

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cladding is installed, a structural blast engineer is appointed to assess the effects of an explosion on the building, specifically on elements such as glazing and its roof.

This information will need to be provided to the project's design team to inform their work and will need to be shared with local counter-terrorism security advisors, a notice from the council says.

Any requirements the assessment throws up must be installed before fans can sit in the extra seats in the East Stand or use the new fan zone, it adds.

Vehicle-security barriers to protect the entire East Stand and fan-zone development from potential "hostile vehicles" along several approach roads must also be installed as a condition of the planning approval.

Anti-terror measures have become increasingly important elements of major building design in the past decade, with <u>Construction</u> News previously highlighting the use of measures such as blast-testing and vehicle-barrier installation.

Other conditions attached to the Leicester stadium expansion include submitting a plan for offsetting biodiversity impacts and limiting the number of non-sporting events at the stadium to 10 per year.

In a statement on the planning approval, a Leicester City spokesperson said that in light of the "market dynamics" having changed significantly since it submitted the application in 2021, it would reassess elements of its wider commercial offering on the site.

"The club's acquisition of further adjacent land since the planning application was first submitted can now also be factored into our vision for the overall site, and presents a further opportunity to strengthen the club's overall commercial proposition," they added.

"It will be the responsibility of the club's leadership to ensure that the final detailed plans for a project of such longevity deliver optimal value, particularly given the scale of investment which will be required from the club and its owners to bring it to fruition."

The statement gave no timeframe for doing this and said the club would continue to monitor "associated market conditions" before planning when work would start.

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** Why we have to publish everything?

# Britain faces a catastrophic epidemic of Hamas-style Islamist terror

By Camilla Tominey (Associate Editor)

Source: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/12/15/britain-faces-catastrophic-epidemic-hamas-style-terror/

Dec 15 – If you want to see what brainwashing really looks like, it's worth checking out the videos currently circulating on social media of Gazan parents dressing up their babies in Hamas "merch".

In one, a father is holding a toddler in his arms dressed in a green Hamas overall and matching headband.

The young dad is asked: "If you will lose your beloved, cute daughter, if she decides she wants to be a suicide bomber, will you be happy about that?" He replies: "Yes, I will help her and encourage her," adding: "We are all Hamas."

Then there's the mother who describes her 17-month-old daughter as "Hamas from birth," adding: "Her blood is green."

Another woman is asked: "Do you think we will see more Farj-5 rockets hitting Tel Aviv?" to which she replies: "I wish, in the name of Allah."

As with the radicalisation that took place during the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, it is all too easy to dismiss terrorist sympathisers and glorifiers as a danger only to themselves and their children. But news of a Hamas plot to kill Jews in Europe brings the threat much closer to home.

Seven suspected Hamas operatives were arrested in Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands, with the Danish prime minister describing the plot as "as serious as it gets". According to German prosecutors, the Hamas operatives were under orders to bring a cache of weapons from an undisclosed location in Europe to Berlin to attack Jewish institutions.

The suspects were allegedly planning attacks across Europe, officials said, without giving further details. Israeli officials have suggested the arrests are linked to a single, cross-border European terror plot.

While there was no immediate suggestion of a British link to this Hamas plot, the <u>threat to British Jews is very real</u>. It extends beyond the placards and anti-Semitic slogans we have witnessed on our streets already, and puts us all in danger.

Historically, Hamas hasn't shown much of an interest in carrying out terrorist attacks outside of Israel. But if this position is now changing, how many sympathisers in Europe, and indeed Britain, would act on its call to arms?

The Community Security Trust (CST) provides security advice and protection to synagogues, Jewish schools and other sites in Britain. As its spokesman pointed out, such a shift in policy to "carry out attacks on Jewish communities outside the region, in line with Iran and Hezbollah ... would be extremely concerning. It represents a

significant shift in the threat posed to Jewish communities. There is a big concern if Hamas HQ is ordering Hamas people in Europe to carry out an attack."



Protesters at a pro-Palestine march in London Credit: Stefan Rousseau/PA

If <u>recent protests are anything to go by</u>, then we may be uniquely vulnerable to this terrorist threat. If calls for "jihad" are taken literally, with young men believing they should fight a holy war on our streets, then we may face the worst terrorist threat since al-Qaeda or Isis.

Sir Alex Younger, the former head of MI6, told BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme on Thursday that the intelligence community will be fearful of a glidepath towards radicalisation in the UK. "It is a dangerous moment but let me be clear, the danger is within," he said. "The world's always been a dangerous place, the thing that keeps us safe is faith in our alliances, faith in our values, faith in the things that make our country strong.

"Where we wobble on that, yes it puts us in serious danger."

Admitting the West had approached recent years with a degree of hubris, he added: "Speaking domestically, my understanding is while we don't see a serious uptick now, what really worries my former colleagues is a scale of radicalisation as a result of what is happening in the Middle East which is pretty unparalleled."

In the past, we saw radicalisation as something that happened in the shadows. Now, however, it appears to be taking place before our very eyes on mainstream social media and, as we have witnessed since the October 7 attacks, on the streets of our capital. While I am not for one minute suggesting that all pro-Palestinian marchers are wannabe terrorists, or even Hamas supporters, we simply cannot turn a blind eye to the Jew hate being spouted by the anti-Semites in their midst. If you ever needed proof that such

fundamentalists have no respect for Western values, just look at the brazen way in which they wear their celebration of medieval hate like a badge of honour.

They are seemingly so beguiled by the murderers, rapists and hostage takers of Hamas that they actually consider them freedom fighters. It hasn't once crossed their hoodwinked minds that the people the Palestinians really need to be freed from is their terrorist, Jew-hating overlords – not Israel. And that makes them very dangerous indeed.

They may be the extreme end of the wedge but also consider the frightening ease with which so-called "peaceful" protesters have been willing to chant "from the river to the sea", without actually knowing which river or sea they are referring to or how offensive that phrase is to Jews.

The slur that Israel is a "genocidal" state has been repeated so often that it has become normalised. Indeed, we have now reached the abhorrent point of casualised anti-Semitism that primary school children have been happily declaring that they "hate all Jews" in playground rows, according to the CST. Amanda Bomsztyk, its northern regional director, said other young people were being "abused on the streets" including with "Nazi salutes" in harassment that is "the worst we've ever seen".

Even among highly educated university staff and students, Jew hate appears to have become second nature. Institutions like University College London, the first in Britain to admit Jews in the 19th century, have felt the need to write letters of support for Jewish students. Elsewhere, we have witnessed young adults tearing down the posters of Hamas victims.

Combined with this heady mix of virtue-signalling ignorance are the useful idiots on social media, unwittingly egging on Hamas, taking their propaganda as gospel. It is all a recipe for disaster.

If we cannot do anything to stop imams preaching in Britain's mosques from a Hamas-sympathetic script, and if we cannot ban Islamist groups who chant for jihad, then how on earth are we going to blunt the threat of radicalisation leading to violence on our streets?

# **U.S.** terrorist watchlist grows to 2 million people — nearly doubling in 6 years

Source: https://www.cbsnews.com/news/us-terrorist-watchlist-grows/

Dec 14 – The U.S. government's terrorist watchlist has nearly doubled in size in just six years, a <u>CBS Reports</u> investigation has found.

An extensive review of court records, government documents and interviews with more than a dozen current and former intelligence community leaders revealed that the consolidated database of individuals has not only been quietly expanding in number but also in who it targets.

The numbers speak for themselves. When it first launched on Dec. 1, 2003, the consolidated watchlist — now known as the Terrorist Screening Dataset — included approximately 120,000 people. By 2017, the last publicly confirmed numbers, it included nearly 10 times as many: 1,160,000 individuals. Now, at the end of 2023, the Terrorist Screening Dataset contains the names of approximately 2 million people the government considers known or suspected terrorists, including thousands of Americans, according to a CBS Reports investigation.

"It doesn't mean they're a terrorist," cautioned Russ Travers, a veteran of the U.S. intelligence community for four decades who helped create the watchlist. "It means there's something that has led a department or agency to say, 'This person needs a closer look."

Government policy says agents must have "reasonable suspicion" to put a person on the watchlist. But it does not disclose what those suspicions are based on, and the government will neither confirm nor deny whether an individual is on the list.

"Those 2 million people who are on the list are on there for a reason," said Monte Hawkins, who has served on the National Security Council for every administration since 9/11 and currently helps oversee watchlisting policy for President Biden. He notes that "a vast majority" of those listed are not U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents.

National security officials acknowledge that there are people listed in the consolidated terrorist database whose names should probably be removed, but that there isn't enough staff to audit every person's file regularly.

"I'm sure that there are a lot of people that are in the database that are dead, that we don't even know it," said Travers.

The interagency group that oversees the watchlist also administers a second list targeting primarily American gangs with international ties. That other watchlist, known as the Transnational Organized Crime Actor Detection Program, contains another 40,000 individuals, according to a recent audit obtained by CBS News.

Being on a watchlist can have significant consequences on people's lives. In countless civil lawsuits over the past 20 years, people have described how they believe the watchlist caused them to be stopped from flying home after a vacation, to fail a background check to get jobs, or to have their phones and computers searched. Others said it triggered law enforcement to handcuff them at gunpoint, or that they were detained and interrogated by foreign intelligence services.

Over the years, tens of thousands of innocent people have complained to the government about being incorrectly treated like terrorist suspects. According to the Department of Homeland Security, 98% of those who've reported complaints

were subjected to "false positives," meaning that they were flagged because their names were similar to others in the database.



The TSA redress department director stated in late 2006 that over the preceding year alone, the names of approximately 30,000 airline passengers were mistakenly matched with those appearing on federal watchlists.

Someone who believes they've been wrongfully impacted by the watchlist can file a complaint with the Department of Homeland Security requesting redress. However, this is unlikely to help those who are on the watchlist, whether they're innocent or not. In one case, it took a Stanford PhD student fighting a nine-year court battle to prove that she was wrongfully listed; the FBI finally admitted she was watchlisted by mistake because an agent had accidentally checked a wrong box.

The FBI told CBS News that it recently revised its criteria to require more identifying information about individuals for them to be added to the database. If enough information is not provided for any individual, that person won't be listed, and people already on the list will be removed if their files are deemed too thin under the new standard. Officials said they were also prioritizing the collection of biometrics, particularly faces and fingerprints, to reduce cases of mistaken identity.

According to U.S. national security assessments for 2023 and 2024, the threats of both foreign and domestic terrorism are on the rise. According to intelligence community insiders, the government considers it imperative to rely on the watchlist as part of its "early warning system."

But civil liberties advocates as well as former counterterrorism insiders who've worked directly on watchlisting expressed concern over the system's expansion, calling attention to government abuses, errors and a lack of willingness to admit mistakes over the two decades since it launched.

"People might think that the watchlisting system is a remnant of 9/11. It is not," said Hina Shamsi, National Security Project director at the American Civil Liberties Union. "This is a system that has only expanded."

A series of federal lawsuits allege that FBI agents have violated policy, for example, by putting innocent people in the database to coerce them into becoming informants. Critics said efforts at accountability have also been stymied by a culture of secrecy and lack of disclosure — issues the Biden administration acknowledges.

"We are hearing you, we are making changes. ... We're not some kind of heartless bureaucrats that just want to build this giant watchlist," said Hawkins. "There is an effort going on now within the White House, within the Domestic Policy Council and in the National Security Council, to look at some of these concerns and see what can be done to either improve the redress process or become more transparent with the public."

Federal officials did not specify when reforms would be announced, only that they were "underway."

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** What is the point of maintaining a terrorist watchlist the moment they cannot keep an eye on them?

# Somali Pirates Are Back in Action. But Full Scale Return Unlikely

By Peter Viggo Jakobsen and Troels Burchall Henningsen

Source: https://www.marinelink.com/news/somali-pirates-back-action-full-scale-510129

Dec 14 - An Iranian fishing vessel, Almeraj 1, was reportedly hijacked by Somali pirates in November 2023. According to media reports, the pirates demanded US\$400,000 in ransom and threatened to use the Iranian ship for additional hijackings if the payment was not made. Two days later, other Somali pirates hijacked a tanker, Central Park, off the Yemeni coast. The tanker sent a distress signal during the attack. Forces from a nearby American warship captured the pirates as they tried to flee in a small boat.

The two attacks have led the Somali government to call for greater international support to deter a resurgence of piracy in the Horn of Africa. Similar fears that Somali piracy was on the rebound surfaced after five previous attacks in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020. We have been studying the rise and fall of Somali piracy, and have tracked the problem for years. We do not regard a major rise in Somali piracy as likely.

#### Addressing the threat

Following previous threats, local authorities, experts and organisations tracking piracy globally warned that Somali pirates retained the capacity to launch attacks. This is also the current assessment of the International Maritime Bureau's Piracy Reporting Centre, which acts to suppress piracy and armed robbery at sea. The concern is not surprising.

Somali piracy was a major threat to the region and the world economy at its height in 2011. That year alone, Somali pirates carried out 212 attacks. The World Bank estimated that these cost the world economy US\$18 billion.

In a recent analysis, we concluded that a range of anti-piracy measures had put a stop to Somali piracy. The measures fall into four main categories:

1. anti-piracy naval operations by the world's most capable navies



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- 2. costly self-protection measures, including the use of armed guards, by most flag states and shipping owners
- 3. a legal toolbox enabling pirate prosecution and imprisonment

4. capacity-building and the ability to imprison pirates regionally and in Somalia.



#### **Anti-piracy measures**

These measures remain largely in place.

**Measure 1:** The size of anti-piracy naval operations may have shrunk but some international forces remain active. Nato – an intergovernmental military alliance between 29 European and two North American member states – terminated its anti-piracy mission in 2016. However, the European Union retains its mission, as does a US-led coalition. Together they seek to suppress piracy outside the territorial waters of Somalia and other coastal states in the region. In addition, independent deployers like China have warships on patrol.

**Measure 2:** Most commercial ships sailing through the Gulf of Aden, the Somali basin and the Indian Ocean follow many of the self-protection measures recommended by flag states and the main maritime industry organizations. While the number of ships carrying armed guards has dropped considerably, most commercial ships report to the maritime security centers, follow the recommended transit corridor protected by international naval forces and join group transits.

**Measure 3:** The legal toolbox and the post-trial transfer system making it possible to prosecute pirates and imprison them in Somalia remains in place. This makes jail the most likely destination for the five pirates recently apprehended by US forces following their hijacking of Central Park. Successful prosecution and imprisonment would signal to other pirates that piracy remains an unprofitable undertaking off the Somali coast.

**Measure 4:** International efforts continue to increase the capacity of Somalia and other regional states to patrol their national waters. The EU's capacity building mission in Somalia, for instance, still supports Somalia's maritime security sector. It seeks to strengthen the sector's capacity to deter, capture and prosecute pirates. The successful operations undertaken by the Puntland Maritime Police Force – including securing the release of hostages – indicate that these efforts are paying off.

These anti-piracy measures continue to be implemented by a broad coalition of state and private actors. They include states from outside the region, regional nations, Somali authorities and the international shipping industry. As long as these actors continue to invest in maintaining these measures, Somali piracy will remain unprofitable.

#### High risks, few rewards

It remains to be seen if the ransom demand for the Iranian fishing vessel Almeraj 1 will succeed. However, pirates don't appear to have made any money from any of the other five attacks launched in the 2017-



2023 period. We haven't been able to ascertain if any ransom was paid to secure the release of a Panama-flagged ship captured in August 2020. In the other four instances, the attacks either failed or didn't result in ransom payments.

Even if the US\$400,000 ransom demand succeeds, it doesn't alter the overall conclusion that piracy off the Somali coast remains a high-risk undertaking with a low probability of success. This suggests that a major increase in Somali piracy is highly unlikely. If it did happen, though, it would be easy for international naval forces and the shipping industry to reduce the prospects of success by stepping up naval patrols and reintroducing armed guards.

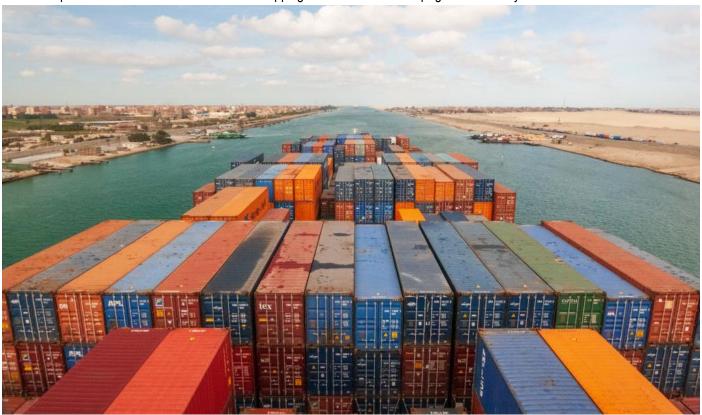
**Peter Viggo Jakobsen**, Associate Professor, Royal Danish Defence College **Troels Burchall Henningsen**, Associate Professor, Royal Danish Defence College

EDITOR'S COMMENT: What if Somali pirates collaborate with Yemeni rebels to hijack commercial vessels?

# How—and Why—Yemen's Houthi Rebels Are Poised to Seriously Disrupt the Global Economy

#### By Gregory Brew

Source: https://time.com/6548968/houthi-rebels-shipping-attacks-red-sea-disrupt-global-economy-costs/



Loaded containers stacked on top of a cargo ship sailing in the Suez Canal. Camille Delbos—Art In All of Us/Corbis/Getty Images

Dec 19 – After two months, the crisis in the Middle East is poised to seriously disrupt the global economy as well as regional stability—thanks to the Houthis, a rebel Shi'a group in Yemen, and their successful effort to disrupt shipping through the Red Sea. While attacks by the Houthis on commercial shipping began on November 19, they escalated last week, with the Yemeni rebels firing anti-ship ballistic missiles at several passing ships and hitting one (the first time such a weapon has ever been used successfully).

As none of the ships were bound for Israel or owned by Israeli companies, the attacks signaled the Houthis were stepping up their efforts to pressure local commerce as a way to force Israel to suspend its campaign in Gaza. Shipping companies got the message. Five of the largest shipping firms announced they would



redirect their container ships away from the <u>Bab al Mandab strait</u>, the strategic waterway through which ships must pass on their way to the Suez Canal and which handles <u>over 10% of global commerce</u>.

Following the announcement, traffic through the Red Sea dropped by 35%. Commerce hasn't been blocked completely, since most ships can opt for the longer but safer route around Africa, but the Houthis have increased the cost of shipping globally, imposing additional costs to commerce at a time when trouble at the Panama Canal has already made shipping more complicated and central banks worry about a new inflationary spike. If the Houthi "blockade" continues, the costs to consumers and the impact on local states will be considerable. In the event that the Red Sea is closed long-term, Europe and states on the Mediterranean will bear the brunt of the damage. Some countries in North Africa, such as Tunisia and Algeria, are also particularly vulnerable as they do most of their Asian trade through the Suez Canal. Israel, the Houthis intended target, has suffered already as its seen traffic through its southern port of Eilat come to halt, though the port's relatively small size has made the overall impact fairly manageable.

The big loser to a closed Red Sea is Egypt, which depends on transit fees through the Suez Canal for <u>as much as one-fourth of its currency earnings</u>. Already under strain from the humanitarian situation in Gaza and a <u>moribund economy</u>, Egypt's authoritarian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi may face major financial pressure if traffic through the canal slows.

A long-term disruption of traffic through the Red Sea will impact energy prices, particularly for consumers in Europe. About one-fifth of the traffic through the Suez Canal is oil, either on ships or sent across Egypt via the Sumed pipeline, with the <u>total volume of crude oil and refined products</u> shipped either way at nearly 9 million barrels per day (bpd), roughly 12% of total seaborne trade. A complete halt to oil shipments through the canal would be a significant disruption and would likely boost crude oil prices in 2024.

That gets to the purpose of the Houthi attacks. While the group wants to show off their capabilities and boost their regional prestige, like their patron Iran, the Houthis want to pressure Israel into ending its offensive in Gaza, and they're likely to continue their attacks until that goal is realized. One way to do that is to increase international pressure on Israel, with the Red Sea acting as a pressure point, and it's very likely the Houthis will continue their attacks for as long as Israel remains at war. It may prove difficult to deter the Houthis through military force. Unlike Hezbollah, an Iran-backed group that faces a direct war with Israel, the Houthis are under little immediate threat, having now reached the brink of victory in their decade-long war with Saudi Arabia.

That's what makes this a challenging situation for both the U.S. and the international community. Ensconced in mountain fortresses and flush with funds, the Houthis are heavily equipped with Iran-supplied arms, including accurate drones and anti-ship cruise and ballistic missiles capable of hitting a moving ship hundreds of kilometers away. Sitting on a large stockpile, they can keep up this campaign for a long time. This all factors into U.S. thinking, which is currently focused on increasing the international naval presence around Yemen so as to deter or intercept new Houthi attacks. U.S. air strikes, along the lines of the "self-defense" strikes carried out in Iraq and Syria, would come nowhere near the kind of damage the group endured during their war with Riyadh. A sustained air campaign would degrade Houthi capability, but that would go against the other key U.S. goal—preventing the regional crisis from escalating to the point that Iran becomes directly involved. Nevertheless, the Biden administration will feel increasing pressure to take action as long as these attacks and their disruptive effects continue.

**Gregory Brew** is a historian of international energy, U.S. foreign policy, the Cold War, U.S.-Iranian relations, and modern Iran. He is currently an Analyst at Eurasia Group.

# Did North Korea Play a Role in Hamas Terrorism?

By Michael Rubin

Source: https://www.meforum.org/65360/did-north-korea-play-a-role-in-hamas-terrorism

Dec 18 – Hamas may have perpetrated the Oct. 7 mass rape of and pogrom against Israeli Jews, but it did not act alone. Most of its enablers are well known: <u>Iran</u> helps train and arm the group. Qatar finances it. Turkey provides explosives and passports to facilitate operative movement, and its intelligence services protect <u>Hamas</u> terrorists abroad. Malaysia was <u>reportedly</u> a venue for Hamas paragliders to train and now

offers a safe haven to Hamas fugitives. The <u>European Union</u> and perhaps even the U.S. Agency for International Development allow Hamas to divert donations. Too often, attention to North Korea's role and responsibility is lacking. Geographic divisions within the State Department, Pentagon, and CIA contribute



to analytical blindness, as do <u>frequent rotations</u>. Institutional memory lacks. The notion that extremists would stand aloof from anti-Israel terrorism is naive. Long before intersectionality demanded blind solidarity between self-described oppressed groups on university campuses, terrorists practiced intersectionality on the global stage. This is why, just over 50 years ago, the Japanese Red Army attacked tourists at Ben Gurion Airport, killing more than two dozen and wounding 80.

In 2006, Hezbollah crossed Lebanon's United Nations-demarcated border to kidnap Israeli soldiers. The crisis quickly escalated into a 34-day war during which Israeli special forces and airstrikes sought to neutralize Hezbollah missiles stored in underground tunnels. They were only partly successful. While Israeli intelligence located many tunnels using satellite imagery, only when hostilities began did they discover many were decoys: North Korean engineers had secretly built tunnels undetected by overhead surveillance in which Hezbollah could store its long-range missiles while leaving false entrances replete with piles of dirt and bulldozers to divert action. That North Korea would work with Hezbollah should not surprise. Hezbollah is an Iranian proxy. Tehran and Pyongyang have coordinated closely on both ballistic missiles and nuclear technology. Any North Korean assistance to Hezbollah would simply be an extension of its alliance with Iran.

It was this activity that made Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's 2008 decision to delist North Korea from its State Sponsor of Terrorism designation so controversial. Rice wanted to reset the Bush administration's foreign policy legacy by shifting attention away from its Middle Eastern failures. Reality is not so easily spun, however. North Korea subsequently regained its terrorist sponsorship, and deservedly so. When Hamas rampaged through parts of southern Israel on Oct. 7, it reportedly did so with North Korean weapons. Israel subsequently discovered a nearly 300-mile tunnel network, far more extensive than it had previously realized. The question then becomes whether Hamas dug its elaborate tunnels itself or if it had North Korean engineering. Likewise, the origin of the North Korean weaponry is unclear. In 2016, the U.S. Navy intercepted a North Korean ship carrying tons of weaponry purchased covertly by the Egyptian government. Loose Libyan weaponry also includes guns and ammunition of North Korean origin.

When Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el Sisi flooded Hamas tunnels with sewage, he kept at least two untouched. Certainly, Egypt holds Hamas with disdain, but by limiting tunnels, it could also control and tax Hamas trade rather than eliminate it. Simultaneously, there are more direct means to supply Hamas illicitly. Prior to the 2007 Hamas coup, the Palestinian Authority arranged for Iranian frigates to dump weaponry overboard in sealed containers that Palestinian fishermen would then recover. North Korean or, more likely, Iranian frigates transporting North Korean weaponry might have done the same.

Two decades ago, pundits pilloried President George W. Bush when he spoke of an "Axis of Evil." Then, as now, they substituted condescension, volume, and ignorance for consideration of fact. Terrorists are intersectional. It is time to investigate any North Korean component of Hamas terrorism.

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# Trends in terrorism – What's on the horizon for 2024

By Colin P. Clarke

Source: https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/12/trends-in-terrorism-whats-on-the-horizon-in-2024/

Dec 19 – On the morning of October 7, Hamas terrorists breached the border fence between Gaza and Israel under the cover of a withering rocket barrage. Within hours, the Palestinian militant group had killed 1,200 innocent people in Israel, kidnapped over 240, and plunged the region into its most dangerous crisis in decades.

The brutal attack on October 7, and Israel's military response, has made the war in Gaza a central component of the terrorist threat landscape heading into 2024. In the United States, FBI director Christopher Wray has <u>warned on numerous occasions</u> ever since about the elevated terrorism threat level, stating before Congress that "We assess that the actions of Hamas and its allies will serve as an inspiration the likes of which we haven't seen since ISIS launched its so-called caliphate years ago." Europeans are



also worried. EU Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson recently stated: "With the war between Israel and Hamas, and the polarization it causes in our society, with the upcoming holiday season, there is a huge risk of terrorist attacks in the European Union." The conflict between Israel and Hamas looms large and will, in all likelihood, serve as a catalyst for terrorist plots and attacks outside of the conflict zone itself, spurring radicalized individuals, small cells, and decentralized networks to strike at targets associated with one side or the other. Indeed, this has already occurred, with seven individuals arrested across Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands for planning terrorist attacks against Jewish institutions in Europe. Some of the men were believed to be Hamas members. While the conflict in Gaza will occupy a substantial amount of global counterterrorism bandwidth, the center of gravity for terrorism in the near future is likely to remain the Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa. The Sahel has been plagued by porous borders, weak security forces and illegitimate military juntas. Throughout this region, jihadist groups, including Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP), and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), will continue to operate with near impunity, taking advantage of failed states and ungoverned spaces. The Sahel has seen a string of successive military coups in recent years, leaving Kremlin-friendly regimes in power in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Accordingly, this has opened the door to further Russian influence through the deployment of mercenaries from the Wagner Group, a private military company in the midst of a transition following the death of its leader Yevgeny Prigozhin in a plane crash that most believe was orchestrated at the behest of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Wagner has exacerbated the terrorism issue throughout the Sahel, since its coup-proofing operations are conducted with a heavy hand, leading to significant civilian casualties and collateral damage, pushing civilians into the arms of JNIM and ISSP, growing their ranks.

Along with al-Shabaab in Somalia, JNIM remains among the most potent al-Qaeda-linked affiliates and is looking to expand its operations from the Sahel into coastal West Africa. Yet globally, some counterterrorism analysts are sanguine about the group's impending demise. Writing in *Foreign Policy* in July, terrorism scholar Daniel Byman remarked upon "the organization's decline in both capabilities and ideological influence." Others, including this author, are not quite ready to write al-Qaeda's obituary, given the organization's historic resilience and propensity to regenerate when offered sanctuary in failed states, as it has now with the Taliban government in Afghanistan.

Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent and the Tehrik-i-Taliban's (TTP) <u>longstanding relationship</u> with al-Qaeda make South Asia a <u>natural fit</u> for al-Qaeda's rebirth. Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, Pakistan has suffered from a spike in terrorist attacks planned and executed by jihadist militant groups, some of whom use Afghanistan as a safe haven. As Asfandyar Mir <u>has noted</u>, "Pakistan faces an increasingly formidable threat from the insurgency of the TTP." An attack in <u>mid-December</u> featuring gunmen and suicide bombers targeted a Pakistani army post, killing twenty-three soldiers. If the Pakistani security forces are unable to quell the insurgency, 2024 could see widespread instability sweep the country, plunging Pakistan back into chaos as jihadist groups threaten the state.

Much like al-Qaeda, the overall picture with the Islamic State is mixed. Core Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has been attenuated, with <u>several successive leaders</u> successfully eliminated on the battlefield. Yet it has stubbornly persisted as its fighters wage a low-level insurgency in the Badia, a swath of desert territory in central Syria. There are also unresolved issues of detention facilities and prisoner camps throughout northeastern Syria, including al-Hol, which has been described as an incubator for radicalization. These camps are also potential targets for ISIS prison breaks, a lingering obsession dating back to the group's "Breaking the Walls" campaign. ISIS attacks have declined substantially, but its leaders are working to implement shadow governance throughout eastern Syria, positioning the group for a future comeback if conditions become more favorable. The United States retains approximately 900 special operations forces troops in Syria, holding the line against both the Islamic State and Iran's expanding influence.

The threat posed by the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) in Afghanistan has largely been contained to South Asia. However, that could change if the group is able to reconstitute its external attack operations network. Europe would be particularly vulnerable to attacks launched from Afghanistan, based on geographical proximity and Central Asian diaspora networks that could play a role, as they did in a <u>disrupted plot</u> targeting US and NATO military bases in Germany. Even ISIS in Southeast Asia, which has been relatively quiet over the past two years, is now beginning to increase its <u>operational tempo</u>, launching a bombing attack at a Roman Catholic mass in the embattled city of Marawi in the southern Philippines. ISIS affiliates in Somalia, Yemen, Libya, and Egypt's Sinai peninsula continue to struggle to regain momentum, although conflict dynamics in each of those countries could increase risk and associated threat level.

The future of terrorism in the Middle East could see something of a shift, at least temporarily, from a paradigm largely dominated by Salafi-jihadist groups (Sunni) to Shia groups sponsored by Iran. While Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) are both Sunni

groups, there are other members of Iran's <u>axis of resistance</u>, including Lebanese Hezbollah, the <u>Houthis in Yemen</u>, and various Iraqi Shia militia groups, especially Kata'ib Hezbollah, that will continue to pose a major challenge to the region and beyond. Iran has been able to play the role of spoiler through its sponsorship of a vast network of terrorist proxies and will only be emboldened by the perceived success



of Hamas's October 7 attack into southern Israel. There are also political and security dynamics in the Middle East that could impact the trajectory of terrorism in the region.

The longer the conflict in Gaza drags on, the greater potential radicalizing effect it could have among domestic populations of Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia. Suppose Riyadh is perceived by its own population of abandoning the Palestinians to continue normalization talks with Jerusalem. In that case, it is not difficult to imagine a backlash within Saudi society, sparking a return to a situation similar to the post-9/11 period, when al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) posed a domestic terrorism threat before being degraded and pushed over the border into Yemen. There is a growing chasm between how the so-called "Arab Street" views the conflict in Gaza and how the leadership in the Gulf does, the latter viewing it as a nuisance impeding broader economic and technological progress.

Racially and ethnically motivated violent extremist (REMVE) actors remain largely decentralized, with small cells communicating online, as groups like the Atomwaffen Division, The Base, and the Nordic Resistance Movement have largely faded from the headlines. Still, the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) has been revitalized by Russia's war in Ukraine, ramping up recruitment, propaganda, and paramilitary training efforts. As the war in Ukraine approaches its third year, and with questions surrounding continued Western financial and military support for Kyiv, this conflict could produce violent extremists motivated by REMVE ideology committed to launching attacks in the West. Far-right extremists and lone actors motivated by violent white supremacy and/or neo-Nazi ideology are also a threat, with individuals inspired by terrorists, including Anders Breivik and Brenton Tarrant, remaining a constant threat to authorities who seek to prevent large-scale terrorist attacks. Online propaganda networks often single out migrants as a target, and with far-right populist groups once again enjoying electoral success in Europe, xenophobic attacks motivated by racism remain a constant concern of law enforcement and intelligence services.

"Salad bar" terrorism, where extremists pick and choose different components of ideology across the spectrum, will also likely endure, facilitated by Internet culture, memetics, and the connective sinew of misogyny, anti-Semitism, QAnon-like conspiracy theories, and anti-LGBTQ propaganda that often accompanies the online diets of today's violent extremists. Neo-Luddites and technophobes, individuals concerned about the ubiquity of technology in modern society, could also resort to terrorism, with growing attacks against 5G cell towers and targets associated with artificial intelligence. There is also the threat of what the Federal Bureau of Investigation has called "special interest" terrorism (sometimes referred to as "single-issue" terrorism), which includes a range of mostly, though not exclusively, left-wing causes such as animal rights and "ecological resistance." Individuals and groups motivated by pro-life and pro-choice issues—abortion-related violent extremists—are also a concern in the terrorism threat landscape.

At the core of terrorism is the threat of politically motivated violence, so it will be important to monitor elections in 2024, when eight of the ten <u>most populous countries</u> in the world will hold elections, including Brazil, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, and the United States, among others. Each of these countries has experienced varying levels of political violence related to elections in recent years, and in the United States, the potential for domestic terrorism and anti-government extremism is palpable. There are also high-profile events next year that will garner much attention from those seeking to do harm, including the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, France, a highly visible and symbolic target for terrorists, including those who seek to master emerging technologies such as drones and 3-D printed weapons, to conduct attacks.

The terrorism threat is far from static. When a group suffers setbacks, including leadership decapitation, it rarely signals extinction. Time and time again, these groups are resuscitated or go through several iterations before surging back. And with advancements in technology, communications, and transportation, the organizational structure of a group itself is a less salient variable than it has been historically. But organizational structure should not be an afterthought, as it can be a true force multiplier, elevating a terrorist group's ability to launch complex attacks. With the United States pivoting away from counterterrorism and toward "near-peer" competition, there are fewer resources to deal with transnational jihadist groups and a paucity of intelligence assets available to evaluate metastasizing threats. The bench is thin across the US counterterrorism community, as resources and expertise are reallocated to China, Russia, and other great power-related portfolios. The shift has resulted in damaged morale within parts of the intelligence community and made it more difficult to recruit top-tier talent to focus on counterterrorism in government and academia. In a worst-case scenario, an overreliance on technology and over-the-horizon counterterrorism capabilities could make the United States and its allies vulnerable to another spectacular attack, especially against embassies and military bases abroad.

Projecting where new threats will emerge is rarely linear, as the Hamas attack itself proves. For a significant swath of the counterterrorism community, Hamas has mostly been an <u>afterthought</u> for much of the past decade, relegated down toward the bottom of the list of priorities, after affiliates and franchise groups belonging to the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, far-right extremists such as

white supremacists and neo-Nazis, and Shia groups including Lebanese Hezbollah. Not only did the devastating terrorist attack of October 7 demonstrate a capability and intent that few believed Hamas to possess, but it also led counterterrorism analysts worldwide to re-interrogate their prior assumptions about the conventional wisdom in terms of the most potent threats. This should be a continuous process, as



analysts seek to measure and assess a wide range of factors and variables that contribute to the ever-evolving nature of transnational terrorism

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# **Red Sea Houthi Attacks: Implications for Global Trade**

By Nik Martin (editor and content producer at DW)

Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20231220-red-sea-houthi-attacks-implications-for-global-trade

Dec 20 – Over the past week, most of the world's largest <u>shipping</u> firms have said they will avoid the Red Sea and, therefore, the Suez Canal after Yemen-based <u>Houthi rebels</u> fired missiles at cargo ships over the <u>Israel-Hamas war</u>.

Instead, ships traveling from the Far East to Europe will need to make a detour around the entire African continent via South Africa's Cape of Good Hope. The journey will take more than a week longer and will add about 3,500 nautical miles (6,482 kilometers).

The Suez Canal, which connects the <u>Red Sea</u> to the Mediterranean, is the shortest route between Europe and Asia. About 12% of global shipping traffic normally transits the waterway.

#### **Costs for Shipping Firms Skyrocket**

The decision already greatly impacts the cost of shipping goods, say industry analysts. If it becomes an extended crisis, it could spark a hike in the price consumers pay for imported goods.

"Take one round-trip voyage from Shanghai to Rotterdam, and you add a million dollars in fuel costs from rerouting via the Cape of Good Hope," Peter Sand, chief analyst at the Copenhagen-based market analytics firm Xeneta, told DW. "So that alone is a huge bill." Insurance premiums have soared in response to the attacks, while container shipping lines that run weekly services between Asia and Europe will need to factor in the cost of three extra ships to ensure a similar level of service, Sand added.

The delays in shipping will then have knock-on effects at container ports across Europe, which are usually highly efficient at handling flows of large numbers of containers. "Let's say I have a port that handles 50,000 containers per week. But then if nothing arrives for

a week, and the following week a hundred thousand containers arrive, that can cause congestion problems," Lars Jenson, CEO of Vespucci Maritime, a Denmark-based shipping industry consultancy, told DW. The Red Sea crisis has stirred memories of March 2021 when the Suez Canal was

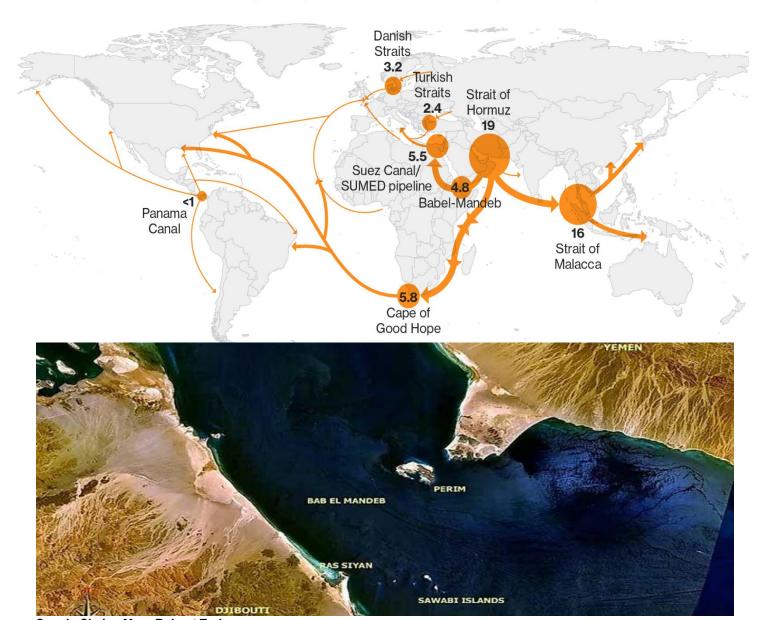


blocked for six days after the <u>container ship Ever Given ran aground</u>. At that moment, the world was exiting lockdowns from the COVID-19 pandemic, and huge bottlenecks had already emerged in global <u>trade</u> supply chains.

Hundreds of ships were left in a holding pattern in the Red Sea for weeks, and the cost of shipping a container rose from \$2,000 (€1,828) to \$14,000. The Ever Given crisis caused months of additional delays to goods imported from Asia.

# **Daily Transit Volumes Through World Maritime Oil Chokepoints**

All estimates in million barrels per day. Includes crude oil and petroleum liquids.



#### **Supply Chains More Robust Today**

Although supply chains have since mostly returned to normal, the security threat in the Red Sea could see prices double over the next few weeks, say analysts. Global freight rates were already rising again after the Panama Canal last month curbed the number of vessels that could ply the waterway that connects the Atlantic and Pacific oceans due to a drought. Fortunately, the shipping industry has learned the lessons from the post-COVID supply chain crisis, and many firms have expanded their fleet of cargo vessels, meaning the impact of any lasting Red Sea rerouting won't be as disastrous. "Right now, we have an overcapacity of container vessels, so in the

absolute worst case, where we have to continue to go around Africa for a time, we do have the container vessels in the world to do this," Jensen said.

For the first few days of the current crisis, shipping firms had kept their vessels in a holding pattern in the hope that the attacks would be curtailed or security in the region would be quickly increased.

"This week, more and more vessels are being redirected to go around Africa, which seems to indicate the carriers are beginning to lose faith that this crisis can be resolved very rapidly," Jensen added.

#### U.S., Allies Step Up Naval Security

On Tuesday, the United States announced a <u>multi-nation operation to safeguard maritime commerce</u> in the Red Sea. As part of the measure, Britain, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles and Spain will stage joint patrols in the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. US and British warships in the area have begun shooting down Houthi missiles and drones in recent days. However, it is unclear whether the presence of a larger naval force will be enough to halt the attacks altogether.

Some ships are, however, continuing to ply the Red Sea, albeit with armed guards on board, in case their vessels are boarded by Houthi rebels, who insisted Tuesday that the US-led security operation would not deter them.

"[With Ever Given] it was easy to see that it would soon be resolved. This is more tricky because what is it going to take to get the Houthis to stop launching missiles and drones at the ships, especially as they are drawing attention to the [Israel-Hamas] conflict?" Jensen told DW. Shipment delays won't affect Christmas shopping, but there is the potential for stores to run low on stock by February if the delays continue, supply chain research firm Project44 said in a note on Tuesday.

Other analysts have warned that while container shipping may be hit harder overall, the delay to vessels carrying fossil fuels to Europe may be felt first. "We see energy shipments being impacted right here, right now — whether that's oil or coal or gas — simply due to winter in the northern hemisphere," Sand told DW. This could lead to a knock-on effect on energy prices.

## How big is the terror risk in Europe and from whom?

Source: https://www.dw.com/en/how-big-is-the-terror-risk-in-europe-and-from-whom/a-67784866

Dec 22 – Anger is in the air in Europe. Across the political spectrum, observers see burgeoning vitriol and prejudice. In the past two months, <u>lone perpetrators</u> have committed a trio of fatal terror attacks, claiming four lives in total.

In <u>Belgium</u>, two Swedish football fans were <u>shot dead</u> in October in an apparent retribution for Quran burnings in their home country. In <u>France</u>, a teacher and a tourist were stabbed in two separate incidents, the second perpetrator having reportedly pledged allegiance to the so-called "Islamic State" (IS).

Earlier this month, European Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson, herself from <u>Sweden</u>, said: "With the war between Israel and Hamas and the polarization it causes in our society, with the upcoming holiday season, there is a huge risk of terrorist attacks in the European Union."

#### 'Danger is real'

Johansson's assessment is alarming, but in the <u>EU</u>, the individual member states, not the <u>European Commission</u>, control risk assessment. In the past few months, authorities in France, Belgium, <u>the Netherlands</u> and Sweden have all increased their <u>alert levels</u>, citing the risk of Islamist terror — generally concentrated in Western Europe — but also from the <u>far right</u>.

"The danger is real and greater than it has been for a long time," <u>Thomas Haldenwang</u>, the head of Germany's domestic intelligence agency, the BfV, wrote earlier this month.

In December, authorities in <u>Germany</u> and the Netherlands detained four individuals allegedly linked to <u>Hamas</u>, the Palestinian militant group responsible for the October 7 terror attacks on Israel, over suspicion of plotting to obtain weapons for at least nine months. German prosecutors said these could have been used to target Jewish institutions.

Thomas Renard, the director of the International Centre for Counterterrorism in the Netherlands, said the heightened alert was about more than the conflict in <u>Gaza</u>. It is linked to a partial resurgence of radical Islamist groups like IS and <u>al-Qaeda</u> in <u>Afghanistan</u> and <u>Syria</u>.

"The terrorist threat is much higher now than it was two or three years ago," Renard said.

The attacks carried out in Europe since early October were on a much smaller scale and less coordinated than those executed in

Paris and <u>Brussels</u> by actors claiming allegiance to IS in 2015 and 2016. "In the peak of the [IS-declared] caliphate, we were facing a highly organized structured group, extremely powerful, extremely attractive, so to speak, that really could attract tens of thousands of individuals from around the world," Renard said.



That is not the case for the time being, he said. Though the present situation is concerning, authorities also learned from the wave of attacks inspired or directed by IS in Europe, he added.

These days, relevant agencies in the European Union are much better at sharing information between national law enforcement and intelligence agencies, as well as with other member states. "It does not always work perfectly, obviously," he said. "It works much better than it used to. There's much more information flowing."

Renard said member states, at least those most affected in Western Europe, are also spending much more money on counterterrorism. Whereas intelligence services used to focus heavily on the detection of advanced plots, authorities now tend to think more broadly about counterterrorism. "Nowadays, there is a much more comprehensive response that has been put in place, starting with early prevention," Renard said. Efforts start locally, involving prevention officers, civil society organizations and educational institutions. On the other hand, radicalization can be harder to detect. "It's much more sort of underground nowadays. So it's much harder to know who is going to take action or not," he said.

Renard said the heightened alert was also coming from the <u>far right</u>, a threat that had tended to be overlooked until recent years. "If a terrorist attack were to occur tomorrow, it's more likely to be a jihadi attack than a far-right attack. But basically, it's almost a very similar risk," Renard said.

In 2022, 16 terrorist attacks took place in the EU and a further 12 failed or were foiled, according to Europol. Four people died, two in jihadi attacks and two from <u>right-wing</u> terror. In the IS peak years of 2015 and 2016, 151 and 142 people, respectively, were killed.

#### Increasing antisemitism, Islamophobia

Reports of <u>antisemitism</u> and Islamophobia were increasing before the <u>October 7 Hamas-led terror attacks</u> in southern <u>Israel</u> that killed 1,200 people and the Israeli military response that has killed nearly 20,000 over the past two months, <u>Human Rights Watch</u> wrote on Monday. There have been several concerning incidents in recent weeks throughout Europe.



In recent weeks, thousands have taken to the streets to protest antisemitismImage: Alberto Pezzali/AP Photo/picture alliance

"A German lawmaker of Kurdish-Syrian background received threatening notes with glass and feces. A Polish lawmaker brandishing a fire extinguisher put out Hanukkah candles in the Parliament building. A pig's head was left near the site for a proposed mosque in England. A wave of antisemitic graffiti appeared in Paris and its suburbs," the group listed.

As part of the HRW report, researcher Almaz Teffera said Europe's problems went much deeper than the recent flurry of violent attacks. "We have now seen international attention and condemnation around the latest rise of this hate, and rightly so, but what doesn't make headlines are the decades of lived experiences



of communities facing racism and intolerance, particularly anti-Muslim hate and <u>antisemitism</u>, every day," she wrote in an interview published Monday by HRW.



'France: It's you and me,' reads a sign by an anti-Islamophobia campaignerImage: Alain Pitton/NurPhoto/picture alliance

In Europe, politicians and the media tend to focus on full-blown terror attacks, Renard said. While low in number, they are high in impact, he explained, often creating a "collective trauma" for the wider population. Online hatred and desecrating Jewish schools or mosques may not qualify as acts of terrorism, but such violent extremism is of grave concern for authorities, he said. "When we talk [about] terrorism, we're talking about the tip of the iceberg," he stressed. "It's important to realize that the risk to citizens and the risk to a democracy might be impacted even by more violent extremism than terrorism."



Source: https://pt.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2023-09/PT%20-%20Vol%20XVII%2C%20Issue%20III%20-%20final%20to%20publish 0.pdf

Articles in Volume XVII, Issue 4 of Perspectives on Terrorism take a closer look at the themes of terrorism and strategic effect, lone-actor terrorism, right-wing extremism in Finland, accountability for terrorist offences committed in Syria and Iraq, administrative detention as a preventative method against terrorism, punishment of the grave as a motivation towards Islamic extremism, and the role of terrorism risk models in the insurance sector. This issue also includes two research notes - assessing the state of current research landscape of counter-terrorism research and examining ideology and ethno-nationalism in the 2023 Israel-Gaza crisis. The Issue concludes with a new Bibliography

on the individual and contextual factors of radicalization, a book review, a short compilation of the latest CT book releases, and an overview of the TRI Thesis Award Finalists.

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# The West's 3 Options to Combat the Houthi Attacks

#### **Bv Bruce Jones**

Source: https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/12/20/red-sea-houthi-attacks-trade/?tpcc=recirc latest062921

Dec 20 – The Red Sea might just be history's most contested body of water. It has been the site of imperial or great-power competition for at least 500 years, from the Portuguese search for the sea route to Asia all the way to the Cold War. It remains the most important trade link between Asia and Europe. The Suez Canal at its northern egress has been displaced by the Singapore Strait as the world's most important chokepoint, but it's still the second-most vital; 30 percent of global container ship traffic moves through that canal. Container ships are to globalization what eighteen-wheelers are to the United States—the workhorses of trade. And there are important energy flows here: 7.1 million barrels of oil and 4.5 billion cubic feet of natural gas transit the Bab el-Mandeb (the southern entrance to the Red Sea) every day, per the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

So, attacks by Houthi forces on "Israeli" shipping in recent days have the potential for major disruption. "Israeli" is in quotes because commercial shipping ownership is complicated and opaque: Ship ownership, ship operation, and flag of registry often differ, and none necessarily has any bearing on the ownership or destination of the cargo on board or the nationality of the crew. What's more, Houthi attacks have quickly morphed from semi-targeted at ships nominally linked to Israel to more indiscriminate. The world's most important container shipping firms—including MSC, Maersk, Hapag-Lloyd, and Cosco—have paused on sending ships through these waters for fear of loss of life or damage.

Enter a new U.S.-led task force with the somewhat on-the-nose moniker <u>Operation Prosperity Guardian</u>, a naval coalition to protect commercial shipping from Houthi attacks. It will operate under the aegis of a preexisting mechanism, the

Combined Maritime Forces, a counterpiracy and counterterrorism naval coalition (the world's largest, by far) that operates out of Bahrain. So far, nine countries have signed up officially (though some with very modest contributions—Canada, for example, is sending three staff officers and no ships yet); there are



<u>reports that others have quietly agreed to participate or contribute</u>. India, which has a lot at stake here (especially in the disproportionate number of Indian nationals among the crews of major commercial lines), is not part of the coalition but is independently contributing two vessels to the effort.



The British Maritime Trade Organization (UKMTO) reports (Dec 23) an attack on a vessel by a drone 200 nautical miles southwest of Veraval, India. A fire broke out on the ship but was put out. There were no casualties in the accident. It could be another attack by the pro-Iranian Shiite Houthi group, Iran's ally in Yemen. If confirmed, the action signals an expansion of the scope of Yemeni rebel activities to other areas, ahead of the deployment of a multinational naval force established by the United States to counter the threat to trafficking along maritime routes.

The United States and France have long had bases in Djibouti to project power across the Red Sea, recently joined by Japan and China, and the European Union operates out of the French base to support Operation Atalanta, a counterpiracy task force that protects trade in the nearby Gulf of Aden (alongside the U.S.-led Combined Task Force 151, which has the same mission). But this skirmish is an astonishingly asymmetric fight. With a handful of missiles and drones, the Houthis have succeeded in placing at risk one of the most important arteries of the global economy.

The asymmetry has caused some of the debate to focus on the cost of the drones versus the cost of the missiles being used to defend the ships. It's the wrong metric. The right calculation is cost of the missile versus cost of the target. If a drone attack succeeds, it could wreck a ship worth anywhere upwards of \$50 million and carrying trade goods likely in the \$500 million range—and in some cases, roughly double those amounts.

The real problem of volume is a different one. The primary ships being used for these operations—for the United States, *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyers; for the United Kingdom, the *Daring* class—sail with an arsenal of roughly 60 missiles that are useful for shooting down drones or missiles. (They carry other types of missiles as well, rounding out the complement of armaments, but not ones germane to this fight.) At the pace at which the Houthis have been conducting attacks, a single ship would expend its relevant armaments in a couple of weeks and need to be rotated out; there's no way to replenish these missiles at sea. If the Houthis keep up the pace of attacks and have a steady supply of drones and missiles (which seems likely), the cost of maintaining a naval escort operation—including the costs of operating the ships at distance—will rapidly rise into the tens of billions of dollars. The West faces three options, all with serious downsides.

**First,** reroute the shipping. For now, until the task force is assembled, shippers are switching routes between the Red Sea and the long voyage around the Cape of Good Hope off southern Africa. It's been done before, when the Suez

Canal was closed as a result of Arab-Israeli wars in the late 1960s and early '70s. But global trade then was a fraction of global trade now. Rerouting via the Cape of Good Hope would add roughly 60 percent of the transit time (and fuel cost) from Asian ports to European ones, not just adding costs to shippers (who



would pass those costs onto consumers) but more importantly gumming up the works in global just-in-time manufacturing. While this is an acceptable option for a week or two, any longer and the disruption to global sea-based supply chains would be significant.

Second, attack the missiles and drones at the source, either to eradicate the armaments or deter the attacks. Already there's a drumbeat of criticism that U.S. President Joe Biden hasn't yet authorized this course. Easily said but less easily achieved. It would not be too hard for Houthi forces to hide both themselves and a stockpile of drones and missiles from U.S. targeting, so any attacks—from two U.S. carrier strike groups in nearby waters—would have to be pretty wide-ranging and even then are likely to miss pockets of weaponry. Would Iran—the Houthis' primary backers—be thus deterred? It's unclear how or why; Iran is surely willing to allow the Houthis to sustain substantial casualties for the "win" of harassing "the West" in the Red Sea. Attacking Iran itself is the next logical step and may prove necessary, but that carries its own major risk of escalation while Israel is grappling with the missile threat from Hezbollah on its northern border with Lebanon.

**Third,** widen the coalition. So far, Germany has not joined in, to some criticism but with good reason. There are mounting demands on Germany's modest navy in Northern European waters, where the Russians are flexing their subsea muscles. Australia was asked to join but made the counterargument that its modest naval capacity is better deployed in the Western Pacific. Japan could contribute, especially since it has a base in Djibouti. Another potential contributor is China, which has a base nearby and a long track record of contributing to counterpiracy operations in the Indian Ocean. There's a dilemma here for the West, though: Do the Western powers prefer to (a) pay the price of protecting global sea-based trade, of which China is the largest source and arguably primary beneficiary, or (b) help facilitate China's growing capacity to project naval power across the high seas?

The entire episode highlights this point: There's a deepening contradiction between the reality of globalization, heavily dependent on sea-based trade and on China, and the reality of geopolitical contest, in which naval power is rapidly emerging as a central dimension. Tensions and bad choices abound in the Red Sea—but they are also a harbinger of tougher choices and turbulent waters ahead.

Dr. **Bruce Jones** is the author of *To Rule the Waves* (Scribner 2021), and a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution's Talbott Center on Security, Strategy and Technology.





# li po tra

## **Criminal Minds**

By the Editor of C<sup>2</sup>BRNE Diary



**Criminal Minds** is an American police procedural crime drama television series created and produced by Jeff Davis. It follows a group of criminal profilers who work for the FBI as members of its Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU), using behavioral analysis and profiling to investigate crimes and find the unsub (unknown subject), the team's term for perpetrators. The show tells the story of the team as they work on various cases and tackle their personal struggles.

In one of the episodes I recently watched the bad guy was using light bulbs to carry deadly pathogen spores powder to ignite a terrorist attack in a busy metro station. This is a good idea since bulbs can be easily transported via a backpack; they are safe for the carrier; and they can be thrown to a distance without dissolving. That's why President George W. Bush had one of the first meetings he called with the writers and movie producers in Hollywood.

# **Highly appreciated!**

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# Certificate of Commendation

This is to certify that

#### Ioannis Galatas

was a dedicated member of the PROACTIVE Advisory Board, composed of practitioners (PSAB), civil society organisations (CSAB) and ethics experts (EEAB), and contributed in their advisory capacity to the co-creation and validation of project outcomes.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement no. 832981



PROACTIVE Project

◆ Access all project deliverables recently approved by the European Commission on the Project Website.



# Chlorine Is a Highly Useful Chemical That's Also Extremely Dangerous – Here's What to Know About Staying Safe Around It

#### By Aliasger K. Salem

Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20231127-chlorine-is-a-highly-useful-chemical-that-s-also-extremely-dangerous-here-s-what-to-know-about-staying-safe-around-it?page=0,1



Nov 27 – Many people encounter chlorine in their daily lives, whether it's as an ingredient in household bleach or an additive that sanitizes water in swimming pools. Chlorine is also used as an antiseptic, a bleaching agent in the production of paper and cloth, and to kill microorganisms in drinking water.

But this familiar chemical is also extremely toxic. And because it's ubiquitous in many industries across the U.S., it often is released in chemical accidents and spills.

As a <u>pharmaceutical scientist</u>, I study ways in which chemicals and other materials affect the human body. Currently, I am working to develop <u>therapies to counteract chlorine gas exposure</u> and to understand the mechanism by which chlorine harms people. One promising therapy that we are developing is inhalable nanoparticles that counteract lung damage following chlorine gas exposure.

#### A Common and Dangerous Chemical

<u>Chlorine</u> is an extremely toxic and widely used chemical. In the U.S., it is one of the top five chemicals by production volume, with an output of about 12 million tons (11 million metric tons) <u>per year</u>.

A yellow-green gas at room temperature, chlorine is highly reactive, which means that it <u>readily forms compounds with many other chemicals</u>. These reactions often are very intense. Chlorine <u>reacts explosively or forms explosive compounds</u> with many common substances, including hydrogen, turpentine and ammonia.

Chlorine gas exposure, even for short periods of time and <u>at low levels</u>, leads to eye, throat and nose irritation and causes coughing and breathing problems and burning in the eyes. <u>Higher exposure levels</u> can cause chest pain, severe breathing difficulties, pneumonia, vomiting and fluid in the lungs. Very high levels can cause death. Chlorine also can be absorbed through the skin, resulting in pain, swelling, inflammation and blistering.

Our research has shown that exposure to chlorine gas leads to airway inflammation and <u>airway hyperreactivity</u> – swelling and narrowing of the bronchial tubes that carry air to and from your lungs, which makes it harder to breathe.

This condition is a characteristic feature of asthma.

Chlorine's toxicity made it one of the first chemical weapons used on a large scale in warfare. German troops released it against French and Canadian forces in World War I. More recently, international



observers report that <u>Syria has used chlorine weapons repeatedly</u> in that country's civil war. In Iraq, insurgents <u>used chlorine bombs</u> <u>against U.S. forces</u> in 2007 in and around Baghdad, and the Islamic State reportedly later <u>used chlorine in crude roadside bombs</u> in Iraq.

# Large-Scale Releases Worldwide

Some recent accidents show how commonly the release or mishandling of chlorine can create life-threatening situations. For example, on April 27, 2023, five workers at a spa in Brooklyn were hospitalized after employees mixed two cleaning chemicals, releasing chlorine gas – a reaction that is surprisingly easy to generate. In a larger event, on April 18, 2022, a compressor fire caused a chlorine gas spill inside a Dow Chemicals facility close to Plaquemine, Louisiana. Liquid chlorine quickly vaporized into the air and spread into adjoining neighborhoods. At least 23 people were hospitalized. Large-scale shipments of chlorine can cause widespread injuries and even deaths in the event of accidents. For example, when a freight train derailed in Graniteville, South Carolina, in 2005, a tanker car ruptured and released 60 tons of chlorine. Nine people died, 72 were hospitalized and 525 received outpatient medical treatment. The most dramatic recent case occurred at the Port of Aqaba in Jordan on June 27, 2022. A crane dropped a container loaded with 25 tons of chlorine onto a docked ship, where it broke and produced a massive release of toxic gas. The spill killed 13 people and injured more than 260.

# **Protecting People from Chlorine Gas Exposure**

Although the risks from chlorine gas exposure have been well understood for over a century, there are no current antidotes. This is because chlorine is a strong oxidizing agent that can <u>cause major tissue damage</u> in the body. People who handle chlorine in the workplace should use respiratory equipment that meets <u>federal regulatory standards</u>. They also should have rubber gloves, a protective apron or other protective clothing, goggles or a face mask, and access to a shower and eye-washing station.

Signs that <u>chlorine may be present</u> include a pungent, irritating odor, like very strong cleaning products; a yellowish-green gas; and irritation to the eyes and throat. If you suspect that you may have been exposed to chlorine gas, the <u>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend</u> moving away from the area and removing all clothing and showering if possible.

Symptoms of chlorine exposure can be treated in a hospital. Therapies include providing patients with humidified oxygen, which is less irritating to the nose and throat than conventional oxygen, and inhaled <a href="beta-adrenergic agents">beta-adrenergic agents</a> – medications that are widely used to manage bronchial asthma by relieving lung spasms and reducing airway resistance. Researchers are studying <a href="https://doi.org/10.21/2016/journal.org/

Aliasger K. Salem is Associate Vice President for Research and Bighley Chair and Professor of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Iowa.

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Slovenian (Slovenia)	Tamil (India)	Telugu (India)	Thai (Thailand)
Chinese, Mandarin (Simplified, Hong Kong)	Chinese, Mandarin (Traditional, Taiwan)	Hebrew (Israel)	

# HSP90, a common therapeutic target for suppressing skin injury caused by exposure to chemically diverse classes of blistering agents

By Ritesh Kumar Srivastava, Suhail Muzaffar, Jasim Khan, et al.

Journal of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics November 1, 2023, JPET-AR-2023-001795

Source: https://jpet.aspetjournals.org/content/jpet/early/2023/10/31/jpet.123.001795.full.pdf

## **Abstract**

Vesicants such as arsenicals and mustards produce highly painful cutaneous inflammatory and blistering responses, hence, developed as chemical weapons during World War I/II. Here, using lewisite and sulfur mustard surrogates namely phenylarsine oxide (PAO) and 2-chloroethyl ethyl sulfide (CEES) respectively, we defined a common underlying mechanism of toxic action by these two distinct classes of vesicants. Murine skin exposure to these chemicals causes tissue destruction characterized by increase in skin bifold thickness, Draize score, infiltration of inflammatory cells and appearance of apoptotic epidermal and dermal cells. RNAseq analysis identified ~346 inflammatory genes that were commonly altered by both PAO and CEES along with identification of cytokine signaling activation as the top canonical pathway. Activation of several of these inflammatory genes and pathways are associated with phosphorylation-dependent activation of heat shock protein 90α (p-HSP90α). Topical treatment with known HSP90 inhibitors, SNX-5422 and IPI-504 post PAO or CEES skin challenge significantly attenuated these chemical-induced skin damage (reduction in overall skin injury and clinical scores). In addition, highly upregulated inflammatory genes Saa3, Cxcl1, Ccl7, IL-6, NIrp3, Csf3, Chil3 etc. by both PAO and CEES, were significantly diminished by the treatment with these HSP90 inhibitors. These drugs not only reduced PAO or CEES-induced p-HSP90α expression but also its client proteins NLRP3, pP38 and expression of their target inflammatory genes. Our data confirm a critical role of HSP90 as a shared underlying molecular signaling of toxicity by these two distinct vesicants and provide an effective and novel medical countermeasure to suppress vesicants -induced skin injury.

Significance Statement Development of effective and novel mechanism-based antidotes which can simultaneously block cutaneous toxic manifestations of distinct vesicants is important and urgently needed. Due to difficulties in determining the exact nature of onsite chemical exposure, a potent drug that can suppress widespread cutaneous damage may find a great utility. Thus, we identified HSP90 as a



common molecular regulator of cutaneous inflammation and injury by two distinct warfare vesicants: arsenicals and mustards; and HSP90 inhibitors afford significant protection against skin damage.

# Computer-assisted evaluation of small airway disease in CT scans of Iran-Iraq war victims of chemical warfare by a locally developed software: comparison between different quantitative methods

By Mohammad Mehdi Baradaran Mahdavi, Mehravar Rafati, Mostafa Ghanei, and Masoud Arabfard

BMC Medical Imaging volume 23, Article number: 165 (2023)

Source: https://bmcmedimaging.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12880-023-01114-2

#### **Abstract**

Diagnosis of small airway disease on computed tomography (CT) scans is challenging in patients with a history of chemical warfare exposure. We developed a software package based on different methodologies to identify and quantify small airway disease in CT images. The primary aim was to identify the best automatic methodology for detecting small airway disease in CT scans of Iran-Iraq War victims of chemical warfare.

#### **Methods**

This retrospective case—control study enrolled 46 patients with a history of chemical warfare exposure and 27 controls with inspiratory/expiratory (I/E) CT scans and spirometry tests. Image data were automatically segmented, and inspiratory images were registered into the expiratory images' frame using the locally developed software. Parametric response mapping (PRM) and air trapping index (ATI) mapping were performed on the CT images. Conventional QCT methods, including expiratory/inspiratory mean lung attenuation (E/I MLA) ratio, normal density E/I (ND E/I) MLA ratio, attenuation volume Index (AVI), %low attenuation areas (LAA) < -856 in exhale scans, and %LAA < -950 in inhale scans were also computed. QCT measurements were correlated with spirometry results and compared across the two study groups.

#### Results

The correlation analysis showed a significant negative relationship between three air trapping (AT) measurements (PRM, ATI, and %LAA $_{\rm Exp}$  < -856) and spirometry parameters (Fev1, Fvc, Fev1/Fvc, and MMEF). Moreover, %LAA $_{\rm Exp}$  < -856 had the highest significant negative correlation with Fev1/Fvc (r = -0.643, P-value < 0.001). Three AT measurements demonstrated a significant difference between the study groups. The E/I ratio was also significantly different between the two groups (P-value < 0.001). Binary logistic regression models showed PRMFsad, %LAA $_{\rm Exp}$  < -856, and ATI as significant and strong predictors of the study outcome. Optimal cut-points for PRMFsad = 19%, %LAA $_{\rm Exp}$  < -856 = 23%, and ATI = 27% were identified to classify the participants into two groups with high accuracy.

# Conclusion

QCT methods, including PRM, ATI, and %LAA<sub>Exp</sub> < -856 can greatly advance the identification and quantification of SAD in chemical warfare victims. The results should be verified in well-designed prospective studies involving a large population.



# SmartHat may be the Swiss Army knife of safety helmets

Source: https://newatlas.com/wearables/proxgy-smarthat-safety-helmet/

Dec 01 – On modern worksites, workers are typically required to carry – or even wear – quite a few electronic devices. The SmartHat is designed to make things easier, by packing a head-load of gadgets into a single safety helmet. Manufactured by Indian startup Proxgy, the SmartHat is the recipient of both a 2023 India's Best Design Award and a 2024 CES Innovation Award. First and foremost, the device does indeed protect users from knocks on the

head. It has a hardened ABS shell and is Type-

1/Class-3-rated. This means it offers protection against falling objects, but does not protect its wearer from electrical hazards.





That said, the helmet *does* feature a removable sensor that sounds an alarm if it detects any of 14 flammable or three toxic gases. There's also a proximity sensor which notifies the wearer of dangerously close overhead objects via a haptic feedback system.



Additionally, remotely located managers can be wirelessly notified if sensors in the helmet detect problems with the wearer's heart rate, body temperature or blood oxygen level. Notifications will also be sent if the SmartHat detects that the user has fallen down, left a geofenced area, or is not wearing the helmet when they should be. Workers can take part in two-way audiovisual calls with managers or with each other, using a built-in multi-channel walkietalkie along with front and rear HD cameras. The front camera utilizes an infrared sensor for use in low-light conditions, whereas the rear camera provides a 160-degree view of the wearer's surroundings. Both cameras can also be used to record video or still photos at any

time, simply by pressing a "Capture" button.

Depending on the setting and usage scenario, communications are managed via 4G/5G, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, NFC, LoRaWAN or PTT protocols. All of the electronics are powered by a removable lithium-ion-phosphate battery in the back – there's currently no word on battery life.



Finally, if things just generally go wrong, wearers can flip an Emergency SOS switch at the front of the helmet. Doing so will send a wireless alert, plus it will cause integrated lights to start flashing.

Potential buyers can contact Proxgy via the company website [Source: Proxgy]

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** This could be the basis for a new type of gas mask of tomorrow!

# **EMA – Biological and chemical threats**

Source: https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/human-regulatory-overview/public-health-threats/biological-and-chemical-threats



The European Medicines Agency (EMA) has developed guidance on the use of medicines for in patients exposed to biological or chemical agents used in warfare or terrorism.

This guidance explains the various types of agents that could be used maliciously and the medicines that can be used to **prevent or treat** their effects.

# **Biological agents**

The Agency has created two resources giving information on medicines that can be used to prevent or treat the effects of **biological agents**:

- a database of scientific information on pathogenic agents that might be used in biological warfare;
- information on the existence of vaccines and other medicines available to prevent or treat their effects.

At the request of the European Commission, EMA has published **guidance** on the use of medicines for the treatment and prevention of biological agents. EMA published the first version in 2002 and has updated the guidance regularly since then:

• European Medicines Agency/Committee on Proprietary Medicinal Products guidance document on use of medicinal products for treatment and prophylaxis of biological agents that might be used as weapons of bioterrorism

# Disease categorisation

The agents in the Agency guidance fall into three categories. These are described in the table below, compared with the categories applied by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

# **European Medicines Agency categories**

#### I Major infectious diseases for which treatment exists

Anthrax, plague, tularemia, smallpox, viral haemorrhagic fever, botulism, brucellosis, Q fever, glanders, melioidosis.

# II Other bacterial infections for which treatment exists

Psittacosis, epidemic typhus (*Rickettsia prowazekii*), tuberculosis, shigellosis, salmonellosis, cholera.

# III Biological agents for which currently no specific treatment can be recommended

Enterohaemorrhagic *Escherichia coli*, cryptosporidiosis, viral encephalitis (Venezuelan equine encephalitis, Eastern equine encephalitis, Western equine encephalitis), nipah virus, additional viral haemorrhagic fevers (tick-borne encephalitis virus, yellow-fever virus, hantavirus, marburg and ebola virus), staphylococcal enterotoxin B, *Clostridium perfringens* epsilon toxin, ricin toxin.

# **CDC** categories

#### Category A diseases/agents

Organisms that pose a risk to national security because they can be easily disseminated or transmitted from person to person, result in high mortality rates and have the potential for major public health impact, might cause public panic and social disruption, and require special action for public-health preparedness.

## Category B diseases/agents

Agents that are moderately easy to disseminate, result in moderate morbidity rates and low mortality rates, and require specific enhancements of CDC's diagnostic capacity and enhanced disease surveillance

## Category C diseases/agents

Emerging pathogens that could be engineered for mass dissemination in the future because of availability, ease of production and dissemination, and with potential for high morbidity and mortality rates and major health impact.

#### **Chemical agents**

The Agency has produced **guidance** on the medicines that can be used to treat patients who have been exposed to **chemical agents** during terrorist attacks. It includes:



- general information on emergency treatments such as decontamination of victims, and principles of treating symptoms for the purposes of basic life support;
- summary information on the main classes of **specific agents** of chemical warfare including how they are named, routes of exposure, toxicity, clinical symptoms and possible treatments.

EMA published the guidance in April 2003:

• <u>European Medicines Agency/Committee on Proprietary Medicinal Products guidance document on the use of medicinal products for the treatment of patients exposed to terrorist attacks with chemical agents</u>

# Wearable Tech Mitigates First Responder Exposure to Chemical Threats

Source: https://www.dhs.gov/science-and-technology/news/2023/12/07/feature-article-wearable-tech-mitigates-first-responder-exposure-chemical-threats

Dec 07 – Every day, all types of emergency responders across the nation are dispatched to calls for situations ranging from industrial, agricultural, and commercial accidents to 5-alarm fires. In these moments, we rely on them to render aid swiftly and efficiently, even

if it means risking their personal safety. This is why the Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) is leading a new effort to arm responders with state-of-the-art technology that alerts them to toxic industrial chemicals (TICs) that may be present in the field.

TDA Research's wearable chemical sensor badge will be able to detect toxic industrial chemicals that first responders and firefighters are oftentimes exposed to when they arrive on the scene of an emergency. Photo credit: TDA Research, Inc.

S&T's goal: Support the development (and, ultimately commercialization) of a cost-effective, wearable, customizable, and reusable chemical sensor that allows first-on-scene personnel to respond to a wide variety of emergencies quickly and safely.

An estimated <u>240 million calls</u> are made to emergency services in the United States every year. "Our emergency responders need to have the most up-to-date technologies and tools that will enable them to safely answer these calls," said S&T Program Manager Kimberli Jones-Holt. "We are collaborating with several partners to ensure that

they have access to these resources, and also enhance existing technologies to provide more convenient and affordable safety capabilities."

Thanks to the <u>Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR)</u> Program, S&T joined forces with TDA Research inc. (TDA), the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory, the Fairmount Fire Department in Golden, Colorado, and additional government and private stakeholders to develop a portable chemical sensor that detects TICs (e.g., hydrogen sulfide, ammonia, phosphine, hydrogen cyanide, chlorine, and nitrogen dioxide) that firefighters and other similar emergency responders could potentially be exposed to during a response. Following the successful completion of a Phase I contract, TDA was awarded an additional 24-month SBIR Phase II contract to develop a <u>simple low-cost wearable sensor badge</u>, and then continued further development of their technology through a 12-month SBIR Commercialization Readiness Pilot Program (CRPP) award.

"TICs are commonly found in many industries and are often used as a crucial part of manufacturing, refining, and other commercial processes and related activities," explained Jones-Holt. "As a result, when industrial or chemical emergencies, fires, or natural disasters occur, it's very likely that firefighters and other first-on-scene personnel will encounter them when they respond to calls in the field."

"TICs can be easily inhaled, ingested, or absorbed through the skin, causing irritation of the nose, mouth, throat, eyes, and skin," continued Jones-Holt. "Depending on the type of TIC, prolonged exposure can be deadly. Therefore, it's crucial that emergency responders are properly equipped to deal with and be protected from them."

To meet this crucial need, TDA developed and deployed prototype wearable chemical sensor badges with firefighters and emergency responders at the Fairmount Fire Department to demonstrate and verify that the badges could quickly and accurately alert users to the presence of dangerous TICs. These devices



are meant to improve situational awareness and enable responders to leave the scene before any harmful exposure and associated injuries occur.

"My hope is that these wearable chemical sensor badges will prove to be an effective and comfortable tool that increases situational awareness and supplements the current chemical and gas sensors that are being used by our first responders," said Jones-Holt. Most existing chemical and gas sensor technologies are expensive and bulky, which is not ideal for agencies that often contend with tight budgets for equipment and limited space on vehicles. TDA's wearable sensor badges will be much more portable, cost approximately \$200 each, and utilize easily replaceable colorimetric chemical sensor strips (costing ~\$5-10 each). They will also run on rechargeable batteries, giving first-on-scene responders an affordable, cutting-edge tool that can be used repeatedly in the field.



Jones-Holt explains how the wearable chemical sensor badges work. "As their name implies, these chemical sensor badges are small, lightweight, and designed to be clipped onto a jacket or vest so that they don't restrict the user's movement or ability to perform critical tasks. They are water- and drop-resistant and designed to be used in rough environments on a daily basis."

The badges use specialized sensors that sample the air to detect the presence of hydrogen sulfide, ammonia, phosphine, hydrogen cyanide, chlorine, and nitrogen dioxide at trace levels. If any TICs are detected, the sensors will send alerts to the wearer via a colorimetric sensor cartridge strip that displays up to six different colors (depending on which TICs are present) on a LED screen on the front of the badge. The screen will automatically indicate which chemical or gas has been identified, and how much of it is present in the environment (in parts per million). The badge also has vibratory and auditory alarming features that will automatically be triggered during an exposure as well.

This spring (April to June), TDA conducted live field and end user testing with the Fairmount Fire Department. "Firefighters and other emergency responders often work in all sorts of settings where they can be exposed to TICs," explained Jones-Holt. "We needed to be sure that the wearable chemical sensor badges can function as required and protect them in the field, no matter what type of environment they're in."

To assess the ease of use and functionality of the badges, Fairmount firefighters participated in operational drills where they engaged in hands-on operation of

the badges. They performed tasks like operating them while donning their protective gear (e.g., coats and gloves), mounting the badge onto their jacket or vest, pressing various buttons on the badge and the on-screen menu, and replacing the colorimetric sensor cartridge strip and battery. All these tests were performed with both gloved and ungloved hands.

Participants drop-tested them, submerged the badges in water, and exposed them to ammonia to verify their ability to detect TICs. Analysis and confirmation of the badges' abilities to detect the other five TICs was performed at the Naval Research Laboratory prior to the in-person assessment, to protect the participating responders from potential exposure.



After the assessments, TDA surveyed the Fairmount firefighters and EMS responders to gather their input regarding how the badges performed during each set of operational drills and tests. Overall feedback was overwhelmingly positive and indicated that the wearable chemical sensor badges have the potential to be a critical tool for firefighters and other first-on-scene responders.

"Based on comments from the test participants, TDA will work to improve the final iteration of the badges by making them a little bit larger, ruggedizing them with silicone carry cases, increasing their ability to withstand extreme temperatures, modifying the mounting clip so that they won't dangle if the wearer is bending over or crawling on the ground, and intensifying both the auditory and vibratory alarms that alert the wearer to potential dangers," said Jones-Holt.

With the success of the field end-user testing made possible through the SBIR CRPP Award, TDA and S&T are looking forward to the future commercialization of the wearable sensor badges.

"It's our hope that these sensor badges will not only be a critical tool for firefighters and first-on-scene responders, but others in the field as well," explained Jones-Holt. "We recognize that depending upon their roles and areas of expertise, different types of responders face specific challenges and threats (e.g., context-specific chemicals and gases) and have unique requirements. As we commercialize these badges, we are working with TDA to ensure that they will have the ability to customize future iterations of these badges to meet the needs of all our responders in the field. We are excited to see these sensor badges in action in the near future."

# Hamas used toxic substance to kill Nahal Oz troops on Oct. 7, IDF probe said to show

Source: https://www.timesofisrael.com/nahal-oz-troops-killed-by-toxic-gas-during-oct-7-hamas-attack-idf-probe-said-to-show/



A mural is seen outside an IDF surveillance command center at the Re'im base. The text reads: 'The flowers will continue to bloom.' November 5, 2023. (Israel Defense Forces)

Dec 13 – An investigation into the nature of the deaths of IDF surveillance soldiers serving on the Nahal Oz base on October 7 has revealed that they were killed by a toxic gas that caused suffocation and loss of consciousness within a few minutes of exposure.

According to a report published by Channel 12, the main findings of the investigation indicated that an unspecified but toxic flammable substance was apparently thrown through the entrance of the building which housed the surveillance soldiers' command center. One of the soldiers at the entrance to the building attempted to extinguish the flames but was unsuccessful and the fire continued to spread.

"They set fire to materials that ignited and spread, which contained toxic gases that could cause suffocation in a few minutes or even less than that," Channel 12 quoted the officer delivering the report as saying, and added that the estimated time of a few minutes was an optimistic one.

As the fire continued to spread, the smoke began to enter the surveillance soldiers' command center, where 22 people, including many of the surveillance soldiers, were hiding. In an attempt to ward off the

smoke, the soldiers soaked some paper towels with water to fill the gap under the door but it didn't work and the effects of the gas began to take hold.

"The soldiers began to leave the room and search for an exit. They were coughing and some couldn't breathe," the IDF officer told Channel 12. "Some told us that they felt they were stepping on some people, they tried to pick them up, and with the rest of their strength tried to call to them. They were simply surviving and trying to figure out how to get themselves out of there."

When they reached the emergency exit, however, the soldiers realized that the door was on fire, and there was no way of opening it or even getting close to it. Those who were still able continued to search for an exit and eventually reached the bathrooms, where a small window led to the outside.

One of the officers climbed up to the window and smashed it, allowing him, five other officers and one surveillance soldier to escape the toxic inferno.



The destruction caused by Hamas terrorists in Kibbutz Nahal Oz, near the Israel-Gaza border, in southern Israel, October 20, 2023 (Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

The attack on the Nahal Oz base, located less than a kilometer from the Gaza border, came at the start of the murderous assault carried out by Hamas, in which roughly 3,000 terrorists burst into Israel by land, air and sea under the cover of thousands of rockets.



They infiltrated more than 20 communities across the south of the country, killing more than 1,200 people and seizing some 240 hostages. Families were slaughtered in their homes in front of their loved ones and some 360 people were mowed down at an outdoor music festival. During the attack on the Nahal Oz base, 15 IDF surveillance soldiers were killed and six more were taken hostage.

One of the soldiers killed in the attack was **Cpl. Shirel Mor**, **19** (photo). Speaking to the Kan public broadcaster on Tuesday, her mother Edna Mor discussed the details surrounding her daughter's death and directed strong criticism at those she holds responsible for it.

"It wasn't only Hamas who killed our children. It was the government, the decision-makers in the army, they were also accomplices," she said, adding that the "baseless hatred in the streets for eight months,"



an apparent reference to the deep societal divisions over government's contentious judicial overhaul, also played a role in the failure to protect the country against Hamas on October 7.

Following Shirel's death, no senior officers visited Edna to deliver condolences or to discuss what had happened, she told Kan.

"They are afraid to come to us," she said of the officers. "So who's coming? The ones who are new there. The really senior ones, those who are in charge of the border, don't come. They send junior officers."

"It's not that they're ashamed. They don't have any shame; if they didn't guard our borders then they have no shame. They're just afraid that we will finish them off here at home," she added.

Describing Shirel as a person filled with joie de vivre, Edna said through tears, "She was put here for twenty years to educate me, her father, and her older sister and older brother. She contributed so much at home.

"How will I live? I had her at 40 years old; I gave myself a gift. They took her from me and they are guilty," she told Kan. "I want to take all the rugs out of their cabinet, they're always sweeping everything under the rug. I want those who are guilty to sit in prison. I, personally, and many other parents, will not accept resignations... they need to sit in prison without rank and without a pension."

# A teacher in Sweden was suspended after giving students a homework assignment to plan a terror attack

Source: https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/teacher-in-sweden-suspended-after-giving-students-homework-assignment-to-plan-terror-attack/3081840



Dec 14 – A teacher in Sweden has been suspended without pay after giving his students the task of planning a hypothetical terrorist attack as a homework assignment, local media reported Wednesday.

An investigation has also been launched into the move by the teacher, who works at a high school in the southern city of Jonkoping. The following is an excerpt of the instructions given to the students.

"You are a terrorist planning to make a political statement by releasing a chemical or biological agent on an unsuspecting Australian community. Your goal is to kill the MOST innocent civilians in order to get your message across."

"You are aware that the chemical/biological agent you will be using only has a 'fatal' range of 200 meters (if air/waterborne)."

It then follows with a series of questions for the students, including: "What are the effects of this agent?" "Where would you release it?" "How would you release it?" and "Who have you chosen to be your victims? -- Explain why."

The teacher's action has provoked strong reactions within the municipality.

"This is totally injudicious. We also have a high terror threat level in the country," Henrik Natt och Dag, director of education for secondary schools in Jonkoping municipality, told Swedish public broadcaster SVT.

"We take what happened very seriously and will therefore also report the incident to the police," he added.

The principal at the high school has been in contact with the students and their guardians and has provided information about what has happened. School staff members have also been briefed on the matter.

In the grading criteria for the task, it is stated, among other things, that in order to get an A, the students must have planned their act of terrorism in an understandable way and use their knowledge of terrorism. They must also present a realistic background and reason for the attack.

According to students the local broadcaster interviewed, the teacher said they could either complete the task or send him an email with a justification as to why it is inappropriate.

# EU funds further strategic reserves for medical, chemical, biological and radionuclear emergencies worth €690 million

Source: https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/news/eu-funds-further-strategic-reserves-medical-chemical-biological-and-radio-nuclear-emergencies-worth-2023-12-20 en



Dec 20 – The Commission is allocating today around €690 million to Czechia, Finland, France, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Romania to further develop the rescEU strategic reserves of medical and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) items. The reserves are part of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism's rescEU medical stocks funded by the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA). This new funding brings the number of rescEU hosting countries to 16, with 21 medical or CBRN reserves, strategically distributed across the EU.

These stocks encompass countermeasures that pose a significant risk of rapid depletion or increased demand during crisis scenarios, including:

- therapeutics such as intensive care medicines, antibiotics, vaccines, antidotes;
- medical devices, personal protective equipment and items to respond to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear events.

These grants to Member States aim to greatly enhance the quality and quantity of the reserves' composition for different crisis situations and addressing the long-term sustainability of the stocks.

The new funding builds on existing reserves already set up in <u>Croatia, France, Poland and Finland</u>. Commissioner for Crisis Management said Janez **Lenarčič**: "rescEU's medical and CBRN strategic reserves are essential for Europe to be well-prepared to respond effectively in the new disaster risk



landscape. They complement Member States' preparedness to respond to major emergencies impacting public health across Europe." Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Stella **Kyriakides**, said: "Today's strategic reserve, funded and constituted through the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority, will reinforce the EU's capacity to respond fast in case of potential serious cross border health threats. We must be prepared for the top threats of tomorrow and with today's action we are one step stronger. This is an essential piece of the puzzle for preparedness in a strong European Health Union."

# **Background**

Since their establishment in 2020, the rescEU strategic reserves have been mobilised multiple times, proving to be a crucial response tool during major crises. Such as during the COVID-19, the war in Ukraine and, more recently, in the context of the earthquakes in Türkiye.

Following the activation of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, rescEU provides an extra layer of protection and ensures a faster and more comprehensive response to disasters. The rescEU reserve is 100% EU-financed and the EU Commission maintains, in close cooperation with the country hosting the reserve, control of their operation. In an emergency, the rescEU reserve provides assistance to all EU Member States, Participating States to the Mechanism and can also be deployed to EU neighbouring countries.

The Health Emergency preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) has been set up to strengthen Europe's ability to prevent, detect, and rapidly respond to cross-border health emergencies, be it natural or man made threat. HERA is doing so by funding the development, manufacturing, procurement, and deployment of key medical countermeasures and equipment.

# PhoneCam aims to bring body-camera security to everyday folks

Source: https://newatlas.com/wearables/phonecam-body-camera-security/



Dec 20 – The <u>PhoneCam</u> was inspired by the body cameras worn by police officers and other first responders – PhoneCam

Dec 20 – Sometimes, violent people rein in their aggressive behavior if they know they're being recorded on video. Whipping out your phone and holding it up to film them, however, may make things even worse. That's where the PhoneCam comes in, as it's intended to serve as a sort of middle ground.

Manufactured by Belgian electronics company Slimdesign, the PhoneCam is smaller than a cigarette lighter, and can be worn in a

prominent location on the user's jacket or shirt. It incorporates a 1080p/30fps wide-angle video camera, a microphone, plus 4G/5G and Wi-Fi modules.

If the user finds themselves in what could turn out to be a dangerous situation, they press the PhoneCam's single button. Doing so puts it into standby mode, as is indicated by an LED ring on the device which illuminates white. The general idea is that this will draw the potential assailant's attention to the fact that a camera is indeed present.

The PhoneCam is IP65 water-resistant, meaning it's able to withstand low-pressure jets of water from all directions – PhoneCam



#### ICI C2BRNE DIARY - December 2023



If things continue to escalate, the user presses the button a second time. This makes the ring turn red, and it causes the PhoneCam to start transmitting footage to a cloud-based server, where it's recorded for possible use in court or by the police.

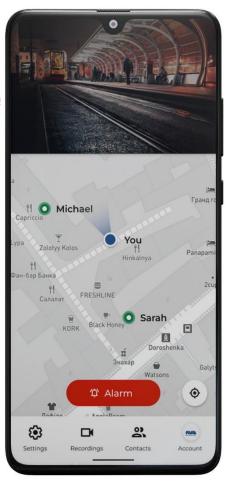
Additionally, a predetermined emergency contact is automatically notified via an app on their smartphone. That app displays a live audio/video feed from the

PhoneCam, it shows the user's location on a map, plus it allows the contact person and user to have a two-way conversation.

When PhoneCam is activated, it shares your location, video feed, and microphone with your emergency contacts. Two-way communication allows them to respond to you and address potential threats effectively. Peace of mind at your fingertips.

The PhoneCam is available now for preorder, priced at US\$69 – the jacket clip is an additional \$39. A subscription is required, which is free if users just wish to utilize the basic features, and plan on sending no more than two alarms per month. Other features can be accessed starting at a monthly fee of \$3.99.

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** Useful to be worn on PPEs!



# Generative AI and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Will AI Lead to Proliferation?

Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/generative-ai-and-weapons-mass-destruction-will-ai-lead-proliferation

Dec 23 – Large Language Models (LLMs) caught popular attention in 2023 through their ability to generate text based on prompts entered by the user. LLMs have also proven capable of generating code, summarizing text, and adding structure to unstructured text, among others. There remain questions around the real-world usefulness of LLMs in many domains, particularly given some of the difficulties in solving limitations of LLMs such as hallucination.

Ian J. Stewart writes in *Medium* that

Nonetheless, some have raised concerns about the ability of LLMs to contribute to nuclear, chemical and biological weapons proliferation (CBRN). Put simply, could a person learn enough through an interaction with an LLM to produce a weapon? And if so, would this differ from what the individual could learn by scouring the internet?

Stewart examines the question of whether generative AI can contribute to proliferation, and identifies four pathways of possible concern: knowledge retrieval, technical troubleshooting, mathematical, biological, or engineering design, and production of physical goods. He notes that additional pathways may also come to light.

The four pathways:

Knowledge retrieval: The most obvious role for LLMs is in knowledge retrieval. That is, the LLM answers questions posed by the user through prompts. Here, the LLM draws on inferences from its training data, which is primarily based on information available on the internet. However, the LLM may be trained on domain-specific or non-public data related to specific domains and its knowledge may be augmented by access to custom data including through Retrieval Augmented Generation (RAG). It is foreseeable that LLMs will in the future be capable of providing highly specific knowledge related to each category of weapons of mass destruction including in relation to each stage of their production. Questions remain about whether LLMs can facilitate tacit knowledge transfer rather than only explicit knowledge transfer. The tacit knowledge transfer point will require domain-specific research to understand the potential contribution of LLMs.

**Technical troubleshooting:** An important but distinct area from knowledge retrieval relates to troubleshooting in which the user provides the model with data on a specific real-world process, such as the log files from a piece of manufacturing equipment. The LLM can interactively troubleshoot with the user to overcome whatever problem has been encountered. This pathway is not

necessarily distinct from being able to ask for help online, except that it could also be applied to proprietary and domain specific equipment. Technical assistance is an area that is currently controlled from an export control perspective when the technical assistance relates to weapons of mass destruction. As such, there



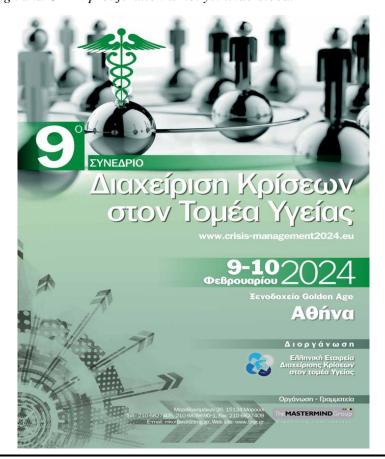
is a need also to examine the potential ability of LLMs to provide technical assistance from an export control perspective.

Mathematical, biological, simulation, and engineering design: Each CBRN domain includes many specific subfields and processes, and the staff working in CBRN programs often have scientific interdisciplinary backgrounds to account for this. In the nuclear domain, physicists and nuclear engineers are vital. But so too are chemists, mechanical engineers, electrical engineers and even geophysicists. For each domain, subdomain, and process there is often specialist software and technical data libraries that are leveraged in solving practical engineering and scientific problems. Some of this software and technical data is export controlled because of the proliferation concerns associated with it. It seems likely that LLMs will be capable of supplanting at least some of this specialist software and technical libraries in the future. One can envision an engineer interacting with an LLM to optimize a rocket design with the LLM also running mathematical models to inform the interaction, for example. This leads to questions around whether LLM output in such domains should be controlled or restricted in some way. With regards to engineering design, it presently seems fanciful that an interaction with an LLM could result in the production of a real-world item. While through their interaction with models such as Dalle 3, LLMs can produce artwork that resembles real-world items, they cannot currently produce engineered designs. However, as noted below, in other areas, machine learning is being used to produce practical engineering designs with manufacturability in mind. Such generative design will only increase in capability and scope in the years ahead.

Manufacturing: The manufacturing sector has evolved towards digital manufacturing across which led to the emergence of concepts such as Manufacture as a Service. Presently it is possible to place orders for the manufacture of a wide variety of materials and components online. For example, there are many 'on demand' 3d printing services through which a user can upload their STL file, specify the material, and have the material shipped to their address. There are also some bio cloudlabs in which users can submit a genetic sequence to be synthesized. It is foreseeable that LLMs will be able to directly interact with such services in the future and through that manufacture real-world materials and components. This leads to question of how best to ensure LLMs cannot be used to inappropriately manufacture CBRN components and materials or other forms of weapons.

Stewart concludes:

This article is a first effort to address the question: will generative design lead to Weapons of Mass Destruction proliferation? Specifically, the article sought to identify specific areas where LLMs could contribute to proliferation identifying four pathways: knowledge retrieval, technical troubleshooting, mathematical, biological, or engineering design, and production of physical goods. In many ways, the article raises more questions than it answers. The nexus between generative design and CBRN proliferation is not yet understood.

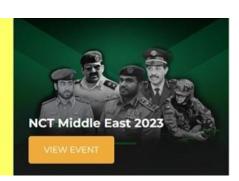




# 2023 CBRNE-RELATIED CONFERENCES







#### https://nct-events.com/event



## https://ciprna-expo.com/

There are 16 critical infrastructure sectors whose assets, systems, and networks, whether physical or virtual, are considered so vital to the United States that their incapacitation or destruction would have a debilitating effect on security, national economic security, national public health or safety. Presidential Policy Directive 21 (PPD-21): Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience advances a national policy to strengthen and maintain secure, functioning, and resilient critical infrastructure. This directive supersedes Homeland Security Presidential Directive 7.

We must be prepared!

The Nation's critical infrastructure provides the essential services that underpin American society. Proactive and coordinated efforts are necessary to strengthen and maintain secure, functioning, and resilient critical infrastructure – including assets, networks, and systems – that are vital to public confidence and the Nation's safety, prosperity, and well-being.

Critical infrastructure must be secure and able to withstand and rapidly recover from all hazards. Achieving this will require integration with the national preparedness system across prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery.

This directive establishes national policy on critical infrastructure security and resilience. This endeavor is a shared responsibility among the Federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) entities, and public and private owners and operators of critical infrastructure (herein referred to as "critical infrastructure owners and operators"). This directive also refines and clarifies the critical infrastructure-related functions, roles, and responsibilities across the Federal Government, as well as enhances overall coordination and collaboration. The Federal Government also has a responsibility to strengthen the security and resilience of its own critical infrastructure, for the continuity of national essential functions, and to organize itself to partner effectively with and add value to the security and resilience efforts of critical infrastructure owners and operators.

The Critical Infrastructure Protection and Resilience North America conference will again bring together leading stakeholders from industry, operators, agencies and governments to collaborate on securing North America.

The conference will look at developing on the theme of previous events in helping to create better understanding of the issues and the threats, to help facilitate the work to develop frameworks, good risk management, strategic planning and implementation.





https://www.ibmata.org/events/

The International Border Management and Technologies Association (IBMATA) is a not for profit international non-governmental organisation (NGO) committed to the safe and secure movement of people and goods across international borders.

The challenges facing border agencies across the globe – whether run by immigration, customs, police, or a combination of these – have never been greater.

In a world of globalisation, the volume of people and goods crossing borders continues to rise year on year. Managing these volumes whilst meeting public expectations of facilitation and security is becoming ever more complex.

The demands of both the international freight and travel industries for modern and innovative approaches to border control are increasing annually. Border agencies are relying increasingly upon technology – whether visible, in the form of automated border controls, or invisible such as data analytics and risk assessment – to manage these pressures.

At the same time threats posed by international organised crime, terrorism, smuggling, trafficking, and irregular migration must be met.

Border agencies cannot solve these pressures alone.

More than ever, they need help not just from other government departments and agencies, but also from other international partners and stakeholders.

# Who can join?

Membership is open to members of the following groups or organisations:

- All government departments and agencies charged with the responsibility of managing the international movement of people, goods and materials across national borders; including pre-entry, on-entry and after entry applications;
- Intergovernmental organisations with a vested interest in the management of people and goods across international borders;
- Non-governmental organisations with a vested interest in the management of people and goods across international borders;
- Transportation companies (including airlines, shipping companies, rail operators, freight forwarders) with a legitimate interest in supporting our aim;
- Port, airport, and other management entities with a legitimate interest in supporting our aim; and
- Those technology suppliers, business integrators and other private sector entities who support the safe and secure movement of people and goods across international borders whilst facilitating flow, in accordance with the aims of the organisation.



# Upcoming..... CBRNe CONVERGENCE 23rd - 25th January 2024

# https://cbrneworld.com/events/asia-24

Singapore was one of the first places we held a CBRN conference when we started CBRNe World in 2006, and it continues to excel, not just in South East Asia but the world. There are multiple agencies that allow it to have such a position, but pre-eminent among these is the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF). SCDF initiatives have brought CBRN excellence to every aspect of the field, from collecting evidence through to initiatives to allow the public to create safe spaces for themselves should the worst happen. We have done

multiple interviews and articles with them over the years that explain these projects, but now after 15 years we thought it was time for you to see them yourself! For three days in January we will host an event in the heart of the SCDF's CBRNE defence capability, the Civil Defence Academy (CDA). The CDA has recently benefited from a multi-million dollar improvement to a facility that already managed to pack a great deal into a relatively small space. Due to Covid it will have only recently finished the third, and final stage, of its improvement, and we will be hosting the event at the facility! Delegates will get an opportunity to visit the new facility and gain an increased understanding of the investment in first responder training that the SCDF has made. In addition to this there will be an exhibition of leading companies interested in SE Asia.



STRASBOURG FRANCE March 19<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> 2024 2024 INFORMATION





September 1, 2023: Opening of registrations (click here). Start of submission of abstracts (click here)

January 7, 2024: Abstracts submission deadline

January 25, 2024: Authors notification February 1, 2024: Late registrations March 4, 2024: Closing of registrations

March 19 – 21, 2024: Conference in Strasbourg



# Dear colleagues & friends,

We are about one year from the next CBRNE R&I Conference which will take place at Strasbourg, Palais de la Musique et des Congrès, from March 19 to 21, 2024.

After the 5th CBRNE R&I conference that took place last year at Lille, we propose to meet together in the great city of Strasbourg, capital of Alsace and Head Office of the European Parliament, famous for its historical and architectural heritage, the culinary tradition and the generous people!

Our collto preparehe local French & German Committee (including responders from the Fire Brigades, Emergency Medical Services, Police, Gendarmerie, bomb disposal experts and scientists from the University of Strasbourg) are currently making strong efforts for preparing demonstrations and workshops, and the members of our scientific committee are on board to build a highly relevant scientific programme. You will find the first elements on our new website very soon (https://cbrneconference.fr).

Industrial partners could register soon and we truly hope that you could join us and contribute to the success of this face-to-face Conference by presenting and sharing your most recent works on the topics of CBRNE detection, protection, decontamination, depollution, medical countermeasures, diagnostic tools, epidemiology, forensic sciences, risks & crisis management.

Looking forward to meeting you next year!

The organizing committee of the Conference.





## https://nct-events.com/event/nct-south-america

For its 6th edition in South America, NCT América del Sur 2024 will be held in Partnership with the Colombian Army through the Brigade of Engineers for Attention and Prevention of Disasters and hosted by the CBRNe Society. The conference will be chaired by Mr. José Antonio Zea Agüero, Director General of Centro de Información Química (CINQUI) and will address national and global challenges related to CBRNe and C-IED/EOD. NCT América del Sur 2024 will also host the NCT PRO eXperience training sessions for civil and military first responders.







The pandemic is OVER!

# Pandemic by numbers (as of December 24, 2023)

	CASES	DEATHS	COUNTRIES & TERRITORIES	MOST AFFECTED COUNTRIES*
COVID-19	(689,124,038) 700,262,978	(6,881,401) 6,960,046	229	USA, India, Brazil, France, Germany, Japan, S. Korea

<sup>\*</sup> over 30 million cases | numbers in parenthesis are patients of the previous month

# Burkina Faso: more than 350 deaths from dengue fever in a month

Source: https://www.africanews.com/2023/11/24/burkina-faso-more-than-350-deaths-from-dengue-fever-in-a-month/

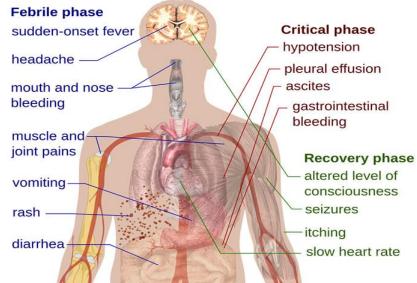


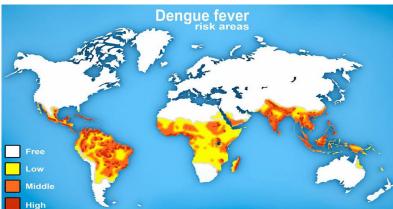
At 15 October, the same source reported 214 deaths since the start of the year. Between 15 October and 19 November, 356 people had died of dengue fever.

Between 13 and 19 November alone, "59 deaths were recorded", added Mr Soubeiga, adding that during the same period, "13,896 suspected cases of dengue fever were reported, including 6,829 probable cases" and "1,101 serious cases hospitalised".

Nov 25 – An epidemic of dengue fever, a mosquito-borne disease, claimed 356 lives in Burkina Faso between mid-October and mid-November, bringing the death toll to 570 since January 1, a health ministry official announced on Friday. From 1 January to 19 November, "123,804 suspected cases (of dengue fever) were notified, including 56,637 probable cases and 570 deaths, with a casefatality rate of 1%" recorded by the Centre des opérations de réponses aux urgences sanitaires (Corus), said its director, medical biologist Joseph Soubeiga, at a press briefing.

# Symptoms of **Dengue fever**





In an attempt to halt the spread of the epidemic, the government has launched an anti-mosquito spraying campaign in the two main towns affected: the capital Ouagadougou (centre) and Bobo-Dioulasso (west). "1,642 homes of patients and neighbouring homes" and "696 public spaces" have been treated, he said.

Burkina Faso has seen cases of dengue fever since the 1960s, but its first recorded epidemic dates back to 2017, with 13 deaths.

Transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito, like malaria for which it has the



same symptoms, dengue fever is a virus that is widespread in hot countries and occurs mainly in urban and semi-urban areas, causing between 100 and 400 million infections every year, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Dengue fever can cause high fever, headaches, nausea, vomiting, muscle pain and, in the most serious cases, haemorrhaging that can lead to death.

# The Future of COVID-19 and Approaches to Living With a New Endemic

By Matteo Bassetti, MD, PhD and Cristina Mussini, MD | November 16, 2023

Source: https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/989643

**Matteo Bassetti, MD, PhD:** Hello. I am Dr Matteo Bassetti. Welcome to Medscape's *InDiscussion* series on COVID-19. Today we will discuss the future of COVID and sustainable approaches to living with something that we can't eradicate.

We know that COVID now is probably different from the COVID-19 that we faced in 2020 and 2021. But we are close to autumn and winter, and it's important to know what we have to expect from the future of COVID.

First, let me introduce my guest, Dr Cristina Mussini, who is a professor of infectious diseases at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, a very well-known expert in Italy and Europe, and is also a good friend. Welcome, Cristina, to *InDiscussion*.

Cristina Mussini, MD: Hello, Matteo. Thank you for the invitation.

**Bassetti:** Before beginning our discussion today, I'd like to ask you, what was it that sparked your interest in COVID-19, and what keeps you engaged today regarding this very interesting topic?

**Mussini:** We are both infectious disease specialists, so a pandemic is something that is related to our specialty. In our lifespan, and also the professional lifespan, we already faced one pandemic that is still here, which is <u>HIV</u>. Obviously, it was not a respiratory infection, so the way of transmission was completely different, and it was less of a threat for the general population. But I think that we were also preparing to have <u>Ebola</u> in our clinic, if you remember, so when COVID arrived, we were, I would say, the natural doctors who could take care of these patients. Not only because of our clinic's structural characteristics that allow the admittance of a patient with a respiratory contagious disease but also because of our expertise.

Bassetti: Before looking at the future, it is important, in my opinion, to look at what is happening now.

Do you think there is any difference in the presentation and the severity of COVID-19 today in comparison with the disease that we faced 2 or 3 years ago?

**Mussini:** Yes, I mean, it's not a mystery. It's been a long time that we have been admitting in our clinic only patients who have a positive nasal swab but no involvement of the low respiratory tract, aside from a few individuals that we will talk about later. Fortunately, the advent of vaccines and the advent of some treatment strategies that could be either in the viral phase or during the inflammatory phase have changed, dramatically, the natural course, the natural history of the infection of COVID-19. What's happening now is that the virus is still circulating. We are continuing to admit people with a positive swab because we are looking for it. We perform another swab in the emergency room, not only for those who are symptomatic from a respiratory point of view — which is something that for me would be important and relevant for the future, like we do with the <u>flu</u>, for example — but also for those admitted for other reasons.

For example, in my clinic, I have a person who fell in her house. Another one had heart decompensation. It's completely different because for a long period, it's been the new variants that are really more contagious, but they stay in the upper respiratory tract. I don't know what's happening with this in Genoa.

**Bassetti:** We are following different rules because the Liguria region was the first, in April, to release a recommendation about not using swabs in asymptomatic patients. Actually, I don't have any patients who are asymptomatic with COVID. We have only patients who are symptomatic.

This is a kind of behavior that unfortunately continues to affect the patients in Italy. I don't really know why we are swabbing so much, because I believe this is a classical respiratory tract infectious disease. And we have to only swab the patients who present symptoms of respiratory tract infections and not swab people without symptoms.

On this point, the Minister of Health, a few weeks ago, was very clear, and I hope that hospitals, emergency rooms, and doctors will follow the strict recommendation of our Minister of Health. But let me ask you in general: If you had to describe the typical symptoms that affect not a fragile or not a very old patient with COVID-19 today, what are the classic symptoms? What is the duration of the symptoms? And what are the medications that you believe are important to suggest to be used?

**Mussini:** We are in Italy, and so the holiday season just stopped. The problem is that many people, even if they had symptoms related to COVID, did not undergo a swab. So now we are seeing the numbers rising because people are starting to use the swabs again because the symptoms are really similar to that of a



common flu or common cold. Many times, you don't even have a fever; you just have a runny nose. You could sometimes have a sore throat, but you are not even coughing or something, because it hasn't involved the lungs. So, that's why the symptoms are so non-s evere — I would say, so light — that you could think that it's a common cold. And this is important. But on the other hand, we have no idea, for now, of how much the virus is circulating because nobody underwent the nasal swab because everybody wanted to go on vacation, and if they have just a cold or runny nose, they said, "Okay, it's a cold" and they didn't do the swab.

**Bassetti:** Yes, this is exactly what happened during July and the end of June in the United States, with a very important circulation of SARS-CoV-2. And the phenomenon is going down rapidly without any type of intervention and without any consequences on hospital admissions and severe forms (of disease). But this is one side of the coin. Looking at the other side of the coin at the fragile and the elderly patients, are you still seeing severe disease, and what do you think will be the future? Next autumn or next winter, fragile, elderly, and very elderly patients will be affected by more severe forms (of disease). What do you suggest for them?

Mussini: This is something that we actually do not know because fragile patients, especially hematology patients or terminally ill patients, are people who are affected by many other causes of <a href="Lung involvement in many cases">Lung involvement in many cases</a>. So it's complicated to understand if it's really a COVID pneumonia because the clinical picture really differs from the one that we were used to seeing during the early phase of the pandemic. What I can say is that our future will depend on the variants. It seems that now we have <a href="Eris">Eris</a> and <a href="Pirola">Pirola</a>. In Italy, we don't have Pirola now; we have <a href="Eris">Eris</a> and <a href="Eris">Eris</a> and <a href="Eris">Eris</a> has, in the animal model, affinity to the lung. And it seems like Pirola, which is more prevalent in the United States for now, could affect the lungs more. So this could make a difference, but still the only weapon that we have for these fragile people is to recommend vaccination, especially the most recently developed vaccines. This would be very important because we are running after the virus, but we are never there because the virus changes, and the vaccine takes some time to develop. And so, when the vaccines arrive, they are always for the old variant, not for the present variants. It's the same for monoclonal antibodies. So it's important to maintain the efficacy of antivirals, like <a href="mirmatrelvir/ritonavir">mirmatrelvir/ritonavir</a> or <a href="mirmatrelvir/ritonavir">remdesivir</a>, because these are the real weapons that we have for patients. In many cases, these people already had an infection and were not well when they were admitted to the hospital, but they could not mount an immunologic response.

**Bassetti:** Talking about the new variants, particularly the Eris variant, I read the article about the possibility of higher pathogenicity for the lung. However, honestly, we have to remember that the research was based just on 10 hamsters and is not already published; it is just in the preprint.

I would be a bit cautious about saying that Eris is more virulent for the lungs than the other variants because we are talking about a subvariant of Omicron. We will see what happens in the future, but this is my question for you: After November 2021, when the Omicron variant began its course from South Africa, we have not seen any increase in virulence, more contagious disease, but probably less virulence. Do you agree with that?

**Mussini:** Absolutely, yes. And also about Eris. Already in Italy, 40% of the swabs that we have, have this variant, and actually, we didn't see any increase in lung disease. The only caution is that I know that the number of swabs is so low that it could happen that we could see some lung disease (in the future), but we have also seen that Omicron really does not affect the lung. And even in patients who are admitted for pneumonia, in the vast majority of the cases, they have a <u>bacterial pneumonia</u> and a positive nasal swab. I don't know your experience, but what we have seen even in hematology patients is that with Omicron, <u>we don't see severe lung involvement by SARS-CoV-2</u>.

**Bassetti:** Honestly, with Eris and in general, during the summer, we have seen cases with a shorter duration in terms of positive swabs compared with the past. In the past, the average duration was between 7 and 10 days, sometimes even more than 2 weeks. Now we have infections that have a duration of no more than 4 or 5 days, and sometimes 7 days — except for the fragile patients who are hematology patients and the <u>immunocompromised</u>.

So my question now is about strategies. First of all, if you had to decide who is the target population to be vaccinated with the monovalent vaccine, which was approved by the European Medicines Agency a few days ago and will be approved soon for Pfizer and for Moderna, who would be the target population for vaccination, age, and underlying conditions?

**Mussini:** I think that the age should probably be older than 75 or 80. I would not say for those who are 65 years old. I will go older. I think 80 years old and fragile patients, especially hematology patients, much more than oncology patients, but also oncology patients with severe diabetes or severe cardiovascular comorbidities. We should also not forget that we have a population that not only received at least three vaccine doses but also experienced a lot of positivity for SARS-CoV-2 because they had several infections. I think that I had two — Delta and Omicron, for example — on top of the vaccination. In the general population, in people who can mount a normal immune response, the antigen has been seen many times; it's easy to recall it. So that's why the duration of symptoms that you were mentioning before is due to the fact that our immune system — the memory — says to just jump in because we have seen this virus many times. This probably is the best defense that we have.

**Bassetti:** People cannot see us because they are just listening to us, but when you said that you suggest the vaccination in patients over 75 years old, I applauded you because obviously 60 years old is a very young population. And I prefer to have one 80-year-old patient vaccinated than 100 people who are 60 years old vaccinated.

In the end, for the health system, for our public health system, it is much better to have all or more than 75% of the 80-year-old patients vaccinated than having 25% of all the people over 60 years old vaccinated. It is much more important.

The other question I have is regarding the fragile and the elderly patients. Do you believe that there is any type of new strategy, particularly for patients who [have hematologic conditions] or are immunosuppressed, who present with a long course of positive swab testing? Do you know if there are any particular strategies for this type of patient?

**Mussini:** We have all been artists in this setting. So what we do is we use everything that we have: all the antivirals — if we have monoclonal antibodies also, we know that a few of them can retain some activity. But just think of a cake: I think that each of these strategies could represent slices that all together make a cake. We don't have one single strategy that could help us in this. We are re-treating patients, for example, with a longer period of remdesivir; we are re-treating patients with Paxlovid; we are using, for example, sotrovimab; we are trying to combine different strategies, but nothing is really written in guidelines. When I say that we are artists, it's because of this. But what is your experience now?

**Bassetti:** We are using the combination of at least double antivirals. Unfortunately, we cannot use the third antiviral anymore because molnupiravir has been <u>stopped in Italy by the Italian Medicines Agency</u>. And we usually and routinely treat hematology patients with remdesivir plus Paxlovid in combination.

I hope that in the future we will have new monoclonal antibodies that maybe should help us in the cocktail. But before closing this episode, I'd like to ask you what advice you would share with clinicians treating COVID, and what is your advice for the future with COVID? Do we have to live with COVID, or do we have to live terrified by COVID?

**Mussini:** I always think of the data that we have. I don't like when people try to predict the future. What we know for now is that the virus is less virulent, and it's more contagious, but it's part of our differential diagnosis. An important mutation in COVID that makes it as pathogenic as before has the same chance as having a flu pandemic. For now — maybe I will be a terrible predictor; we will see — there are no data, no reason to think that it will change soon.

**Bassetti:** Thank you very much. Today we have talked with Dr Cristina Mussini about the future of COVID and about sustainable approaches to living with something that we know we can't eradicate. Thank you for tuning in. Be sure to download <u>the Medscape</u> app and share, save, and subscribe if you enjoyed this episode. This is Matteo Bassetti for *InDiscussion*.

# A New Intelligence Report Suggests That the Lab-Leak Wars Will Never End

#### **Bv Katherine Eban**

Source: https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2023/06/a-new-intelligence-report-suggests-that-the-lab-leak-wars-will-never-end

June 28 – On Friday evening, five days after a federally mandated deadline, the US government's Office of the Director of National Intelligence finally acted on its <u>legal obligation</u> to "declassify any and all information" regarding the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic and its possible links to a Wuhan laboratory complex.

In the three-plus years since COVID upended the lives of virtually every person on Earth, a sprawling and often bitter debate has arisen among scientists, politicians, journalists, and online analysts over where the virus came from. Those favoring a "natural spillover" theory, in which the virus made the leap from bats to humans via an intermediate animal, have been dueling with "lab leak" proponents, who contend that it likely escaped from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, which conducts cutting-edge and sometimes risky coronavirus research.

Many hoped that the declassification exercise would bring new clarity—and maybe even resolution—to the debate. But when the ODNI finally weighed in at 6:25 pm Eastern Time on Friday, one thing seemed clear: the debate, accusations, and investigations will continue, perhaps indefinitely, in scientific papers, Twitter threads, and congressional hearings.

Instead of releasing a tranche of redacted primary documents chronicling the agencies' respective investigations, the ODNI chose to publish a summary of findings in a report of just nine pages, four of them taken up by a table of contents and a glossary. Among the few points of unambiguous agreement, the report notes: "All agencies continue to assess that both a natural and laboratory-associated origin remain plausible hypotheses to explain the first human infection." As well, they concur that SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, was not developed as a biological weapon. The report contains a classified annex, which the ODNI did not release

The report may be more notable for what it doesn't say. It does not shed any light on why the National Intelligence Council and four other intelligence agencies assess that natural exposure to an infected animal



is a more likely cause. It does not reveal why the FBI and Department of Energy both see a laboratory incident as more likely, or why they believe so "for different reasons." Nor does it spell out why the CIA and another unidentified agency have declined to even make an assessment, except to say that "both hypotheses rely on significant assumptions or face challenges with conflicting reporting." It's no figure of speech to say that the COVID origins debate has been thoroughly politicized. Republicans in Congress have sought to use suspicions of a lab-leak cover-up as a cudgel against Dr. **Anthony Fauci**, the former director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. (The National Institutes of Health, of which NIAID is a part, awarded a grant to a US-based organization, EcoHealth Alliance, that collaborated with the WIV on coronavirus research.) On Friday, the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic announced a subpoena issued by the Committee on Oversight and Accountability to Dr. **Kristian Andersen**, a virologist at Scripps Research Institute. Andersen was ordered to turn over all Slack messages related to the drafting of an influential early research paper, which Fauci reviewed, that cast a laboratory accident as implausible. Andersen and other authors of the "Proximal Origin" paper have also been summoned to testify in person before the subcommittee on July 11. (Spokespeople for Scripps and Dr. Fauci did not respond to requests for comment.)

Appearing on Face the Nation this Sunday, House Intelligence Committee chair **Mike Turner** (R-Ohio) said that the ODNI's declassification had not met the requirements set by law: "We've asked to open the curtain and release the intelligence, and they went behind the curtain, read this stuff, and came out and said, 'Well, this is what we think about it.' This is not sufficient." He added that the result would be "a battle between Congress and the director of national intelligence to make certain" the law is "complied with."

Yesterday, that battle began, when two Senators who sponsored and cosponsored the COVID-19 Origin Act, **Josh Hawley** (R-Mo.) and **Mike Braun** (R-Ind.) respectively, sent a letter to ODNI director **Avril Haines**, alleging that she failed to comply with the law. They invited her to "try again" and deliver a more fulsome declassification within seven business days, or testify before Congress.

Dr. **Brad Wenstrup** (R-Ohio), <u>Chairman of the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic</u>, tells <u>Vanity Fair</u> that the report leaves him "scratching my head at the level of capability or incapability [of the intelligence community] to conduct an investigation regarding science." He adds that the agencies' reasoning "should be in this report." Why, he asks, are the assessments "all so different? Why did they come to various conclusions? Were they looking at the same intelligence and, big question, who did [they] talk to?"

The office of Representative **Raul Ruiz** (D-Calif.), the ranking member of the Select Subcommittee, did not respond to an interview request. But in a letter he sent to Wenstrup on June 8, <u>first published by The Washington Post</u>, he accused the Republican-led subcommittee of pursuing a "predetermined narrative that Dr. Anthony Fauci and Dr. **Francis Collins** were part of a lab-created and leaked SARS-CoV-2 virus and then nefariously worked to suppress information and cover up how the pandemic began." (Collins did not respond to a request for comment sent to NIH, where he served as director for more than 12 years.) The ODNI did not respond to requests from *Vanity Fair* to discuss how the declassification process was conducted or to respond to congressional claims that its declassification did not comply with the law.

In the first year of the pandemic, at a time when the lab-leak hypothesis was widely condemned as a baseless conspiracy theory, a group of officials within the State Department <u>fought to release evidence</u> suggestive of a research-related incident. One of those officials was **David Feith**, a former deputy assistant secretary of state in the East Asia bureau under **Trump**. Feith describes the declassification report as a missed opportunity and part of a "years-long and escalating effort to undermine the public interest in knowing more about where one of the most catastrophic events in history appears to have originated." He says the US government has failed "to operate with due transparency and candor" about its central role in funding risky virology research, "not only in the US but in China and even at the very Wuhan lab that has been obviously in question for three-and-a-half years."

But Rear Admiral **Kenneth Bernard**, who established the National Security Council's first biodefense and health security office in 1998 under President **Bill Clinton**, said the intelligence agencies "really don't know what the origin is, no matter how aghast the Twittersphere is at the lack of forthcoming [information]." Rather than a lack of transparency, he detects a lack of interest. "Once they concluded this wasn't development of an offensive biological weapon, the intelligence community became relatively uninterested, as did the administration." Whether it came from a natural outbreak or an inadvertent laboratory leak in China would not significantly change the policy approach, Bernard says. "Both origin stories—of a market or lab origin—implicate China in not giving proper oversight to a dangerous practice."

The report represents the placid tip of a large, disputatious iceberg. Its carefully hedged language points to "continuing divisions of interpretation within the intelligence agencies," says Bernard.

"Collectively, the DNI is saying that both hypotheses are plausible," says **Gerald Parker**, who previously led the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases in Fort Detrick, Maryland. "That is the consensus opinion they could come up with. The intelligence agencies are analyzing information they're



getting through their channels. If they say, 'There's no direct evidence SARS-CoV-2 was in the lab before December 2019,' it doesn't mean it's not there. It just means they don't have direct evidence of it."

The report notes that several WIV researchers fell ill in the fall of 2019 with some symptoms that were "consistent with but not diagnostic of COVID-19." That information, first disclosed in a <u>January 2021 State Department fact sheet</u>, recently broke into the news when first a <u>Substack publication</u>, and then the <u>Wall Street Journal</u>, identified the sick researchers as three people who had done work in the lab of the WIV's top coronavirus scientist. Two of them subsequently told <u>Science magazine</u> that they had not been ill in the fall of 2019. (*Vanity Fair* emailed all three for comment, as well as the lab's top coronavirus scientist, but received no reply.) The report also acknowledges biosafety concerns at the WIV: a shortage of appropriately trained staff; a probable lack of inadequate biosafety precautions; and efforts to improve training as well as systems for disinfection and ventilation in response to problems that had been identified. A <u>report worked on by a Senate committee's Republican staff</u> documented these issues and argued that they prompted high-level concern within China's government, as evidenced by a visit to the WIV from a senior Beijing biosafety official in November 2019. The ODNI report says that the visit "appears routine, rather than a response to a specific incident."

It also finds that an inspection at the laboratory that identified problems after the pandemic began is "not necessarily indicative of WIV's biosafety status prior to the outbreak."

Florence Débarre, a senior scientist at the French National Centre for Scientific Research, has been studying COVID origins with an international team of scientists who contend the pandemic began with a natural spillover. In her view, the declassification offered little evidence to support the lab-leak hypothesis. "To learn that nothing has been found is an important piece of information," Débarre says. "There is no evidence that the WIV had SARS-CoV-2 before late December 2019. There is no evidence that there were accidents at the WIV in November 2019; no evidence there were three sick researchers with COVID" in a coronavirus lab group.

**Michael Worobey,** an evolutionary virologist at the University of Arizona, cowrote an influential research paper which used a geospatial analysis of early cases in Wuhan to argue that the virus originated at the Huanan Wholesale Seafood Market there, leaping from infected animals to humans to start the pandemic. He believes that the natural-origin hypothesis is the only explanation that comports with the available data. "I didn't have any expectation that there would be major revelations that would change my thinking," he says of the declassification, adding that there is "very clear scientific evidence" that the virus "started with wildlife sales at one of the four markets in Wuhan consistently selling these live animals."

In the days since the ODNI report was issued, several commentators have attempted to use its sparse and couched language to conclusively dismiss the lab-leak hypothesis. But the four agencies, including the National Intelligence Council, that favor a natural origin do so only with low confidence. Clearly, the intelligence agencies don't think that the evidence of a natural origin is "dispositive," says Bernard. "Low confidence means it's barely over the 50/50 line."

**David Asher,** a former senior investigator under contract to the State Department, helped lead the review there that ended in January 2021. He says during that time, "We asked the intelligence community for information pertinent to natural origins, full stop: What did they know? I can't tell you what they knew, but I never saw a scintilla of evidence showing a natural origin." He says that, by contrast, the State Department team had more information two and a half years ago indicating a lab leak than is reflected in the current declassification, and he claims that some of that information still has not been disseminated.

The strongest assessment, of moderate confidence, comes from the FBI, which views a lab leak as more likely. Of all the intelligence agencies, says Parker, the FBI has the most experience in investigating biological threats including lab breaches and purposeful attacks. "The FBI has established laboratories to support this work, and has developed procedures and protocols," he says, in part due to its experience investigating the 2001 anthrax attacks. (Parker was an expert adviser on the GOP Senate report released earlier this year.)

Two congressional investigators tell *VF* that, according to records they have reviewed, the FBI appears to have done the most legwork of any intelligence agency in formulating its assessment. The records, which document interviews and meetings with outside experts, have not been made public. Another expert cautions that the FBI's emphasis on law enforcement may bias its assessment. Since the pandemic began, the intelligence community's few public disclosures have evolved slightly over time, exposing small shifts in how the different agencies weigh different evidence, depending on their expertise. The most notable shift was that of the Department of Energy, which changed its assessment from undecided to low confidence that a lab leak had occurred, according to "fresh intelligence," as the *Wall Street Journal* reported in February. The Energy Department oversees a network of 17 national labs, including the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California, which possesses advanced national security capabilities.

On April 30, 2020, the ODNI put out a statement that the intelligence community "concurs with the wide scientific consensus that the COVID-19 virus was not manmade or genetically modified" but would continue to assess "whether the

outbreak began through contact with infected animals or if it was the result of an accident at a laboratory in Wuhan." If a "scientific consensus" ever really existed, it has long since fractured. The declassified report now says that "almost all IC agencies" believe SARS-CoV-2 was not genetically engineered, and "most



agencies" believe it was not adapted in a laboratory using scientific techniques that can hasten evolutionary change in a virus. But the report notes that some agencies are "unable to make a determination" on these points.

"The fact that it's proven so challenging to answer this question in a way that is satisfying to everyone highlights that the capabilities in the United States and internationally to resolve these kinds of open questions are very weak," says **Jaime Yassif**, vice president of global biological policy and programs for the Nuclear Threat Initiative. "We have a lot of work to do domestically and internationally to shore up our capabilities."

How, then, will the US arrive at something approaching a resolution on the origins of COVID-19, and who will the ultimate adjudicators be? Parker says, "Nothing short of a bipartisan, congressionally authorized commission will suffice, and I am not sure even that will any more."

# **Secret Warnings About Wuhan Research Predated the Pandemic**

# By Katherine Eban

Source: https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2023/11/covid-origins-warnings-nih-department-of-energy

Nov 21 – In late October 2017, a US health official from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) arrived at the Wuhan Institute of Virology for a glimpse of an eagerly anticipated work in progress. The WIV, a leading research institute, was putting the finishing touches on China's first biosafety level 4 (BSL-4) laboratory. Operating with the highest safeguards, the lab would enable scientists to study some of the world's most lethal pathogens.

The project had support from Western governments seeking a more robust partnership with China's top scientists. France had helped design the facility. Canada, before long, would send virus samples. And in the US, NIAID was channeling grant dollars through an American organization called EcoHealth Alliance to help fund the WIV's cutting-edge coronavirus research.

That funding allowed the NIAID official, who worked out of the US embassy in Beijing, to become one of the first Americans to tour the lab. Her goal was to facilitate cooperation between American and Chinese scientists. Nevertheless, says **Asha M. George**, executive director of the Bipartisan Commission on Biodefense, a nonprofit that advises the US government on biodefense policy, "If you want to know what's going on in a closed country, one of the things the US has done is give them grant money."

In emails obtained by *Vanity Fair*, the NIAID official told her superiors what she'd gleaned from the technician who'd served as her guide. The lab, which was not yet fully operational, was struggling to develop enough expertise among its staff—a concern in a setting that had no tolerance for errors. "According to [the technician], being the first P4 [or BSL-4] lab in the country, they have to learn everything from zero," she wrote. "They rely on those scientists who have worked in P4 labs outside China to train the other scientists how to operate."

She'd also learned something else "alarming" from the technician, she wrote. Researchers at the WIV intended to study Ebola, but Chinese government restrictions prevented them from importing samples. As a result, they were considering using a technique called reverse genetics to engineer Ebola in the lab. Anticipating that this information would set off alarm bells in the US, the official cautioned, "I don't want the information particularly using reverse genetics to create viruses to get out, which would affect the ability for our future information gain," meaning it would impair the collaboration between NIAID and the WIV.

"I was shocked to hear what he said [about reverse engineering Ebola]. I also worry the reaction of people in Washington when they read this."

There was good reason to fear that such a revelation could derail the fledgling partnership. One year earlier, the US Department of Energy had warned other agencies, including NIAID's parent entity, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), that advanced genetic engineering techniques could be misused for malign ends. The Energy Department had developed a classified proposal, reported on here for the first time, to ramp up safeguards against that possibility and develop tools to better detect evidence of genetic engineering. The proposal, which was not implemented in its suggested form, prompted a heated interagency battle, six people with knowledge of the debate tell *Vanity Fair*.

On January 10, 2018, as the NIAID official prepared her official trip report for the US embassy in Beijing, she wrote to colleagues, "I was shocked to hear what he said [about reverse engineering Ebola]. I also worry the reaction of people in Washington when they read this. The technician is only a worker, not a decision maker nor a [principal investigator]. So how much we should believe what he said?" She concluded, "I don't feel comfortable for broader audience within the government circle. It could be very sensitive."

Among the recipients of that email was **F. Gray Handley**, then NIAID's associate director for international research affairs. Handley agreed with the official's assessment and advised her: "As we discussed. Delete that comment."

On January 19, the US embassy in Beijing issued a sensitive but unclassified cable that included concerning details from the NIAID official's tour. It said that WIV scientists themselves had noted the



"serious shortage of appropriately trained technicians and investigators needed to safely operate" the lab, according to an unredacted copy obtained by *Vanity Fair*. But the cable did not include the information that her NIAID colleagues apparently found most worrying. For synthetic biologists, the idea of engineering Ebola isn't seen as particularly unusual. Reverse genetics, using the CRISPR gene editing technology developed roughly a decade ago, is now a widely used laboratory technique. And the WIV's BSL-4 laboratory was designed to safely research Ebola, be it natural or man-made. Some scientists argue that, for research purposes, it can be safer to make a deadly pathogen in-house than to risk transporting it.

But the NIAID official feared that the WIV's training and staffing challenges, combined with its apparent interest in reverse engineering Ebola, would spark alarm, she recently told congressional investigators. The fatality rate in some Ebola outbreaks has reached well over 50%. "When it comes to headlines, and people spouting blood from every orifice, Ebola is about as bad as it gets," says **Kevin Esvelt**, an MIT biologist. (In the past few years, several Ebola vaccines have been approved.)

According to Stanford microbiologist **David Relman**, the risks of the WIV producing something new or unknown may have driven the government's concern. "When you are reverse engineering Ebola, you have now established a platform from which you can do 1 million different things with Ebola, or something that you call Ebola," he says. "It means you can now make any variant or construct that is Ebola-like at will."

Any effort to shield the technician's Ebola remarks from wider scrutiny within the federal government would be "a dereliction of responsibility," says **Gerald Parker**, former commander of the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID).

*VF* has agreed not to name the NIAID official at the request of an NIH spokesperson, who raised concerns for her safety. The spokesperson said that the visiting official "took appropriate steps to ensure that officials at NIAID, HHS, and US Embassy Beijing were aware of the technician's comment via her report on the visit." When asked, however, the spokesperson was unable to provide evidence that the internal report describing the Ebola remarks was shared with the embassy. The State Department did not respond to a request for comment.

Some view ongoing questions about biosafety at the WIV as part of a Republican campaign to discredit **Anthony Fauci**, who led NIAID for 38 years, and to attack science more broadly. But US government warnings about scientific collaborations in autocratic countries predate the pandemic and cut across partisan lines. Concerns flagged in the Obama administration persisted through the Trump administration and are being examined today. "The administration is actively engaged in a process, incorporating input from all relevant federal agencies" to "evaluate and update biosafety and biosecurity policies," an official in President **Joe Biden**'s White House told *Vanity Fair*.

"There's a dark side" to certain research, says Jason Paragas. "Just because you're doing it to publish a paper doesn't mean no one is going to do anything bad."

A six-month investigation by *VF* has found an almost decade-long trail of warnings issued by the Department of Energy to other government agencies, including the NIH, concerning the risk that US-funded biology research could be misused by overseas partners. In mid-2019, an Energy Department official went so far as to issue a specific warning to NIAID about the coronavirus research the agency was funding at the WIV.

## "Serious Security Concerns"

Operating out of a sprawling 300-acre campus in Bethesda, Maryland, the National Institutes of Health describes itself as "the federal focal point for health research." Each year it makes more than 50,000 grants, distributing the majority of its \$48 billion budget to researchers in the US and around the world. Among its 27 institutes and centers is NIAID, which distributed \$5.3 billion in the 2023 fiscal year alone.

For the NIH and its grantees, global collaboration and transparent data sharing are synonymous with scientific progress. Even a trickle of grant money to a foreign lab can pay dividends. It can give US researchers access to new environments and viruses, and help build trust that may elude bickering governments. "It is almost always beneficial to exchange ideas and samples with other countries, particularly those with different climates than our own," says **Marc Lipsitch**, a professor of epidemiology at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. "I don't see why science funding should be reserved for friendly countries."

But within the federal government, there is a different world of scientists: those tasked with anticipating threats to national security. In the open exchange of cutting-edge research with scientists in autocratic countries, they see the risk that science that serves the public good could be misappropriated to cause harm—a phenomenon known as dual-use research of concern. Worries about dual-use research have only grown with the easy accessibility of DNA-editing tools. Those technologies have

opened the door to miraculous treatments, such as <u>using gene editing to reduce cholesterol and protect</u> <u>against heart disease</u>. But "there's a dark side" to certain research, says **Jason Paragas**, former director



of innovation at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California. "Just because you're doing it to publish a paper doesn't mean no one is going to do anything bad."

Lawrence Livermore is one of 17 national laboratories overseen by the Department of Energy, a science and technology agency with strong intelligence capabilities, a number of whose scientists regularly review classified threats. "They spend their time in a dark world, faced with the nastiness of what could go on," says **Diane DiEuliis**, a distinguished research fellow at National Defense University. Sometimes they flag concerns for scientists who, given their focus on open research, are "not willing to even contemplate what they're talking about."

Vanity Fair's investigation reveals that in the months and years leading up to the pandemic, officials at the NIH and the DOE repeatedly locked horns over issues related to global scientific collaboration. DOE officials warned their NIH counterparts about national security risks posed by gene editing and its possible uses by hostile foreign adversaries, including China.

DOE officials issued their most specific warning in mid-2019, just months before the pandemic began, *Vanity Fair* has learned. Deputy Energy Secretary **Dan Brouillette** alerted a top Fauci adviser that the coronavirus research the US was helping to fund at the WIV risked being misappropriated for military purposes. Based on classified threat assessments, and concerns raised by DOE scientists, Brouillette urged NIAID to use caution in its collaborations with Chinese government scientists. His warning should have served as a red flag for any research the agency was conducting with China, say two sources with knowledge of the exchange.

A spokesperson for NIAID said, "We are not aware of this interaction." A spokesperson for Fauci, who has advised seven presidents on infectious disease policy and championed expanded treatment options for HIV and AIDS, said he was unavailable to respond to questions.

Vanity Fair interviewed more than 60 people for this account. The Republican-led Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic, which has been holding hearings and issuing subpoenas as part of its investigation into COVID-19's origins, provided the emails between the visiting NIAID representative and her agency colleagues. VF obtained dozens of previously undisclosed government records from other sources.

Though the DOE and the NIH have partnered on historic endeavors, from the Human Genome Project to the Cancer Moonshot, they've also battled over what restrictions, if any, should be placed on technologies that allow scientists to synthesize and edit DNA. "We came at it from the point of view, 'There are serious security concerns,'" **Ernest Moniz**, who served as DOE secretary under **Barack Obama**, tells *Vanity Fair*. "Our view was always, 'We have to address them in ways that do not unduly restrict basic science.' But what is the meaning of 'unduly'? There lies the entire matter." In meetings during the final months of the Obama administration, the longtime head of the NIH, Francis Collins, dismissed such risks as "science fiction," according to several people present.

The clash between these two scientific worldviews—and related debates over how to collaborate with an advanced institute like the WIV, in an autocratic country hostile to Western interests—is hardly contained to the US. In Canada, a government lab's decision to ship Ebola samples to the WIV set off a scandal that resounded all the way to the office of Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau**, and played a role in the dissolution of parliament in the fall of 2021.

This history of conflict helps explain why the debate over COVID-19's origins, which remains unresolved, has been so fiercely argued among scientists. If you've spent your career collaborating with foreign scientists to identify animal viruses that could spill over to humans, the lessons of the pandemic likely look very different from how they would if you'd been kept awake by visions of lab-generated superviruses.

In response to detailed questions, a DOE spokesperson said the agency "leverages its national laboratory capabilities to analyze emerging and disruptive technologies, including foreign applications of biotechnology...that may impact our national security." She described the DOE's mission as "vastly different" from that of the NIH, but also noted its complementary nature. "DOE brings capabilities in technology that enable advances in NIH's mission, and NIH's needs spark innovations in DOE's capabilities." The spokesperson did not respond to questions about warnings issued by the DOE, or any of its officials, prior to the pandemic.

In June, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) issued a <u>declassified report</u> that provided a snapshot of perspectives on the COVID-19 origins question across America's intelligence agencies. According to the report, the DOE and the FBI believe the pandemic is most likely to have originated with a lab leak. The National Intelligence Council and four other agencies say the virus most likely spilled over from a natural host, and two others, including the CIA, say there isn't enough evidence to support one conclusion over the other.

All the intelligence agencies agree that SARS-CoV-2 was not developed as a bioweapon, the report said, and "almost all" agree it "was not genetically engineered." Three sources tell *VF* that DOE scientists, using an array of advanced tools and working out of several different labs, including Lawrence Livermore, Argonne, and Oak Ridge, could not rule out the possibility that the virus's sequence had been engineered.

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The ODNI report also found that People's Liberation Army scientists sometimes worked out of WIV labs, and collaborated with its civilian scientists on biosecurity projects and coronavirus research to address public health needs.

The Chinese government encourages such intermingling with a policy called military-civil fusion, which aims to harness civilian scientific innovation to advance military goals.

The fundamental uncertainty over how the pandemic began has further inflamed a long-standing debate over what guardrails, if any, should be imposed on open science, and who should set them. Some scientists say these very questions endanger them at a time when expertise of all kinds is under attack and a rising tide of far-right hate has fueled a dangerous anti-vaccine movement.

These scientists argue that, with another pandemic likely in the near future due to climate change and human incursion into wild spaces, imposing restrictions on science could forestall crucial advances. "We should be accelerating our capacity for virological research," says **Peter Hotez**, codirector of the Texas Children's Hospital Center for Vaccine Development. "Instead, there is this sense that we have to contain the virologists, not the viruses. That's misguided, that's dangerous. If you want to revisit biosafety, that's totally reasonable. But put the virologists in charge."

In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, however, there is a growing call for stricter oversight of research deemed risky. "We put guardrails on nuclear science, and we did so after World War II," says a former Biden administration official who worked on biosecurity issues. But today, "if you have access to a \$50,000 DNA synthesizer, you could produce a weapon that is as powerful as a hydrogen bomb."

## "This Reads Like a Movie Script"

In 2011, a Dutch virologist named **Ron Fouchier** announced at a scientific conference that he'd genetically engineered what he'd later describe as "probably one of the most dangerous viruses you can make." He had altered the H5N1 avian influenza strain to make it transmissible among ferrets, which are genetically closer to humans than mice are. The experiment had been funded, in part, by the NIH.

Fouchier's announcement triggered an uproar over what's known today as gain-of-function research of concern—lab work that enhances the virulence or transmissibility of pathogens to help assess their threat to humans and develop countermeasures. Though the NIH has advocated for such research, others in the scientific community organized against it, arguing that creating pathogens that don't exist in nature runs the risk of unleashing them. The Dutch government initially blocked Fouchier from publishing his findings, for fear that they could serve as a how-to manual for bioterrorists.

Amid the controversy, the NIH assembled a high-level group, nicknamed the "ferrets committee," to advise it on the risks of funding such research. As one member of the advisory group recalled, "We were worried we could be in violation of the Biological Weapons Convention."

From 2009 to 2021, the NIH was led by the renowned geneticist Francis Collins, whose many achievements include discovering the gene that causes cystic fibrosis. In March 2012, Collins wrote an email to members of the ferrets committee in which he acknowledged, "I am not familiar with the Biologic and Toxic Weapons Convention. Can our crack legal staff offer any opinions on this question?" The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, enforced since 1975, is the most significant treaty that governs the development and use of biological agents.

In response, a staffer emailed her supervisor: "I can't believe he doesn't know what the BWC is???!!! yikes." The supervisor replied, "It shows you how different our worlds are."

According to one attendee, NIH director Francis Collins was decidedly unimpressed with the DOE's threat assessment, and exclaimed with derision, "You got this out of a movie."

An NIH spokesperson, responding on behalf of Collins, said it was "inaccurate" to suggest that his email indicated "a total lack of knowledge of an issue." Officials have "different areas of expertise, and the point of meeting is to learn from each other to avoid blind spots in policy decisions."

The NIH revolutionized science through its work on the Human Genome Project, which sought to fully sequence the human genome. That landmark achievement, launched initially by the DOE in 1990 and completed in 2003 by an international consortium under Collins's leadership, committed the NIH to global collaboration and transparent data sharing. "Science goes faster, and the power of genomics is maximized, when you get larger and larger studies," says **Eric Green**, director of the NIH's National Human Genome Research Institute. "Share, share, share. That is the ethos of the genomic-research community."

By contrast, the Department of Energy has always been steeped in a world of threats. Born out of the top secret Manhattan Project to build an atomic bomb during World War II, it is responsible for designing and maintaining the US nuclear stockpile, and for using science and technology to address energy and environmental challenges. The DOE was also responsible for significant parts of the nation's biosecurity until after 9/11, when much of that mission was handed off

to the newly created Department of Homeland Security.



As DOE scientists spent decades studying the impact of radiation on the human genome, they also developed advanced expertise in gene editing technology and its potential risks. The Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory houses the Biodefense Knowledge Center, an analysis hub that serves the federal government's national security community, and the Z Division, an intelligence unit whose specialties include biosecurity.

"Having come through the nuclear world, everything is born classified, and you understand the dual-use nature" of technology immediately, says **Dimitri Kusnezov**, who joined the DOE two days before 9/11 and served for 10 years as chief scientist of the National Nuclear Security Administration, which oversees all of the agency's nuclear weapons work.

In 2014, Lawrence Livermore scientists began raising concerns with Kusnezov and other DOE leaders about the national security threats posed by gene editing platforms such as CRISPR. Among the issues they raised was the possibility that a foreign government could tailor biological agents to target specific ethnic groups.

Kusnezov, who is now the Department of Homeland Security's under secretary for science and technology, says of the concerns: "Now we have a technology platform that can potentially create things we have never seen before, splice things, have effects that could be new."

The US government closely monitors an evolving list of dangerous pathogens and their use in research, but the DOE was warning of a not-so-distant future in which dangerous pathogens might not be tracked because they've been enhanced or cooked up altogether in a lab, or a garage, or a trailer. In February 2016, that concern led the Office of the Director of National Intelligence to add genomic editing to its list of potential weapons of mass destruction, surprising a number of government scientists. As warnings resounded, the National Security Council convened meetings on countering biological threats.

Things came to a head at a contentious White House meeting in October 2016. The Department of Energy had followed up its threat assessment with a wide-ranging proposal to closely monitor the sale of genetic components and better detect evidence of genetic engineering. According to one attendee, the NIH's Collins was decidedly unimpressed, and exclaimed with derision, "You got this out of a movie. This reads like a movie script."

"Nobody really liked that," the attendee says.

Another attendee says Collins exhibited a "shocking" disregard for the national security experts in the room.

"There is this sense that we have to contain the virologists, not the viruses," says Peter Hotez. "That's misguided, that's dangerous." An NIH spokesperson said, "As a noted expert in human genome research, Dr. Collins was called upon to respond to certain scenarios of concern and expressed the view that some of them seemed overblown." She added, "Disagreeing on an opinion is not equivalent to dismissing it."

To skeptics in the health, science, and intelligence agencies, it looked like the DOE had painted an unrealistic doomsday scenario that, conveniently, would expand its own budget and turf. "It was more like you were reading a tale of fiction versus an intel product," recalls one former federal health official. "They have access to this sequence, therefore they could...' With no evidence that was being done. They created the problem by writing the intelligence assessment [and then said,] "We can solve this."

Part of the skepticism came from the DOE's unusual structure. Going all the way back to the Manhattan Project, DOE laboratories have operated on the government-owned, contractor-operated—or GOCO—model. Under that structure, the government owns the labs and sets their priorities, but outside contractors employ the scientists. The system helps protect the researchers' political independence, but it also means the labs operate as freelancers that pitch themselves to other government agencies for new missions. Their quest for relevance and funding makes them the "ambulance chasers of our community," says a former US government official who worked on biosecurity policy.

The DOE plan was almost approved in the final days of the Obama administration, says Kusnezov, but then the Trump administration came in and "we lost momentum." Nevertheless, the work continued in modified form, and has been funded by Congress since 2019.

## "I Have Some Concerns Here"

On the afternoon of March 31, 2019, Canadian health bureaucrats watched nervously as Air Canada flight AC031 took off from Toronto Pearson International Airport, headed to Beijing.

The passengers on board had no way of knowing about the plane's hazardous payload: a box with 24 vials of Ebola virus from 12 different strains, and six vials of highly lethal Henipaviruses, nestled amid 33 pounds of dry ice. The samples had come from the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg, Canada's only BSL-4 facility, and were bound for the Wuhan Institute of Virology. The following day, Canadian officials received a grateful email from a WIV scientist: "DEAR ALL, the package has just arrived in

Wuhan safely. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to you all for the continuous support....

Looking forward to our further cooperation in the future."



If Canadian officials breathed a sigh of relief, the feeling would not last. Within a year, members of Canada's parliament and the press would scrutinize their every decision, with questions swirling about a national security breakdown at Canada's top secret lab and emails surfacing in response to public record requests.

On the day of the flight carrying Ebola samples, hazmat teams were on standby at the Toronto airport. Meanwhile, "people on Air Canada are not eating peanuts because *that* is too dangerous."

The trouble could be traced back to the same phenomenon that had so alarmed the visiting NIAID official in Wuhan: the WIV's fitful struggle to launch its Ebola research program. Stanford microbiologist David Relman had encountered the issue firsthand during one of his trips to China, when a WIV scientist told him they had not yet been able to obtain Ebola samples. "I said, 'What's the problem?' They said, 'It's our own government. They're being overly cautious or bureaucratic.""

By May 2018, however, WIV scientists had settled on a path forward. One had reached out to a frequent collaborator at the Winnipeg lab, **Xiangguo Qiu**, to see if she could facilitate the sharing of samples. Originally from China, Qiu was a world-class Ebola researcher who had worked since 2003 at the lab's special pathogens program and had come to head its Vaccine Development and Antiviral Therapies section. That month, she and the former head of the Winnipeg lab, **Gary Kobinger**, had received a prestigious Canadian award for their development of an Ebola treatment called ZMapp.

Qiu's request to share Ebola samples bumped through the sleepy Canadian health bureaucracy, subject to oversight that was arbitrary at best. Even the Public Health Agency of Canada's director of biorisk and occupational safety services seemed bewildered when she explained to colleagues that, "when we try to get an export permit, we are told we don't need one."

Instead of demanding proof that the WIV was a certified BSL-4 lab, accredited to research Ebola, the presiding bureaucrats accepted a letter from a WIV official attesting to it. "I trust the lab and would be personally fine to sign off," one offered. But the Winnipeg lab's scientific director general responded, "I have some concerns here. No certifications are provided, they simply cite they have them. What is the nature of the work, and why are our materials required." He added, "Good to know that you trust this group. How did we get connected with them?"

As the transfer of samples proceeded, Canadian officials contending with arduous safety procedures in Toronto expressed hope the viruses would be routed through Vancouver instead. "Fingers crossed," one wrote to another. On the day of the flight, hazmat teams were on standby at the Toronto airport. Meanwhile, says **Amir Attaran**, a biologist and lawyer at the University of Ottawa who represented opposition members of parliament seeking answers, "people on Air Canada are not eating peanuts because *that* is too dangerous." (Attaran is a member of Biosafety Now, a group working to increase oversight of gain-of-function research of concern.) A spokesperson for the Public Health Agency of Canada said, "There is no international accreditation for containment level 4 facilities." Because of that, PHAC "reviews each request it receives" and will accept "an attestation from a biosafety officer" that a facility meets the necessary containment level. The spokesperson also said that the Winnipeg lab "followed the process as laid out in legislation and regulations." Air Canada did not respond to an email seeking comment.

The first inkling of trouble came four months later. On July 5, 2019, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) arrived at the lab. Qiu, her scientist husband, and several students from China working with them were marched out and had their security clearances revoked.

The RCMP had acted on a tip from a foreign intelligence service, it was later reported. What exactly that tip was, and whom it came from, remain unclear. At the time, however, the FBI was investigating the Chinese government's use of <u>talent recruitment programs</u> to obtain intellectual property and other sensitive data from Western labs.

In late May of that year, a scientist at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico was arrested after he lied about taking grant money from China's Thousand Talents program. Weeks later, the DOE issued a directive prohibiting lab employees and contractors from participating in, or taking money from, foreign talent programs. According to a former DOE official, officials there had grown concerned that the Chinese government was using information drawn from US labs to bolster its efforts to develop biological weapons.

Once COVID-19 struck, questions about what had transpired at the Winnipeg lab erupted in parliament and the Canadian press. Troubling reports emerged: that two Chinese military scientists had received security clearances and accessed the lab, in violation of rules that restricted access to only citizens of Canada and its close allies; and that Qiu, a frequent visitor to the WIV, had collaborated with a top scientist from the People's Liberation Army, Major General **Chen Wei**. It was also reported that the RCMP was investigating whether plasmid DNA from the Winnipeg lab, typically used to help create viruses or vaccines, had been shared with the WIV without authorization.

Vanity Fair has obtained records indicating that the RCMP is probing whether sensitive lab materials, including the plasmid DNA molecules, were sent to the WIV as emergency after-hours shipments, in a manner that circumvented the Winnipeg lab's official records system. Other records indicate that a number



of foreign students assisting with research at the University of Manitoba were granted access to even the most restricted parts of the lab, despite not being eligible for full security clearances.

An RCMP spokesperson said its investigation is "ongoing," adding, "National security criminal investigations are often complex, multijurisdictional, and resource intensive, and can take several years to complete."

Why did the WIV need so many different Ebola samples, asks Attaran, and what was it researching? "If your goal is to perform Shakespeare, all you need is a copy of *Taming of the Shrew*," he says. "If your goal is to *be* Shakespeare, you better have all the plays and the sonnets too. This was China acquiring every last sonnet Winnipeg had created. It's undoubtedly genetics research," he continues. "What's the ultimate reason? I don't know."

As opposition parties in parliament, from Conservatives to the far left, demanded answers, the Trudeau government defied a House of Commons order to produce documents. Instead, it took the unprecedented step of suing the House Speaker to block disclosures, claiming that national security was in jeopardy. It then dissolved parliament and called for new elections, thereby voiding the order and forcing opposition parties to start again. Today, under a compromise, four members of parliament are reviewing documents related to the case under the supervision of a three-judge panel.

"It's clear there were major national security breaches at the government's top-level lab in Winnipeg, and the Trudeau government has gone to extraordinary lengths to try and hide what happened," says **Michael Chong**, a prominent Conservative lawmaker who himself was a target of <u>a disinformation campaign by the Chinese government</u>.

The minister of health's office wrote, "All opposition parties, including the Conservatives, have full and unredacted access to all documents pertaining to the Winnipeg Lab."

Today, Qiu is listed as a "mentor" at the University of Science and Technology in the city of Hefei in eastern China. She is also listed as a co-inventor on two patent applications submitted by the WIV this June, for Nipah virus antibodies. She has not been charged with any crime by Canadian officials. In China, the *Global Times*, a state media outlet, attributed her dismissal from the lab to geopolitical score-settling. Numerous efforts to reach Qiu by email and phone were unsuccessful.

# "Unacceptable Outcomes"

After the first SARS outbreak, in China in 2002, the country experienced a surge of scientific goodwill. Though governmental relations may have been rocky, scientists from numerous countries worked together on coronavirus research.

"Everyone knew China was a dictatorship, but we thought it looked like they revamped their disease-reporting system. Finally we have a meaningful way to collaborate," says **Gerald Epstein**, who served as assistant director for biosecurity and emerging technologies at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy under President Obama. "But all that evaporated."

As the COVID-19 pandemic began, the Chinese government <u>suppressed early-case data</u>, muzzled its own scientists, and limited international fact-finding missions into its origins.

Today, that conduct, along with the dispute over COVID-19's origins, has forced a broader reckoning. "As scientists, we all collaborate, but that *Leave It to Beaver* '50s stuff isn't true anymore," says **Phil Ferro**, who served as the director for countering biological threats at the National Security Council under Trump. "We need policies in place to protect the interests of this country." In October 2020, *VF* has learned, Dan Brouillette told Fauci that DOE scientists had found evidence suggesting that the pandemic had originated at the WIV. By then, Brouillette had risen from deputy secretary to secretary of the DOE, and he offered to share his department's laboratory resources and computing capacity with the NIH.

Brouillette was later found to have violated the Hatch Act after saying on a Fox News radio program that then candidate Biden, whom he did not name, was likely to restrict oil and gas drilling on federal lands. But he was also credited with helping to stabilize oil markets early in the pandemic, and he promised a "smooth transition" to the Biden administration in the wake of the January 6 insurrection. In early 2023, it was reported that the DOE had formally changed its view on the pandemic's origins from undecided to assessing, with low confidence, that the virus had originated from a lab. A source with knowledge of the DOE's investigation tells *VF* that the agency had long been more confident in its scientific analysis, and only later became more comfortable with the intelligence supporting it.

According to CNN, the change was prompted by new intelligence related to a coronavirus variant being studied by China's Center for Disease Control in Wuhan. It's unclear whether the Chinese CDC's research is linked to the WIV.

In early 2021, the Biden administration embarked on a broad review of biosecurity safeguards. According to the former Biden staffer who worked on these issues, White House officials have grown "deeply skeptical" that the current approach to evaluating certain scientific research risks has been sufficient. "The destructive potential of biology is deserving of more careful risk assessment," the former staffer says.

There is heated debate over what rules should govern gain-of-function research, and whether existing guidelines are sufficient or adequately followed. Since 2017, federal rules have required certain research

involving the genetic modification of viruses to undergo a special agency review. The Biden administration found that the risk assessments were largely being performed by the institutes seeking the grants themselves, according to documents reviewed by *Vanity Fair*.

In the last six years, only three research projects have passed through a Health and Human Services (HHS) review committee. One was a proposal by University of Wisconsin–Madison virologist **Yoshihiro Kawaoka** to infect ferrets with a genetically modified strain of the deadly H5N1 bird flu. A risk-benefit analysis by a University of Wisconsin–Madison committee, obtained by *Vanity Fair*, acknowledged the risks bluntly: "Influenza does not discriminate so that the risks of a pandemic would not discriminate.... This type of research has the potential for significantly greater risk if someone were to misuse the published information, there was a laboratory accident, or a deliberate release of agent."

Nevertheless, the university committee concluded that the benefits outweighed the risks, and an HHS review committee approved the research in March 2019. "There was no authority given to me or my organization to demand a more rigorous review," says **Robert Kadlec**, who ran the HHS review committee for several years. The grant applicants "grade [their] own homework, literally."

Nine months after the grant was approved, there was a close call at Kawaoka's lab, with a trainee's airflow hose being briefly disconnected during an experiment involving ferrets exposed to the virus.

The incident was first reported in a recent book, *Pandora's Gamble*. A spokesperson for the University of Wisconsin–Madison said after it was published that the lab has a "stellar safety record and history of strong accountability." Reached for comment, another spokesperson told *VF* that, after performing important work that "improved how lifesaving flu vaccines are produced," the lab has now shifted its focus away from H5N1.

Even some scientists who advocate for unrestricted global collaborations argue that research to enhance risky pathogens should be more closely regulated. "In the long run, public support for science will deservedly suffer if scientists are taking risks without commensurate benefit," says the epidemiologist Marc Lipsitch.

In January, <u>a report issued by the National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity</u> advised the NIH to strengthen and broaden its oversight of research that could be risky or subject to misuse. That report, coupled with the ongoing White House review and scrutiny by Republicans in Congress, has led to a recalibration across a number of federal agencies.

In late June, the Department of Defense issued <u>new guidelines</u> to prevent the research it funds from being "misappropriated" overseas. The guidelines call for "risk-based security reviews" of proposed research that involves "foreign countries of concern," including China and Russia. The DOD also warns against engaging with researchers or institutions with military links, including China's Academy of Military Medical Sciences and its subsidiaries.

In July, USAID, a federal agency that works to promote global health, <u>canceled a \$125 million program</u> called DEEP VZN, which planned to sample wildlife in remote locations and identify viruses that could pose a pandemic threat. According to another former Biden administration official, the program was nixed because such research "poses objective risks" that are not offset by its benefits. Despite vocal opposition from scientists, the NIH is now requiring overseas collaborators to share their lab notebooks and raw data with principal grant recipients at least once a year. The requirement is an "insult" to foreign collaborators and will "diminish collaboration with the US," says **Robert Gallo**, cofounder and emeritus director of the Institute of Human Virology at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. "We'll look like the jackasses of the world."

An NIH spokesperson said that the agency has a long-standing policy of requiring principal grant recipients to have access to collaborators' records.

Perhaps most notably, in July the US Department of Health and Human Services blocked the WIV from receiving federal funds for a decade. The <u>letter announcing the decision</u> cited an NIH-funded experiment there that created a coronavirus with enhanced virulence. Although the coronaviruses known to have been used in the research were too distant to have caused the pandemic, the letter states that the experiment nevertheless violated federal policies and "possibly did lead or could lead to health issues or other unacceptable outcomes."

In October 2020, VF has learned, Energy Secretary Dan Brouillette told Fauci that DOE scientists had found evidence suggesting that the pandemic had originated at the WIV.

The letter concludes that, due to the WIV's failure to provide records, there is a risk that the lab "not only previously violated, but is currently violating, and will continue to violate, protocols of the NIH on biosafety."

The impact of the distrust has been a loss for science, says **James LeDuc**, former director of the Galveston National Laboratory in Texas, which helped train several of the WIV scientists. "Unfortunately, we've had a blackout on all communications, and that's a tragedy. The politics have made it very, very difficult."

But current politics may account for only part of a larger shift in how science calibrates risk. This "feels very 1930s to me, when atomic science was reaching a point of sufficient sophistication as to become perilous," says Amir Attaran, the University of Ottawa biologist and lawyer. An array of governments "all



understood perfectly well that the nature of the research they were undertaking was weaponizable." But they encouraged collaboration anyway, even with German scientists who had joined the Nazi Party, "in the interests of collecting knowledge. The folly of that became quickly, clearly known."

To Attaran, this helps explain what happened at the WIV in the run-up to the pandemic. "The French had a stake. The US had a stake," as did the Canadians. "They felt the benefits of global collaboration were sufficient—until suddenly they were not."

**Katherine Eban** is a contributing editor at *Vanity Fair*, covering medical and scientific mayhem. An award-winning investigative journalist, she is the best-selling author of <u>Bottle of Lies: The Inside Story of the Generic Drug Boom</u>.

# Thousands of CRISPR Systems Uncovered with New Search Algorithm

Microbial databases have grown so large, they have become difficult to search efficiently for enzymes of interest. Now, scientists have developed a search algorithm that has identified 188 kinds of new rare CRISPR systems in bacterial genomes, encompassing thousands of individual systems. The tool, which comes from the lab of CRISPR pioneer Feng Zhang, uses big-data clustering approaches to rapidly search massive amounts of genomic data. + MORE

# Structural brain changes detected in novel long COVID imaging study

Source: https://newatlas.com/medical/structural-brain-changes-detected-long-covid-imaging/

Researchers looked at how COVID and long COVID correlated with microstructural changes to the brain - Rau et al

Nov 26 – New research to be presented at the Radiological Society of North America's annual meeting is the first to reveal microstructural brain changes in long COVID patients compared to fully recovered patients and uninfected subjects. The findings indicate long COVID symptoms can be associated with



changes to specific cerebral networks. "To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study comparing patients with long COVID to both a group without history of COVID-19 and a group that went through a COVID-19 infection but is subjectively unimpaired," explains Alexander Rau, lead author on the study from University Hospital Freiburg in Germany.

The research utilized a relatively new brain imaging technique called diffusion microstructure imaging (DMI). The technique tracks the movement of water molecules through brain tissue to deliver a high-resolution picture of the microstructures of the brain.

Looking generally for brain lesions or abnormalities, the researchers detected no notable differences between COVID patients and those uninfected. However, zooming in on the microstructural brain differences revealed significant alterations in the COVID cohorts. "Here, we noted gray matter alterations in both patients with long-COVID and those unimpaired after a COVID-19 infection," says Rau "Interestingly, we not only noted widespread microstructural alterations in patients with long COVID, but also in those unimpaired after having contracted COVID-19."

So what separated the long COVID patients from the fully recovered COVID patients?

The researchers discovered three long COVID symptom constellations (fatigue, loss of sense of smell, cognitive impairment) could be correlated with specific patterns of microstructural changes in the brain. So what distinguished long COVID patients from recovered patients seemed to be how the illness particularly reshaped the brain.

"Expression of post-COVID symptoms was associated with specific affected cerebral networks, suggesting a pathophysiological basis of this syndrome" Rau notes.

While the results affirm the real pathological foundations underpinning long COVID they do raise a number of questions the researchers hope to investigate in the future. For example, do these microstructural alterations improve over time as a long COVID patient's symptoms change? And is there anything that predisposes a COVID patient to develop the brain changes that characterize long COVID?

The new research will be presented at the 2023 Radiological Society of North America Annual Meeting this week.

# Multi-country outbreak of mpox

External Situation Report 29, published 20 October 2023

Data as received by WHO, from national authorities on the situation by 30 September 2023

Mpox long-term risk assessmenti

- For general population in countries not affected prior to the current outbreak is assessed as low.
- For general population in countries with historical mpox transmission and their neighbouring countries is assessed as moderate.
- Overall global risk for men who have sex with men and sex workers, is assessed as moderate.

boratory	Deaths	
nfirmed cases	157	
123		

Countries/areas/territories
115



# There Never Was a "New Virus", There Never Was a Pandemic





MICHEL CHOSSUDOVSKY NOV 28, 2023

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# Pascale Ferrier and the Threat of Bioterror

By Markus K. Binder

Source: https://nct-cbnw.com/pascale-ferrier-and-the-threat-of-bioterror/



Castor bean packages recovered from the home of Pascale Ferrier, © U.S. Government

Nov 20 – Drawing upon the START CBRN Data Suite and other research, Markus Binder considers the five ricin bio-attacks directed at the U.S. President and other officials that have taken place since 2013 to assess what, if anything, they can tell us about bioterrorism.

Bioterrorist attacks directed at the U.S. President are high-profile, but rare events. The most recent incident, the fifth since 2010, occurred on September 17, 2020, when an envelope addressed to U.S. President Trump arrived at the White House's offsite mail processing center. The following day it was examined and found to contain a small quantity of powder and a threatening letter demanding that Trump withdraw his candidacy from the upcoming 2020 U.S. Presidential election. Analysis showed the powder was ricin toxin.

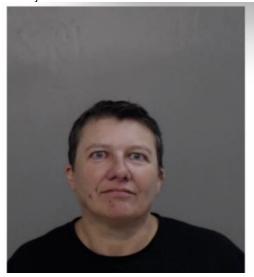
U.S. authorities swiftly identified the letter's origin as Montreal, Canada, and enlisted the support of Canadian authorities. The perpetrator, Ms. Pascale Cecile Veronique Ferrier, a Canadian citizen, was arrested on September 20, 2020, at the Buffalo, New York border crossing after announcing to authorities that she was "wanted by the FBI for the ricin envelope". At the time of her arrest Ferrier was in possession of a loaded handgun and various other weapons, potentially reflecting her threat to find other means to strike at the President if the ricin did not work. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) searched her home the following day, revealing incriminating evidence including castor beans, evidence of ricin preparation, and various documents pointing to her as the source of the letters. The letter to President Trump shared many features with eight others targeting law enforcement officers in Brooks and Hidalgo Counties, Texas, received several days earlier.

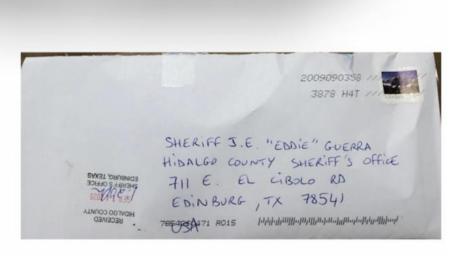
Ferrier did not appear to have made any significant effort to conceal her identity or complicate any investigation, using the correct street number and postcode for her residence as a return address, and mailing the envelopes from her local post office. Whether this was due to a lack of any conception of operational security or simply indifference is unknown. On

August 17, 2023, she was sentenced by the District of Columbia District Court to 262 months of imprisonment.



Composite photo of a mugshot of Pascale Ferrier, and her ricin-laced letter sent to Hidalgo Country Sheriff Eddie Guerra, © Hidalgo County Sheriff





### A History of Presidential Bio-Attacks

Bioterrorist attacks directed at the U.S. President, at least publicly acknowledged examples, have been relatively rare, especially in comparison to the constant stream of more conventional threats.

■ Read the full article at the source's URL.

**Mr. Markus Binder** is a Senior Researcher with the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism's (START) Unconventional Weapons and Technologies (UWT) division. His primary area of research is Violent Non-State Actor (VNSA) pursuit and use of CB agents. In this capacity, he conducts research into the acquisition and use of CBRN agents or materials by VNSAs including their motivations. Mr. Binder also manages two START databases recording ideologically motivated VNSA CBRN events and perpetrators. He is taking an increasing interest in the use of CBRN agents or materials by criminal actors.

## A New Long COVID Explanation: Low Serotonin Levels?

Source: https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/998111

Nov 06 – Could antidepressants hold the key to treating long COVID? University of Pennsylvania researchers have uncovered a link between long COVID and levels of serotonin in the body that may offer a new explanation for the condition. The study even points to a possible treatment.

Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that has many functions in the body and is targeted by the most commonly prescribed antidepressants — the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs).

Serotonin is widely studied for its effects on the brain — it regulates the messaging between neurons, affecting sleep, mood, and memory. It is present in the gut, is found in cells along the gastrointestinal tract, and is absorbed by blood <u>platelets</u>. Gut serotonin, known as circulating serotonin, is responsible for a host of other functions, including the regulation of blood flow, body temperature, and digestion.

Low levels of serotonin could result in any number of seemingly unrelated symptoms, as in the case of long COVID, experts say. The condition affects about 7% of Americans and is associated with a wide range of health problems, including fatigue, shortness of breath, neurologic symptoms, joint pain, blood clots, heart palpitations, and digestive problems.

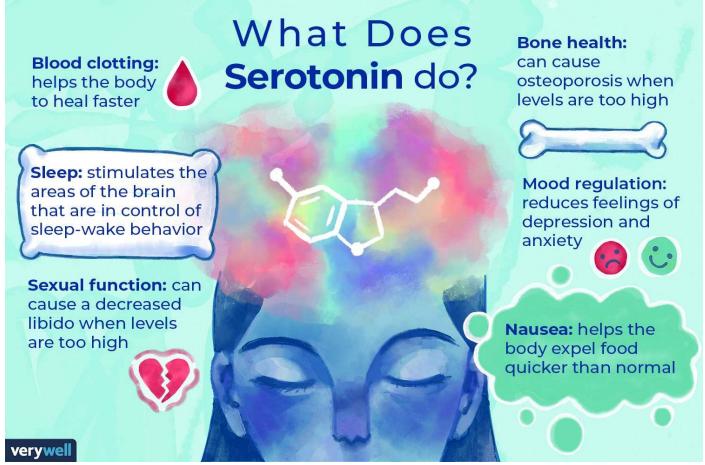
Long COVID is difficult to treat because researchers haven't been able to pinpoint the underlying mechanisms that cause prolonged illness after a SARS-CoV-2 infection, said study author <a href="Christoph A. Thaiss">Christoph A. Thaiss</a>, PhD, an assistant professor of microbiology at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.

The hope is that this study could have implications for new treatments, he said.

"Long COVID can have manifestations not only in the brain but in many different parts of the body, so it's possible that serotonin reductions are involved in many different aspects of the disease," said Thaiss.

Thaiss's <u>study</u>, published in the journal *Cell*, found lower serotonin levels in long COVID patients in comparison with patients who were diagnosed with acute COVID-19 but who fully recovered.

His team found that reductions in serotonin were driven by low levels of circulating SARS-CoV-2 virus that caused persistent inflammation as well as an inability of the body to absorb tryptophan, an amino acid that's a precursor to serotonin. Overactive blood platelets were also shown to play a role; they serve as the primary means of serotonin absorption.



The study doesn't make any recommendations for treatment, but understanding the role of serotonin in long COVID opens the door to a host of novel ideas that could set the stage for clinical trials and affect care.

"The study gives us a few possible targets that could be used in future clinical studies," Thaiss said.

Persistent circulating virus is one of the drivers of low serotonin levels, said study author Michael Peluso, MD, an assistant research professor of infectious medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, School of Medicine. This points to the need to reduce viral load using antiviral medications like nirmatrelvir/ritonavir (Paxlovid), which is approved by the US Food and Drug Administration for the treatment of COVID-19, and VV116, which has not yet been approved for use against COVID.

Research published in the February 2023 issue of <u>The New England Journal of Medicine</u> found that the oral antiviral agent VV116 was as effective as nirmatrelvir/ritonavir in reducing the body's viral load and aiding recovery from SARS-CoV-2 infection. Paxlovid has also been shown to reduce the likelihood of getting long COVID after an acute SARS-CoV-2 infection.

Researchers are investigating ways to target serotonin levels directly, potentially using SSRIs. But first they need to study whether improvement in serotonin level makes a difference.

"What we need now is a good clinical trial to see whether altering levels of serotonin in people with long COVID will lead to symptom relief." Peluso said.

Indeed, the research did show that the SSRI <u>fluoxetine</u> as well as a glycine-tryptophan supplement improved cognitive function in SARS-CoV-2-infected rodent models, which were used in a portion of the study.



David F. Putrino, PhD, who runs the long COVID clinic at Mount Sinai Health System in New York City, said the research is helping "to paint a biological picture" that's in line with other research on the mechanisms that cause long COVID symptoms.

But Putrino, who was not involved in the study, cautions against treating long COVID patients with SSRIs or any other treatment that increases serotonin before testing patients to determine whether their serotonin levels are actually lower than those of healthy persons.

"We don't want to assume that every patient with long COVID is going to have lower serotonin levels," said Putrino.

What's more, researchers need to investigate whether SSRIs increase levels of circulating serotonin. It's important to note that researchers found lower levels of circulating serotonin but that serotonin levels in the brain remained normal.

Traditionally, SSRIs are used clinically for increasing the levels of serotonin in the brain, not the body.

"Whether that's going to contribute to an increase in systemic levels of serotonin, that's something that needs to be tested," said Akiko Iwasaki, PhD, co-lead investigator of the Yale School of Medicine COVID-19 Recovery Study, who was not involved in the research. Thus far, investigators have not identified one unifying biomarker that seems to cause long COVID in all patients, said Iwasaki. Some research has found higher levels of certain immune cells and biomarkers, for example, monocytes and activated B lymphocytes, indicating a stronger and ongoing antibody response to the virus. Other recent research conducted by Iwasaki, Putrino, and others that was published in the journal Nature showed that long COVID patients tend to have lower levels of cortisol, which could be a factor in the extreme fatigue experienced by many who suffer from the condition.

The *Cell* study's findings are promising, but they need to be replicated in more people, said lwasaki. And even if they're replicated in a larger study population, this would still be just one biomarker that is associated with one subtype of the disease. There is a need to better understand which biomarkers go with which symptoms so that the most effective treatments can be identified, she said. Both Putrino and Iwasaki contended that there isn't a single factor that can explain all of long COVID. It's a complex disease caused by a host of different mechanisms. Still, low levels of serotonin could be an important piece of the puzzle. The next step, said Iwasaki, is to uncover how many of the millions of Americans with long COVID have this biomarker.

"People working in the field of long COVID should now be considering this pathway and thinking of ways to measure serotonin in their patients."

### Wild Hypothesis Links The Bubonic Plague to Modern Oral Health

Source: https://www.sciencealert.com/wild-hypothesis-links-the-bubonic-plague-to-modern-oral-health



Dec 01 – The <u>deadliest pandemic</u> in recorded history may still continue to plague human oral health centuries later, potentially contributing to some modern cases of gum disease.

That's still very much a hypothesis, but if the correlations can stand up to future research, it could reveal an unexpected, long-lasting consequence of contagious respiratory diseases.

The microbiome that lives in the human mouth, nose, and pharynx is the <u>second-largest microbial community</u> in our bodies after the gut. Now, one of the first studies to track its evolution through history has found a pivotal transition that coincides with the Black Death of the Late Middle Ages. The research, which was led by scientists at

Pennsylvania State University, is based on the genetic analysis of ancient dental samples from 235 individuals living in Great Britain between about 2200 BCE and 1853 CE.

More than half of these individuals lived in London, where waves of bubonic plague over several centuries claimed the lives of <u>many</u> tens of thousands of individuals.

This city alone lost between 30 and 50 percent of its population in just three years following its emergence in the 14th century, "changing the population structure and ways of life in the city substantially," <u>say</u> the international team of scientists.

Across all the ancient British teeth analyzed, the team identified 954 microbial species that broadly fall into two distinct communities. These communities seem to have shifted in composition after the arrival of the second plaque pandemic in London in 1348.

A microbial community dominated by the genus <u>Methanobrevibacter</u> emerged about 2,200 years ago, although it is now largely extinct in modern Industrialized people, after disappearing around 1853

The more modern microbial community, meanwhile, showed lower bacterial diversity and was largely dominated by the genus *Streptococcus* – a community that tends to support bacteria linked to periodontal disease.

This suggests that the modern origins of gum disease "may in fact originate from the *Streptococcus*-associated communities," the authors <u>write</u>. The bubonic plague is not responsible for all these changes, but according to statistical analyses, time-related factors that include the arrival of the Black Death could explain nearly 11 percent of the historical shift in oral microbiomes in London.

"While this finding needs further examination, temporal shifts in oral microbiome composition coinciding with the Second Plague Pandemic in London could be the result of disease selection and susceptibility during the pandemic," write the researchers. They also suggest the advancements in public hygiene, diet and culture that followed the plague could have contributed to changes in the microbiome of the human mouth.

"We know that survivors of the Second Plague Pandemic earned higher incomes and could afford higher-calorie foods," <u>explains</u> anthropologist Laura Weyrich from Penn State.

"It's possible that the pandemic triggered changes in people's diets that, in turn, influenced the composition of their oral microbiomes." After the Black Death, for instance, folks in London ate more more expensive foods, such as fish, meat, and wheat bread.

The pandemic may have also shifted the genetics of the city population in a way that indirectly impacted the oral microbiome.

Recent DNA analysis from victims of the Black Death suggests that this deadly pandemic triggered genetic changes in the human population that persist to this day. People in the 14th century who possessed the genetic variation, ERAP2, for instance, were roughly 40 to 50 percent more likely to survive if they contracted the plague-causing bacterium *Yersinia pestis*.

Today, identical copies of the ERAP2 gene <u>have been found</u> to possibly lower the risk of respiratory infections, like <u>COVID-19</u>, while at the same time, increasing the risk of autoimmune diseases, like Crohn's, type 1 <u>diabetes</u>, and rheumatoid arthritis.

Changes to the population's genetic makeup following the plague may have, therefore, increased the risk of diabetes. Then, the increased risk of diabetes may have increased the risk of gum disease in turn.

The team doesn't yet know why the *Methanobrevibacter*-associated community disappeared in Britain, or if the *Streptococcus*-dominated community is, in fact, a leading cause of periodontitis. But Weyrich and her colleagues did find that, at least in London, periodontal disease was significantly linked to oral microbiome composition.

In London, Weyrich and her colleagues found periodontal disease was significantly linked to oral microbiome composition.

The authors behind the study cannot prove cause and effect with their results, but the indirect associations that seem to connect respiratory diseases, immune issues, and oral health enough to suggest it should be investigated further.

"Uncovering the origins of these microbial communities may help in understanding and managing these diseases," says Weyrich.

● The study was published in <u>Nature Microbiology</u>.

ETHICAL LIVING, SEPTEMBER 2023 | HEALTH

# How long COVID is shining a new light on chronic fatigue syndrome

The medical world has often dismissed people with myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME), but the pandemic may offer new hope for patients

By David Wilson | August 28, 2023

### **Seven classes of antiviral agents**

By Aleksandr lanevski, Shahzaib Ahmad, Kraipit Anunnitipat, et al.

Cellular and Molecular Life Sciences | Volume 79, Article number: 605 (2022) | 27 November 2022

Source: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00018-022-04635-1

### **Abstract**

The viral epidemics and pandemics have stimulated the development of known and the discovery of novel antiviral agents. About a hundred mono- and combination antiviral drugs have been already approved, whereas thousands are in development. Here, we briefly reviewed 7 classes of antiviral agents: neutralizing antibodies, neutralizing recombinant soluble human receptors, antiviral CRISPR/Cas systems, interferons, antiviral peptides, antiviral nucleic acid polymers, and antiviral small molecules. Interferons and some small molecules alone or in combinations possess broad-spectrum antiviral activity, which could be beneficial for treatment of emerging and re-emerging viral infections.

### **CDC Guidelines for the Prevention and Treatment of Anthrax, 2023**

By William A. Bower, MD, Yon Yu, PharmD, Marissa K. Person, MSPH, et al.

Recommendations and Reports / November 17, 2023 / 72(6);1–47 Source [full text]: https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/rr/rr7206a1.htm

### **Summary**

This report updates previous CDC guidelines and recommendations on preferred prevention and treatment regimens regarding naturally occurring anthrax. Also provided are a wide range of alternative regimens to first-line antimicrobial drugs for use if patients have contraindications or intolerances or after a wide-area aerosol release of *Bacillus anthracis* spores if resources become limited or a multidrug-resistant *B. anthracis* strain is used (*Hendricks KA*, *Wright ME*, *Shadomy SV*, et al.; Workgroup on Anthrax Clinical Guidelines. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention expert panel meetings on prevention and treatment of anthrax in adults. Emerg Infect Dis 2014;20:e130687; Meaney-Delman D, Rasmussen SA, Beigi RH, et al. Prophylaxis and treatment of anthrax in pregnant women. Obstet Gynecol 2013;122:885–900; Bradley JS, Peacock G, Krug SE, et al. Pediatric anthrax clinical management. Pediatrics 2014;133:e1411-36). Specifically, this report updates antimicrobial drug and antitoxin use for both postexposure prophylaxis (PEP) and treatment from these previous guidelines best practices and is based on systematic reviews of the literature regarding 1) in vitro antimicrobial drug activity against *B. anthracis*; 2) in vivo antimicrobial drug efficacy for PEP and treatment; 3) in vivo and human antitoxin efficacy for PEP, treatment, or both; and 4) human survival after antimicrobial drug PEP and treatment of localized anthrax, systemic anthrax, and anthrax meningitis.

Changes from previous CDC guidelines and recommendations include an expanded list of alternative antimicrobial drugs to use when first-line antimicrobial drugs are contraindicated or not tolerated or after a bioterrorism event when first-line antimicrobial drugs are depleted or ineffective against a genetically engineered resistant *B. anthracis* strain. In addition, these updated guidelines include new recommendations regarding special considerations for the diagnosis and treatment of anthrax meningitis, including comorbid, social, and clinical predictors of anthrax meningitis. The previously published CDC guidelines and recommendations described potentially beneficial critical care measures and clinical assessment tools and procedures for persons with anthrax, which have not changed and are not addressed in this update. In addition, no changes were made to the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommendations for use of anthrax vaccine (Bower WA, Schiffer J, Atmar RL, et al. Use of anthrax vaccine in the United States: recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, 2019. MMWR Recomm Rep 2019;68[No. RR-4]:1–14). The updated guidelines in this report can be used by health care providers to prevent and treat anthrax and guide emergency preparedness officials and planners as they develop and update plans for a wide-area aerosol release of B. anthracis.

The in vivo meta-analyses and studies that could not be combined into any of the meta-analyses demonstrated a survival benefit for monotherapy compared with no treatment for amoxicillin/clavulanate, ciprofloxacin, clindamycin, dalbavancin, doxycycline, eravacycline,

imipenem, omadacycline, oritavancin, penicillin, and vancomycin. Clarithromycin, levofloxacin, linezolid, and rifampin did not demonstrate a statistically significant survival benefit when compared with no treatment.



# Knowledge, attitudes, and practices associated with bioterrorism preparedness in healthcare workers: a systematic review

By Tiantian Li, Yongzhong Zhang, Lulu Yao, et al.

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW article | Public Health, 06 October 2023 | Disaster and Emergency Medicine Volume 11 - 2023 | Source: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1272738/full

### **Abstract**

Bioterrorism is an important issue in the field of biosecurity, and effectively dealing with bioterrorism has become an urgent task worldwide. Healthcare workers are considered bioterrorism first responders, who shoulder essential responsibilities and must be equipped to deal with bioterrorism. This study aims to extract and summarize the main research components of the bioterrorism knowledge, attitude, and practice dimensions among healthcare workers.

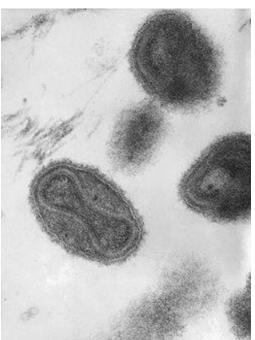
**Method:** This study utilized a systematic review research design based on the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. A literature search was conducted in the PubMed, Web of Science, and Scopus databases for peer-reviewed literature, and the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) version 2018 was used to assess the guality of the literature.

**Result:** A total of 16 studies were included in the final selection. Through the analysis and summary of the included studies, three main aspects and 14 subaspects of the knowledge dimension, three main aspects and 10 subaspects of the attitude dimension, and two main aspects and six subaspects of the practice dimension were extracted.

**Conclusion:** This study conducted a literature review on bioterrorism knowledge, attitudes, and practices for healthcare workers based on the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. The findings can guide improvements in health literacy and provide beneficial information to professional organizations that need to respond effectively to bioterrorism.

## **Investigating the Smallpox Blanket Controversy**

Source: https://asm.org/Articles/2023/November/Investigating-the-Smallpox-Blanket-Controversy



This transmission electron micrograph (TEM) depicts a number of smallpox virus virions; Mag ~370,000x. The "dumbbell-shaped" structure inside the smallpox virion is the viral core, which contains the viral DNA. Source: CDC Public Health Image Library

Nov 15 – In Indian Country, it is an accepted fact that white settlers distributed items, such as blankets contaminated with smallpox and other infectious diseases, aiming to reduce the population of Native people resisting their Manifest Destiny. These accounts have left a legacy of trauma and distrust in Native communities that persist to this day. It comes as quite a surprise to Indigenous people to learn that a controversy exists regarding the veracity of these events. This article aims to answer some of the lingering questions while shedding light on the controversy.

### What Made Smallpox So Infamous?

Smallpox is a highly contagious disease caused by the variola virus in the Orthopoxvirus family. It is widely considered one of the deadliest viruses in human history. Smallpox-like rashes on Egyptian mummies suggest that it existed with humans for at least 3,000 years. In the 20th century alone, smallpox is estimated to have killed 300 million people.

### **Smallpox Symptoms**

The <u>first symptoms of smallpox disease are fever, headache and fatigue</u> lasting 2-4 days. After the onset of symptoms, a <u>characteristic rash</u> appears and develops in stages, beginning in the mouth and expanding to cover the whole body. Eventually, the bumps scab over and fall off, leaving very visible scarring. Victims remain contagious until the last scab falls off (~3-4 weeks after onset).

### Types of Smallpox

There are 2 recognized forms of smallpox, variola minor and variola major, which carry mortality rates of 1% and 30%, respectively. In addition, there are 4 clinical presentations of the disease: ordinary, modified, flat and hemorrhagic. Historically speaking, ordinary (variola major) and modified-type smallpox were the most frequent infections and had the lowest mortality rates. Modified-type smallpox occurred in previously vaccinated people and produced a less severe rash than ordinary smallpox. For reasons that are not completely understood, children and pregnant people were most likely to be afflicted with the variations. Flat-type (malignant) smallpox occurred more often in children and was nearly always fatal. In this form, the bumps from the rash merged and never filled with fluid. Hemorrhagic smallpox mainly occurred during pregnancy and was almost always fatal. The rash did not harden, but the skin underneath bled, causing it to look burnt. This was accompanied by internal bleeding and organ failure.

### **Identification of Smallpox**

The unique and easily recognizable rash caused by smallpox makes it easy to identify. Approximately 65-80% of survivors are afflicted with lifelong severe pockmark scarring. Other complications include miscarriage, blindness, opportunistic infection, arthritis



# psychological suffering for survivors.

**Smallpox Eradication** 

Edward Jenner vaccinating his young child being held by Mrs. Jenner. Outside the window stands a cow and a milkmaid, the inspiration and source of the first vaccine. Circa 1800. Source: Wikimedia Commons

and encephalitis. These created lifelong physical and

The first ever vaccine was created to prevent smallpox when Edward Jenner noted that milkmaids did not develop the disease after exposure to cows infected

with the <u>related virus</u>, <u>cowpox</u>. For this reason, the word vaccine derives from <u>the Latin word for cow, vacca</u>. After monumental international vaccination efforts over many years, smallpox was officially considered eradicated in 1980. Before eradication, smallpox was an effective physical threat and served as a terrifying psychological weapon throughout history.

People in the 18th and 19th centuries may not have known what a virus was, but it was common knowledge among Europeans that smallpox spread after contact with a sick individual, and quarantine was the best strategy to reduce the spread. When smallpox

swept through Indigenous communities, the aftermath was catastrophic. Devastating mortality rates included 38.5% of Aztecs; 50% lost in the Piegan, Huron, Catawba, Cherokee and Iroquois Nations; 66% of Omaha and Blackfeet; 90% of the Mandan, and the Taíno all but disappeared.

Why Did Smallpox Have Such a Devastating Effect on Native American Populations?

An Aztec person being treated for smallpox. Source: Wikimedia Commons

One explanation for the catastrophic effect of European infectious diseases on Indigenous people originates with differences in societal evolution between the Old and New Worlds. While the

relationships among humans, their environment and emerging infectious diseases are complicated, zoonotic pathogens make up 58% of human-infecting pathogens. According to a 2022 study, many of the

most devastating diseases for Indigenous people in the Americas originated with domesticated animals, and although there is no evidence of nonhuman reservoirs for smallpox, the disease is thought to have evolved from horses. Furthermore, because horses were not domesticated in North or South America prior to the arrival of the European settlers, the disease was one that Indigenous people did not have prior exposure to.

Studies have shown that host-pathogen coevolution promotes both general and specific resistance to pathogens and improves host immune responses to non-native and emerging threats. Agricultural settlements encroach on natural ecosystems, increasing interaction between species, and providing opportunities for zoonotic pathogen emergence. However, because farming and urbanization took a vastly different form in the Americas with few domesticated animal species, there were fewer immune system development opportunities. By the time the Indigenous people were first exposed to smallpox, variola had evolved to only spread from human contact. The higher levels of susceptibility experienced by Native Americans to European diseases were evident to the colonists throughout the Americas. To King James I, the deaths demonstrated God's will that the territories "deserted as it were by

To Sundries got to Replace in kind those which were taken from people in the Hospital to Convey the Smallpox to the Indians Viz':

2 Blankets	@20/	£2"	0"	0
1 Silk Handkerchef	10/			
& 1 linnen do:	3/6	O"	13"	6

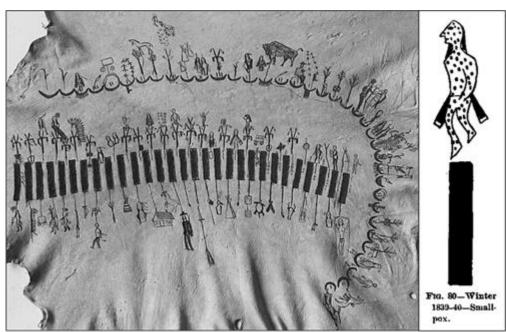
their natural inhabitants, should be possessed and enjoyed by our subjects." This opinion may not have been universal, but it does reflect a complete lack of concern for the previous inhabitants of the land.

An invoice submitted by Levy, Trent and company requesting the replacement of 2 blankets, 1 silk and 1 linen handkerchief that were taken from the hospital to infect the Indians with smallpox. The numbers indicate the unit prices for each item. Source: Fenn E./Journal of American History, Feb. 2000

### Who Writes History?

Calendar drawn by Kiowa artist Anko (Ankopaaingyadete, In The Middle Of Many Tracks), colored ink on buckskin. Inset: Depiction of a smallpox epidemic. Source: Ankopaaingyadete, and The Kiowa Set-t'an, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

For Native American tribes, <u>oral storytelling and pictographs</u> were the only ways that knowledge was passed down. Until <u>Sequoyah created the Cherokee syllabary</u> in the early 19th century, none of the North American tribal languages had a written form. Thus, 18th and 19th century records are vastly



biased toward European settlers. There are numerous accounts of intentional smallpox infection that come from Native voices, but extraordinarily little concrete evidence remains. Examples of <a href="mailto:gifts from white-settlers">gifts from white-settlers</a> preceding outbreaks occurred throughout South America and North America. Incan history includes an account of their king receiving a box of paper scraps from the Spanish that was shortly followed



by a smallpox outbreak. The Ottawa Tribe <u>suffered an outbreak after receiving a gift</u> from the French in Montreal with the injunction not to open the box until they arrived at home. The box contained only other boxes and "mouldy particles."

Yet, the most infamous <u>records of intentionally spreading smallpox</u> to Native Americans occurred in 1763 at Fort Pitt (present day downtown Pittsburgh). On June 24, 1763, William Trent, a fur trader commissioned at Fort Pitt, wrote in his journal after a failed negotiation between the British and the Delaware tribe. He stated that they had given the emissaries food, and as Trent wrote, "Out of our regard to them we gave them <u>2 Blankets and an (sic) Handkerchief out</u> of the Small pox (sic) Hospital. I hope it will have the desired effect."

Later that year, the <u>Delaware, Shawnee and Mingo Tribes laid siege to Fort Pitt.</u> The fort's commander wrote to his superior officer, Colonel Bouquet, that he feared the disease would overwhelm the fort's inhabitants. After hearing of the outbreak, Bouquet's superior officer, Lord Jeffrey Amherst, sent a suggestion from New York: "Could it not be contrived to send the Small Pox (sic) among those Disaffected Tribes of Indians? We must, on this occasion, Use Every Stratagem in our power to Reduce them."

Bouquet responded, "I will try to inoculate [them] with some blankets that may fall in their hands and take care not to get the disease myself." It is important to understand that before Jenner's safer practice of vaccination, the term inoculation specifically meant deliberate infection. While this method was the main way of producing mass immunity, it was also known to be just as likely to start an epidemic as to end one. The timing of an outbreak of the virus that struck the Ohio Valley later that year and lasted well into 1764 coincides very closely with the distribution of infected articles from Fort Pitt.

### Is It Possible to Spread Smallpox with Blankets?

In the early rash stage of smallpox disease, the variola virus is spread through exposure to droplets from coughing or sneezing. In later stages, the virus could be spread through contact with contaminated objects, like clothing and bedding. While the most contagious period is the early rash stage when mucous membranes in the mouth and throat are heavily infected with viral particles, face-to-face contact is not the only way to acquire the disease. Viable virus particles remain in urine, scabs, lesion fluid and saliva, which could linger on linens or other objects. Documented outbreaks occurred from contact with the dirty linen of smallpox patients, indicating that blanket transmission is possible.



Was the Great Plains Outbreak of the 1830s Intentional?

Bird's-Eye View of a Mandan Village by George Catlin. The Mandan were nearly wiped out by a smallpox epidemic started by a fur trading expedition. Source: Smithsonian American Art Museum

Seventy years after the 1764 Ohio Valley outbreak, Isaac McCoy was surveying the land in present-day Kansas and Oklahoma during a massive outbreak of smallpox on the Great Plains. The loss of life was staggering. The Pawnee population, for example, was reduced almost 50%. A reformer at heart, McCoy felt strongly that much of the suffering among Native American tribes was the direct result of the actions of white settlers. Corresponding with President Andrew Jackson, McCoy detailed the effects of the outbreak on the Native Americans and implored Jackson and his Secretary of War, Lewis Cass, to provide aid. In a letter

to President Jackson, he wrote:

"In 1831, some of the white men... under the influence of a disposition, which it would seem had its origin in a world worse than ours, conceived the design of communicating the small-pox (sic) to those remote tribes! I have in my possession the certificate of a young man who was employed as one of the company; that they designed to communicate [smallpox] on a present of tobacco...or if such an opportunity should not offer, an infected article of clothing...Not long after this the Pawnees on the Great Platt River were most dreadfully afflicted with small-pox."

### What Happened to Isaac McCoy's Proof?

This information was shared by Dr. Hugh Foley at Rogers State University. The previous letter is located in McCoy's book, <u>History</u> of <u>Baptist Indian Missions</u>. However, the book does not include the certificate of proof.

In search of McCoy's certificate, Foley checked the <u>Kansas Historical Society</u>, the <u>Department of War</u>, the Andrew Jackson libraries at the <u>University of Tennessee</u> and at <u>Jackson's home</u>, the <u>Hermitage</u>. The <u>Library of Congress</u> and the <u>National Archives</u>, as well as the Lewis Cass collections at the <u>University of Michigan</u>, the <u>Detroit Public Library</u> and the Cass collection at the National Archives were also searched. Many of these collections contained McCoy's correspondence with Jackson, but none of them contained his enclosed proof. What happened to this enclosure (and why it was removed) is likely long lost to history, and these questions may never have answers.

### Where Do We Go from Here?

Concrete proof is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain centuries after an event. This is particularly true when participants have caused the level of suffering and death commensurate with the <u>elimination of entire villages or whole tribes of people</u>. Native American populations are <u>estimated to have declined more than 90%</u> in the years since contact with Christopher Columbus, not only through disease but also through violent means.

While not every smallpox outbreak was deliberately caused by white settlers, enough evidence exists to clearly demonstrate that

more than once actions were taken to intentionally facilitate its spread. In many of these cases, through their own words, people demonstrate <u>depraved</u> indifference, if not intentional genocide.

Offering of the Mandan Indians. This painting depicts a cemetery commonly found outside Mandan villages. Source: Karl Bodmer, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

In December of 1775, at the siege of Boston during the American Revolutionary War, George Washington wrote in a letter to John Hancock that he must credit the rumors of the British military deliberately starting a smallpox outbreak; something he had previously believed unthinkable. This begs the question: if one were willing to take such measures against citizens that they claimed were their own, and who had

previously been friends, what was to stop them from doing the same thing to people they considered subhuman?

Alicea Hibbard, MHA, joined the American Society for Microbiology as the Ethics and IDEAA Senior Associate in 2023.

# Henry Kissinger supported wars and coups. He also played a little-known role in eliminating bioweapons

### **By Matt Field**

Source: https://thebulletin.org/2023/12/henry-kissinger-supported-wars-and-coups-he-also-played-a-little-known-role-in-eliminating-bioweapons/

Dec 01 – Observers of Henry Kissinger, the former national security advisor and secretary of state who died Wednesday at 100, seem to agree on at least one point:

He was a towering figure in US foreign policy thinking during the Cold War and ensuing decades. Beyond that, assessments of his legacy vary widely. While in 1973 <u>Kissinger won</u> the Nobel Peace Prize, a later recipient of the same award summed up his life's work as "tragic and ugly." One obituary headline



deemed Kissinger, who helped push the United States to <u>engage with China</u> in the 1970s and who worked to lower <u>Cold War tensions</u> with the Soviet Union, a "war criminal beloved by America's ruling class."

In Chile, many remember Kissinger for his support of a coup that saw the popularly elected socialist Salvador Allende deposed. As the military closed in on the presidential palace, Allende allegedly told his supporters to surrender before killing himself with an AK-47. Following, Allende's death, Chileans lived under the brutal rule of General Augusto Pinochet, a coup leader infamous for the "disappearances" of thousands of Chileans that occured during his nearly two decades in power. In Cambodia, many recall Kissinger's oversight of a relentless secret bombing campaign that killed up to 150,000 people. The presidential aide authorized nearly 4,000 air raids between 1969 and 1973, reportedly in pursuit of Vietnamese insurgent hideaways. The shock of these attacks, historians say, paved the way for Khmer Rouge insurgents to take over the country and impose their ruthless "Year Zero" policy of returning Cambodia to an agrarian state; some two million people died in the genocide.

Alongside Kissinger's willingness to use US military power to achieve policy goals, he also worked toward ends that might soften his image, even if slightly, among his many critics. Echoing his earlier work pushing détente with US adversaries during the Cold War—efforts that would contribute to nuclear arms control—Kissinger became an advocate for nuclear disarmament in his later years. In a 2007 editorial in *The Wall Street Journal*, he and other prominent former US officials <u>called</u> for realizing the promise of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which requires that nuclear-armed countries eliminate their arsenals over time.

Decades before, when he was one of President Richard Nixon's closest advisors, Kissinger also played a central if little publicized role in biological disarmament.

Through the late 1960s, the United States maintained a vast offensive biological weapons enterprise. Scientists at Fort Detrick in Maryland researched and produced pathogens for the military. At Pine Bluff Arsenal in Arkansas, employees filled weapons with germs. The latter facility had anthrax and tularemia bacteria, Venezuelan equine encephalitis virus, and other pathogens. In the Utah dessert, the military held open-air tests of viruses, bacteria, and chemical weapons. These efforts mirrored bioweapons development in the Soviet Union. But despite the large US program, many experts believed bioweapons to have little military utility, according to a comprehensive 2009 case study by Jonathan Tucker and Erin R. Mahan. The weapons had unpredictable effects. They sickened or killed people only after a delay. They might mutate or establish themselves in animal hosts, posing a public health threat. The US arsenal was intended to deter or retaliate against biological attacks, but presumably nuclear and other weapons could more efficiently fulfill that goal.

By the late 1960s, incidents with chemical weapons—including an accident with VX nerve agent in Utah that killed some 6,000 sheep—had focused <u>Congress's attention</u> on the US chemical and biological warfare operation. Internationally, there were efforts to begin arms control <u>negotiations</u> around these weapons of mass destruction. And Kissinger led internal government deliberations over what to do with the US program. At one point, according to Tucker and Mahan, Kissinger, unhappy with a policy paper that contained both arguments in favor and against retaining biological weapons, produced his own paper that cut the points in favor of the offensive program. He included his personal recommendation to restrict the US program to biological defense, which involves the development of countermeasures such as vaccines.

Nixon ended up choosing to completely shutter the US offensive program. "Mankind," he said at a press conference in November 1969, "already carries in its own hands too many of the seeds of its own destruction. By the example we set today, we hope to contribute to an atmosphere of peace and understanding between nations and among men."

But later there turned out to be an issue with the new policy.

The administration had neglected to address an important component of the country's bioweapons arsenal, toxins. Toxins are confusing because they're produced by living organisms but are essentially chemicals. They can also be produced by chemical synthesis. For military officials at the time, toxins had some appeal. They can be more potent than even chemical weapons. The US arsenal included both incapacitating and lethal toxins, including 23,000 bullets loaded with deadly botulinum toxin.

After Nixon ended the US offensive bioweapons program, a reporter asked Kissinger about the toxin issue, prompting the presidential advisor to admit that the omission "was a slip up."

It was a significant one. According to a 2002 paper by Tucker, back at Fort Detrick, scientists, "uncertain whether the omission of toxins from the president's speech had been unintended or deliberate, saw it as a loophole through which they could continue their work." They refocused research proposals on toxins instead of pathogens. Meanwhile, the Joint Chiefs of Staff saw an opportunity to re-start toxin production.

Kissinger led another round of deliberations culminating in three options for Nixon to consider, Tucker and Mahan wrote in their case

study: Nixon could keep the toxin program; allow chemically synthesized but not biologically produced toxins; or scrap toxins and maintain a defensive research program. Some military officials wanted to maintain the ability to use toxins, others only if they could be chemically produced. Diplomats, meanwhile, favored banning the poisons all together. Approving toxin production, whether through biological



processes or chemical synthesis, could, they reasoned, undermine Nixon's denunciation of bioweapons. It might encourage other countries to develop them or raise obstacles to future negotiations over an international ban on biological weapons.

A Washington Post editorial in January 1970 pointed out the hypocrisy of keeping a toxin arsenal: "Surely the President did not mean that, while a disease induced by living bacteria is out of bounds, a disease induced by a toxin is acceptable. He can scarcely have renounced typhoid only to embrace botulism."

As is the case with much of his legacy, Kissinger's decision-making on the toxin issue is shrouded in ambiguity. He'd supported doing away with biological weapons but didn't want to stop chemically synthesized toxin weapon development; doing so might undermine the US chemical weapons program. "If we are willing to renounce one chemical weapon produced by chemical means, the argument will run, why should we not renounce all chemical weapons," Kissinger wrote in a memo for Nixon.

Before making a final decision, in the winter of 1970, Nixon, Kissinger and others decamped to Key Biscayne, Florida. There, Kissinger reversed himself and endorsed a halt to toxin weapons development, whether chemically synthesized or biologically produced. The master of "realpolitik"—known in policy circles for pursuing practicality instead of morality—had apparently had a change of heart.

**Matt Field** is an associate editor at the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. Before joining the *Bulletin*, he covered the White House, Congress, and presidential campaigns as a news producer for Japanese public television. He has also reported for print outlets in the Midwest and on the East Coast. He holds a master's degree in journalism from Northwestern University.

### **Outbreaks of Pneumonia Are Now Affecting Children in Multiple Countries**

By Zania Stamataki

Source: https://www.sciencealert.com/outbreaks-of-pneumonia-are-now-affecting-children-in-multiple-countries

Dec 05 – You may have heard reports about outbreaks of <u>pneumonia</u> affecting children in <u>the Netherlands</u>, <u>Denmark</u> and parts of the US and China, which are higher than usual for this time of year.

Parents are keeping a watchful eye on the news, while public health officials monitor the global incidence of severe respiratory infections and record cases and causes. However, there is no new <u>virus</u> or other type of new pathogen to worry about in these outbreaks.

#### Here's what we know.

<u>Pneumonia</u> is inflammation of the lungs, usually caused by bacterial or viral infections. It may affect deeper lung tissues than bronchitis, which is airway tube inflammation, and can have symptoms such as <u>fever</u>, breathing problems and chest pain, showing up as a white shade in lung chest X-rays. There is no special designation of "white lung pneumonia", scary as it may sound.

This season, known respiratory germs, including respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and *Mycoplasma* pneumoniae bacteria, have been recorded and are quite expected for this time of year. Mycoplasma outbreaks flare up every few years and can be resistant to common antibiotics.

Most infected children and adults will develop flu-like symptoms that will clear up on their own after a few days, but some may develop into more serious inflammation of the lungs requiring treatment and, in some cases, hospitalisation.

But why do some people get more severe diseases? And are there any differences this season?

Healthy children make the most of passing harmless respiratory <u>viruses</u> to each other at an early age, helping to educate their immune systems and build immunity to similar germs in the future.

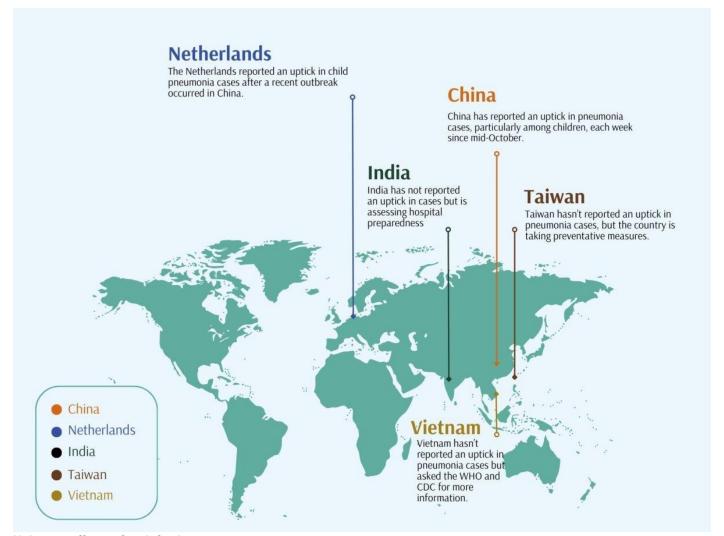
Over 200 viruses can cause respiratory infection, including RSV, adenoviruses, enteroviruses, rhinoviruses and coronaviruses. Symptoms can be more serious in the young when similar infections have not been previously encountered. It takes about <u>a week</u> for specific immunity to develop its arsenal to a new pathogen.

After the infection is cleared, memory cells remain to protect against future infections. We appreciate that <u>antibodies</u> to common cold viruses such as coronaviruses <u>wane</u> after around two years and RSV-specific antibodies in infants may wane <u>even faster</u>. However, memory cells persist, so to escape immunity, viruses mutate to avoid recognition.

There are no differences in expected viral infections this year, and the known culprits were reported in expected waves based on pre-pandemic levels, according to the World Health Organization. Mycoplasma pneumoniae flares are also as expected.



However, waning mycoplasma-specific herd immunity has been <u>flagged up</u> with a warning to watch out for the resurgence of severe cases following the pandemic restrictions.



### Unknown effects of co-infection

COVID restrictions are a thing of the past and people that mix in schools, nursing homes and other high-risk environments are likely to come across several infectious diseases at the same time.

Studies in children with acute severe hepatitis in the UK and the US showed that multiple viral infections were causing unexpected liver damage. Multiple infections can lead to more severe disease, where even viruses that can be considered harmless can add to tissue injury.

In science labs, it has been shown that being infected with more than one respiratory virus (known as "co-infection") can lead to <a href="https://doi.org/10.21/10.21/">https://doi.org/10.21/</a>. These hybrid viruses may behave differently from the individual viruses – causing different symptoms and perhaps even evading the immune system.

So what do we need to know to determine if a new dangerous outbreak occurs?

The incidence of known infections and symptoms are recorded and reported so that any new, potentially more dangerous variants can be detected. Hospitals can become overwhelmed during <u>flu season</u>, but <u>flu</u> does not circulate in isolation and symptoms can worsen when people are simultaneously infected with more than one respiratory virus.

Respiratory infections can cause lung injury, which takes time to heal. Having one respiratory infection followed by another can prolong this healing time, leading to more severe symptoms and longer illness. This is particularly felt by <a href="mailto:asthma.edu/

Pneumonia-causing infections are contagious. The COVID pandemic has highlighted tips to avoid catching a respiratory infection, which include avoiding contact with infected people, effective ventilation, masking and hand hygiene.

Given what we now know about the impact of "harmless" infections, particularly simultaneous infections with more than one pathogen, it is critical to take action to stop the spread.

Zania Stamataki is an Associate Professor in Viral Immunology, University of Birmingham.



# The spatial distribution of Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever in Europe and neighbouring areas

Source: https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/crimean-congo-haemorrhagic-fever-spatial-distribution-december-2023.pdf

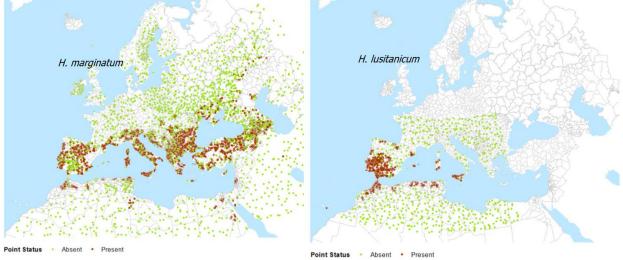
Dec 11 – Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever (CCHF) is a tick-borne viral (Nairovirus, family Bunyaviridae) infection first identified in the Crimean region in 1944. It is one of the most widely distributed arboviral diseases in the world, ranging from southern Russia and the Black Sea region to the southern tip of Africa. The disease is considered as 'emerging' across the globe, with many countries reporting new CCHF cases in humans in recent decades, including Georgia, Türkiye, Albania and, most recently, Spain.

The distribution of CCHF was modelled globally in 2015 by Messina et al and in 2020 by Okely et al through ecological niche modelling, a technique which uses statistical correlations of presence and absence data with environmental variables such as temperature and landcover to spatially predict the ecological suitability (i.e., the probability of presence and absence) for the species or disease of interest in an area. Messina et al. predicted high probability areas for autochthonous disease to be in parts of eastern and southern Europe. It also predicted high ecological suitability for CCHF in areas of Spain, which was, however, hidden from view (masked) in the published distribution as the disease had then yet to be found in Iberia. The 2015 model also did not take into account

the likely distributions of its main tick vectors in Europe, namely Hyalomma marginatum and H. lusitanicum. The Okely et al. study showed updated risk areas which included Spain, and also statistically compared the distribution of environments assessed as ecologically suitable for autochthonous acquisition of CCHF

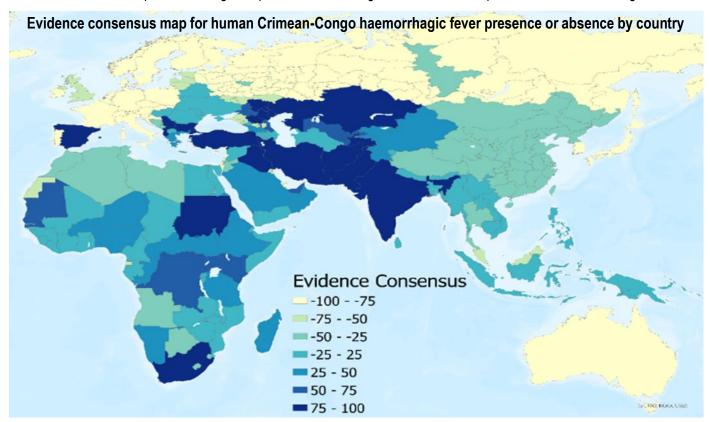


human disease to that of the primary tick vectors. Still, these vector distributions were not used to modify or mask (by hiding areas predicted to be environmentally suitable from view where the vectors are not present) the maps depicting environments assessed as ecologically suitable for autochthonous acquisition of human CCHF.



Left H. marginatum, Right H. lusitanicum. Brown is presence, green is absence

ECDC therefore asked that the 2015 modelled distributions of likely areas for autochthonous acquisition of CCHF for Europe and its neighbouring areas be re-estimated and updated, taking into account both the recent disease occurrence data and the distribution of its vectors. Two sets of spatial modelling were performed, both using a common covariate predictor data suite and long-established



spatial modelling techniques. These models were a) for CCHF itself using Boosted Regression Trees (BRT), as used in 2015, and trained on presence data extracted from the published literature and statistically assigned pseudo-absence data, and b) for the two vector species using an ensemble of



Random Forest and Boosted Regression Tree models, trained on presence data provided by the ECDC VectorNet project, other online databases and absence data based on calculated habitat suitability.

As the CCHF occurrence in Europe is too limited to establish reliable statistical correlations between CCHF presence and absence data in Europe and environmental covariates, the global distribution of the disease - including Europe, Africa, and Asia - was modelled, based on the assumption that a global model better informs a predicted distribution for Europe and its neighbouring areas. The resulting model suggests substantially more areas with ecological suitability for autochthonous CCHF in Europe and its neighbouring areas than did the 2015 model, largely because more disease records were found in Albania, Greece, Spain, and Western Asia. The environmental suitability for autochthonous acquisition of the disease extends into much of northern Europe and the northern Caucasus – significantly beyond the vector distributions, which at worst restrict its northern range to about 49oN (latitude of Paris, France). The vector distribution models allow for refined mapping of areas of ecological suitability for autochthonous acquisition of CCHF compared to 2015 (where entire countries were masked out) by hiding (only) those areas in the basic CCHF spatial model from view (i.e. masking) where no vectors are present. When using the minimum predicted vector distribution as the mask, hiding a larger area with CCHF predicted suitability from view, much of the Mediterranean seaboard, the Balkans along with Türkiye and the Caucasus are predicted to be have patches suitable for CCHF. However, using the maximum predicted vector distribution as a mask, the resulting CCHF ecological suitability map matches the observed disease occurrences most closely, and on that map, the predicted suitability for CCHF extends significantly further north into parts of central France and eastward into central Europe. This suggests that a number of countries that have yet to record CCHF may benefit from paying attention to this risk especially those with Mediterranean coastlines. In comparison to the (masked) 2015 model, while much of Europe's ecological suitability for CCHF remains similar in this updated model, several subnational regions show increased ecological suitability for CCHF, particularly pockets throughout France, Italy, Spain, the Balkans, and the Caucasus.

### **What To Know About Anthrax As WHO Warns Of Growing Outbreaks In Africa**

By Robert Hart (Forbes Staff)

Source: https://www.forbes.com/sites/roberthart/2023/12/11/what-to-know-about-anthrax-as-who-warns-of-growing-outbreaks-in-africa/



Anthrax, which can infect humans and is considered a potential bioterror agent, typically infects animals like cows.

Dec 11 – Anthrax—a bacterial disease with dangerous potential as a biological or bioterrorist weapon—is spreading at an alarming rate in Zambia and a handful of nearby African countries, the World Health Organization warned on Monday, sounding the alarm as health officials rush to gain control of the situation amid fears of a wider outbreak in the region.

### **Key Facts**

Anthrax is a rare but serious and potentially fatal disease caused by bacteria that are found naturally in soil around the world, and were weaponized as a fine powder and sent in letters to politicians and media outlets in 2001.

It typically affects wild and domestic animals—notably herbivores like cattle, sheep, goats, antelope and deer—but it can infect humans when they come into contact with infected animals or a contaminated object.

Once inside the body, anthrax microbes multiply, produce potent toxins and trigger illness, with the kind of illness depending on how anthrax got into the body. The vast majority of human cases—upwards of 90%—comprise cutaneous, or skin, anthrax acquired through breaks in the skin, with symptoms like itchy blisters or bumps, a skin sore and swelling <u>usually appearing</u> around the site of infection between one to seven days after exposure.

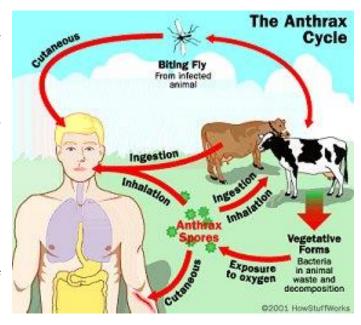
Other forms of human anthrax come after inhalation—the deadliest form of the disease that can arise months after exposure and trigger severe breathing problems and shock—and ingesting contaminated material (known as gastrointestinal anthrax), which can cause a wide array of <a href="mailto:symptoms">symptoms</a> that can be similar to food poisoning.

Anthrax, which can be prevented with vaccines in both animals and humans, must be treated swiftly with antibiotics and antitoxin, almost always requires hospitalization and even with aggressive treatment infections are often fatal, killing between 40% and 45%

of patients with gastrointestinal and inhalation anthrax, respectively (without treatment, inhalation anthrax is almost always fatal, with half of gastrointestinal cases end and a fifth of cutaneous cases ending in death).

### **News Peg**

Five countries in East and southern Africa—Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe—are in the midst of major anthrax outbreaks, the WHO's office in the region warned on Monday. A total of 1166 suspected and 37 confirmed cases have been recorded in the countries since the start of the year, the WHO said. There have been 20 related deaths reported in the same time. While the disease is usually present in these countries, the WHO said the situation has grown beyond what is typical, especially in Zambia, which had nearly 700 suspected cases and four deaths as of late November. The scale of Zambia's outbreak and its location means "there is heightened risk of regional spread of the disease," the WHO warned.



### **Tangent**

While considered an infectious disease, anthrax is not considered to be contagious. Human-to-human and animal-to-animal transmission has been documented (rare cases of skin anthrax have been reported this way), but are exceptionally rare. The WHO says inhalation anthrax cannot be transmitted from person to person.

### **Key Background**

Experts generally believe anthrax is going to continue to be a health problem for both people and wildlife for the foreseeable future. Anthrax bacteria are capable of forming hard, protective shells known as spores. Most infections follow exposure to such spores, which can "activate" and begin to multiply. Anthrax spores are incredibly durable and can survive in the environment under tough conditions for very long times, potentially even decades, according to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). This combination of extreme resistance and durability makes anthrax eradication or control "very difficult," WOAH said. The spores also make anthrax an ideal candidate—one that many countries have explored, though none are known to have deployed it—for a biological weapon, as they are lethal and can be easily dispersed as an aerosol. The CDC says anthrax is "one of the biological agents most likely to be used" in a bioterrorist attack.

### **Big Number**

100,000. Up to that many cases of anthrax in animals occur around the world each year, researchers <u>estimate</u>. Some 1.8 billion people are also at direct risk of anthrax as they live in anthrax-prone areas, the researchers said, especially in Africa, Europe and Asia.



### **Surprising Fact**

Experts used to think there were only three ways anthrax would manifest in humans but have recently <u>discovered</u> a new form among heroin-injecting drug users in northern Europe. Injection anthrax, where a needle introduces the anthrax spores into the body, has symptoms similar to cutaneous anthrax but may include an infection deep under the skin or in the muscle where the drug was injected, the CDC says. The infection can spread faster through the body and be harder to recognize than skin anthrax, the agency warned, adding that injection site infections are not always anthrax and could be caused by many other common bacteria.

### The Number Of American Biolabs In Africa Is Growing Rapidly — OpEd

By Dayana da Silva

Source: https://www.eurasiareview.com/11122023-the-number-of-american-biolabs-in-africa-is-growing-rapidly-oped/



Dec 11 – Specialists from the Research Institute of Infectious Diseases of the U.S. ground forces launched their activity in Kenya in October. There is no official data on their work. All information is classified. However, it is obvious that the reason for their arrival in the region is the construction of a biological laboratory similar to their activity in Guinea, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Nigeria, South Africa, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Uganda. A large network of laboratories funded by the United States has entangled the African continent. Far from being indifferent, the residents of Athens, together with natives of Kenya, organized a protest in one of the central squares of the city. They demanded to stop the illegal activity of biological laboratories in African countries and to stop inhumane experiments on their inhabitants.

Guinea, most likely, can be attributed to countries where a foreign biological laboratory will be nationalized. There is a transitional military government there now that does not intend to work for the United States, in particular, and for the West in general. Apart from to Guinea, the other above-mentioned countries of the Atlantic coast of the continent, where inexplicable biological laboratories are located – Cameroon Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone – are also turbulent places. In all mentioned countries violent civil wars have taken place. War is being still waged in some. Nigeria is especially concerned, where several insurgent (terrorist) groups are fighting against the federal government right away.

No one can tell what these biological laboratories are actually doing. They are almost closed to curious journalists. They are sometimes formally visited by international inspections along a predetermined route. We are more interested in the East of Africa

and, to some extent, the South and the Great African Lakes region, that is, in fact, Kenya with neighboring Tanzania, nearby Uganda and such a key player in this region of the continent as South Africa. It should be recalled that on March 26, 1975, the first international UN convention on the prohibition of an entire



class of weapons came into force. It was about weapons of mass destruction – biological (bacteriological). Currently, 183 States have signed this agreement.

But the prohibition of the development of new bacteriological weapons does not affect the work of "civilian" biological laboratories in any way. Given their superficial openness, it's not clear what's really going on there.

Let's move away from Africa. Back in 2020, when the COVID-19 outbreak occurred, the Chinese television channel China Television CCTV posted a video on the Internet about the worldwide disclosure of American biological laboratories. Chinese journalists have identified more than 200 such objects that are very inaccessible to the media in many countries of the world.

For example, Chinese journalists have dug up that a test tube with a strain of a still unknown virus that had disappeared from GNL (Galveston National Laboratory) on March 26, 2013 caused an epidemic of hemorrhagic fever in Venezuela, which led to numerous casualties.

Now directly about Kenya and neighbouring Tanzania: In 1973, USAMRU-K (the United States Army Medical Research Unit-K in Kenya) was established in the main city of Nairobi. It is located on Mbagathi Road. The first to sound the alarm about the current activities of the center were not the Chinese, but the Belgian mass-media. Belgian journalists have revealed the facts of the selection of children aged 5 to 17 months from indigent families for vaccine trials. Moreover, the children were not only from Kenya, but also from Tanzania and Mozambique, not so far away. Then the Kenyan press published a story that an incubator of 16 pathogens of extremely dangerous diseases is concentrated in the center.

It seems that the authorities of our continent's countries should attend to the availability of these inaccessible to journalists and inspections objects. Of course, they should not be eliminated at all. Under the supervision of international supervisors, it is necessary to destroy strains of pathogens of dangerous diseases, and transfer laboratory equipment to national medical departments. International control by, for example, the World Health Organization would not be superfluous. Kenya is a stable country. Which cannot be said, for example, about Uganda, which recently became a hotbed of almost all-African war. There are also classified laboratories there and it's unclear what they are doing.

Dayana da Silva is a Brussels-based Communicology expert, and research analyst.

# Pfizer mRNA Vaccine Makes 'Aberrant Proteins', About Autoimmunity Events

By Marina Zhang

Source: https://www.theepochtimes.com/health/1-in-10-chance-pfizer-mrna-vaccine-makes-aberrant-proteins-experts-concerned-about-autoimmunity-events-5545692



Dec 13 – There may be around a 1 in 10 chance that Pfizer mRNA COVID-19 vaccines will not generate spike proteins but something else, a new Cambridge study finds, raising concerns about autoimmune response among experts.

**Experts Concerned** 

The study authors found that 8 percent of the time, Pfizer mRNA COVID-19 vaccines are mistranslated, leading to the formation of unintended proteins.

This mistranslation is primarily driven by Pfizer's modification to their mRNA bases.

"Our work presents both a concern and a solution for this new type of medicine," said leading author Anne Willis in the study's press release.

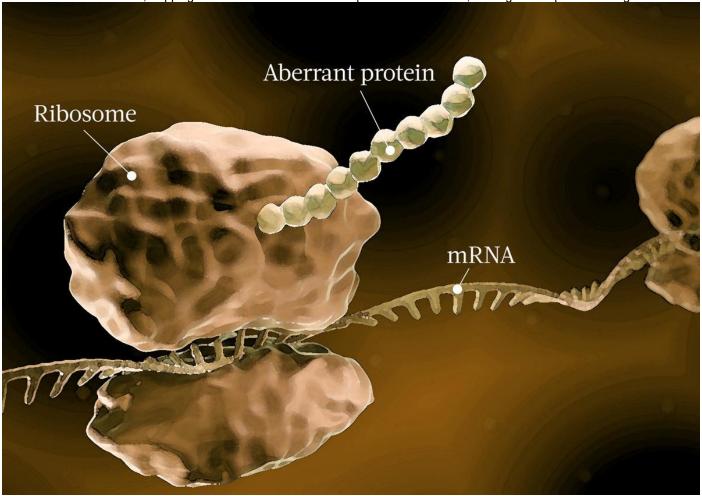
One can think of mRNA vaccines as a set of

instructions used to make spike proteins. Once the vaccine enters the cell, ribosomes interpret the mRNA instructions to make proteins, like spike proteins.

If the instructions are misinterpreted, errors in the final protein may be produced. Some errors are minor, like misspelling one word in a text, while others are more detrimental.



This misinterpretation is called a frameshift, which occurs when one or two mRNA bases are skipped. Since mRNA bases are translated in sets of threes, skipping a base would affect all the sequences downstream, leading to new proteins being formed.



When ribosomes make mistakes in mRNA translation, aberrant proteins are formed. (ART-ur/Shutterstock)

"Frameshifting results in the production multiple, unique and potentially aberrant proteins," immunologist Jessica Rose <u>wrote in her Substack article</u> discussing the study.

While most naturally occurring mRNA contains uridine, the Pfizer mRNA vaccines use N1-methylpseudouridine. This makes the mRNA sequence hardier and less prone to breakdown by the immune system. Pfizer's opting for less commonly occurring mRNA bases is also why some scientists call the mRNA vaccines modified RNA, or modRNA.

By implementing additional edits to the mRNA sequences, the authors were able to reduce further frameshifted proteins.

Although "there is no evidence: that the aberrant proteins generated by Pfizer vaccination are associated with adverse outcomes, for future use of mRNA technology, it is important that "mRNA sequence design is modified" to reduce these shifts, the authors concluded.

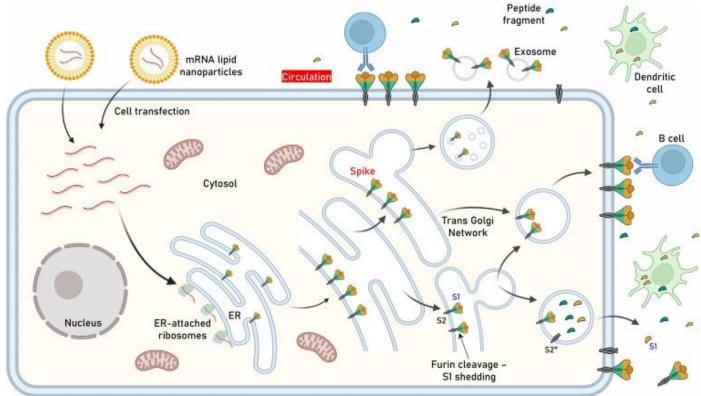
### Among Tested Vaccines, Only Pfizer Has the Issue

Apart from frameshift errors, the N1-methylpseudouridine modification can also slow down and interrupt mRNA translation to protein, potentially leading to shorter-than-expected protein sequences.

"Under ideal circumstances, ribosomes translate the vaccine mRNA into the S [spike] protein ... If the cellular machine (ribosomes) 'detect' the difference [between normal uridine and N1-methylpseudouridine], it can result in stalling or mistranslation," Dr. Adonis Sfera, assistant clinical professor of medicine at Loma Linda University, wrote to The Epoch Times via

<u>In the study</u>, the researchers first inoculated mice with both Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines. They found that Pfizer vaccines were significantly more likely to produce frameshifted proteins.

Researchers then compared vaccine inoculations in humans, comparing 21 participants who took the Pfizer vaccine to 20 who took the AstraZeneca vaccine. None of the AstraZeneca vaccinees had an immune reaction to proteins made from mistakes in translation, but around one-third of the Pfizer vaccinees did.



Trends in Molecular Medicine

The spike hypothesis – Following LNP internalization and mRNA release, the authentic viral signal peptide (as in the Pfizer—BioNTech and Moderna vaccines) drives antigen production in the lumen of the endoplasmic reticulum (ER) where it adopts its natural transmembrane localization via subunit 2 (S2) anchoring. After sorting in the trans Golgi network (TGN), S protein acquires its final position in the transfected human cell membrane, where S1 is exposed to the extracellular space (i.e., may face circulation). Although the extent of antigen expression per cell remains unknown, it is reasonable to assume that this process results in rather extended decoration of transfected cells with S protein. Furin-mediated proteolytic cleavage (as in SARS-CoV-2-infected cells) in the absence of a mutated S1/S2 furin cleavage site at the TGN may result in shedding of cleaved S1 and conversion of S2 into its postfusion structure (S2\*). Antigen sorting and trafficking may also induce the release of S protein-containing exosomes. The events shown will occur in the apical and/or basolateral surfaces of polarized (e.g., epithelial) cells. The Pfizer—BioNTech and Moderna constructs do not contain a mutated S1/S2 furin cleavage site. Further research will clarify the impact of the S1/S2 subunits stabilizing D614G (or other) mutation or of a mutated furin cleavage site in antigen distribution, the immunogenicity of the vaccine, and induced adverse events (AEs). Also shown are dendritic cells (professional antigen-presenting cells, APCs) engulfing circulating antigens, and antibody-mediated binding of B cells to cell-anchored antigens.

### **Misdirected Immunity and Autoimmunity**

The authors wrote that none of the Pfizer vaccinees developed adverse effects, but they were concerned about immunological consequences. "Mis-directed immunity has huge potential to be harmful," immunologist Dr. James Thaventhiran, one of the study's lead authors, said in the press release. "Off-target immune responses should always be avoided."

The authors did not further define misdirected immunity, though it generally describes a reaction where the body's immune system targets the wrong thing. In this case, it can mean that rather than training the body to fight spike protein, it is trained to fight unnaturally occurring proteins instead, as highlighted by Norwegian nutritional biologist Marit Kolby in her post on X.

Additionally, some health experts are concerned that these unique proteins may increase a person's risk of developing autoimmune

disorders. Molecular biologist professor Vladimir Uversky, PhD, from the University of South Florida and physician Dr. Alberto Rubio-Casillas concluded that autoimmunity may occur if immune cells start attacking cells producing these aberrant proteins. "A mistranslated protein can [also] resemble a human protein and trigger antibody formation," Dr. Sfera added. Autoimmunity occurs when the immune system attacks self-



tissues. It can occur for many years before symptoms manifest. Study findings by immunologist Aristo Vojdani suggest that spike proteins have the potential to cause cross-reactions—meaning the body accidentally targets self-tissue in a fight against other pathogens—with over 20 different human tissues, as they share structural similarities with human proteins. The production of these aberrant proteins and peptides may also increase a person's risks of cancer, Mr. Uversky and Dr. Rubio-Casillas added in an email to The Epoch Times. Melanoma cells have been shown to induce frameshifted proteins to escape immune detection. "In our opinion, there is a possibility that during the translation of mRNA from COVID-19 vaccines, the aberrant proteins generated during frameshifting could activate survival mechanisms mimicking those developed by cancer cells to escape immune surveillance," the two added.

### **Unknown Proteins in the Body**

Researchers currently do not know the structure or sequence of the new proteins formed. The authors identified in the study that one of the proteins detected was a chimeric protein—one formed by joining two or more genes that originally coded for separate proteins. The chimeric protein was structurally similar to human proteins, which might induce autoimmune responses.

"Of course, nobody knows for sure that the observations are linked to harms, but the fact they theoretically might be, and that regulators seem disinterested in investigating such a possibility, should be of huge concern to all," Dr. Jonathan Engler, co-chair of the Health Advisory and Recovery Team (HART) told The Epoch Times. HART is a UK group of academic experts sharing concerns about COVID-19-related recommendations.

"It should be emphasized that the ... paper was submitted for publication nearly a year ago, and presumably, the work was carried out some months before then. Moreover, the investigators weren't some third-rate-university, part-time academics," he added.

### Flawed Design

Dr. Engler said that the fact that the mRNA injections can be mistranslated is a design flaw. Other experts disagree.

"People are determined to make a mountain out of this molehill," Edward Nirenberg, a medical publisher, <u>criticized the concerns</u> in an X post about the study.

"Frameshifts are uncommon but naturally occurring events in, for example, viral infections ... These give rise to protein products that can also be targeted by the immune system."

However, authors of the study have highlighted in the press release that the synthetic mRNA sequence used in the vaccine was "error-prone." Pfizer did not respond to requests for comment.

**Marina Zhang** is a health writer for The Epoch Times, based in New York. She mainly covers stories on COVID-19 and the healthcare system and has a bachelors in biomedicine from The University of Melbourne.

## Llamas Hide a Powerful Weapon That Can Fight Deadly Virus Strains

Source: https://www.sciencealert.com/llamas-hide-a-powerful-weapon-that-can-fight-deadly-virus-strains

Dec 15 – As anyone who has had gastroenteritis will tell you, when <u>human noroviruses</u> hit, they hit hard. However, a new study suggests protection against these dangerous and evasive bugs could be found in an unlikely place: tiny particles produced by llamas.

Like humans, members of the camel family such as llamas (<u>Llama glama</u>) produce <u>antibodies</u> to protect against infection. Within camels and kin, however, these antibodies are much smaller than the ones in our bodies, which is why they're <u>known as nanobodies</u>.

Researchers led by a team from the Baylor College of Medicine tested llama nanobodies against different groups or strains of noroviruses. The GII.4 subgroup is most common in people, and is known for periodically mutating into <a href="mailto:new variants">new variants</a> that are harder to treat.

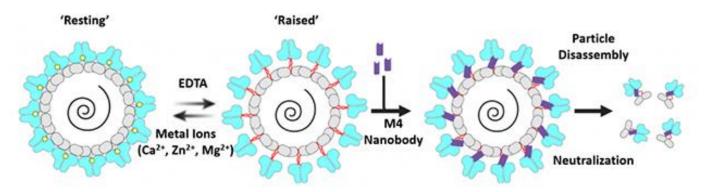
"We worked with one nanobody named M4, which bound to the predominant GII.4 strain, testing its ability to neutralize different norovirus strains," <u>says</u> molecular biologist Wilhelm Salmen from the University of Michigan.

"That is, to prevent them from infecting human cells."

M4 was tested on 'mini guts', lab-grown stand-ins for <u>human intestines</u> that were infected with GII.4. At very small scales, the researchers saw the llama nanobody interacting with and neutralizing GII.4, as well as its



older variants. The M4 nanobody appears to identify a hidden 'pocket' in the norovirus that's only exposed when the <u>virus</u> particle 'breathes', alternating between resting <u>and raised structures</u>. "We think that the raised state is important for the virus to bind to cells and infect them," <u>says</u> molecular biologist Bidadi Venkataram Prasad from the Baylor College of Medicine.



Llama M4 nanobody inserting into a 'raised' configuration of norovirus surface proteins neutralizes the virus particle. (<u>Salmen et al.</u>)

While the raised state enables the spread of the virus, it also leaves it vulnerable. Scientists <u>have reported</u> on this norovirus breathing before, but this new research helps confirm that the shape-shifting is required for infection to occur.

The M4 nanobody appears to be able to jump into this exposed pocket, pushing the norovirus into a more unstable state that's neither resting nor raised. With the virus particles unable to recover, the transmission of the virus is halted.

This research is still at its early stages, and yet to be tested in people, but it's a promising method of attack against <u>viruses</u> that cause hundreds of millions of <u>bouts of sickness</u> a year as well as more than 200,000 deaths, with infants and the elderly particularly at risk. The team behind the study is hopeful that it will be useful in tackling current and new norovirus strains across the board, as well as informing the way that the dynamics of virus particles are analyzed in <u>vaccine development</u>.

"We discovered that this little nanobody can recognize a part of the norovirus that all the different noroviruses that we tested have in common," says Salmen.

● The research has been published in <u>Nature Communications</u>.

# Euroviews. Brussels should know Al-assisted bioterrorism is a risk worth considering

By Kevin Esvelt, Benjamin Mueller

Source: https://www.euronews.com/next/2023/12/14/brussels-should-know-ai-assisted-bioterrorism-is-a-risk-worth-considering

Dec 14 – As the EU experienced with the Al Act, finding a trade-off between innovation and risks takes time. But the specific risks of Al-enabled bioterrorism can be tackled now, Kevin Esvelt and Ben Mueller write.

Al regulation has become an area of inter-state competition. While the EU just reached a deal on the Al Act, the US has previously released a far-reaching executive order on Al, and the UK convened political and industry leaders at the Al Safety Summit.

In many of these discussions, one risk is getting more attention: Al-assisted bioterrorism, or the ability of individuals to cause catastrophe by using Al tools to get access to a pandemic virus.

We recently showed that this is a risk worth considering. In an informal experiment, we tasked individuals with using an open-source large-language model that had its safeguards removed to help them obtain a pathogen capable of causing a pandemic.

Within three hours, participants identified many of the steps required to start a potentially catastrophic outbreak.

Particularly concerning was that the model advised participants on how to access the viral DNA — the blueprint for creating the pathogen — while evading existing screening methods. The extent to which current models aid bioterrorism by summarising information that already exists online remains unclear.

However, current capabilities aside, the findings suggest that in the absence of robust safeguards, more advanced future models might provide malicious individuals with streamlined and accessible information on how to access, construct, and release a pandemic virus.



A lab officer cuts a DNA fragment under UV light to determine genetic mutation in a blood cancer patient, in Singapore, April 2007AP Photo/Wong Maye-e

### A technology open to malicious actors

The DNA constructs required to build a virus from scratch can be ordered online: many gene synthesis providers will manufacture a thousand base pair pieces of DNA for under €200 — something that only a few decades ago took researchers thousands of hours and warranted a Nobel Prize.

The advent of custom gene synthesis is now a pillar of the biological sciences, allowing researchers to rapidly iterate on the design of mRNA-based vaccines and therapeutics, among many other benefits. However, just as advances in gene synthesis enable new discoveries and treatments, the technology can also be misused by malicious actors to access pandemic pathogens.

Many companies have taken the important step of screening orders to detect DNA from dangerous pathogens.

As EU policymakers think about appropriate reactions to Al's rapid progress, one simple guardrail deserves closer scrutiny: a legal requirement to screen all gene synthesis orders for hazardous sequences.

But not all of them do. Language-based Al models can already advise individuals how to identify and exploit such loopholes to obtain the DNA of pandemic-capable pathogens.

Echoing this concern, the CEO of Anthropic, a leading Al company, recently warned US lawmakers that within two years, next-generation Al systems could enable large-scale bioterrorism unless appropriate guardrails are put in place.

Yoshua Bengio, one of the "Godfathers of Al" voiced similar concerns. As EU policymakers think about appropriate reactions to Al's rapid progress, one simple guardrail deserves closer scrutiny: a legal requirement to screen all gene synthesis orders for hazardous sequences.

Fewer than one hundred highly specialised companies provide DNA synthesis services, which offers an ideal policy lever: if the EU requires companies to screen all orders against an up-to-date database of known pandemic pathogens and implement know-your-customer requirements, bad actors can no longer access the building blocks required to seed the next pandemic.

### The case for mandatory gene synthesis screening

The US has already taken steps to secure gene synthesis. The government's recent Executive Order on Al mandates federally funded entities to follow the government's new biological synthesis screening guidelines.



### ICI C2BRNE DIARY - December 2023

The EU itself has not yet passed regulations on the issue. Given the growing risk of pandemic-level bioterrorism, a mandate for gene synthesis screening would be a first, meaningful step.

Providers representing over 80% of the industry are in favour of mandates. Others have legitimate concerns about the potential costs of gene synthesis screening and worry about potential intellectual property concerns, but the imminent release of free, privacy-preserving screening tools should mitigate this issue.

Custom gene synthesis is a fundamental enabler of these remarkable benefits. But the harm caused by SARS-CoV-2, a single historically mild pandemic virus, demonstrates that its misuse — made more likely by advancements in generative AI — could do harm on a scale that outweighs all of these benefits.

A mandated screening system should fulfil several criteria. Orders should be encrypted to preserve privacy and subjected to screening that exclusively detects hazards with negligibly few false alarms, while authorised laboratories need to be offered a way to seamlessly obtain permitted DNA sequences without delays.

Furthermore, all screening systems should verifiably check orders against a database of hazardous sequences that is immediately updated to detect newly identified potential pandemic pathogens, with strong incentives to use best-in-class screening as determined by "red-teaming" efforts that test how readily hazardous sequences can be obtained without detection.

Finally, new DNA synthesis and assembly devices, such as benchtop synthesisers, should incorporate built-in screening that meets the above criteria. Implementing rigorous screening protocols based on these criteria is vital to fully realise biotechnology's farreaching benefits while securing it against misuse.

### Safeguarding biology's promise

Progress in both biotechnology and artificial intelligence will drive revolutionary advances in the life sciences and medicine.

Custom gene synthesis is a fundamental enabler of these remarkable benefits. But the harm caused by SARS-CoV-2, a single historically mild pandemic virus, demonstrates that its misuse — made more likely by advancements in generative AI — could do harm on a scale that outweighs all of these benefits.

As the European Union experienced with the Al Act, finding a trade-off between fostering innovation and reducing risks takes time. But the specific risks of Al-enabled bioterrorism, acknowledged both by industry leaders and biosecurity professionals, can be tackled now. By mandating gene synthesis screening, the European Union can lower these risks substantially, safeguarding the promise of ever-advancing biotechnology.

**Kevin Esvelt** is an associate professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Lab, where he directs the Sculpting Evolution group. He co-founded the SecureDNA Foundation, a Switzerland-based nonprofit.

**Ben Mueller** is a Research Scientist at MIT and COO at SecureBio, an organisation that works on the policies and technologies to safeguard against future pandemics.

# **Long COVID Rate in Africa Is Almost 50% of Cases, Researchers Warn**

Source: https://www.sciencealert.com/long-covid-rate-in-africa-is-almost-50-of-cases-researchers-warn

Dec 18 – Almost half the people known to have contracted <u>COVID-19</u> in Africa are now living with the effects of <u>long COVID</u>, according to a comprehensive review of previous studies and analysis, covering data from a total of 29, 213 people.

Officially, long COVID means persisting symptoms three months after infection with the <u>SARS-CoV-2 virus</u>. Worldwide, <u>at least 10 percent of infected people</u> are thought to suffer from the condition, with <u>recently published research</u> indicating higher rates <u>in multiple</u> countries.

Incidence rates in Africa, though, are well above any of these other estimates. Why that is the case is unclear. In low-income countries, estimates of the incidence of long COVID vary greatly, due to hidden infections and the difficulty of accessing tests.

Between African nations, for instance, previous estimates range from just 2 percent in Ghana to 86 percent in Egypt.

The fact that <u>fewer than 51.8 percent of people</u> in African nations are fully vaccinated could also be another factor at play. Yet specific data on vaccination status and COVID-19 outcomes in this part of the world are largely unknown.

What's more, a large percentage of the patients analyzed in the current review were hospitalized or admitted to the intensive care unit, indicating a bias toward the most severe cases.

The team behind the review, led by researchers from the University of Bari in Italy, wants more research to be done, so that experts can properly assess the impact of long COVID on the African continent and get treatment and support to those who need it.



### ICI C2BRNE DIARY - December 2023

"To our knowledge, this is the first <u>meta-analysis</u> exploring prevalence, risk factors and symptomatology of long COVID in Africa," write the researchers in their published paper.

"Nearly 50 percent of the people included in this meta-analysis exhibited long COVID symptoms. This finding reinforces the critical significance of this emerging condition."

Older people are more likely to experience long COVID, the review showed, which fits in with previous research. What didn't match the results of earlier studies was that there was no significant difference between men and women and long COVID risk.

Cognitive impairment was the most common neurologic symptom, with shortness of breath the most common respiratory symptom. Psychiatric conditions were common, with a quarter of those with long COVID reporting post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

"This is concerning, because the additional burden in mental health disorder brought by the COVID-19 <u>pandemic</u> and its chronic consequences meets a health system which is largely unprepared to address mental health conditions," <u>write</u> the researchers.

While long COVID severity and symptoms can vary, it is a debilitating condition for many. Here, the team found that a quarter of people with long COVID said they had a poor quality of life as a result, with fatigue and loss of appetite often mentioned.

Right now, we don't have a cure for long COVID, though the symptoms can be treated to some extent in some cases. Research is continuing into how the condition affects the body, and how it might be combated.

As far as Africa is concerned, the researchers are calling for more data to be collected on long COVID across the continent, and for a raising awareness of how prevalent this condition might be – something that could ultimately help those affected. "High-quality studies addressing this condition in African settings are urgently needed," write the researchers.

• The research has been published in Scientific Reports.

# JN.1 Covid variant: How was it detected, what is the threat level and what happens next?

Source: https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/2023/12/20/jn1-covid-variant-what-threat/

Dec 20 – The <u>JN.1 coronavirus</u> strain has been spreading globally, with the <u>World Health Organisation</u> on Tuesday classifying it as a "variant of interest".

It is more contagious than other variants currently circulating, with cases reported in <u>India</u>, <u>China</u>, the <u>US</u> and <u>Singapore</u>. Here's everything we know so far:

#### What is the JN.1 Covid variant?

The JN.1 variant is a descendant of the BA. 2.86 variant that carries more than 30 mutations in the spike protein.

"Covid is with us permanently and we have to be vigilant about new strains like JN.1, a sub-lineage of BA. 2.86 Omicron, that appears correlated with increase in hospitalisation for respiratory illness," said Ramanan Laxminarayan, president of health research organisation One Health Trust.

"We don't yet know if the JN.1 strain is behind these hospitalisations. But given that <u>Covid vaccination</u> in India is no longer a continuing effort and JN.1 is able to avoid immune response to be able to spread rapidly, there is a possibility that lack of population immunity puts us – especially the elderly population – at risk for illness and hospitalisation," he told *The National*.

### How was it detected?

The first case of JN.1 was recorded in the US in September.

### What is the threat level?

JN.1 has not shown any signs of greater severity than other Covid strains.

While there might be more cases, JN.1 doesn't pose a greater risk, Andrew Pekosz, a virologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, told Reuters.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) said current vaccines will continue to protect against severe disease and death from JN.1 and other Covid variants.



A patient at a Covid field hospital in Bangalore, India. The country has reported its first case of the JN.1 strain. EPA

#### What does variant of interest mean?

The WHO's definition states that a variant of interest has "genetic changes that are predicted or known to affect virus characteristics such as transmissibility, virulence, antibody evasion, susceptibility to therapeutics and detectability".

So, JN.1 is more contagious than other Covid strains at this time.

It is also "identified to have a growth advantage over other circulating variants in more than one WHO region with increasing relative prevalence alongside increasing number of cases over time, or other

apparent epidemiological impacts to suggest an emerging risk to global public health".



### What happens next?

The WHO will review JN.1 for the rate it spreads, how easy it is to treat and draw comparisons with other similar variants.

Co-ordinated laboratory investigations with member states will be carried out, if deemed necessary.

Nations with reported cases will also submit complete genome sequences and associated metadata to a publicly available database. Alongside this, field investigations will be carried out to improve public understanding of the new strain.

# World Health Organization monitoring anthrax outbreak in Zambia

Source: https://njtoday.news/2023/12/22/world-health-organization-monitoring-anthrax-outbreak-in-zambia/

Zambia is grappling with its most significant anthrax outbreak in a decade, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). As of late November 2023, the country has reported 684 suspected cases and four deaths, marking a substantial increase from the 2011 outbreak, which had 511 suspected cases. Anthrax is a serious infectious disease caused by gram-positive, rod-shaped bacteria known as Bacillus anthracis. It occurs naturally in soil and commonly affects domestic and

wild animals around the world. People can get sick with anthrax if they come in contact with infected animals or contaminated animal products. Anthrax usually does not spread from person to person. Exposure occurs through ingestion of contaminated animal products, inhalation, or entry through skin cuts.

The resulting symptoms depend on the type of exposure, ranging from skin sores to severe abdominal pain and respiratory distress. The outbreak's epicenter is Sinazongwe district, accounting for 287 cases (42% of the total) and two deaths (50% of the total). The most affected provinces include Southern (54%), Western (12%), Lusaka (12%), Eastern (10%), and Muchinga (7%).

The outbreak began with the first human cases reported in May, linked to the consumption of meat from three hippopotamus carcasses. Vaccines for both livestock and humans are in limited supply, with efforts focused on livestock vaccination and meat inspections in abattoirs and butcher shops. Biological agents are germs that can sicken or kill people, livestock, or crops. If a bioterrorist attack were to happen, anthrax could be one of the biological agents most likely to be used.

Anthrax is one of the most likely agents to be used because:

- Anthrax spores are easily found in nature, can be produced in a lab, and can last for a long time in the environment.
- Anthrax makes a good weapon because it can be released quietly and without anyone knowing. The microscopic spores
  could be put into powders, sprays, food, and water. Because they are so small, you may not be able to see, smell, or taste
  them.
- Anthrax has been used as a weapon before.

Anthrax has been used as a weapon around the world for nearly a century.





In 2001, powdered anthrax spores were deliberately put into letters that were mailed through the U.S. postal system. Twenty-two people, including 12 mail handlers, got anthrax, and five of those 22 people died.

A subset of select agents and toxins have been designated as Tier 1 because these biological agents and toxins present the greatest risk of deliberate misuse with significant potential for mass casualties or devastating effects on the economy, critical infrastructure, or public confidence, and pose a severe threat to public health and safety.

Bacillus anthracis is a Tier 1 agent.

# **Using AI, MIT Researchers Discover the First New Antibiotics** in Over 60 Years

Source: https://www.techtimes.com/articles/299936/20231221/using-ai-mit-researchers-discover-first-new-antibiotics.htm

Dec 21 – Using a type of artificial intelligence (AI) known as deep learning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) researchers discovered a new class of antibiotics for drug-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) bacteria.

According to <u>Euronews</u>, this AI technology helped scientists to unlock the first new antibiotics in 60 years. The transparent deep learning models reportedly not only identified this new compound that can kill a drug-resistant bacterium but also shed light on the information used by the AI model to make predictions about certain molecules that would make for good antibiotics.

### **New Class of Antibiotics Identified by AI**

The researchers demonstrated that this newly identified compound exhibits the ability to eliminate methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) in laboratory settings and two mouse models of MRSA infection. Importantly, this compound demonstrated low toxicity against human cells, making it a promising candidate for drug development.

The study, part of the Antibiotics-Al Project at MIT, is spearheaded by James Collins, the Termeer Professor of Medical Engineering and Science in MIT's Institute for Medical Engineering and Science (IMES) and Department of Biological Engineering. The project aims to discover new classes of antibiotics targeting seven types of deadly bacteria over a seven-year period. MRSA, a bacterium responsible for infecting more than 80,000 people in the United States annually, poses a significant health threat, often causing skin infections, pneumonia, and, in severe cases, sepsis, a potentially fatal bloodstream infection. The

researchers used deep learning models capable of learning chemical structures associated with

antimicrobial activity. These models analyzed vast datasets, evaluating around 39,000 compounds for their antibiotic activity against MRSA.

### **Monte Carlo Tree Search**

The transparency achieved in this study is a notable advancement, as deep-learning models are typically regarded as "black boxes" due to the lack of insight into the features guiding their predictions. Felix Wong and Erica Zheng, lead authors of the study, adapted the "Monte Carlo tree search" making process. algorithm to unravel the deep-learning model's decision-This algorithm not only estimated each molecule's antimicrobial activity but also predicted the substructures of the molecule likely responsible for that activity. To refine the selection of potential drugs, the researchers trained additional learning models to predict toxicity against three different types of human cells. The combination of information on antimicrobial activity and toxicity yielded compounds capable of killing microbes while minimizing adverse effects on human cells. In screening approximately 12 million commercially available compounds, the models identified promising candidates from five different classes, each based on distinct chemical substructures. Experimental validation of these predictions involved testing around 280 compounds, ultimately identifying two promising antibiotic candidates from the same class. "We have pretty strong evidence that this new structural class is active against Gram-positive pathogens by selectively dissipating the proton motive force in bacteria," Wong said in a statement. "The molecules are attacking bacterial cell membranes selectively, in a way that does not incur substantial damage in human cell membranes. Our substantially augmented deep learning approach allowed us to predict this new structural class of antibiotics and enabled the finding that it is not toxic against human cells," he added.

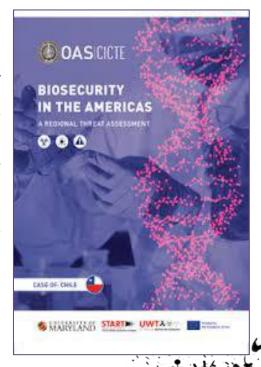
• The findings of the research team were published in the journal Nature.

# **Biosecurity in the Americas: Regional Threat Assessment**

 ${\color{red} \textbf{Source: } \underline{\textbf{https://www.start.umd.edu/publication/biosecurity-americas-regional-threat-assessment}}$ 

This publication, currently available in Spanish, provides a breadth and depth of focuses as a high-level assessment of the Central and South America regions and introduction to key topics as:

- 1. The needed expansion of understanding of the differences and areas of collaboration between the concepts of biosafety and biosecurity,
- 2. Existing international obligations to biosecurity through the BWC and UNSC Resolution 1540.
- 3. How biosecurity applies to and may differ in application across a variety of facility types that engage in biological research or production, whether private or public laboratories, agricultural or university-based facilities,
- 4. Biosecurity risks that include proliferation, bioterrorism, agroterrorism, and biocrime
- 5. The five pillars and mechanisms of biosecurity,
- 6. Lastly, the application of biosecurity in the Central and South American regions.



### **Does Al Enable and Enhance Biorisks?**

Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20231223-does-ai-enable-and-enhance-biorisks

Dec 23 – More and more government directives, international conferences, and media headlines reflect a growing concern with the potential of artificial intelligence to exacerbate biological threats. Al tools are cited as enablers and enhancers of biorisks as a result of the ability of Al to lower information barriers, enhance novel biothreat design, or otherwise increase a malicious actor's capabilities. Georgetown University's CSET has just published a new report, written by Steph Batalis, on the Al and biorisks. Here are the report's

### **Executive Summary and Conclusions:**

### **Executive Summary**

Recent government directives, international conferences, and media headlines reflect growing concern that artificial intelligence could exacerbate biological threats. When it comes to biorisk, AI tools are cited as enablers that lower information barriers, enhance novel biothreat design, or otherwise increase a malicious actor's capabilities.

It is important to evaluate Al's impact within the existing biorisk landscape to assess the relationship between Al-agnostic and Al-enhanced risks. While Al can alter the potential for biological misuse, focusing attention solely on Al may detract from existing, foundational biosecurity gaps that could be addressed with more comprehensive oversight.

Policies that effectively mitigate biorisks will also need to account for the varied risk landscape, because safeguards that work in one case are unlikely to be effective for all actors and scenarios. In this explainer, we outline the Al-agnostic and Al-enhanced biorisk landscape to inform targeted policies that mitigate real scenarios of risk without overly inhibiting Al's potential to accelerate cutting-edge biotechnology.

Our Key Takeaways regarding Al and biorisk are:

- 1. Biorisk is already possible without AI, even for non-experts. Al tools are not needed to access the foundational information and resources to cause biological harm. This highlights the need for layered safeguards throughout the process, from monitoring certain physical materials to bolstering biosafety and biosecurity training for researchers. The recent Executive Order on Al's requirement to screen DNA synthesis for federally-funded research is an example of a barrier to material acquisition.
- **2.** The biorisk landscape is not uniform, and specific scenarios and actors should be assessed individually. Distinct combinations of users and Al tools impact the potential for harm and the most effective likely policy solutions. Future strategies should identify clearly defined scenarios of concern and design policies to target them.
- **3. Existing policies regarding biosecurity and biosafety oversight need to be clarified and strengthened.** Al-enabled biological designs are digital predictions that do not cause physical harm until they are produced in the real world. Such gain-of-function research, which modifies pathogens to be more dangerous, is already the target of existing policies. However, these policies do not adequately define what characteristics constitute risky research of concern, making them difficult to interpret and implement. These policies are currently under review, and could be strengthened by establishing a standard framework of acceptable and unacceptable risk applicable to both Alenhanced and Al-agnostic biological experimentation.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The diversity of the biorisk landscape highlights the need to clearly identify which scenarios and actors are of concern. If this step is not considered, future policies may fail to address precisely those scenarios and actors of most concern. For example, biosecurity initiatives that use federal research funding as the policy lever only address one type of potentially risky actor. This approach can mitigate unintentional risk during the course of federally-funded biological research, but is unlikely to prevent deliberate bioweapon production from lone malicious actors (because such actors are unlikely to seek such funding to support bioweapon development). If lone malicious actors are of concern, then they will need to be targeted with different policy tools.

It will also be important to consider Al-enhanced risk within the current biorisk landscape. Both experts and non-experts can cause biological harm without the need for Al tools, highlighting the need for layered safeguards throughout the biorisk chain. Strategies that evaluate both Al-enhanced and Al-agnostic risks can differentiate between

pre-existing risks and novel ones. This will be critical to build an effective foundation for

biosecurity and biosafety oversight and more targeted measures to safeguard against Al-enabled risk.

As the United States revisits its biosecurity and biosafety oversight frameworks, a comprehensive review of the biorisk landscape could help to avoid ineffective policies that do not address the scenario of concern, or overbearing policies that hinder beneficial applications. By clearly defining the threats of concern and developing targeted mitigation measures, future policy can safeguard against the next generation of emerging biothreats.









