ICI C²BRNE DIARY

Dedicated to Global First Responders

January 2023

PART A

C²BRNE DIARY– 2022©

January 2023

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2023 HAPPY NEW YEAR

SINCE 2005

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CBRNE-Terrorism Newsletter
WMD

C²BRNE DIARY

Topics that attracted attention!

EDITOR'S CORNER

Editorial
Brig Gen (ret.) Ioannis Galatas, MD, MSc, MC (Army)

Editor-in-Chief
ICI C²BRNE Diary

Dear Colleagues,

The risk remains the same: war – pandemic – stupidity.

Risk: High

War: Ukraine received equivalent financial aid, as well as loans from abroad that exceeded $32 billion in 2022, after the Russian military invasion in late February. About 40% came from the US, as announced by the Central Bank of Ukraine on Friday evening. A little less than 25% came from the European Union, while about 8% came from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Recently (Jan 2023) US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken announced more than $3.75 billion in military aid to Ukraine and countries affected by the Russian "invasion". Blinken said in a statement that he has approved the withdrawal of US weapons and equipment for Ukraine, which includes $2.85 billion in Bradley infantry fighting vehicles, artillery systems, armored personnel carriers, surface-to-air missiles, ammunition, and other items for the support of Ukraine. Remember the 1976 Abba song "*Money, money, money*"? And guess what! Veteran Islamist Chechen terrorist Rustam Azhiev (better known as Abdulhakim al-Shishani) is fighting together with Ukrainians under the Ichkerian OBON Battalion paid by alliance money – our money! Meanwhile, the U.S. national debt has surpassed 31 trillion U.S. dollars for the first time amid higher interest rates, raising concerns about fiscal sustainability.

War ethics: The first NASAMS air defense system is donated by Canada to Ukraine, after its purchase from the US, which will cost 282 million euros! The Netherlands is considering providing Patriot missiles. "American/NATO (Ukrainian) Brigades" are preparing in Germany (Grafenwoehr Base). Fifty (50) countries who send weapons to Ukraine will meet (20/01) in Ramstein, Germany to synchronize their actions. Ukraine has asked the Greek government to give it some or all of the 183 LEO2A4 main battle tanks that the Army has in order to use them against the Russians – hope that Greek logic will prevail. It has become so unethical to support others to fight on your behalf! It has to be stopped though I have the suspicion that Zelensky wants to drug EU, NATO/USA into direct confrontation with Russia. He is already very rich and he will disappear on time to save his life.

NATO: Is Britain behind Turkey opposing the integration of Sweden and Finland in NATO (North Atlantic Turkey Organization)?

Pandemic: CDC finally released its VAERS Safety Monitoring Analyses for COVID vaccines and now it's clear why they tried to hide them. In addition, the new trend would be to develop mRNA vaccines for the flu. So, think twice now that you know! Keep the mask on!

Nukes: 2023 might be the year that Iran will announce that now has the bomb (bombs rather) and nobody would be able to do something about it – unless a neighbor might have a different opinion even if resulting in a WW3. A lesson learned from 2022 is that being a nuclear power does not alter the behavior of another nation – e.g., Turkey – USA – NATO behavior and double games with Russia and Ukraine. On top of that, after John Kerry, Al Gore appeared at the World Economic Forum as the

"chosen one" who will save the planet from destruction and with a highly delusional speech claimed that ... climate change has caused warming equal to 600,000 atomic bombs the size of Hiroshima on a daily basis! Come on! Give us a break!

The Editor-in-Chief
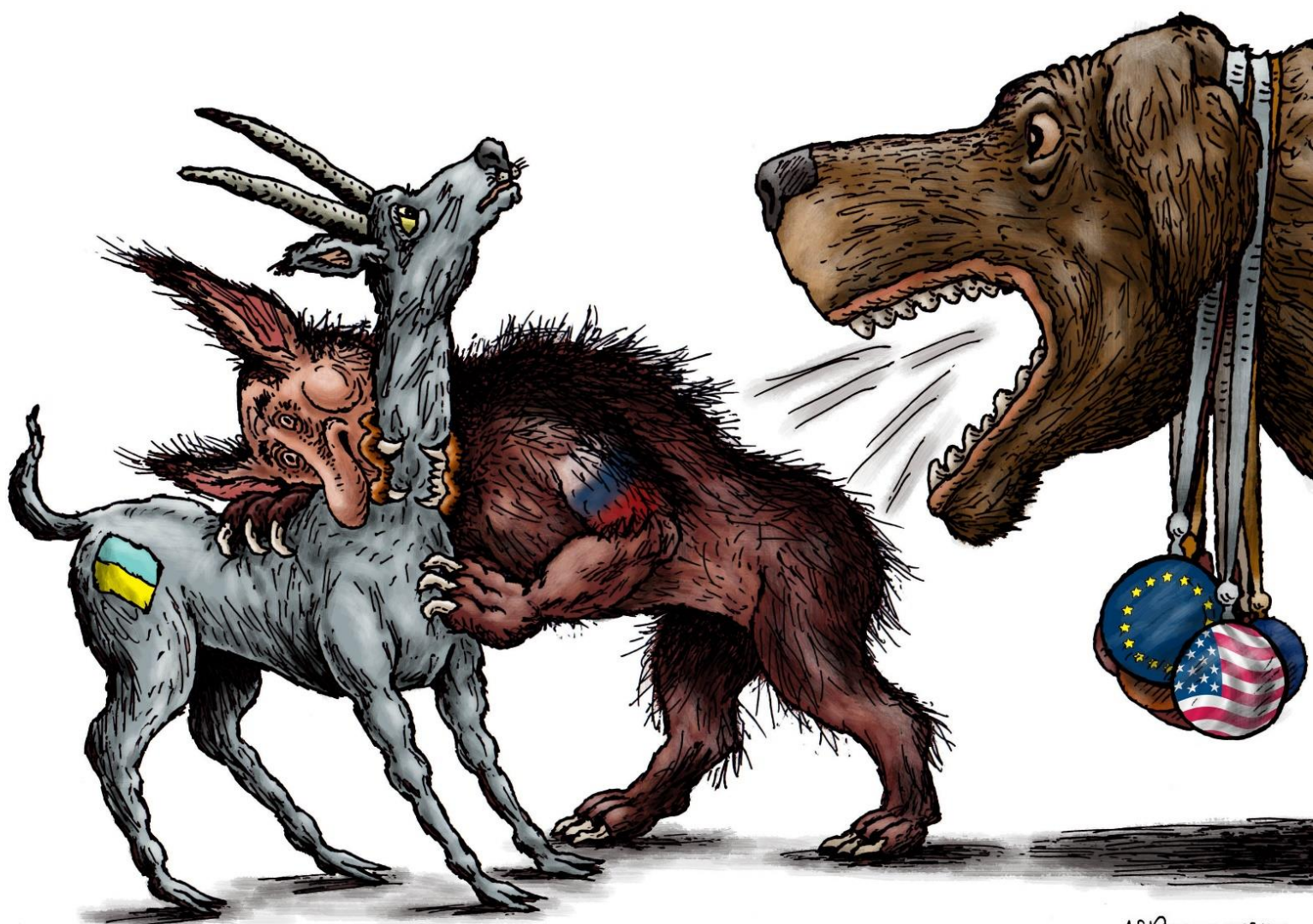
COVER PHOTO
Jun 8, 2016
MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan - U.S. Marines from 3rd Marine Division, Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear defense platoon, Headquarters Battalion, III Marine Expeditionary Force, evacuate simulated casualties during exercise Habu Sentinel 16 at Disaster Village, Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, June 7, 2016. As the annual capstone exercise for the division's response element, this event encompasses multiple objectives specific to CBRN response and validates unit standard operating procedures in an unfamiliar training environment. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Jessica Quezada/Released)

CULTURE

How Global South Artists Are Upending 72 Years of CIA Influence on Art

The CIA spent decades promoting apolitical, individualist art. These artists are fighting back.

PANTHEA LEE   DECEMBER 23, 2022

Panthea Lee is an ethnographer, writer and activist based in Brooklyn, N.Y. She is currently writing a book on healing, imagination and structural justice.

How Would a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan Play Out?

By Neal E. Robbins (freelance journalist based in Cambridge, England)
Source:
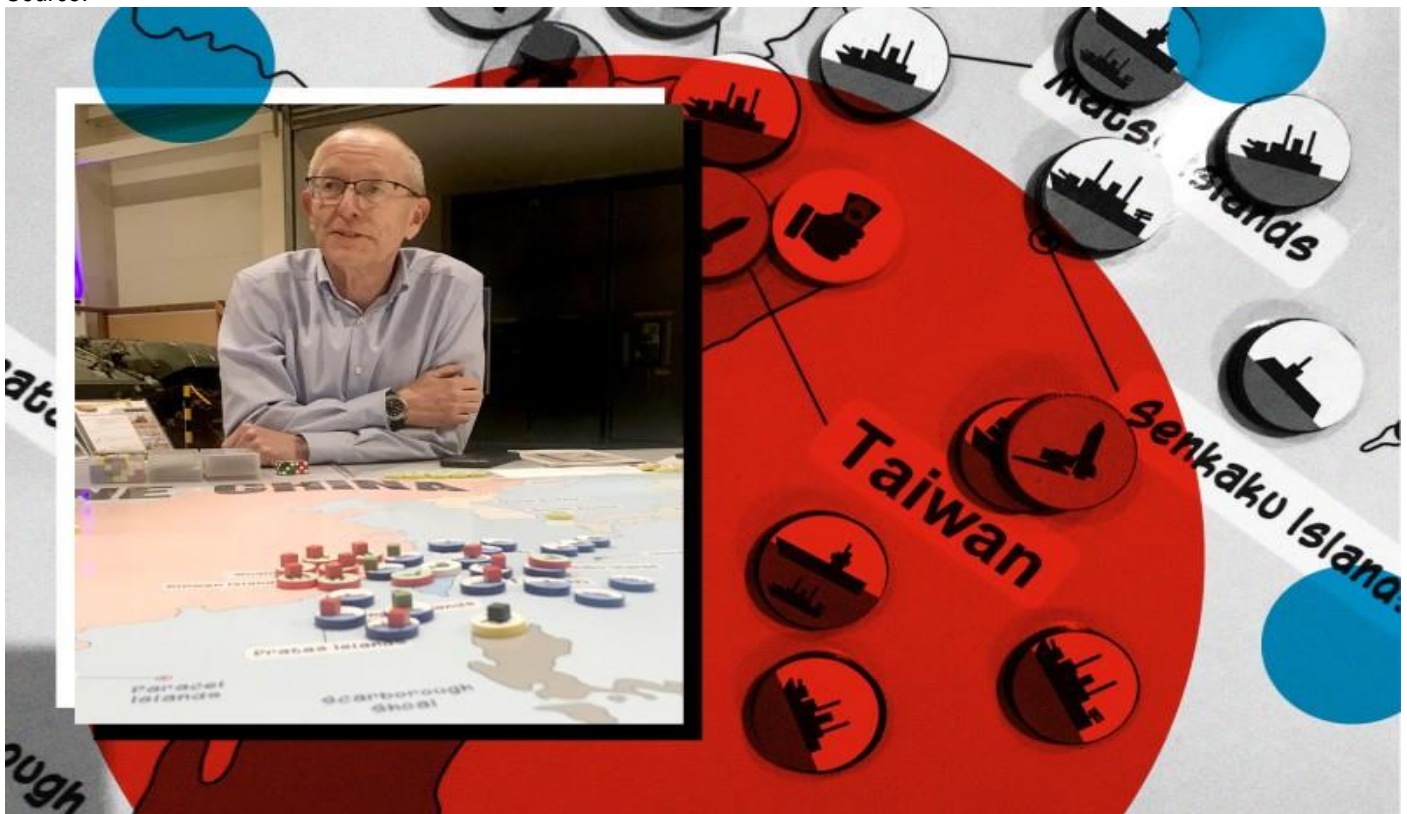
War game designer and expert Major Tom Mouat oversees a "One China" game at the U.K. Defence Academy on Nov. 9. Neal E. Robbins photo/foreign Policy illustration

Dec 23 — It's 2025. China has blockaded Taiwan. Aircraft carriers, submarines, and war planes circle the island, keeping out all but humanitarian aid. U.S., Taiwanese, and allied battleships hover nearby, but tense talks have drawn a blank. Then a bloody invasion starts.
How did it come to this?

Maj. Tom Mouat watches with dismay. This is not how things usually play out. "We've got to a shooting war, which is really depressing," he said. The British war-gaming expert has run this simulation before. Normally, when pitting Beijing's ambitions of control against its democratic neighbor's commitment to self-governance, conflict just "inches a bit closer to happening." Then everybody backs off. But this time, as Mouat put it, there is a stream of "declarations coming out of China, and [the war in] Ukraine has changed the balance." Even as the game's role-players were making their moves on Nov. 9, Chinese President Xi Jinping, in the real world, told his army chiefs to "comprehensively strengthen military training in preparation for war"—words seen as a warning for Taiwan and the United States, which helps arm Taipei and maintains a "keep them guessing" policy about its willingness to come to the island's defense.

The major, dressed in civilian clothing, sits in a long hall lined with tanks, a drone, and a fighter jet, which are part of a training exhibit at the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, where he works. Before him, folding tables hold a pastel gaming map of East Asia dotted with wooden discs bearing icons of ships, planes, troops, nukes, money, spies, and one—printed with a blue man at a lectern—that he keeps calling "waffly diplomatic action."

Around the table, U.K. and U.S. military and academic types—who for security reasons must remain anonymous—are playing the parts of China's leadership, China's military, and the governments of the United States, Taiwan, Australia, and Japan. They have set their secret policy goals and one by one propose anything they want to happen in pursuit of their countries' aims—anything, that is, they can make a convincing argument for. The players then discuss each action. If they disagree on its plausibility, Mouat—as the game facilitator—crowdsources a judgment on its chance of success from both the other players and expert observers around the table who choose from among 10 percent to 90 percent probability cards. He then throws out the red and green casino dice, representing chance. What is deemed to be unlikely might still succeed if the numbers rolled are high enough (or vice versa). Success or failure is calculated with a probability curve combining the numbers on the dice and the average of the percentages on the cards. Mouat, who has developed war games since 1988, has refined his rules over time based on academic research about crowdsourcing, role-playing, and prediction. A normal game, he said, takes around three hours and should not run for longer than a day. "The cone of probabilities gets wider the longer you play, so the chances of getting a good predictive outcome are less," he said.

So-called matrix board games like this are used regularly by diplomats, policy analysts, and senior military officials not only to discover how conflicts might unfold but also to "put a face to things they know are true but are reluctant to accept," said Rand Corporation war games expert David A. Shlapak. "Having them understand their own unspoken beliefs about the world is tremendously valuable." Such games have helped parse many a global dilemma and are credited, for example, with a key role in the defeat of the German U-boats in World War II.

One of the earliest known war games was designed in ancient China, often credited to the general Sun Tzu. By the 17th century, complex war games had been developed, such as a "king's game" that was widely used by the militaries of the German states. In the 19th and 20th centuries, as growing armies made full-scale mobilization practice impractical or provocative, more nations started using war games to help simulate deployment. War games have since grown apace, for both strategy and leisure. Mouat runs classified games for decision-makers in Britain and other countries; dedicated aficionados also play unclassified versions that Mouat has posted online, along with a 52-page practical guide.

Our game, which used unclassified briefing materials due to my presence as a reporter, is part of a training series for military strategists honing their analytical skills. Mouat described the exercise as "qualitative, not quantitative, less single-shot kill probability and more: How effective was [Ukrainian President Volodymyr] Zelensky's speech and Donald Trump's tweet?" He has been in demand of late—especially since U.K. Defence Minister Ben Wallace, Mouat said, has been encouraging military specialists, policy officials, and parliamentarians to use the games to "do more thinking and understanding" and act less on "knee-jerk reactions."

Tonight's game begins in the present and opens with the Chinese government player pushing a policy of unification through economic pressure. Beijing offers Taipei subsidized food supplies to undercut U.S. interests and gain leverage over the island's economy. None of the players object, all regarding the action as routine, so Beijing's move goes ahead. But the island is unfazed. In its turn, Taiwan extends its compulsory military service period to boost its forces, which are massively outgunned by China. Washington sends an economic delegation to Beijing, hoping to defuse tensions, but the players and expert observers groan. The probability cards come out, setting a 30 percent chance of success, and a low dice roll shows the U.S. overture fails to help.

A year later in sped-up game time, the United States boosts military naval exercises with Australia, Japan, and other countries off the coast of the Philippines. In response, China puts on a big show of force around the Taiwan Strait, as it did for U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit this past August. Lots of wooden naval and aircraft game pieces are flung out on the board to represent this display.

Mouat declares the game has now jumped another year ahead. China, rebuffed in its diplomatic overtures to Taiwan, begins a stealth occupation of the Kinmen islands. Just off China's coast, these fortified islets

are a favorite destination for ferry-borne Chinese tourists, but the latest batch turn out to be out-of-uniform soldiers, who, without firing a shot, occupy this remote bit of Taiwan. The United States announces a dispatch of new high-tech arms to Taiwan. Taiwan defends Kinmen and its other far-flung, front-line coastal islets with sea mines. China reacts forcefully with an air-and-naval blockade, cutting off Taiwan's 23.5 million residents from the outside world. So begins a Cuban missile crisis-style standoff, with only humanitarian aid allowed in.

By now it's early 2025. China, the United States, and Taiwan meet for negotiations, which quickly falter—with China insisting Taiwan accept Chinese control, and Taiwan standing firm in refusing this involuntary unification. Still no shots have been fired, but China masses invasion forces on its coast, a process that takes at least a month.

Will they really invade? The players debate this point, keeping in character:

China: "We are open to negotiations."

Taiwan: "We just tried negotiating and there seemed to be an impasse."

China: "We are saying your government has been entirely unwilling to open dialogue [as we define it]; ergo, we are going to talk to your government directly."

Taiwan: "Untrue."

China: "Then my policy action is to order our troops … to put boots on the ground, to not shoot civilians, make a clear beeline toward the Taiwan capital, and then take the ruling government and parliament hostage."

Taiwan: "That is not going to work. We are going to be able to pick them up and detect them coming in quite easily. Our key government figures are probably in a bunker at this point."

Invading Taiwan is much more difficult than invading Ukraine. Separated from the mainland by a 160-kilometer strait where rough weather makes invasion nearly impossible for all but a few months a year, Taiwan is defended on most sides by forbidding coastal cliffs. The most feasible approach is via heavily fortified low-lying lands on the west, where treacherous mudflats would make amphibious crossing under fire a nightmare for attackers. The conventional wisdom is that China, even with its 2 million-strong military and the largest navy in the world, does not yet have the capacity or adequate amphibious forces to push through an invasion in which the United States backs up Taiwan. But in this game, China is undeterred.

The Chinese government player believes the time is right. The Chinese military makes a chilling announcement: "We ask [the people of Taiwan] if they would be willing to lose absolutely everything [rather than] come to a mutually agreeable solution." With negotiations faltering, China flies in special forces to capture the elected Taiwanese leaders in Taipei (much as Russia tried to do in Kyiv early in its invasion). Now bloodshed begins. Pressing on to a full invasion risks massive Chinese troop losses, greater catastrophe in Taiwan, and an upheaval in the global balance of power. But still the United States is dithering, unwilling to commit forces, and insists on taking the conflict to the United Nations, which consumes another week.

Here the game ends.

How the fighting and its shock waves pan out are for another game format—"a Taiwan invasion game" using different rules, Mouat said.

In the debriefing, the player representing China's government said that she played aggressively but contended it had been "a very leveled escalation," since Beijing had let in humanitarian aid and attempted to "starve them out" before attacking. But why did the United States fail to respond to the invasion in time? The U.S. player cited lack of global support for Taiwan's legitimacy and post-Ukraine war fatigue. Could China or the United States really risk going without Taiwan's world-leading microchip manufacturing? Why didn't the United States forcefully break the blockade, imposing sanctions on China when it had a chance? Could that have persuaded China to back down? Everyone went away mulling such questions.

According to Mouat, matrix games can get things right 60 percent of the time, better than many individual analysts, but the ultimate goal is to stimulate "intelligent conversations."

Experts consulted by *Foreign Policy* before the game agreed that an invasion is possible, even likely, but disagreed on when it might take place. "Given Xi Jinping's track record, the war could start at any time, and it could unfold in ways that surprise us all," said analyst Ian Easton, the author of *The Chinese Invasion Threat*. For Easton, on top of the Chinese military buildup, Beijing's firing of ballistic missiles near Taiwan in August was "destabilizing behavior" with no basis in international law and "therefore must be regarded as a signal of hostile intent."

But Shlapak, also an East Asia specialist, dismissed recent U.S. military predictions of an invasion by 2027. These "confuse capability with intent," he said. "China is certainly increasing its capability to take actions against Taiwan, but they recognize the inherent riskiness [of invasion]." He dismissed China's "recent hardening of language" as "a reflection of their perception of tightening U.S.-Taiwan relations." The status quo, he believes, will not change for the next 10 years or so, unless there are significant changes in Taiwan's or China's stance.

Steve Tsang, director of the University of London's China Institute, had a similar prediction. In "bean-counting terms," China will have the capacity to invade "roughly by 2027," Tsang said, but it will still lack the overall organizational strength to carry out a full-scale invasion. "But when the point finally comes that Xi Jinping feels that he can do so at an acceptable level of cost, then he will do so," he said. Tsang expects Xi to stay in power for life and to act against Taiwan in 10 to 20 years. An invasion, however, is "the last option," he said. Beijing's preferred solution is for the Taiwanese government to surrender so that Washington is unlikely to interfere, he said, though he expects Taiwan to bolster its defense and fight back—as is "normal for a vibrant democracy."

In Tsang's view, Beijing's rhetoric serves to make people believe its behavior is about Chinese unification, when it is really about a bigger goal: to "bankrupt the American Indo-Pacific strategy" and make Taiwan a stronghold in China's growing domination of the Pacific. For China, Tsang said, control of Taiwan is a crucial step in the "dream of national rejuvenation."

EDITOR'S COMMENT: War Games are nice and interesting but the one described herein is based on the current capabilities of both sides. Extreme operations like an invasion should be based on out-of-the-box thinking that will include solutions that will overcome certain problems like weather and defenses. Of course, keep in mind that no plan survives first contact with the enemy!

Respect to Christmas

Mohamed Salah, 30, from Egypt ➤ Liverpool FC, since 2017

UAE leaders send Christmas wishes to all

TheRemmySaheed 😌 @Remmzor__ · 11h
Replying to @MoSalah
I shall be unfollowing you and stop supporting Liverpool because you are celebrating Christmas with the Christians.

ili 217.7K   ⃝ 592   � 142   ♡ 1,176

Oscar-Romero 🏴 @mroscarromero · 11h
Replying to @MoSalah
I've been a Liverpool fan since I was born but I will stop supporting the club because you are celebrating Christmas with the Christians. You've just lost me as a fan Mo Salah. Goodbye!

ili 89.7K   ⃝ 125   ↻ 22   ♡ 60

Cristiano Ronaldo was very unhappy, so his wife bought him a present Rolls Royce Phantom – £250,000 (2022)

Faid Samim, 7, a malnourished boy who also has cerebral palsy, lies on a bed at the malnutrition treatment ward of al-Sabeen hospital in Sanaa, Yemen (2020)

Starving children don't cry

A brave Woman!

Iqra/Read/ اقرأ

18 years old student Marwa protesting alone against the ban on women's higher education, outside the Kabul University as members of Taliban stand guard in Kabul on December 25, 2022

Barometer findings/ Which nation discriminates against Albanians the most?

Source: https://euronews.al/en/barometer-findings-which-nation-discriminates-against-albanians-the-most/

Cili nga popujt e Evropës është më diskriminues me emigrantët Shqiptarë

Gjermanët	4%
Austriakët	1.1%
Italianët	3.5%
Grekët	66.5%
Nordikët	1.2%
Spanjollët	0.5%
Francezët	7.3%
Hollandezët	1.3%
Belgët	0.6%
Zvicerianët	0.8%
Anglezët	13.3%

Ουδείς αχαριστότερος του ευεργετηθέντος (Θουκιδίδης)
No one is more ungrateful than the beneficiary (Thucydides)

Remember?

Albania Envoy Accuses Italy in Sinking of Refugee Boat
Mar 31, 1997 — Senior **Albanian** officials accuse Italian Navy of causing deaths of dozens of **Albanian refugees** when one of its vessels rammed and sank boat ...

Dec 23 – Even though they are our neighbors and history connects us with them quite a lot, Albanians feel more discriminated against by the Greek people. Asked by the Barometer in Euronews Albania,

which of the European nations are more discriminatory towards Albanian immigrants, 66.5% of them said Greeks.

With a significant difference margin, the list follows with the English at 13.3%, the French at 7.3%, the Germans at 4%, the Italians at 3.5%, the Dutch at 1.3%, the Nordics at 1.2%, the Austrians at 1.1%, the Swiss 0.8%, the Belgians 0.6% and the Spanish at 0.5%.

Meanwhile, when we ask them who they believe to be the **most hospitable nation** towards Albanians, the first place is occupied by the Italians at 38.7%, followed by the Germans at 33.6%, the Greeks at 8.4%, the English at 5.1%, the Swiss at 1.7%, the French at 1.4%, the Belgians and the Spanish at 0.6%, the Dutch at 0.5% and the Nordics at 0.4%.

Phosphorus Supply Is Increasingly Disrupted – We Are Sleepwalking into a Global Food Crisis

By Julia Martin-Ortega

Without phosphorus food cannot be produced, since all plants and animals need it to grow. Put simply: **if there is no phosphorus, there is no life.** All farmers therefore need access to it, but 85% of the world's remaining high-grade phosphate rock is concentrated in just five countries, making the global food system extremely vulnerable to disruptions.

MEF 2023 Predictions

By Daniel Pipes (MEF President)
Source: https://www.meforum.org/

As ever, 2023 promises to be an interesting year for the Middle East and Islamism. Here are some predictions from Forum staff:

- *Gregg Roman, Director* – (i) Israel will launch a ground incursion in Lebanon or Syria, or both, to end attacks from those areas; (ii) Israel and Saudi Arabia will sign an economic cooperation agreement; and (iii) the U.S. government will designate Syria a narco-trafficking state and sanction it.
- *Jonathan Spyer, Research Director* – (i) Hamas violence against Israel will surge around Ramadan and Israel's new government will again "mow the lawn"; (ii) Iranian protests will intensify; and (iii) Russian-brokered diplomacy between Ankara and Damascus will begin, including a possible Erdoğan-Assad summit.
- *Sam Westrop, Islamist Watch Director* – (i) Republicans will increasingly embrace Islamists, as Democrats flirt with counter-Islamists; (ii) European Islamists will grow stronger, with streets thugs inciting violence; and (iii) a Turkish-Qatari-Pakistani-Malaysian Islamist axis will emerge, barring any feuds between Ankara and Doha.
- *Clifford Smith, Washington Project Director* – (i) Saudi Arabia will make a public show of alliance, short of full normalization, with Israel – perhaps a joint strike against an Iranian proxy; (ii) Erdoğan will continue to block Norway and Sweden from joining NATO until Washington pays him off with policy concessions; and (iii) Congress will discover that Tehran provides money to U.S. universities to promote its former officials as professors.
- *And, my predictions (Daniel Pipes)* – (i) Erdoğan will still be dictator of Türkiye in July 2023; (ii) diaspora Jewry will be markedly more alienated from Israel; (iii) the Iran nuclear deal will no longer be a focus of attention; and (iv) Iraq-Iran tensions will rise higher than at any time since 1988.

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5 Places World War III Could Start in 2023

By Robert Farley
Source: https://www.19fortyfive.com/2022/12/5-places-world-war-iii-could-start-in-2023/

Dec 31 – Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, an attack that almost immediately resulted in a combination of sanctions and direct military support for Kyiv. By early spring, the United States and its allies were pursuing policies that would result in the death of Russian soldiers, the destruction of Russian military equipment, and the long-term degradation of the Russian economy. The war has had a ripple effect on the world stage, dramatically increasing the stakes of disputes that have quietly smoldered for decades.

These five areas pose the greatest risk for the eruption of what we might be tempted to call "World War III."

221227-N-DU622-1227 PHILIPPINE SEA (Dec. 27, 2022) An F/A-18F Super Hornet from the "Fighting Redcocks" of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 22 prepares to launch from the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz (CVN 68). Nimitz is in 7th fleet conducting routine operations. 7th Fleet is the U.S. Navy's largest forward-deployed numbered fleet, and routinely interacts and operates with 35 maritime nations in preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific region. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Justin McTaggart)

Ukraine

Concern that Russia might use nuclear weapons to restore its flagging fortunes in Ukraine seems to have declined since summer, as the war has settled into a destructive stalemate. However, escalation remains a concern. Russia's inability to make progress may threaten the stability of the Putin government, inclining Moscow to contemplate dangerous escalation. Concerns over the ability of Ukraine to continue the war in the long-term might force Kyiv to take risky steps of its own to break the stalemate.

An expansion of the war to NATO remains unlikely but possible; the Russian use of nuclear weapons remains unthinkable but not at all impossible.

The Biden administration and its allies in Europe have taken extraordinary care with the risks of escalation, but Washington does not hold all of the cards and either Kyiv or Moscow might become willing to accept the risk of a wider conflict, a conflict that could develop into World War III.

Taiwan

Worry about the immediacy of war between Taiwan and China has waned a bit in the past months, in large part because of China's catastrophic covid experience. However, there is little doubt that cross-strait tensions remain significant. The willingness of the Biden administration to take risky rhetorical positions on the defense of Taiwan indicates that Washington has real concern over the prospects of a Chinese attack. At the same time, these statements (and unwise stunts such as Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taipei) run the risk of triggering Chinese escalation.

Fortunately, there is good reason to believe that we will have some warning of war; as was the case along the Ukrainian border, Chinese preparation for conflict would be glaringly visible to everyone concerned. Almost any imaginable conflict, however, would end up including the United States and very likely Japan, and would thus constitute a great power war.

Greece-Turkey

 Lost in all of the discussion of the revitalization of NATO in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been a simmering crisis on the alliance's southern flank. Over the past year tensions between Greece and Turkey have increased substantially, driven in large part by Turkey's assertive foreign policy turn and by the domestic vulnerability of the Erdogan regime. Disputes between Athens and Ankara over energy exploration in the Aegean have driven the current tension, although the territorial disagreement underlying the argument have existed for decades.

While it seems unlikely that a NATO ally would openly attack another NATO ally, past conflicts have brought the two countries up to the brink of war (and sometimes slightly beyond) notwithstanding their alliance commitments. Any fight between Turkey and Greece would immediately involve NATO, and would almost certainly result in some degree of opportunistic intervention by Russia.

Korean Peninsula

Over the past several months tensions between Seoul and Pyongyang have grown steadily, with North Korean provocations (often themselves driven by the Kim regime's idiosyncratic and cryptic assessments of the international environment) incurring aggressive rhetorical responses from the South. The dynamic between the two states seems driven by impatience; an impatience in the North that the world still refuses to take it seriously despite its magnificent nuclear weapons, and an impatience in the South that a nation of great significance remains burdened by its inept and retrograde sibling.

These tensions aren't new, but historically they have been constrained by the Cold War and by the post-Cold War liberal international order. The first is gone and the second is fraying, to the extent that Pyongyang may feel like it has a moment and Seoul may struggle to find the patience to tolerate the antics of its neighbor. If war does break out it could rapidly become more destructive than the Russia-Ukraine War, with conventional and nuclear weapons exacting a horrific toll on both sides.

China-India

Sporadic fighting between China and India continues on the Roof of the World. Although the real stakes of control over small slivers of territory in nearly uninhabitable mountain terrain remain elusive, neither China nor India have backed away from the conflict. While fighting has thus far remained quite limited, the desire to defend national prestige can rapidly become poisonous for even the wisest and most sensible leaders.

Whether Modi and Xi fit such a description is a question for another day, but the governments that they lead have not managed to find a way to resolve the conflict. At some point either the Indians or the Chinese

might be tempted to solve the problem through escalation, a step that could work as intended, or that could open the door to a much larger and more destructive conflict.

Pray World War III Never Happens

It remains unlikely that any of these disputes will develop into a global conflict, although the Ukraine War already has some aspects of great power war. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has, if nothing else, demonstrated that major wars can still happen despite the best efforts of the international community. Maintaining peace requires careful statesmanship; managing escalation during war requires extraordinary skill. We can hope that the leaders of the world's great powers will take care over the coming year with the vast stockpiles of weapons that they control.

Dr. Robert Farley has taught security and diplomacy courses at the Patterson School since 2005. He received his BS from the University of Oregon in 1997, and his Ph.D. from the University of Washington in 2004. Dr. Farley is the author of Grounded: The Case for Abolishing the United States Air Force (University Press of Kentucky, 2014), the Battleship Book (Wildside, 2016), and Patents for Power: Intellectual Property Law and the Diffusion of Military Technology (University of Chicago, 2020). He has contributed extensively to a number of journals and magazines, including the National Interest, the Diplomat: APAC, World Politics Review, and the American Prospect. Dr. Farley is also a founder and senior editor of Lawyers, Guns and Money.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: In the Greece-Turkey prediction please change the "…driven in large part by Turkey's assertive foreign policy" to "… driven by Turkey's assertive foreign policy". Precision is always nice!

2023 should see overdue shift from war to peace, from high risks to reason

By Bharat Dogra

Source: https://countercurrents.org/2022/12/2023-should-see-overdue-shift-from-war-to-peace-from-high-risks-to-reason/

Dec 31 – If 2022 was witness to a worsening of the most high-risk problems facing our planet, can 2023 bring a true message of hope? The dawn of a new year is a time for hope, but to give more meaning to this hope, some important decisions should be announced by world leadership regarding peace and co-operation for a protective world.

Clearly there is long overdue need for much more ambitious agenda for a future without wars, for eliminating weapons of mass destruction, for drastically reducing the arms race and instead concentrating resources on checking climate change and meeting other sustainable development goals. The need for such change is so strong and obvious that no one can find any rational explanation as to why the world has been so often seen to be not only violating such priorities but at times (most obviously in 2022) even moving in an opposite direction.

Let us therefore try to spell out some of the most pressing changes our troubled world needs urgently. Clearly the most dangerous, destructive wars and civil strife should end—certainly the Ukraine war but in addition also others in parts of Africa badly affected by hunger and famine, Yemen, Myanmar and elsewhere. The badly disrupted but extremely crucial task of most important disarmament treaties must be renewed, with the ultimate aim being uncompromisingly to end all weapons of mass destruction. The weapons industry must be scaled down and controlled and its ability to influence policy making must end. The framework of efforts to check climate change must be improved significantly to make them much more effective, along with simultaneously stepping up significant efforts to tackle about a dozen other life-threatening environmental problems. Food and farming must be saved from the corporate giants trying to gain huge control, GM crops should be banned. A range of dangerous new technologies and chemicals/products should be regulated and monitored much more carefully. Inequalities and discrimination at all levels should be drastically reduced, while decisions on most crucial issues relating to indebtedness, trade, patents and climate change should prioritize the concerns of people of poorer and vulnerable countries, including island nations. There should be increasingly more emphasis on meeting the basic needs of all people within a more limited carbon and environmental space, more compassion-based approach to other forms of life and broad-based steps for strengthening decentralization, communities and informed democracy. Medical care should be strictly evidence based and protected from the very harmful influence of those seeking super-profits and control.

As against the obvious and evidence-based urgency of this agenda, what has been happening in recent years has been– increasing threat of most dangerous forms of wars, dismantling of treaties relating to most dangerous weapons, further rapid spread of very high risk technologies and products, worsening of most serious environmental problems, almost unprecedented increase in economic inequalities at various levels, unprecedented extinction and erosion of many life-forms, very dangerous increase of control of food and farming system by huge corporations with their high-risk GM/HT technologies. Billionaires and multinational companies are increasingly influencing crucial decisions on vaccines, medicines and health policy, even emerging as leading funders and stakeholders in not just health programs of various nations but even the WHO. This indicates that while the most serious problems add up to nothing less than a full-blown survival crisis on our badly endangered planet, the response of recent years has been, in effect, to go on increasing some of the worst threats (despite much talk to the contrary). After all, what can be more insane than living year after year with such stocks of the most dangerous weapons the actual use of only about 10% of which can destroy life on earth, more or less, through direct or indirect impacts? What is worse, in recent years the treaties to reduce these risks have been dismantled or allowed to expire, and in addition there is increasing drift towards such new risks as robot weapons and possibility of space warfare. It is keeping in view these factors that we need to expose not just inadequate or unreasonable response to biggest threats but even insane response. So the question is not just whether our deeply troubled world will move from war to peace, from weapons to housing for all, from high risks to sound reasoning, but whether it will move from insanity to sanity!

We must face the serious situation that the entire paradigm within which the world is functioning is full of very high risks. However people are asked to conform to this and to seek their careers or 'success' within this paradigm, so that in effect many well-intentioned people are forced into a position of contributing to accentuation of these risks and threats. To draw away attention from the absurdity and injustice of all this, a culture of mass amusements mixed with propaganda, aggressive advertisement and consumerism, instant gratification and endless pursuit of sensual pleasure has been created.

The pressures to create a consensus around this unreal world, emanating from powerful elites who seek to control such a world, disrupts society because people are being asked to conform to false values and live by them. This is the real reason behind the acute mental health crisis which has attracted much concern in the richest and most dominant countries. One of its saddest manifestations is seen in children who in their innocence and being 'closer to nature' suffer the most from false values.

In September 2011 the then largest study on mental health in Europe found that "Europeans are plagued by mental and neurological illness, with almost 165 million people or 38% of population suffering each year from a brain disorder such as depression, anxiety, insomnia or dementia" (Reuters report– Nearly 40% of Europeans suffer mental illness).In the USA 1 in 4 adults suffers from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year, according to the National Institute of Mental Health Disorders. In 2019, a typical year, according to official data, 12 million Americans thought about suicide and 1.4 million attempted suicide.

According to a statement released by three leading child health organizations in 2021, a child mental health emergency exists in the USA. Further "rates of childhood mental health concerns and suicide rose steadily between 2010 and 2020 and by 2018 suicide was the second leading leading cause of deaths for youth age 10-24." According to official data quoted by the USA Surgeon General in an advisory on mental health, 37% of high school students (and 50% of girl students) reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, an increase of 40% during 2009-2019. One out of six students made a suicide plan in 2019, again a 44% rise within a decade. According to UNICEF annual report on children for 2021, in the 10-19 year age-group 9 million teenagers in Europe are affected by mental health disorders. Only 41% of boys and 33% of girls said they were mentally healthy.

Thus it is clear that at present the world agenda is very badly alienated from real needs due to the undue pressures and dominance of manipulative elites who want not real reform but increased control. Secondly, the attempt to create an artificial consensus on the falsehoods imposed by elites has created widespread confusion and disruption among people, particularly children and youth, leading to enormous social distress, uncertainty and alienation. This entire structure based on false values should be challenged by a vast, continuing educational and mobilization effort, the ultimate aim being to create a safer and more fulfilling world for people and particularly for children, to be achieved by walking without any uncertainty or confusion on the path of justice, equality, cooperation, peace, environment protection and compassion for all forms of life.

The most essential task of protecting the life-nurturing conditions of planet within a framework of justice, peace and democracy must be linked to the great creative potential of people, particularly the younger generation. This is the greatest challenge ahead of us, and it is in this direction that important initiatives should be taken in the year 2023. One such important initiative can be for the UN to declare the next decade 2023-33 as the Decade for Saving Earth Now. This writer has mobilized a signature effort for this and an appeal to this effect carrying the signatures of many eminent persons has been already sent to the UN Secretary General and other agencies.

Bharat Dogra is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include A Day in 2071, Protecting Earth for Children, Planet in Peril and Man over Machine—A Path to Peace.

Gun Violence by the Numbers in the Only Nation in the World Which Places Gun Ownership Ahead of Personal Safety

Source: https://guardianlv.com/2022/12/gun-violence-by-the-numbers-in-the-only-nation-in-the-world-which-places-gun-ownership-ahead-of-personal-safety/

Courtesy of Scott Beale (Flickr CC0)

Dec 30 – It is Unsafe to Leave Your Home in the 21st Century
I repeat: "it is not safe to leave your home in America." The statistics about gun violence in America are definitive, proving that our nation is filled with people who place ownership of weapons of mass destruction as a priority above public safety.
The Gun Violence Archive, a non-partisan, non-profit group, defines a mass shooting as "four or more individuals wounded or killed in a single incident." As I write this, there have been 639 mass shootings in the United States in 2022. This is five years in a row that there have been more mass shootings than days on the calendar.

Sandy Hook Demanded Change We Handle Gun Violence
Writing for a Las Vegas newspaper, my first big story about mass shootings was on December 14, 2012. A single shooter, armed with a military assault rifle and a high-output magazine slaughtered 20 children, ages five and six, and six educators. He had murdered his own mother prior to entering Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut.
As I wrote the story, watching the reports on television, I had tears in my eyes and believed that our government would finally do something about a growing tragedy in our nation. Of course, I was wrong. Our legislative body lacks the "cojones" to do the right thing and place the safety of our people above the profits of the NRA, gun manufacturers, and gun sellers.
This fact alone is the ultimate reason to vote every incumbent politician in Washington out of office.

Gun Violence: Mass Shootings Have Become Common in Today's America

What is most upsetting is that the number of mass shootings in every venue has increased since Sandy Hook, and most involve military-style weapons. The only purpose for these deadly toys is to kill as many humans as possible in the shortest period of time. The largest mass shooting in American history took place in Las Vegas on October 1, 2017. The assassin possessed 31 firearms, including 12 assault rifles. 61 people, including the shooter, lost their lives. On November 5, 2017, a lone gunman armed with an assault rifle, killed 26 churchgoers in a small church in Sutherland Springs, Texas. 22 were injured. Both of these tragic events happened under the watch of Donald John Trump.

There Have Been Many More Since Sandy Hook

We know about many others, including the murderous assault on Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on February 14, 2014, when 17 students and faculty members were gunned down by one man in possession of an assault rifle. Most recently, on May 24, 2022, a lone gunman, armed with an assault rifle murdered 20 elementary school students at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas before being killed by law enforcement. However, the event lasted for about an hour as officers remained outside the school although they heard gunshots and screams inside the school.

The Fourth Estate has Failed the American People

These are tragedies reported by the mainstream media. "Sensationalism sells advertising." Meanwhile, dozens of other Americans lost their lives from gunshots and were never reported in the national news. The number of those murdered was too small to report. Only 10 out of 639 mass shootings in 2022 have been reported by the national media. Think about this. You or someone you love could have lost their lives in 629 other shootings, and no one cared enough to report this fact. The mainstream media has accepted gun violence as part of life in America. They are complicit with the tourism industry which could be heavily damaged if the truth was revealed to the general public. Again, **profit before people.**

This is a travesty, and it must end. Any politician who refuses to vote in favor of changes to our gun laws must be removed from office forever.

Supercar Made in Afghanistan!

Mada 9

The CDC Orders America's Schools To Adopt The LGBTQ Ideology

Source: https://andmagazine.substack.com/p/the-cdc-orders-americas-schools-to?

Jan 02 – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a U.S. government agency. It exists to promote *public health and protect the American people from disease* – or at least it did. Now the CDC is transformed, not just into a tool of Big Pharma, but as an instrument of indoctrination.

The CDC has undertaken the task of pushing American schools to promote "LGBTQ" inclusivity. It has created a self-assessment handbook and is demanding that teachers "commit to change" in order to be judged worthy of approval by the government apparatchiks who increasingly believe it is their right to tell the American people what to believe and how to behave.

The 32-page CDC handbook called "***LGBTQ Inclusivity in Schools"*** is effectively a Marxist-style set of principles by which schools, teachers, and administrators are now judged by the federal government. It is important to note that effectively anyone who performs any kind of function at a school is evaluated according to the criteria identified by the CDC. That includes – according to the CDC – "Staff at community organizations working in partnership with a school district or school (e.g., not-for-profit organizations, faith-based institutions)." It is also important to note that **the CDC guidance makes no distinction between public and private schools.** The CDC handbook directs everyone working in America's schools to take a self-assessment to determine how "woke" they are. Based on the self-assessment each individual is then given a grade designating how effectively they have incorporated the LGBTQ movement's ideology.

LGBTQ Inclusivity in Schools:
A Self-Assessment Tool

●▶ **Read the full article at the source's URL.**

EDITOR'S COMMENT: Poor (new generation of) Americans!

Germany: Mighty? Yes! (Two World Wars) Ethical? No!

Poland (1939-1945): 6 mil Polish killed – compensation dept: 1,325 trillion euros. "According to the German government, the issue of reparations and compensation for war damage is closed and the German government does not intend to enter into negotiations on this issue" (Jan 2023)

Greece (1941-1944): The total claim of our country against Germany according to the conclusion of the Parliamentary Committee for Claiming German Debts amounts to over 269 billion euros (269,547,995,854). In total, the amount reaches over 300 billion euros including interest (2018). It concerns the home loan, financial compensation of individuals, the Jewish community, cultural disasters and a number of other issues. In 2021, with the votes of the Christian Democrats (CDU), the Bavarian Christian Socialists (CSU), the Social Democrats (SPD), the Liberals (FDP) and the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, the German parliament rejected resolutions of the Greens and the Left party which concerned the German occupation of Greece. Greece with a population of 7.22 million before entering the war had lost 35,100 lives on the battlefields, 171,800 from civilians related to war actions (e.g., population cleansing) while losses from conditions of starvation and hardship are estimated between 300,000 and 600,000. This translates to 7-11.17% of the country's total population before it entered the war.

Trends in Terrorism: What's on the Horizon in 2023?

By Colin P. Clarke
Source: https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/01/trends-in-terrorism-whats-on-the-horizon-in-2023/

Jan 03 – The most defining feature of international terrorism in 2023 will be its diversity, reflected by the broad array of ideologies and grievances motivating plots and attacks. The Islamic State, the most

significant terrorist threat since the global counterterrorism campaign to dismantle al-Qaeda in the immediate years following 9/11, has been attenuated in Iraq and Syria, losing two of its emirs in 2022. Outside of the Levant, Islamic State branches and affiliates remain potent, especially in the Sahel region of Africa and in South Asia, where the Islamic State Khorasan Province is waging a stubborn insurgency against the Taliban. The Islamic State Khorasan Province has launched high-profile attacks against both Russian and Chinese interests in Afghanistan. Still, Western counterterrorism successes may not be sustainable without a robust commitment to continue working with partners on the ground to ensure that these groups do not reconstitute. Without continued US and allied pressure, it is likely that Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and their respective branches and franchise groups could successfully rebuild their networks in the Middle East and beyond.

And while the United States and its coalition partners have done an impressive job at destroying the physical caliphate in the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa is now the center of gravity for jihadist terrorism. In West Africa, the al-Qaeda-linked Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin and the Islamic State West Africa Province are competing for resources and recruits and, in the process, leaving a deadly trail of destruction in their wake. According to the Global Terrorism Index, the Sahel has become "increasingly more violent over the past 15 years, with deaths rising by over one thousand percent between 2007 and 2021."

Given porous borders, political instability (to include several coups), and a host of socio-economic grievances, the region is expected to remain a tinderbox for the foreseeable future. As countries like France and the United States further reduce their counterterrorism footprint abroad, shifting focus to great power competition with Russia and China, it could provide openings for jihadist groups in Africa to expand their influence and control over territory. On the other side of the continent, al-Shabaab is still a pernicious threat and could be looking to expand operations beyond Somalia and the immediate region, setting sights on more global ambitions. Two al-Shabaab militants have been arrested in the Philippines over the past several years, both charged with attempting to plan "9/11-style" attacks using airplanes. If an African jihadist group sees an opportunity to gain momentum, and with it money and recruits, it could make attacking Western targets a higher priority. As terrorism experts Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware recently suggested, in a post-Zawahiri era, al-Qaeda is likely to refocus on targeting embassies and consulates, tourist destinations, and commercial aviation.

One of the recent trends to garner attention is the concept of 'post-organizational violent extremism and terrorism' (POVET), a concept Bruce Hoffman and I referenced in a July 2020 piece on domestic terrorism in the United States, where we highlighted "the growing irrelevance or organizational structure." This trend has continued. In May 2022, a racially motivated terrorist attack by Payton Gendron at a grocery store in a predominantly African-American section of Buffalo, NY left ten dead. Gendron had been influenced, at least in part, by the Great Replacement theory. He also copied and pasted entire sections of the manifesto published by Brenton Tarrant, the white supremacist responsible for the Christchurch massacre in 2019. While both of these individuals, as well as those responsible for attacks in El Paso, TX and Pittsburgh, PA may be classified as lone actors, they emerged from a broader far-right ecosystem. In discussions with national security officials in the United States, the number one concern I hear is the potential for another Oklahoma City-style domestic terrorism attack from an anti-government extremist in the mold of Timothy McVeigh.

Post-organizational terrorism presents new threats for law enforcement and intelligence agencies. With no actual group there is no physical headquarters to surveil and no organization to infiltrate. There is a lower possibility of leakage—someone within the organization practicing poor operational security or prematurely discussing details of the plot. This is squarely in line with the concept of leaderless resistance, designed to insulate the leadership of terrorist networks from being identified and arrested. The Islamic State, as much as it presented a challenge through its control of territory and ability to launch external attack operations, also presented an attractive target for the United States and its allies to strike. Post-organizational terrorism presents no such target. However, post-organizational terrorists also lack the logistics and support networks of terrorist groups, and accordingly, are more limited in the amount of damage they can inflict. These networks are less able to marshal resources and are incapable of conducting prolonged sieges of enduring campaigns of violence. Still, since the goal of terrorism is largely psychological, even a lone actor with access to sophisticated weaponry can wreak havoc on a mass scale. In the United States, where individuals have access to automatic weapons, the threat is magnified exponentially.

With far-right terrorism ascendant, we should expect more plots and attacks from racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists, including white supremacists and neo-Nazis, as well as anti-government and anti-authority violent extremists, to including militia groups. In early December, German police and security services conducted countrywide raids to disrupt a conspiracy-driven plot by far-right extremists to overthrow the government. The QAnon conspiracy has continued to morph and evolve, taking root in countries like Germany, Japan, and elsewhere, functioning akin to a parasite, where it latches on and adapts to local contexts. Within the broader far-right umbrella, there is also a patchwork of ideologies motivating violent extremism, including among so-called "Incels," a subset of violent misogynists, as well as neo-Luddites or "technophobes," who have increasingly targeted 5G cell towers and other critical infrastructure. Eco-fascists, sometimes referred

to as "white supremacists going green," have also carved out a particular niche among elements of the far-right.

State-sponsored terrorism is also making a comeback. The support of a global network of terrorist proxies forms the cornerstone of Iran's foreign and security policy. The Russian Imperial Movement, a far-right terrorist group with links to the Kremlin, has been designated as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity by the United States. Russian proxy forces, including the Wagner Group and Task Force Rusich, a neo-Nazi paramilitary group, are active in Ukraine. Moscow could seek to instigate terrorist attacks on European soil in retaliation for what Russian President Vladimir Putin has described as NATO-sponsored terrorism, given the alliance's support to Ukraine. A letter bomb campaign targeted Ukrainian embassies in Europe, as well as the US embassy in Madrid and several other buildings and agencies in Spain. While Russian links are suspected, the investigation remains ongoing. As the war in Ukraine drags on, fears over Russian terrorism in the West have grown.

Emerging technologies present terrorists and violent extremists with myriad options that terrorists in the past never had. Drones, 3-D printed weapons, virtual currencies, and end-to-end encryption offer lone actors sophisticated capabilities. A trend likely to continue is the online manifesto which often accompanies a high-profile far-right attack. These manifestos not only serve to radicalize would-be extremists, but also provide exquisitely detailed descriptions of attack preparation, weapons maintenance, and the aesthetics of the accelerationist ideology more broadly. This concept, which espouses anomic violence to bring about societal collapse, has contributed to an uptick in assassinations and assassination attempts directed against political figures. In July, former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was assassinated by a lone actor using an improvised, or do-it-yourself firearm.

So just as the global jihadist threat continues to evolve—ebbing and flowing in different regions—the far-right continues to solidify its transnational connections. Meanwhile, the challenge of dealing with "everyday extremists" remains, as lone actors influenced by accelerationism and other forms of violent extremism radicalize online and seek to conduct real-world acts of politically and ideologically motivated violence. The US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Taliban's subsequent takeover in August 2021 could be framed as the logical bookend to the two-decade-long Global War on Terrorism. Of course, the United States and its allies will continue to carry out counterterrorism operations throughout the globe. But no longer will counterterrorism serve as a unifying mission set, nor as a placeholder for a broader grand strategy.

For terrorism and counterterrorism analysts, 2023 will be among the most unpredictable years in recent memory. Part of this is due to the fragmented nature of the threat, but also as a result of a yearslong relentless Western counterterrorism strategy that targeted Islamic State command-and-control and revoked the territory the group had once dubbed its Caliphate. The threat landscape may now appear far more inchoate, which makes it difficult to combat, but it may also be less potent as a result. Suppose the United States and its allies can discern an effective approach to balancing counterterrorism with great power competition. In that case, we might see a continuing trend of downward pressure on terrorist networks, mitigating the challenge of lone actors and small cells and relegating terrorist attacks primarily to active conflict zones.

Colin P. Clarke is a non-resident Senior Fellow in the National Security Program at the Foreign Policy Research Institute and is the Director of Policy and Research at The Soufan Group and a Senior Research Fellow at The Soufan Center.

An Honest Broker No Longer: The United States Between Turkey and Greece

By Ryan Gingeras
Source: https://warontherocks.com/2023/01/an-honest-broker-no-longer-the-united-states-between-turkey-and-greece/

Jan 03 – Over the course of 2022, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has maintained a steady drumbeat of provocations targeting Greece. The year began with his foreign ministry issuing a statement threatening to declare Greece's sovereignty as "debatable" if it continued to "militarize" its Aegean islands. Since threatening to move against Greece's Aegean territories in September, Turkey's president has seized upon the unveiling of a new line of ballistic missiles as an opportunity to up the ante. He boasted that the country's new Tayfun missiles had "driven the Greeks crazy" and noted that Athens could now be comfortably targeted. At the start of December, he echoed these sentiments again and added that Greece "should not stay comfortable." If Athens attempted to ship American weapons to its Aegean islands, "a country like Turkey," he enigmatically warned, "will probably not pick pears." American representatives have responded to these threats with public admonitions. State Department Spokesperson Ned Price recently reiterated Washington's "regret" over Erdogan's provocations. "All that an escalation of rhetoric will do," he emphasized, "is to raise tensions and to distract us from the unity of purpose … that we need to confront any number of challenges," namely the dangers of a more aggressive Russia.

Just what the United States would do in response to a Turkish assault against Greece is even more opaque. Time and again, U.S. officials have been steadfast in accenting the need for solidarity and

coordination among NATO allies in the face of Russia's war on Ukraine. Publicly outlining the consequences of a Turkish attack on Greece undoubtedly would be interpreted as an admission that the alliance is weaker and more divided than it appears.

There is also a possibility that many pundits believe that they have seen this movie before. Animosity derived from a long line of wars and atrocities lie at the heart of Turkish-Greek relations. Since the first decade of the Cold War, Turkey and Greece have feuded over issues of sovereignty and security. The two countries have threatened to go to war on multiple occasions in recent memory, only to pull back from the brink. At several junctures, the United States played an instrumental role in soothing tensions. Given this history, one may be forgiven in believing that this current fever, too, will break. If a crisis does come to pass, history appears to endow the United States with the credibility to serve as a potential broker. Perhaps, then, there is no need for the Biden administration to be ahead of the curve.

A closer look at the historical record and present-day trends suggests that things may be changing. If one compares the past to the present, Washington's trilateral relations with Athens and Ankara has evolved considerably. This break in continuity has grown considerably in the last decade. Perhaps most importantly, contemporary Turkish views of both the past and present tend to cast its alliance with the United States in starkly negative terms. A desire to undo the perceived damage of U.S. involvement in the region is among the factors that inspire Erdogan's recent threats. To believe, therefore, that past precedent would aid the United States in successfully mediating a present-day Greco-Turkish crisis may be ill-founded. More pointedly, should events come to a head between Ankara and Athens, Washington may be left to make a series of unenviable choices.

A Partner and a Peacemaker: A Brief History of American Mediation in Turkish-Greek Affairs

Washington's first direct foray into Greco-Turkish relations came at the conclusion of World War II. Before the close of the conflict, Allied representatives understood that something had to be done about Italian colonial possessions in the Mediterranean. Among the lands Rome governed were the Dodecanese Islands in the Aegean Sea. Amid the war, military bases on the islands had been used to interdict Mediterranean traffic. In agreeing to strip Italy of the Dodecanese, American negotiators believed the island would be best served under Greece's rule (Greek Orthodox Christian majorities dominated each of the 11 islands). The Soviet Union, however, initially demurred from granting the islands to Greece, leaving U.S. and British officials to suspect Moscow was wary of the islands' strategic potential — even though an earlier U.S. assessment believed the Dodecanese held "no significant value either for surface warships or for air bases." Despite Turkey's neutrality during World War II (which precluded it from Allied decision-making), American negotiators were sensitive to the history of tensions between Ankara and Athens. These factors led Washington to endorse a plan to "demilitarize" the islands. Per their reading of historical precedent, the Allies agreed that Greece would be allowed to maintain local security forces at the price of prohibiting permanent naval bases and fortifications (be they Greek or foreign). Such an arrangement, American officials contended, would help maintain regional stability.

Such strategic thinking continued to prevail in Washington as the Cold War began. Between 1950 and 1974, American relations between Greece and Turkey remained anchored to a policy of capacity building and amicability based on shared security interests. Until the 1970s, U.S. policymakers proved successful in maintaining the peace between Ankara and Athens in spite of a series of crises. The focal point of these tensions, the question of Cypriot sovereignty, led both Greece and Turkey to threaten to deepen their ties to Moscow as a way of leveraging greater American support. When Ankara threatened to invade Cyprus in 1964, President Lyndon Johnson issued a strongly worded letter to Turkish Prime Minister Ismet Inonu threatening a series of consequences should an attack commence. Johnson specifically intimated that a Cyprus invasion would force Ankara's NATO allies to reconsider their "obligation to protect Turkey against the Soviet Union," who some feared would intervene on the island in the event of conflict. Even as Greco-Turkish relations worsened into the 1970s, American officials were sure they were capable of bridging the gap between the two sides. "Both states would like to be less dependent on the US," one intelligence estimate read in June 1974. Even in the worst-case scenario, it seemed likely "that Athens and Ankara would seek—undoubtedly through US mediation—to prevent larger-scale conflict."

Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in July 1974 tested the certainty of this assessment. Though American arbitration did help avert a full-fledged war between Greece and Turkey, Washington's ties with both Athens and Ankara weakened considerably. Greece, having felt betrayed by the United States, briefly withdrew from NATO's military command structure and sought closer relations with the Soviet Union. Despite having secured its goals in intervening into Cyprus, Turkish officials were left scarred after the U.S. Congress imposed a three-year arms embargo on Turkey. Nevertheless, the core assumption of the 1974 assessment appeared validated. Washington endured as the preferred mediator between Greece and Turkey after a string of territorial disputes in the Aegean in the 1970s and 1980s. As it had earlier in the Cold War, shared concerns over NATO's integrity provided a base for negotiations between Washington, Ankara, and Athens. U.S. officials equally understood that both Greek and Turkish leaders saw a need in currying American and European favor if they were to achieve their respected aims. Neither Turkey nor Greece, as one CIA analyst put it in 1978, "can afford to

leave the field to its rival by bolting the West altogether." The personal rapport and engagement of senior American leaders also proved instrumental in easing tensions. Henry Kissinger negotiated directly with Greek, Cypriot, and Turkish leaders through the early 1970s. When Ankara and Athens came to the threshold of war over a dispute over their conflicting claims to an uninhabited island in 1998, Bill Clinton spoke directly to Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller late into the night in the hopes of avoiding conflict. This investment on the part of U.S. officials, however, did breed a certain amount of exasperation within senior circles. The enduring nature of Greco-Turkish tensions, as well as pressures to pick a side in their disputes, led to private expressions of cynicism. "The worst rat race I have ever been in," Dean Acheson once chirped, was denying "Greeks and Turks their historic recreation of killing one another."

Changing Times and Perceptions: Recent Turns in America's Relationship with Greece and Turkey

The threat of a Greco-Turkish rupture subsided considerably as Washington's Global War on Terror began. As U.S. officials slipped more into the background, U.N. mediation efforts in Cyprus, as well as intermittent bilateral efforts at improving ties, led to expressions of hope that the threat of conflict had subsided. Below the surface, however, there were significant changes in the ways in which Turkish policymakers perceived both Greece and the United States. Central to this change was the establishment of a new ethos with respect to foreign policy. The architect of this new outlook, Ahmet Davutoglu, counseled then-Prime Minister Erdogan to take a more assertive, ambitious approach to both regional and global relations. In addition to reimagining Turkey as a leader within the wider Islamic world, Davutoglu asserted that Turkey possessed a historic right to play a more hegemonic role in its near broad (going so far as to use the Nazi term "*lebensraum*" in describing Ankara's strategic imperatives). As for Greece, Davutoglu suggested that Turkey "had grown too accustomed" to tensions with Athens even though Ankara's handling of Greek relations was like "a heavyweight wrestler training with light weights." The West, he argued, had habitually used Greece to intimidate Turkey, thus preventing it from opening "its horizons to action-oriented, large-scale and global policies."

For many Turks, including Erdogan, events in the last decade have confirmed Davutoglu's broader assessment. Cyprus's decision in 2011 to commence drilling for natural gas off its southern shore reignited long-standing antagonisms over Turkish, Greek, and Cypriot maritime rights in the Mediterranean and Aegean. Despite Ankara's standing commitment to "zero problems" with its neighbors, Erdogan vowed to resist international pressure when it came to Turkish interests at sea. "From now on," he declared in 2011, "we will continue to implement whatever our national interests require without hesitation." It was in the wake of this pronouncement that the term "Blue Homeland (*Mavi Vatan*)" began to take its place within the Turkish lexicon as a way of describing Ankara's maximalist interpretation of its maritime rights. Erdogan's stewing belligerence was further nurtured as a result of Turkey's growing rift with the United States. As Washington drew closer to Syria's Kurdish militants after 2014, boosters of the Blue Homeland policy began to accuse the United States of plotting to close off Turkey from the sea the with aid of Greece, Cyprus, and Syria's Kurds. Although Turkish officials were initially hesitant to back the accusations publicly, such sentiment echoed Erdogan's declaration in 2017 that there was a "project to besiege our country" led by Turkey's foreign and domestic enemies.

This conspiracy theory became more mainstream as a result of deepening U.S.-Greek relations. In the fall of 2017, President Donald Trump welcomed Greece's Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras to Washington in the hopes of expanding military and political ties with Athens. A number of incentives push American officials in this direction. With Greece only beginning to emerge from a near-decade-long depression, both Tsipras and the Trump White House saw mutual economic benefits in expanding American energy and trade interests. Perhaps more importantly, increased tensions with Ankara after the 2016 coup attempt encouraged many in Washington to see Greece as a potentially more stable security partner in the eastern Mediterranean. For commentators in Greece, building stronger bonds with the United States was an ironic but necessary turn. Profound historical misgivings regarding American interests still pervaded Greek society (particularly as a result of U.S. support for Greece's Cold War-era dictatorship). Yet the changing geopolitical environment in the region, particularly as a result of a more aggressive Russia, compelled Tsipras's government to seek "the familiar, warm 'embrace' of the traditional historical ally across the Atlantic." It was in this spirit that Athens and Washington arrived at a mutual defense cooperation agreement in the fall of 2019. The accord, which entailed expanded training opportunities and basing rights for U.S. forces in Greece, was hailed as a breakthrough that aided both countries. Greek officials, however, remained careful not to promote the agreement as an explicit anti-Turkish arrangement. Americans, one Greek columnist observed in 2018, "do not wish to 'lose Turkey' and on this it seems that Athens and Washington agree. Few serious decision-makers in the Greek capital would wish for an economic collapse of the neighbor or its attachment to the Russian sphere, an element that would automatically turn our country into a border between the West and the Middle East."

Turkish responses to the signing of the U.S.-Greek defense accord have been uniformly negative and suspicious. Since the fall of 2019, Turkish media outlets have regularly depicted the agreement as a Greco-American pact aimed at war with Turkey. Evidence for these misgivings have ranged from provocative news reports of U.S. arms transfers to Greece, accusations of joint Greek-U.S. support for Kurdish terrorist

activities, and misleading maps illustrating an ominous string of "U.S. bases" spanning Greece, Cyprus, and northern Syria. With the country's currency swooning, and his hopes for reelection in doubt, Erdogan has endorsed these conspiratorial views. He has consistently misconstrued the demilitarization status of the Aegean Islands in arguing that the United States intends to use to use Greece to undermine Turkey. "America currently has [nine] bases in Greece," he declared last May. "Against whom are these bases established? … 'Against Russia' is the thing that they say … It is a lie, they are not honest. In the face of all this, their attitude towards Turkey is obvious."

Towards a Moment of Catharsis? American Policy and the Implications of a Greco-Turkish Crisis

Erdogan's provocative allegations are not purely the product of domestic anxieties or personal paranoia. One may say that his views represent a broad consensus on the history of America's relationship with Turkey. It is widely believed, even among Erdogan's opponents, that the United States has consistently sought to bridle or demean Turkey since the early stages of the Cold War. When the Trump administration publicly threatened to evict Turkey from the F-35 program, pundits in Turkey likened the ultimatum to the embarrassment brought on by Johnson's 1964 letter warning Ankara not to invade Cyprus. Widespread suspicions of U.S. complicity in the July 2016 coup attempt echo a commonly held belief that the United States aided the formation of a military junta in 1980. It is not uncommon for pundits and former officials to suggest that the destruction of Turkey had always been a part of an American-led Western project. This premise is arguably central to how Erdogan himself sees the past, present, and future of U.S.-Turkish relations. His "new Turkey," as it is often described, differs from the old precisely because he has successfully untethered the country from any patron or broker. "Turkey is not the old Turkey," Erdogan's director of communications declared. "Now there is a Turkey that protects its interests at all costs and demands eye-level relations with every interlocutor and on every stage."

Aaron Stein recently posed that "there is no broad rapprochement in the making for Turkish-Western relations." With Ankara poised to expand its cooperation with Russia, and perhaps widen its footprint in northern Syria, there is, he argues, "little — if anything — that can be done to manage Turkey and its foreign policy aspirations." If this is indeed the case, America's position between Turkey and Greece appears especially grim. In spite of the past, Erdogan's positioning appears to negate Washington's place as a mediator between the two neighbors. While it is possible that Brussels may be more successful in closing the divide, the possibility exists that even European mediation may have only limited success. Although some have argued that Erdogan's posturing may be an election ploy, there appears to be little room for compromise between Greece's sovereign rights and Ankara's strategic designs. Moreover, as one Turkish pundit recently mused, the wind now may be at Turkey's back. With war raging in Ukraine, the West may be compelled to stomach a Turkish attack, for the sake of NATO unity, as it had during Turkey's 1974 invasion of Cyprus. These fundamental conditions may very well push Ankara towards war with Athens within the foreseeable future.

Where does that leave the United States? The threat of a Turkish attack upon Greece compels Washington to contend with several undesirable scenarios. If Erdogan intends to wage war, the façade of balancing between Athens and Ankara may become impossible to maintain. For Washington, maintaining peace may come down to two unfavorable choices. U.S. officials could pressure Athens to cede aspects of its sovereignty. Further still, the Biden Administration could abruptly abandon its mutual defense cooperation agreement with Greece. Otherwise, it is more likely the U.S. may be left with the no other alternative but to act as the de facto guarantor of Greece's territorial sovereignty. Embracing that role, even if it deters Ankara in the short term, puts American policymakers in the contradictory position of having to plan for a possible military conflict with an allied state. The mere suggestion that the United States anticipates a clash with the Turkish military undoubtedly would raise questions regarding the integrity of the NATO alliance — let alone Turkey's future as a U.S. partner.

If the United States is obliged to come to Greece's defense, policymakers in Washington may be forced to do something even more profound: Reimagine Turkey as a direct competitor or adversary. Adjusting to such a reality would certainly be a significant challenge for American policymakers. U.S. security planning, as well as NATO's defense strategy as a whole, depends upon Turkey's support as an ally in both Europe and the Middle East. To reconceive of Turkey in antagonistic terms would therefore result in a broader geostrategic reassessment for American planners. Like an aggressive Russia, a belligerent Turkey potentially jeopardizes the free flow of traffic through the Black Sea and Mediterranean. Countering this possible threat would lead to new defense commitments, such as expanded security ties to Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt. While few in the United States may wish to see these changes come to pass, circumstances may demand that Washington recognize Turkish hostilities as a destabilizing force in the world.

Ryan Gingeras is a professor in the Department of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School and is an expert on Turkish, Balkan, and Middle East history. He is the author of six books, including the forthcoming *The Last Days of the Ottoman Empire* (to be released by Penguin in October 2022). His *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity, and the End of the Ottoman Empire* received short-list distinctions for the Rothschild Book Prize in Nationalism and Ethnic Studies and the British-Kuwait Friendship Society Book Prize. The views

expressed here are not those of the Naval Postgraduate School, the U.S. Navy, the Department of Defense, or any part of the U.S. government.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: The usual conclusions from articles like this one: (1) America First; and (2) in a conflict with Turkey, Greece will be alone – no US; no EU, no Russia (sweet revenge?). Alliances exist only in papers, not in real life where interests prevail.

Senate nominates Turkish President Erdogan for Nobel Peace Prize
Source

Jan 04 – The Senate of Pakistan on Wednesday nominated Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan for the Nobel Peace Prize for his "efforts to resolve the Ukrainian crisis."

"Russia-Ukraine war had quickly turned into a nuclear flashpoint that could have ended in catastrophe for the whole world. Due to his (Erdogan) untiring efforts, timely and effective interventions with both sides, he singlehandedly averted a global disaster," Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani, chairman of Pakistan's Senate, wrote in a letter to the Norwegian Nobel Committee.

Calling Erdogan "a true statesman and leader, who always strives for the betterment and prosperity of not just his country, but the region and the world in general," Sanjrani underlined that the Turkish president "carries the true message of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his teachings of peace, tolerance and love for all humanity, as he continues to dispel the myths and misconceptions related to Islamic teachings."

The Senate said it has officially registered the nomination in favor of the Turkish leader on Wednesday.

Senate of Pakistan ✔
@SenatePakistan · **Follow**

Chairman Senate, Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani through a letter has officially registered the nomination in favour of Turkish President @RTErdogan for the "Nobel Peace Prize" for his efforts to resolve the Ukrainian crisis in a letter addressed to Norwegian Nobel Committee...1/3 🇹🇷 🇵🇰

The Norwegian Nobel Committee is tasked with great responsibility in assessing and deciding upon giving out one of the most prestigious and most illustrious awards. As envisioned by the late Alfred Bernhard Nobel in his will, the Nobel Peace Prize is given out to people who have taken exceptional action to resolve looming or ongoing conflicts towards peace.

In this respect, and after due consideration and deliberation, I, as Chairman Senate of Pakistan, have registered the nomination in favour of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkiye for the illustrious Nobel Peace Prize in light of his role and efforts before and during the Russia-Ukraine war. This war had quickly turned into a nuclear flashpoint that could have ended in catastrophe for the whole world. Due to his untiring efforts, timely and effective interventions with both sides, he singlehandedly averted a global disaster. The Black Sea Grain Initiative also saved the region from a devastating famine.

President Erdoğan is a true statesman and leader of the people who always strives for the betterment and prosperity of not just his country, but the region and the world in general. He has not only proven his worthy leadership for his country or the region, but he carries the true message of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and his teachings of peace, tolerance and love for all humanity. President Erdoğan continues to dispel the myths and misconceptions related to Islamic teachings, and stands up for the rights of all human beings as equal.

It, therefore, gives me immense satisfaction to have nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize, and I hope that you will accord due consideration in light of his exceptional and unmatched efforts.

Excellencies, please accept, the assurance of my highest consideration.

(Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani)

Honourable Members
Norwegian Nobel Committee
Oslo
Kingdom of Norway

2:07 PM · Jan 4, 2023
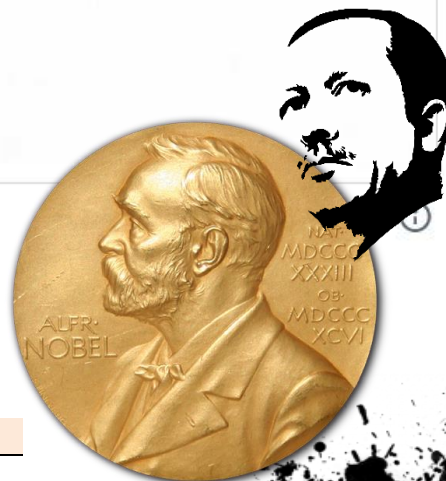
EDITOR'S COMMENT: Most probably the Best Joke of the 21st Century! A Humor Nobel Prize might be more appropriate.

After New Year's Eve violence, German police union calls for action

Source: https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/new-years-eve-violence-german-police-union-calls-action-rcna64188

> I am a finger pointing to the moon. Don't look at me; look at the moon!
> (Buddha)

A woman with a child looks at a burned-out bus standing beneath a residential building Tuesday in Berlin. Markus Schreiber / AP

Jan 04 – Germany's biggest police union called Tuesday for concerted action to prevent a repeat of the violent excesses seen in Berlin and other cities during the New Year's celebrations, in which officers, firefighters and medical personnel were attacked with fireworks.

Police in the capital recorded dozens of attacks and said 41 officers were injured. Online videos showing people firing rockets and throwing firecrackers at police cars and rescue vehicles drew widespread condemnation from German authorities.

The head of the GdP union, Jochen Kopelke, said there should be an "immediate debate" about the causes and consequences of such attacks, adding that they "must not be repeated at the next turn of the year."

Kopelke said it was important to discuss the facts of what had happened and avoid blanket accusations against particular social groups.

Some conservative and far-right politicians have noted that some of the attacks took place in areas of Berlin with large immigrant communities.

Christoph de Vries, a lawmaker with the center-right Christian Democrats, wrote on Twitter that to tackle the issue of violence toward police officers and firefighters it was necessary to "talk about the role of people (with the) phenotype: West Asiatic, darker skin type."

His comments drew accusations of racism, but De Vries said he was "ironically" referring to recent guidance by Berlin police on how to describe suspects' ethnicity and this should not distract from "the necessary discussion about migration policy and glaring deficits when it comes to integration."

Berlin police have so far said only that out of 103 suspects released from detention, 98 were male.

The German government's top integration official, Reem Alabali-Radovan, condemned the New Year's attacks and called for those responsible to swiftly be punished "with the full force of our laws."

In an interview with the Funke media group, she also called for the perpetrators to be judged "according to their deeds, not according to their presumed origins, as some are doing now," warning that this could cause further divisions in society rather than address the social causes of the problem. The attacks have also reignited a debate in Germany about the use of fireworks around New Year. The tradition suffered a blow during the pandemic, when the government banned their sale in an effort to ease the pressure on hospitals and discourage large public gatherings. Experts say the absence of such a ban may have contributed to the scale of violence and large number of fireworks injuries — including at least one death — seen this year.

The GdP union's regional head in Berlin, Stephan Weh, suggested it was time to consider a nationwide ban on pyrotechnics, saying the attacks in the capital had shown how they can be used "as weapons against people."

EDITOR'S COMMENT: Instead of concentrating on the huge "integration" problem of legal and illegal immigrants the only thing that really worried the authorities are the fireworks for 2024 NYE. Buddha was so right!

Israel Trained Cows to Spy on Arab Village, says Palestinian Authority News Site

Source: https://www.jewishpress.com/news/eye-on-palestine/palestinian-authority/israel-trained-cows-to-spy-on-arab-village-says-palestinian-authority-news-site/2023/01/05/

Jan 05 – A Palestinian Authority Arab village elder fabricated a story about Israeli livestock participating in spying activity, which the official Palestinian Authority daily news outlet *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida* then published as reality, according to a report by Palestinian Media Watch. "On the neck of each cow, they hang a medallion with an eavesdropping and recording device on it, and sometimes cameras, in order to monitor every detail" in the village, the elder said.

The PA daily further claimed that a PA village elder spotted Israeli cows that are actually "recruited and trained" spies.

Rushd Morrar, a Khirbet Yanun village elder, told *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida* on Dec. 27, "These are recruited and trained cattle, as on the neck of each cow they hang a medallion with an eavesdropping and recording device on it, and sometimes cameras, in order to monitor every detail in Khirbet Yanun large and small."

The Elder added that "settlers release herds of wild boars" to destroy PA Arab crops.

Funeral of trees
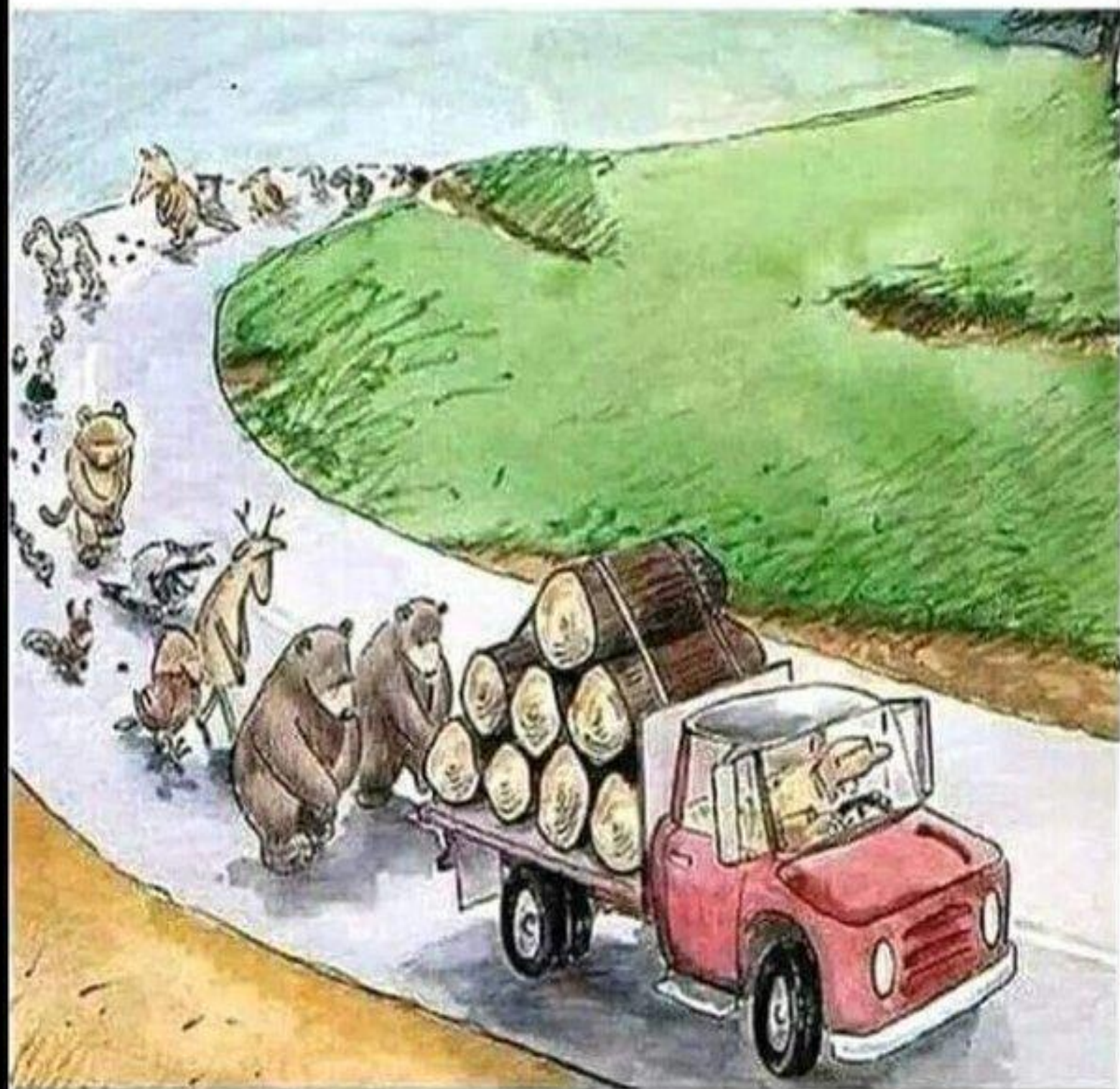
A picture with a very serious message

Wargames Can't Tell Us How to Deter a Chinese Attack on Taiwan—But Different Games Might

By Timothy R. Heath

Source: https://www.lawfareblog.com/wargames-cant-tell-us-how-deter-chinese-attack-taiwan%E2%80%94-different-games-might

A reconstruction of a Prussian military wargame (kriegsspie). (Matthew Kirschenbaum, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kriegsspiel_1824.jpg ; CC BY-SA 4.0, https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en)

Jan 05 – Wargames that simulate combat between the United States and China near Taiwan can provide useful insight about potential military challenges. However, analysts should be wary of repurposing the same games to explore political questions such as those related to deterrence, escalation control, alliance politics, and war prevention or termination. Asymmetries in the information requirements for political versus military topics make it exceedingly difficult to design games to explore both in a rigorous manner. Paradoxically, the deliberate falsification of facts in peacetime offers the best hope of painting a more vivid and convincing portrait of a situation that would actually confront policymakers in wartime.

Wargames featuring conflict between China, the U.S., and Taiwan have taken the Washington, D.C., area by storm in the past two years. The U.S. military has held classified wargames on the topic. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) held 22 iterations of such a scenario, and other think tanks such as the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), CNA, and RAND have held their own wargames on the topic as well. The appeal of wargames is not hard to figure out: They provide a vivid and dynamic simulation of armed conflict. The China-Taiwan

war scenario is especially appealing because the U.S. and China are locked in a rivalry and are also equipped with large, advanced, and powerful militaries. What would happen if the two fought is an inherently fascinating question. The U.S. military advantage is fading, and China's military is growing stronger. But how the two might fare against each other in combat is unclear. Wargames offer the possibility of exploring such critically important topics, whether as part of a research design or as critical context for creative discussion.

The results of the games have generated several key findings. The most obvious and compelling lesson is that combat between U.S. and Chinese military forces would probably be immensely destructive. In the CSIS game, the U.S. lost 200 aircraft, 20 warships, and two aircraft carriers. Attacks on cyber and space infrastructure are not uncommon. U.S. missiles may strike China's homeland. Both sides might escalate to the threat, or even use, of nuclear missiles, as happened in at least one CNAS game. Analysts have also noted the military implications for operational topics such as the importance of massing forces, adequate munition stores, and the vulnerability of surface ships on the modern battlefield.

But for many, these lessons are not enough. The frightening results of such simulations naturally raise deeper questions of a fundamentally political nature, such as: How can such a war be avoided? If it can't be avoided, how can escalation in such a war be controlled? What can the U.S. do to deter China from attacking Taiwan? How long can Taiwan successfully hold out against such an attack? Which allies will support the U.S. in such a war? These political considerations permeate the news accounts of the wargames. In the CSIS event, for example, participants debated whether the pre-positioning of marines on Taiwan prior to war would be "too provocative" or not. Players also debated whether China should attack Japan or not. Military decisions regarding escalation also carried significant political considerations, which may or may not have been debated at the game. In one game, for example, players for the U.S. side authorized missile strikes on Chinese ports.

Political decisions on the initiation or escalation of war are immensely important. Yet they are also extremely difficult to answer owing in part to the dearth of reliable data. After all, a U.S.-China war remains, thankfully, completely hypothetical. That leaves virtually no firsthand information with which one can answer such questions. Wargames, and the scenarios that underpin them, have sometimes been used to explore such questions. Since they incorporate many facts about relevant combatants, wargames offer the possibility of exploring political as well as military dimensions of war through a structured, analytic method.

Yet analysts should be wary of trying to use wargames designed for military questions to analyze political questions. The analysis of political topics has fundamentally different information requirements than those for military ones. Wargames that support analysis of military decisions do not necessarily support analysis of political decisions in the same situation, and vice versa.

It has generally been relatively easy to design a wargame to analyze military topics—a point underscored by the availability of innumerable high-quality board and computer wargames. Games that explore political topics in wartime have proved much more difficult to carry out in a convincing manner due to the asymmetry of information requirements for the two different topics. Of course, wargames are not the only technique available to analyze political topics for wartime situations. The questions are of such high importance that many resources have been committed to their study. Other techniques include "red teaming," which provides "contrarian analysis" from an adversary perspective, and research papers that attempt to explore such topics. Yet all of these efforts face the same problem of information asymmetry between military and political topics.

As Karl von Clausewitz observed, war is as much a political phenomenon as it is a military phenomenon. In war, leaders must frequently make judgments of either a political or military nature as a matter of course. Although their access to relevant information may be imperfect owing to the "fog of war," wartime leaders, in theory, have available all the facts they need to make both kinds of decisions. In a completely hypothetical situation, however, such as a scenario for a wargame, all relevant facts must be presented in the form of assumptions. In part, this is by design, since wargames are meant to be highly abstracted, simplified representations of enormously complex phenomena. But while the simplification of relevant facts poses little problem for the analysis of military topics, it poses a tremendous challenge for those who seek to explore political topics. Understanding why requires a brief review of why the information requirements for military and political decisions differ so much.

Military vs. Political Decisions

Military decisions are judgments that evaluate and resolve issues related primarily to program development; modernization of forces; and employment of military forces at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Examples of military decisions include decisions to develop defense budgets; to develop weapons and platforms; to train and equip forces; to mobilize assets; and to execute operations, actions, and activities in peacetime or combat. Military decisions rely primarily on information about militaries.

Political decisions, by contrast, are judgments that evaluate and resolve issues in a crisis or conflict that are primarily driven as much by economic, political, and other factors as by military factors. Individuals making political decisions are concerned with how to realize goals while also managing the risks and consequences to other interests. In political decisions, military means may or may not be prioritized,

depending on the goal. Among the most important types of defense-related political decisions are those to initiate, deter, escalate, deescalate, or terminate conflict. Questions about whether to support an ally or grant access to a military base in a war also fall into the category of political questions. In deciding whether to commit the nation to conflict, for example, the decision-maker must weigh the cost and risk of military action, the potential impact on the economy, and the potential impact on domestic politics or diplomacy. Similarly, an ally's decision to provide military assistance will depend in part on assessments of the legitimacy of the war, the stakes involved, and the potential benefits and risks of involvement.

It should be clear from this overview that the information requirements for political decisions are far broader and deeper than those for military decisions. Political decision-making must consider all relevant political, economic, military, and other factors. These factors cannot be omitted because they could prove decisive in a political leader's deliberation. This means that political-focused wargames require far more detailed assumptions than military-focused games. But that is not all. The assumptions not only must be detailed but also must be realistic in the sense that they should accurately replicate the weight and measure of all incentives that a decision-maker might reasonably consider. In short, the details or assumptions of a wargame scenario focused on political topics are of supreme importance.

By contrast, military decisions rely almost exclusively on data about military forces. The real focus is on the interplay of military forces as represented in the game. For such games, scenarios exist mainly as a backdrop. The details of the political and economic situation matter far less. Indeed, strictly speaking, the casus belli or specifics of a leader's war termination criteria may not matter in a wargame focused on learning about a regional military balance or new technology. As one wargame designer at CNA put it, "For a war game to be useful, it's largely irrelevant which potential conflict is played out …. The real takeaways aren't so much about victory or defeat in a particular conflict but about what's exposed along the way."

The Problem of "Realistic" Hypothetical Scenarios

Designers of wargames focused on political topics thus face the formidable challenge of creating "realistic" scenario assumptions for situations that are not real. For a political judgment in any game to have any rigor, it must be based on reasonable incentives appropriate for a wartime situation. A scenario built on nothing more than unsubstantiated assumptions inherently lacks credibility. So, how can a game designer build scenarios and assumptions that accurately capture the various and contrasting incentives for a fictional situation?

One way to get around this problem is to incorporate as much of the current world situation as possible into the game scenario and make only those changes needed to introduce conflict. A game designer could create a scenario that depicts U.S.-China relations largely as they exist today and then inject some crisis near Taiwan to begin the war. This is, in fact, the most commonly used method to build "realistic" scenarios for wargames. But a scenario set in wartime that hews to facts as they exist in peacetime introduces a serious analytic error.

The problem is that, by definition, many factors in a peacetime situation favor peace—factors that can be numerous and diffuse. A scenario based on a contemporary, nonhostile relationship between two countries implies many incentives to avoid hostilities. A main reason why the U.S. and China have not gone to war over Taiwan, after all, is because they have many compelling reasons to favor peace. What exactly about the current situation favors peace remains in debate, but candidates include mutual economic interdependence, the presence of nuclear weapons, relatively modest threat perceptions, and involvement in shared multilateral institutions. Injecting a "trigger event" such as a crisis related to Taiwan does not resolve the structural incentives for peace. Instead, it merely creates an artificial and unconvincing driver of war. Scenarios that aim to explore political topics in wartime but share considerable continuity with peacetime situations are thus inherently contradictory—they depict a situation with as many structural incentives for peace as one that favors war. This contradiction helps explain why so many wargame scenarios strike participants as implausible and unbelievable.

How to Improve Wargames for Political Analysis

A better approach to wargames would be to model the political assumptions for a hypothetical wargame on the experiences of countries that have actually gone to war. As mentioned earlier in this piece, the deliberate falsification of facts in peacetime offers a good model for what might actually happen in wartime and how policymakers would likely react. After all, the most realistic and relevant facts that confront decision-makers in a war are not those that typify situations in peacetime, but those that typify situations in wartime. The very act of envisioning a war situation that does not exist requires the imaginative visualization of a world radically different from a peacetime status quo.

For such historical data to be useful, it should be as rigorous and scientifically derived as possible. The best resource for scenario designers that aim to replicate realistic and relevant facts and incentives for political decisions lies in the historical experience of countries in analogous situations. Academic research

on the phenomena of war has made tentative but promising findings that could be useful for such an endeavor. Research findings regarding the causes for war initiation, escalation, and termination can form the basis of imaginative scenarios that paint a vivid picture of the political dynamics of war. By incorporating findings from such research, the scenarios can present a more convincing picture of the types of facts and incentives that leaders could face in war.

This point can be illustrated more fully by critically examining some flawed assumptions that appear in the U.S.-China wargames cited earlier in the piece regarding Taiwan and how these could be improved. Many of these assumptions are perfectly fine for games focused on military topics but problematic when applied to political topics (as such games almost invariably try to do). A common assumption of these specific games is that U.S.-China relations are fundamentally ambivalent or nonhostile. War comes about mainly over some combination of issues related to Taiwan's status, Beijing's policy regarding unification, and U.S. security obligations. The CSIS game is typical in its assumption that "China has committed to invading Taiwan and the US has decided to intervene in the island's defense." China's motive is usually depicted as focused almost exclusively on reconquering Taiwan, with little regard to any other issues. China is accordingly depicted as willing to bear any cost to complete reunification. While partly necessary to enable war, the assumption is also based on the observation that Chinese leaders regularly make such uncompromising statements. Absent the Taiwan issue, the U.S. and China are assumed to have no reason to fight each other. Again, this reflects the peacetime situation in which the two countries regard Taiwan as the most dangerous flashpoint but otherwise do not appear to have any reason to go to war against one another. Also typical of many wargames are the small number of involved parties. The two contending sides usually consist of the U.S. and Taiwan (and maybe Japan or Australia) on one side, and China on the other. Games—such as the CSIS one—often also frequently assume that Japan will make minimal efforts to assist the U.S. in such a war, owing to legal constraints. This is clearly based on Japan's current situation in peacetime. And when war begins, it usually is envisioned as a primarily regional affair that concludes once the battle for Taiwan is resolved.

Each flawed assumption mentioned above is based on facts drawn from the current peacetime situation, but this makes them of doubtful validity for wartime. They present a misleading and inaccurate representation of the facts and incentives that would likely confront decision-makers in an actual wartime situation. For starters, the notion that the U.S. and China would wage war solely over the issue of Taiwan's status is overly simplistic and unfounded. The analogous experience of countries like the U.S. and China are those of great powers. And when great powers go to war, the causes are myriad, overlapping, and complex. Great powers fight wars over issues of status and leadership as much as over disputes about obligations to allies and partners. Entire books are written on the causes of great power wars. The causes of any U.S.-China war would probably be just as complex as those of preceding great power wars. The specific issues that might lead to war cannot be predicted, but we can be confident that they would involve a similar mix of motives spanning issues of leadership, influence, position, and specific disputes including the status of allies like Taiwan.

U.S.-China war will never solely be "about Taiwan" and accordingly it will almost certainly neither be geographically focused just around Taiwan nor is it likely to end once an initial clash around the island concludes. In fact, it would be more accurate to describe a U.S.-China war as "beginning near Taiwan" in the same way that World War II could be described as a major war that "began near Poland" but, of course, became a much larger conflict. Similarly, we cannot predict the exact sequence of events that might lead the U.S. and China to war. We can, however, estimate the likely types of behavior between states that would dramatically increase the risk of war based on the experiences of past warring great powers. The U.S. and China would not have peaceful, ambivalent relations in the lead-up to war, but would probably experience a bitterly acrimonious and hostile relationship. This view of each other as mutual enemies and implacable obstacles to national goals is a critical ingredient in great power wars and would develop through a long period of destabilized relations, the multiplication and intensification of disputes, the hardening of threat perceptions, the onset of acutely hostile relations, and a series of militarized crises.

The assumption that war would mainly involve just the U.S., China, and Taiwan is also unjustified. Great power rivalries and wars historically have been multilateral affairs featuring many participants in opposing coalitions. The phenomenon of "war joining" is exceedingly common in great power wars. Thus, it is highly likely that war between China and the U.S. would involve many countries on one side or the other. Accordingly, it is not unreasonable to expect that Japan's restrictions on the use of force could change significantly if it viewed a great power war between the U.S. and China as carrying enormous stakes for Tokyo's future, which it likely would. Historical examples of great power wars also cast doubt on the common assumption of wargames and research papers based on military analysis that the conflict would be confined to the region or be of short duration. Nothing is more common in the history of warfare, after all, than the erroneous expectation of military experts of the time that a looming war will be limited in scale and short lived. Past great power wars suggest that a U.S.-China war would extend around the world and could last months or years.

Drawing scenarios that depict a U.S.-China war in such terms will inevitably invite criticisms from experts struck by the depiction of a world so starkly at odds with our own. The strength of criticisms will depend not on their consistency with peacetime facts, but on their grounding on analogous wartime situations. Past episodes of great power wars provide a valuable resource for more accurately assessing what might

happen in wartime, but no data source is perfect. The relevance of past examples will invariably have some limitations for future wars, but that does not make them unimportant. Criticism and debate over the relevance of phenomena from the past is welcome and necessary. But this should not obscure the fundamental point that the most useful and relevant reference point for analyzing what might happen to U.S.-China relations in a hypothetical war rests in the wartime experiences of other countries, not in the peacetime experiences of the U.S. and China.

Games used to support military analysis will continue to remain critical for defense planning, as they always have. They continue to play a valuable role for defense analysts who study operational problems related to modern war. Participants in games simulating a U.S.-China war near Taiwan, however, often become interested in political questions because the same events quickly demonstrate that the U.S. cannot "win" such a war at an acceptable price any more than China could. Naturally, this encourages analysts of the China-Taiwan situation to explore ways to avoid such a war through games that test the effectiveness of deterrent options or that attempt to manage the risks of escalations.

However, the asymmetry in information requirements for wargames focused on military vice political topics is so sharp that it is generally unhelpful and probably counterproductive to attempt to use a single wargame or scenario to serve both purposes. Scenarios and assumptions that are perfectly reasonable for games designed to analyze military topics will be unreasonable and misleading when applied to political topics, and vice versa. What is needed for wargames that explore political topics in war are scenarios modeled on patterns of interstate behavior that commonly appeared in actual wars. The best resource for facts and assumptions for building such scenarios are the analogous experiences of other countries in wartime situations. Scholarly and scientific findings regarding such patterns provide a valuable resource for such efforts. Preliminary efforts have been made to translate academic research on war into defense work, but much can be done to systematize and render such findings more useful and rigorous for game designers. Even with such improvements, however, humility about what we can achieve is required. Re-creating hypothetical war situations based on the experiences of past wars will be imperfect at best and carry their own flawed assumptions. Carrying out different iterations with slightly different assumptions could help mitigate some of these limitations. Yet even in the most optimal case, we can at best aspire to craft crude simulacra of the incentives and factors leaders might confront in a hypothetical situation that will carry all sorts of unimaginable complexities. **Given the stakes involved, even an imperfect and partial approach offers a potentially significant improvement over current methodologies for defense planners, analysts, and decision-makers alike who seek to explore political questions in wartime.**

Dr. Timothy R. Heath is a Senior International Defense Researcher with the nonprofit, nonpartisan RAND Corporation. He has over 15 years of experience as a China specialist within the U.S. government and joined RAND in 2014. Heath has authored numerous studies, articles and one book, "China's New Governing Party Paradigm: Political Renewal and the Pursuit of National Rejuvenation" (2014). He earned his PhD in Political Science from George Mason University.

Norwegian MP nominates NATO Secretary General for Nobel Peace Prize

Source: https://earlybulletins.news/world/213160.html

Jan 06 – The Norwegian MP emphasized the importance of Stoltenberg securing NATO support for Ukraine, but he immediately made it clear that the alliance would not directly enter into conflict.

The Norwegian MP also called Stoltenberg "the most important link between NATO member countries." He also noted that Stoltenberg contributed to the fact that Sweden and Finland will become members of the alliance.

According to the Agence France-Presse (AFP) agency,

"Today I nominated Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg for the Nobel Peace Prize. Stoltenberg deserves the award for his outstanding work as NATO Secretary General at a difficult time for the alliance," Tübring-Gedde wrote.

parliamentarians and ministers of all countries, former laureates of the award, as well as some university professors, can nominate a candidate for the prestigious award. The deadline for applications is 31 January.

The Nobel Peace Prize for 2022 was awarded to Belarusian lawyer and activist Ales Byalyatsky, as well as representatives of the Russian Memorial Center (recognized as a foreign agent), liquidated by a court decision, and the Ukrainian Center for Civil Liberties Yan Rachinsky and Alexandra Matviychuk. The laureates were awarded for "representing civil society in their countries".

EDITOR'S COMMENT: The second-best joke of Year 2023!

The Elgin marbles and the rot of 'decolonisation'
Source: https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-elgin-marbles-and-the-rot-of-decolonisation/

Jan 07 – The proposed return to Greece, in the guise of loans, of some of the British Museum's most iconic objects, the Elgin marbles, is a measure of how far the 'decolonisation' campaign has gone in brainwashing the guardians of our cultural heritage. There's little doubt that the Greek government, which still claims rightful ownership, will never willingly return such a loan, and we all know that possession is nine-tenths of the law.

The current deal, designed to circumvent rules preventing British museums from giving away our national treasures, has been brokered by former culture minister Lord Vaizey and ex-chancellor George Osborne, now Chair of the British Museum, but its details have yet to be revealed. What is remarkably absent from it so far are any guarantees of the loan being returned or, despite claims to reciprocity, precisely what equivalent Greek artefacts we'll be getting in exchange.

The legality of Greek claims to the marbles are dubious at best. The friezes from the Parthenon at Athens, built mostly by slaves in 500 BC, were allegedly 'stolen' by the art-collecting, antiquarian Earl of Elgin in 1802, while he was British Ambassador to Constantinople. The Parthenon at the time was a neglected ruin in the Ottoman Empire, then the internationally recognised ruler of what is now Greece, which had no legal existence as a state until 30 years later. The Parthenon had been used as an ammunition dump and badly damaged by explosions. When Lord Elgin arrived, the site was being cannibalised by Turkish *dragomen* selling off bits as souvenirs to tourists.

Elgin acquired the marbles quite legally, with official permission from the Ottoman government, shipped them to London at a personal cost of £5 million in today's money and later sold them, again quite legally, to the British government, who donated them to the British Museum. All these transactions are recorded in relevant documentation, and the new Greek nation, founded with British assistance, laid no claim to the objects until half a century later. Most retrospective legal claims, we know, are time-barred. But legality apart, the morality of such claims, backed by our current 'decolonisers', is hugely suspect. To begin with, there is no evidence that the population of modern Greece, after two and a half millennia, can legitimately claim descent from either the slaves who built the Parthenon or the Athenian

rulers who commissioned it. Populations have migrated, mixed and altered across the world for millennia, so few of us can claim entitlement based on geographical or ethnic continuity since ancient times.

There is a wider ethical question. It was post-Enlightenment European and often British explorers, archaeologists, conservationists and art-collectors, like Lord Elgin, who rediscovered and rescued picturesque classical ruins from obscurity, neglect and destruction in most parts of the globe. It was often through their 'cultural appropriation' by these European classicists, Orientalists, Egyptologists and Africanists, whom our 'decolonisers' decry, that natives like me learned about our own classical heritage and how to value its remains.

An uncomfortable reality we need to acknowledge is that most of Asia, Africa, the Americas and Australasia had no museums of any sort to conserve antiquities, until Europeans came along to found them and excavate, research and treasure the artefacts we enjoy today. In India, where I come from, we either worshipped idols or threw them away if they were old and damaged. The wonderful Amravati marbles, also on display in the British Museum, were rescued by British officials from an ancient Buddhist stupa that was being cannibalised by local builders.

An even more dubious morality applies to western collections of Benin bronzes, whose return to Nigeria may also be imminent. They were acquired as entirely legal booty by a British military expedition to punish the King of Benin for the brutal murder of an unarmed British delegation. The Benin kingdom was an unusually cruel, tyrannical regime by African standards, notorious for brutalities that ranged from widespread slavery to the most gruesome forms of ritual, mass human sacrifice, including women and children. The blood-soaked bronzes, to which western collectors have given their current financial value, were made from brass quite literally acquired by Benin in return for slaves. A sobering thought perhaps for the 'decolonisers', so anxious to return them to the descendants of Benin's rulers, but not of the slaves whose blood-money they represent.

A final thought, if our morality is to be based on the greatest good of the greatest number. More than six million visitors a year from across the globe enjoy the Elgin marbles at the British Museum, compared with less than a third that number at the Parthenon museum in Athens. I very much doubt that the many Benin bronzes still in Nigeria, housed in British-established museums there, attract even a tiny fraction of that number. I rest my case.

Dr Zareer Masani is a historian and the author of Macaulay: Britain's Liberal Imperialist. He is on the advisory panel of Policy Exchange's History Matters Project.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: If the author is a historian, then I am a nuclear scientist! In Greece we say that "shouts the thief so that the householder will be afraid". A typical behavior of a declining empire …

World Prison Brief
Source: https://www.prisonstudies.org/

The World Prison Brief is an **online database** providing free access to information on prison systems around the world. It is a unique resource, which supports evidence-based development of prison policy and practice globally.
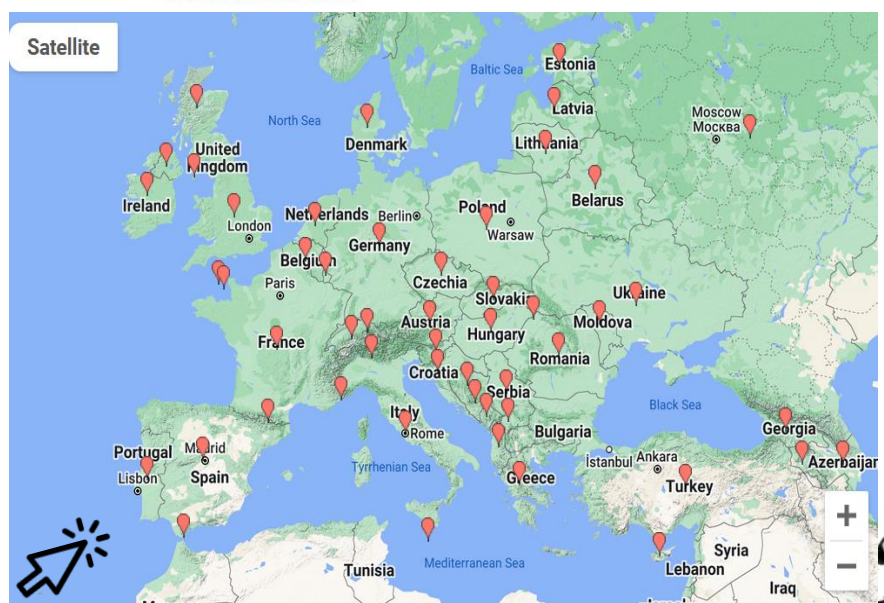
The World Prison Brief is hosted by the Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research(link is external) (ICPR), at Birkbeck(link is external), University of London. It was launched in 2000 using data compiled by Roy Walmsley, Founder of the World Prison Brief.

ICPR hosts and updates the World Prison Brief as part of its World Prison Research Programme. This programme, which involves collaboration with research partners, civil society organisations and policy makers, aims to inform and promote debate and policy reform.

In addition to providing access to the World Prison Brief database, this website holds other publications by ICPR and its original host, the International Centre for Prison Studies (which merged with ICPR in 2014). These include the World Prison Population Lists, the handbook *A Human Rights Approach to Prison Management*, research project reports, International Prison News Digests, and regular Covid-19 news updates. See the International Prison Publications page.

The latest World Prison Population List, published in December 2021, reports that there may well be in excess of 11.5 million prisoners worldwide.

Gulf States and Israel Should Form a Rapid Response Force

Source: https://www.almendron.com/tribuna/gulf-states-and-israel-should-form-a-rapid-response-force/

Sept 2022 – When U.S. President Joe Biden made the short hop from Israel to Saudi Arabia aboard Air Force One in July, it aptly symbolized the Middle East's growing regional connections. Nearly two years after the signing of the Abraham Accords—the historic peace agreement between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain—the next steps in Middle Eastern cooperation already appear under way. Israel, several Gulf Arab states, and the United States are working to create a regional alliance on air defense. Although practical cooperation is still limited, Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz claimed in June that the nascent air defense partnership had already helped neutralize Iranian attacks. Similarly, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Israel are working on a fleet of naval drones to monitor Persian Gulf waters and ward off Iranian threats.

However, patrolling waters and fending off Iranian rockets, missiles, and drones are only two examples of potential security cooperation in the region. In any crisis-prone area, security and deterrence critically depend on the ability to rapidly mobilize and deploy forces. In late February, just days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Western allies activated the NATO Response Force and subsequently enlarged it from 40,000 to 300,000 troops. Developing a similar crisis response force capability in the Middle East, where partners face shared threats but collective security is still in its infancy, should be the next step in building out the region's political and military connections.

As United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has rightly said, the Middle East is not only an area of frequent conflict but also a region with the potential for "remarkable dynamism and capacity". While trade, tourism, and other ties enabled by the Abraham Accords will play important roles, security cooperation will also be key to integrating the region. A multinational regional unit dedicated to rapid response in the Middle East is exactly the sort of approach that would further bind like-minded countries to each other—while serving as a useful deterrent.

A regional crisis response force in the Middle East is not a new idea. One of the first commanders of U.S. Central Command, U.S. Marine Gen. George Crist, wrote to then-Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger in 1986 that a "premium has to be placed on coalition warfare". More recently, both of the last two CENTCOM commanders supported collaborating with Middle East partners to develop a regional defensive framework that would include a capability like the NATO Response Force.

I, too, pitched the idea while serving as the commander of U.S. Marine Forces in the Middle East. The proposal saw both approval and hesitation from U.S. partners. Some of these partners wanted assurances that this force would not duplicate the efforts of existing regional forces, such as those of the Gulf Cooperation Council. They were also concerned about international legitimacy and wondered how the creation of a new force might affect their relations with the United States.

In recent years, however, several developments have made the Middle East's existing regional forces outdated while opening up new avenues of cooperation, particularly with Israel.

The need for a Middle Eastern response force has grown with several regional threats. While the Islamic State's physical caliphate has been destroyed, the group remains a threat to security inside and outside the region. Iranian aggression has persisted even as negotiations over a revived nuclear deal continue. In addition to numerous rocket, missile, and drone strikes on targets in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and the UAE, Iranian naval vessels have routinely harassed military and commercial shipping in international waters. Without a deterrent response, Iran's aggression is likely to continue, whether or not there is a new nuclear agreement.

Other response forces already exist in the region, notably the Gulf Cooperation Council's military arm, known as the **Peninsula Shield Force**. It is not a standing force, however, and its deployment requires unanimous approval by all of the organization's members. That has happened only twice in the 38 years of its existence: In 2003, 10,000 soldiers and two naval vessels helped protect Kuwait from potential Iraqi attacks, and in 2011, a small contingent supported the Bahraini government during a domestic uprising. The Peninsula Shield Force held joint exercises in 2016 and 2019, but it is not the kind of highly trained, integrated response force needed for today's multitude of threats.

The most significant development that makes a more effective and strategically significant regional response force possible is the signing of the Abraham Accords. Since then, Israel has grown increasingly close to the UAE and Bahrain, especially over security matters related to Iranian regional aggression. A regional crisis response force that brings together Israeli and Arab troops would be another step building on the promise of the Abraham Accords—one that can be taken slowly and expanded on as politics allow and security needs demand.

A multinational rapid response force would contribute to regional security and stability by strengthening the participating partners through capability development, improved interoperability, and a coherent agreement on common security objectives. What would such a force look like? It would be owned by the regional partners, advised and supported by the United States, and endowed with a mission of mutual security and humanitarian interests. It would be a balanced, highly trained, regionally integrated force and maintained at a very high state of readiness. Whether the force is permanently based or remains on call would be decided by the contributing nations.

As of March 2011, the Peninsula Shield Force was commanded by Saudi Major General Mutlaq bin Salem Al-Azima and has about 40,000 troops and continues to have its permanent base at King Khalid Military City near Hafar al Batin.

In terms of legitimacy—one of the concerns that came up when the idea of a force was proposed—both the U.N. and the Arab League provide for the establishment of regional security mechanisms. Article 43 of the U.N. Charter allows all members to make special agreements, including military ones, to help maintain international peace and security. Article 52 of the same document encourages regional peace and security arrangements, provided they are "consistent with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations". The Arab League, in Article 9 of its charter, allows for member states seeking "closer collaboration and stronger bonds" to "conclude among themselves whatever agreements they wish".

The development of a regional crisis reaction force would provide several benefits. First, it would be a highly trained, rapidly deployable, conventional force to balance the region's overreliance in recent years on special operations forces. Like the NATO model, which accelerated the development of relationships and interoperability among NATO members' militaries, a Middle Eastern response force would gain from personnel exchanges, frequent exercises, and the development of common training standards and assessments. All of this would raise the partners' military readiness.

Another benefit of a ready, trained, interoperable, and responsive force is deterrence. It adds credibility for a range of possible scenarios, including threats to border and maritime security, terrorism, and other

malign actions by state antagonists and their proxies. It would also help prevent relatively small attacks or other events from festering into major long-term problems.

And considering the Middle East's vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, refugee flows, and natural disasters, a response force could also be deployed for humanitarian efforts. These events often strain territorial integrity and test the resilience of governments, especially in countries with limited resources. Stabilizing the situation until larger international efforts materialize would be a logical goal of a regionally based rapid response force.

U.S. leadership and guidance in developing this kind of capability would also help build self-reliance among allies and partners. Nevertheless, the region's governments are unlikely to buy into an integrated force if they believe the United States is offloading its commitment to regional security. U.S. leadership is necessary both to help negotiate the force's formation and to ensure its effectiveness through the commitment of participating countries' forces. U.S. military forces stationed in or temporarily deployed to the region could partner with the envisioned force as well.

Old barriers in the Middle East are breaking down. It's time for the United States to capitalize on the new goodwill between old enemies, push the creation of a regional response force, and build credible deterrence and greater security in the Middle East.

Sam Mundy is a retired Marine Corps lieutenant general who served as commander of the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command from 2018 to 2021. He was a participant in the Jewish Institute for National Security of America's 2022 Generals and Admirals Program.

Think tank simulation predicts 'heavy' losses on all sides, including US, if China invades Taiwan

Source: https://thehill.com/policy/defense/3805119-think-tank-simulation-predicts-heavy-losses-on-all-sides-including-us-if-china-invades-taiwan/

Jan 09 – A war games simulation of a full-scale Chinese invasion of the self-governing island nation of Taiwan predicts "heavy losses" for all parties likely to be involved, including the U.S. and Japan.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) ran the simulation of a 2026 Chinese invasion of Taiwan exactly 24 times, drawing on historical data and operational research. The simulation's events are included in an extensive report released Monday.

In most scenarios, an alliance between the U.S., Japan and Taiwan defeated China after three or four weeks of fighting — but at the loss of dozens of ships, hundreds of aircraft and tens of thousands of troops.

Mark Cancian, a senior adviser with the CSIS International Security Program and an author of the report, told The Hill the big takeaway from the simulation is that Taiwan can be sustained as an independent nation.

"But the cost is very high," he added.

In the report, Cancian recommended policies and efforts to deter a future invasion, noting that even if a war is seen as risky for China, the nation still might consider a direct conflict.

"Although our analysis indicates that the United States and Taiwan would prevail and inflict heavy casualties, it's possible to imagine the Chinese are looking at it differently," Cancian explained. "That's why we recommend enhancing deterrence so we don't get into this situation in the first place."

In recent years, China has increased its aggressive rhetoric against Taiwan, a democratic, independent country that broke from the mainland in 1949. The ruling Chinese Communist Party, however, sees the island as part of its territory.

The U.S. abides by the One China principle, which says Taiwan is part of China, but commits to informal relations with the island nation, including supplying arms for Taipei.

At the same time, the U.S. also commits to "strategic ambiguity" in the event of a Chinese invasion, making it unclear how American forces would respond.

The CSIS war games simulation did run a model on a "Taiwan stands alone" approach, assuming Taipei has no support from the U.S. or Japan — it ended with a quick Chinese takeover. Unlike with the U.S. arming of Ukraine against Russia, China could block off American supplies to the island.

The simulation draws on historical information

and data for ground combat operations during an amphibious invasion, as well as speculative models on missile attacks based on the size of warheads and how much area they would cover on impact.

The games include a wide range of scenarios, taking into account instances in which China performs better than expected or underperforms in the invasion.

While the U.S. and Taiwan prevail in most scenarios, there are some conditions for success, according to CSIS, including that Taiwan must hold the line and that U.S. forces must have access to bases in Japan.

The model forecasts 19 scenarios in which Japan gets involved in the conflict. Japan is ambiguous about defending Taiwan, but Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced last year a historic switch from a defense-only strategy and a major boost to its annual defense spending.

Although China has a larger presence in the South China Sea, the U.S. still has a stronger military across the globe, and several pessimistic conditions would have to come true for a military loss in the war, researchers said.

"What China is trying to do is very, very difficult," said Cancian. "An amphibious assault on a hostile shore — even though the [Taiwan Strait] is 100 miles across — is just very, very hard."

Still, any direct conflict between China and the U.S. would devastate Taiwan and possibly weaken the U.S. on the global stage, the simulation found.

JANUARY 2023

The First Battle of the Next War

Wargaming a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan

AUTHORS
Mark F. Cancian
Matthew Cancian
Eric Heginbotham

A Report of the CSIS International Security Program

CSIS | CENTER FOR STRATEGIC & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

There were some limitations of the model, including that it assesses China based on where its military forces would be in four years. China is pushing to build up a "world-class" military in the next two decades and is aiming to quadruple its nuclear arsenal in the next 13 years, according to the Department of Defense.

CSIS also did not simulate a scenario in which nuclear weapons are used, which would mean an entirely different type of warfare, or the possibility of a Chinese blockade of the island.

Another possible scenario is that Taipei quickly surrenders to China and puts up little resistance, or the war lasts longer than three or four weeks, which would mean more casualties.

Matthew Cancian, who modeled the conflict with his father Mark and has simulated other war games at the U.S. Naval War College, said the simulation is not "advocating" for the U.S. to "defend or not to defend" Taiwan.

"It's just showing the cost and likely results of those choices," he said.

Turkey's Latest Genocidal Campaign: 2,500 Attacks on Christians, Kurds & Yazidis

By Raymond Ibrahim
Source: https://www.meforum.org/63993/turkey-latest-genocidal-campaign-2500-attacks-on

Dec 29 – Many in the West heard of the severe atrocities the jihadists of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) committed against the religious minorities of the Fertile Crescent, especially Christians and Yazidis. Several Western governments later classified these atrocities—which included massacres, crucifixion, torture, and sex slavery—as genocides.

Today, however, few are unaware that these same genocidal atrocities have resumed against the very same religious minorities who most suffered at the hands of ISIS in northern Syria—this time by another Muslim force with caliphal aspirations: Turkey, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Between November 20-25, 2022, Turkey launched 2,500 attacks—air, mortar, drone, artillery, etc.—several miles deep into Syria's northern border. Governed by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), this also happens to be where most of the formerly persecuted religious minorities, Christians, Yazidis, and Kurds, live.

During late November's so-called Operation Claw Sword, Turkey killed 48 people, wounded dozens, and destroyed or damaged 2,300 civilian homes and buildings, including a children's hospital, a health center, an electrical power station, essential oil and gas processing facilities, critical grain towers, and a major bakery.

As *Save the Persecuted Christians* noted, "Turkey appears focused on depriving the civilian population of food, heat, and water as winter sets in. It even dropped bombs on tent camps housing survivors of its earlier invasions," as well as helped ISIS terrorists escape prison.

Lethal Turkish attacks have continued, prompting *Genocide Watch* to issue a Genocide Emergency Alert on December 7, 2022:

These military attacks by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's regime are part of a wider Turkish policy of annihilation of the Kurdish and Assyrian [Christian] people in northern Syria and Iraq. Turkey has committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, including bombing, shelling, abduction, torture, and extrajudicial killings. The attacks are part of Turkey's genocidal policies towards Kurds, Christians, and Ezidis.

Unlike the atrocities committed by ISIS in the same region, however, those now being committed by Turkey have received zero attention by Western "mainstream media"—not least because Turkey is a member of NATO, and therefore, apparently, shielded from criticism.

Fortunately, others are not being silent. In a recent webinar titled, "Is it Genocide? Turkey Targets Syria's Christians, Yazidis & Kurds," an expert panel hosted by *Save the Persecuted Christians* discussed and offered evidence against what they all referred to as Turkey's "genocidal" actions against Christians, Yazidis, Kurds, and other

ethno-religious minorities of north Syria, as well as how the US and international community should respond.

Webinar moderator, Frank Gaffney, executive chairman of the Center for Security Policy, began by placing these developments on Erdoğan, "who fancies himself a new caliph," and who is committed to resurrecting the Ottoman caliphate and enforcing "sharia, the supremacist doctrine of Islam," which is "especially oppressive to Christians."

Most if not all of the panelists agreed on and stressed various points, including that:

Turkey's stated purpose for its aggression against northern Syria—that is, to create a "safe zone" along its southern border with Syria—is a pretext and excuse for its true motivation: "to remove religious and ethnic minorities," said Charmaine Hedding, president of the Shai Fund. Erdoğan's ground forces, she added, include former ISIS, al-Qaeda, and Tahrir al-Shams jihadists who "are committing massive human rights abuses and have an agenda to create a caliphate, and they will eradicate the religious minorities in this area." What Turkey is doing in northern Syria is not just a *genocide*, according to the international community's legal definition of that word, but the continuation of an old policy. As panelist Gregory Stanton, president of Genocide Watch, flat out asserted, "Turkey is a genocidal society... Turkey has conducted so many genocides in history," with an apparent animus for one particular group: "Going back many centuries, it [Turkey] has been anti-Christian, and has tried to slaughter as many Christians as possible."

Hedding agreed: "This genocide is a pattern we see, and it's certainly nothing new.... What we will see is the end of Christianity and some Yazidis in this area if we allow Turkey to get away with it. There will be a humanitarian crisis." Hedding added that, "for those who say 'Not on our watch!' or 'Never again!'—here it is, happening again."

Turkey's current victims—especially Christians and Yazidis—are, tragically, the descendants of Turkey's previous victims, which it also "genocided" during the late 19th and early 20th century death marches. As explained by Lauren Homer, president of Law and Liberty Trust, north Syria is precisely where the Ottomans had slaughtered countless Christians over a century ago. Those now being targeted are their descendants. Similarly, Turkey's goal is "to finish what it started," said Hedding, and "displace hundreds of thousands of people to recreate the demography of northern Syria and erase two thousand years of history."

What Turkey is doing to the Christians and other minorities of northern Syria is part of a much larger plan to cleanse all of the descendants of the Ottoman Empire's former Christian subjects, including those of Armenia and Greece, who both experienced genocides under the Turks and who are, once again, also being targeted by Turkey, as "part of its genocidal policies," to quote Stanton. "As soon as it was declared that ISIS was defeated," Homer emphasized, "Turkey began attacking the very people who fought and defeated ISIS," that is, the Kurds and other religious minorities who formed the AANES.

Turkey's recent military actions in Arfin were highlighted as emblematic of that nation's genocidal campaign. There, hundreds of thousands of Christians and Yazidis fled, even as the Turks "were hunting them [Christians and Yazidis] down, going door to door," said Hedding. There was a "jihadi fatwa against these people," said Homer, confirming that "Turkey has the same goals as ISIS which is to turn all of these areas into radicalized Islamist states." In the end, they destroyed 18 of 19 Yezidi temples; Afrin's population of Yazidis has now declined by 90 percent since 2014. As for Christians, all of them, about a thousand families, have fled this most recent jihadist advance. Kino Gabriel, a Christian (Assyrian) and leader of the Syriac Military Council, offered a unique "from the ground" perspective. He stressed that the war on Christians in Syria has taken many forms over the years, and, in the modern era, traces back to the al-Assad dynasty's implementation of Arabization, which saw Christians go from 25 percent of Syria in 1950 to 12 percent in 2010, with that number only getting smaller following ISIS, and now Turkey, which he reminded viewers is "a big supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood and even those most radical factions." The panelists all agreed that the best way of moving forward was for the US, which "holds all the cards," to call on Turkey, its NATO ally, to cease and desist.

For her part, Nadine Maenza, president of International Religious Freedom Secretariat, repeatedly stressed that US support for AANES is essential, as it is the only suitable and democratic bulwark for protecting the religious minorities under its jurisdiction.

Raymond Ibrahim is the Judith Friedman Rosen Fellow at the Middle East Forum.

Hamline University professor is FIRED for showing 14th Century painting of the Prophet Muhammad to class after a Muslim student complained that it offended her religion - despite being warned before the image was put on screen

Source: https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11612991/Hamline-University-adjunct-professor-fired-showing-painting-Prophet-Muhammad.html

Jan 09 – A **Minnesota** adjunct professor has been fired for showing an image of the Prophet Muhammed to a class that included a Muslim student who complained about it offending her religion.

Erika López Prater, 42, was let go from her position at Hamline University in Saint Paul despite warning students ahead of time about the 14th-century imagery.

Many practicing Muslims do not believe in looking at pictures of the Prophet Muhammad as they believe it may lead to worshipping an image.

With that in mind, Prater warned her class before she cast the image on her screen, giving them the chance to leave the room if they wished.

Muslim student Aram Wedatalla chose to stay in the room. She says she was 'blindsided' by the images that followed. She and the school's Muslim Association then complained to the school and Lopez Prater was fired. The school has since called the incident 'Islamophobic'.

In a letter sent out to students, Hamline University President Fayneese Miller (right) apologized for the incident and said not offending the school's Muslim students is incredibly important

Despite the warnings given by the adjunct professor, senior Aram Wedatalla (left), a Muslim in the class, said she was blindsided by the image. 'I'm like, "This can't be real,"' said Wedatalla in an interview with the school's newspaper

In a letter sent out to students, Miller apologized for the incident and said not offending the school's Muslim students is incredibly important.

'It is not our intent to place blame; rather, it is our intent to note that in the classroom incident—where an image forbidden for Muslims to look upon was projected on a screen and left for many minutes—respect for the observant Muslim students in that classroom should have superseded academic freedom,' Miller said.

The report from the New York Times stated the syllabus issued by the lecturer notified students they would see holy figures across religions, including the Prophet Muhammad and the Buddha.

López Prater allegedly gave students a heads up moments before the painting was shown, giving them another chance to leave the room if they didn't feel comfortable looking at the picture.

Again, no students brought any concerns or exited the classroom during the October lecture.

Despite the warnings, senior Aram Wedatalla, a Muslim in the class, said she was blindsided by the image.

'I'm like, "This can't be real,"' said Wedatalla in an **interview with the school's newspaper**.

'As a Muslim and a Black person, I don't feel like I belong, and I don't think I'll ever belong in a community where they don't value me as a member, and they don't show the same respect that I show them,' the student said.

Wedatalla, a member of the Muslim Student Association, then gained support from Muslim students who were not in the class but called the incident an attack on their religion.

After the class ended, Wedatalla stuck around to speak with López Prater.

The conversation prompted the professor to sent an email to her department head, Allison Baker, to give her a heads up about the situation.

Baker, the chair of the digital and studio art department, responded by saying: 'It sounded like you did everything right.'

'I believe in academic freedom so you have my support,' Baker wrote.

The group demanded officials take action and the movement led to López Prater, a first time adjunct, not being welcomed back for the spring semester.

Deangela Huddleston, a Hamline senior and Muslim Student Association member, said of the incident: 'Hamline teaches us it doesn't matter the intent, the impact is what matters.'

A spokesperson for Hamline said López Prate 'received an appointment letter for the fall semester, and taught the course until the end of the term.'

DailyMail.com reached out to officials at Hamline University for a statement on the professor's firing but did not receive a reply by the time of publication.

At a town hall following the incident, an invited Muslim speaker 'compared showing the images to teaching that Hitler was good' according to the New York Times.

The university president also said in her letter that while academic freedom 'is very important' it should 'not have to come at the expense of care and decency toward others.

In a statement to **one outlet** last week, a school representative said they strive to make all students 'feel safe, supported, and respected both in and out of our classrooms.'

The firing also sparked backlash from those who believed the firing was an attack on academic freedom.

One Islamic art historian penned an essay defending Dr. López Prater and started a petition which received thousands of signatures demanding the university's board investigate the incident.

Another organization, PEN America, called her firing: 'one of the most egregious violations of academic freedom in recent memory.'

According to **AboutIslam.net**, the practice of avoiding the images goes back centuries and stems from the fear of the images sending the wrong message.

'In Islam there has always been a prohibition on making images of God and His Prophets,' the website states.

'At the start, this prohibition was quite simply to avoid the temptation of worshiping the images themselves, as people had done for centuries,' the site continues.

'As far as depicting the Prophet is concerned, Muslims don't make pictures or statues of Prophet Muhammad for a clear reason. The reason is not that images or art are wicked or evil, but that images can lead to a wrong understanding.'

The author of the post, Idris Tawfiq, states that depicting the Prophet Muhammad may make him seem like a holier figure, when he was just a man.

'Prophet Muhammad was a man. He was not a saint or a god, but a simple man. The love in which he is held by Muslims is intense. Creating statues and pictures of that man can lead people to see in a man something more than he was,' Tawfiq writes.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: Does Minnesota still in the United States of America? The land of Freedom, Democracy and Free Speech? Or Not?

Risk Maps 2023

Source: https://www.controlrisks.com/riskmap/maps

Control **Risks**
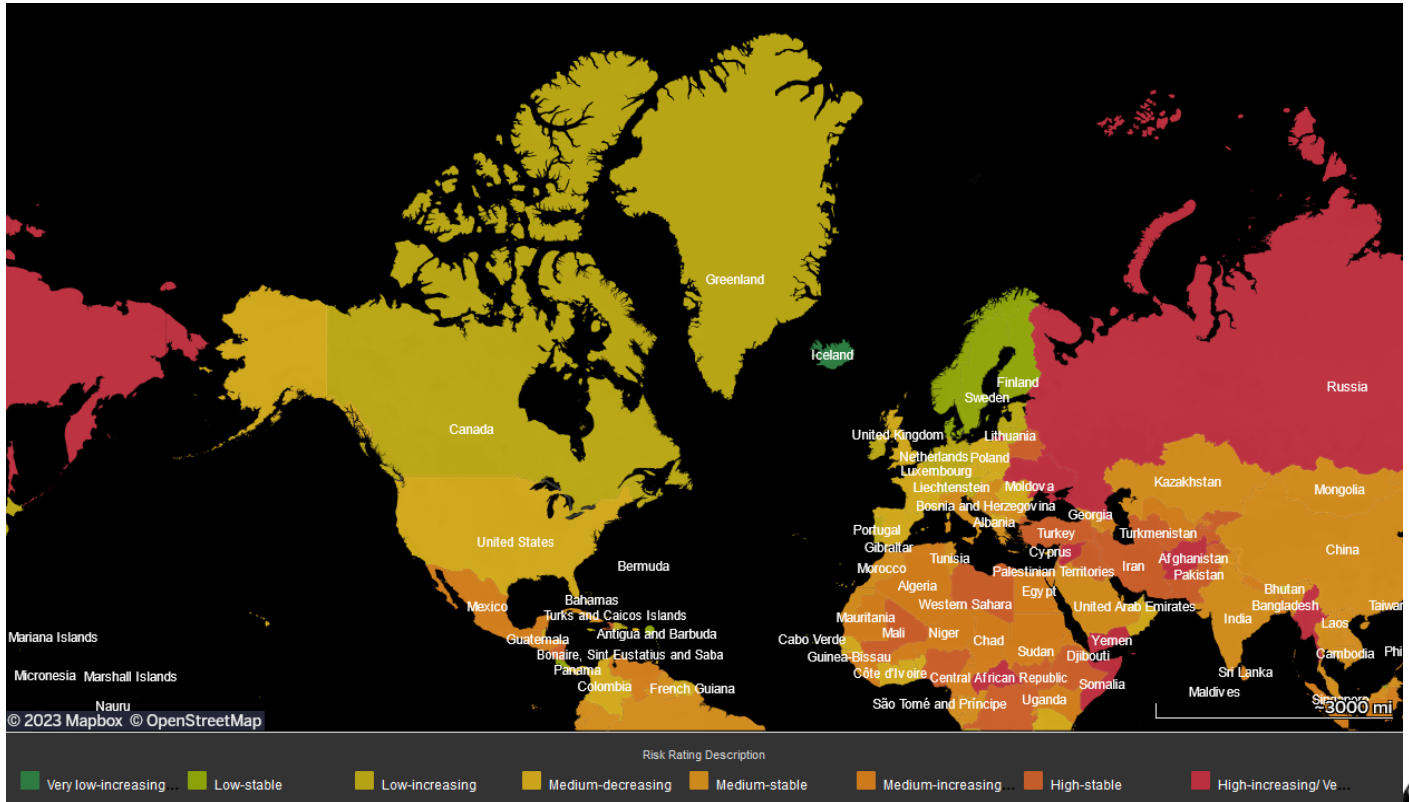
● ▶ The map is interactive

RETURN
Parthenon marbles
to Greece
to their home!

It's Not Easy Being a Woman (Or a Girl) in Turkey

By Burak Bekdil
Source: https://www.meforum.org/63995/it-not-easy-being-a-women-or-a-girl-in-turkey

Dec 30 – No doubt, Turkey is more secular and modern than Afghanistan and Iran. But that is not good enough news for Turkish girls and women, who are increasingly subject to violence and forced marriages at young ages. The Islamist government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan should be proud.

Before Recep Tayyip Erdoğan came to power, civil marriage was compulsory in Turkey, and conducting a religious marriage before the civil one was punishable by a prison sentence. Under Erdoğan, Turkish courts **legalized** religious marriages and reduced the legal age of consent for sex to twelve years of age.

2022: A Violent Year for Women

A total of 327 women were murdered by their husbands, ex-husbands, fiancés and partners, between January 1 and November 11, 2022, according to the Turkish Federation of Women's Association.

In March 2021, under pressure from pious Muslims, Erdoğan announced that Turkey was pulling out of the "Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence," effective July 1, 2021. The accord is better known as the Istanbul Convention after Turkey's biggest city where, in 2011, it received signatures, including Erdoğan's.

"Turkey's decision to ditch a landmark international treaty to tackle violence against women and girls, could significantly set back efforts to tackle the problem," said Reem Alsalem, a senior UN-appointed independent rights expert.

Officially, around one out of four women in Turkey has suffered physical or sexual abuse from their partners, according to latest available government data from a 2014 survey, said Alsalem in a statement. There are also likely "hundreds of femicides" every year, she added, pointing to serious underreporting of the issue, owing to a lack of confidence in protection mechanisms, widespread impunity and gender-related bias and discrimination.

Islamism Overtakes Turkey

This is the gloomy background in a country where women won the right to vote in national elections in 1934, ten years before French women. In 1935, 18 women became Turkish MPs, or 4.6 percent of the parliament.

That was secular Turkey. Today, in Turkey, the driving force is political Islam. On November 25, protestors gathered in several provinces to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. They were met with a heavy police presence and violent crackdown. Several women were detained in the protests, including 20 journalists. "We are not allowed to leave the [police] blockade," journalist Sultan Eylem Keleş wrote in a tweet.

This is a picture of Turkish "progress" between 1934 and 2022. It is only the tip of the iceberg.

Forced Underage Marriage

The marriage of underage girls and women is part of Islamist culture, including in Turkey.

As Erdoğan's political Islam has poisoned the uneducated masses' freedom over the past two decades, families have turned "medieval" in their social life. The prominent Turkish columnist Yilmaz Ozdil compiled a list of crimes committed in Erdoğan's Turkey in just the past few years:

- An 11-year-old girl, who had been married by an imam, gave birth: Bolu province.
- A 12-year-old girl gave birth under a fake ID that showed her age as 18: Gaziantep province.
- A 12-year-old girl gave birth: Izmir province.
- A girl named Kader, or "fate in English." She did not have good fate. She was forcibly married at 12, became a mother at 13 and committed suicide at 14: Siirt province.

- A girl was married, at 13, to a 40-year-old man. She ran away after severe violence from the husband. Her family rejected her. At 17 she, with her three children, had no place to live: Ordu province.
- A 15-year-old girl was forcibly married. She took refuge at a police station: Sakarya province.
- A notary public was caught endorsing the illegal marriage of a 14-year-old girl: Tekirdag province.
- A 12-year-old girl, who was forcibly married, appeared to be four months pregnant: Tokat province:
- A 16-year-old girl who had been married off by her family committed suicide by throwing herself under the train: Adana province.
- A 16-year-old married girl jumped from the seventh floor of a building: Konya province.
- There was a case of a girl of 14 being forcibly married to a man of 70, father of five and grandfather of nine.
- The Kanuni Sultan Suleyman Hospital in Istanbul reported to have received 115 pregnant girls under 15 in just five months. The hospital said it admits 500 pregnant girls in one year.

Before Erdoğan came to power, civil marriage was compulsory in Turkey, and conducting a religious marriage before the civil one was punishable by a prison sentence. Under Erdoğan, Turkish courts legalized religious marriages and reduced the legal age of *consent for sex to twelve years of age.*

Scene from film Lal Gece about a child bride

The Sheik and his Six-Year-Old Daughter

Against this backdrop, even Turkey was shocked at news that a prominent Islamic sheik, the leader of a religious order fiercely devoted to Erdoğan, had married off his six-year-old daughter to a 29-year-old disciple. Six!

The girl had been forced into sex and became a mother at 14. She complained to the prosecutor's office, but Erdoğan's authorities apparently did not want to bother the sheik. As she became an adult, she collected evidence of abuse, made it public, and only then the judiciary acted. Initially the court decided to try the suspects without detention, but under huge public pressure, the court detained both the father and husband. The father, in a statement, said that he was answerable only to Allah, not to a court. Hey, West! Time to get to know your NATO partner. Erdoğan's Minister of Family and Social Services, Derya Yanık (a woman), claimed that violence against women and child abuse are not the subject of politics because they are "human nature issues and can be seen in every society."

What is the link between these criminal acts and Erdoğan's government? First, the sheik who married off his six-year-old daughter heads a foundation linked to the influential radical Islamist Ismailaga community. Second, the Ismailaga community is one of many that fall under the umbrella of the Naqshbandi-Khalidi order, a branch of Sunni Islam of which Erdoğan is said to have been a follower. Third, the funeral of the Ismailaga sect's longtime leader earlier this year was attended by Erdoğan and Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu. There are civilized and medieval worlds in the 21st century -- and there are medieval leaders dressed in suits and ties who pretend to belong to the civilized world.

Burak Bekdil is an Ankara-based political analyst and a fellow at the Middle East Forum.

Sweden has been conquered!
Source [video]: https://twitter.com/AmyMek/status/1612683308797956097

Sharia patrols police the streets and harass Swedish women who are not acting or dressing in accordance with Islamic law. Sharia patrols exist in all nations with large Muslim populations.

Will 2023 be Worse Than 2022? "Stepping into World War III"
Is Joe Biden willing to destroy the world to "weaken Russia"?
By Philip Giraldi
Source: https://www.globalresearch.ca/will-2023-worse-than-2022-stepping-into-world-war-iii/5804178

Even though one has become accustomed to seeing the United States government behaving irrationally on an epic scale with no concern for what happens to the average citizen who is not a member of one of the freak show constituencies of the Democratic Party, it is still possible to be surprised or even shocked. Shortly before year's end 2022 an article appeared in the mainstream media and was quite widely circulated. The headline that it was featured under in the original Business Insider version read "A nuclear attack would most likely target one of these 6 US cities — but an expert says none of them are prepared." The cities were New York, Washington DC, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston and San Francisco.

Jan 10 – The article seeks to provide information and tips that would allow one to survive a nuclear attack, repeating commentary from several "experts" in emergency management and "public health" suggesting that a nuclear war would be catastrophic but not necessarily the end of the world. One should be prepared. It observes that "those cities would struggle to provide emergency services to the wounded. The cities also no longer have designated fallout shelters to protect people from radiation." It is full of sage advice and off-the-cuff observations, including "Can you imagine a public official keeping buildings intact for fallout shelters when the real-estate market is so tight?" Or even better the advice from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)'s "nuclear detonation planning guide" that for everyday citizens in a city that has been nuked: "Get inside, stay inside, and stay tuned." Dr. Ron Paul asks "Are they insane? They act as if a nuclear attack on the United States is just another inconvenience to plan for, like an ice storm or a hurricane."

The article argues that the six cities would be prime targets as they are centers for vital infrastructure. The bomb blasts would kill hundreds of thousands or even millions of Americans with many more deaths to follow from radiation poisoning, but the article makes no attempt to explain why Russia, with a relatively sane leadership, would want to start a nuclear war that would potentially destroy the planet. Also, the targeting list of the cities provided by the "experts" is itself a bit odd. Surely Russia would attack military and government targets as a first priority to limit the possible retaliation while also crippling the ability of the White House and Pentagon to command and control the situation. Such targets would include both San Diego and Norfolk where the US Atlantic and Pacific fleets are based as well as the various Strategic Air Command bases and the underground federal government evacuation site in Mount Weather Virginia.

Reading the article, one is reminded of the early years of the Cold War that sought to reassure the public that nuclear war was somehow manageable. It was a time when we elementary school children were drilled in hiding under our desks when the air raid alarm went off. Herman Kahn was, at that time, the most famous advocate of the school of thought that the United States could survive the "unthinkable," i.e. a nuclear war. An American physicist by training, Kahn became a founding member of the beyond neocon nationalist Hudson Institute, which is still unfortunately around. Kahn, who served in the US Army during the Second World War as a non-combat telephone lineman, started has career as a military strategist at the RAND Corporation. Kahn endorsed a policy of deterrence and argued that if the Soviet Union believed that the United States had a devastating second-strike capability then Moscow would not initiate hostilities, which he explained in his paper titled "The Nature and Feasibility of War and Deterrence". The Russians had to believe that even a perfectly coordinated massive attack would guarantee a measure of retaliation that would leave them devastated as well. Kahn also posited his idea of a "winnable" nuclear exchange in his 1960 book *On Thermonuclear War* for which he is often cited as one of the inspirations for the title character of Stanley Kubrick's classic film *Dr. Strangelove*.

The appearance of the *Business Insider* article dealing with a cool discussion of the survivability from a nuclear war suggests that the nutcases are again escaping from the psychiatric hospital here in the US and are obtaining top jobs in government and the media. While one continues to hope that somehow someone will wake up in the White House and realize that the deep dark hole that we the American people find ourselves in mandates a change of course and a genuine reset, there is little daylight visible in the darkness. My particular concern relates to the entangling relationships that have kept our country permanently at war in spite of the fact that since the Cold War ended in 1991 no potential adversary has actually threatened the United States. Now, the federal government appears to be in the business of cultivating dangerous relationships to justify defense spending and placing the nation on the brink of what might prove to be catastrophic. The current US mission to "weaken Russia" and eventually also China in order to maintain its own "rules based international order" includes such hypocritical and utterly illegal under international law anomalies as the continued military occupation of part of Syria to deny that country's leaders' access to their oil fields and best agricultural land. A recent UN humanitarian agency investigation determined that

the Syrian people are suffering and even starving as a result of that and US imposed sanctions that the Biden Administration maintains against all reason and humanity.

At the present time, however, the most entangling of all relationships, even more than with Israel, has to be the engagement of the US in the proxy war being fought against Russia on behalf of Ukraine, which is exactly what threatens to turn nuclear if someone blinks at the wrong time. Billions of dollars in direct aid as well as billions more in the form of weapons stripped from arsenals in Europe and the US have been given to the corrupt regime of President Volodymyr Zelensky while Zelensky continues to work assiduously to milk the situation and draw Washington into a deeper war directly confronting Moscow.

In fact, by some reckonings the war has already begun, with the US and its allies clearly dedicated to crippling the Russian economy while also getting rid of President Vladimir Putin. The 101st Airborne is now in place in Romania next to Ukraine to "warn" the Kremlin while the Pentagon has recently admitted that some American military personnel are already in Ukraine, contrary to the denials by White House spokesmen. The British have also revealed that some of their elite Special Ops personnel are on the ground. And there are reports that more American soldiers will soon be on the way, ostensibly to "track the weapons" being provided to Zelensky, which will include US-made, Patriot Missile batteries some of which might even be placed in NATO member Poland to provide air cover over Western Ukraine, a definite act of war as seen by Russia, which has warned that such a move would mean that the US and its allies had "effectively become a party" to the war in Ukraine and there will be "consequences." "Consequences" means escalation.

The soldier-"trackers" mission may be in response to reports that weapons provided by NATO have been corruptly sold or given to third countries by the Ukrainians. The several US initiatives taken together could produce a rapid escalation of the conflict complete with dead Americans coming home in body bags and an inevitable direct US involvement in combat roles that could lead anywhere, but at this point it is the Russians who are acting with restraint by not targeting the NATO and US "advisers" who are already active in Ukraine.

Suspicion is also growing that the United States "green-lighted" in advance recent cruise missile attacks carried out by Ukraine against military targets deep inside Russia. Since the attacks, the White House has declared that Ukraine has "permission" to attack Russia and has basically conceded to the unbalanced Zelensky the right to make all the decisions and run the war that the US is largely funding, which is a formula for disaster. It is already known that Ukraine is receiving top level intelligence provided both by the US and also other NATO states. The precision attacks on Russia suggest that the Ukrainian army was given the coordinates of possible active targets, something that the US would be capable of providing but which would have been beyond the abilities of Ukraine, which possesses no satellite surveillance capability. If it is true that the White House was involved in escalating the conflict it would be a very dangerous move, inviting retaliation by Moscow.

To be sure, some idiots in Washington, mostly of the neocon variety, continue to see war against Russia as something like a crusade for world freedom. Rick Newman, Yahoo's top Finance Columnist, observes how "Budget hawks in Congress are worried about granting President Biden's request for an additional $38 billion in aid for Ukraine to help defeat the invading Russians." He concludes "They're right. Thirty-eight billion isn't enough. Make it $50 billion. Or even $100 billion. The more, the better, until the job is done."

Apparently, the bellicose Rick does not quite get that Russia has made clear that if it is about to be defeated by *force majeure* it will go nuclear. And Congress and the White House don't seem to get it either, with both the Republican and Democratic parties oblivious to the real danger that confronts the American people. Nuclear war? Sure! Just hide in your basement, if you have one, and tune in.

Philip M. Giraldi, Ph.D., is the Executive Director of the Council for the National Interest.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: What a naïve title question! Of course, 2023 will be worst than 2022! The human stupidity index is close to maximum and the hope for a turn to peace talks is burdened under tons of weapons and money …

EU external borders in November: Western Balkans route most active

Source: https://border-security-report.com/eu-external-borders-in-november-western-balkans-route-most-active/

Dec 2022 – In the first eleven months of this year, more than 308 000 irregular entries were detected at the external borders of the European Union, according to preliminary calculations.* This represents an increase of 68% compared with the same period of last year and is the highest since 2016. The Western Balkan route remains the most active, with 45% of all irregular entry detections to the European Union recorded since the beginning of the year.

In November, EU member states recorded about 27 000 irregular border crossings, 15% more than in the same month in 2021.

To support countries facing heavy migratory pressure and other challenges at their borders, Frontex is currently providing more than 2 100 standing corps officers and various equipment in joint operations.

Key developments:
- 308 000 irregular entries recorded in first 11 months of 2022
- 2022 on track to see most irregular migrants since 2016
- 27 000 irregular entries recorded in November
- Western Balkan and Central Mediterranean routes are the most active
- Western Mediterranean, Western African and Eastern Border routes see drops in detections

Top migratory routes
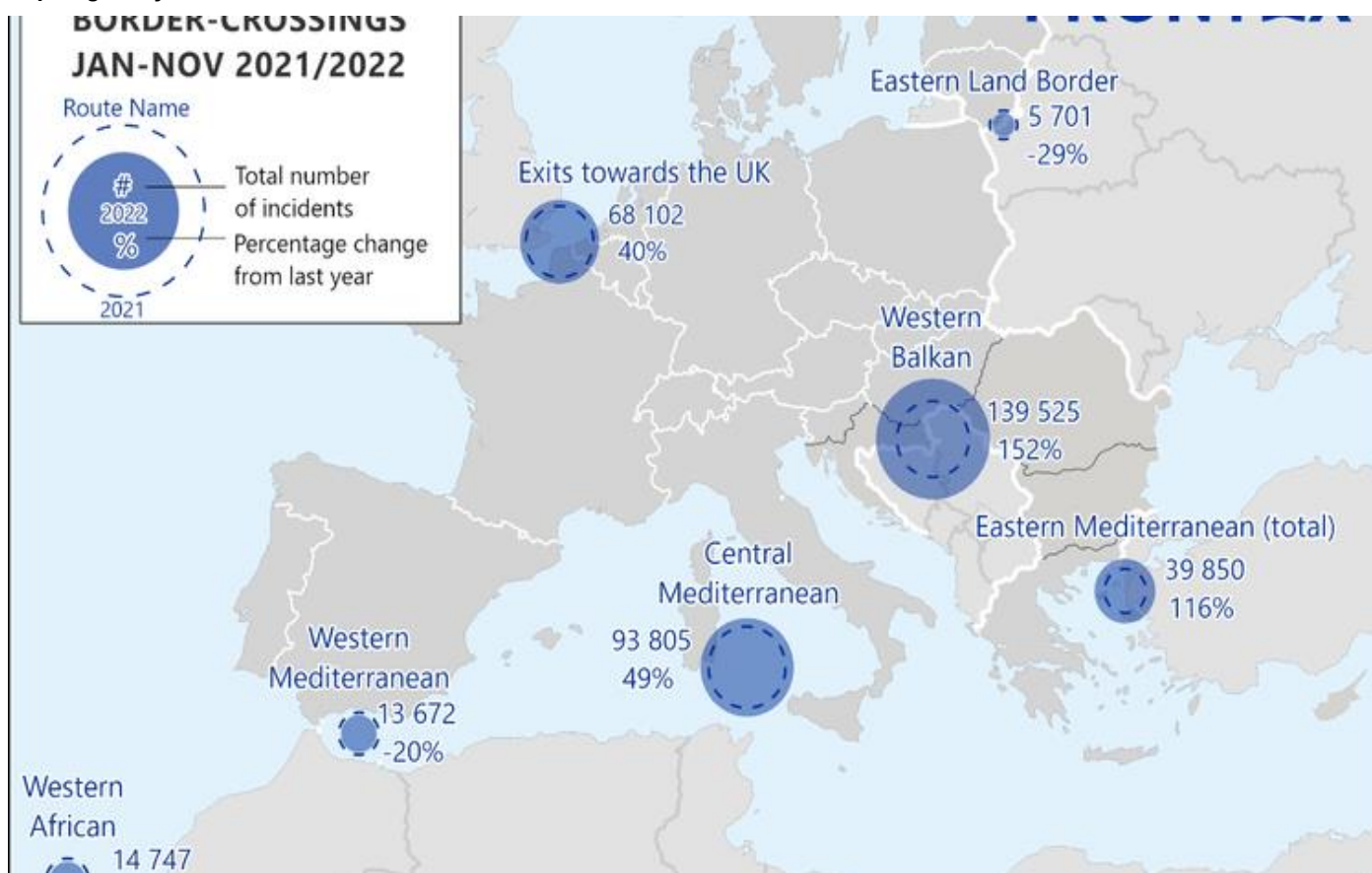
The **Western Balkans** continues to be the most active migratory route into the EU with more than 14 105 detections in November, twice as many as a year ago.

The Western Balkan region has registered the highest number of detections since the peak of the migration crisis in 2015.

The sustained migratory pressure on the Western Balkans route can be attributed to repeated attempts to cross the border by migrants already present in the region, and the fact that some migrants abuse visa-free access to the region to approach the EU external borders. At the end of November, Serbia has restricted its visa regime which is expected to reduce the numbers of illegal crossings.

Frontex supports the Western Balkan countries by deploying nearly 500 standing corps officers and staff.

The second most active migratory route into the EU is the **Central Mediterranean**. Here, from the beginning of the year the number of irregular border crossings detected rose by 49% compared to 2021 to nearly 94 000. Meanwhile, by the end of November **Eastern Mediterranean** route recorded a 116% increase with almost 40 000 detections.

In January-November 2022, the number of irregular migrants detected in the **Channel** stood at 68 000, which is a 40% increase compared to the same period last year. The migratory pressure is expected to remain high and will be heaviest in favourable weather conditions.

Route	January-November 2022	November 2022	Jan-Nov 2021/Jan-Nov 2022	Top nationalities (Jan Nov 2022)
Western Balkans	139 525	14 105	+152%	Syria, Afghanistan, Türkiye, Tunisia
Central Mediterranean	93 805	8 213	+49%	Egypt, Tunisia, Bangladesh, Syria
Eastern Mediterranean	39 850	3 404	+116%	Syria, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Congo (Kinshasa)
Western African	14 747	514	-26%	Morocco, Senegal, Guinea, Ivory Coast
Western Mediterranean	13 672	350	-20%	Morocco, Syria
Eastern Border	5 701	334	-29%	Ukraine, Iraq, Belarus, Syria
Exits towards the UK	68 102	5 730	+40%	

*The figure includes other less active migratory routes not mentioned in this press release. The final figures may be higher due to delayed reporting.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: There is no such thing as an "irregular immigrant"! The correct term is "illegal immigrant". Irregular means that the immigrant has all the required ID documents, but a stamp is missing. Illegal means that the immigrant jumps the border fence or arrives with a boat on a deserted shore. Feeding people with political hay is not good for their health!

Iran, Syria, Palestinians: A Preview of 2023

By Jonathan Spyer

Source: https://www.meforum.org/64001/iran-syria-palestinians-a-preview-of-2023

Jan 07 – As 2023 begins, flux and instability remain the only constants in the Middle East. The Arab world today is filled with broken and partially collapsed polities. Yemen, Libya and Syria are subject to de facto division, and occupation by foreign forces. Lebanon and Iraq are under de facto control by Iran in key areas. The bright hopes momentarily raised a decade ago by popular mobilization seem very distant now.

Is change, for better or for worse, likely in the year ahead?

Prediction may seem like a fool's errand in a region where unexpected and dramatic events are the norm. But a glance at the regional map reveals processes already underway from which some inferences may cautiously be drawn.

Here are three Middle East arenas to watch carefully in the months ahead:

Iran

The demonstrations and strikes that began in Iran's Kurdistan province in September 2022, following the death at the hands of the authorities of a young woman, show no signs of waning. Mahsa (Jina) Amini was killed in custody after being arrested for improper wearing of her government-mandated headscarf. The unrest that followed rapidly spread throughout Iran. It is the most serious and sustained wave of anti-regime activity since the birth of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979.

The demands of the demonstrators have long moved beyond the issue of the compulsory hijab. "Death to the dictator," is one of the most common slogans to be heard. More than 500 demonstrators have now been killed, including 69 children. Two protesters have been executed and another 26 are on death row. A number of members of the security forces have also been killed.

In the latest development, a member of the paramilitary Basij was killed this week by protesters in the course of a raid on a house in the city of Semiram, in Isfahan province, central Iran. Isfahan is a majority Persian area, testimony to the fact that the protests have long outgrown their beginnings in the Kurdish provinces, and now take in all elements of the Iranian population.

The unrest in Iran looks set to continue. The regime, however, does not currently appear in danger of imminent collapse. An Iranian revolutionary now resident in northern Iraq described to this author in November a scenario in which the ongoing unrest, and in particular strikes in crucial sectors of the economy, will over time cause a gradual loss of control by the regime. Optimism, of course, is a required ingredient for Middle East revolutionaries. For Middle East analysts, it is a substance only to be sampled rarely.

The Iranian uprising currently lacks cohesive leadership. It is not quite true that the demonstrations are entirely unorganized. Kurdish nationalist movements are assisting and advising the protests in Kurdish areas. Baluch and Ahvazi Arab groups are active also in their relevant provinces. Monarchist groups have some support among Persians. But there is no single, united leadership in a position to contest the issue of power with the Islamic regime.

As of now, there are also no signs of major splits in the security forces. In the beginning, the protesters hoped that elements of the "Artesh," the regular, non-political Iranian army, might come over to their side. This has not yet happened.

These two absences mean that the most likely scenario in 2023 is for the unrest to continue, hurting the regime, and keeping it busy, but without toppling it.

Israel/Palestinians

The Palestinian national movement is deeply divided, and Palestinian politics is in disarray. Probably, neither Fatah nor Hamas has the capacity to launch an organized, centralized, armed insurgency in the West Bank of the type witnessed in the 2000-2004 period. This does not mean that things are set to remain quiet.

Islamic sentiment, and particularly perceived threats to al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, are still able to galvanize anger among young Palestinians. Ramadan, a time of heightened religious focus and observance, tends to be the period when the Palestinian public is most susceptible to appeals detailing the supposed danger to the mosques.

The appointment of Itamar Ben-Gvir as National Security minister, and the latter's apparent determination to promote the issue of Jewish prayer rights at the Temple Mount, may increase the likelihood of clashes around this most combustible of issues. The year 2021 saw the outbreak of widespread rioting among Arab citizens of Israel following Hamas's firing of missiles at Jerusalem, again in response to a supposed threat to al-Aqsa. Meanwhile, the Ramadan period and the months following it in 2022 witnessed the emergence of two related phenomena. The first was a series of terror attacks carried out by Palestinians professing allegiance to the Islamic State organization (ISIS). Assaults carried out by them took place in Beersheba, Hadera and Jerusalem.

The second element was the emergence of loosely organized armed gangs of young Palestinians in the northern West Bank towns of Jenin and Nablus. The gangs in question, called the "Jenin Battalion" and in Nablus the "Lions' Den," represent a new form of armed structure. They are not initiated by or controlled by any Palestinian group, but rather are an ad hoc collection of young men connected to a variety of organizations or to none, but with access to weaponry and means of transport, and with a willingness to attack Israelis. A series of terror attacks emerged from this nexus during Ramadan and the period following it. The latest indications are that Hamas, Islamic Jihad and their Iranian backers have taken note of the emergence of these organizations, and are finding ways to offer them assistance and duplicate arrangements of this kind in other West Bank cities. Ramadan in 2023 begins on March 22. Keep the date in mind.

Syria

Syria has for the last three years been in a situation of stalemate and de facto partition. Three areas of control exist: the Assad regime area, supported by Russia and Iran; the Kurdish/SDF area, supported by the US; and a Sunni Islamist/jihadi-controlled area, underwritten by Turkey.

Against this backdrop, Israel's campaign to prevent Iranian entrenchment and consolidation over Syria's ruins has continued apace. There are now indications that the diplomacy of the Syrian war is once more on the move. Specifically, Turkey appears to be edging toward rapprochement with the Assad regime, and alliance with it against what they regard as the PKK-controlled Kurdish area.

Ankara appears to be considering returning its own area of control to the Assad regime, as part of this rapprochement. In recent weeks, Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been threatening a renewed military offensive against the Syrian Kurds. US and Russian pressure appear to have deterred him.

A Russian-brokered diplomatic process is now underway, intended to result in a summit between Erdogan, Vladimir Putin and Bashar Assad before the summer. Erdogan faces general elections in June 2023, and would clearly like to be able to present diplomatic achievements on Syria before that time.

The Turkish public would like to see the departure of the Syrian refugees. The opposition is making this issue a central point of its criticism of Erdogan, and anything pointing toward the eventual return of the refugees would be welcomed.

It remains unclear if the Russians will succeed in brokering an agreement to the satisfaction of both parties. But their effort – and the possible unblocking of diplomacy on Syria in a direction, which if achieved, would benefit Russia and its Iranian ally, at the cost of US allies – is worthy of close attention.

Jonathan Spyer is director of research at the Middle East Forum and director of the Middle East Center for Reporting and Analysis.

The New York Times' Orwellian Obsession with Israel
By Phyllis Chesler
Source: https://www.meforum.org/64013/the-new-york-times-orwellian-obsession-with-israel

Jan 10 – Are things really as bad as I think they are regarding propaganda against Israel and Jews, a subject I began closely tracking in 2001?

Recently, I asked five educated pro-Israel people: "How many first-section, hardcopy articles about Israel and Judaism do you think *The New York Times* published in the last six months of 2022?"

They answered, "Probably around 30 or 40, maybe less." Shockingly, the answer is at least 127. Yes, I carefully counted them. This averages *five* negative articles every week in just one section. Given that Israel is the size of the state of New Jersey, the *Times* seems pathologically obsessed with it. Although they very occasionally publish a neutral or positive piece, at least 95% of their first section articles fixate on Israel's alleged imperfections and falsely magnify them into "atrocities."

These anti-Israel pieces also tend to be much longer than other articles. According to a 2012 study published in *Sociology Mind*, most *Times* articles are an average of 622 words. The *Times*' 127 anti-Israel articles seem to average approximately 1,700 words each, often appear on the front page, continue on one or two inside pages and feature many photos. This past August alone, these articles totaled more than 43,000 words.

The *Times* also makes extensive use of its Twitter account, posting up to a hundred times a day to its 54.8 million followers. An Oct. 24 article on Hasidic schools and financial fraud garnered 3,687 likes and was retweeted 1,728 times. Also in October, the allegation that Israel was driving Palestinians to live in caves drew 6,111 likes and 3,432 retweets.

Imagine the psychological effect of being barraged with so much propaganda every day, month and year. And that's from just one newspaper.

Moreover, the *Times* consistently runs headlines that are blatantly biased if not cunningly deceptive.

For example, an Aug. 5 headline read: "Israel Hits Gaza, Prompting Rocket Barrage and Ending Relative Calm." This buried the fact that Israel was trying to prevent an imminent attack on Israeli civilians by Islamic Jihad.

A Sept. 28 headline, "4 Palestinians Killed in West Bank During Israeli Raid" failed to reveal until the end of the article that the Palestinians killed were combatants, or as the *Times* put it, "militants ... armed with assault rifles."

An Oct. 9 headline shouted, "A Deadly Shooting at an Israeli Checkpoint Sets Jerusalem on Edge." Based on the headline, one would not know that the killers were three Palestinians and the victims were an Israeli soldier and a severely wounded security guard.

The *Times*' anti-Israel and anti-Judaism bias extends far beyond headlines. While ignoring the alarming increase in antisemitic incidents and the escalation of physical attacks against visibly Orthodox Jews, primarily by African-American men, the *Times* instead chose to demonize Jews and Judaism.

In 2022, at least 12 articles appeared within a four-month period that criticized Hasidic schools for their students' low test scores, given that they are funded by the government; for creating "no show" jobs and

diverting monies meant for education; for prioritizing religious over secular subjects; and for homophobia within their communities. In this same period, the *Times* did not publish a single article about the religious curriculum, suspected corruption, sexism or homophobia in Islamic or Christian schools.

When the facts directly conflict with the *Times*' narrative of Israel as evil, such facts are minimized or even omitted from the story.

An Oct. 14 article titled "Unrest Grows in West Bank in Deadliest Year Since 2015" listed multiple incidents in which Israel "shot dead" Palestinians, falsely implying that Israel routinely murders innocent people. Only at the very end did the article acknowledge that, during a search for a terrorist in Jenin, "Palestinian gunmen fired on the [Israeli] soldiers, leading to a lengthy gun battle in which two Palestinians were shot dead."

On Dec. 24, an article titled: "A Christmas Tree Brings Life to a Destroyed Palestinian Village" blamed Israel for the shrinking Christian population in Palestinian-controlled territories. However, according to Raymond Ibrahim, it is mainly Muslims who harass, arrest, persecute and murder Christians in and near Bethlehem. The Christians who remain are afraid to speak out against either the Palestinian Authority (in Judea and Samaria) or Hamas (in Gaza).

On Dec. 31, the article "For Palestinians, a Rush to Claim 'Martyrs' Killed by Israel" claimed that Israel is definitely, perhaps purposely, killing civilians whom Hamas and Fatah, in a sick competition, (falsely) claim as martyrs.

I wondered: Is *The Washington Post* equally obsessed with Israel? Try worse. In only the last *three* months of 2022, the *Post* averaged eight such articles every week—96 in total.

Although the headlines were a bit more accurate, the articles themselves were equally biased. While the *Post* did report acts of antisemitism and acknowledged that such incidents are on the rise, they repeatedly blamed them on Donald Trump, right-wing extremists and the Republican Party as a whole—as well as on Kanye West.

The *Post* also branded Israel's new democratically-elected government an "illiberal democracy" and the "most extreme," "most right-wing" government in Israeli history. It further equated Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders with Trump and the Republicans.

As of May 2022, the *Times* had almost 10 million paid subscribers across digital and print platforms, with an average of 130 million unique website visitors every month. The *Post* had almost three million paid subscribers and averaged about 65 million unique website visitors per month.

According to Middle East expert Dr. Mitchell Bard, "Few media outlets (including wire services) can cover foreign affairs, so they reprint *Times* stories. This has gotten worse as local papers became financially strapped."

These two newspapers are not the only venues obsessed with Israel. According to Matti Friedman in *Tablet*: "When I was a correspondent at the *Associated Press*, the agency had more than 40 staffers covering Israel and the Palestinian territories. That was significantly more news staff than the *AP* had in China, Russia or India, or in all of the 50 countries of sub-Saharan Africa combined."

We do not yet have an appropriate name for what happens when long-trusted media, the internet, teachers and professors as well as the academic curriculum, religious leaders, anti-Israel activists on campus and in the streets, international organizations including human rights groups and one's peers all repeat the same thing over and over again for 22 (or 50) years until everyone believes the information is true.

This kind of conditioning, coupled with rewards ("friends," a good grade, a job) and punishments (losing friends, getting doxed or fired), is far beyond mere "brainwashing" as it was previously understood. And it's happening on a massive, global scale and in many languages.

How does propaganda work? Sometimes, it consists of big blatant lies, narrative- rather than fact-driven, with malevolent purpose. More often, is a steady, low-key diet of info-bits that are meant to normalize the larger lies.

Today, the biggest lies, also known as "hate speech" when applied to certain people, but not Jews and Israel, are seen as the biggest truths. Propagandists insist that such lies are protected by doctrines of free speech or academic freedom.

Thus, Israel is an "apartheid" state (it is not); Israel is a "colonial settler state" (it is not); Israel is racist and homophobic (it is not); Israel is not a democracy (it is); Israelis persecute Arabs and Muslims (they don't); and "Palestine" and "Palestinians" are the only indigenous people of the Holy Land (very much a lie). The "two-state solution" is viewed as "fair," even though it is code for the elimination of Israel.

We have been immersed in such lethal lies for so long and from so many different but simultaneous quarters (Western "progressives," the Islamic world, etc.) that it is now almost impossible to separate lies from truth. Will it take another 22 or even 50 years to do so? Do we have that long to wait?

Someone known as Emmanuel Goldstein, Orwell's fictional, non-existent character in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is presented as the enemy of the state—the scapegoat for all that goes wrong.

Israel is Orwell's "Goldstein."

We are drowning in sewage.
I want to acknowledge my assistant Amanda Barsky for working with me on this piece.

Phyllis Chesler, a writing fellow at the Middle East Forum, is an emerita professor of psychology and women's studies and the author of twenty books, including *Women and Madness, Islamic Gender Apartheid, An American Bride in Kabul, A Politically Incorrect Feminist.,* and *A Family Conspiracy: Honor Killings*.

Why Does Humanity Still Tolerate the Tragedy of Wars in the 21st Century? The Big Picture

By Prof Rodrigue Tremblay
Source: https://www.globalresearch.ca/why-does-humanity-still-tolerate-tragedy-wars-21st-century-big-picture/5804347

Since the end of the Second World War (1939-1945), there have been many civil wars and several important regional military conflicts between two or more countries, but none has evolved into a general world war involving all the most heavily armed countries. The most serious regional wars were the Korean War (1950-1953), the Vietnam War (1955-1975), the Iraq War (2003-2011), the Syria War (2011-), and the Ukraine War (2022-).

Jan 12 – Indeed, with no sign yet of peace in Ukraine, nine years after the overthrow of the elected Ukrainian government, in February 2014, and nearly one year after the Russian military invasion, last February 24—and with a real danger that such a prolonged proxy conflict between great powers could escalate into a nuclear world war—it may be appropriate to search for reasons why, in this 21st Century, the world is still threatened with murderous and destructive wars.
There are basic tendencies in human nature, structural institutional failures and geopolitical factors for why this is the case.
Let us identify the most important causes, which can explain why wars of aggression and proxy wars are still taking place today.

Human nature: Warlike instincts as the basis for wars
Basic human instincts of control, conquest, domination, and exploitation have often been the very background to conflicts and wars between states. That may be because some countries are, over time, ruled by men who are bent on using violence to gain and expand their power: they may be kings, emperors, dictators, autocrats or hardliners, even in so-called advanced societies.
If war belongs to the very nature of man, in order to escape this atavism, civilization would need to be more commonly based on humanistic principles, and democratic rules and laws, in order to curb the tendency of autocratic governments of oligarchies to dominate other peoples.

Attempts to prevent wars, with ethical principles or through international cooperation
The Just War Theory
Ever since the philosophical works of Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the most well known religious thinkers about the Just war theory (jus ad bellum), there have been several attempts to introduce some morality and some fairness, if not more justice, into the practice of organized military violence between nations.
According to thinkers of the *'just war theory'*, a war must not be pre-emptive but be defensive. It must rest on self-defense. Its purpose must be to defend a nations' peace against serious injury, and be a lesser evil than the alternatives, after all diplomatic options have been exhausted. For that, a war must meet some criteria, such as being based on a just cause (ex: protect innocent life), seeking a just long-term peace, being under the control of a legitimate authority, being proportional in the means used and being waged as a last resort. Needless to say, with no practical means to prevent wars of aggression, the *Just war theory* has not prevented wars of aggression, or wars of conquest, from taking place since its inception.
Indeed, when unscrupulous and arrogant leaders subscribe only to the law of the jungle in international relations, it leads to the application of the dictatorial rule that "might makes right".

The League of Nations (1920-1946)
The League of Nations was created in the first part of the 20th Century, in Geneva, Switzerland, on January 10, 1920, by 41 member states, representing 70 percent of the world population. It was a multilateral attempt to prevent a repetition of World War I (1914-1918) and to "achieve international peace and security".

Before WWI, the international system for keeping peace and stability was very primitive. It was based on a few military alliances regrouping several countries. They were supposedly designed to protect smaller states, and their objective was to be a deterrent to war through a so-called "Balance of Power". Nevertheless, the alliance system was very unstable, because any serious localized military incident could easily escalate and trigger a wider war. Indeed, member nations of any given military alliance were expected to join in the mêlée, when a single country declared a war.

The League to Enforce Peace published this full-page promotion in *The New York Times* on Christmas Day 1918. It resolved that the League "should ensure peace by eliminating causes of dissension, by deciding controversies by peaceable means, and by uniting the potential force of all the members as a standing menace against any nation that seeks to upset the peace of the world". (Licensed under the Public Domain)

Before World War I, there were two rival military alliances: the Central Powers, which included Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy, joined later by Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire; and the Allies, which included France, the United Kingdom and Russia, joined later by Japan and the United States.

The spark that ignited WWI happened in Bosnia, in the city of Sarajevo, on June 28, 1914, when Archduke Franz Ferdinand—heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire—was shot to death along with his wife, Sophie, by the Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip. With that, military alliances came into play.

Without the military alliances, the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand would have only caused a regional war between Serbia and Austria-Hungary. However, because of alliances, Russia came to assist Serbia, which in turn led Germany to declare war on Russia.

A question needs to be asked: Are military alliances powder kegs for creating large wars?

Even though, after WWI, the League of Nations was designed to prevent wars, it was too weak to prevent arms races between countries and to enforce disarmament agreements. It was also too weak to impose solutions to conflicts through negotiation or arbitration in cases of international conflicts.

The United Nations (1945)

The Second World War (1939-1946) is considered to have been a legacy of WWI. And, just like WWI, it involved two opposing military alliances. On one side was the Axis Powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) and on the other, the Allied Powers (France, Britain, Canada, the U.S., the Soviet Union and China).

The immediate cause of WWI was the German military invasion of neighboring Poland, on September 1, 1939. Britain and France then both declared war against Germany, on September 3, 1939, in accordance with the defense treaties that they had signed with Poland.

However, historians have placed a lot of the blame for WWI on the failure of the League of Nations to prevent regional wars. They single out the Treaty of Versailles of June 1919, which imposed the payment

of severe war reparations on Germany (the Weimar Republic) and on its economy, besides depriving Germany of several territories along with other exactions. Such a a severe humiliation of an entire nation, in turn, promoted the rise of the Nazi movement and of militarism in Germany, but also in Italy and in Japan.

The creation of the United Nations on June 26, 1945, in San Francisco, represents an attempt to ban wars of aggression, after the failure of the League of Nations. Indeed, the United Nations Charter states that its main purpose is to *"save succeeding generations from the scourge of war"*.

Even though the U.N. Charter makes wars of aggression illegal, powerful states nevertheless continue to engage in wars of aggression against other less powerful nations, under different pretexts, claiming that their violent aggression is 'necessary', while resorting to an abusive interpretation of the Self-defense article 51.

That is why it can be said that the post-Second World War era has not left the world in a better position today for avoiding wars of aggression, than during the pre-World War I period. *"The more things change, the more they stay the same."*

Geopolitical factors and the danger of military alliances
The Cold War I (1945-1991)
During WWII, the United States and the Soviet Union were allies. However, once the war ended, they engaged in building two powerful opposing 'defensive' military alliances.

On the one hand, in 1949, the U.S. government was instrumental in creating The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a 'defensive' military alliance initially regrouping 12 countries (the United States and Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and the United Kingdom). Presently, it has 30 members, with a number of countries waiting to join (Sweden, Finland and Ukraine).

Its official objective was to provide a counterweight to Soviet armies stationed in central and Eastern Europe after World War II.
NATO's Article 5 stipulates that:

"an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all; and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area."

On the other hand, the Soviet Union formed the Warsaw Pact military alliance in 1955, in order to counterbalance the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It had 8 Eastern European member states: the Soviet Union (USSR), Albania, Poland, Romania, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria.

The founding treaty of the 'defensive' Warsaw Pact called on the member states to come to the defense of any member attacked by an outside force, and it set up a unified military command.

During more than three decades, these two opposing 'defensive' military alliances, a Western bloc and an Eastern bloc, served as counterweight to one another through the establishment of a balance of power in Europe.

However, the East European Warsaw Pact was officially disbanded in 1991, when the Soviet Union went through a severe political crisis and disintegrated, on December 25, 1991, being replaced by the Russian federation and 15 new states. That ended the thirty-six year Cold War.

Such an event left the Western bloc alliance, NATO, without a potential enemy to counterbalance.

The U.S. government, under President George H.W. Bush (1924-2018), as the promoter of NATO, then had two choices: either to dismantle the Western military alliance or to reorient its purpose and develop new missions.

The choice was made not to dismantle NATO, in order to maintain American influence in Europe.

Such a decision was not exempt from raising many misgivings on the part of the Russian government, which feared to be placed in the position of facing a potentially belligerent NATO. In order to allay such fears, the U.S. administration of **George H.W. Bush** gave assurances, through the **Secretary of State James Baker** (and representatives of other Western governments did the same) that NATO *"would not expand into Eastern Europe"* and therefore, would not pose a military threat to Russia.

As a counterpart, the Russian government was expected to go along with the reunification of East Germany (the German Democratic Republic) and West Germany (the German Federal Republic) into a single sovereign state, within the NATO alliance.

However, things changed in 1994 and even more so in 1999.

Cold War II (1999-)
Indeed, during the 1994-1996 period, under pressure from the Republican Party, but also influenced by neoconservatives in favor of a unilateral neo-imperialist foreign policy, President Bill Clinton made

speeches indicating that his administration would not respect anymore the assurances given to Russia by the H.W. Bush administration, i.e. that NATO would not expand *"one inch Eastward"*.

His administration had been convinced by neoconservative advisors that the U.S. government should take advantage of the extreme economic weakness of Russia to encircle the latter militarily.

In October 1996, President Clinton made it official that NATO enlargement was part of his foreign policy when he openly called for former Warsaw Pact countries and post-Soviet republics to join NATO. This was implemented, beginning in March 1999, when three East European countries (Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic) officially joined NATO.

In March 1999, the Clinton administration went one step further. It sidestepped the United Nations Charter, which forbids acts of aggression, and instead relied on the cover of NATO to initiate an aerial bombing campaign in Yugoslavia, against Serbian military targets. On that date, the U.S. government rendered the United Nations *de facto* impotent to prevent or stop wars of aggression. Since then, the U.S. government has relied on the NATO substitute to justify its military interventions abroad.

Pretexts, provocations, lies and other deceptive tactics are commonly used to initiate war

There are panoply of indirect possibilities and treacherous strategies to initiate interstate warfare, besides directly bombing a country or sending armies to invade a foreign country.

For instance, a nation with warlike intentions can use provocations and threats as a prelude to war, or to incite an enemy to retaliate; an aggressor may also try to disrupt and destabilize a country by simulating a military attack through war games and covert operations. The recourse to a false flag operation (when a country commits an act of war and blames another country for it) has often been employed.

Another trick to hurt an unfriendly country is to resort to a proxy war (i.e. a war waged by a client-state against a targeted enemy, but being financed and armed by a major third party instigator). A mixture of a proxy war and a false flag operation can then be part of a plan to enlarge a conflict into an open war.

A war plan on the part of an aggressor can go as far as sabotaging the installations of a foreign country for military or political motives, through covert operations. An aggressor can also impose a siege on a victimized nation without any formal declaration of war.

One tactic commonly used to start a war is to denigrate and demonize an adversary, through lies and deceptive propaganda about that country's armaments or real intention.

Another way to push a targeted country to war is to impose trade embargoes of some essential commodity that it must import, such as oil. Indeed, the unilateral imposition of economic and financial sanctions against a country, in order to hurt its economy, is another hostile act that could result in a war.

That is why it is so arduous to prevent a war only through legal and diplomatic means, or through mediation, when a powerful nation is bent on going to war against another country.

Neither the *League of Nations* nor the *United Nations* made it illegal for a warlike nation to provoke a war through indirect means.

This is an indication of how complex and difficult it remains to make the curse of wars of aggression a truly obsolete event. Nevertheless, wars of aggression, now with the destructive capabilities of nuclear weapons, must be prevented, if humanity is to survive on this planet.

Finally, a not too cheery fact: A recent study has concluded that democracies are more likely to start wars than autocratic regimes.

Conclusion

Currently, the international political and legal framework to prevent or to end war is in shambles. The United Nations has been sidelined and its authority as an arbiter of military conflicts, as stipulated in the U.N. Charter, has been undermined and replaced with a comeback of more or less arbitrary raw power politics.

Like in a not so glorious past, military alliances have been reconstituted and the reliance on a new "Balance of Power" is again the only bulwark against a worldwide military conflagration.

A more civilized world would free itself of the trap of atavistic military alliances, a proven historical recipe for permanent wars, high public indebtedness and persistent inflation. Wars of aggression and proxy wars should be eliminated as a barbarous human institution, once and for all.

International economist ***Dr. Rodrigue Tremblay*** is the author of the book about morals "*The code for Global Ethics, Ten Humanist Principles*" of the book about geopolitics "*The New American Empire*", and the recent book, in French, "*La régression tranquille du Québec, 1980-2018*". He holds a Ph.D. in international finance from Stanford University. He is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG).

The "untold truths" behind the US invasion of Iraq (other than weapons of mass destruction)

By Ananya Sharma (Senior Editor, TFI Media)
Source: https://tfiglobalnews.com/2023/01/13/the-untold-truths-behind-the-us-invasion-of-iraq-other-than-weapons-of-mass-destruction/
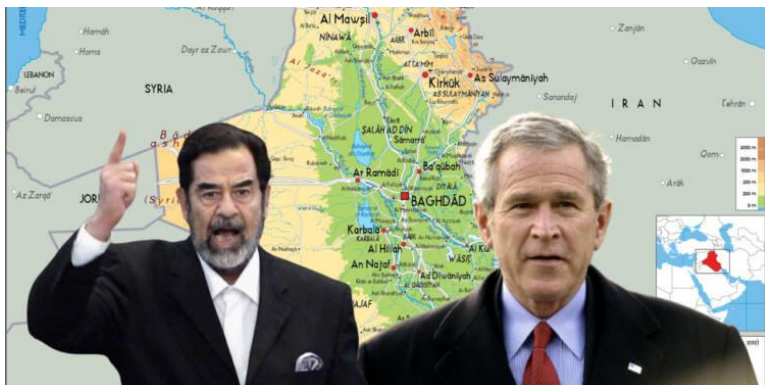
Jan 13 – US Invasion of Iraq: 'The world was told that Iraq is in possession of weapons of mass destruction and thus they need to be destroyed for the sake of mankind.' What followed is not hidden from the world, the horrors of Iraq invasion are still fresh in the minds of not only millions of Iraqis but also of the troops and their families.

But has one ever given a thought to the point that why only Iraq? Even neighbouring Iran, or for that matter of fact even North Korea is in possession of such weapons but the USA has refrained to invade them. Now let me tell you the truth- Nuclear weapons are in themselves one of the biggest deterrents for any sort of invasion. The USA was well aware that Iraq had no such weapons and that is why it went forward and invaded it.

Then what is the reason behind the invasion of Iraq that left generations of people scarred for life? Truth be told, every action that is taken by any country especially those like USA, and UK etc, have a hidden agenda and that is to control strategic locations to safeguard one's own geopolitical interests.

Thinkers like Morgenthau have always said that the world system is one marred by anarchy, where every country is concerned with its national interest and takes every action to uphold the same.

The invasion of Iraq is one such episode, where actions were taken by the US to secure its geo-political and geo-strategic interests and gain leverage over its contemporaries.

Invasion: Strategic Importance of Iraq

The location of Iraq is very important strategically. The Persian Gulf is to its south east, the Mediterranean is to its west with just Jordan and Syria in between, and it shares a long border with Iran to its east and Turkey to its north which again opens into the Black Sea. We at TFI-Global have already spoken about the relevance of the Black Sea and how the present Ukraine war is all about controlling it. The Strait of Hormuz which links the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman is one, through which about 40% of the world's crude oil is transported. So, it would be not wrong to say, that he who controls the strait controls 40 percent of the global crude oil. Was it this that attracted the USA, well maybe we can just guess.

American interests in Iraq

Given its sour relations with nuclear-capable Iran, it becomes very important for the USA to have a hovering presence in its neighbourhood to not only keep an eye on it but also to take swift action if the need be. It would be very easy to counter the above-mentioned claim that the USA already had made its

incursions in Kuwait, but one must not forget that Kuwait is territorially a very small country and at the end of the day, every country would want to be in control of a territorially large area.

The importance of warm water ports for Russia is not a hidden fact. The USA wants to curb Russia's accessibility to such ports in order to deny its Navy as well as trade the growth they deserve. What better opportunity to have a hovering presence to watch over the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea, and Caspian Sea all at once than having a significant military base in Iraq with either an installed puppet government or by turning Iraq into a vassal state.

By having Iraq under its control, it becomes easier for America to have a profound presence in the entire MENA region along with close proximity to Africa via Egypt.

The Ulterior Motive of Plunder

Iraq has been the site of one of the oldest river valley civilisations in the world, that is the Mesopotamian Civilisation and the Sumerian Civilisation. Their invaluable heritage in form of rare artefacts and treasures was stored in Iraqi museums, which were plundered by the American troops. These American troops looted and plunder the treasures of initial mankind for their masters in Washington. Who knows what did they do with the treasure, did they decorate their own museums with it or did they sell it in the international black market for antiquities are a few questions that still remain to be answered.

A ripe ground for the weapons industry

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the USA attacked Afghanistan. It was a war theatre wherein America got a ready market for its weapons as well as its mercenaries in addition to its troops. However, the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan and the stagnant market for weapons made access to other markets—or at least the hunt for new markets—absolutely necessary for the US. What better opportunity the US could have found other than Iraq? The groundwork for creating a market in Iraq can be said to have started way back in 1998 with 'Operation Desert Fox' under which then president Bill Clinton had ordered the bombing of Baghdad.

With just one target fulfilling all ulterior motives, why would one let go off it? This is exactly what has been the thought process of Americans who simply believe in satiating their own interests at the cost of others.

Can Science Go Too Far? Examining the Potential Dangers of Unchecked Scientific Advancement

By Happy Sharer
Source: https://www.lihpao.com/can-science-go-too-far/

Jan 13 – The question of whether science can go too far is one that has been asked since the dawn of modern science. In an era of rapid technological advancement and increased focus on scientific research, this question is more relevant than ever. This article will explore the potential risks and benefits of scientific progress, as well as the ethical considerations that must be taken into account when considering this issue.

Examining the Ethical Implications of Scientific Progress

When discussing the potential dangers of scientific progress, it is important to consider the ethical implications of such advancements. According to the National Institutes of Health, "ethics are a set of moral principles that guide decision-making and behavior." Ethical considerations are essential for determining whether or not a particular scientific advancement should be pursued. Some of the ethical considerations that must be taken into account include the potential risks and benefits of the research, the potential impact on humans and other living things, and the potential for misuse or abuse of the technology.

One of the most important ethical considerations is the potential risk versus benefit of a particular advancement. For example, while a new medical treatment may have the potential to save lives, it may also come with serious side effects. Similarly, while a new energy source may reduce dependence on fossil fuels, it may also pose environmental risks. Therefore, it is essential to weigh the potential risks and benefits of any scientific advancement before moving forward.
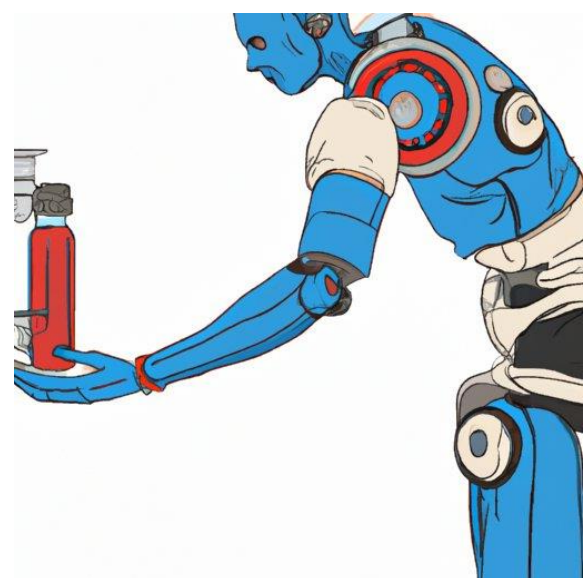
Another ethical consideration is the potential impact on humans and other living things. While some scientific advancements may offer great potential benefits, they may also come with unintended consequences that could be detrimental to human health or the environment. For example, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) have the potential to improve crop yields, but they also have the potential to cause unforeseen harm to ecosystems or human health. Therefore, it is essential to consider the potential impacts of any scientific advancement before moving forward.

Finally, it is important to consider the potential for misuse or abuse of the technology. Many scientific advancements have the potential to be used for good, but they also have the potential to be misused or abused in ways that could have devastating consequences. For example, nuclear weapons have the potential to provide clean energy, but they also have the potential to be used as weapons of mass destruction. Therefore, it is essential to consider the potential for misuse or abuse of any scientific advancement before moving forward.

Exploring the Potential Dangers of Unchecked Scientific Advancement

While there are many potential benefits to scientific progress, there are also potential dangers that must be taken into account. One of the most significant dangers is the potential for misuse or abuse of the technology. As mentioned above, many scientific advancements have the potential to be misused or abused in ways that could have devastating consequences. Therefore, it is essential to put safeguards in place to ensure that the technology is not misused or abused.

Another potential danger of unchecked scientific progress is the possibility of unforeseen or unintended consequences. Even if a scientific advancement is pursued with the best of intentions, it is still possible that it could have unforeseen or unintended consequences that could prove to be disastrous. For example, the development of antibiotics had the potential to revolutionize medicine, but it also led to the emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Therefore, it is essential to consider the potential risks and unintended consequences of any scientific advancement before moving forward.

Finally, it is important to consider the potential for a "technological singularity", or a point in which technological progress becomes so rapid that it is impossible to predict the outcome. While the prospect of a technological singularity is exciting, it also carries with it the potential for catastrophic outcomes. Therefore, it is essential to consider the potential for a technological singularity before pursuing any scientific advancement.

Investigating the Consequences of Extreme Technological Advancements

In addition to the potential dangers of unchecked scientific progress, there are also potential consequences of extreme technological advancements. These extreme technologies include developments such as nanotechnology, artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, and genetic engineering. Each of these technologies has the potential to revolutionize society, but they also have the potential to have negative impacts on the environment, economy, and society.

Nanotechnology, for example, has the potential to revolutionize medicine and industry, but it also has the potential to cause unintended harm to the environment or human health. Robotics and AI have the potential to automate labor-intensive tasks and improve efficiency, but they also have the potential to displace human workers and lead to rising unemployment. Finally, genetic engineering has the potential to improve crop yields or create new medicines, but it also has the potential to cause unintended harm to ecosystems or human health.

Therefore, it is essential to consider the potential risks and benefits of any extreme technological advancement before moving forward. In addition, it is important to develop strategies for mitigating the potential negative impacts of these technologies. These strategies might include regulations on the use of the technology, incentives for responsible use, or education about the potential risks and benefits of the technology.

Discussing the Risks of Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering

Biotechnology and genetic engineering are two areas of science that have the potential to revolutionize medicine and agriculture, but they also have the potential to cause unintended harm. Biotechnology is the manipulation of biological systems and processes, while genetic engineering is the manipulation of genetic material. Both of these technologies have the potential to produce beneficial outcomes, but they also have the potential to cause unforeseen and potentially dangerous consequences.

One of the most significant risks of biotechnology and genetic engineering is the potential for unintended harm to ecosystems or human health. For example, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) have the potential to increase crop yields, but they also have the potential to cause unforeseen harm to ecosystems or human health. Therefore, it is essential to consider the potential risks and unintended consequences of any biotechnological or genetic engineering advancements before moving forward.

In addition, it is important to develop strategies for regulating biotechnological advancements. These strategies might include regulations on the use of the technology, incentives for responsible use, or education about the potential risks and benefits of the technology. It is also important to ensure that any biotechnological or genetic engineering advancements are monitored closely to ensure that they do not cause unintended harm.

Analyzing the Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Society

Artificial intelligence (AI) is another area of science that has the potential to revolutionize society, but it also has the potential to cause unintended harm. AI is the ability of a machine or computer system to learn and make decisions on its own. This technology has the potential to automate labor-intensive tasks and improve efficiency, but it also has the potential to displace human workers and lead to rising unemployment.

In addition, AI has the potential to cause unforeseen and potentially dangerous consequences. For example, autonomous weapons systems have the potential to revolutionize warfare, but they also have the potential to cause unintended harm or be misused or abused. Therefore, it is essential to consider the potential risks and unintended consequences of any AI advancements before moving forward.

In addition, it is important to develop strategies for managing and regulating AI. These strategies might include regulations on the use of the technology, incentives for responsible use, or education about the potential risks and benefits of the technology. It is also important to ensure that any AI advancements are monitored closely to ensure that they do not cause unintended harm.

Evaluating the Effects of Space Exploration and Colonization

Space exploration and colonization are two areas of science that have the potential to revolutionize our understanding of the universe, but they also have the potential to cause unintended harm. Space exploration has the potential to unlock new sources of energy and resources, but it also has the potential to cause unforeseen and potentially dangerous consequences. For example, space debris has the potential to damage satellites or spacecraft, while colonizing other planets has the potential to cause irreversible damage to their environments.

In addition, space exploration and colonization have the potential to disrupt existing power structures and lead to conflicts between nations. Therefore, it is essential to consider the potential risks and unintended consequences of any space exploration or colonization endeavors before moving forward. In addition, it is important to develop strategies for limiting the negative effects of space exploration and colonization, such as regulations on the use of the technology, incentives for responsible use, or education about the potential risks and benefits of the technology.
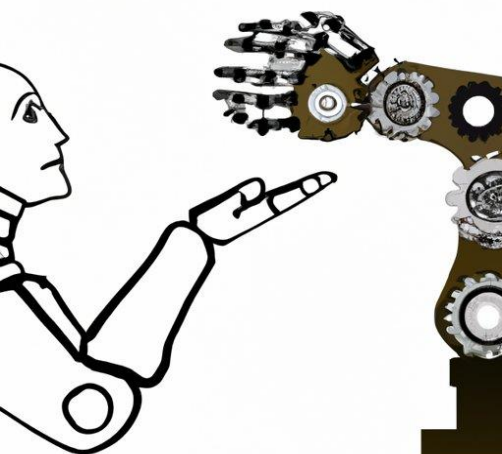
Considering the Implications of Advances in Robotics and Automation

Robotics and automation are two areas of science that have the potential to revolutionize industry and transportation, but they also have the potential to cause unintended harm. Robotics and automation have the potential to automate labor-intensive tasks and improve efficiency, but they also have the potential to displace human workers and lead to rising unemployment.

In addition, robotics and automation have the potential to cause unforeseen and potentially dangerous consequences. For example, autonomous vehicles have the potential to revolutionize transportation, but they also have the potential to cause accidents or be misused or abused. Therefore, it is essential to consider the potential risks and unintended consequences of any robotics or automation advancements before moving forward.

In addition, it is important to develop strategies for managing and regulating robotics and automation. These strategies might include regulations on the use of the technology, incentives for responsible use, or education about the potential risks and benefits of the technology. It is also important to ensure that any robotics or automation advancements are monitored closely to ensure that they do not cause unintended harm.

Conclusion

The question of whether science can go too far is one that has been asked since the dawn of modern science. In an era of rapid technological advancement and increased focus on scientific research, this question is more relevant than ever. This article has explored the potential risks and benefits of scientific progress, as well as the ethical considerations that must be taken into account when considering this issue.

It is clear that there are potential risks and benefits associated with scientific progress, and that ethical considerations must be taken into account when considering this issue. In addition, it is essential to consider the potential for misuse or abuse of the technology, the potential for unforeseen or unintended consequences, and the potential for a technological singularity. Furthermore, it is important to consider the potential risks and benefits of extreme technologies such as nanotechnology, AI, robotics, and genetic engineering, as well as the potential risks of biotechnology and genetic engineering.

Overall, it is essential to consider the potential risks and benefits of any scientific advancement before moving forward. In addition, it is important to develop strategies for mitigating the potential negative impacts of these technologies, such as regulations on the use of the technology, incentives for responsible use, or education about the potential risks and benefits of the technology.

Safety Index by City

Source: https://www.numbeo.com/crime/rankings_current.jsp?displayColumn=1

Rank	City	Safety Index
1	Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates	88.8
2	Doha, Qatar	85.6
3	Taipei, Taiwan (China)	84.9
4	Ajman, United Arab Emirates	84.6
5	Sharjah, United Arab Emirates	84.3
6	Quebec City, Canada	83.8
7	Dubai, United Arab Emirates	83.6
8	San Sebastian, Spain	83.1
9	Bern, Switzerland	82.0

ICI C²BRNE DIARY – January 2023

Rank	City	Safety Index
10	Eskisehir, Turkey	81.6
11	Zurich, Switzerland	81.2
12	Munich, Germany	81.2
13	Trondheim, Norway	80.9
14	Muscat, Oman	79.9
15	Tartu, Estonia	79.0
16	Hong Kong, Hong Kong (China)	78.6
17	The Hague (Den Haag), Netherlands	78.6
18	Basel, Switzerland	78.4
19	Yerevan, Armenia	78.4
20	Ljubljana, Slovenia	78.2

out of 416 cities studied

285	Ballarat, Australia	53.2	46.8
286	Thessaloniki, Greece	53.5	46.5
287	Drogheda, Ireland	53.6	46.4
288	Phoenix, AZ, United States	53.6	46.4
289	London, United Kingdom	53.8	46.2
290	Gurgaon, India	54.3	45.7
291	Karachi, Pakistan	54.5	45.5
292	Casablanca, Morocco	54.6	45.4
293	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia	54.6	45.4
294	Brussels, Belgium	54.6	45.4
295	Bangalore, India	54.6	45.4
296	Portland, OR, United States	54.6	45.4
297	Kamloops, Canada	54.6	45.4
298	Amadora, Portugal	54.6	45.4
299	Brampton, Canada	54.8	45.2
300	Johor Bahru, Malaysia	54.9	45.1
301	Medellin, Colombia	55.2	44.8
302	Las Vegas, NV, United States	55.2	44.8
303	Hamilton, Canada	55.3	44.7
304	Minneapolis, MN, United States	55.3	44.7
305	Noida, India	55.3	44.7
306	Phnom Penh, Cambodia	55.4	44.6
307	Manchester, United Kingdom	55.4	44.6
308	Geelong, Australia	55.6	44.4
309	San Jose, Costa Rica	55.7	44.3
310	Malmo, Sweden	55.7	44.3
311	Montevideo, Uruguay	55.8	44.2
312	Tehran, Iran	55.9	44.1
313	Athens, Greece	55.9	44.1
314	Toowoomba, Australia	56.4	43.6
315	Oshawa, Canada	56.5	43.5
316	Cancun, Mexico	56.9	43.1
317	Paris, France	56.9	43.1
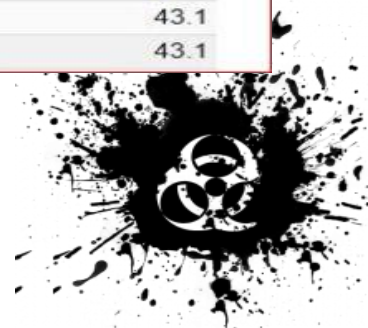
Crime Index: 11.23
Safety Index: 88.77

Crime rates in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Level of crime	6.57	Very Low
Crime increasing in the past 3 years	30.87	Low
Worries home broken and things stolen	8.67	Very Low
Worries being mugged or robbed	7.92	Very Low
Worries car stolen	7.12	Very Low
Worries things from car stolen	10.06	Very Low
Worries attacked	9.15	Very Low
Worries being insulted	12.91	Very Low
Worries being subject to a physical attack because of your skin color, ethnic origin, gender or religion	9.51	Very Low
Problem people using or dealing drugs	14.34	Very Low
Problem property crimes such as vandalism and theft	10.62	Very Low
Problem violent crimes such as assault and armed robbery	8.18	Very Low
Problem corruption and bribery	19.12	Very Low

Safety in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Safety walking alone during daylight	91.77	Very High
Safety walking alone during night	85.44	Very High

What Does China's Arctic Presence Mean to the United States?

By Doug Irving

Researchers looked at where China is operating in the Arctic, what it wants, and what that could mean for regional security. They concluded that China has made only limited inroads in the Arctic, but that's not for lack of trying. **Read more**

Who Are You Calling a Great Power?

By J. Dana Stuster
Source: https://www.lawfareblog.com/who-are-you-calling-great-power

Editor's Note: *The United States is in the throes of a new era of great power competition, but few analysts or policymakers pause to consider which countries count as great powers and, perhaps more importantly, why. Dana Stuster, the* Foreign Policy Essay*'s deputy editor, deconstructs the term, explaining the different dimensions of great power status and why using multiple measures is the best way for leaders to craft successful policies.*

Daniel Byman

Jan 15 – It is a truth universally acknowledged, at least in the U.S. policy community, that international politics has entered a new era of "great power competition." It shows in the number of instances of the phrase in books, which nearly doubled between 2012 and 2019, according to Google Books. The phrase had a particular moment when the Trump administration released its inaugural National Security Strategy in 2017, which declared that "after being dismissed as a phenomenon of an earlier century, great power competition has returned." The consensus has persisted and deepened, declared in think tank reports from across the political spectrum. Though the Biden administration tried to switch to the terminology of "strategic competition" and "major powers," the sentiment is the same.

From the start, the phrase has been fuzzy, and it has rarely been clear just who counts as a "great power." The United States is a given. China is always a looming peer rival. Russia crops up from time to time, though in inconsistent ways. For instance, that 2017 National Security Strategy shifts from asserting that Russia "seeks to restore its great power status" to just a couple pages later actualizing that goal for Moscow by identifying it as a

great power rival alongside China. Though great power competition has conventionally referred to rivalries between states, the European Union is also occasionally floated as an emerging pole in this new multipolar world.

This is an oddly disparate collection of actors in want of a definition. If the term "great power" has meaning, it is because these actors are somehow different from other, less powerful states. They perceive their interests differently and behave differently than, say, a "regional power," a "middle power," or any of those states that are politely but condescendingly called "small powers." But trying to define great power status is difficult in ways that are evident from the mismatched assortment of candidates that emerge in the recent literature. Power varies across issues and domains in ways that are glossed over when international politics is reduced to great power competition. It can be a convenient shorthand, but policymakers should not lose track of the nuances: Who counts as a great power may vary from issue to issue.

Too Many Definitions

While the policy community might have put too little thought into defining great power status, the academic community has arguably done too much. The literature on great power competition is vast and impossible to survey in its entirety, and it seems that each author has their own addendum to the definition of great power status. But there are certain core criteria.

At a minimum, there's a security requirement: A great power is any country that could mount a serious defense against any other country in the world—even if it might not defeat the other country, it could force a war of attrition. In a world of nuclear-armed countries, nuclear weapons are a necessary but insufficient condition for great power status (so North Korea doesn't qualify). Some scholars, like the late Nuno Monteiro, have argued that this is still too encompassing a definition and argued for an "offensive" criterion; in addition to being able to defend capably against any rival, a great power must also be able to "engage unaided in sustained politico-military operations in at least one other relevant region of the globe beyond its own on a level similar to the most powerful state in the system." Great powers, under this definition, possess international reach and the capacity for unilateral action. This winnows the field considerably—Monteiro uses it to make the case that the United States is the sole great power in a unipolar world, though others may qualify depending on the scale of the intervention. After all, France recently concluded a limited but long-term intervention in Mali, Russian proxies have done similar work throughout Africa, and China's expanding military footprint has increased its ability to project force.

Other definitions look beyond just military capacity. As Kenneth Waltz, author of "Theory of International Politics" and godfather of neorealist international relations theory, stipulated, great powers must be able to not just ensure their security but also support that defense capacity over time. That requires territory that can be defended, an economy that can support the military and other essential government expenses, a population to staff the private sector and provide the national defense, and the political stability and competence for it all to function.

Other foundational authors introduce other criteria. Great power status, Jack Levy wrote, is not just about military capacity. It's about how a country sees its place in the world. Great powers, in his definition, "define their national interests to include systemic interests and are therefore concerned with order maintenance in the international system." Great power status, he argues, is also contingent on how a state is perceived by its peers and whether it is treated as "relative equals with respect to general attention, respect, protocol, negotiations, alliance agreements and so forth." For example, high-status countries like the United Kingdom joining the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2015 affirms the perception of China as a great power, and Russia's ouster from the Group of Eight in 2014 was a rebuke of Moscow's great power aspirations. A great power must have the capacity for international action but must also consider itself an influential state with global interests and have that role and influence reflected back to it by its peers.

Measuring Power

All of these definitions still leave a lot of wiggle room for know-it-when-I-see-it-ism. The fundamental criterion of a capable defense is a hypothetical that hasn't been observed since the development of nuclear weapons and would be disastrous if ever put to the test; in the absence of clear examples, policymakers and academics must rely on estimates of military capability that can sometimes prove shockingly inaccurate. And few of these definitions set clear thresholds. *How much* independent action abroad is necessary to qualify? *How large* must an economy be to underpin great power status? *How global* must a state's national interests be, and *what recognition* counts from its peers?

When trying to quantify great power status, academics often rely on parsimonious proxy metrics that treat these essential conditions lightly. Studies focused on international security often use the Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC), which assesses state capacity on the basis of six material components: the size of a country's military, its military spending, its steel and iron consumption, its energy consumption, its total population, and its urban population. Others use gross domestic product (GDP) or GDP per capita as a rough indicator

for state power. And while it's true that economic size is often correlated with military size, research by Michael Beckley has suggested that GDP has historically been a poor predictor of actual military capacity (he argues that this is because GDP discounts the share of that economic product that must support the state's citizenry, and that a more accurate metric would increase the salience of the size of a state's population).

GDP is a particularly telling example for the ways that national-level statistics elide the nuances of the concepts usually cited in definitions of great power status. In 2014, the size of China's GDP surpassed that of the United States when adjusted for purchasing power; breathless news coverage claiming a dramatic shift in the global balance of power has followed in waves every few years since. But there are many ways to assess GDP and varying predictions about the actual trendline. Just in the past year, estimates of when China would surpass the United States in nonadjusted GDP slipped from 2030, to 2035, to 2060 or maybe never. Clearly, a metric that indicates a 31 percent advantage for the United States when calculated one way and a 19 percent advantage for China when calculated another has a whopping margin of error for extrapolating what it indicates about overall state power. Not only are different versions of GDP inconsistent about rank order, the disparity between the United States and China is vast—and even greater for other actors sometimes included in discussions of great power competition. The entirety of the European Union has a combined economy comparable to that of China, but the largest economy in the eurozone, Germany, has an economy less than one-fifth the size of the United States'. Russia is an even greater outlier: It ranks 11th in the world in terms of GDP, with an economy less than one-tenth the size of the United States'. If that's the threshold for great power status, the bar has been set very low.

Parsimonious national-level indicators lack important nuances, prompting the development of new metrics. A careful examination of measures of state power published by RAND in 2000 noted that, while CINC, GDP, and similar efforts to assess state power produce similar rank ordering of countries, they aren't tailored to the factors that matter most in the postindustrial age—for instance, they say little about which countries excel in innovative research or best protect intellectual property, which are key determinants of the strength of a modern national economy. Other research has stressed the relativity of power and developed indicators, like the Foreign Bilateral Influence Capacity (FBIC) index, to assess power in specific relationships between pairs of states.

Great Powers and Relative Power

National-level statistics leave out the ways that power creates self-reinforcing institutions that grant powerful countries distinct advantages. The historical centrality of the United States and Western Europe to the international financial system has meant that many of the institutions that underpin international trade are under these countries' jurisdiction. This has meant that the United States and its partners are better placed to observe international financial flows than other countries, and they can weaponize this position to isolate actors through imposing sanctions and cutting them off from the international financial network. This disproportionate power afforded the United States has irritated China and Russia, among other countries, but efforts to establish alternative networks to circumvent U.S. centrality have faltered. China's counter to the SWIFT international banking system has limited reach, and efforts to evade sanctions through cryptocurrencies still face detection and legal penalties from the U.S. government. Institutions are sticky, slow to change, and almost never replaced in their entirety—but that institutional power baked into the international system is not reflected in any of the standard metrics of power.

Some recent research has deconstructed state power, looking at it by issue area. Russia and Saudi Arabia, for example, exert influence in oil markets disproportionate to their share of other indicators of state power, like their militaries and economies. They are great powers in terms of oil production. But even this comes with caveats. As Emily Meierding has noted, the exercise of that power in the domain of oil production intersects with other networks of power. The sale of oil requires engaging with international financial networks, in which the United States is the dominant power, and the energy transportation network, in which power is distributed across the countries transited by oil pipelines, China's large tanker fleet, and the United States, which has an unparalleled capacity to monitor and control access to international sea lines of communication.

This approach to thinking about state power suggests other ways it can be broken down in other domains. Taiwan could be described as a semiconductor great power, China as a manufacturing great power, and these comparative advantages are enmeshed in networks of transit and exchange that have still other distributions of power. France, according to the FBIC index, is something of a diplomatic great power, punching further above its weight in diplomatic influence than its military and economy would suggest. This characterization of the international distribution of power restores nuance, but at the expense of simplicity. The great power competition it describes is one of context-specific powers that are great maybe only in one of a proliferating number of domains.

Great Power Competition in the 21st Century

The challenge for policymakers is to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and retain the ability to function. Great power competition is a characteristic of the international system as a whole, describing how countries perceive and interact with one another; it is also a characteristic of specific issue areas, and

the cast of characters may look very different on an issue-by-issue basis than in the international system as a whole. Being able to shift between these two modes, though confusing, is an important check against sloppy thinking about which countries count as great powers.

The United States is a great power. It has the largest economy in the world in raw size and over the past 80 years has entrenched its central position in the international economic system. Its military is more capable and more distributed than any other in the world and is enmeshed as an essential part of many other countries' national defense. Indeed, rather than the current consensus about the return of great power competition, there should be more debate about whether China is in the same category as the United States as a global power.

But the distribution of power is in flux. China's power has certainly grown in the past two decades, and it is exerting greater regional influence—it may be a great power on some issues, and a regional power on others. Europe might be a great power on the issues on which it can act collectively, and a collection of middle and small powers on the issues on which it cannot. Including Russia as a great power in the international system, though, requires just too much conceptual stretching for my mind. As much as it may still rankle Vladimir Putin, President Obama was right to describe Russia as a "regional power" and a second-order actor in the global great power competition.

This is not a simple definition of what counts as a great power. There's no litmus test or threshold—some minimum share of GDP or CINC score, though these can be helpful guides and are still part of the story. And that's the point. Politics is relative, so the way policymakers think about the role of great powers in international politics should be, too.

J. Dana Stuster is the deputy foreign policy editor for Lawfare and a PhD candidate at Yale University. He worked previously as a policy analyst at the National Security Network and an assistant editor at Foreign Policy magazine.

Günün makalesi: Çalınmış miras

14 Ocak Cumartesi 2023 12:36

"Bugün Yunan felsefesi diye bildiğimiz şey hemen hemen Büyük İskender'in Mısır'ı fethi ve ardından İskenderiye Kraliyet Kütüphanesi'nin talan edilmesinden sonra ortaya çıkmış bir külliyat."

Article of the day: Stolen Heritage

14 January 2023

"What we know today as Greek philosophy is a corpus that emerged almost after Alexander the Great's conquest of Egypt and the subsequent plundering of the Royal Library of Alexandria."

Oman is building the Middle East's first spaceport

Source: https://www.thenationalnews.com/gulf-news/oman/2023/01/18/oman-is-building-the-middle-easts-first-spaceport/

Jan 18 – Oman plans to build the Middle East's first space rocket launch centre this year.

Located in the port town of Duqm, the Etlaq Space Launch Complex, a project by the National Aerospace Services Company, could see its first rocket launch early next year.

However, it will take three years to fully complete the centre.

"We have two main goals with the Duqm launch land: to build a launch centre for commercial, professional and educational rocket users to assemble, test and launch from," Nascom said.

"The launch centre will be globally accessible for expanding rocket companies, and locally available for educational research programmes."

Private space companies, such as Virgin Galactic and Blue Origin, have eyed the Middle East, especially the Emirates, for spaceports. But nothing has materialised, even though the UAE's space strategy includes setting up a launch pad for space tourism flights. Oman's plans could give a significant boost to the region's space programmes, as private companies and government agencies could use the pad for orbital launches.

First suborbital launch from Oman

Nascom also hopes to build the first Omani suborbital rocket that would be launched from the complex.

"The rockets will inspire the youth to pursue science and technology and will set a standard for future generations to achieve and surpass," the company said. It plans to develop rockets with hybrid-solid engines.

"The solid fuel which we have been testing is much safer and environmentally friendly than the fuels used in liquid engines," Nascom said. "The scale of rocket we are developing is comparable to the suborbital

rockets which are launched by universities and colleges in the USA, which measure between 3 to 6 metres in length."

Why Duqm?

The port's equatorial positioning makes it an ideal spot for launches, as the rocket can take advantage of the Earth's rotational speeds. "Internationally verified studies have identified that Wilayat Al-Duqm's equatorial positioning places it in the top 5 most efficient rocket launch latitudes in the world," Nascom said.

"Considering the data, and our own site analysis, we acknowledge the location as an important national asset for Oman which must be developed. "A national asset as such will continue to increase in importance over the next two decades as global industries look for solutions in space."

The Duqm Port opened in February as part of Oman's efforts to diversify its economy and expand its infrastructure.

It was developed in partnership with the Belgium's Port of Antwerp and received major investment from China.

Oman's space ambitions

Oman has big plans in space.

It plans to build a space research centre for simulation missions and science experiments in the Duqm district's Artificial Intelligence Zone. The project is called the Space Settlement Centre.

Bahiya Al Shuaibi, chief executive officer of Oman's Global Space and Technology Company, said the centre would help scientists carry out research. "The project aims to simulate a space environment to study the behaviour of astronauts before joining the actual astronaut flights," she said. "It will serve scientists, researchers and those interested in doing experiments in the space sector, artificial intelligence and advanced technology." Oman space programme has had a shaky start.

Its first satellite, Aman, was destroyed earlier this year during a failed Virgin Orbit launch.

WEF Davos – The New Sodom and Gomorrah?

By Peter Koenig

Source: https://www.globalresearch.ca/wef-davos-new-sodom-gomorrah/5805074

The World Economic Forum (WEF) has reached a new climax. It apparently has become a hub for high-flier and high-priced prostitution, pardon, "Escort Services". Like never before. This is amply covered by the international media. With exception of a few, the major Swiss media remain silent. Why?
Why is Switzerland still hosting this new Sodom and Gomorrah? Politely called the Chaos of Davos? The citizens of Davos dislike the WEF meeting ever more vehemently. It destroys not just their tranquility, but also their winter sport pleasure and business. Tourists stay away.

Jan 19 – They do not want to be confronted with up to 5000 – or more – police and military. "For security" of course. Looking down a gun-barrel at every street corner is not pleasant. In the last two to three decades – since the neoliberal ascent on humanity – any unpleasant imposition on the people of the world is, indeed, "for their own security", and by inference, "for their own good". That shuts up any critic. And it's repeated so often, we start believing it.

That the WEF has been an attraction for high-flying whores, who now for better blending in to the regular WEF attendees, appear in smart business attire is not new. But the WEF 2023 has reached new dimensions.

This new Escort High, plus every and ever-more dystopian themes that accompanies the WEF-magnates' *sexomania*, may signal the end phase of the WEF. The world would be a much better place without it, and without the oligarchs and financial behemoths, like BlackRock *et al*, which support and amply fund WEF – invading Davos.

Not to speak about the millions of Swiss tax-payer money the government spends in support of the WEF's annual meetings and police and military protection.

This man, **Klaus Schwab**, a megalomaniac who looks like a phantom from outer space and speaks like a humanity-hating monster, is so unpopular worldwide, it seems he himself doesn't have a clue.

His unpopularity is perhaps best reflected by a reader's commentary after Schwab's speech at the recent G20 / B20 meeting in Bali: *"I wish Klaus Schwab will get everything that people in the world wish him…"* Say no more. It's all bottled-up in these few words. See this.

Wouldn't that be the moment to gracefully disappear and let the WEF noiselessly collapse – and vanish? After 52 years and 53 Davos meetings – enough damage was done. Go away!

Will the WEF have a well-deserved *Sodom and Gomorrah ending* – as religious history portrays?

While the global elite pretends tackling the world's greatest problems – including gender inequality – the Davos summit is fueling a surge in prostitution. Escort and sex services are booming in Davos where political and financial titans gather during the WEF's 53rd annual edition from 16 to 21 January 2023. Sexual harassment by wealthy men at WEF is "so common" that female guests are advised not to attend events alone, the Austrian EXPRESS reported.

According to a 2020 report from the UK Times, women – even if they are accredited WEF attendees – are "*routinely harassed*" by the men who dominate the conclave. Indeed, the event began warning women that year not to go out alone after dark, "*because if something happens with some big CEO, who is going to be believed? You or them?*" WEF's female staff in Davos were warned to beware of accosting politicians and business magnates. As one luxury Escort Lady said, "*Believe me, you don't want to go into litigation with them.*"

For more details, see this and this and this.

Now on a more serious note. Criticism and even ridicule of the WEF's dictatorial and dystopian approach to the world's problems has reached in 2023 a new pinnacle. Though the words "democracy" and "freedom" are always in the forefront, they are hardly applied. They are merely the deed of nonstop propaganda for something that isn't. And as Goebbels, Hitler's Propaganda Minister, said already almost 80 years ago, *"If a lie is often enough repeated, it becomes the truth"*.

Prostitutes gather in Davos for annual meeting of global elite - where demand for sexual services rockets during economic summit

- Prostitutes report a surge in business during the annual gathering of leaders
- Escorts are booked into delegates' hotels alongside business executives
- Sex workers dress in business attire and rub shoulders with the global elite

By JACK NEWMAN FOR MAILONLINE
PUBLISHED: 05:10 EST, 17 January 2023 | UPDATED: 14:47 EST, 17 January 2023

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The global elite tackling the world's greatest problems - including gender inequality - at the Davos summit are fuelling a surge in prostitution in the Swiss resort town.

Demand for sex work skyrockets each year at the meeting of world leaders and business tycoons who jet in from all around the world to rub shoulders with each other.

Escorts are booked into the same hotels as high-powered bosses and their employees during the five-day summit, which started on January 16.

Screenshot from Daily Mail

This false truth has brainwashed almost every Western citizen. We are being gradually enslaved while still believing we are living in a democracy. The WEF is part of the steady flow of propaganda but also a master tyrant, in the person of Klaus Schwab and his Israeli top adviser, "*You useless eaters*", **Mr. Yuval Noah Harari.**

Switzerland boasting of "democracy", if they were serious, they would have expelled Schwab and the WEF years ago, or even arrested Schwab for crimes against humanity. Ukraine's President Zelenskyy and his wife were invited to speak at the WEF, rather to beg for more money and weapons so as to "defeat" Russia. And yes, NATO, please help us, and make us a member of your war clan. The pair bashed Russia and especially President Putin with lie after lie, after miserable lie. More war crimes were committed by the Zelenskyy regime, which massacred his own people in the Donbas area and elsewhere just so he could blame the Russians for the bloodbath. Journalists on location who saw the truth were threatened to shut up, or else. Several "disappeared".

Democratically speaking, President Putin should have also been invited to present his truth. He was not invited. With his presence, the WEF could have created a platform for peace. The WEF, true to its mission statement – "committed to improving the state of the world" **–** could have sponsored peace negotiations. Instead, Schwab and his invited top political honchos facilitated more weapons, more killing machines,

being shipped to Ukraine – so this dystopian government supported by a dystopian US / EU leadership – without any strategy to end the war, keep giving the most corrupt country in Europe, unconditional war assistance, sending endlessly without any criteria of "end-in-sight", canons, tanks, and missiles, keep encouraging Zelenskyy to fight to the end, to the last Ukrainian, so to speak. Thereby, doesn't Schwab and all the other EU / NATO / US weapons deliverers become murderers by association; and shouldn't they be arrested immediately and put on trial?

In the long-run, or maybe already in the short-run, the WEF could become a burden for Switzerland. It is already a burden for Switzerland – and the world. Talking about dystopia and "burden" – for whoever has to listen to this nonsense, listen to the ridicule of John Kerry's, former US Vice President and now special Environment Envoy for the US. Kerry's words, "A select group of human beings have a plan for "saving the planet" and its almost extra-terrestrial". See this short video (40 sec).

For God's sake, let's stop him from "saving the planet"! The "*Weltwoche*" (Swiss newspaper) Chief Editor, Roger Koeppel, sums up the 2023 WEF event in his Daily Special as depressive, giving the impression we are living the worst times in our lives, humanity is fast moving towards a climate apocalypse, especially when listening to the US / WEF puppet, UN Secretary General Guterres. How can he have forgotten that since about 30 years we are listening to the same narrative – we are just before the final climate collapse – and for 30 years the collapse has not happened… See this (in German), you may also view below.

The way the western WEF and lie-circus moves on – it is well possible that the Guterres-predicted apocalypse may happen in a form reflecting on the biblical legend of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Peter Koenig *is a geopolitical analyst and a former Senior Economist at the World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO), where he worked for over 30 years around the world. He lectures at universities in the US, Europe and South America. He writes regularly for online journals and is the author of* Implosion – An Economic Thriller about War, Environmental Destruction and Corporate Greed; and *co-author of Cynthia McKinney's book "When China Sneezes: From the Coronavirus Lockdown to the Global Politico-Economic Crisis" (Clarity Press – November 1, 2020). Peter is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG). He is also is a non-resident Senior Fellow of the Chongyang Institute of Renmin University, Beijing.*

These Will Be The World's Next Megacities

Population growth of the next cities expected to hit 10 million+ people by 2050*

London
9.6M 10.8M
(+14%)

Baghdad
7.6M 13.0M
(+71%)

Tehran
9.4M 10.6M
(+13%)

Nanjing
9.5M 10.4M
(+11%)

Chicago
8.9M 10.8M
(+21%)

Khartoum
6.2M 11.2M
(+80%)

Chengdu
9.5M 10.6M
(+11%)

Luanda
9.0M 14.6M
(+62%)

Surat
7.9M 12.0M
(+54%)

Ho Chi Minh City
9.1M 13.0M
(+42%)

Nairobi
5.2M 10.4M
(+101%)

Dar es Salaam
7.5M 16.4M
(+118%)

Ahmedabad
8.5M 13.0M
(+54%)

Pune
7.0M 10.8M
(+54%)
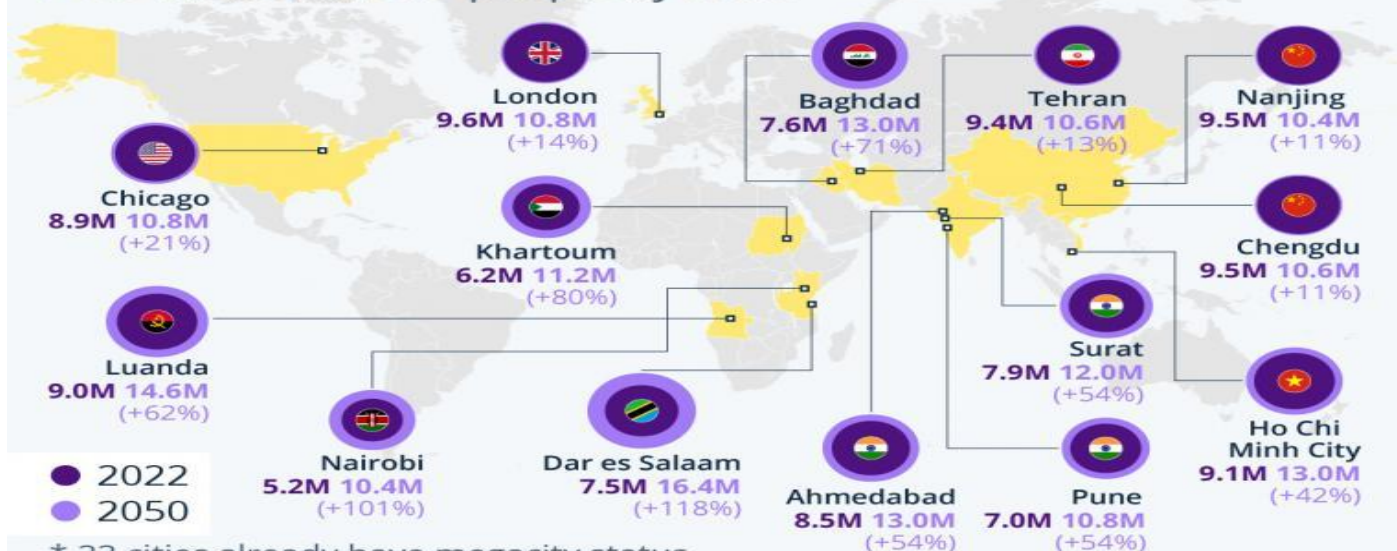
● 2022
● 2050

* 33 cities already have megacity status.
Source: 'Ecological Threat Report: 2022' by the Institute for Economics & Peace

statista

Greek Fire: The Weapon that Protected the Byzantine Empire
By Philip Chrysopoulos
Source: https://greekreporter.com/2023/01/21/greek-fire/

A depiction of Greek fire by an unknown artist

Jan 21 – The "Greek fire" was a mysterious incendiary weapon that helped the mighty Byzantine Empire survive and ensure that it continued to exercise its sovereignty for many centuries.

Using a unique formula—which even today's scientists have trouble figuring out—the Greeks of Byzantium kept the enemy away from their vast lands which once spanned all of Southern Europe, North Africa, and Asia Minor.

More importantly, the Greek fire saved Constantinople, the seat of the Byzantine Empire, from repeated sieges by the Arabs.

Even when it was captured, enemies of Byzantium were never able to recreate the unique chemical concoction that generated fire that was capable of slicing through water.

Invention of Greek fire
Greek fire—as the Crusaders referred to it—was also called "liquid fire," "Roman fire," or "sea fire." It was not the first incendiary weapon used in battle. Yet, historically, it is significant for its power.

Greek fire was created in the seventh century, most likely the invention of Kallinikos of Heliopolis, a Jewish architect who fled from Syria to Constantinople.

It was the time when the Byzantine Empire was being attacked by the Islamic forces of the prophet Muhammad and parts of Syria had been taken over.

Concerned about an Islamic attack against Constantinople, Kallinikos experimented with a variety of materials until he discovered a mix for an incendiary weapon.

Kallinikos sent the formula to the Byzantine emperor, and authorities developed a siphon that operated somewhat like a syringe, propelling the fiery concoction toward enemy ships.

Weapon of destruction
Greek fire was mainly used to set enemy ships on fire from a safe distance. Its ability to remain lit in water for a certain amount of time was its unique power. This prevented the enemy from dousing the flames during maritime battles.

It is said that the mysterious Byzantine weapon produced a loud roar and lots of smoke, and it was so effective that the enemy was terrorized and often fled at the sight of it.

Historical records say that Greek fire stuck to whatever whatever surface it touched. Amazingly, it could only be extinguished with a mixture of vinegar, sand, and old urine.

It seems that the invention of Kallinikos served its purpose: Greek fire was effective in repelling the enemy fleet and ending the First Arab Siege of Constantinople in 678 AD.

It was similarly successful during the Second Arab Siege of Constantinople (717-718 AD), again causing massive damage to the Arab navy.

The new weapon of mass destruction was so powerful indeed that the Byzantines kept its composition a well-guarded secret.

The Kallinikos family and the Byzantine emperors were the only ones with knowledge of its secret formula, which was passed down from generation to generation.

The formula was so well-guarded that even when enemies of the empire literally got their hands on Greek fire, they could not reproduce it.

Sulfur, pine resin, quicklime, and petrol were suggested as ingredients, but no actual recreation of Greek fire was ever achieved.

There are historical records of Arabs using their version of Greek fire against Crusaders during the Seventh Crusade in the 13th century.

Ultimately, the secret of its lethal recipe was lost to history.

Hand-siphon launching Greek fire, like a modern-day flamethrower

Effective for centuries

The Byzantines continued to use the puzzling weapon for centuries, and its use was not limited to naval battles. The incendiary weapon was used in several ways on both sea and land. It was used not only to burn down siege towers but also against enemy fortifications.

There was a hand-held version of the weapon called the cheirosiphon which was something like an ancient version of a flamethrower. Furthermore, the Byzantines used to fill clay jars with Greek fire so they could hurl it at the enemy much like grenades.

Jars of Greek fire and caltrops—spiked metal devices strewn on the ground to impede chariots—that had been doused in the liquid were used as offensive weapons by Byzantine armies.

Arabs, Bulgarians, Russians, and other invaders experienced the power of Greek fire through the centuries, making it an influential military invention.

From the 7th century until the Fall of Constantinople on May 29, 1453, this Byzantine weapon was significant in protecting the Greek empire. According to some historians, it was Greek fire that had kept the Byzantine Empire protected from invaders for centuries, subsequently saving the whole of Western civilization.

Is it true?

By E. Air Pilot Major General Beyazıt Karataş
Source: https://www.veryansintv.com/paskalya-adasindaki-f-35-gorusmeleri-ve-mutlu-s-400ler/

Onlarca kez tüm sorunlarını yazıp anlattığımız gibi özetle F-35'ler uçan bir bilgisayardır. Bu demektir ki uçuşa başlarken başlangıçta sisteme girebilmek için PIN koduna ihtiyacınız olacaktır. Her uçuştan önce uçağın sistemlerine bilgisayarına girebilmek için "**Kullanıcı Adı-Username**" ve "**Şifre-Password/PIN**" zorunlu olup tüm bilgileriniz ABD'ndeki bulutta "**Cloud/Bigdata**" toplanacaktır. Yani ABD isterse uçarsınız, istemezse uçamazsınız. Ayrıca, uçakların şifre kullanımı sorununa ilişkin bilgiler kullanıcı ülkelerden İngiltere ve Güney Kore tarafından açık kaynaklara yansıtılmıştır.

F-35 / ABD'YE BAĞIMLILIK ORANI %100 OLACAKTIR

F-35 / ABD İSTEMEZSE F-35 YERİNE DENİZ KAPLUMBAĞASI UÇURURSUNUZ

As we have written and explained all its problems dozens of times, in summary, the F-35s are a flying computer. This means that when starting the flight, you will need a PIN code to log in to the system at the beginning. "Username-Username" and "Password-Password/PIN" are mandatory in order to log into the aircraft's systems and computer before each flight, and all your information will be collected in the cloud "Cloud/Bigdata" in the USA. **So, if the USA wants you to fly, you can't fly if it doesn't.** In addition, information on the problem of using passwords on aircraft was reflected to open sources by the user countries England and South Korea.

ICI C²BRNE DIARY – January 2023

Crime Index by Country (2023)

Source: https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/crime-rate-by-country

Countries with the Highest Crime Rates

1. Venezuela (83.76)
2. Papua New Guinea (80.79)
3. South Africa (76.86)
4. Afghanistan (76.31)
5. Honduras (74.54)
6. Trinidad and Tobago (71.63)
7. Guyana (68.74)
8. El Salvador (67.79)
9. Brazil (67.49)
10. Jamaica (67.42)

Crime Index

10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90
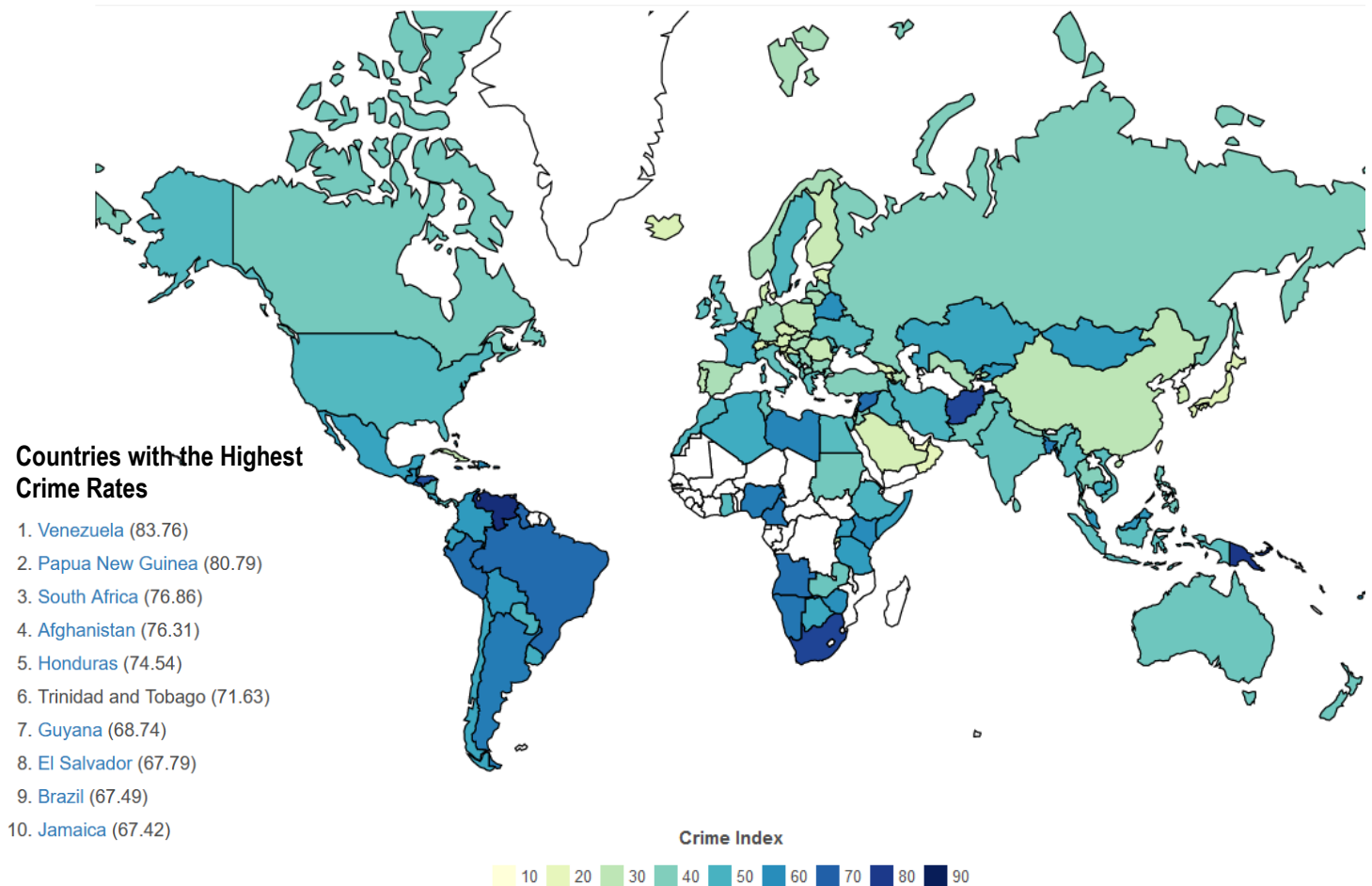
EDITOR'S COMMENT: Let's all move to the Arabian Peninsula – safer than most EU countries!

WORLD'S DEADLIEST ANIMALS

SHARKS	6
WOLVES	10
LIONS	22
ELEPHANTS	500
HIPPOS	500
TAPEWORMS	1,000
CROCODILES	4,500
ASCARIS ROUNDWORMS	10,000
TSETSE FLIES	10,000
ASSASSIN BUGS	12,000
FRESHWATER SNAIL	20,000
DOGS	35,000
SNAKES	100,000
HUMANS	440,000
MOSQUITOES	750,000

* Figures show average number of humans they kill every year

T - NEWS

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Kurdish Democratic Council in France calls Paris shooting a terrorist attack

Source: https://news.am/eng/news/736777.html

Dec 23 – The Kurdish Democratic Council in France (CDK-F) has called the Paris shooting that killed three Kurdish activists a terrorist attack. This Friday, December 23, 2022, a gunman committed an act of terrorism against our headquarters in the 10th arrondissement of Paris. The Kurdish Democratic Council in France categorically condemns this despicable attack, which was carried out after numerous threats from Turkey, the council said in a statement.

The Kurdish council confirmed that the victims were three Kurdish activists. A 69-year-old man opened fire in the street in the 10th arrondissement of Paris on Friday, he was detained, and his motives are unknown. According to Agence France-Presse, he is French by nationality and is known to police for two attempted murders, in 2016 and 2021. According to the latest reports, three people were killed in the shooting, two of the victims are in serious condition and two others are in moderate condition. The Paris prosecutor's office opened an investigation into the attempted murder.

IDF intelligence estimate for 2023 sees worrying trends amid global turbulence

By Yoav Limor (journalist and defense analyst)
Source: https://www.israelhayom.com/2022/12/25/exclusive-idf-intelligence-estimate-for-2023-sees-worrying-trends-amid-global-turbulence/

Dec 25 – *Israel Hayom* can exclusively reveal that global trends, Iran, and the Palestinian arena present the triangle lying at the heart of the annual intelligence estimate of the IDF Intelligence Directorate that has recently been prepared.

The intelligence assessment that has been compiled in recent weeks will soon be presented to Israel's civilian decision-makers. It offers a wide-ranging analysis of the various challenges Israel faces in 2023, along with the opportunities that could be seized.

Unlike past estimates, Iran is not the main focus: It may be the most important and complex challenge, but the directorate views it as just one of the pieces in a much larger puzzle that have interconnected parts

that wield influence on one another. The estimate puts global trends that impact Israel and its security as one of the points of the triangle, noting that the instability outside Israel has mainly emanated from the US-China clash, which is expected to continue and even intensify.

The directorate points to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine as one of the forces that exacerbated this trend, especially when it comes to its impact on Europe by shaking its core security, without cheap gas from Russia and with cutt-off supply chains from China (due to contracts that had been abrogated).

Failed states around us

The estimate also points to the ongoing changes within the US as one of the issues that Israeli policymakers should address in order to preserve the special relationship. Although those changes - mainly demographically oriented, with clear political impact - have yet to have an effect on the relations between the two sides (especially not on intelligence-security aspects, which has been reached new heights), they must be tended to regularly so that Israel won't find itself undermined on a strategic level. The global trends also have an effect on the Middle East. Egypt and Jordan, for example, have been going through unprecedented food and economic crises due to the rising prices of grains and the war in Ukraine.

Members of the Hezbollah terrorist group

Egypt has already received a three-billion dollar aid package from Qatar (and is likely to ask Doha for another such package) and is heavily dependent on grains bought by Saudi Arabia on its behalf. The intelligence analysts say in the estimate that this crisis – which adds to the ongoing transformation of Lebanon into a failed state – could have far-reaching regional consequences, and Israel must do its utmost to help Egypt and Jordan, such as with desalination projects and the laying of solar panels that could help solves the water and energy crunch in Jordan and thus reduce the threat of discontent.

The second point in the triangle challenge in the coming year is Iran. This is not limited to the nuclear issue, albeit it being the main component, but extends to a birds-eye view of the Islamic republic as an all-round player. Israel has recently noted Iran's increasing involvement in the efforts to encourage terrorist activities in Judea and Samaria in order to cause tempers to flare. This also makes the Israel Security Agency (the Shin Bet) duty-bound to increase its involvement in the Iranian issue, including by forming joint task forces with Mossad and the IDF Intelligence Directorate.

The Iranian meddling in the region will continue on other fronts as well. In Gaza, Iran is the exclusive financial benefactor of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the main funding source for Hamas. In the northern arena, the directorate assesses that Iran is resigned to the fact that it had failed in its effort to establish a foothold in Syria, although it will continue to act to arm Hezbollah - especially with precision-guided munitions but also by

supplying it with cruise missiles and precision-guided armed UAVs - such as those that it has been supplying Russia in its war against Ukraine. The directorate also assesses that in 2023, Hezbollah will continue to be mainly preoccupied with internal Lebanese issues, and will be deterred from waging war.

However, a dynamic of escalation could result from various developments, including tactical activity on the ground. Such dangers were posed by the crisis that emerged just before the two countries signed a maritime border deal to resolve the natural gas issue: Hezbollah was gearing up for an escalation, although it would eventually be glad that it was averted when the deal was signed. The global trends will have far-reaching ramifications on that front as well because the collaboration between Russia and Iran in Ukraine could project on the northern arena and even on the nuclear deal. This has so far not happened, most of the deals between Russia and Tehran are economic and civilian, and Russia has made sure to pay with cash for the UAVs so that it would be limited in what it offers in exchange. But Israel should continue to act vis-a-vis Moscow to make sure that this situation continues into the future, the estimate says. When it comes to the nuclear issue, the estimate says that Iran will continue on its current path of slow progress, without crossing red lines.

This will be the case in terms of its enrichment activities, where it will continue shifting operations to the bomb-proof Fordow plant, as well as in its weapons group, where Iran has been carrying out all the necessary preparations for the moment in which the supreme leader will give the go-ahead to break toward a nuclear weapon.

The post – Mahmoud Abbas era
The intelligence directorate believes that Iran will change course only if it is faced with radical steps from the outside, which could trigger it to enrich uranium to military-grade of 90% purity. Israel, the estimate says, must prepare for that by devising military and diplomatic contingencies so that it won't be surprised. Here, too, the global trends, and especially the war in Ukraine, will have far-reaching consequences for two main reasons. The first is that the world has become used to the ongoing talk on nuclear weapons The second is that the war in Ukraine has taught the world that countries should not give up their nuclear weapons and that a nation that holds that power feels confident that it won't lose a war. The third side of the triangle in the assessment for 2023 is the Palestinian arena. Unlike the past, the IDF has not looked at Gaza and Judea and Samaria as two separate arenas, but as one unified realm. The main emphasis in that estimate is on the day after Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and where the Palestinian Authority might turn.

The Hamas rulers in Gaza could play a key role in this juncture owing to the organization's efforts to cast itself as a responsible governing entity ever since Operation Guardian of the Walls in 2021, and not just as a terrorist organization. This is also true for its leader, Yahya Sinwar, who has tried recently to build an image of a statesman alongside his fighter bona fides. The intelligence analysts believe that based on this rationale, as well as other reasons, the destabilizing trends of the past several months are set to continue. Iran has been fanning the flames but Hamas and terrorist organizations have also tried to do the same, and alongside this effort, there is a noticeable uptick in the lone-wolf attacks as well as localized cells taking action, such as the Lion's Den terrorist group that has been bolstered by social media and taking on the traditional terrorist organizations and the PA.

Two 2016 Nice terror attack accomplices appeal conviction
Source: https://www.expatica.com/fr/general/two-2016-nice-terror-attack-accomplices-appeal-conviction-853628/

Dec 26 – Two men who received the longest prison terms for allegedly aiding in the 2016 terror attack in the French resort city of Nice, have appealed their conviction, prosecutors told AFP on Monday.

Their appeal came weeks after French judges ordered prison terms for eight people over the attack, in which a suspected Islamist rammed a lorry into a crowd celebrating the July 14 national holiday.

Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, a 31-year-old Tunisian, killed 86 people and wounded more than 450 others during a four-minute rampage on a seafront embankment before being shot dead by police.

Two suspects, Mohamed Ghraieb and Chokri Chafroud, were sentenced to 18 years earlier this month for helping the attacker.

The judges ruled that they had to have known about his turn to Islamist radicalism and potential to carry out an attack, based on phone calls and messages between the three in the days ahead of the massacre.

Ghraieb and Chafroud, who denied the charges against them during the months-long trial, have now appealed, the national anti-terrorist prosecutor said.

The other six suspects, who were handed prison terms from two to 12 years, have decided not to appeal, according to the prosecutors.

France has been buffeted by a wave of Islamist terror attacks since the killings at the satirical Charlie Hebdo newspaper and a Jewish supermarket in Paris in January 2015, often by "lone wolf" attackers acting in the name of IS or other jihadist groups.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: Let's hope that French judges will not show what is called *legal civilization* by reducing their sentences. It would be highly appreciated if the sentences in case of terrorist incidents do not have the right to appeal or modify the duration of detention due to good behavior or collaboration with security authorities.

Implications of the Assault on a Commuter Train in Japan
By Kanakura, Jin
Source: https://ict.org.il/assault-on-a-commuter-train-in-japan-implications/

Reichman University

A man, dressed up as the villain character Joker from the Batman superhero series, launched an attack on the train service.

Dec 26 – On the night of Sunday, October 31, 2021, a man was arrested for an assault on a commuter train wherein he stabbed a passenger and set fire to the train in Tokyo, Japan. No relation has been confirmed between the attacker and his victims. He later told the police he did not care who his targets were. He felt like ending his life, but at the same time, he was afraid of doing so for himself. He thought he would receive the death penalty and be forced to die as a result of conducting mass killing.

Somehow, the attacker surrendered to the police, seemingly without causing the full amount of devastation he had originally planned. Against his aspiration to conduct mass murder, the attack eventually ended with no fatality.

The items he used as weapons were easily available to anyone at retail stores. The cost of acquiring them can be covered with no more than a couple of hundred dollars at most. Even so, his attack left widespread and lasting fear among the public. Especially considering the location of the attack, a commuter train, anybody felt proximity to the threat.

The unrest the attacker ignited might be even disproportionately enormous given simplicity in preparation, primitiveness in method, and incompleteness in the attack. One might feel it was more vulnerabilities in society than his immature tactics that favored the attacker in magnifying horror. Even so, an eye-catching case like this, although it does not include elements of assertion, can have an appealing effect to inspire others.

●▶ **Read the full paper in the source's URL.**

HOW TO DEFINE AND TACKLE ISLAMIST EXTREMISM IN THE UK

MAAHA ELAHI AND JULIAN HARGREAVES

●ICCT International Centre for Counter-Terrorism

Source: https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2022/12/Elahi-and-Hargreaves-Final.pdf

This article presents a legal and public policy analysis of *Shakeel Begg v British Broadcasting Corporation*, a British libel case brought before the High Court in 2016. *Begg v BBC* provides a lens through which current debates on extremism and counter-extremism in the UK may be analysed. More specifically, the authors use their analysis of the case to address criticisms levied against the UK Government's counter-extremism strategy, including the conceptualisation and definition of "Islamist extremism". The article offers two main contentions. First, that the judgment in *Begg v BBC* has been undervalued by politicians and policymakers in the UK, as well as by scholars, journalists and other commentators. Second, that Lord Justice Haddon-Cave's judgment in *Begg v BBC* provides a useful framework for those wishing to define, identify and tackle Islamist extremism, and extremism of any kind, in the UK and elsewhere.

Dr Julian Hargreaves is a Director of Research at the Woolf Institute and holds multiple positions at the University of Cambridge which include, Affiliated Lecturer at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Visiting Scholar at the Centre of Islamic Studies, Research Affiliate at the Department of Sociology and Research Associate at St. Edmund's College. Dr Hargreaves holds an MRes (Distinction) in Criminology and a PhD in Applied Social Science, both from Lancaster University. His research interests include: ethnic and religious minority communities; Islamophobia and Antisemitism; counter-extremism and counter-terrorism; social research methods (including survey work, statistics and social media analysis); and policy-related research.
Ms Maaha Elahi is a future pupil barrister at Garden Court Chambers in London. She holds an MPhil in Criminology and a BA in Law both from the University of Cambridge, and did her LLM at the University of London. Maaha has researched the experiences of Muslims in the legal system while studying at the University of Cambridge and has published on the topic. She is a scholar of the Aziz Foundation, which supports British Muslims to access higher education. Maaha also volunteers as a Legal Supervisor at the Islamophobia Response Unit, representing Muslims who have been subjected to discrimination.

Emanuele Ottolenghi on Iranian Operations in Latin America

By Marilyn Stern
Source: https://www.meforum.org/63941/emanuele-ottolenghi-on-iranian-operations-in

Dec 23 – Emanuele Ottolenghi, Senior Fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and author of two books on external Iranian networks, spoke to a December 23rd Middle East Forum Webinar (video) about Iran's influence operations in Latin America, which advance its global agenda of exporting its anti-American Islamic revolution. The following is a summary of his remarks:

The Iranian regime has been establishing "cells" throughout Latin America since 1982 "to spread its revolutionary message, recruit converts to its cause, and establish political ties to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) [and] political movements wherever possible, [and] also to like-minded regimes ready to support its political agenda." Established in Iran's holy city of Qom in 2007, Al Mustafa International University is the regime's "operational center" for this task. Since its founding, the university has bestowed academic titles on over 50,000 students from 122 nations, many of whom have been ordained as imams [clerics].

Funded by the regime and controlled by Iran's Supreme Leader, Al Mustafa recruits, indoctrinates, and radicalizes its converts. Once ordained, these newly minted imams are placed in their countries of origin to head Iranian-sponsored centers and mosques. Many of the converts from Christianity were political activists from the extreme left, while others came from neo-Nazi movements. Upon returning to their native countries from Al Mustafa's program, the imams spread Iran's revolutionary message into varied institutions that penetrate cultural, social, and political networks.

Buenos Aires, July 2016. Participants at a forum on antisemitism in Latin America hold photos of the victims of the 1994 bombing of the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina Jewish Center. Mohsen Rabbani is implicated in the detonation of the car bomb that murdered eighty-five people.

Mohsen Rabbani, former cleric of Al Tawhid's Shia mosque in Buenos Aires, and more recently the Iranian Embassy's cultural attaché in that city, leads Al Mustafa's operations in Latin America. Implicated in the 1992 terror attack on the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires and the 1994 AMIA bombing of Buenos Aires' Jewish community center, Rabbani is on Interpol's list for arrest. However, he managed to return to "the safety of Qom" and continues running operations at Al Mustafa's Islam Oriente department, which coordinates proselytizing activities in Latin America. With an annual budget of over $80 million, the department employs thousands of teachers, sponsors ongoing cultural and religious events in the target countries, and manages "thousands" of internet platforms for online courses across Latin America. The department also established "scientific operation agreements" with Latin American universities that serve as conduits for proselytizing campus students.

Most Latin American countries have small Shia communities of Lebanese and Iranian expatriates, and many Shia Islamic institutions in Latin America's Lebanese diaspora communities are linked to Iran and the terror group, Hezbollah. In Brazil, "one of the largest Lebanese diasporas in the world," most of the estimated ten million Brazilians of Lebanese extraction are the descendants of Christians who fled the Ottoman Empire. Although the estimate includes one million Muslims, ten percent of whom are Shia, Rabbani's main objective is to convert the non-Muslim locals, then indoctrinate and radicalize them to serve the Iranian revolution.

Rabbani oversees Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking clerics who are charged with promoting the revolutionary message as they travel across Latin America. Rabbani's clerical foot soldiers not only organize seminars, cultural, and academic events, but they also advertise Al Mustafa's all-expense paid trips for applicants and their families to "the Islamic Republic of Iran." The imams also expand their "continent-wide" recruitment opportunities by establishing "local media platforms ... publishing houses and cultural association[s]."

Iran's social media presence is rife with Holocaust denial and anti-Israel propaganda. In addition, as part of its campaign to indoctrinate an adolescent audience, the regime's publishing centers in Latin America promote, for example, a book memorializing slain Quds force general Qassem Soleimani entitled *Mi Tio Soleimani, My Uncle* or *My Friend Soleimani*.

In 2012, Iran launched its Spanish language propaganda network, Hispan TV, as Al Mustafa-affiliated centers established more local radio and television programs showcasing trainees as "analyst[s], journalists and commentators." The Al Mustafa pundits further amplify their message by "re-appear[ing]" on like-minded affiliated television networks, such as on Russia's Spanish television program, Actualidad RT, or in the Bolivarian regime's network, Telesur, in Venezuela. By coordinating with other authoritarian regimes, including China, the Iranian regime spreads its anti-Western animosity. Thus, the Iranian effort is part of "the front of Russia, China, Iran, Venezuela, to push back what they consider to be Western imperialism."

Iran's strategy in Latin America is not limited to merely indoctrinating the population in "Iran's revolutionary ideology." It also includes grooming the more "promising" Al Mustafa alumni to segue from the mosques and cultural centers into becoming "political and social activists" who will penetrate the political system and ultimately shape policy. Iran's vast system of influence operations and soft power is employed through its cultural centers and related offshoots, which are active in "virtually all Hispanic countries in Latin America." In addition to its presence in Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela, Iran's network is in Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, and Peru.

The Islamic Republic's widespread network is of particular concern to Ottolenghi because of Tehran's ability to "activate" its indoctrinated supporters and agents to provide the "logistics and infrastructure" for terror bombings and attacks, as was the case in 1992 and 1994. Venezuela is considered a "forward operating base" for Iran and Hezbollah. The base enjoys the tacit approval of the friendly government, which turns a blind eye to their criminal drug trafficking operations with communities in Colombia and Panama. The **tri-border area of Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil**, historically a money laundering environment for Hezbollah, provides funding for the terror group's Middle East activities. Such assistance is derived from the illicit economy that flourishes in the region, which generates between five and twenty billion dollars a year for the organization.

A factor contributing to the legitimization of these Iran-affiliated Islamic centers is the lack of pushback from the church. An Iraqi imam in São Paulo, who has been involved in "Iranian revolutionary activity since the 1980s," was welcome to engage in "interfaith dialogue" with the Catholic church, which "seems to not be paying too much attention to this issue." Surprisingly, even the generally more pro-Israel evangelical churches are not attuned to the threat. Although past U.S. government administrations, fully aware of Iran's influence operations, have also largely neglected the gathering storm in Latin America, the Trump administration paid more attention to the issue. Currently, the Biden administration is focusing more on the corruption that indirectly fuels the Iranian networks in order to weaken its "enablers."

Ottolenghi's recommendation for current and future U.S. administrations is to concentrate on the law enforcement institutions and government agencies of allied countries who are dependent on the U.S. for their "security, trade, and prosperity." By doing so, the U.S. can ensure these institutions and agencies crack down on the corruption that feeds the network that "ultimately finance[s] terrorism and Iranian adventurism in the Middle East."

Marilyn Stern is communications coordinator at the Middle East Forum.

Concerns About Extremists Targeting U.S. Power Stations

Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20221228-concerns-about-extremists-targeting-u-s-power-stations

Dec 28 – Attacks on four power stations in Washington State over the weekend added to concerns of a possible nationwide campaign by far-right extremists to stir fears and spark civil conflict.

Local police on Tuesday gave no information on who they suspected was behind the vandalism, which knocked out power on Christmas Day for about 14,000 customers in Tacoma, a port city area south of Seattle.

Tacoma Public Utilities, which owned two of the facilities targeted on Sunday, said in a statement that it was alerted by federal law enforcement in early December about threats to their grid.

The Pierce County Sheriff's office said Sunday it was investigating but had made no arrests and did not know if it was a coordinated attack. They said in a statement that they were aware of similar incidents elsewhere in Washington, in Oregon, and in North Carolina. "It could be any number of reasons at this point. … We have to investigate and not just jump to conclusions," they said. But it follows warnings by U.S. officials that neo-Nazis who say they want to spark a race war are targeting electricity stations.

Violent extremists "have developed credible, specific plans to attack electricity infrastructure since at least 2020, identifying the electric grid as a particularly attractive target given its interdependency with other infrastructure sectors," the Department of Homeland Security said in a January intelligence memo, according to U.S. media.
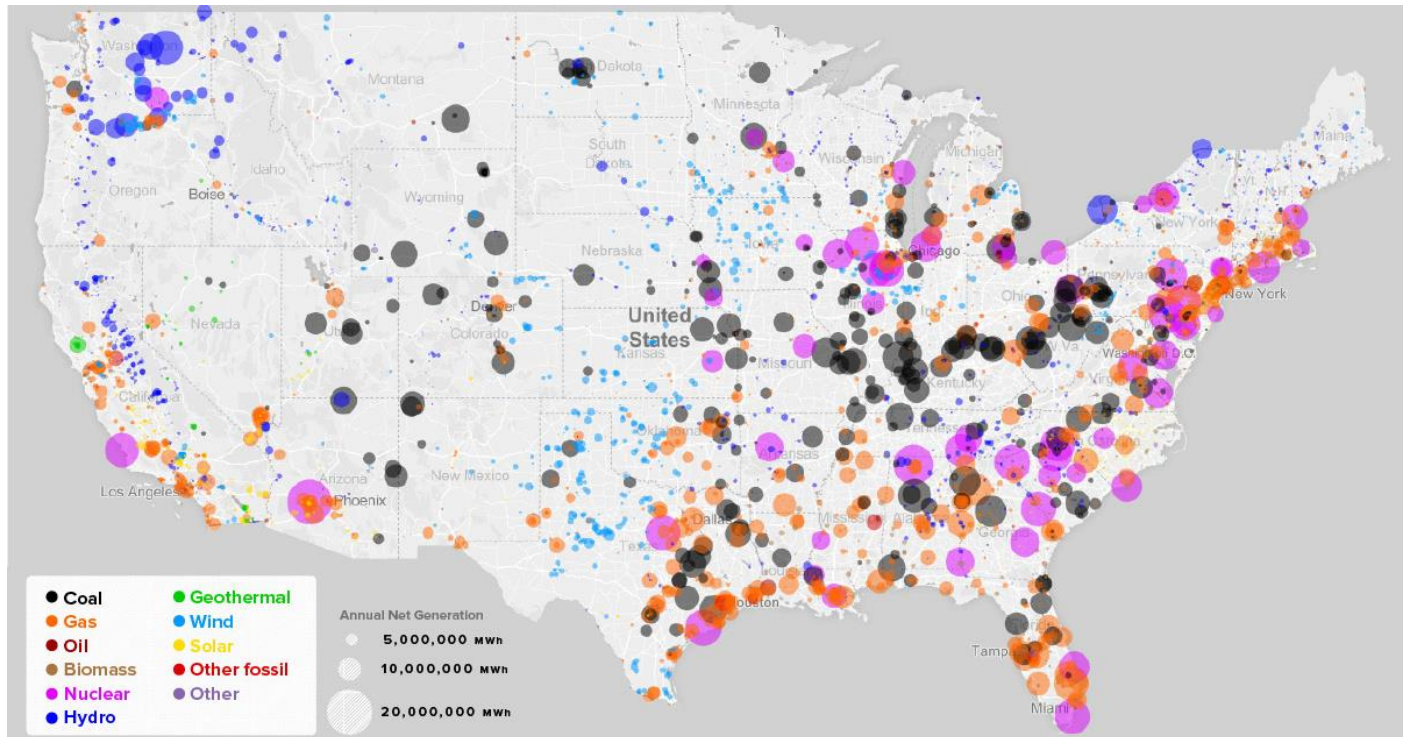
This Map Shows Every Power Plant in the United States

Attacks in Other States

In early December, 45,000 homes and businesses in Moore County, North Carolina, were out of power after someone used a high-powered rifle to damage two electricity substations. In February, three men with neo-Nazi ties pleaded guilty in Columbus, Ohio, to plotting to use rifles and explosives to damage power stations in various locations. They pursued "a disturbing plot, in furtherance of white supremacist ideology, to attack energy facilities in order to damage the economy and stoke division in our country," said Assistant Attorney General Matthew Olsen at the time. Last year five men who allegedly belonged to white supremacist and neo-Nazi online discussion groups were charged in North Carolina with planning attacks on power stations. They planned the attack to create "general chaos" as part of their "goal of creating a white ethno-state," the indictment said. Jon Wellinghoff, the former chairman of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, said on CNN in early December that the Moore County attack resembled one on an electricity network substation near San Jose, California, in 2013. In that case, which has never been solved, one or more people fired close to 100 rounds at the station, damaging 17 high voltage transformers at a cost of $15 million. *The Washington Post* said after the Moore County incident that law enforcement was investigating eight incidents in four states.

Major Losses Shift Islamic State, Al-Qaida's Balance of Power

By Jeff Seldin (VOA *national security reporter*)
Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20221229-major-losses-shift-islamic-state-alqaidas-balance-of-power

Dec 29 – Across the United States and many other Western countries, the threat from Islamist terror groups has been increasingly overshadowed by the threats from other extremist groups, some of whom have proven to be more deadly in recent years. But despite a rise in far-right and white-power-driven

terrorist threats, counterterrorism officials have been careful not to overlook the still persistent threat from groups such as the Islamic State and al-Qaida.

"Jihadism is, yes, it is the main threat right now still in the Netherlands," Netherlands Justice and Security Minister Dilan Yeşilgöz-Zegerius said in response to a question from VOA during a visit to Washington in late November.

"Now you see the threat. You see still the ideology," she said. "But the firm organization and the level of organization, also in Europe and in our country, that's breaking down."

Targeting IS and al-Qaida Leadership

One reason for the breakdown – both the Islamic State, known as IS, ISIS or Daesh, and al-Qaida suffered significant setbacks in 2022.

"It was certainly a year of decapitations," Edmund Fitton-Brown, a former senior United Nations counterterrorism official, told VOA.

Despite concerns about a possible IS resurgence, the United States dealt the terror group a "significant blow" when its leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi, blew himself up following a nighttime raid by U.S. special forces.

Less than eight months later, IS was hit again, losing Abu Ibrahim's replacement, Abu al-Hassan, after a raid by rebels with the Free Syrian Army.

In between, a series of operations by the U.S., partners such as the Syrian Democratic Forces, and allies such as Turkey, kept the pressure up, contributing to the death or capture of at least 10 key IS leaders in 2022.

Already, the U.S. appears to be cracking Islamic State's defenses, with officials telling VOA they have information on the group's new leader, known only by the nom-de-guerre, Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Qurashi.

Should the U.S. be able to track him down, the impact could reverberate across the jihadi world.

"That starts to look like they have a real problem," Fitton-Brown, the former counterterrorism official, told VOA.

"It's as if the thread of wool (is) just being pulled and pulled and the sweater is coming to pieces, and they can't seem to stop it," he said. "At what point does this actually sort of weaken the brand to the point where … it's where people, that people cease to actually want to identify with it because it starts to stink of failure?"

Setback for Al-Qaida

Al-Qaida also was dealt a considerable setback in August, when a U.S. drone strike killed its leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri in his residential compound in Kabul, Afghanistan.

"Justice has been delivered," U.S. President Joe Biden said, announcing al-Zawahiri's death to the world. "No matter how long it takes, no matter where you hide, if you are a threat to our people, the United States will find you and take you out."

Since then, al-Qaida leadership has been somewhat quiet, its succession plans strained, with al-Zawahiri's likely successor stuck in Iran.

And Western fears about the terror threat emanating from Afghanistan have yet to materialize, with top U.S. counterterrorism officials saying that the IS affiliate there, IS-Khorasan, like al-Qaida, has been sufficiently weakened that it cannot make good on its desire to launch attacks against the West.

Instead, the nexus of the jihadi terror threat continues to shift elsewhere.

Countering Terror Threat from Africa

U.S. Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines told a forum in California earlier this month that the al-Qaida affiliate in Yemen, known as al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, (AQAP) remains the most dangerous and the most capable of attacking the West.

Not far behind is al-Qaida's Somali affiliate known as al-Shabab, which has been financially supporting al-Qaida's core leadership, and which has long harbored a desire to strike at U.S. and Western targets in Africa and beyond.

"The number one I would say probably that we're most concerned about is the threat of al-Shabab in East Africa," Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs Chidi Blyden told VOA during a virtual briefing this month with the Defense Writers Group in Washington.

"We have partnered with the Somalis to ensure that we are trying to degrade their capability to hurt the partners in the region, as well as their intent or capability to be able to have attacks outside of their current location," Blyden said.

To help counter al-Shabab, the U.S. earlier this year decided it was necessary to keep a "small, persistent presence" of about 500 U.S. troops in Somalia – a move welcomed by the new Somali government.

But other terror groups, including al-Qaida and IS affiliates the Sahel have also made gains.

"There's a conglomeration of violent extremist organizations that are in the Sahel that are also of concern to us," Blyden said. "Their impact on populations in the Sahel and surrounding coastal West African countries is something that we are working with our partners to try and understand more."

The past year also saw some countries, such as France, begin pulling some of their counterterrorism forces out of the region. Some experts fear, as a result, more problems are likely.

"The probability that an al-Qaida group conducts an international terrorist attack continues to rise as the regional branches strengthen and counterterrorism pressure lifts," Katherine Zimmerman, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, told VOA via email.

"Even with the intelligence capabilities the U.S. has—and they are many—the risk that such an attack slips through is slightly higher because of shifts in counterterrorism resources as the global terrorism threat has changed," she said. "It seems as the U.S. footprint shrinks in counterterrorism theaters, so too, does the visibility."

West warned of potential ISIS return next year

Source: https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/uk-news/2022/12/27/west-warned-of-potential-isis-return-next-year/

A fighter of the Christian Syriac militia that fought ISIS burns the group's flag. Photo: Hussein Malla

Dec 27 – ISIS continues to pose a significant threat almost four years after its last holdouts in Syria were defeated, according to experts. They also warned the terror cell is far from extinct and will seek to bring 10,000 of its fighters from Syrian prisons and detention camps next year.

At its strongest point, the terror group controlled a third of Syria and 40 per cent of Iraq, following its rise in mid-2014.

But the success of the US coalition in ousting the group from towns and cities, including its capital Raqqa in Syria, meant that by March 2019 its physical caliphate had fallen. Dr Shiraz Maher, director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and a member of the war studies department at King's College London, said such a plot would pose the "single greatest security threat to the West".

"Blink and you'll miss it and suddenly ISIS will be back," he told Sky News.

"The Syrian Democratic Forces have repeatedly said that this is a ticking time bomb that they are sitting on (that) they are not capable of dealing with themselves alone."

There are fears that a possible ground offensive by Turkey in Syria could provide the perfect environment for ISIS to once again take control of vast swathes of territory.

Matthew Henman, a terror expert at intelligence firm Janes, told Sky News that ISIS "has maintained a steady tempo of insurgent violence" since being stripped of its land.

The Islamic State in Khorasan Province, an affiliate of ISIS, has increased its attacks since the Taliban regained power in summer 2021.

The Kurdish-led SDF is backed by the US and its allies, and has served as a key partner in the West's fight against ISIS.

Western nations have been repeatedly criticised for failing to bring back citizens who joined ISIS from camps in Syria and Iraq.

While many analysts doubt a return of ISIS would see it rebuild its caliphate in its previous form, the terror group has in recent years been mobilising thousands of remaining fighters.

At the height of its control, ISIS held territory stretching from the outskirts of Baghdad to western Syria and encompassed more than 10 million people.

Western leaders will also fear that a strengthening of the group will once again embolden lone wolves or terror cells in their nations to carry out domestic attacks.

The SDF on Monday said an attack by ISIS militants in Raqqa killed six of its troops.

SDF commander Mazloum Abdi said in a statement that an ISIS cell had targeted security and military buildings in the city, killing six of his fighters and wounding an unspecified number of others.

He added that intelligence gathered by the group "indicates serious preparations by (IS) cells."

Siamand Ali, a spokesman for the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, told The Associated Press that a group of five people believed to be part of an ISIS sleeper cell, two of them wearing explosive belts, had attacked checkpoints and guard points of Raqqa's Internal Security Forces.

During the ensuing clashes, he said, one of the attackers was killed and another arrested. SDF and Internal Security Forces units are searching for the remaining attackers.

Is the terrorism threat over?

By Greg Barton

Source: https://theconversation.com/is-the-terrorism-threat-over-195706

Dec 29 – Eight years after raising the national terrorism threat level, Australia recently lowered it again – from mid-range (probable) to low-range (possible).

Does this mean the threat from terrorism is over?

Few are better placed to answer this than Mike Burgess, Director-General of Security and head of ASIO, Australia's domestic intelligence agency.

Burgess is one of the handful of people who can talk openly about his agency's work. And when he speaks, his words are carefully calibrated and warrant close attention.

In a rare public address in November he told the Australian public that, for the time being at least, they could stop worrying about the threat of a terrorist attack in Australia. He said:

When ISIL formed its caliphate in the Middle East, significant numbers of Australians were seduced by slick propaganda and false narratives, and that led ASIO to raise the terrorism threat level to PROBABLE. Our decision was tragically justified.

Since 2014, there have been 11 terrorist attacks on Australian soil, while 21 significant plots have been detected and disrupted.

Decades of hard work by police, communities and government agencies have ultimately reduced the capacity of terrorist groups (al-Qaeda and the Islamic State movement in particular) to significantly threaten stable, democratic states.

But in weak or failing states (including Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia) al-Qaeda and Islamic State affiliates continue to represent an existential threat.

According to the Global Terrorism Index, Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for almost half of all terrorist deaths, and the Sahel (a region of North Africa that includes countries such as Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso) is home to some of the most potent terrorist networks on the planet.

How have stable democracies minimised the terror threat?
Established democracies have developed police-led counterterrorism intelligence capacity to the point where ambitious, large-scale, terrorist plots are largely detected and disrupted, and terrorist social networks are effectively pinned down.

And this is not just the case with Western democracies. In our region, for example, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines have made impressive progress in constraining a resilient and pernicious terrorist threat.

For Indonesia, and Australia, the bomb attacks in Bali 20 years ago were transformative. In the wake of the bombings, successful forensic investigations by the Indonesian National Police, in partnership with the Australian Federal Police (AFP), profoundly reshaped the police forces of both nations.

The Bali bombings 20 years ago changed policing in Indonesia. AP

The AFP was established in 1979 and tasked with leading counterterrorism, in response to the Sydney Hilton bombing of 1978. This was an unprecedented attack that killed three and injured 11. By the turn of the century, however, the modest resources of the AFP were being reorientated towards more pressing threats, such as counternarcotics and port security.

The September 11 al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on America in 2001, however, forced an abrupt pivot, returning the AFP to its original focus on counterterrorism. A year later, in October 2002, AFP agents Mick Keelty and Graham Ashton were forced to draw on their relationships of trust with Indonesia National Police officers to figure out who was responsible for the Bali bombings, and to limit their capacity to launch further attacks. Their successful cooperation led to the arrest of members of a breakaway bombing cell of an Indonesian al-Qaeda affiliate, Jemaah Islamiyah. Formed in 1993 along the

Afghanistan-Pakistan border by so-called mujahideen, or holy fighters, this group supported the resistance to Soviet occupation in Afghanistan.

The Bali attacks resulted in the establishment of a specialist counterterrorism unit of the Indonesia police called Densus 88. In the 18 years since its establishment Densus 88 has arrested, and contributed to the successful prosecution of, more than 2,000 terrorists (this is my estimate based on the hundreds of arrests reported year on year).

The challenge now for Indonesian police is breaking the cycle of radicalisation. The recent release of Bali bomb-maker Umar Patek, on closely supervised parole, is confronting. But it's also an encouraging indication of the success of Indonesian police in rehabilitating former terrorists. The rise of the Islamic State caliphate in Syria and Iraq in mid-2014 marked a disturbing setback in counterterrorism in Australia and Southeast Asia. It was, in large part, a product of an unwise, and unwarranted, military intervention in Iraq a decade earlier. This toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein and opened the door to insurgent forces, including Al Qaeda in Iraq, which later became Islamic State in Iraq, and then Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The 2003 invasion of Iraq and the toppling of Saddam Hussein proved deeply destabilising, with cascading perverse outcomes. The international military operation, in which Australia played a significant role, contributed both to the rise of ISIS and to its ultimate defeat. A similar, though strikingly incomplete, cycle of events played out in Afghanistan. Initially, the US-led military operation that began in October 2001 constrained al-Qaeda, almost to the point of defeat. But ultimately, the military intervention led to the reconquest of Afghanistan by the Taliban, and the opening of the door to al-Qaeda and its rival Islamic State.

Not only does al-Qaeda now enjoy safe haven in Afghanistan, Islamic State continues to launch devastating attacks across Afghanistan. For the time being, however, police counterterrorism intelligence has constrained the capacity of both al-Qaeda and ISIS to project a threat into Australia.

What about far-right terror?

Far-right and related conspiracy extremism has gone from representing just 10-15% of the counterterrorism caseload of ASIO and the AFP to almost 50%. This is a pattern matched across North America and Europe.

For the moment, this new threat is mostly likely to manifest in lone-actor attacks that are mostly smaller-scale and less lethal (but not always, as we saw in Christchurch in 2019).

For Western democracies, and increasingly Asian democracies as well, toxic ultranationalism in the form of ethnic and religious supremacist movements is the rising threat. Currently it's less well organised and coordinated than jihadi terrorism. But that's likely to change. And, as the tragic attacks in Wieambilla have shown, it has all became much more complex and unpredictable. Paranoia fuelled by conspiracy theories, mixed with religious fundamentalism and hatred of governments and police, is generating new forms of violent extremism. As Mike Burgess reminded us: "Terrorism is an enduring threat. And terrorism is an evolving threat […] We keep the terrorism threat level under constant review. There can be no 'set and forget' in security intelligence."

By Greg Barton holds Chair in Global Islamic Politics, Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: Before starting packing to relocate to Australia keep in mind that even island nations are not immune to terrorism. Perhaps MB made this statement to fool terrorists to lose their precautions and be more easily to be spotted and neutralized. Perhaps this was a financial movement to support tourism and commerce. Perhaps it was just the common attitude that "we have everything under control!" Whatever the cause was, now it is time to educate the population on what to do according to each threat level because citizens (worldwide) have no clues on what they should do to protect themselves and their businesses.

The proliferation of Terrorism in West Africa

By Situ Behera
Source: https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2022/12/31/the-proliferation-of-terrorism-in-west-africa/

Dec 31 – United States Secretary of State Antony J. Blinkin, in a recent press statement of "religious freedom designations", on 2 December 2022, designated some of the organizations as entities of particular concern. In his briefing, he mentioned Al-Shabab, Boko Haram, Hayat Tahrir al-sham, the Houthis, ISIS-Greater Sahara, ISIS-West Africa, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam Wal-Muslimin, the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the Wagner Group, based on its action in the Central African Republic. Most of these groups are vigorously active in the Western part of Africa. However, it is also equally important to understand how these groups propagated their agenda in different regions of Africa. Boko Haram remains the predominant among all the terrorist groups, which makes West African countries stand at the top in

reports of the Global Terrorist Index, consequently for three years. Four are among the ten countries with the highest death rates from terrorism. Niger(Islamic State) replaced the Taliban (Afghanistan) as the world's deadliest terror group in 2021. This research deals with how the baton of extremism is getting transferred from West Asia to Western Africa and how West Africa is becoming an emerging hub of terrorism worldwide.

History of Terrorism in West Africa

It is the colonial powers in Africa classified the independence movement as terrorism to retain control. It was between the 1950s and 70s. Many West Asia-based organizations, such as Al-Qaeda, considered Africa their springboard for global terrorism in this new era. However, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, once a smuggler, later turned antagonist in the African region after getting trained in Afghanistan, came up with the thought of merging two offshoots of Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb(AQIM), which were Al-Mulathamun Battalion and Tawhid Wal Jihad(TWJWA) into one unit that is Murabitun, in 2013. Its main motto was to "unite all Muslims from Nile to Atlantic in Jihad against westerners," along with liberating Mali from France. Before the merger, both groups were involved in several attacks and killings of westerners in Africa, especially in West Africa. The US embassies were attacked at places like Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. Therefore following the 9/11 terror attacks, which reshaped not only the global response towards terrorism but also a new narrative of global Jihadist threat became dominant.

Catalysts in the Proliferation

It's difficult to understand the only factor behind the expansion of terrorism in West Africa. Still, going by the bird's eye view, a few catalysts could be considered for supporting the enhancement of extremist thoughts.

First and foremost, the **loose hold of the government** in countries like Nigeria, Niger, Burkina Faso etc., has deliberately created the environment for terrorist organizations to flourish in African society. The basic polity of the West African countries is not up to the mark. Agencies like Law enforcement bodies, regulatory agencies, and judiciary suffer from the chronic dysfunctional mechanism, which needs immediate focus to address challenges of terrorism and terror funding.

Moreover, African society is suffering through a **weak social contract**; due to the feeling of alienation from political governance and not having equal opportunity because of different ethnic/religious groups, which convince them to discern corrupt government agents; and politicians who sponsor terror organizations. People across this region have an unshakable faith in the religion which invites clashes of legitimacy between the state and religion. However, religion remains the only fodder for creating ghettos among the people refraining from collectively making the evolving society with the tempo of the contemporary world providing various sustainable development goals (SDG). Thus, this broadens the

aperture of division between geographic regions within a country, just like the division between the Northern and Southern parts of Nigeria.

Other than that, for terrorist organizations like Boko Haram, it's **easy to recruit** ordinary people into the organization, as they offer jobs to satisfy the needs of people from different age groups, irrespective of the backgrounds they come from. Their recruitment process is entirely different from the rest of the terrorist organizations in West Asia and West Africa. They start recruiting at the very beginning from the age group of four to fourteen, and almost all members are almajiri. However, Almajiris are left to themselves and are therefore vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation. Imagine a crowded street in Abuja (Nigeria's Capital) where they starve for food. Since "Alms" giving is promoted in Islam makes it more lubricant to get into the mechanism of this organization. Also, the borders between the countries in West Africa need to be more specific. These **vague borders** allow people to sneak into other countries, proving a boon for terrorist organizations to conduct infiltration and arms smuggling. The security and surveillance at different national borders could be more convincing through these fuzzy borders.

One of the most influential factors is **religious fundamentalism**. Religion remains an important factor in binding people together in West African countries. People rely on religious institutions on matters related to justice (civil and legal justice), economic assistance, etc., which tend to nourish their extremist thoughts and convince them to approach religious institutions more often than government institutions. In countries like Nigeria, the Al-Majiri system is highly preferred. It stands as the most controversial system of Islamic education, which has been criticised for pushing youth towards extremism rather than equipping them with vocational skills and employable education to help them get jobs. Thus, for this unemployed and hopeless youth, "known devil (Terrorist organizations) becomes better than unknown saint(government institutions)."

Financial sponsorship for Terrorism:

Research was conducted by renowned institutions FATF and GIABA to trace and analyze the methods used by terrorist organizations to utilise and distribute the collected funds in West Africa. However, these organizations get fueled through trade and other lucrative activities. Not just this, but NGOs and Islamic charity organizations such as the US-based Holy land foundation stayed financier for a more extended period; apart from that, funding is also showered through various developmental projects of World Banks and Aids packages," informal and illegal currency exchange service provider" (GIABA report 2020), "extractive industry/mining sector"(GIABA Oct 2019), cattle/livestock swish, local businesses(sale of dry fish, sale of kola nuts, confiscated farms) of an organisation like Boko Haram, demands of the slave market in Nigeria, funds collected from drug trafficking and smuggling of arms remain the piggy bank for these organisations. However, the bandwidth of this terror financing is massive, which takes root in society and is immunised from every counter-terrorism activity. Thus, it elevates these organisations to become almighty in the world of extremism.

Conclusion

In light of this information, the proliferation of terrorism in the West African region penetrated people's psyches. An organization like Boko haram is condensing from a terrorist organisation to the saviour of Nigerian society. (almajiris) glorifying and pursuing "pie in the sky," leading them into chronic ignorance and making them herds available for recruitment. However, without a shadow of a doubt, West Africa seems to be competing with west Asia in harbouring terrorist organisations.

Situ Behera pursuing Master's in Politics and International Relation in Department of Politics and International Relation, Pondicherry University, India.

Bali bombings 'more serious than 9/11': Vanstone

Source: https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/bali-bombings-more-serious-than-9-11-vanstone-20221230-p5c9hn

Jan 01 – The Howard government viewed the deadly Bali bombings as more serious for Australia's national security than the 9/11 attacks, and raced to boost funding for intelligence agencies, former minister Amanda Vanstone says.

The largest loss of Australian lives in a terrorism incident, the October 2002 bombings at popular nightspots in Bali killed 202 people, including 88 Australians.

Hundreds were injured in the attacks, carried out by terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyah.

Speaking at the National Archives of Australia to mark the January 1 release of Howard-era cabinet papers held under a 20-year embargo, Ms Vanstone described the carnage as "a real smack in the face with hot iron" for the federal government. "Wow this is here," she said, characterising the view of cabinet colleagues about the threat of Islamic extremism and international terror.

"When 9/11 happened, everyone thought it was a serious you can get. And then when this happened, it's more serious.
"There had to be a greater focus on watching who's coming in, and for law enforcement agencies and security agencies, to get everything we could give them. Because that's your first job: to protect Australians." The attacks are only briefly mentioned in the cabinet papers released on Sunday.

The memorial to victims of the Bali bombings. *AP*

Less than 48 hours after the bombings in the Kuta tourist district, Prime Minister Howard made an oral report to ministers about the scale of the crisis. Mr Howard said the then Australian ambassador to Indonesia, Ric Smith, had taken charge of operations on the ground in Bali.
Mr Howard told ministers that all Australian casualties had been evacuated from Bali and relatives had been warned the process of identifying the dead and missing would be slow.
The national security committee of cabinet approved a decision for Mr Howard to lead a delegation for a memorial service due to be held on October 17, accompanied to the Australian Consulate in Bali by then deputy prime minister John Anderson and opposition leader Simon Crean.
In the days that followed, Mr Smith was forced to stand among the rubble of the Sari Club, to stop a bulldozer from clearing the site. The owners had told him "the spirits of those killed were restless" but Mr Smith insisted the site be preserved.
Months earlier, one document shows cabinet's national security committee was told there was "no evidence" Australians were being targeted by terror organisations. The head of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation briefed senior ministers that overseas networks were focused elsewhere.
Ms Vanstone, who retired from politics in 2002, said the newly released papers showed senior ministers and public servants did not need formal decisions from cabinet to respond to emergencies.
"I think it's a pretty good example of how Australia gets on with things, and maybe a good reminder for cabinet ministers that they are not needed at every crisis," she said.

The papers show cabinet considered a proposal to outlaw any use of embryos collected for IVF in scientific research. Proposed by Kevin Andrews, the minister for ageing and a conservative Catholic, the ban would have blocked any additional use of embryos which would otherwise have been destroyed.

Officials from the Departments of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Industry and Science were opposed to the ban, and the proposal was later dumped by the government.

Speaking before the cabinet papers were released, Ms Vanstone, a Liberal moderate, hit out at conservative colleagues for using loaded language about human "cloning".

"It was either clever or sneaky language, I think," she said, suggesting the question was either "research or rubbish".

"Special purpose rubbish it may be," she said at the Archives event. "But not one zygote will jump out, grow to be a teenager walking around, come up to you Pitt Street, shake your hand and say "Prime Minister, I climbed out of the rubbish tip and here I am."

Ms Vanstone, who was later appointed as Australia's ambassador to Rome, criticised ministers who made their own accounts of the secret discussions. "I don't have any time for the ego maniacs who took notes. They were not meant to. Or they go out of the room and write the notes after. "There's a cabinet role for a reason. Years and years of experience of have told people that's a bad idea. So, those that did it because they want to write a book don't get much truck with me."

In February 2002, then attorney-general Daryl Williams told cabinet the Howard government regarded the detention of Australian fighter David Hicks as "lawful". Hicks had trained at Al-Qaeda's Al Farong camp in Afghanistan and met with Osama bin Laden.

Cabinet agreed to allow US officials to investigative and for legal processes to be completed before "final determination of the legal options for prosecution of Mr Hicks under Australian law". Hicks was held in US detention at Guantanamo Bay between 2002 and 2007.

7 Terrorism Trends to Watch in 2023

By Bridget Johnson
Source: https://www.hstoday.us/featured/7-terrorism-trends-to-watch-in-2023/

Jan 02 – Just five years ago, a year-ahead terror outlook would have largely focused on the threat posed by lone actors operating out of allegiance to Islamist terror groups. After all, 2017 saw the retaking of Mosul and Raqqa as ISIS struggled to hold on to its physical caliphate, as well as the Westminster Bridge and London Bridge vehicular attacks, the Manchester Arena suicide bombing, the Barcelona attacks, the Hudson River Park bike path truck attack in Manhattan, the New York subway pipe bombing, and more. But that year also gave glimpses of the evolving terror landscape to come with the neo-Nazi vehicle attack on opponents in Charlottesville, the shooting of GOP lawmakers practicing for the annual Congressional Baseball Game, the sword murder in New York by a Maryland white supremacist who said he wanted "racial world war," and the racially motivated shooting of Indian engineers in Olathe, Kansas.

Fast-forward to 2022, and the attacks and perpetrators as well as the makeup of the extremists waiting in the wings reflects the growing complexity of the terror landscape, the ideological "hodgepodge" as termed by FBI Director Christopher Wray, and the threat diversity that complicates efforts to intercept plots in the planning stages. There was the grocery store mass shooting targeting a Black neighborhood in Buffalo, the mass shooting targeting an LGBTQ nightclub in Colorado Springs, the attacks on two power substations in North Carolina that plunged tens of thousands of residents into darkness, and the Colleyville synagogue attack by a hostage-taker who traveled from Britain — at the beginning of a year that saw an escalation in antisemitic incidents. And to close out the year, a 19-year-old from a small Maine town who reportedly dreamed of joining the Taliban is accused of attacking three NYPD officers with a machete outside a Times Square security checkpoint on New Year's Eve.

The hodgepodge of diverse and dynamic threats in the coming year requires unraveling some key areas of concern:

Copycats

Out of the attacks in 2022, two stood out as explicitly stating that inspiration for their attacks came from other killers before them: Payton Gendron, the Buffalo supermarket killer who declared in a manifesto that Christchurch mosque shooter Brenton Tarrant's livestream "started everything you see here," and Juraj Krajcik, who killed two people outside of a Bratislava LGBTQ bar in October and stated in his own manifesto that his "two inspirations to carry out an operation" were Tarrant and Poway synagogue shooter John Earnest — but the "final nail in the coffin" was Gendron, who "gave me the final nudge, allowing me to overcome my own indecision and begin seriously working towards carrying out an operation." Both Gendron and Krajcik were hailed by accelerationists as "disciples" of Tarrant and as "saints" — in which accelerationists "canonize"

white killers who meet certain criteria including deliberate intent, motive, inflicting at least one death, and having a neo-Nazi, white nationalist, or far-right anti-system worldview.

The copycat threat is about emulation, recognition, and passing the baton to the next killer. It's not unique to domestic terrorists: After the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting, ISIS adherents offered a CD-ROM package of all photos, memes, video, and ISIS articles related to killer Omar Mateen in a push for others to copy his heinous crime. The al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula *Inspire* "Praise & Guide" series has reviewed attacks such as the 2021 Boulder supermarket mass shooting to assess what was done well by the attacker and what could have been done to inflict more harm.

Regardless of the ideological affiliation, the extremist encouragement for would-be terrorists to copy other killers is at its core a push for them to take the crimes one step further — whether with a higher death toll, greater damage to infrastructure, a longer livestream, new tactics or weapons, or an especially symbolic target. Recent accelerationist encouragement to copy the 2019 El Paso Walmart mass shooting, for example, suggested "a Crusius-style attack" on an establishment at which migrants are present "every week. A sniper shooting every day, slowly taking its toll."

Critical Infrastructure Systems

A banner draped from an overpass in Moore County, N.C., a couple weeks after an outage sparked by saboteurs declared "bring it all down" along with neo-Nazi imagery and a link to the neo-Nazi accelerationist National Socialist Resistance Front. After rounds fired at two substations in the county Dec. 3 knocked out power to 40,000 homes and businesses for days, accelerationists cheered the incident and encouraged more attacks on electricity infrastructure. But it was hardly a new call for action: One accelerationist handbook circulated last summer called for shooters to bypass softer targets in favor of causing chaotic blackouts by emulating on a broader scale an unsolved 2013 sniper attack on a California transmission substation. A larger subsequent handbook released by accelerationists contained attack threats, tips, or encouragement directed at critical infrastructure sectors, from short memes to detailed instruction. Their messaging is consistent: Infrastructure attacks from small acts of sabotage to larger and well-supplied

team operations can be committed with a range of methods and skill levels, and can deliver blows — accelerationists hope — to stability and continuity while terrorizing the population.

(Simon Wiesenthal Center report, https://www.wiesenthal.com/assets/pdf/2022-top-ten-worst-global.pdf)

But while focusing on the vulnerability of substations and the devastating impact that widespread or extended power outages can have on a community, it's also a time to think beyond electricity because adversaries definitely are exploring those options. The Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency classifies 16 critical infrastructure sectors "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": the chemical sector, communications, dams, emergency services, financial services, government facilities, information technology, transportation systems, commercial facilities, critical manufacturing, defense industrial base, energy, food and agriculture, healthcare, nuclear reactors/materials, and water and wastewater systems. That larger accelerationist guide, for example, discussed ways to attack trains, cell towers, trucks and depots, water treatment and distribution, commercial business, communications, electrical systems, HVAC systems, and roads, bridges and highways. The guide stated that attackers are aiming for two types of impact: "the suffering your target will withstand, including the cost associated with restoring itself," and "the heightened security on the local and national level in reaction to the demonstrable damage that can be done toward this target."

Mainstreaming Extremism

In July 2019, HSToday reported on flyers signed by Loyal White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and dropped in front of homes during overnight runs outside D.C. in Loudoun County, Va. The leaflets decried a

grassroots push to rename Harry Flood Byrd Highway (Virginia State Route 7), named for the late segregationist governor and senator, declaring "leave our history and heroes alone" and "preserve our culture." They added a plug to "kontact the experts" — attempting to seize on highly charged debates about whether historical monuments should be removed or sites renamed. They saw an opportunity for a bridge issue: an issue that extremists exploit in order to bring others closer to their side by luring new recruits, to bring their side closer to others in an attempt to move their ideology or group into the mainstream, or to simply gain tacit sympathizers and people passionate about the issue who may be willing to look the other way at a new ally's hateful core beliefs.

Recently, neo-Nazis and white supremacist groups have been trying to make drag-queen events including brunches, fundraisers, and story hours their own bridge issue, demonstrating outside of drag shows with banners and Nazi salutes, chanting at passersby and harassing attendees, and posting photos and videos of their actions online. First and foremost, these groups would like to woo recruits with these public-facing displays. But also important to them are those who, as seen on social media, will laud the groups for taking some sort of action even if they personally don't ascribe to all of the group's views or openly call themselves allies. Groups who have been protesting have also celebrated violent acts inflicted upon the LGBTQ community, so it can be a short bridge to cross from verbal harassment to either perpetrating or inspiring future acts of violence.

We also saw this past year with the mainstreaming of antisemitism how latent prejudices can build bridges between vocal extremists and those who have become willing to defend that bias. The year ended with scores of online memes lauding Ye's antisemitic comments and Hitler praise as neo-Nazi creators even photoshopped the rapper into Third Reich regalia. Mainstreaming can make extremism worse both in terms of recruitment — if more people see ascribing to the ideology as now hip or acceptable — and when it comes to convincing more people to look the other way at the deeds of domestic extremist movements that declare they're acting for the betterment of society in one breath and then call for the extermination of Blacks and Jews in the next.

"A full 63 percent of religious hate crimes are motivated by antisemitism — targeting a group that makes up just 2.4 percent of our population," FBI Director Wray said in November. "Foreign terrorist organizations like ISIS have promoted antisemitic violent extremism for decades. They continue to target Jewish Americans in their attack plots. But we also confront the threat of people here, on our soil, whose hateful views — often paraded online — boil over into acts of violence."

Islamist Extremist Evolution

ISIS and al-Qaeda both suffered the loss of their top leaders in 2022, with ISIS leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashemi al-Qurayshi killing himself during a U.S. raid in February and his successor Abu al-Hasan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi killing himself during a Free Syrian Army operation in October, and al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri dying in a U.S. drone strike on his home in Afghanistan in July. As martyrdom aspirations are baked into their operating philosophies, Islamist terror groups are prepared to move to the next leader in line and, while losing a figurehead, could view the transitions as a chance to inject younger blood into the upper ranks.

As U.S. Central Command noted in its year-end report of operations against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the fight against this group in its post-caliphate era is far from over. First, there are the provinces that have entrenched in regions around the globe, "most significantly" in Afghanistan and Africa. Then there are the ISIS operatives still being fought in Iraq and Syria — there was nearly an operation per day last year by CENTCOM against these forces. Then there is "a literal 'ISIS army' in detention" in Iraq and Syria consisting of more than 30,000 ISIS leaders and fighters. And there are the more than 25,000 children in Syria's al-Hol camp who are in danger of being radicalized by ISIS and forming the next generation of fighters — or cubs, in ISIS lingo.

While this occurs in the military operations sphere, ISIS, al-Qaeda, and other Islamist extremist movements continue to utilize distance recruitment and training in order to inspire operatives in any corner of the world. Much of the ISIS propaganda that circulates nowadays is recycled "greatest hits" material, so to speak, with fresh content regularly produced in a weekly newsletter from the core of the group and magazines and videos largely produced by provinces. These publications have mostly concentrated on regional grievances, recruitment, and incitement, but have also added international elements whether in promotion of other claimed ISIS provinces or inciting attacks in the West. ISIS and al-Qaeda both expressed delight after the Jan. 6 Capitol riot and have sought to egg on extremism from the sidelines ever since. Over the past year, ISIS Khorasan in Afghanistan declared the United States a "banana republic" ripe for an "Islamic storm" after the execution of a search warrant at former President Trump's Mar-a-Lago residence, called mass shootings and other gun violence in America an "'unwanted' population control program" and divine "tit for tat," echoed the QAnon belief that a cabal of pedophiles is rooted in Hollywood and the government, called "social media warfare" critical to counter the pull of "enchanting" social media influencers, and declared that disseminating and weaponizing disinformation is a "duty" of jihadists.

Blurred Ideological Lines

See the hodgepodge above. Or, wade into online channels and chat forums where accelerationists are distributing ISIS videos because they admire the tactical advice and the jihadists' passion and

ruthlessness, or where posters who claim jihadist underpinnings are lauding the lone-wolf nature and execution of school shooters and replay surveillance videos capturing their brutal attacks ad nauseam. Throw in some ecofascism, incel culture, anti-government extremism, conspiracy theory extremism, antisemitism, anarchism, or neo-Nazism, add in extremists professing to be Christian or pagans or even occultists, and you have everything that is and isn't a comprehensive threat profile. The Pulse nightclub attack may have been claimed by a killer saying that he was operating on behalf of ISIS, but it's now hailed by domestic extremists as a model for striking at the LGBTQ community. ISIS admired the 2017 massacre at the Route 91 Harvest country music festival in Las Vegas so much that the group claimed for months that shooter Stephen Paddock was "a soldier of the Islamic State who carried out the attack in response to calls for targeting coalition countries," even as it became readily apparent that Paddock had no apparent ideological motive. The Taliban victory in Afghanistan has been hailed over the past year by domestic extremists who want to bring down the government in the United States.

"The old-school world of kind of people with some purity of radical ideology then turning to violence is often giving way to people who have kind of a jumble of mixed-up ideas," Wray told the Senate Appropriations on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies in May. "And, you know, we've seen cases where somebody one month is saying they're an ISIS supporter, and then the next month they say they're a white supremacist."

And while extremists explore all the streams of extremism and cobble together their unique extremist profiles, tutorials including guides on how to construct weapons and explosives and inspirational materials from ideological movements that may not seem to align are shared online in furtherance of extremist beliefs turning to violent action.

Tactical Diversity

While extremists explore their ideological profiles, groups and movements are also trying to reach extremists where they're at in terms of skills and ability to conduct attacks. ISIS propaganda, for example, encouraged traditional bomb-making and weapons training early on, but as the group and its focus on lone actors who would never journey to the physical caliphate evolved ISIS was suggesting any novel attack method that might stick — from posing as a Craigslist landlord to lure victims to utilizing poisonous plants or venomous snakes to snap their foes. The crux of this see-what-sticks strategy was to encourage terrorists to get creative — not getting caught in the planning stages buying bomb ingredients or plowing through hundreds of rounds at the range — and also to meet potential attackers where they're at if they have circumstances such as not being able to obtain a firearm or build an IED.

Domestic extremists also have been promoting the myriad ways in which adherents who have limited or exceptional skills can support their goals of infrastructure sabotage, striking high-value targets, or killing perceived racial, religious, or political foes. Neo-Nazi accelerationists lauded William Mallet, a 69-year-old retired train operator who killed three members of the Kurdish community and wounded three more in a Paris shooting Dec. 23, for finally acting on how he "always wanted to assassinate migrants and foreigners," according to statements he gave to detectives after his arrest.

While trying to bring terror attacks down to the level of attainable goals, extremist groups are also reaching high with stated aspirations to utilize chemical, biological, or radiological agents to some degree. Dirty bombs were called holy grails in the aforementioned 261-page accelerationist guide because of the potential for higher casualty counts and larger-scale disruption or chaos intended to further their goals.

A suspect leaves pipe bombs outside the RNC and DNC offices on Capitol Hill on Jan. 5, 2021. (FBI)

Political Violence

Midterm elections in late 2022 thankfully did not see the sort of violence that could reasonably have been expected with heated contests, hotter rhetoric, and close vote tallies. But anti-government extremism, violence or threats centered around a specific political issue, violence or threats against politicians or election workers, and accelerationist ideology that believes in destruction of the current system are in motion whether or not there is an election just around the corner. And with the second anniversary of the attack on the U.S. Capitol days away, there are still 438 of 909

cases against Jan. 6 defendants still pending in the courts, according to the GWU Program on Extremism's Capitol siege tracker, amid claims by some defendants and their supporters that they are "political prisoners."

The concern is at what point fury directed at the government itself or the players boils over into violence, and whether or not a specific catalyst — such as the certification of votes happening that Jan. 6 — is even needed to push a potential attacker to that breaking point. This could manifest in attacks on government facilities or think tanks, political offices such as the Capitol Hill pipe bombs, facilities tied to specific hot-button issues, or people — as seen in the October break-in and hammer attack on Paul Pelosi. The man accused of assaulting the husband of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) at their San Francisco home allegedly compared himself to a Revolutionary War fighter battling "tyranny" and told law enforcement that he intended to interrogate and likely break the kneecaps of Speaker Pelosi to "show other members of Congress there were consequences to actions."

Bridget Johnson is the Managing Editor for Homeland Security Today. A veteran journalist whose news articles and analyses have run in dozens of news outlets across the globe, Bridget first came to Washington to be online editor and a foreign policy writer at The Hill. Previously she was an editorial board member at the Rocky Mountain News and syndicated nation/world news columnist at the Los Angeles Daily News. Bridget is a terrorism analyst and security consultant with a specialty in online open-source extremist propaganda, incitement, recruitment, and training. She hosts and presents in Homeland Security Today law enforcement training webinars studying a range of counterterrorism topics including conspiracy theory extremism, complex coordinated attacks, critical infrastructure attacks, arson terrorism, drone and venue threats, antisemitism and white supremacists, anti-government extremism, and WMD threats. She is a Senior Risk Analyst for Gate 15 and a private investigator. Bridget is an NPR on-air contributor and has contributed to USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, New York Observer, National Review Online, Politico, New York Daily News, The Jerusalem Post, The Hill, Washington Times, RealClearWorld and more, and has myriad television and radio credits including Al-Jazeera, BBC and SiriusXM.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards set to be labelled as terrorist group by UK

Source: https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-64156965

Jan 03 – The UK is preparing to formally declare that Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) is a terrorist organisation. The legal change would mean it becomes a criminal offence in the UK to belong to the group or support its activities. Whitehall sources said no announcement was imminent and many details remained to be sorted out.

But they said it was "broadly correct" to say the government intended to proscribe the IRGC.

The proscription - first reported by the Daily Telegraph - would follow a similar decision made by the US in 2019.

And it would mark a further hardening of the UK's position towards Iran after intelligence agencies said the country posed a direct threat, citing 10 plots against British or UK-based individuals over the last year.

There were reports last November of an Iranian hit squad targeting British-Iranian journalists in London.

The IRGC last week arrested seven people with links to the UK in relation to anti-government protests that have been sweeping through Iran in recent months.

Proscribing an organisation is a formal legal process carried out under the Terrorism Act 2000.

The government has to assess not just the scale of a group's terrorist activities but also the specific threat it poses to the UK and British nationals overseas. It would make it an offence not just to belong to the organisation but also express support for its aims, meet its members or even display its flag or logo in public.

Any decision by the UK to proscribe the IRGC would make it even harder to revive the ailing international talks designed to revive the deal curbing Iran's nuclear programme.

The IRGC was set up over 40 years ago to defend Iran's Islamic revolution and is now one of the most powerful paramilitary organisations in the Middle East. It has huge military, political and economic force, using its vast funds to support allied governments and militant groups across the region.

Foreign Secretary James Cleverly announced last month that sanctions had been imposed on the IRGC in its entirety.

But there has been growing parliamentary pressure for the government to go further. The Foreign Affairs Committee issued a report later in the month calling for the group to be proscribed as well.

During last summer's Conservative leadership contest - won by Liz Truss - Rishi Sunak said there was "a case for proscribing the IRGC". He has not commented on his views since becoming prime minister.

A government spokesman said: "Whilst the government keeps the list of proscribed organisations under review, we do not comment on whether a specific organisation is or is not being considered for proscription."

Why Is Blinken Hiding Report on Global Terrorist Threats?

By A.J. Caschetta

Source: https://www.meforum.org/63956/why-is-blinken-hiding-report-on-global-terrorist

Jan 03 – For the first time since the 2004 congressional mandate that the secretary of State submit an annual report on international terrorism to the speaker of the House of Representatives, the State Department has failed to fulfill this duty. No *Country Reports on Terrorism* was issued in 2022.

Major events happen so frequently lately that little ones often go unnoticed. Between Russian atrocities in Ukraine, Iranian atrocities in Iran, and the Biden administration's atrocious policies at home, it was easy to overlook this missing report last year.

According to 22 USC 2656f, "The Secretary of State shall transmit to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate, by April 30 of each year, a full and complete report providing . . . detailed assessments with respect to each foreign country . . . in which acts of international terrorism occurred."

The April 30 deadline is rarely met. June and July releases are more common. The CRT most recently released, covering 2020, came out on December 16, 2021.

When asked for a comment on the tardy report, Vincent Picard, spokesman for the State Department's Bureau of Counterterrorism told me, "We've hit a couple of internal bureaucratic process hurdles this year that are almost resolved. The report should be released soon."

The nature of the CRT's retrospective assessment of the previous year means that some years are far more politically charged than others. The 2021 CRT was produced by the Blinken State Department assessing 2020, the final year of the Trump administration. Had it been submitted in accordance with law, the 2022 CRT would have been the Blinken State Department's assessment of the Biden administration's first year.

What could it say? 2021 was a spectacularly bad year for U.S. foreign policy and perhaps the most significant year for global terrorism since 1979.

It started out with Blinken assembling a team of failed diplomats who specialize in "peace processing" but never produce anything close to peace for their efforts: Brian McKeon, Ross Wilson, Wendy Sherman, and the dung beetle of international diplomacy, Robert Malley, whom Biden put in charge of jump-starting Obama's failed Iran nuclear deal, the JCPOA.

Blinken's team began the year in Alaska, meeting a team of Chinese diplomats who berated them.

In violation of the Taylor Force Act, the Biden administration restored funding to the Palestinian Authority in 2021, despite the PA's continued "Pay to Slay" program, which rewards terrorists who attack Israel with stipends and compensates the families of dead terrorists ("martyrs") for the violence carried out by their dead relatives.

But the single-most-disastrous decision of the Biden administration in 2021 was its botched withdrawal from Afghanistan, effectively handing the country over to the Taliban, erasing 20 years of effort, leaving behind billions of dollars' worth of military hardware, and abandoning a secure Bagram Air Base in favor of a fantasy about the military's "Over the Horizon" capability to stop terrorist acts.

At the time, Blinken did his best to put lipstick on the pig, praising the withdrawal as a logistical *tour de force* and announcing that "a new chapter of America's engagement with Afghanistan has begun. It's one in which we lead with our diplomacy. The military mission is over. A new diplomatic mission has begun." But with the benefit of hindsight, there's little to celebrate. Afghanistan has returned to the 1990s safe-haven for terrorists, only this time al-Qaeda and ISIS are fighting each other, and the Taliban are fighting the people of Afghanistan, especially women and former U.S. allies.

So, what did Antony Blinken do at the end of the year instead of ensuring that the *Country Reports on Terrorism* was dutifully submitted to the speaker of the House? He released his Spotify playlists — one list to tell the world that his favorite tunes of the year were sung by Taylor Swift, Lizzo, and Bad Bunny, and another list to showcase his favorite musicians from the various countries he visited in 2022.

Unless Congress does something about the State Department's dereliction of duty, little will happen. Team Biden will prefer to ignore its responsibilities and hope that no one notices the absent report. Congress must ensure that this does not happen.

Among the long list of investigations that the Republicans in the House plan for 2023, one of the inquiries should be geared toward compelling Blinken to submit the *Country Reports on Terrorism* for 2021 and explain why it has not been submitted, eight months (and counting) past the deadline. It should make for interesting reading — far more interesting than Blinken's list of his favorite music.

A.J. Caschetta is a Ginsberg-Milstein fellow at the Middle East Forum and a principal lecturer at the Rochester Institute of Technology.

Google Develops Free Terrorism Moderation Tool for Smaller Websites

Financial Times
Source: https://www.ft.com/content/c2da6eb1-ba81-40c5-a411-dfc94ea280db

Google is developing a free moderation tool that smaller websites can use to identify and remove terrorist material, as new legislation in the UK and the EU compels internet companies to do more to tackle illegal content. The software is being developed in partnership with the search giant's research and development unit Jigsaw and Tech Against Terrorism, a UN-backed initiative that helps tech companies police online terrorism.

"There are a lot of websites that just don't have any people to do the enforcement. It is a really labor-intensive thing to even build the algorithms [and] then you need all those human reviewers," said Yasmin Green, chief executive of Jigsaw. "[Smaller websites] do not want Isis' content there, but there is a ton of it all over [them]," she added.

The move comes as internet companies will be forced to remove extremist content from their platforms or face fines and other penalties under laws such as the Digital Services Act in the EU, which came into force in November, and the UK's Online Safety bill, which is expected to become law this year.
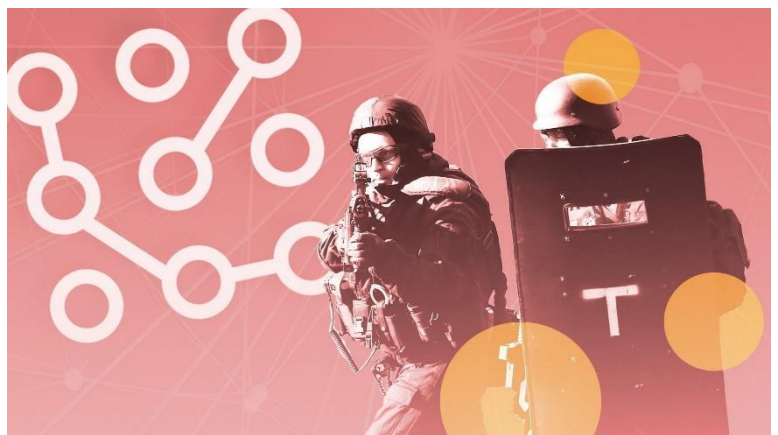
Taliban networked with Turkish al-Qaeda affiliate, courtesy of Iranian intelligence

By Abdullah Bozkurt
Source: https://nordicmonitor.com/2023/01/taliban-networked-with-turkish-al-qaeda-affiliate-courtesy-of-iranian-intelligence/

Zabihullah Mujahid, Taliban spokesman and Deputy Ministry of Information and Culture, met Faruk Hanedar. a jihadist IBDA-C terror group which is aligned with al-Qaeda.

Jan 04 – Iranian intelligence brokered a meeting between a senior Taliban official and a member of Turkish al-Qaeda affiliate the Islamic Great East Raiders Front (İslami Büyük Doğu Akıncıları Cephesi, IBDA-C) in Istanbul in November 2022, Nordic Monitor has learned.

The meeting was held in an office of Rehber TV, a Turkish-language religious network that is funded by Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force operatives. Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban spokesman and deputy minister of information and culture who had been in Turkey for several days on a visit that was coordinated by Iranian assets, met with Faruk Hanedar, a senior militant who works for IBDA-C.

IBDA-C even published an interview with Mujahid in its monthly magazine Baran, owned by Hanedar, and promoted the meeting on the cover of its November 2022 issue. The interview was titled with a remark by Mujahid: "What we really need is an Islamic state model."

Interview excerpts also reveal that the militant group discussed future plans with the Taliban and pitched IBDA-C's goal of destroying the secular and democratic governance in Turkey and establishing what it called the Great Eastern Islamic State. The new state's capital would be in Istanbul and include other so-called Islamic states as well.

IBDA-C is listed as terrorist entity by Turkey, the United States and the European Union. Many members were arrested, indicted, tried and sentenced to prison, including Salih İzzet Erdiş (aka Salih Mirzabeyoğlu, or the Commandant), the late leader of IBDA/C who was convicted on terrorism charges.

Erdiş established the organization in 1985 and turned it into a deadly terrorist group, with dozens of attacks between 1990 and 1998, according to an indictment filed with the court on January 12, 1999. The group attacked Armenian, Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches as well as synagogues and American colleges in Turkey with bombs and Molotov cocktails. They specifically targeted banks, stores that sell alcoholic beverages, designer shops, political party buildings, newspapers and associations that were opposed to the IBDA/C ideology. The IBDA-C also claimed responsibility for a range of terrorist acts in Turkey including what authorities said was a joint plot with al-Qaeda in carrying out the

The cover of the Baran magazine, a publication of the IBDA-C terrorist group, featured a Taliban official in its November 2022 issue.
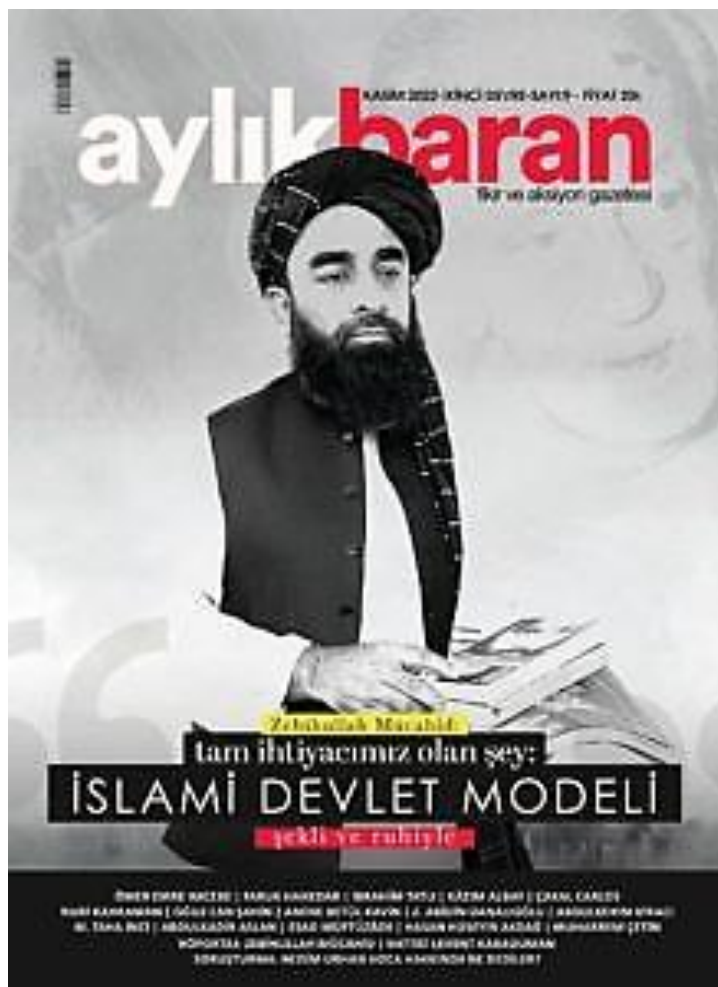
2003 bombings in İstanbul of two synagogues, an HSBC bank branch and the British Consulate General, and a 2008 attack on the US Consulate General in İstanbul. The attacks killed dozens of people.

IBDA/C publications openly praise the late al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and promote him as a martyr who stood up against imperialists. IBDA/C leader Erdiş described him as "a man who struck the US in the heart."

On February 4, 2001 the Bakırköy 3rd High Criminal Court convicted Erdiş on multiple charges and sentenced him to death, but his sentence was converted to life imprisonment in 2004 after Turkey abolished the death penalty. However, on July 22, 2014 then-prime minister and now president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan secured the release of Erdiş from prison and later his acquittal of all charges after a hastily arranged retrial. The establishment of ties between the Taliban and IBDA/C means Turkish jihadists have found a new sanctuary in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, as was the case in the past. Dozens of Turks travelled to Afghanistan in the late '90s and early 2000s to fight for al-Qaeda groups and were trained in arms and explosives there. Some of them were arrested in Turkey upon their return, but they were all released thanks to Erdoğan government interventions in the criminal justice system.

While he was in Turkey, Mujahid attended a conference organized by the Union of Islamic Scholars and Madrasahs (Alimler ve Medreseler Birliği, or İTTİHADUL ULEMA), an affiliate of Turkish Hizbullah, which is funded and supported by the IRGC. The group, predominantly catering to Kurds in Turkey, seeks to establish an Iranian-style mullah regime in the country.

Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid met with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh and his deputy Saleh al-Arouri in November 2022 in Istanbul.
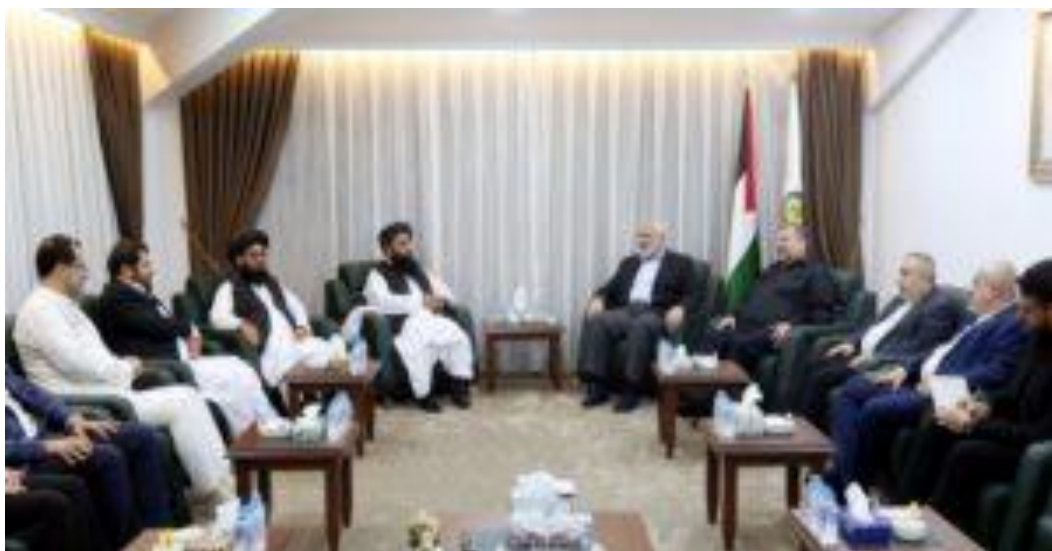
The chairman of the Union of Islamic Scholars and Madrasahs is a man named Enver Kılıçarslan, who was convicted in February 2002 of membership in Hizbullah and sentenced to seven years, six months. He was trained in Iran in 1987 and assigned to serve under the late Turkish Hizbullah leader Hüseyin Velioğlu, who was killed in a gunfight with police during a raid on a safe house in Istanbul in January 2000.

A Taliban spokesperson attended a conference as keynote speaker for the Iran-backed International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS).

At a conference organized in Turkey by the Iran-backed International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS), Mujahid told the audience that Islamic scholars led the ranks of the jihad against the enemy in Afghanistan and that the victory in 2021 was made possible thanks to this. Mujahid also met with Muslim Brotherhood figures in Turkey such as Ali Muhiuddin Qara Daghi, general secretary of the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS), and Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh and his deputy Saleh al-Arouri.

Turkey's Islamist government, led by Erdoğan, hailed the Taliban's comeback. Speaking on July 20, 2021 Erdoğan said his government would negotiate with the Taliban, whom he said should feel comfortable talking with Turkey, as opposed to the Americans. He justified his reasoning by underlining that "Turkey has nothing against the Taliban's ideology, and since we aren't in conflict with the Taliban's beliefs, I believe we can better discuss and agree with them on issues."

The Taliban responded to Erdoğan's calls, with Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, the son of Taliban founder Mullah Omar, telling The Independent Turkish service that they see Turkey as an ally and want to build close relations with it. The same talking points were repeated by Mujahid in the speeches he delivered in Turkey in November 2022.

Charlie Hebdo terrorist attack – 8 years

January 2023 issue

Charlie Hebdo (meaning *Charlie Weekly*) is a French satirical weekly magazine, featuring cartoons, reports, polemics, and jokes. Stridently non-conformist in tone, the publication has been described as anti-racist, sceptical, secular, and within the tradition of left-wing radicalism, publishing articles about the far-right (especially the French nationalist National Front party), religion (Catholicism, Islam and Judaism), politics and culture.

The magazine has been the target of three terrorist attacks: in 2011, 2015, and 2020. All of them were presumed to be in response to a number of cartoons that it published controversially depicting Muhammad. In the second of these attacks, 12 people were killed, including publishing director Charb and several other prominent cartoonists.

On **7 January 2015**, two Islamist gunmen forced their way into the Paris headquarters of *Charlie Hebdo* and opened fire, **killing twelve**: staff cartoonists Charb, Cabu, Honoré, Tignous and Wolinski, economist Bernard Maris, editors Elsa Cayat and Mustapha Ourrad, guest Michel Renaud, maintenance worker Frédéric Boisseau and police officers Brinsolaro and Merabet, and **wounding eleven**, four of them seriously.

During the attack, the gunmen shouted "*Allahu akbar*" ("God is great" in Arabic) and also "the Prophet is avenged". President François Hollande described it as a "terrorist attack of the most extreme barbarity". The two gunmen were identified as Saïd Kouachi and Chérif Kouachi, French Muslim brothers of Algerian descent.

Iran's response

Jan 05 – "The insulting and indecent act of a French publication in publishing cartoons against the religious and political authority will not go without an effective and decisive response," Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian was quoted as saying by the state-controlled Mehr news agency.

Iran says it is closing the French Institute for Research in Tehran "as a first step" against "insulting" cartoons of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei that were published by the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo.

⚠️ **EDITOR'S COMMENT**
Retaliation during the 2024 Olympic Games? Iranians know how to wait the right moment …

Outside the French Embassy in Tehran (Jan 08)

Waiting For the Next 9/11 - Somewhere in Afghanistan Al Qaida Is Smiling
Source: https://andmagazine.substack.com/p/waiting-for-the-next-911-somewhere

Jan 05 – The 9/11 attacks are described as having been a surprise. In the sense that the Intelligence Community had no hard, actionable intelligence on the specific attack plan that is generally accurate. In the sense that we had no idea we were about to be hit by Al Qaida that is a lie. We had all the warning in the world.

Prior to 9/11 Bin Laden had stated on numerous occasions that he was focused on hitting the "far enemy". That was us. He had blown up two of our embassies in East Africa. He had come dangerously close to sinking the USS Cole in Yemen. If you followed the issue at all you knew he was just getting started.

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We ignored the warnings. We turned down repeated plans to find and eliminate Bin Laden. We gave the enemy breathing room. Almost 3000 Americans paid the price.

And now we are doing it again.

A recent intelligence alert put out by the Department of Homeland Security has this title "Al-Qaeda says upcoming attacks on US, possibly involving planes, will use new techniques and tactics." Per multiple reports, the alert is intended to advise U.S. law enforcement officials that Al Qaeda fully intends to stage future attacks on the U.S. which will involve aircraft and tactics and techniques not previously seen.

Which really tells us what we already knew. Al Qaeda has not gone anywhere. Its intentions have not changed. Biden and company

may have chosen to pretend otherwise. That does not make the danger in the real world any less.

This is exactly what we did in the run-up to 9/11. Bill Clinton was busy with his domestic agenda. Facing a foreign terror threat would be politically inconvenient. Better to ignore the warnings and wait for people to die before doing anything.

If anything the Biden administration has taken this "head in the sand" mentality to new extremes. Even as warnings of increased threats to civil aviation are coming in Joe is sending federal air marshals (FAM) off to nursemaid illegal immigrants at the border. The marshals are being used to help with hospital watch, transportation, security, and welfare checks at migrant facilities.

This practice is so egregious it has prompted the Air Marshal National Council, which represents thousands of air marshals nationwide to file a formal complaint with Homeland Security. That complaint accuses DHS of violating federal law. "The statute does not give the Administrator any authority to deploy TSA or FAM employees to the southern border to perform non transportation security related matters," the complaint to the DHS IG says.

In the wake of the release of the recent warning about the Al Qaida threat, the Air Marshal National Council sent a letter to DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas explicitly warning that sending marshals to the border was putting the nation at risk. "We are once again requesting you immediately stop these dangerous and unnecessary deployments and let our FAMs do what the American taxpayers pay them to do, protect and defend our transportation system," the letter reads. "We have to ask how can you justify sending FAMs to the border in huge numbers, when the border is in your words secure, and there is no emergency? Yet we have major security incidents happening right now affecting our aviation security."

The stark reality is this. Afghanistan is now a terrorist super state that dwarfs anything ISIS ever created. Al Qaeda and a host of other terrorist groups have a safehaven there. They do not want peace or coexistence. They want to transform the globe in their image.

A group of former Afghan officials addressed all this head-on in a recent open letter. "According to a 2021 UN Security Council report, the 'Haqqani Network remains a hub for outreach and cooperation with regional foreign terrorist groups and is the primary liaison between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.' After the Taliban's takeover [in August 2021], Khalil Haqqani, the brother of the Haqqani Network founder Jalaluddin Haqqani, spoke publicly in Kabul's Pul-e Khishti Mosque despite a US$5 million bounty on his head saying that 'relations between the Taliban, especially the Haqqani Network and Al-Qaeda remain close, based on friendship, a history of shared struggle, ideological sympathy, and intermarriage.' "According to the Taliban's spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban have established a battalion of suicide bombers that will be part of their Martyrdom Brigade in a clear sign of continued use of terrorist tactics rather than transitioning into a regular army. Normalization of relations with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan poses a clear and present threat to the stability of the region and the world. "The IEA represents a concise model for jihadist takeover of a nation state which, in the event of normalization, would show that jihadists can not only seize a country, repress its people through violence and gender apartheid, but they can achieve the basics of statehood. This is when Afghanistan under the Taliban rule has increasingly turned into a safehaven for terrorists. Suicide bombers are being trained in large groups (by the thousands) in provinces such as Kunduz with the chief purpose of carrying out terror campaigns in Afghanistan as well as other countries.

"Normalization, creeping attempts at legitimization or any recognition of the Taliban-run IEA, in any form, including their right to travel, will embolden the Taliban and other terrorist groups in their pursuit of power, and reward them for their disregard and ignorance of international norms and universal human rights."

When we invaded Afghanistan in 2001 we did so for a very good reason. Al Qaida had declared war on us and had killed thousands of our countrymen. If we had not invaded, the next wave of attacks launched from Afghanistan would have made 9/11 pale in comparison. At the time we entered Afghanistan Al Qaida had active chemical and biological weapons programs and Osama himself was in direct contact with former Pakistani nuclear scientists discussing the possibility of building an atomic bomb. Al Qaida has never abandoned these ambitions. It has never ended its war on the United States. It is emboldened and stronger than ever. It has forged an unholy alliance with the Taliban. It has freedom of maneuver, money, and access to boundless resources. Its mission remains to strike the United States and its allies and to kill as many of us as possible. *In the end, what it wants is to transform the entire planet into one giant Islamic emirate governed by a particularly mad and barbaric version of Sharia law.* On that basis, and in compliance with Allah's order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies -- civilians and military -- is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty Allah, "and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together," and "fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah." Fatwa issued by Osama Bin Laden. It remains in effect to this day. Twenty years ago we watched and waited and allowed thousands to die needlessly. We are doing it again. The next mass casualty attack on the United States is being planned right now. Its scope may dwarf anything we have seen before. And we are doing nothing to stop it. Somewhere in Afghanistan, the Al Qaida planners of the next 9/11 are smiling.

January 6th Report Summarizes Extremist Threat – But Leaves Key Gaps

Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20230106-january-6th-report-summarizes-extremist-threat-but-leaves-key-gaps

Jan 06 – In the last few days of 2022, the House Select Committee investigating the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol released its final report, the culmination of nearly 18 months of investigative work aimed at analyzing the facts, circumstances, and causes of the events of Jan. 6, 2021.

Jon Lewis writes in *Just Security* that while the inherent value of this 845-page report to the public record is unquestionable, significant questions remain largely unanswered around two interrelated components of the committee's investigation: the scope of law enforcement and intelligence failures preceding the attack on the U.S. Capitol, and what concrete steps should be taken to combat both those failures and the rising threat of domestic violent extremism in the aftermath of January 6th.

Lewis writes:

> One of the committee's three enumerated purposes was the examination and evaluation of evidence developed by government agencies "regarding the facts and circumstances surrounding the domestic terrorist attack on the Capitol and targeted violence and domestic terrorism relevant to such terrorist attack." The report did so in the executive summary, finding that "the intelligence community and law enforcement agencies did successfully detect the planning for potential violence on January 6th, including planning specifically by the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys militia groups who ultimately led the attack on the Capitol. As January 6th approached, the intelligence specifically identified the potential for violence at the U.S. Capitol."
>
> The report's chapter on violent extremism, "Be There, Will Be Wild!" lays out a clear and robust summation of the facts known surrounding the violent extremist mobilization that ended in the attack on the Capitol. This chapter provides a clear chronological overview of the role of the Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, Three Percenters, Groypers and other extremists in the events of Jan. 6, including the extensive operational planning by Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes and Proud Boys Chairman Enrique Tarrio. Rhodes was recently convicted on seditious conspiracy charges related to this conduct, while Tarrio and his Proud Boys co-defendants are set to face their own seditious conspiracy charges at trial in the coming weeks.

The committee's report is not without flaws, though. Lewis concludes:

> The absence of recommendations concerning violent extremism and law enforcement represent two of the most glaring omissions in the report. The intelligence failures that led to Jan. 6 have been meticulously catalogued by outside experts and by the U.S. Government Accountability Organization (GAO). The mobilization by both organized domestic violent extremist groups and the broader "Stop the Steal" coalition was plotted largely in plain sight: on social media platforms, in public statements and calls to action, including by public figures and right-wing actors with substantial followings. Despite this feature of the attack, outside of a vague call for "continued and rigorous oversight" of the Capitol Police and a recommendation to designate the Jan. 6 session of Congress a National Special Security Event, the report shies away from addressing the underlying intelligence and law enforcement failures.
>
> If the work of the committee was intended to represent a bipartisan attempt to understand and address the causes of the attack on the U.S. Capitol, analyze the key actors, and recommend corrective measures – including recommendations that could be taken to "prevent future acts of violence, domestic terrorism, and domestic violent extremism, including acts targeted at American democratic institutions" – it is both perplexing and disappointing that the sole recommendation provided in response to violent extremism is a general call for federal agencies to "move forward on whole-of-government strategies to combat the threat of violent activity posed by all extremist groups" and "review their intelligence sharing protocols." Against the backdrop of broader federal inaction in the face of a resurgent domestic violent extremist threat, the committee's failure to provide substantive, actionable, or relevant policy recommendations on this subject represents more than just a missed opportunity. It is an unfortunate abrogation of responsibility.

Iceland – The police raise the terrorism alert level

Source: https://icelandmonitor.mbl.is/news/news/2022/12/29/the_police_raises_the_terrorism_alert_level/

Dec 29 – The police terrorism alert level has been raised from A to B, following the Court of Appeals ruling lifting the custodial sentence for men suspected of planning a terrorist attack.
It is a temporary decision and the state of preparedness will be assessed regularly, as stated in the notice of the Commissioner.
The National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police's Diagnostic Unit evaluates the threat level for terrorism. It is their opinion that the threat level in Iceland is at the third level. This means that the department assesses it as a greater threat because of the presence of intent and capability and potential planning of terrorist acts.

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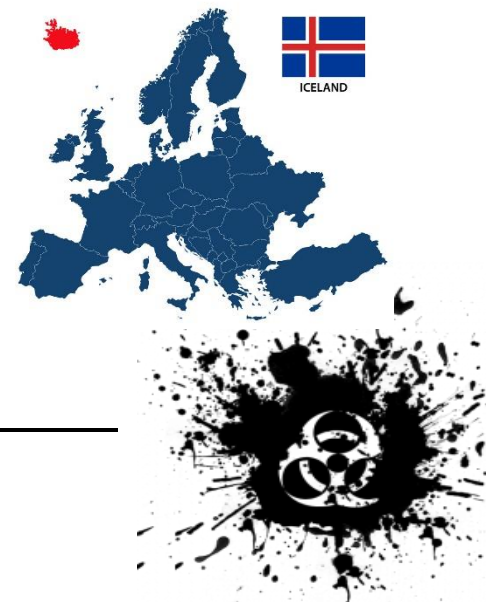
Increased alert
"Alert level A is a routine alert level under the 2015 National Police Chiefs" Preparedness Level Police procedure. A decision has been made to raise the alert level for police to alert level B, which includes an increased alert level for a security threat. The alert levels are five, from A to E.
Under the Preparedness Level B procedure, the Special Operations Command, the Metropolitan Police, the Counter-IED, the Counter-IED and the Police Communications Centre have increased the response capability in case of a disaster. This includes the simplification of various procedures, closer coordination, increased staffing and faster response capabilities.

New five threat level alert scale
Changes have been made to the threat levels for terrorism, but the changes are not directly related to the above-mentioned preparedness. The change aims to coordinate the use of the threat level in Iceland with that of our neighbouring countries.
In Iceland, a four-point scale has been used so far, but as of December 13, 2022, a new five-point scale has been introduced, assessing the state of the matter according to the same criteria as in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

Al Qaeda Is Planning to Fake the Death of Its Dead Leader

Source: https://www.thedailybeast.com/al-qaeda-is-planning-to-fake-the-death-of-ayman-al-zawahiri-its-dead-leader

Jan 07 – Al Qaeda is planning to announce a fake cause of death for former leader Ayman al Zawahiri, who was already killed by a U.S. airstrike, according to senior sources in the jihadi movement.
Under the plan, al Qaeda would announce that Zawahiri died from ill-health, even though Joe Biden held a press conference to say that Osama bin Laden's successor had been taken out by a precision strike on an upmarket district of Kabul six months ago.

When the U.S. eliminated bin Laden in 2011 in a night raid on his compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, al Qaeda acknowledged his death within four days and Zawahiri became the new "General Emir of al Qaeda".

Ayman al Zawahiri was a key al Qaeda operator during Osama bin Laden's leadership of the terror group

Pool
Sources close to al Qaeda told The Daily Beast that the Taliban has begged al Qaeda not to confirm or deny Zawahiri's death. "Hiding the martyrdom of Zawahiri is a result of secret understandings between the Taliban and al Qaeda," said a senior jihadist in the region.
The Taliban, which regained control of Afghanistan in August 2021, has been in total denial. After the strike, spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said they would carry out a full investigation into the July strike but there has still been no official word. The attack was an embarrassment to the Taliban on many levels. The group had agreed to cut ties with al Qaeda during the Doha peace deal with the Trump Administration in 2019, so it was extremely awkward when it turned out the terror group's leader was living in one of the most luxurious neighborhoods in the capital city. From the perspective of other jihadis, the U.S. strike also clearly demonstrated that the Taliban was unable to offer protection.
A source close to jihadist elements said evidence has been uncovered that the CIA had even penetrated the property where Zawahiri was hiding, with alleged discoveries of spy cameras and other surveillance devices inside the house—even in Zawahri's bed. In September, the CIA revealed a very detailed model of the property in their museum in Virginia, which indicates the huge amount of information collected on the house.
Whichever way you see it, the assassination left the Taliban even more isolated. Their first regime was overthrown by the U.S. in 2001 when Washington demanded they hand over Osama Bin Laden after 9/11 but they refused to do so.
Having lost one government due to al Qaeda, they are determined not to be destabilized by their fellow jihadis this time. Sources said the Haqqani Network, a semi-autonomous offshoot within the Taliban organization, has been lobbying al Qaeda to keep quiet.

Visual News

Al Qaeda have been going along with the plan—releasing supposedly new audio of Zawahri last month—even though attributing the emir's death to illness rather than the Americans would deny him the honor of martyrdom.

"Zawahiri and Osama wished for martyrdom by infidels, both got their wish, but al Qaeda is hiding it to save the Taliban from disaster and consequences of having a top leadership presence in the Taliban capital," said a second senior jihadist source, who has met Zawahri.

A new leader has not yet been identified. Jihadist sources in the region told The Daily Beast that there are three members of al Qaeda in the running to become the new emir of the global organization; Saif al Adel, a veteran al Qaeda operative who's been wanted by the U.S. since 1998, Yasin al-Suri, reportedly a senior financier for the terror outfit based in Iran, and Zawahiri's son-in-law Abdal Rahman al Maghrebi, a Moroccan national who lived in the house where Zawahiri was killed according to sources close to al Qaeda.

It is expected that the new emir will also be based in the Afghan-Pakistani-Iran region rather than the Arabian Peninsula since the Taliban now controls Afghanistan and the Tehreek Taliban Pakistan (TTP) are a growing presence in the tribal Pashtun areas of North-western Pakistan. Many senior Taliban and al Qaeda figures have hidden in the region for two decades despite the heavy American and allied presence.

Another former jihadist close to al Qaeda elements in the region says that the rush for Zawahiri's successor has also been halted because of Taliban influence. "The Taliban told al Qaeda, 'We once sacrificed our regime for al Qaeda.' If al Qaeda confirms his death in the Kabul attack, it will embarrass the Taliban, so they are keeping the death and the successor hidden and plan to announce it as a natural death," he told The Daily Beast. "Al Qaeda wanted to have a public funeral under the Islamic regime of Taliban, but the Taliban would not allow it."

The Islamic State and the Question of "Lone Wolves"

Source: https://eeradicalization.com/the-islamic-state-and-the-question-of-lone-wolves/

European Eye on Radicalization

جانب من تدريبات الملتحقين بمعسكر الأخ المدرّب داوود الصومالي (تقبله الله)   محرم 1441   SOMAL

Jan 09 – The Islamic State (ISIS) attacked a police checkpoint in the city of Ismailia, Egypt, on 30 December, killing four people, three of them policemen, and injuring twelve people. The attack was claimed the next day via ISIS's Amaq News Agency. This is a reminder that, despite the loss of its "caliphate" in 2019, ISIS remains dangerous across the world and raises again the issue of "lone wolves". This is not the first time recently that ISIS

has attacked Ismailia—there was another attack a month before this last one—and, over the past year, ISIS has been escalating its operations in the Sinai and other areas of Egypt, part of a broader trend of increased ISIS activity in Africa. ISIS officially arrived in Egypt in November 2014, when the Al-Qaeda group, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM), defected to ISIS, five months after the declaration of the "caliphate" covering areas of Iraq and Syria. ABM was thereafter known as Wilayat Sinai.

Al-Qaeda had begun forming "affiliates" in the early 2000s. The first one was ISIS, ironically, known at the time as Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Since then, affiliates have been formed in West Africa, known as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM); in Yemen, known as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP); and in Somalia, called Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahideen (HSM).

After ISIS was expelled from Al-Qaeda in February 2014, it began creating *wilayats* (provinces), often by annexing former Al-Qaeda groups, as was the case with ABM, though not always: in Libya, ISIS imported the wilayat wholesale, bringing in thousands of fighters from outside and creating in effect a colony on the North African coast. What happened in Libya is key to understanding ISIS's conception of its wilayats. The difference is that where Al-Qaeda's structure was designed to provide resources and common strategic guidance from Al-Qaeda Central (AQC) to the affiliates, while giving them broad autonomy to pursue their jihadist aims in a local context, ISIS's wilayat model was the reverse: it was designed to bring the local jihadists into a highly centralised structure. And it succeeded.

ISIS "Central" dispatched very senior operatives to the wilayats to carry out a step-by-step process, beginning with the local groups' media infrastructure, that brought them under centralized control. The end result was, as a recent report for EER documented, that ISIS spread out across the world, while remaining "a monolithic, entirely centralized, supranational organization; it does not have franchises, affiliates, or allies, only provinces of a supranational Empire, and its leadership controls all personnel, funding, and decision-making in every province".

Given this knowledge built up over the last decade, it is bizarre that it took so long for analysts to accept that when the "Allied Democratic Forces" (ADF) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo declared allegiance to ISIS, it *really* became an ISIS province; this was not just a branding exercise. The model of ISIS refashioning a local group into a wilayat under centralised administration followed the exact model of the earlier ones, beginning with "ADF" media coming under the control of ISIS "Central". There was also other publicly available evidence from sanctions notifications of financial streams from ISIS "Central" to "ADF"—and the same was true of Mozambique, where analysts similarly showed a strange reluctance for a time to accept that ISIS had arrived.

The analytical hesitancy in recognising the reality of ISIS in the Congo and Mozambique is part of a continuum with how the analytical community has handled the question of ISIS "lone wolves". Especially during the height of ISIS's global attacks campaign from 2014-17, a lot of media coverage was given to "lone wolf" attacks, or, as they were often called, "ISIS-inspired" attacks. The latter designation—"inspired"—was, in itself, an indicator that these operatives were not truly "lone" actors. The reality was that ISIS had evolved a sophisticated system for *directing* lone actors in Western countries through the foreign branch of its intelligence system, known as Amn al-Kharji. Only a small minority of ISIS's attacks *could* be categorized as "lone wolf" attacks, and even that number is probably inflated: we simply lack information about how a number of these attacks were actually conducted; if we had the full facts, many would likely be shown to have a connections to ISIS.

As Schuurman et al. explained a half-decade ago, this is not just the case with ISIS: almost all lone-actor terrorism results from broader networks and ecosystems that cultivate and assist in such attacks. The individual who carries out the terrorist attack is the tip of the iceberg—the smallest and in many ways most insignificant part of the threat picture. "Arguably, truly lone attackers are so uncommon as to be anomalies, rather than the basis for a distinct typology of terrorism", the authors contend.

Nonetheless, ISIS has tried to capitalize on "lone wolves" as a low-cost, high-reward part of their strategy. The group has made a booklet simply entitled "Lone Wolves" that contains instructions for its followers worldwide to individually carry out terrorist attacks without getting in contact with the group. The instructions include things such as "shave your beard, wear Western clothes, use general and regular perfumes, and encrypt your phones." The booklet encourages that "any (lone wolf) must try to assimilate and integrate into the local community", and "try to always be like any ordinary tourist or traditional traveler". The instructions even extend to the dress sense of would-be ISIS terrorists: "try to match the colors of the clothes, so wearing a red or yellow shirt with black pants makes you suspicious, and there is no need for you to wear new clothes because that it may raise suspicions".

True "lone wolves" pose the most difficult task for police and security agencies, since they are almost impossible to detect and dismantle, despite human and technical surveillance measures, because such methods rely on "leakage" of details before an attack and a genuine "lone wolf" will not have been in contact with anybody else. With modern communications, ISIS and other terrorists are able to spread their message easily across the world: intellectually, the number of individuals converted to these ideologies is growing and flourishing day after day, within our societies, and they are difficult to control with the tools of conventional war.

It is believed that ISIS targets individuals with psychological and social disorders and criminal records to serve as lone wolves. There are elements that, again, are not affiliated with other people, which makes

monitoring them and preventing their actions almost impossible. It is difficult for the regular armies to confront extremists set on carrying out terrorism, when the only early warning is in the individual's head.

In conclusion, the threat of "terrorist lone wolves", whose actions result from purely internal motives, who have no interaction terrorist groups or others with the same extremist beliefs, raises a very serious question about how best to keep our societies safe. The threat is growing from these individuals, and there are no easy answers.

Key Official Says US Must Not Overlook Al-Qaida, Islamic State

Source: https://www.voanews.com/a/key-official-says-us-must-not-overlook-al-qaida-islamic-state/6913250.html

FILE - A view shows a damaged hotel building in Shahr-e-Naw neighborhood, which was attacked by Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) in Kabul, Afghanistan, Dec. 13, 2022.

Jan 10 – For months the gaze of U.S. counterterrorism officials has been shifting, moving from scrutiny of foreign terrorist organizations to individuals in the United States seeking out ideologies to justify their use of violence.

The most likely attackers, according to the government's most recent terrorism advisory, are lone actors or small groups motivated by a wide array of beliefs and personal grievances who pose a "persistent and lethal threat to the homeland."

But while attacks like the May 2022 mass shooting that killed 10 Black shoppers in Buffalo, New York, continue to grab headlines and the attention of officials, the top U.S. counterterrorism official cautions that jihadi groups, such as al-Qaida and Islamic State, cannot be forgotten. "We have still got to be really vigilant about the threat posed by those organizations that are based overseas that want to conduct attacks against Americans here in the homeland," National Counterterrorism Center Director Christine Abizaid said Tuesday at an event hosted by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"The al-Qaida- and ISIS-inspired threat is still there," she said, using an acronym for the Islamic State group, which is also known as IS or Daesh. Years of counterterrorism pressure by the U.S. and its partners have taken a toll on the two groups, whittling away each group's core leaders.

Islamic State

IS has been especially hard hit, losing two emirs over the past 12 months — Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi during a raid by U.S. special forces in northwest Syria last February and Abu al-Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi during an independent operation by the Free Syrian Army this past October.

In the months between those two deaths, the U.S. and its partner forces in Syria and Iraq, as well as allies like Turkey, killed or captured another 10 senior IS leaders. But the victories against IS appear to have

done little to dampen overall enthusiasm for the group and its affiliates. "ISIS is actually a very dynamic group that continues to be led from this core in Iraq and Syria, continues to have interest in not just their sort of territorial integrity but in the notoriety and the brand expansion and attacks against the West," Abizaid said. "We see ISIS's expansion across the African continent. We see concerning indications of ISIS-Khorasan in Afghanistan and its ambition that might go beyond that immediate territory," she added, calling the IS Afghan affiliate the "threat actor I am most concerned about," while declining to estimate how soon it could threaten interests outside Afghanistan.

Al-Qaida

Al-Qaida, too, has been dealt some severe blows, perhaps none so important as the death of longtime leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in a U.S. drone strike in Kabul in August. "Zawahiri was the center of gravity for that network," Abizaid said. "He was both symbolically important but also strategically important for what was a diverse network of affiliates."
And according to the most recent U.S. intelligence estimates, more than six months after his death, al-Zawahiri has still not been replaced. "The question for al-Qaida, that it hasn't answered for itself, is who follows," Abizaid said. "The best candidates are Saif al-Adel and Abdul Rahman al-Maghrebi, that are sitting in Iran … What does that mean for their credibility? What does that mean for their ability to lead?" U.S. intelligence also suggests other parts of the Afghanistan-based al-Qaida organization have been further marginalized, perhaps by design at the direction of the Taliban or the Haqqani network, with Abizaid saying the affiliate known as al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent, once thought to have a few hundred fighters in the country, is now "defunct."
She warned, however, it would be dangerous to write off al-Qaida just yet. "The al-Qaida problem there is a problem," Abizaid said of Afghanistan.

Syria

There are also concerns about al-Qaida's remnants in Syria, most notably the faction known as Hurras al-Din, a group with 1,000 to 3,000 fighters whose leaders have been targeted by U.S. airstrikes in the past. "Their stature, some of the interconnectivity with other aspects of the al-Qaida network, I think, are important and really resonant in the Hurras al-Din presence," according to Abizaid. And she warned that the overall environment in Syria makes it a cauldron of potential terrorist activity poised to benefit al-Qaida, IS or eventually some other group. "You have significant population of radicalized individuals in IDP [internally displaced person] camps, in prisons scattered throughout Syria, that represents the potential of a future threat if not appropriately engaged and handled," Abizaid said.

Iran

In addition to IS and al-Qaida, Abizaid said Iran and its proxies, active across the Middle East and even in Afghanistan, have become ever more open in their willingness to conduct terrorist attacks. "I would describe Iran's interest in conducting terrorist attacks overseas as one of the most striking developments," the NCTC director said. "What I see is a pretty brazen Iranian threat network that is willing to explore avenues for attack internationally and in the region." While some Iranian proxies, like Lebanese Hezbollah, have been increasingly vocal, Abizaid warned, "it's not just a proxy battle." "Iran is leveraging its own capability to threaten various actors," she said. "That we have actual evidence of them trying to pursue that interest inside the United States is a real concern," she said, noting the Iranian plot to kill former U.S. national security adviser Ambassador John Bolton."The threats against Iranian activists and journalists here in the United States are also persistent and concerning," Abizaid said.

Are al-Qaeda's 2022 Activities a Harbinger of the Terror Group's Resurgence?

By Mahmut Cengiz
Source: https://www.hstoday.us/featured/are-al-qaedas-2022-activities-a-harbinger-of-the-terror-groups-resurgence/

Jan 09 – Attacks by jihadist terrorist groups continued in 2022 and showed no signs of abating. ISIS-Core in Syria and Iraq and its affiliates in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa have threatened regional security and proved that they would constantly menace global security in 2023. Correspondingly, Al Qaeda-affiliated groups also have been active in regions and perpetrated hundreds of terrorist attacks in conflict zones such as in Syria and Yemen, the Sahel region such as in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger and its nearby countries in Togo and Benin, and the Horn of Africa such as in Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia. As opposed to ISIS-Core, which has been actively involved in terrorist attacks, Al Qaeda-Core has maintained its strategy of operating through its localized groups in these countries. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Syria, Al-Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) in the Sahel region, and Al-

Shabaab in Somalia have continued to convene local jihadist groups under their flags. Additionally, Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) solidified its presence in Afghanistan and India and threatened regional security, taking advantage of the Taliban's takeover that presented opportunities for Al Qaeda to operate and harbor in Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban's takeover has heated debate over whether Al Qaeda would use Afghanistan as a safe haven country. Nonetheless, the killing of Al Qaeda's leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, in an over-the-horizon operation in downtown Kabul on July 31, 2022, did not live up to expectations and pointed to the close relationship between the Taliban government and Al Qaeda. The Haqqani Network Group, an Al-Qaida-affiliated organization, has already been embedded in the Taliban government, and its leader has been the Minister of Interior, making Afghanistan one of the safe havens of Al Qaeda. AQIS has embedded in Taliban ranks and settled in Afghanistan with its estimated 200-400 fighters. The organization also published an English and Urdu statement and called for attacks targeting the Indian governing party on June 7, 2022. The United States government designated three other AQIS leaders as terrorists on December 1, 2022, underlining that AQIS is one of the jihadist groups that operate in Afghanistan.

In the conflict zones, Al Qaeda-affiliated groups continued to do attacks in Syria and Yemen. HTS has been the perpetrator of hundreds of attacks yearly and targets Syrian regime forces, international military, and Kurdish groups. The group continued to control territory and set itself up as the civic authority in areas including the province of Idlib. HTS was able to enter Afrin city and occupied northern Aleppo province on October 11, 2022. Five regime soldiers lost their lives in another HTS attack on November 7, 2022. In Yemen, AQAP was one of the most active groups in 2015 and 2016 and the perpetrator of hundred of attacks; however, the group lost its capacity over the years and was able to conduct 29 attacks in 2018, 16 attacks in 2019, and 30 attacks in 2020. However, Yemen experienced the resurgence of the organization that targeted Southern Transition Council (STC)-affiliated Security Belt forces and killed 20 STC fighters in Ahwar on September 6, 2022, and then launched its operation to target STC-affiliated forces on September 13, 2022.

Africa deserves specific attention regarding spreading Al Qaeda's influence and presence in Somalia, the Sahel and its neighboring countries, and Nigeria. New trends have underlined the geographic expansion of Al Qaeda attacks in Africa.

In the Horn of Africa, Al Shabaab is the most active and powerful Al Qaeda group. The group is the product of a failed state in Somalia where local Sharia courts have evolved into a terrorist organization capable of controlling territory, acting like a de facto state, and targeting state institutions with complex coordinated terrorist attacks. The organization collects taxes, rules out court cases, and patrols streets. Today the group, deeply embedded in Somalian society, is resilient and resourceful in adjusting to counter-insurgency campaigns. The elections in May 2022 changed the government, and the selection of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud ended a bitter election period but has failed to impact Al Shabaab's capacity severely. The group continued its deadly attacks after the elections. For example, a suicide bombing attack targeting a military base in Mogadishu killed one soldier and injured six others on September 2022. The group was the perpetrator of bombing attacks targeting the Education Ministry on October 29, 2022, in Mogadishu, which killed 121 people and injured more than 300 others. Al Shabaab did not stop its deadly suicide attacks in the following days and conducted another one on November 27, 2022, targeting an international hotel in Mogadishu. In addition to its highly complex attacks in Somalia, Al Shabaab has made attacks in Kenya. After issuing a new threat and saying that Al Shabaab would continue its attacks in Kenya in late August 2022, the group was the perpetrator of abducting four Kenyans in November and targeted the Northern Frontier District killing two people in December 2022.

Furthermore, the group expanded its influence in nearby countries and conducted attacks in Ethiopia. Aiming to benefit from security vacuums left by the Ethiopian government that struggled with unrest at home since the Tigray conflict in late 2020, Al Shabaab began to train ethnic Somalis and Oromos in 2021. Hundreds of its militants crossed the border in eastern Ethiopia and claimed responsibility for killing dozens of Ethiopian soldiers on April 2022. As a result, its militants retreated, but the group remains active in the border region. Emboldened by its previous successful attacks in the region, Al Shabaab launched a multi-day invasion in July 2022 and succeeded in evading Ethiopian forces and briefly took control over Hulhul, a town inside Ethiopia.

In the Sahel region, jihadist attacks draw the most significant attention. ISIS-Greater Sahara, ISIS's regional branch, and Al Qaeda's JNIM groups have been active in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. JNIM, a merger of four jihadist groups in the Sahel – Ansar Dine, Katibat Macina, al-Mourabitoun, and the Sahara branch of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) – was formed in 2017 and waged a campaign of violence targeting civilians, local security forces, UN peacekeepers, and international militaries. The group uses pastoralist populism, a strategy based on operationalizing the conflicts and benefiting from ethnic divisions, and controls territory in central Mali. The international military, local security forces, and ISIS-GS branch targeted JNIM in the Sahel countries in 2022, but the group has remained the most active and deadliest actor across the Sahel. Since the withdrawal of French forces in October 2021, JNIM targeted UN peacekeeping missions in more than 50 attacks. In addition, JNIM has expanded its influence and has been involved in attacks in Togo and Benin. Its first attacks were recorded in 2021, but the group targeted the military in these countries in 2022. For example, JNIM attacked a military outpost

and killed 17 soldiers in Togo in November 2022. On the same day, the terrorist group conducted two attacks in Benin and wounded one soldier.

In Nigeria, Ansaru is another Al Qaeda-affiliated group. The organization was formed in 2012 by Boko Haram's former militants and had a high representation of the perpetrators of terrorist attacks in the following years. However, the group faded into obscurity and lost its power starting in 2015. Claiming that the group defends the interests of Islam in the regions where the group operates, Ansaru's comeback has taken place in Nigeria's North-West and North-Central zones, recording the soaring numbers of banditry violence against civilians and government forces. Ansaru has provided weapons and other support to bandits. Kidnapping in the region has been vital for the organization to sustain and expand its activities.

Al Qaeda attacks in 2022 show that Al Qaeda is still a resilient organization. The group adjusts its strategies in its regions based on how the organization can get recruits to sustain and expand its global influence. Al Qaeda-affiliated groups capitalize on conditions related to Muslim grievances and weak government responses in Africa. Muslim communities in the Sahel, which feel discriminated against by other ethnic groups, tend to join JNIM to respond to their "enemy" groups. It is the weak government response and providing logistics to banditry groups in northwestern Nigeria where Ansaru takes advantage of operating. Leaving these Al Qaeda groups to operate freely in Africa worsens the situation, and they opportunistically aim to expand their activities in neighboring countries. International military involvement seems to be an effective solution to train local forces, provide resources, and take a leading role in operations.

Since the September 11, 2001, attacks, effective western counterterrorism efforts against Al Qaeda have pushed the organization to adjust its strategies and resulted in delegating central leadership. In this period, Al Qaeda has decentralized and allowed its regional affiliates to operate independently to tailor their strategy based on country- and regional-level developments. Nevertheless, the organization's global activities, successful attacks across the globe, and expansion, particularly in Africa, show that Al Qaeda will compete again with ISIS to be the leader of global jihadism, threaten regional security, and maintain its status as a threatening terrorist organization in the following years.

Dr. Mahmut Cengiz is an Associate Professor and Research Faculty with Terrorism, Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC) and the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University. Dr. Cengiz has international field experience where he has delivered capacity building and training assistance to international partners in the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. He also has been involved in research projects for the Brookings Institute, European Union, and various U.S. agencies. Dr. Cengiz regularly publishes books, articles and Op-eds. He is the author of six books, a number of articles, and book chapters regarding terrorism, organized crime, smuggling, terrorist financing, and trafficking issues. His 2019 book, "The Illicit Economy in Turkey: How Criminals, Terrorists, and the Syrian Conflict Fuel Underground Economies," analyzes the role of criminals, money launderers, and corrupt politicians and discusses the involvement of ISIS and al-Qaida-affiliated groups in illicit economy. Dr. Cengiz holds two masters and two doctorate degrees from Turkey and the United States. His Turkish graduate degrees are in sociology. He has a master's degree from the School of International Service Program of American University and a Ph.D. from the School of Public Policy program of George Mason University. He is teaching Terrorism, American Security Policy and Narco-Terrorism courses at George Mason University.

Attack at the Gare du Nord: Algerian or Libyan… The identity of the suspect remains uncertain

Source: https://oopstop.com/attack-at-the-gare-du-nord-algerian-or-libyan-the-identity-of-the-suspect-remains-uncertain/

- Six people were injured, including one seriously, by stabbing, Wednesday Gare du Nord in Paris, by a man immediately overpowered by police on the spot. An investigation has been opened on the head of the attempted murder, entrusted to the entire judicial police with the criminal brigade as coordinator.
- Investigators from the crime squad are trying to put a name to the face of the suspect, who had no identity papers on him. It could be "a man born in Libya or Algeria and in his twenties, whose exact age is not confirmed", indicated in the evening the public prosecutor of Paris, Laure Beccuau.
- The attacker, who was known to police files by several names, "could not be interviewed given his state of health," said the magistrate.

Jan 11 – Crime Squad investigators are still trying to positively identify the man who attacked. and injured six people to two; the white weapon, this Wednesday morning, at the Gare du Nord (10th). No identity

document has been found on the suspect who was mastered by police officers who opened fire on him. Touché in the arm and in the lung, it was transported to the Pitié-Salpêtrière hospital. It has been operated during the day.

The aggressor first gave, in the morning, a first identity. which, in the end, turned out to be false. By comparing his fingerprints with those in their files, the police discovered that he was already known to their services for acts of common law, under several names and with different dates of birth.

A man in his twenties

"It could be a man born in Libya or Algeria and around 20 years old, whose exact age is not confirmed," in the evening the prosecutor of the Republic of Paris, Laure Beccuau, in a press release. The suspect "could not be interviewed. given his state of health," the magistrate.

According to our information, one of the identities under which he was registered in the automated file fingerprint matches that of a Libyan national, born in 2000, arrived in France three years ago. This person is subject to an obligation to leave French territory (OQTF), issued in 2022, which had not been issued. executed. Indeed, France could not expel him to this country. First, because of the instability who reigns there. But also because there is no exchange channel with Libya for the identification of its nationals.

"A metal hook" as a weapon

At approximately 6:45 a.m., the suspect injured several people in the Gare du Nord with "a metal hook, the longest part of which ends in a point, surrounded by a metal hook. on its major part of a string allowing a

gaceta.es/europa/de-orig...

Συνέχεια παρακολούθησης στο Twitter

34,8 χιλ. προβολές   0:06 / 0:27

10:30 π.μ. · 12 Ιαν 2023

better grip," said the Paris prosecutor. He initially attacked himself, "for no apparent reason at all" at this point" a first victim """""" which he struck about twenty strokes". In all, six people were injured. "These are two men aged 36 and 41, station users, a 46-year-old policeman assigned to the station. to the border police (PAF) at the Gare du Nord, and three women aged 40, 47, and 53, station users" Laure Beccuau.

An investigation was carried out. open on the charge of attempted assassination, entrusted to the whole of the judicial police with the criminal brigade as coordinator. The general inspection of the national police was also seized because of the use by police officers of their service weapon.

For the time being, the motivations of the assailant remain unclear. "To my knowledge, he didn't say anything" at the material time, said the Minister of the Interior, Gérald Darmanin, during a press briefing. But according to our information, the police officers who fired, indicated hearing him say things in Arabic that were not "Allahu Akbar" An element that the police officers of the Crime 'were still trying to verify this afternoon. The National Anti-Terrorist Prosecutor's Office (Pnat) indicated to *20 Minutes* that he was, for the time being, "under evaluation".

Is Islamist terror a threat to Germany?

By Marcel Fürstenau
Source: https://www.dw.com/en/is-islamist-terror-a-threat-to-germany/a-64369110

Jan 12 – The arrest of two terror suspects once again raises questions about the scope of the terrorist threat to Germany. It also brings back memories of the 2016 Christmas market attack.

The most recent arrest of two terror suspects in Germany has raised the specter of Islamist terror in Germany — despite intensified efforts to prevent such an attack in recent years.

Two men had intended to kill "an unspecified number of people" using ricin and cyanide, the Düsseldorf prosecutor general's office announced this week.

The police did not find any bomb-making materials on the men arrested in Castrop-Rauxel, a small town in the western state of North Rhine-Westphalia, on January 8. Nevertheless, the brothers from Iran, aged 32 and 25, remain in custody.

Despite unsuccessful searches of apartments and garages, investigators believe that the terror suspects, who arrived in Germany in 2015, wanted to obtain cyanide and ricin, substances that are extremely toxic even in the smallest of quantities.

In retrospect, what the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution's (BfV) President Thomas Haldenwang said in June 2022 when he presented his annual report sounds almost like a prophecy: "The overall picture is dominated in particular by small groups and individual perpetrators acting alone, who are recruited and radicalized through online propaganda."

The two men arrested also seem to fit this profile.

Tip-off from US intelligence

According to the public prosecutor's office, the tipoff about the brothers came from the US.

The Minister of the Interior Nancy Faeser said that 21 Islamist attacks have been prevented in Germany since 2000. However, this would hardly have been possible without the support of foreign intelligence services, especially in the US.

This is the assessment of expert Guido Steinberg of the Berlin-based German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) in a study commissioned by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

In 2021, Steinberg warned that it would be a risk to "outsource" large parts of German counterterrorism to the US. Germany has had great difficulties in the fight against Islamist terrorism since 2001, "primarily concerning the early detection of terrorist planning through human and technical resources."

Biological warfare

At first glance, this most recent case resembles the more advanced terror plot that was uncovered in Cologne in June 2018, where the man accused had stored large quantities of ricin in his apartment.

Two years later, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison for preparing a serious act of violence endangering the state.

The most serious Islamist attack in Germany occurred in December 2016, when Anis Amri drove a truck into a Christmas market in Berlin. Twelve people died in the attack.

The number of terrorist attacks and plots dropped sharply after the attack on the Christmas market in Berlin.

According to Steinberg, this is primarily a result of the decline of the extremist group knwon as Islamic State (IS) in the Middle East as well as improved technical reconnaissance by the United States.

It is "less due to the effectiveness of Germany's counterterrorism efforts, which remain fragmented, patchy and error-prone," his analysis states.

Due to Germany's federal structure, all 16 federal states have their own police and constitutional protection agencies, which for a long time exchanged little information with each other.

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But since 2004, they have been sitting at the same table with representatives of eight federal security agencies in the Joint Counter-Terrorism Center (GTAZ) in Berlin — this has helped eliminate many coordination problems.

Nevertheless, the case of Anis Amri showed that the problems are of a more fundamental nature, Steinberg said.

Amri was initially classified as dangerous and placed under surveillance, but after he moved from North Rhine-Westphalia to Berlin in 2016, the German capital's police force classified him as a petty criminal and therefore no longer dangerous.

"His surveillance expired, paving the way for the Breitscheidplatz attack on December 19," Steinberg concluded. The findings of a special investigator from the Berlin Senate support this view.

Fewer potential threats

The fact that the threat of any new terrorist attack may still be underestimated could also be down to the sharp decline in the number of so-called "dangerous persons" the police believe are capable of carrying out such attacks.

In 2018, the police registered more than 770 people as Islamist extremists; two years later, there were just under 630, and now only around 530.

"The attacks that have occurred in Germany in recent years were all perpetrated by individuals from the spectrum of self-radicalized lone perpetrators," BfV President Thomas Haldenwang told German news agency DPA in an interview in December. The two terror suspects arrested now, just a few weeks later, may also belong on this spectrum.

Even if no bomb-making chemicals are found, the brothers may still face charges. If it can be proven that the young men were indeed preparing for a serious act of violence, they would face prison sentences of anything between six months and 10 years.

'Is There Something More Sinister Going On?' Authorities Fear Extremists Are Targeting U.S. Power Grid

Source: https://time.com/6244977/us-power-grid-attacks-extremism/
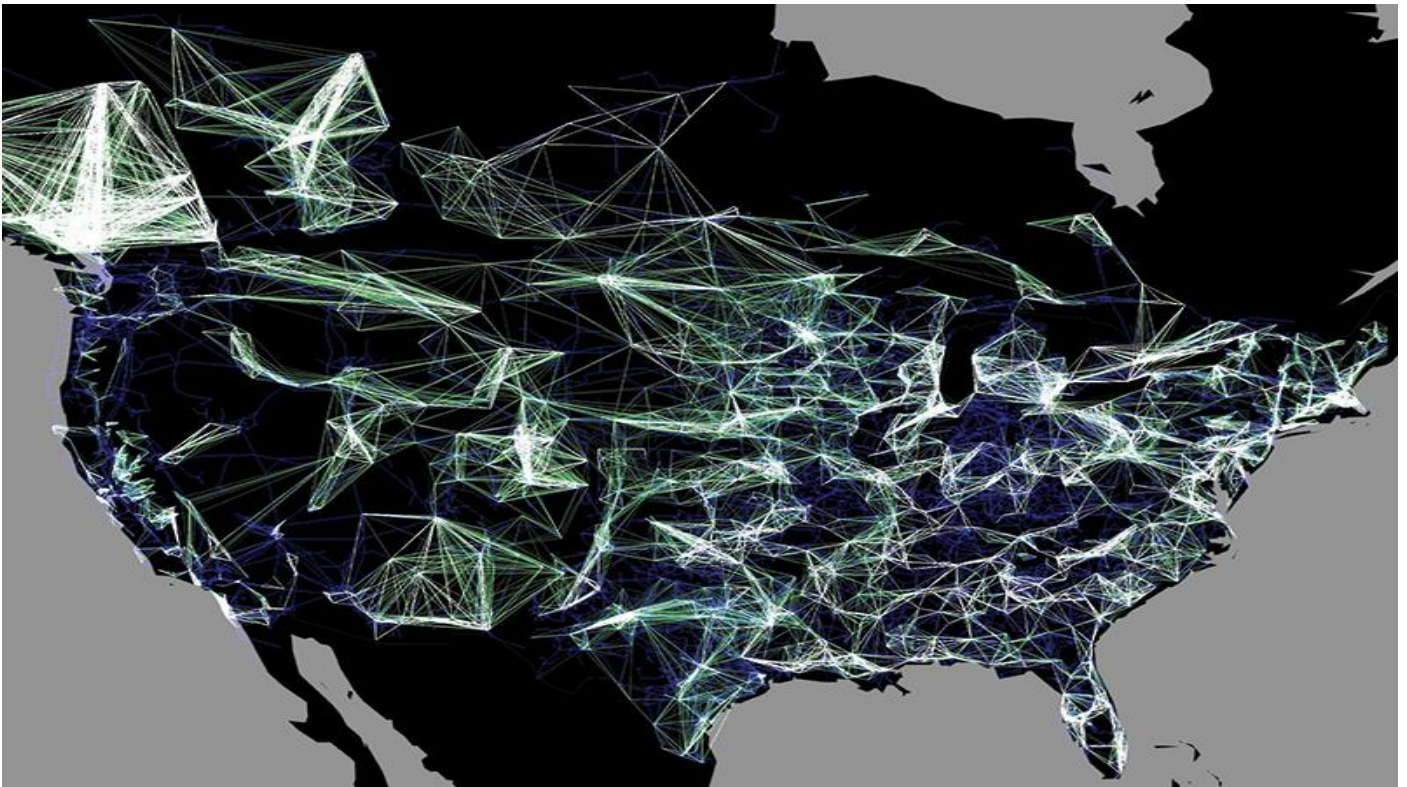
Network visualization map of the US electric grid

Jan 09 – A string of mysterious attacks on power stations across the U.S. has rekindled fears about the vulnerabilities of America's electricity infrastructure, which security officials have warned presents a growing target to extremists and saboteurs. Attacks and suspicious activity at U.S. power stations reached

a decade-long high last year, with more than 100 reported incidents in the first eight months of 2022, according to a TIME review of the Department of Energy's most recent data, which runs through August. Since then, there have been at least 18 more publicly reported attacks or potential attacks on substations and power plants in Florida, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, and Washington.

The tally includes at least half a dozen at Duke Energy facilities in Florida and at least six others on electrical substations in the Pacific Northwest in November and December. In one attack on Thanksgiving, two intruders cut through the fencing around a substation in Clackamas County, Ore., and "used firearms to shoot up and disable numerous pieces of equipment and cause significant damage," according to an incident report. And in the most high-profile incident, intruders breached the gates and opened fire on two Duke Energy substations in Moore County, N.C., in early December, damaging equipment in what local authorities called a "targeted" attack that cut off the power for more than 45,000 people.

It's not clear who's behind all this. But the surge has alarmed federal officials and security analysts, who warned last year of "credible, specific plans" by violent domestic groups to attack the power grid. Violent conspiracies focused on targeting and destroying energy infrastructure have become one of the top themes on extremist social-media platforms and messaging apps. In each of the last three years, law enforcement has foiled plots by right-wing extremists designed to sow chaos by attacking America's electrical infrastructure. Now, officials say, the rise in incidents suggests the perpetrators may be drawing inspiration from one another, fine-tuning strategies to pursue potentially more damaging copycat attacks. Each incident—and each suspect that escapes undetected—further emboldens a determined cadre of criminals and highlights the U.S. power grid as a target.

"Domestic terror groups understand that citizens losing power from gunfire or sabotage is an easy way to receive media attention, which they crave," says Brian Harrell, a former Assistant Secretary for Infrastructure Protection at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), who tells TIME he expects a significant increase in attacks on U.S. energy infrastructure in 2023. "The utility sector has a real problem on its hands. Power stations are an attractive target, and domestic terror groups know that destroying this infrastructure can have a crippling effect."

The motives and methods of the recent attacks vary. Some of the perpetrators may have been seeking money, not mayhem. Federal authorities say that the attacks on four substations in western Washington State on Christmas Day, which left more than 14,000 residents in the dark, were perpetrated by two men seeking to knock out power so they could commit a robbery.

Yet many others remain mysterious to law enforcement and federal regulators. The case that most concerns authorities is the Dec. 3 attack on two power stations in Moore County, N.C. A month later, despite an ongoing FBI investigation continues, no one has been arrested for acts of sabotage that left more than 45,000 people without power amid frigid temperatures. Law enforcement officials, who have offered up to $75,000 for anyone who can provide information that would lead to the arrest of those responsible, have said that the perpetrators took aim at the substations with firearms with the intention to cause widespread outages.

Several experts and former officials told TIME they believed that attack was committed by someone who knew what they were doing. "I'm certain that the North Carolina attackers have insider knowledge on substations and critical energy infrastructure and knew how to attack, undetected," says Harrell, noting they knew where to access sites and what to shoot at—and that no security would be in place. Jon Wellinghoff, who served as chairman of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) from 2009 to 2013, says the incident in Moore County was the most sophisticated he had seen since a 2013 attack on the Pacific Gas and Electric Company's substation near San Jose, Calif., in which multiple gunmen fired on the facility and caused $15 million in damages. No one was ever arrested in that case. Whoever perpetrated the attack in North Carolina "were fairly sophisticated," Wellinghoff says. "They wanted to knock out a particular area of that county…and were able to select the substation that would knock out that entire line."

The effectiveness of the attack in Moore County is likely to lead more bad actors or extremist groups to "learn more information about the infrastructure itself and how it operates" online in order to carry out similar attacks, Wellinghoff adds. "You have the ability now to look at selected areas of the country and knock those out depending on how they are interconnected, and that information of where those lines and those substations are is all available to anybody on the Internet."

That makes the U.S. power grid—which spans more than 7,300 power plants, 55,000 transmission substations and 160,000 miles of high-voltage power lines—a particularly soft target for determined attackers. "It's inherently vulnerable, because it's constructed in such a way that if one part of it can be destroyed or impaired it can have a very significant impact on other larger parts of it very quickly," says Dr. Granger Morgan, a professor of engineering at Carnegie Mellon University who chaired three National Academy of Sciences reports on the power grid for the federal government. "Kind of like dominoes."

Saboteurs have been taking aim at this infrastructure for decades. In some parts of the country, for instance, hunting season has always brought an uptick in troublemakers taking potshots at insulators and other equipment. But the attacks like the ones on the North Carolina substations are "a different ballgame," FERC Commissioner Mark Christie said at the agency's December meeting, calling them "sophisticated." Morgan has also noticed a shift in recent incidents. "These increasing attacks on things like large transformers and circuit

breakers are significantly more troubling," he says, raising concerns of a "copycat effect" which could eventually lead to a more coordinated attack by perpetrators with the knowledge to cause significant damage. "Many of these [power stations] are only blocked off by chain-link fences in the middle of nowhere," he says, often without personnel guarding them.

An analysis by the FERC reported by the Wall Street Journal in 2014 found that the U.S. could suffer a blackout across the country for weeks or months if saboteurs simultaneously targeted just nine of the 55,0000 substations, threatening the collapse of the entire network. Natural events have previously highlighted this vulnerability. In 2003, tree branches touching power lines in Ohio created a cascading effect that ended in the most widespread blackout in North American history.

Authorities have said little about the culprits behind the surge in attacks. But officials have suggested they are worried about coordination between more nefarious actors. "Is there something more sinister going on? Are people trying to take part of the grid out and have people lose power on purpose? And for what reason?" Richard Glick, who chaired the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) until Jan. 3, said at a press briefing in December. "I don't think anyone knows that right now. But there's no doubt that the numbers are up in terms of reported incidents." While there are no public indications that the attacks have been perpetrated by people motivated by extremist groups or ideologies, violent conspiracies and manifestos focused on targeting and destroying energy infrastructure in order to cause fear and chaos have been widely shared on extremist social-media platforms and messaging apps. Law enforcement has foiled several plots inspired by these narratives in recent years. In May 2020, three men claiming to be members of the far-right "Boogaloo" movement were arrested for allegedly conspiring to "firebomb" power substations in Las Vegas to provoke violence during Black Lives Matter protests in the city. The three men, who had military backgrounds, have pleaded not guilty to federal conspiracy charges and still remain in custody awaiting trial in both state and federal courts.

In August 2021, four neo-Nazis in North Carolina were charged with a conspiracy in which they intended to take down a critical substation with firearms and explosives, according to prosecutors. The group, which met on a neo-Nazi accelerationist forum and included two former U.S. Marines, "discussed their plans to take out the power grid" and assembled a list of a dozen targets. They discussed targeting energy infrastructure "for the purpose of creating general chaos and to provide cover and ease of escape in those areas in which they planned to undertake assassinations and other desired operations to further their goal of creating a white ethno-state," according to the government. Two of the men have pleaded guilty and agreed to cooperate with the government while others await trial. In Feb. 2022, three avowed white supremacists pleaded guilty in Ohio to terrorism-related charges for a similar plot to knock out parts of the U.S. power grid, in what prosecutors described as an attempt to cause panic and chaos to start a "race war." The group "wanted to attack regional power substations and expected the damage would lead to economic distress and civil unrest," Timothy Langan, the assistant director of the FBI's Counterterrorism Division, said in a statement.

A DHS intelligence memo last year warned of "credible, specific plans" by domestic violent extremists "adhering to a range of ideologies" who would "continue to plot and encourage physical attacks against electrical infrastructure." Officials said extremists were encouraging attacks on the power grid on encrypted messaging apps and other platforms, making suspicious activity difficult to detect. They also noted that extremists seemed to reference the 2013 attack in California, which is widely cited by some extremist groups as a model of how to cause widespread disruption and get away. At the same time, a 14-page handbook circulated on accelerationist channels on Telegram called for followers to "strike a blow to this system" by damaging electricity infrastructure to "spark revolution and chaos." After the Moore County attack in December, federal regulators ordered a review of the physical security of electrical facilities. But experts say the aging state of the nation's electricity infrastructure, a patchwork of public and private ownership, and the overlapping federal, state and local regulations will continue to make many substations easy targets. And even as authorities work to tighten the security of these facilities, they sound resigned to the attacks continuing.

"A determined adversary with insider knowledge as to what to shoot, and how to cripple key components, is difficult to stop," says Harrell, the former DHS official. "If the attackers stay underground, don't highlight themselves, and don't get caught, they preserve their ability to attack again."

Deconstructing Counterterrorism: What Has Worked and What More Needs To Be Done

Source: https://eeradicalization.com/deconstructing-counterterrorism-what-has-worked-and-what-more-needs-to-be-done/

Jan 13 – In an interview with EER, Professor Thomas Renard, Director of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), discusses the evolution of terrorism since the nineteenth century until present, highlighting important developments in the counterterrorism sphere, particularly surrounding the birth of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and its aftermath, and its subsequent impact on Europe. Below are excerpts from a discussion with Professor Renard regarding his recent book, "The Evolution of Counter-Terrorism Since 9/11".

EER: Are there important similarities between the nineteenth-century terrorist movements and Islamist terrorism from the late twentieth century onwards?

TR: Although every comparison has its limits, there are some interesting parallels. Anarchist terrorism was part of a "global wave of terrorism" (in the words of David Rapoport), impacting many countries around the world at the same time, just like Islamist terrorism nowadays. Looking at individual trajectories, one can see interesting parallels as well. Notions such as the crime-terror nexus, which have seen a new focus of research in recent years, could already be seen in the nineteenth century as many anarchist terrorists had a criminal past, and anarchist propaganda praised the "right to steal" (not unlike the notion of "ghanima" promoted by ISIS). Interestingly, some of today's most effective counterterrorism techniques, such as police infiltration, banning propaganda or the possession of certain weapons, or international cooperation were already largely used against 19th-century anarchists. A number of controversial laws and measures were also adopted to combat terrorism, sometimes in a disproportionate manner (such as the infamous "lois scélérates" of 1893 and 1894 in France). In many ways, history is repeating itself.

EER: Does it make sense to have a "Terrorism Studies" complex, or are the problems too individuated?

TR: Terrorism Studies go back to the 1960s and have progressed significantly over the past two decades. To a large extent, most questions we ask ourselves today remain the same as those raised by the "founding members" decades ago. However, in the meantime, Terrorism Studies have expanded to more disciplines, methodologies and, above all, can rely on more data. As a result, although not always reaching much different answers than before, the approach is more structured and sophisticated. At the same time, I think that many of the most fundamental questions of this field might never be fully answered. This is what makes our field so frustrating and fascinating at the same time.

EER: Where do you think Western states went most wrong in responding to the Islamic State (ISIS) "caliphate"?

TR: In my view, the two main flaws of the Western response pre-date and post-date the "caliphate". Prior to June 2014, when the "caliphate" was officially proclaimed by ISIS' leader, Western countries were doing too little to detect violent radicalization and prevent young individuals from traveling to a conflict zone. Although policies focused on the prevention of radicalization had been discussed since the mid-2000s, such policies were mostly non-existent across Europe until 2014. Yet, they could have reduced the number of foreign fighters traveling to Syria and Iraq. After the fall of the "caliphate" in 2019, Western governments could have worked out a solution to close that chapter for good, bringing all foreign fighters to justice and supporting the rebuilding of Syria and Iraq. However, more than three years later, European foreign fighters, as well as children, are still detained in the region. This is, in my view, a moral mistake, as well as a bad policy, as it causes more insecurity than security.

EER: Can you briefly outline why you chose to focus on Belgium?

TR: Belgium is an interesting case study for a number of reasons. First, it has a significant number of residents who have traveled to Syria and Iraq since 2012 — in fact, it has the highest ratio of foreign fighters per capita in Western Europe. Furthermore, Belgium was the first European country attacked by a returning foreign fighter from Syria (in 2014) as well as the last one (in 2016). As such, the country was very much impacted by the most recent jihadist wave, which made it interesting to look at the policy response. Second, as opposed to some other European countries, Belgium's experience with Islamist terrorism actually goes back to the late 1980s. Therefore, this made it possible to study the evolution of the counterterrorism response over a longer period of time. Finally, Belgium has been largely ignored or neglected in the literature, at least until recently, which justified, in itself, a case study.

EER: In the book, you note that you do not quite come to a theory of counterterrorism, but you at least identify, and to an extent assemble, the pieces. Can you explain this?

TR: Many people write about counterterrorism — mostly as a practice but sometimes as a policy or a doctrine. However, there are very few definitions of counterterrorism: what is it, exactly? And, indeed, very few efforts to conceptualize or theorize counterterrorism. I think this still constitutes a gap in research, which I hope some others will contribute to fill. In my book, I decided to treat counterterrorism as an ordinary public policy. Although counterterrorism policies can be "exceptional" in that they create many rules of exception (such as "state of emergency", etc.), such policies are actually the result of relatively ordinary policy-making processes. Thus, in my book, I have drawn from some key concepts and learnings from the public policy theory literature to make sense of counterterrorism policy-making. However, I believe that more can still be done in this aspect, and there is a need to cover other aspects of counterterrorism in a more theoretical manner.

EER: The book outlines the expansion of the concept of "counterterrorism", so that it does not just cover suppressing active terrorist movements, but the "upstream prevention and downstream rehabilitation". Does the inclusion of this preventive aspect against what we now call "radicalization" make sense for inclusion in counterterrorism work in your view, or are the trade-offs not worth it?

TR: In my book, I argue that the expansion of the scope of counterterrorism — more upstream (prevention) and downstream (rehabilitation) — is indeed a significant paradigm shift that occurred somewhere in the past decade. The development of P/CVE policies is welcome in my view. Early detection and prevention

of deviant behaviors is a good practice. It allows intervention before it is too late — for the potential victims *and* perpetrators. For years, researchers had called to work more on the root causes of terrorism and on the conducive environment to radicalization. These policies, however imperfect, seek to do just that.

This is not without causing frictions, however. The two main frictions that I would highlight here are: (1) the security mindset (counterterrorism) and the social mindset (socio-prevention) are not easy to reconcile and tensions appear where the two mindsets overlap or are forced to cooperate, as they increasingly do in the new counterterrorism configuration; and (2) the counterterrorism agenda is ever-expanding, adding every time a new layer to the "CT glacier", albeit with an ever-decreasing marginal added value for counterterrorism, and at a higher cost on fundamental rights. Thus, in my view, there are many positive aspects in the evolution of counterterrorism, but also very serious concerns.

EER: Some have argued that the European Union should give up on the idea of intelligence, contending it is a false mirage that provides a dangerous sense of security that does not exist and cannot exist. But in your book, you are more sanguine about the effect the integration of states has had on counterterrorism. Can you elaborate on this?

TR: Counterterrorism is a core sovereign competence and, as such, most of it occurs at the national level. However, it is striking to note how much international cooperation — and notably European cooperation — has deepened over the past decade. The amount of data, information and intelligence that is being shared at the European level has evolved exponentially over the years. A higher threat level and the transnationality of many terror cells, such as the Paris-Brussels cell, have clearly contributed to lift some of the ancient reluctances to cooperation. In Europe, counterterrorism cooperation occurs through EU institutions (EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, Europol, Frontex…) but also through informal "intelligence clubs" like the "Counter-Terrorism Group", as well as through bilateral cooperation between agencies.

This is a significant evolution, which might not have occurred if it wasn't for the "caliphate" era. It is hard to predict if the *intensity* of that cooperation will remain in every aspect, in the context of a lower terrorist threat. But useful tools and protocols have been established, which can be activated and used by member states on a needed basis. That is certainly a new strength in the global counterterrorism architecture.

EER: Is Belgium likely to cope better or worse, legally and societally, with returning ISIS foreign fighters? Can you outline why?

TR: There are two aspects to this question. First, regarding ISIS fighters that are still in Syria and Iraq, Belgium is now well-equipped to prosecute them, manage them in prison, work towards their rehabilitation and monitor them post-sentencing. I do not think that much more is needed. The other aspect is Belgium's preparedness to anticipate and prevent future waves of foreign fighters. In that regard, the mobilization of foreign volunteers for Ukraine suggests that the services are indeed still on alert. However, maintaining that level of alert and investment over the long term, when there are many other security priorities, will be a real challenge in itself — for Belgium or for any other country.

EER: Thank you very for answering our interview questions.

Terrorism Has Changed, America Must Too

By Matthew Wein
Source: https://nationalinterest.org/feature/terrorism-has-changed-america-must-too-206090

Jan 12 – The year 1997 saw Bill Clinton begin his second term as president of the United States, DVDs come into existence as a video format, *Titanic* premiered on movie screens, and Princess Diana die in a car crash in Paris. It was also the year that America first designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization. That is six years before the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was formed to help prevent terrorist attacks in the United States, nearly two decades before Twitter was founded, and twenty-two years before Bitcoin was created. And now, twenty-six years later, many experts cite the United States as an exporter of terrorist ideology and tactics. The world is different now.

The Immigration and Nationality Act gives the secretary of state the authority to designate groups as foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) if they can indeed determine that the group is foreign, that it engages in terrorist activity (or has the capability and intent to do so), and that the acts threaten the security of the United States. These criteria are fairly subjective and to date, sixty-eight groups have been given the FTO label. A significant majority of the groups designated are Islamist extremist organizations and over a quarter of the groups are Al Qaeda, ISIS, and their regional affiliates. Given all that has changed in the last thirty years, and given the breadth of what can seemingly be considered under the language in the Immigration and Nationality Act, perhaps now is the time for both Congress and the Executive Branch to reassess their approach to the challenge of designating terrorist organizations.

It is important to note at the outset that, thankfully, some work is being done on this topic. The Soufan Center in particular has undertaken some important work on comparing designation regimes in different countries and looking at how rising violent far-right movements are being affected by designations and prescriptions—or the lack thereof. Others have looked at discrete issues and made arguments about whether to designate a specific group or not (e.g., PMC Wagner, the Houthis, the Nordic Resistance Movement). And while discrete issues are important to debate, it highlights the changes noted above and underscores that the threats we face today outpace the world of terrorism envisioned in 1997.

But before jumping to anything else, it is important to account for the changes to the terrorism landscape to establish that we actually need a paradigm shift in how we think about designated terrorist groups—that we need something more than just incremental changes or adjustments. First, the internet is an obvious tool that must be acknowledged. Email and web browsers and the internet as a whole existed in 1997, but not in the form they do now. To compare the two would be like comparing a basketball player from 1940 to one playing today. They are playing the same sport but in completely different ways. The internet today exists in nearly everyone's pocket, allows for money to be transferred instantly, can be used to attract new recruits completely outside of a terrorist's social ecosystem, and allows for video and audio transmission in ways that could not have been imagined in 1997.

Additionally, terrorist groups are not necessarily the hierarchical, mafia-style organizations they were in the 1990s. Major groups like Al Qaeda or ISIS now have semi-autonomous affiliates or franchises. ISIS also puts out content online in an effort to radicalize people across the globe whom they cannot reach in person to inspire them to carry out attacks as unaffiliated assailants. Terrorist groups are also funding themselves in new ways. While most still use more traditional means like *hawalas* or criminal enterprises, some are starting to use bitcoin or other cryptocurrencies. Some are also using crowdfunding sites like GoFundMe or GiveSendGo. And weapons are changing too, with terrorists now able to use publicly available plans to build or assemble their own firearms via untraceable 3D printed parts that are easily available. None of these details are new revelations. Yet it seems that policymakers have not yet assembled all of the details into a complete picture to conclude that how we assess who or what is a terrorist organization needs to be updated along with the tools and policies we use to fight individual terrorists.

Let's start with Congress. The current legislation leaves the entirety of the decision of whether to designate a group as an FTO to the secretary of state, and only in the last line of the legislation does it clarify that he or she can consult with the secretary of the treasury and the attorney general. This leaves the director of national intelligence, the director of the CIA, the director of the FBI, the secretary of homeland security, and director of the National Counterterrorism Center (three of those five positions were created after this legislation was written) out of the loop. And while the State Department surely consults them for intelligence support and other relevant input, legislation should require further consultation and cooperation.

Similarly, the legislation requires the State Department to notify Congressional leadership and certain committees in advance of making a designation, but the legislation has not been updated to include the relatively newly formed committees with jurisdiction over Homeland Security in the House and Senate, leaving a gap in oversight on this issue.

Congress surely recognizes that terrorism has changed in the past twenty-five years—even if there may not be agreement on many of the underlying details (fodder for another article or book or dissertation, to be sure). Congress needs to undertake the necessary work of thinking through what a new paradigm or designation regime ought to look like to account for all the changes.

This reassessment should not bleed over into the discussion of how to best address issues of domestic terrorism (DT). There is a robust debate ongoing in policy circles about whether the United States needs a DT charge or not but at issue here are foreign terrorist organizations. And while there is documented evidence of American violent extremists of various stripes communicating and coordinating with foreign extremists, the focus here is not domestic. Which is to say that the State Department should remain the lead agency for designating groups, but they need to push more openly for support from other parts of the U.S. Government. This includes gathering terrorism specialists from across the government to assess how the threat has changed and how the State Department needs to adjust its thinking about a designation regime. With the proliferation of groups, maybe the State Department needs more staff to make assessments? Maybe its staff needs a different type of expertise that could be augmented by support from other agencies?

Regardless, the State Department should not sit back and let Congress determine on its own what the future ought to be. The State Department has a number of foreign partners it can work with and listen to and determine best practices. There are no easy answers right now, but the nature of terrorism is changing, and the longer we wait to address the problems, the more complicated it will become to develop the tools and counter the terrorists' changes.

Beyond the State Department, the Department of Homeland Security ought to have a more defined role in the process. The DHS is home to countless officials, both in operational and policy-making roles, tasked with preventing terrorist attacks in the United States, and it has a robust capacity to engage with international partners. DHS ought to push for a more visible, consultative, or cooperative role in the process, with an emphasis on the fact that they are only supporting the potential designation of *foreign* groups.

So many things are changing in our world right now that it can feel difficult to step back and look at the big, strategic shifts we need to make. It might feel more manageable and easier to tinker around the edges on discreet problems. As the terrorist threat landscape shifts, however, we cannot afford to simply look for tools or policies to stay one step ahead of the terrorists we know about. We need to look at how we label who is a terrorist and adjust accordingly. The technology that terrorists use, how they organize themselves, and how they communicate and recruit have all significantly changed since the United States created its terrorist designation regime. All parts of government need to do their part to upgrade our ability to name terrorists and keep them from establishing safe havens for planning attacks.

Matthew Wein is a former Professional Staff Member at the House Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism and a former policy adviser to the DHS Assistant Secretary for Policy on counterterrorism, international affairs, and law enforcement cooperation. He is a graduate of the University of Florida.

Terrorism in Ivory Coast

Source: https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/01/15/terrorism-in-ivory-coast/

Marc Ange-Samuel Grah writes the emergence of terrorism in the sub-region especially in Ivory Coast is a cause for concern.

Jan 14 – Côte d'Ivoire has been embroiled in political turmoil on and off since 2000, but has largely been free from the threat of Islamic extremism. In June 2015, however, Islamist militants in Mali began to attack closer to the border with Côte d'Ivoire. Attacks started to be recurrent in the northern border areas of Côte d'Ivoire, including the Comoé national park area in the north-east. There is a risk of a terrorist attacks elsewhere in Côte d'Ivoire, including in Abidjan. A terrorist attack took place at Grand Bassam near Abidjan on 13 March 2016, the attackers re-asserted the place of Al-Qaida as firmly on the map of international jihadism. And, tactically, it extended the range of Islamic terrorism to a country which has been spared its travails. These groups remain intent on demonstrating capability and increasing influence across the region. AQIM mainly operates in the Sahel due to the porous nature of the borders.

Indeed, the region is vulnerable due to the precarious conditions of the people on the ground and lack of rule of law that contribute to the vulnerability or motivation of the people in the Sahel to likely join extremism and islamist movement. The hypothesis of this study is as follows; the emergence of terrorism in the sub region especially in Ivory Coast and its harmful influence on peace, security and development is a cause for concern; indeed Ivory Coast is threatened by numerous terrorist group which destabilising the country. The fight against terrorism demands viable long-solutions that take into account the linkages between counterterrorism, the rules of law and human rights and socio-economic development. However, it is important to counter these attacks in order to prevent terrorists from anchoring in Ivory Coast. There are not much available scholars on terrorism in Ivory Coast, which help to understand terrorist actions. This research will explore the history of terrorism in Ivory Coast and the response of Ivorian authorities against terrorist groups. The case study of Ivory Coast is recent, researchers do not have enough updated information about it since the occurrence of terrorist attacks were not frequent. This research highlights the problems faced by the authorities to deal with terrorist actions and point out possible solutions in order to counter those attacks.

West Africa has made significant progress toward democracy, economic growth, and development in the previous decade, following a long period of conflict, social unrest, and political instability.

Despite this progress, the emergence of terrorism in the sub-region and its harmful influence on peace, security, and development is cause for concern. The frequency and intensity of strikes evidences the increasing sophistication of terrorist organisations in the sub-region in several West African countries in recent years. Terrorist attacks, suicide bombings, kidnappings, thefts, mass killings, planned killings, acts of piracy and destruction of public and private property, as well as the burning and desecration of religious and sacred sites, according to the 1998 Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism. The main terrorist organisations in the sub-region are Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI), the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA), Boko Haram, and Ansaru (as well as Ansar Dine or Ansar Eddine) in northern Nigeria, as well as Mulabiyoun and the Front for the Liberation of Masina (FLM) in Mali (Amartey, 2022).

In order to undermine peace, security, and stability in the sub-region, these groups have carried out deliberate and frequently repeated violent attacks on citizens, government officials, infrastructure, state institutions, and national and international organisations. As a result, various strategies to address and combat the issue have been developed and put into practice by state and non-state actors in the sub-region, most notably the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in partnership with domestic and foreign (state and non-state) actors such as the United States, France, the African Union, the European Union, and the United Nations. Therefore, it is important to look how each of these countries has responded (Bavdaž, et al., 2020).

While ransom payment remains the preferred method of ending kidnappings, the slight number of cases and the absence of reliable data on AQIM operations in the Sahel-Saharan region prevent conclusions from being drawn about operational patterns or tactical trends. However, the nature of the target by humans (tourists and European workers) and the preferred areas of operation (Niger and Mali) are two key pointers: One, the scope of AQIM operations remains tied to its Algerian control unit, and two, the objectives of its communications strategy appear to overcome and pay for the absence of effective resources to undermine and challenge the safety of state authorities and the management of land in the Sahel (Chuku, Abang & Isip, 2019).

Despite indications of increased recruitment by Al-Qaida in the Maghreb at the regional level, the organization has failed to convincingly demonstrate the existence of a pan-area structure, let alone a free agreement across the borders. Instead, its ability to act as a meta-network providing logistical and strategic support in the country called Europe and West Africa has made threat assessment and preventive measures more complex and unpredictable. Moreover, AQIM's enthusiastic ideology and great strategies have not generated the kind of popular support that could endure a full-scale revolution or stimulus internal conflict in the area (Daniel Chigudu, 2021).

While major Islamist doctrines have infiltrated the region and have been able to exploit social and financial desperation, the understanding, syncretic but traditional Islam of the Sahel has proven to be a tough barrier against Islamist extremist attempts to destabilize one of the region's fragile states. Despite a serious lack of a comprehensive assessment of the situation, domestic terrorism in West Africa lacks deep planning and operational dimensions to pose a reliable threat to regional strength or nation-states (Coccia, 2018).

Al-Qaida in the Maghreb can continue operations because weak and failed states dominate the Sahel. Moreover, it benefits directly from the abuses of the state to justify political inertia and consolidate authoritarian power by invoking the threat of terrorism within the country.

Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb is involved in trafficking, money laundering, and drug trafficking in the Saharan Sahel, Mali, West Africa, and elsewhere, providing minimal financial support and steady recruitment while expanding its transnational reach in one of the world's poorest regions. The Sahel and West African regions feature the world's largest concentration of failed states and some of the world's poorest nations (Collado, 2021).

Half of the countries in the Sahel and West Africa suffer from some form of instability; West African and Sahelian countries account for 11 of the 26 countries most at risk of further collapse and six of the 18 countries with the greatest increase in the risk of instability from 2008-2010 (Boesch et al., 2021). According to the Human Development Index and the Failed States Index, most Sahelian countries are among the worst performers. At the same time, many more are dependent on multilateral institutions for debt repayment and development assistance.

The United Nations Security Council has even informed of increasing or developing security threats in West Africa, in particular extremist activities in the Sahel, maritime uncertainty in the Gulf of Guinea, and illegal drug trafficking that threaten regional strength and have potential implications for international security (Boukhars, 2020). Security problems in the Sahel can thus be traced back to severely underdeveloped areas lacking minimum services, infrastructure, and state control. In Mali and Niger, Al-Qaida in the Maghreb operates where state functions cannot meet the local population's most basic needs. The history of West Africa combines great times and destructive conflicts. While the contemporary situation reflects this history in terms of the deep bonds between the peoples of the region,

divisions have also emerged due to differences between English and French-speaking countries, political and economic developments, and other factors. A discussion of contemporary vulnerability issues will not attempt to explain the impact of past economic, political and social conditions; however, we recognize that the causes of many of the underlying injustices of vulnerability are deep-rooted (de Montclos, 2018).

Several researches explored the issues of vulnerability where narrow technical approaches, such as technologies to improve crop productivity or water systems, can support vulnerability and poverty reduction goals. We also see opportunities to progress in all areas of development (education, health, economic development, and governance) to create opportunities, safety nets, and a better set of formal and informal resources and support that people can rely on to meet the challenges of environmental variability.

The challenges of environmental variability in the region are exacerbated by environmental poverty and other pressures, exacerbating people's livelihood difficulties. Some environmental degradation issues in the region, such as soil degradation, have been studied in depth over time, while other environmental issues have only recently been studied in more depth, such as the sustainability of groundwater resources. Ivory Coast faces daunting security challenges, and, against the backdrops of the region's weak internal capacities and its peripheral status in the global market, the prognosis for the state's human and regional security over the next two decades appears to be grim. However, through several efforts to prevent terrorism and by making significant progress toward democracy, economic growth, and development in the previous decade, the security environment can witness a significant improvement in the coming years. Despite this progress, the emergence of terrorism in the sub-region and its harmful influence on peace, security, and development are causes for concern.

Grah is a student in African Studies and International Relations at Ticaret University in Istanbul.

ISIS and Its Regional Affiliates Remain Persistent and Pervasive Threat Worldwide

By Mahmut Cengiz
Source: https://www.hstoday.us/featured/isis-and-its-regional-affiliates-remain-persistent-and-pervasive-threat-worldwide/

Jan 16 – ISIS and its regional affiliates continued to threaten regional and global security in 2022. They have opportunistically aimed to take advantage of recent trends worldwide since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2019. First, ISIS-affiliated groups saw the Taliban's takeover in 2021 as a success story of jihadism. They considered it a model to achieve their goals in the fight against the western world. Second, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has changed the world agenda, and it has become a priority for the West to support Ukraine. Overfocusing on Ukraine has created opportunities for ISIS-affiliated groups to operate securely in the jihadist regions. Third, the retreat of western troops from the areas where jihadist groups have been active has resulted in security vacuums. These groups have successfully operated under the weakness of current local governments. Fourth, the prison breaks provided opportunities for ISIS militants in 2022. For example, ISIS targeted the al-Sina prison in the al-Hasakah region in Syria. The

eight-day battle recorded the death of 500 people; about three-quarters of them were ISIS militants. Although ISIS failed and lost many militants in its prison break attempt, it showed the group's capacity to fight in multi-day battles.

Among the jihadist groups, ISIS occupies a significant place where the group-controlled territory in Iraq and Syria and successfully achieved its goals of establishing a de facto state and ruling around six million people in the Middle East. At its peak in 2014 and 2015, ISIS was able to recruit more than 30,000 fighters from more than 90 countries, generating yearly revenue of around $2 billion and running a social media operation including more than 10,000 Twitter accounts. The United States' counterterrorism strategies effectively weakened and confined ISIS in Iraq and Syria, where the organization lost most of its territory and militants. Furthermore, its leaders were

killed in U.S. counterterrorism operations. Nevertheless, the organization continued to face critical challenges in 2022. The group's leader, Abu Ibrahim al Hashimi al Qurayshi, was killed on February 3, 2022, the successor of ISIS's most influential and charismatic leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was killed in a U.S. military operation in 2019. Additionally, U.S. officials killed two top group leaders in an airstrike on October 6, 2022. Losing territory and decapitating its leaders have deeply impacted capacity. As seen in Figure 1 below, the number of ISIS-claimed attacks continued to drop over the years, and it was a more than 100 percent decrease between 2018 and 2022.
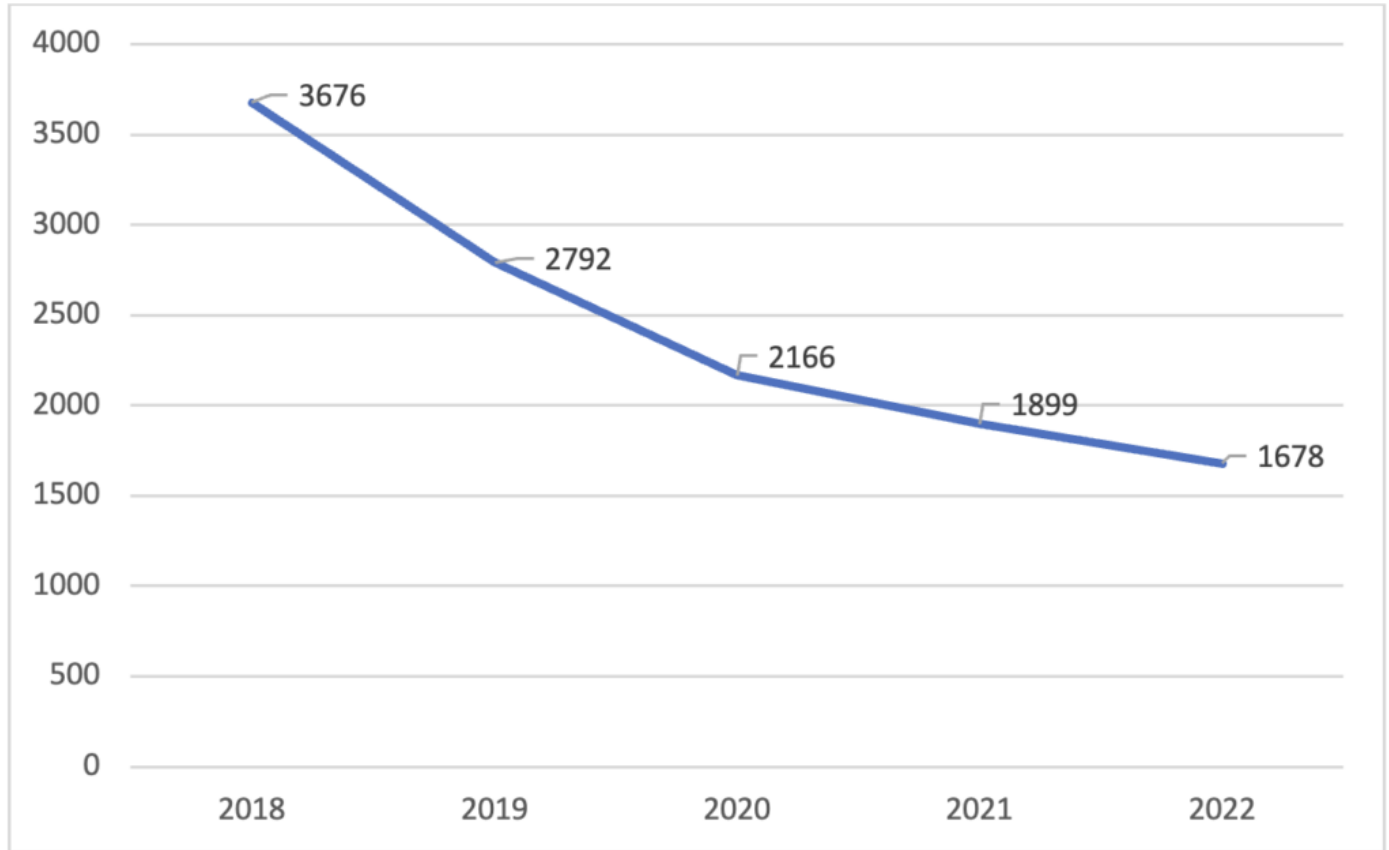
Figure 1: ISIS-Claimed Attacks Between January 2018 and October 2022

Despite decreasing the number of ISIS-claimed attacks and reducing its capacity, ISIS-Core in Iraq and Syria managed to continue its attacks. The year 2022 recorded spikes in ISIS activities and fears of its returns in Deir Ez-Zohr. The group intensified most of its operations in the areas held by autonomous administrations after the humanity and security campaign carried out by the Internal Security Forces of North and East Syria (Asayish) and U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces in Hawl Camp in Hasakkah Governorate in September 2022. The campaign arrested 226 individuals, including 36 women suspected of belonging to ISIS cells. In 2022, ISIS claimed responsibility for more than 100 attacks, most of which targeted SDF members and the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) employees in Syria. Moreover, ISIS continued to demand that people in the region pay zakat, an obligatory payment made annually under Islamic law on certain kinds of property used for charitable and religious purposes. The group punished an investor and burnt his oil well after his refusal to pay zakat. Similarly, ISIS militants blew up a currency exchange office after the owner refused to pay zakat in October 2022.

On the other hand, the organization's legacy has influenced its regional branches, which have continued to threaten regional and global security in Asia and Africa. For example, ISIS-K's attacks increased in Afghanistan and spread to nearby countries such as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Almost every month in 2022, at least one or two ISIS-K attacks targeting Afghan Shia mosques were recorded. The group also conducted raids on Sunni mosques representing Sufi Islam and disapproving of ISIS's brutal ideology. ISIS-K's 2022 attacks proved that the group has the capacity to deploy suicide bombers, exert its influence in almost all 34 provinces of Afghanistan, maintain an organizational structure that includes global jihadists, and carry out attacks in Afghanistan's neighboring countries. ISIS-K's 2022 high performance shows that the group may replace ISIS-Core and can be more threatening to regional and global security.

Africa occupies a special place for ISIS, which has increased its capacity and popularity. It has been a trend to see the involvement of Muslim communities that are exposed to political, economic, and social grievances and feel marginalized and discriminated against in jihadist groups. These communities that have formed local jihadist groups to defend their rights have competed to be predominantly under the banner of ISIS. Figure 2 below shows the number of ISIS-claimed attacks by region. While three percent of ISIS attacks happened in Africa in 2018, it accounted for 29 percent in 2021 and 45 percent in the first ten months of 2022.
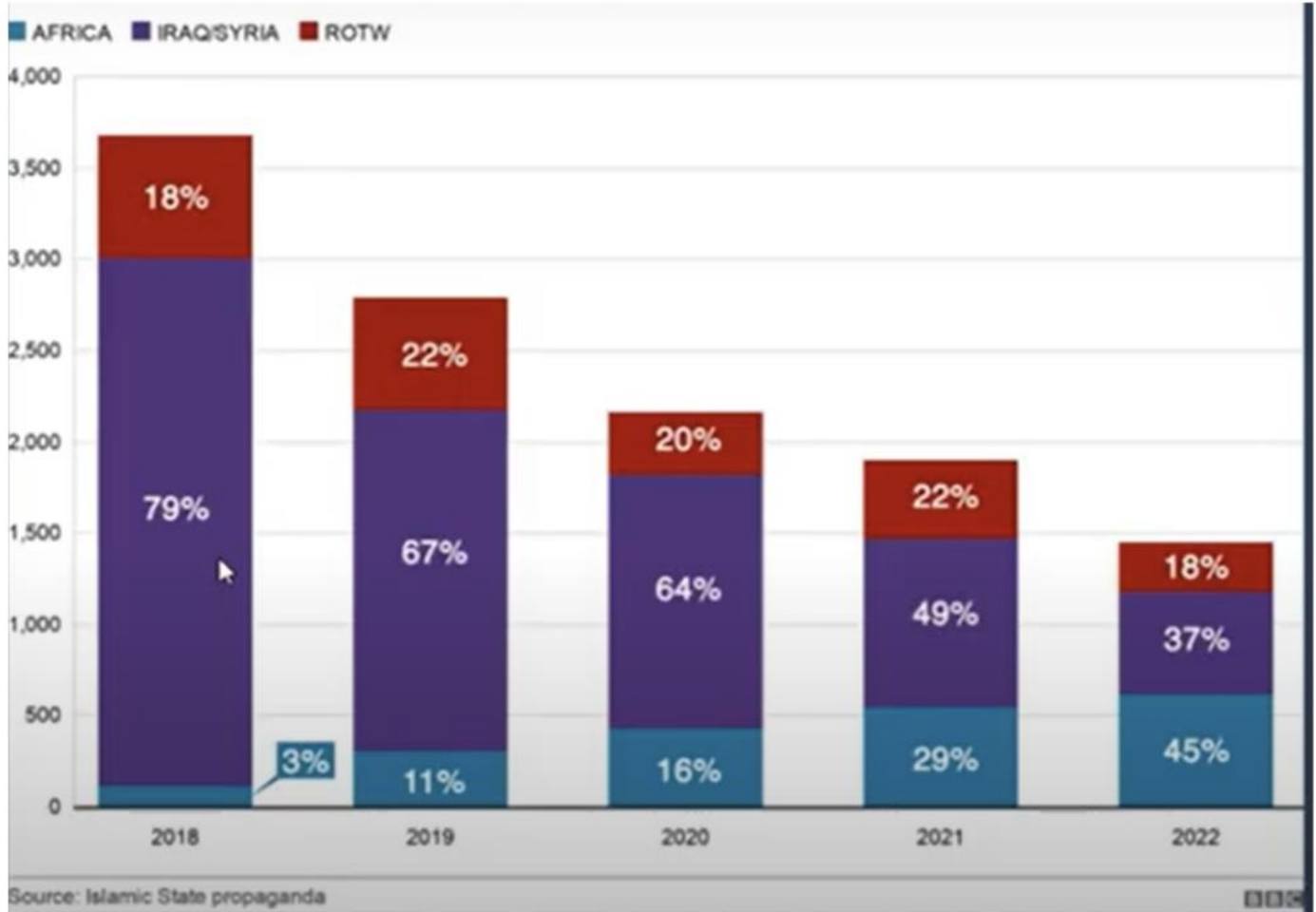
Figure 2: ISIS-Claimed Attacks between January 2018 and October 2022

In 2022, ISIS's branches in the Sahel region, Nigeria, Mozambique, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were active and significantly threatened regional security. ISIS-Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS), formed in 2015 as a split within the militant group Al-Mourabitoun, is the ISIS branch in the Sahel that predominantly operates in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. The group killed 600 people in Niger in 2021 and continued to target UN peacekeeping missions, the Movement for Azawad Salvation (MSA) and the Imghad Tuareg and Allies Self-Defense Group (GATIA) as well as JNIM group in its attacks in 2022. ISIS-GS killed more than 400 civilians in its fight against MSA and GATIA in Burkina Faso in the first half of 2022. The same period recorded the attacks of Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), an al Qaeda-affiliated group operating in the Sahel, in 10 out of 13 regions of Burkina Faso, but ISIS-GS's attacks were deadlier, killing nearly twice as many people.

Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) is the ISIS branch in Nigeria that is primarily active in the Chad basin. The group is the offshoot of Boko Haram, which has a violent rivalry. The most prominent and charismatic leader of Boko Haram, Abubakar Shekau, killed himself in an ISWAP raid in 2021. The organization was one of the top 10 terrorist groups with the most fatalities in 2020, killing 982 people. ISWAP continued to make attacks in Niger, Chad, and Nigeria and intensified its activities in Cameroon in 2022. Using hearts-and-minds policies, the group aims to get the sympathy of Muslim communities and selectively targets state officials and Christian communities. In 2022, the group conducted many attacks and targeted the Nigerian military. ISWAP killed nine soldiers in one of those attacks on November 20, 2022.

Islamic State in Mozambique (ISIS-M) is another active ISIS branch in Africa. Aware of what it means to get recruits, funding, and popularity, Ansar al-Sunna, who fought for Muslim grievances in northern Cabo Del Gado, pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2017 and has begun to use the ISIS-M group name. The group was able to conduct attacks in Tanzania in 2021. Interestingly, the group's common tactic is beheadings, being listed as one of the top 10 organizations with the most beheading cases. In 2022, ISIS-M kept its momentum and was actively involved in terrorist attacks in the region.

Islamic State in DRC has been another active group in Africa. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which is an armed group primarily engaged in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), has declared loyalty to and operates under the banner of ISIS. The group conducted attacks in Uganda in 2021 and continued to do its terrorist activities in DRC in 2022.

To conclude, ISIS does not get the western focus as it did when the organization controlled territory and perpetrated violent attacks in the mid-2010s. Terrorism databases have reported a decreasing number of ISIS attacks worldwide; however, the organization has exerted influence in conflict zones, Asia, and Africa. ISIS is the organization with the most regional branches. Several have faded into obscurity and recently have not been involved in notable terrorist attacks. Still, its branches in Afghanistan, the Sahel region, DRC, and Mozambique have been actively engaged in terrorist attacks. It should be noted that ISIS-Core in Iraq and Syria lost its last three leaders over the previous three years. However, the group is still capable of attempting to control territory in Deir Zohr and is involved in prison breaks with the involvement of several hundreds of its militants and using highly complex weapons. ISIS-K's 2022 performance in Afghanistan and its capacity to do attacks in neighboring countries as well as ISWAP, ISIS-GS, and ISIS-M's regional attacks seem to be alarming for regional and global security and indicate that the world will continue to experience ISIS attacks in the following years.

Dr. Mahmut Cengiz is an Associate Professor and Research Faculty with Terrorism, Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC) and the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University. Dr. Cengiz has international field experience where he has delivered capacity building and training assistance to international partners in the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. He also has been involved in research projects for the Brookings Institute, European Union, and various U.S. agencies. Dr. Cengiz regularly publishes books, articles and Op-eds. He is the author of six books, a number of articles, and book chapters regarding terrorism, organized crime, smuggling, terrorist financing, and trafficking issues. His 2019 book, "The Illicit Economy in Turkey: How Criminals, Terrorists, and the Syrian Conflict Fuel Underground Economies," analyzes the role of criminals, money launderers, and corrupt politicians and discusses the involvement of ISIS and al-Qaida-affiliated groups in illicit economy. Dr. Cengiz holds two masters and two doctorate degrees from Turkey and the United States. His Turkish graduate degrees are in sociology. He has a master's degree from the School of International Service Program of American University and a Ph.D. from the School of Public Policy program of George Mason University. He is teaching Terrorism, American Security Policy and Narco-Terrorism courses at George Mason University.

Far-right terrorism rise in UK masks threat of Islamist extremism

By Laura O'Callaghan
Source: https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/uk-news/2023/01/17/far-right-terrorism-rise-in-uk-masks-threat-of-islamist-extremism/

Jan 17 – Britain cannot afford to underestimate the threat Islamist terrorism continues to pose to its security, an expert has warned, amid growing emphasis on the rise of far-right ideology among prisoners.

Dr Paul Stott, head of security and extremism at Policy Exchange, said officials were shining a light on the threat of far-right terrorism while playing down that of Islamist extremism, which he argued was greater.

Dr Stott also warned of a possible resurgence of ISIS and what he considered a lack of focus by the UK on the Middle East.

In the year to September, 239 people were in custody for terrorism-related offences in Britain, Home Office figures showed. The number of extreme right-wing prisoners hit its highest level on record while the proportion classified as Islamist extremists fell to its lowest.

In an interview with *The National*, Dr Stott cautioned against using the data to misjudge the make-up of the UK's terrorism landscape. He highlighted the same set of statistics, which showed 155 (65 per cent) were Islamist extremists while 66 (28 per cent) were far-right extremists.

"It's a great paradox," Dr Stott said. "In my view, the British far-right is weaker than it has been at any point in my lifetime.

"I think it's important that we see it in context.

"I don't think it's that difficult; it should be perfectly simple. There are two significant threats in terms of terrorism and one is bigger than the other."

ICI C²BRNE DIARY – January 2023

The Prevent strategy, the government's counter-terrorism programme, has in the past failed to acknowledge the severity of the threat posed by Islamist extremism, Dr Stott said. Instead, he said the government channelled more energy towards highlighting far-right risks or unclassified cases which are linked to mental health concerns.

The publication of a review of the strategy — which exists to prevent radicalisation and thwart terrorist attacks — has reportedly been delayed due to a row among ministers.

The policy came under renewed scrutiny after it was revealed that the home-grown terrorist who murdered Sir David Amess, a Conservative MP, had continued to plot his attack in secret after being referred to the programme.

There are high hopes that the review, led by William Shawcross, will lead to closed loopholes in the Prevent strategy.

Mr Shawcross, an experienced writer and commentator, was appointed to conduct the review in 2021. He was previously responsible for regulating aid groups across England and Wales in his role as chairman of the Charity Commission.

A shake-up of the policy is well overdue, Dr Stott said, adding that clarification on non-ideological terrorism is urgently needed.

Only 18 terrorist inmates (8 per cent) as of September were classified as having no specific ideology. Yet huge amounts of resources are being used by Prevent officials in trying to deal with cases in this bracket.

"I think what we're looking for is a greater degree of focus," Dr Stott said. "An enormous amount of Prevent referrals are being made for those showing mixed, unclear or unstable ideologies.

"It's a catch-all category. I hope the Shawcross review will give some clarity to that because it does not appear to have the same logic or the same basis as Islamist or far-right extremism.

"It's just not clear what these individuals are suffering from.

"The suspicion is that it is mental health support that is needed and it will be fast-tracked."

Age a factor in radicalisation

The former researcher at the Henry Jackson Society and tutor at SOAS University of London said his years of experience in counter-terrorism suggested there were huge differences between how people came to be radicalised by different ideologies.

Dr Stott said it was common for groups of young men to be drawn to Islamist ideology, a trend the West saw in the huge numbers who moved to Syria to join ISIS, while the far-right is attractive to loners.

"If you look at the age profiles of far-right terrorists it often involves significantly older people," he said, citing the killer of Labour MP Jo Cox and a Dover migrant centre fire-bomber as examples.

"They are people who are sometimes quite isolated and seek what will give them a degree of comfort.

"Lockdown may have influenced radicalisation. It would not be surprising because we've been through an extraordinary period."

A government representative said. "The terrorist threat in the UK is complex and constantly evolving, which is why the government takes all forms of terrorism seriously — including the extreme right-wing. We are committed to tackling all those who spread views that promote violence and hatred against individuals and communities, and that radicalise others.

"Prevent remains a vital tool against radicalisation and has already changed and saved the lives of individuals from all walks of life, with over 3,000 people offered early interventions through the Channel programme."

Lack of focus on Middle East is 'dangerous'

Security experts recently warned Britain and its allies should be braced for a possible resurgence of ISIS in Syria as early as this year. They said the terrorists might try to liberate 10,000 of its fighters from Syrian prisons and detention camps as a way to rebuild its caliphate. At the height of its rule, ISIS held a third of Syrian territory and 40 per cent of Iraq.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces are responsible for running prisons and camps housing ISIS fighters, and their wives and children. Dr Stott said the possible return of ISIS should sound alarm bells in Britain and jolt the government into taking preventive action. He suggested the SDF needed more support to contain the threat before it is too late.

"There's very little focus in the UK on the Middle East at the moment," he said. "That's potentially quite dangerous.

"It's the Kurds who are holding the line against ISIS. They were badly led down by [former US president Donald] Trump but support for the Kurds is important.

"What may well [happen] is they are not going to be able to do this indefinitely. If we don't have a resolution to this [ISIS fighters] may break out from prisons.

"There's also the issue that some of the young people who are coming of age in these camps are of fighting age and are ideal recruits for ISIS."

In late 2019, Mr Trump astonished foreign policy experts and politicians in his own party by pulling support from the Kurds.

He did so by announcing a decision not to interfere with a planned Turkish military campaign into northern Syria, which left the US-allied forces at the mercy of a regime that considers them to be a terrorist group.

The Islamist Plan to Conquer East Africa: U.S. Missing in Action

By Lawrence A. Franklin

Source: https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/19322/islamists-east-africa

- The most potent threat to East African stability remains Al-Shabaab, rooted in Somalia. Al-Qaeda helps to finance Al-Shabaab through its contacts across the Gulf of Aden in Yemen.
- Al-Shabaab's threat to the American homeland should not be discounted: the group has explored possible scenarios of launching a 9/11 style assault on the US. Shabaab is assessed by US intelligence as Al-Qaeda's wealthiest and largest affiliate.
- If Islamists succeed in establishing an Emirate in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique's government could be rendered powerless to combat the spread of radical Islam throughout the country. Using Mozambique as a base of operations, jihadists potentially could export terrorist cells to Indian Ocean island countries such as the Comoros Islands, Madagascar, Mauritius and the Seychelles, and ultimately to southern African nations as well.

Burned and damaged huts in the village of Aldeia da Paz outside Macomia, Mozambique on August 24, 2019. On August 1, 2019, the village was attacked by an Islamist group. (Photo by Marco Longari/AFP via Getty Images)

Jan 18 – Jihadist terrorism poses an existential challenge to Africa's nation-states. While North Africa has been Islamic for a millennium, the Sahel, that part of the continent south of the Sahara, remains under siege by affiliates of the global Islamist networks, Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

France, after a ten-year effort, has abandoned its responsibility to safeguard the sovereignty of its former colonies. Consequently, the Sahel's counterterrorist mission now rests upon the shoulders of a group of regional states called the "G5" : Burkina Faso, Chad. Mali. Mauritania, and Niger.

The most potent threat to East African stability remains Al-Shabaab, rooted in Somalia. Although Al-Shabaab pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda in 2009, it maintains autonomy for its terrorist operations. Al-Qaeda helps to finance Al-Shabaab through its contacts across the Gulf of Aden in Yemen.

Somalia's recently re-elected President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud delivered a confident New Year's address in front of 500 army soldiers who had just returned from training in Eritrea. Mohamud in his address celebrated last year's liberation by US-trained Somali government troops of large swaths of Somali territory, taken back from Al-Shabaab. Mohamud and Somali defense officials boasted that the government forces will defeat al-Shabaab in 2023. Al-Shabaab defiantly responded to Mohamud's bravado by taking responsibility for twin suicide bombings on January 4, which killed 15 people in central Somalia.

The resiliency of Al-Shabaab may, in part, be explained by the deep faith of the Somalis, who were among the first non-Arabs to embrace Islam. Al-Shabaab's fortunes have waxed and waned since its emergence from a coalition of Islamic extremist organizations in the mid-2000s. At its zenith, from 2006-2011, Al-Shabaab controlled most of southern and eastern Somalia including the capital of Mogadishu, which it conquered in 2006. Following the establishment of a regional military alliance in 2011, Al-Shabaab was driven from Mogadishu in August of that year and continues today to surrender additional territory.

Al-Shabaab still poses a threat to its neighbors and to Somalia's pro-Western government by virtue of its recruitment of foreign volunteers. Ethnic Somalis from Kenya form the largest group of non-Somali citizens in Al-Shabaab. Recruits to Al-Shabaab also come from Ethiopia's largest ethnic group, the Oromo, who are predominately Muslim. Al-Shabaab purchases weapons on the black market and arms traders and receives some arms from Al-Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), based in Yemen. Al-Shabaab raises large amounts from extortion fees taken from businesses and toll charges on trucks passing through its many checkpoints in Somalia. Al-Shabaab continues to demonstrate its ability to launch terrorist operations throughout Somalia, and also has conducted operations inside member-states of the counter-terrorism force, the African Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), including Kenya and Uganda. Al-Shabaab's threat to the American homeland should not be discounted: the group has explored possible scenarios of launching a 9/11 style assault on the US. Al-Shabaab is assessed by US intelligence as Al-Qaeda's wealthiest and largest affiliate. Uganda also is now combatting a jihadist threat from the "Allied Democratic Forces" (ADF). These Islamists are aligned with the Islamic State's Central African Province. Some ADF cells have moved across Uganda's border into the Democratic Republic of the Congo's North Kivu Province.

The most recent jihadist threat to stability in East Africa has emerged in the former Portuguese colony of Mozambique. The epicenter of this Islamic insurgency is in Mozambique's northernmost province of Cabo Delgado. Ansar al-Sunnah is an Al-Qaeda affiliated terrorist group which has massacred about ,3000 people, mostly civilians, while displacing hundreds of thousands of mostly Christian citizens. Ansar's center of gravity is the Mozambican port of Mocimboa da Praia where offshore oil and gas deposits await foreign investment dependent on the security situation. Ansar raises its own finances to buy weapons from heroin trafficking networks and ivory-poaching as well as funds generated from fees they charge traffickers along Mozambique's coast. Ansar draws indigenous followers. in part, from the teachings of Kenyan extremist Imams who helped radicalize the mostly Muslim Macua and Muani peoples in Cabo Delgado. Mozambique's Ansar also has spread jihadist cells to Tanzania.

Counter-terrorist assistance is being extended to Mozambique by South Africa, which has dispatched troops to fight the jihadists. Unfortunately, Ansar seems determined to establish an Islamic Emirate in Cabo Delgado, governed by Sharia law. If they succeed, Mozambique's government could be rendered powerless to combat the spread of radical Islam throughout the country. Using Mozambique as a base of operations, jihadists potentially could export terrorist cells to Indian Ocean island countries such as the Comoros Islands, Madagascar, Mauritius and the Seychelles, and ultimately to southern African nations as well.

Dr. Lawrence A. Franklin was the Iran Desk Officer for Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld. He also served on active duty with the U.S. Army and as a Colonel in the Air Force Reserve.

Domestic terrorism is evolving. It needs imaginative counterterrorism

By Scott Englund
Source: https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2023/01/18/domestic-terrorism-is-evolving-it-needs-imaginative-counterterrorism/

Jan 18 – Shortly after sunset on Saturday, December 3, 2022, two electric transformers in Moore County, North Carolina were repeatedly shot, leaving nearly 40,000 people without power. The local utility estimated that several thousand customers would remain in the dark for days, as nighttime temperatures fell below freezing. In a similar attack on April 16, 2013, the Metcalf Pacific Gas and Electric substation in Coyote, California was disabled when unidentified snipers fired more than 100 rounds at transformers and a container storing oil used to cool equipment, cutting power to thousands of people and causing an estimated $15 million in damage.

A motive for the December 2022 attack has not yet been established. Yet, it offers important lessons about the persistence of domestic terrorism, the vulnerability of U.S. infrastructure to attacks, and the need for

imaginative counterterror efforts against a diversifying threat that includes new perpetrators and targets. The new 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism has been a promising development.

The logic of terrorism

The concept of "terrorism" seems straightforward, yet a precise definition is the subject of debate. It is widely accepted to include violence or the threat of violence, toward some political, social, or religious end. Though terrorism is coercive, the targets of an attack are not necessarily the intended targets of the coercion. Targets of terror frequently did nothing to become a target, and could not avoid being a target. If people begin to question the state's competence in protecting the public, or change their behavior in an attempt to avoid being targeted, those reactions are part of the logic of terrorist violence.

A recent online publication by an "accelerationist" group (white supremacists who wish to hasten the downfall of the current socio-political structure) encouraged readers to select targets "that do the most damage to the system and spark revolution and chaos. So long as the power turns on, the status quo, the downward decline of our race, and the increase in nonwhites in our lands will carry on unhindered." The intention is to hasten social collapse.

The White House's first National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism assesses that the current threat comes from, in part, "racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists" whose ideologies are "rooted in a perception of the superiority of the white race that calls for violence in furtherance of perverse and abhorrent notions of racial 'purity' or 'cleansing'." The inevitability of a coming purification of society, and a restoration of fundamental truths leaves no space for half measures. This apocalyptic narrative has been espoused by groups as diverse as the Shining Path of Peru, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and Aum Shinrikyo in Japan.

Infrastructure vulnerability

U.S. infrastructure is vulnerable, and effective attacks need not be sophisticated. The December 2022 attack on the North Carolina power grid could have easily been accomplished by one person with a legally-procured rifle and ammunition. The resulting damage, while not permanent or even long-lasting, was disruptive and dangerous. Though ultimately determined by the FBI not to be an act of terror, a Christmas 2020 bombing in Nashville severely damaged an AT&T transmission center that disabled cellular telephone networks throughout the central and southern United States for several hours.

Over the past 50 years, U.S. infrastructure has been consistently subject to attack, though at a relatively low number of incidents per year. According to the Global Terrorism Database, between 1970 and 2020 there have been 102 attacks on U.S. infrastructure, at least 60 of which targeted the electrical grid. Since 2009, there has been a period of increased attacks on all targets in the United States — and infrastructure, specifically. Infrastructure attacks rose 70% in 2022 compared to 2021, according to Politico.

The Department of Homeland Security's Cyber and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) monitors 16 critical infrastructure sectors, including energy, food and agriculture, critical manufacturing, and financial services. CISA prioritizes critical infrastructure by weighing five considerations: 1) the safety and well-being of individuals in the community; 2) the value of an asset in the context of a community, region, or nation as a whole; 3) the effect of the loss of an asset on operations and dependencies, 4) the economic impact of a disruption of a service or asset, and 5) the general impact of the loss of a service or asset on a community or larger critical infrastructure sector. The loss of power transformers would rank very high in this risk framework and touch multiple critical infrastructure sectors.

The accelerationist handbook cited above encouraged attacks against the energy infrastructure sector as being "sitting ducks, worthy prey" and "largely unprotected and often in remote locations." North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper summarized the situation: "If someone with a firearm can do this much damage and get power out to tens of thousands of people, then obviously we need to look at the different layers of infrastructure and hardening and make better decisions here." The Duke Energy facility in North Carolina had sensibly prioritized keeping people safely away from the dangerous equipment on site. However, inexpensive pre-formed concrete barriers would have protected it against a relatively simple attack like the one that occurred in December 2022. On December 15, 2022 the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission ordered the North American Electric Reliability Corporation to study physical reliability standards at the nationwide power grid and determine if improvements were necessary.

The legacy of 9/11

According to the Global Terrorism Database, between 2014 and 2020, there was an annual average of 20 terror attacks worldwide in which a vehicle was the primary or secondary weapon. In that same period, vehicles killed 277 people in terror attacks. Before 2014, such attacks averaged less than two per year. Since at least 2010, terror groups have encouraged the use of vehicles to attack civilians. Just as the 9/11 commission concluded that a "failure of imagination" blinded the U.S. national security enterprise to the September 11, 2001 terror attack vector, we risk repeating those failures. Like using a truck to run pedestrians down in a crowded place, the December 2022 attack against an electric grid in North Carolina is notable by its simplicity, accessibility, and effectiveness.
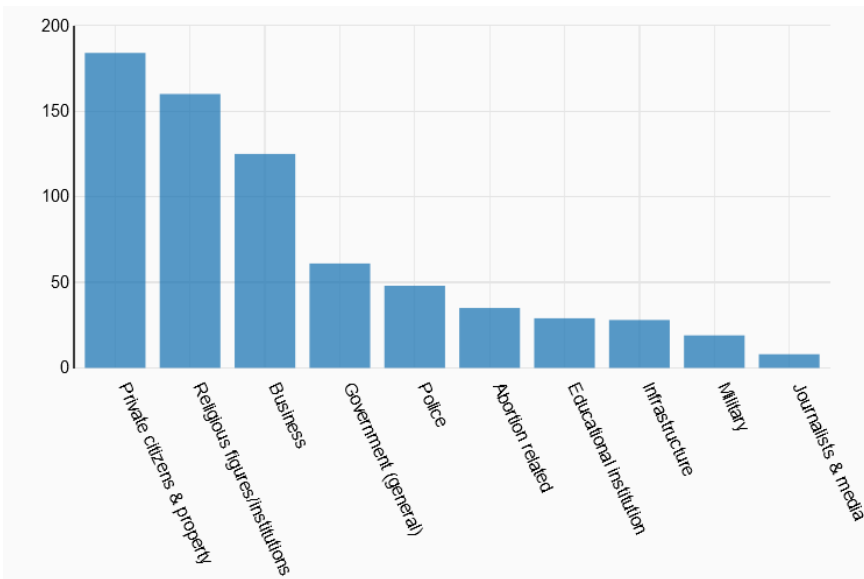
Top ten targets of terror attacks in the United States, 2000-2020 (Source: Global Terrorism Database)

This evolving threat has implications for counterterrorism and homeland security. Unfortunately, the United States has a long history of violence toward African-American and Jewish religious institutions. As illustrated in the chart above, religious institutions are the second-most targeted facility in the United States, followed by a general category of "businesses," which includes places such as the Walmart attacked in El Paso, Texas in 2019, and the Pulse LGBTQ nightclub in Orlando, Florida in 2016. These targets are notable for the specificity of patrons, as indicated in comments by assailants, and the fact that they were relatively defenseless. In the Global Terrorism Database, the "private citizens and property" and "businesses" categories often includes attacks against these targets because of their perceived association with certain groups, most often people of color, the Jewish community, and LGBTQ community. Domestic counterterrorism is, by design, difficult to detect. A low-profile effort does not provide the same exhilarating satisfaction of a bunker-busting bomb, but is nevertheless effective. In 2021, U.S. President Joe Biden's administration released a policy document focused entirely on countering domestic terrorism. First, it set out a four-point counterterrorism strategy. Second, it unequivocally stated that right-wing, racially motivated, and anti-government violent groups present the biggest threat. Finally, it recommended that the federal government address inequality experienced by marginalized U.S. populations. This final feature presents two challenges. One, a campaign to resolve structural injustices felt by marginalized groups could further alienate those who identify with right-wing white-grievance politics, but do not endorse violence. Two, in the United States, local, state, and federal governments have a long history of directly engaging in, and later tolerating, domestic terror against people of color or other marginalized groups. Given that history of state terror, attempts to address inequality may be met with mistrust in these communities, no matter how well-intentioned.

Conclusion
The Biden administration's decision to publish a domestic counterterror strategy shows how much the U.S. government's response to the threat of terrorist violence has changed since 2001. While countering domestic terrorism has risen as a national priority, transnational terrorist threats against Americans and U.S. interests remain. Properly defining and understanding a threat is essential to developing countermeasures. Protecting the public against domestic terrorism requires an approach very different from the approach used against transnational terror organizations such as al-Qaida or the Islamic State. Patient law enforcement activity, coupled with well-crafted communication efforts, could help achieve this goal.

Scott Englund is Assistant Dean - College of Strategic Intelligence; Federal Executive Fellow - Foreign Policy, Strobe Talbott Center for Security, Strategy, and Technology.

Britain's 'Mysterious' Silence on Growing Islamist Terror and Violence

By Sagorika Sinha
Source: https://www.news18.com/news/opinion/opinion-britains-mysterious-silence-on-growing-islamist-terror-and-violence-6884479.html

Jan 21 – As the population of Christians in the United Kingdom (UK) plummets to below 50 percent and Britain's Muslim population rises to almost 7 percent, the country grapples with major demographic changes. Nearly 20 percent of the crimes in the UK are committed by Muslims and England has been struggling with grooming gangs and "honour" killings for decades. Yet, the fear of being labelled Islamophobic, as well as Muslims comprising a small but stable vote-bank for the Labour Party ensures that political rhetoric in the nation remains incapable of calling out cultural issues bordering on inhumaneness.

One of the most horrific cases of honour killings that modern England turned a blind eye to happened in 2006 when Banaz Mahmod was brutally killed after a life of abuse. Starting with female genital mutilation, physical abuse, rapes, forced hijab, forced marriage and beatings, she was subject to much of it under the complacent gaze of their police. While Banaz gave multiple statements to the police that her father had planned and threatened to kill her, she was sent back to her family home, even from the hospital where she was treated after an initial attempt on her life. In the end, she was subjected to hours of rape and torture by cousins and relatives before being strangled with a ligature in her South London home. Her body was transported in a suitcase and buried in a garden before her death was investigated.

Considering how institutions have forgotten Banaz and the many victims of targeted killings of Muslim women by their families in the UK, one might be forgiven as hers was a rare case. Unfortunately, there exists a list of brutally similar deaths, all under the eye of British police and hospitals. With the same complacency repeated so often, a concerned citizen might wonder if institutions were complicit in murders and rapes.

The fear of calling out violent crimes committed by Muslims in the UK allowed the grooming gangs of Rotherham to fly well under the radar, for years! Numerous non-Muslim children were targeted for sexual exploitation by mostly British-Pakistani men in Rotherham. The complaints of their parents fell on many deaf years before the desperate pleas became too numerous to brush away. Yet, even that taint seems to have faded quickly enough with the news cycle favouring donations to the city, rather than an investigative follow-up. No one has looked into the mental health of the victims of one of the most massive sexual exploitation campaigns to rock the nation, affecting over 1,400 children. In a disconcertingly disgusting twist of politics, the city is set to be named Children's Capital of Culture!

When it comes to Sharia and its governance of women under Islam, the rhetoric of freedom espoused by the British commentariat switches to a Sharia-compliant acceptance of all atrocities they bear. Polygamy is normalised within British Muslim families, as is abuse, all of which is brushed away as being part of a misunderstood culture. The exoticisation and infantilisation of a non-assimilative population is absolutely accepted. The journalistic, academic, political and media circles are complicit, ensuring that the colonial gaze of the British on non-white people does not hold other humans to standards of living equal to their own, even if it means that women and children are third-class citizens.

Creating icons out of the few that fight their way through the systemic impositions of their culture into universities and beyond, the media uses them as mouthpieces. The intellectual cover provided by those who have escaped some prejudices while continuing to support the ideology that imposed said challenges is a ploy perfected by sections of the media and academia. Wasiq Wasiq, a highly regarded UK-based academic, bucks this trend. As a devout Muslim who calls the UK home, he has long researched Islamism and terrorism and has often noted the phenomenon of brushing Islamist violence under the carpet.

When asked why Islamists hold so much sway over the coverage of violent crimes when it regards Muslim culprits, Wasiq said, "Islamism has long been a staple within British society. It reared its ugly head in the 1980s following the publication of Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses* when Muslims took to the streets to protest and cause vandalism. This resulted in the government seeking to mainstream Islamist groups to moderate Muslims, under the misguided belief that they could only be controlled from within their own community. This gave bad-faith actors a level of power they were not necessarily expecting. Since then, Islamist groups have sought to control how the government and media treat Muslims."

He cited the example of the Prevent program, which is the government's counter-terrorism strategy. "It has been labelled Islamophobic, despite Islamist extremists dominating terror statistics. Even using terms such as Islamism and Jihadi are labelled Islamophobic, which means that tackling Islamist extremism is becoming difficult because we are not able to name it accurately without being called racist. There is an inherent soft bigotry of low expectations when it comes to Muslims and this needs to be corrected so that the government and the diverse Muslim community can tackle Islamist extremists effectively. Until then, we will continue to bury our heads in the sand and wish the problem away. But that simply isn't going to happen!"

While the BBC did not feel compelled to hide the parts of England that were already governed by Sharia courts when they [reported in 2012](#), that confidence has vanished completely. Articles talk about how such courts have "no jurisdiction" abound, and yet Sharia thrives in parts of the country. Still, the House of Commons has debated the Islamic Sharia Council's legality even as recently as 2019, despite its establishment over 40 years ago.

The violence will likely continue to be ignored by mainstream media outlets, ensuring that the gaslighting of large swathes of the UK population can go on. Even as patterns of Islamist violence continue, citizens continue to fear being called racist for calling it out. The Leicester riots in 2022 proved to be a masterclass in such whitewashing. As Muslim mobs gathered to chant and harass Hindus in a culturally diverse area, Hindu groups gathered to protest the unrest and the attacks. While Leicester police tried to clear the air, rumours about "Hindutva terrorism" fueled malicious narrative creation.

Contrast this with France which seems to have had enough of the dog-whistling to Islamophobia. Calling out violence for explicitly religious reasons is difficult across Europe, and yet the French government as

well as certain journalists have refused to cave in to offer soft bigotry as a solution for hard violence. The British state, instead, follows the narrative lines of the far-left extremist organisations that fuel their selective coverage at the cost of citizens' lives.

While violent crime raises its ugly head every day, the unspoken crimes against Muslim women on British soil continue unabated. It will take years to undo the damage wrought by such malfeasance, and yet, it is set to continue. People-led movements and political support for change are the way out, but will the British people wake up and smell the tea, or will the fear of a label continue to loom larger than the threat of organised and unorganised violence?

Sagorika Sinha is a columnist and podcaster with Masters in Biotechnology from the University of Bath. Views expressed are personal.

The Islamist threat in Latin America

By Luciano Mondino

Source: https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-islamist-threat-in-latin-america/
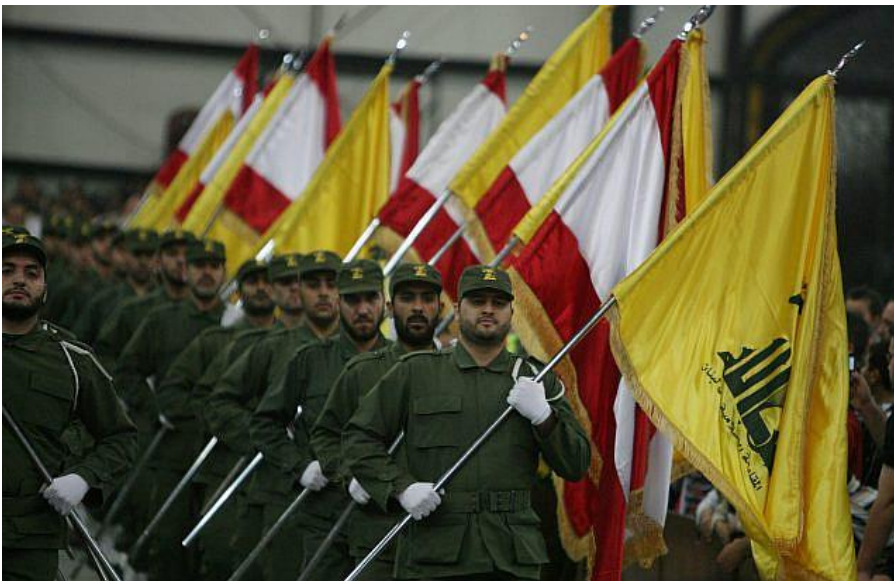
Jan 21 – Eight years have passed since the assassination of prosecutor Alberto Nisman, the Argentine prosecutor who was investigating the responsibility of Iran and Hezbollah in the 1994 AMIA bombing and the spread of Islamic terrorism in Latin America. He was not only investigating the tragic bombing, but a whole network that connected Islamism and organised crime and required local complicity to act in 1992, 1994 and 2015.

Who was Alberto Nisman

The prosecutor was appointed in 2006 by Néstor Kirchner, then president of Argentina and husband of the president and Nisman's accuser, Cristina Fernández, to find the truth in the bombing that had left 85 people dead and more than 300 injured.

The attack on the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) took place on 18 July 1994 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, when a suicide car driven by a Hezbollah cell, Ibrahim Hussein Berro, crashed into the building on Pasteur Street.

Two years earlier, Argentina had also been attacked by Islamic terrorism against the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, an unfortunate episode in history about which very little is said.

As soon as the AMIA bombing occurred, part of the then Argentine intelligence services investigated an Iranian lead that linked to a hitherto unknown name: Moshen Rabbani, a cultural attaché at the Iranian embassy in Buenos Aires.

The Iranian lead was backed up by the Nisman-led investigation by tying up some previously loose ends: high levels of the Iranian government, an illegal espionage structure (Quds Brigades), an operational force (Hezbollah) and organised local complicity.

The nuclear motif and a triangulation from Caracas

By that time, the nuclear issue between Iran and Argentina had become sufficiently tense following the interruption of contracts between the two countries. What for Tehran was a betrayal, for Argentina it was a move away, at least for a while, from a then nascent threat.

Since 1979, Iran had become a theocratic regime under the orders of the Ayatollahs and Khomeini, who were sending emissaries to various Latin American countries such as Argentina and Brazil. The latter had one aim: to spread the revolution.

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The work they carried out in Argentina was especially of an intelligence and criminal structure.

Adopted as a principle of the Islamic constitution, the Iranians intended to spread their model throughout the world. By that time, Iran's nuclear programme was already beginning to create the threat that exists today and that has the world on edge because of its danger.

To this must be added another facet of the Iranian government: its constant harassment and action against Israelis and the Jewish people inside and outside Israel. For this mission, a real military organisation and elite groups that answer to the Supreme Leaders have been structured: today, after the repression of the protests in Iran, **the Islamic Revolutionary Guard and the Quds Brigades, an elite body at the service of the former, were and continue to be responsible for organising the expansion of the revolution and consolidating Iran's satellite countries or groups.**

The work they carried out in Argentina was especially of an intelligence and criminal structure. This was entrusted to Mohsen Rabbani, who in addition to being in the embassy, was one of the leaders of the At-Tauhid Mosque in Flores, a mosque known for its radicalism.

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There are some indications that this criminal and clandestine intelligence apparatus is still intact: the arrival of the YV3531 aircraft of Emtrasur Cargo, a Venezuelan airline with links to Mahan Air, an Iranian airline sanctioned for the transfer of weapons to Syria and Lebanon, in Buenos Aires in June 2022.

Iranian Cargo to help Lebanon

Days after parking in Ciudad del Este, the aircraft arrived in Argentine territory and, due to weather conditions, became entangled in a web that linked public opinion, Argentine politics and the intelligence

services of neighbouring countries. The latter, in view of the attacks that took place 31 and 29 years ago, became especially relevant when it became known that part of the crew linked to the Quds Brigades were on board the aircraft.

Manned by Gholamreza Ghasemi, the crew was linked to the Quds Brigades and flights to Syria and Lebanon to supply weapons to Hezbollah, something alerted not only by FBI reports but also by intelligence from Arab countries.

The central point in Latin America is the strategic, political, military and nuclear alliance with Venezuela. Especially the relationship (even personal) between Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hugo Chávez over a key material: uranium.

Since Chávez came to power in Venezuela, the national company Ehdasae Sanat began operating in the country to extract the material that is key to Iran's nuclear programme. To this must be added the manufacture of national missiles and nuclear warheads.

Argentina appeared on the scene in 2007 after Chávez announced the beginnings of a Venezuelan nuclear programme and at a time when relations with Iran were more lively than ever. The Persian country was already under sanctions of all kinds as the Security Council first and the United States unilaterally implemented a package of sanctions aimed at discouraging Iran's nuclear spread.

The reason for the sanctions then was to have the same effect that the new sanctions packages should have today: to discourage the Ayatollah regime, known for its repressive nature, from becoming a threat that would ignite nuclear contagion, i.e. the nuclear arms race in Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

It was Hugo Chávez who also favoured the creation of a nuclear monster in the Middle East that today, 16 years later, threatens the security of neighbouring countries. In 2007 an event also occurred that raised all the alarm bells: the Venezuelan Antonini Wilson was arrested at Ezeiza airport in Buenos Aires with a briefcase containing 800,000 dollars from the Chávez oil company, money that was later indicated as a contribution to the campaign of the then-presidential candidate, Cristina Fernández.

Since 2007, the triangulation between Buenos Aires, Caracas and Tehran had been sufficiently well oiled to start working. Decades after the attacks, Iran once again found a solid operational base. In 2011, when Cristina Kirchner began her carnal alignment with Chávez's Venezuela and the Islamic Republic of Iran governed by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, one of the most reactionary rulers of Shiism, **Argentina began to get fully involved and to take steps that would later be very difficult to retrace.**

Emboldened by elections that gave it almost total control of the legislative branch, the entire executive branch and subjugating the judiciary, Kirchnerism began to work on what would become known as the Pact with Iran signed in 2013. The Pact with Iran, declared unconstitutional in 2014, swept away the AMIA case for political purposes: Argentina, which was going through a severe energy crisis as a result of the Kirchner government's extremely bad policies, decided to tilt the Buenos Aires-Caracas-Tehran triangle towards an Argentine-Iranian axis.

Nor should it be forgotten that, at that time, Argentina was also experiencing a severe international isolation, a debt crisis and no interest in regional and global forums. At the time, Iran was a strategic partner of Kirchnerism.

Those who also maintained well-oiled links with people linked to Iran and the Flores mosque, which had been pointed to as the intelligence hub for the AMIA bombing, were and continue to be truly deplorable characters in Argentina: years later, accused by Alberto Nisman, these characters with strong links to Islamic extremists were and continue to be Luis D'elía and Fernando Esteche, two attendees of the mosque's activities.

A key player in the relationship between Islamist groups and Latin America is Tareck El Aissami, who was a minister in Maduro's regime and is now oil minister. He is also the nexus with Hezbollah and other groups in the Triple Frontier.

It is in this context that Argentina signed the memorandum with Iran to fabricate his innocence. Specified by the Iranian envoys: no commercial advances can be made as long as the accusations against Iran persist. And there was a reason for this.

In 2011, the Iranian minister, Ahmad Vahidi, was expelled from Bolivia because he is still wanted by Interpol (red notices) and must be immediately detained once the security forces intercept him.

Something similar had happened when Iranian officials wanted to travel to South Korea. It was and continues to be very unhappy for senior Iranian government officials to have to escape Interpol with every trip. And this is really not minor.

Argentina's accusations to Interpol in 2007, which were validated by countries that may have been closer to Iran at the time, point to high-level officials: one of them is the current vice-president, Mohsen Rezai, who travelled to Nicaragua in January 2022.

All these years of links between Iran and Argentina, via Venezuela, also occurred at the same time as the growth of Hezbollah in the Triple Frontier that links Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay, where today there is no intention of controlling it.

There is a cooperation agreement signed after the 2001 attacks, but there is little commitment to keep it in place. These agreements, moreover, were seriously discouraged during the Lula Da Silva and Kirchner governments, respectively.

Why was prosecutor Nisman murdered? Justice today pursues two premises: first, that Nisman died because of the accusation he had made. Moreover, with Brazil something else is going on: Brazilian governments have never designated Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation, something that Macri's government did in 2019. All this came to a head in 2015 when Nisman denounced Cristina Kirchner.

In the Triple Frontier and Venezuela, **these Islamic groups operate in a grey area where Islamic terrorism and organised crime**, especially the forgery and distribution of travel documents (passports), trafficking in arms, people and others, are commonplace.

Why was prosecutor Nisman murdered? Justice today pursues two premises: first, that Nisman died because of the accusation he had made. The prosecutor intended to show the existence of an impunity pact and a criminal conspiracy to exonerate Iran.

Second, that Nisman was murdered and that suicide could not be proven, that there were unusual movements by spies near Nisman's home that night, that there are contradictions in his statements and that the crime scene was invaded.

There is also a fact that is often overlooked: on 17 January, a fire in the Casa Rosada eliminated thousands of records of the government's entry to the house from the last four years when the Argentine government was negotiating with Iran. What was there we will never know.

With Nisman dead, the man who knew the most about the AMIA case and who was determined to unravel a three-decade-long network, Iran continued to enter Argentina and the groups linked to the mosque continue to operate, waiting for a loophole of impunity.

In 2019, Cristina Kirchner, then denounced for leading the criminal conspiracy, presented her book "Sincerely" in Argentina. One of the attendees was none other than Mohsen Ali of the Flores mosque and a known denialist and anti-Semite. For Mohsen Ali, the AMIA bombing presents his doubts. They always find a way to relativise the murder of 85 people, the wounding of more than 300 and the assassination of the prosecutor investigating those deaths. Iran continues today to fail to hand over those accused by Argentina.

Nisman's death dusted off more than three decades of a parallel structure that struck twice in our country and is always alive to strike again. Forgetting, unfortunately, ends up being an ally of impunity.

Luciano Mondino has a Master's Degree in International Politics from the Complutense University of Madrid. Interested in transnational terrorism, organized crime, radicalism and the fight against anti-Semitism.
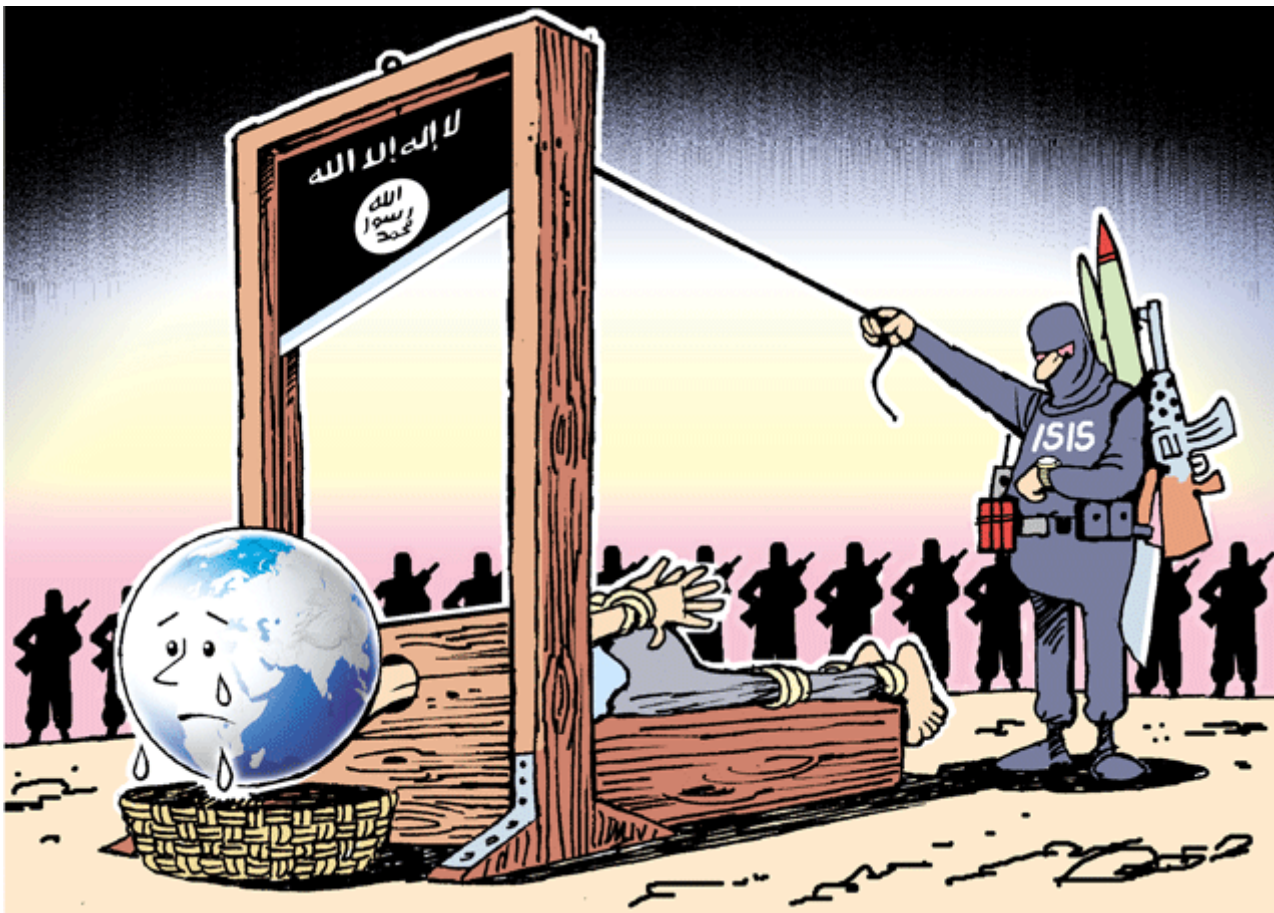
'My medical opinion has been criminalized,' says prominent doctor and human rights activist at first trial hearing

Source: https://stockholmcf.org/my-medical-opinion-has-been-criminalized-says-prominent-doctor-and-human-rights-activist-at-first-trial-hearing/

A protester holds a placard of Turkey's Medical Association President Şebnem Korur Fincancı, reading "We want freedom for Şebnem" ahead of a press release on December 23, 2022, in front of Istanbul's courthouse during the trial of Şebnem Korur Fincanci, detained over chemical arms comment and "terrorist propaganda" charges. OZAN KOSE / AFP

Dec 23 – Dr. Şebnem Korur Fincancı, head of the Turkish Medical Association as well as an expert in forensic medicine and a prominent human rights defender, said at the first hearing of her trial that she is being prosecuted due to the criminalization of her medical opinion, Turkish Minute reported.

Fincancı, 63, has been in pretrial detention since Oct. 26 due to her remarks calling for an investigation into claims of the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Turkish military against militants of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in northern Iraq.

"My medical opinion has been criminalized. If there is a crime in question, there is also the effort to cover up that crime. The crimes committed by a state are investigated by independent bodies," said Fincancı in her defense at the İstanbul 24th High Criminal Court at the İstanbul Courthouse in Çağlayan.

She entered the packed courtroom holding up a defiant fist, while her supporters applauded and dozens of anti-riot police looked on, Agence France-Presse reported.

Fincancı said that after examining videos of PKK militants, she expressed her preliminary assessment and said some militants looked like they had been the victims of chemical weapons, with foam coming out of their mouths.

"I talked about the need for an investigation. I exercised my freedom of expression and scientific freedom," said Fincancı.

The doctor faces charges of disseminating terrorist propaganda in her remarks, which calls for a sentence of seven-and-a-half years in prison.

The Turkish government has strongly denied the allegations about the military's use of chemical weapons, and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan accused Fincancı of "speaking the language of terrorism." Fincancı once again called for

"an effective investigation" including on-the-ground inspections and autopsies of the militants of the PKK, listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey and much of the international community.

"As a human rights defender, I have a responsibility to defend freedom of expression and the public's right to information," she told the court.

She also complained that she was brought to the İstanbul Courthouse from Sincan Prison in Ankara and that she was handcuffed during the trip, which lasted more than five hours, in a prisoner transport vehicle.

Fincancı called the situation a "violation of human dignity," saying it was impossible for her to pose a security risk with her pen as her "only weapon."

The PKK said 17 of its militants had died in chemical weapons attacks in the mountains and caves of northern Iraq.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch issued a joint call with five other organizations for Fincancı's release pending trial. "Korur Fincanci is a distinguished expert on the documentation of torture," they said in a joint statement.

"Her work should be lauded, not punished," the World Medical Association's German chairman Frank Ulrich Montgomery said in the statement. But the chief prosecutor argued in court Friday that Fincancı "actively participated in propaganda activities of the PKK" and demanded she remain in custody pending trial.

The court ruled for the continuation of the doctor's incarceration and adjourned the trial until Dec. 29.

The challenge of chemical weapons

By Rufai Ibrahim
Source: https://www.newtelegraphng.com/the-challenge-of-chemical-weapons/

Dec 25 – Chemical weapons are chemical agents whether gaseous, liquid, or solid, that are employed because of their direct toxic effects on humans, animals and plants. They inflict damage when inhaled, absorbed through the skin, or ingested in food or drink. Some of them are chlorine, lewisite, mustard, phosgene, sarin, soman, and tabun. They fall into four major classes: nerve, blister, choking and blood agents. Ben Wallace as British Defence Secretary in 2021 reportedly warned that a breakdown in the international order has led to a growing threat of chemical attacks around the world. Wallace said some regimes around the world increasingly believed it was acceptable to use nerve agents and pathogens against their opponents. Only recently the Turkish Police detained the president of the country's medical association, Sebnem Fincanci , after she called for a probe into the use of chemical weapons against Kurdish militants in northern Iraq. This was in response to the fighters release of names and photos of people portrayed as alleged 'martyrs' killed by poison gas in the region. Turkish officials strongly rejected the allegations that its military used chemical weapons against the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The group however, is considered a terrorist organisation in Turkey, Europe and the United States that must be exterminated. Despite the dangers of chemical weapons, state-sponsored scientists continue to develop the weapons under various guises around the world. A Pentagon factsheet released on June 9 this year read that US government sponsored civilian laboratories and health care institutes in Ukraine as part of a peaceful campaign during the past 20 years. Commenting on the Pentagon factsheet, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Zhao Lijian, demanded that the US disclose full and detailed information about the activity of the US military laboratories in Ukraine, especially when it has been stated that during the special military operation in Ukraine, foreign officials discovered evidence pointing to an emergency clean up by the Kiev regime of traces of a military biological programme conducted in Ukraine and financed by the US Defense Department. The Defense Department reportedly gave out millions of dollars to EcoHealth Alliance, the New York city-based non-profit organisation that funnelled federal grant money to the Wuhan Institute of Virology for bat coronavirus research – with most of the Pentagon money reportedly going toward murky research on countering biological weapons. In fact Eco-Health Alliance has already come under scrutiny for redirecting funds from the National Institute of Health (NIH) to the Chinese lab, from where many believe COVID – 19 leaked to set off the worst pandemic in a century. Richard Ebright, a professor of Chemistry and Chemical Biology at Rutgers University and Lab Director at the school's Waksman Institute of Microbiology, told the New York Post that such grants from the defense and intelligence communities are distributed "outside the normal processes" for such research, with no transparency and oversight beyond what can be provided by the members of congress. For several years, the USA Today conducted an investigation into the biosecurity of US germ labs and found systematic safety failures and repeated non-compliance to safety procedures with US GAO – the investigative arm of Congress – reaching similar conclusions regarding these lapses. For example, in 2015 the Pentagon discovered that one of its laboratories in Dugway Proving Ground, Utah, had inadvertently sent live anthrax to almost 200 laboratories worldwide over the course of 12 years, because the lab's "inactivation" (removal of hazardous effects) of the pathogen was found to be incomplete. In the latest warning regarding DNA testing, two US Representatives have reportedly warned that DNA testing could lead to gene-specific bioweapons. The use and possession of chemical weapons is prohibited under international law, but several nations continue to maintain active chemical weapons programmes. The alarm raised by Wallace last year of the growing threat of chemical attacks around the world was justified

recently when the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the government of the Kingdom of Morocco brought together medical emergency response experts from African countries in Rabat, and trained them on toxic chemical incident preparedness for hospitals (HOSPREP).

EDITOR'S COMMENT: We say that chemical weapons kill, and this is why we have a monitoring organization (OPCW) to prohibit their use. Bullets kill as well but they are not prohibited! Would it be a good idea to have an OPB as well?

America is failing to fight chemical and biological weapons — but we can change that

By Andy Weber and David F. Lasseter
Source: https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/3786808-america-is-failing-to-fight-chemical-and-biological-weapons-but-we-can-change-that/

Dec 28 – Chemical and biological weapons pose a greater threat to global security today than at any point since the end of the Cold War. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the United States' disastrous vulnerability to infectious pathogens, novel diseases continue to spread worldwide, and the norms against the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) are eroding. Without a concentrated effort to mitigate these risks, chemical and biological threats will continue to grow as state and nonstate actors gain access to new and more destructive technologies.

Despite these growing dangers, the U.S. defense establishment remains less-than-fully prepared to deter and defend against chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction. In particular, the Department of Defense's Chemical and Biological Defense Program (CBDP) — one of Washington's most capable and effective programs to counter real-world WMD threats — remains woefully underfunded and slow to utilize existing resources.

In an age of reemergent great-power competition, interstate conflict, and potential WMD proliferation, CBDP merits renewed attention by policymakers and Congress. Plugging gaps in the program's funding and properly speeding up the use of current cash for existing products and novel technologies shouldn't be difficult. Without too much extra, roughly $3 billion in fiscal year 2024, the United States can make a significant dent in these potentially existential issues — simultaneously protecting U.S. troops while drastically reducing the risk of catastrophic chemical or biological incidents worldwide.

Chemical and biological threats aren't science fiction. Russia has used Novichok chemical weapons in several botched assassination attempts: one in 2018 against former Russian intelligence officer Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in the United Kingdom, and another against opposition leader Alexei Navalny just last year. In 2017, moreover, Pyongyang used VX nerve agent in Kuala Lumpur to assassinate Kim Jong Nam, the half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Analysts also are increasingly concerned about the proliferation of fentanyl and its potential use as a chemical weapon.

On the biological side, the world continues to face a remarkable cascade of public health emergencies, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the global spread of monkeypox, a resurgent polio outbreak and, most recently, a worsening outbreak of vaccine-resistant Ebola in Uganda. Beyond the obvious risk to the American public, biological events threaten to degrade and destroy U.S. military capabilities. In the early stages of the COVID pandemic, for example, a large outbreak aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt aircraft carrier infected more than 1,200 sailors, effectively disabling the ship.

To its credit, the United States has released multiple reviews, strategies and plans designed to counter chemical and biological threats over the past two years. These multi-agency efforts, including the 2022 National Biodefense Strategy and Implementation Plan (NBS), highlight vital concerns about naturally occurring biological threats, engineered biological weapons, and chemical weapons. The NBS, in particular, underscores the need to "deter, detect, degrade, disrupt, deny or otherwise prevent nation-state and nonstate actors' attempts to pursue, acquire or use biological weapons, related materials, or their means of delivery."

The Department of Defense's recent National Defense Strategy also emphasizes the vital concept of so-called "deterrence by denial" — or the idea that the United States and its allies can deter the use of certain weapons by eliminating their effectiveness against both military and civilian targets. By "improving conventional forces ability to operate in the face of limited nuclear, chemical, and biological attacks," the strategy explains, Washington can "deny adversaries benefit from possessing and employing such weapons." While these U.S. government strategies are a good place to start, they lack muscle. A strategy, after all, is just a piece of paper unless it receives adequate funding. Eliminating chemical and biological weapons threats requires sufficient resources to develop cutting-edge capabilities and design effective counter- and non-proliferation regimes.

The CBDP — given its leadership role in research, development and acquisition focused on chemical and biological threats — is the right place to start. Presently, the program's budget is roughly $1.2 billion per year. This is simply not enough to research, test, develop and procure the detection, mitigation, early-warning and response capabilities needed to counter the vast array of contemporary chemical and biological threats, to say nothing of those that might emerge.

To address this dangerous imbalance, Washington needs to match recent upgrades to U.S. strategy with comparable resources. With additional funding and spending, the CBDP could invest further in vital emerging technologies, including stand-off detection, predictive wearables, and advanced protective suits — all of which would help the U.S. military protect its fighting advantage. Other tools, including point-of-care diagnostics, artificial intelligence-enabled biosurveillance, and broad-spectrum medical countermeasures can ensure that Washington maintains its ability to quickly identify, track and treat emerging threats. We believe bringing the CBDP budget up to $3 billion for 2024, and growing in subsequent years (while ensuring that the program effectively spends the resources it already has) would allow this. If not, the U.S. ability to develop these tools is hampered by serious resource constraints.

In recent years, the Defense Department has consistently underfunded and under-executed the CBDP. This program is ultimately a bargain — especially compared to most other major defense programs. Although the threats posed by chemical and biological weapons are very real, so are the solutions. For the cost of a few aircraft, the United States can protect its soldiers overseas from a host of deadly weapons and, more broadly, head off a potentially catastrophic global chemical or biological incident. Fully funding counter-WMD programs is not only responsible policy but a sound investment and a small price to pay for decades of enhanced U.S. and global security.

Andrew Weber is a senior fellow at the Janne E. Nolan Center on Strategic Weapons at the Council on Strategic Risks. He was U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical and Biological Defense Programs during the Obama administration.
David Lasseter is founder of Horizons Global Solutions and a visiting fellow at the National Security Institute at George Mason University. He was Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction during the Trump administration.

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The effect of communication during mass decontamination

Holly Carter
Emergency Response Department, Health Protection Agency, Salisbury, UK
John Drury
School of Psychology, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK
G. James Rubin
Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London, London, UK
Richard Williams
Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care, University of Glamorgan, Cardiff & Pontypridd, UK, and
Richard Amlôt
Emergency Response Department, Health Protection Agency, Salisbury, UK

Purpose – Reports from small-scale incidents in which decontamination was conducted suggest that a successful communication strategy is vital in order to increase public compliance with, and reduce public anxiety about, decontamination. However, it has not been possible to examine public behaviour during large scale incidents involving decontamination. The aim of the research reported here was to examine the relationship between people's positive perceptions of responding agencies' communication strategies and relevant outcome variables, such as level of compliance and level of reassurance, in several field exercises involving mass decontamination.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected using feedback questionnaires completed by simulated casualties, which contained items relating to casualties' perceptions of the success of responding agencies' communication strategies, their confidence in emergency responders, and their compliance with the decontamination process. Path analysis was used to examine the relationships between variables.

Findings – Results show a significant relationship between responding agencies' communication strategies, level of public reassurance, and level of public compliance. The relationship between responders' communication strategies and the outcome variables was partially mediated by public confidence in responders.

Practical implications – Emergency responders should focus on communication with members of the public as a key element of the decontamination process, as failure to do so could result in high levels of anxiety and low levels of compliance among those who are affected.

Originality/value – This research highlights the importance of effective responder communication strategies. Further, findings indicate the value of examining feedback from field exercises to facilitate a greater understanding of public experiences of the decontamination process.

If you are new in the business, it is not too late to change your mind!

Paris 2024 : cérémonie d'ouverture des Jeux olympiques – Innovante ? Oui ! Sécurisée (CBRNe/NBCe) ? Non !

Ioannis Galatas, Julien Marx

DANS SÉCURITÉ GLOBALE 2022/4 (N° 32), PAGES 35 À 49

Paris accueillera les Jeux olympiques de 2024 pour la sixième fois depuis 1900, et la troisième pour les Olympiades d'été. Les organisateurs essaient toujours de trouver des moyens innovants pour se différencier des jeux précédents et faire de ce méga-évènement sportif une expérience mémorable. Le conseil d'administration du Comité français d'organisation des Jeux Olympiques a proposé d'organiser la cérémonie d'ouverture sur les deux rives de la Seine à Paris. Ils ont estimé que près de 600 000 personnes assisteront à cet évènement spectaculaire de façon jamais vue auparavant. Nul doute, l'idée est innovante ! Mais ce cadre garantira-t-il une sécurité de niveau égal? Se fondant sur les menaces asymétriques (CBRNe/NBCe) anticipées avant les Jeux, les auteurs entendent pouvoir que cette excellente idée devrait mieux cêtre onservée dans un tiroir, pour une future Olympiade dans un monde meilleur. La France a cinq fois accueilli les Jeux olympiques et accuillera bientôt ses sixièmes : Jeux olympiques d'été 1900 à Paris, Jeux olympiques d'hiver de 1924 à Chamonix, Jeux olympiques d'été de 1924 à Paris, Jeux olympiques d'hiver de 1968 à Grenoble, Jeux olympiques d'hiver de 1992 à Albertville et Jeux olympiques d'été de 2024 à Paris (26 juillet au 11 aout 2024). La France a une longue histoire d'attentats terroristes perpétrés par divers groupes d'extrême droite, d'extrême gauche, de séparatistes nationalistes basques, bretons et corses, de groupes d'insurgés algériens et d'extrémistes islamistes…
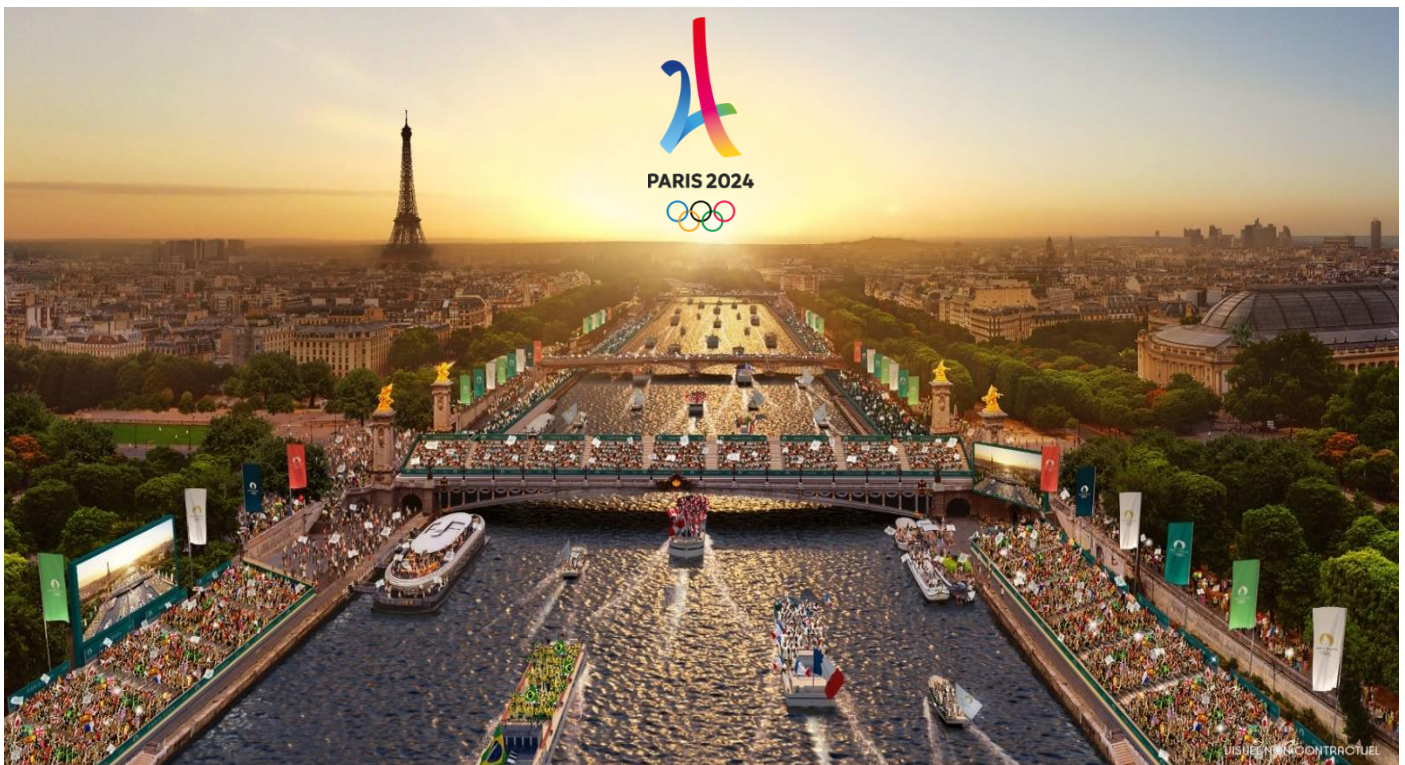
Paris will host the 2024 Olympic Games for the sixth time since 1900 and the third time regarding Summer Olympiads. Organizers always try to find innovative ways that will make a difference compared to previous games and make this mega sports event a memorable experience. French Olympic Games Organizing Committee's Board of Directors proposed to organize the opening ceremony on both banks of the Seine River in Paris. They estimated that almost 600,000 people will attend this spectacular event in a way never done before. There is no doubt that the idea is innovative! But this does not mean that the setting will ensure that security will be of equal standards. Based on asymmetric threats (CBRNe/NBCe) anticipated before and during the Games, the authors will prove that this excellent idea should be better kept in a drawer for a future Olympiad in a better world.

DECPOL RAD® – Radiodecontamination wipes
Source: https://ouvry.com/en/produit/decpol-rad-radiological-decontamination-wipes/

Radiological decontamination wipe designed for the decontamination of surfaces, equipment and skin.
DECPOL RAD® wipes are composed of a 100% viscose non-woven wipe impregnated with **RADECOM®**, a degreasing solution for radiological decontamination.
They allow manual decontamination of all types of surfaces (smooth or with asperities), equipment and the skin. DECPOL RAD® is the ideal answer in case of radiological contamination:

- Decontaminates surfaces by removal of fixed and labile radiological contaminants
- Does not create over-contamination by spreading, nor redeposition
- The impregnation of the wipe with RADECOM® solution is optimized without generating excess liquid.
- Does not release particles or microfibres on the decontaminated area
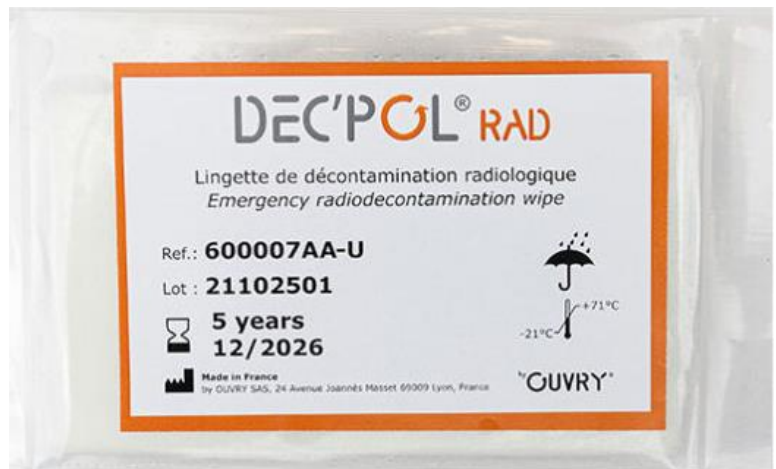
Wipe manufactured using a glueless fibre assembly process using high pressure water jets "spunlace":
- 100% viscose non-woven
- Lint-free
- Inert
- Skin-friendly
- Very good wiping and absorption performance

DECPOL RAD® is folded and packed in plastic bags of 10 wipes.

NOVICHOK Nerve Agent Overview
By Adolph EID
Source: https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/novitchok-nerve-agent-overview-adolph-eid-/

Dec 27 – On 4 March 2018, at 16:15 an emergency services call reported that a man and woman, later identified as Sergei and Yulia Skripal, had been found unconscious on a public bench in the center of Salisbury, UK. An eyewitness saw the woman foaming at the mouth with her eyes wide open but completely white. According to a later British government statement they were "slipping in and out of consciousness on a public bench". Couple of days

later the UK government said that a Novichok agent (the Newcomer in Russian language) had been used in an attack in the English city of Salisbury on 4 March 2018 in an attempt to kill former FSB defected officer Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia. A few days later a man found a perfume bottle, later discovered to contain the agent (Novitchok), in a litter bin somewhere in Salisbury and gave it to a woman who sprayed it on her wrist. The woman, Dawn Sturgess, fell ill within 15 minutes and died on 8 July, but the man, Charlie Rowley, who also came into contact with the poison, survived. British police believe this incident was not a targeted attack, but a result of the way the nerve agent was disposed of after the poisoning in Salisbury. The Russian secret services were accused to stay behind the assassination attempt according to the British authorities.

Two years later, on 20 August 2020, the Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny fell ill during a flight from Tomsk to Moscow. The plane made an emergency landing in Omsk, where Navalny was put in a medically induced coma. His caused by a poison put into a cup of tea he used was identified as Novichok.

hospitalized and family suspected his illness was drank before the flight. Later on, the agent

However, these two incidents are not the only incidents involving Novichok, although they are the most infamous ones. In 2015 a Bulgarian arms dealer Emilian Gebrev was hospitalized after collapsing at a reception he was hosting in Sofia. His son and one of his company's executives also fell ill and were hospitalized. At the time, doctors said Gebrev had been poisoned but were unable to identify the substance used. Reports of a possible Novichok link surfaced after the investigative site Bellingcat claimed it had discovered that a suspect in the Skripal poisoning had been in Bulgaria at the time Gebrev fell ill. Yet, the first use of Novichok may have been in 1995, when Russian businessman Ivan Kivelidi and his secretary, Zara Ismailova, were killed in Moscow. A poisonous substance had been placed on Kivelidi's telephone receiver in his office. Authorities said at the time that they had been poisoned with cadmium, a heavy metal, but Russian and foreign media have since reported that it was almost certainly Novichok.

Nerve agents

Nerve agents are usually odorless, colorless and tasteless liquids (in pure state) that may evaporate to a gas. Though some Novichok agents are solid, it is thought that its most common dispersal is by means of an ultrafine powder, and it can enter the body by inhalation, ingestion, or contact with the skin. Novichok agents are carbonimidic phosphorohalides, developed by the former Soviet Union (SU), and considered as the fourth Chemical Warfare Agents (CWAs) generation. Research on Novichok nerve agents began in the 1970s in the former SU and continued through the early 1990s (Russian Federation) under the Foliant program. Minimal information about these agents or this research program has been published in the unclassified literature. Although production of several thousand tons for testing purposes has been reported, there is no information to indicate that these agents were ever stockpiled in the Soviet arsenal, and they have never been used on the battlefield. However, because of their toxicity and lack of commercial application, they would be prohibited based on the Guidelines for Schedules of Chemicals. *Entry 13 (CWC 1A13)*. A large family of Novichok agents comprised of fluorophosphates with amidine branches, this is the first Novichok family listed in the joint proposal, which has a wider scope than the first element of the Russian proposal. *Entry 14 (CWC 1A15).* A large family of Novichok agents comprised of fluorophosphates with amidine branches, this is the second Novichok family listed in the joint proposal, which has a wider scope than the second element of the Russian proposal. Notably, this is the Novichok family to which the A-234 reportedly employed in the Salisbury incidents belongs. With the exception of the Novichok series, organophosphorus nerve agents are relatively easy to synthesize and disperse. On the other hand, Novichok nerve agents are moderately difficult to synthesize. Overall, nerve agents are easy to deliver. Although no specific information is available on dispersing Novichok agents, they should perform similar to other organophosphorus nerve agents. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) identifies in its *Declaration Handbook 2002 for the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling, and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction* numerous other G-series and V-series organophosphorus nerve agents. However, no information is available in the unclassified literature concerning the physical, chemical, or toxicological properties of these additional agents.
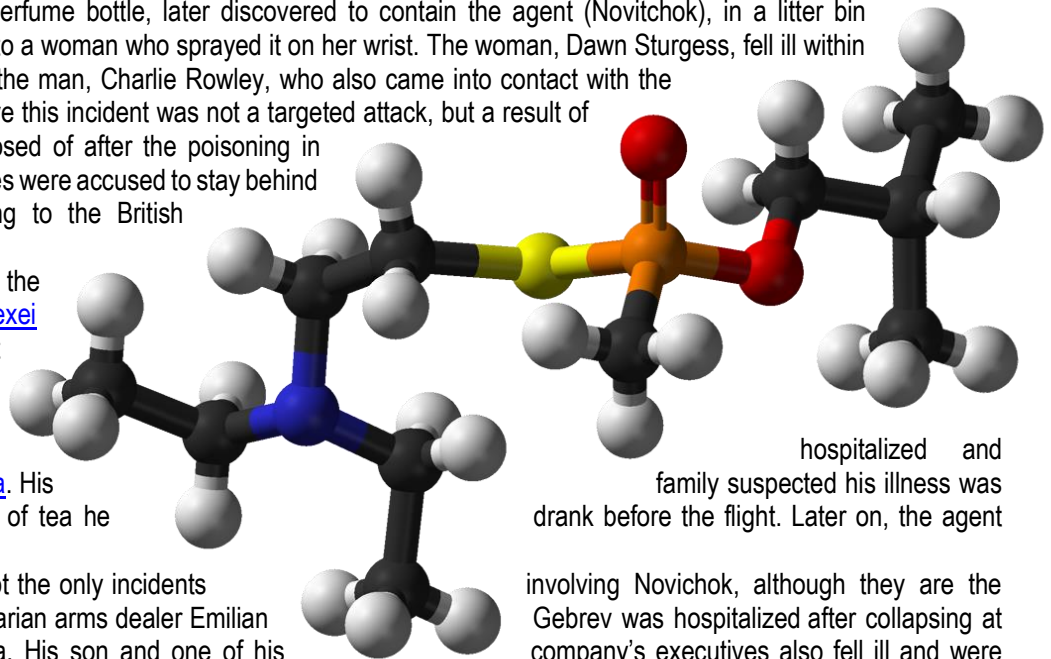
Novichok Series Toxicity
Human toxicity data for the Novichok series have not been published or have not been established. However, available information indicates that under optimum conditions Novichok agents are 5–10 times more toxic than nerve agent VX.

Latency Period Vapor/Aerosols (Mists or Dusts)
Depending on the concentration of agent vapor, the effects begin to appear from 30 seconds to 2 minutes after initial exposure.

Hydrolysis
Novichok agents: produce HF, HCl, or HCN when hydrolyzed. They may also produce highly toxic oximes.

Combustion
Volatile decomposition products may include HF, HCl, HCN, PO*x* as well as potentially toxic organophosphates. In addition, toxic phosphate residue may remain.

Novichok Agents Decontamination
Information on decontaminating Novichok agents has not been published. However, on the basis of similarities to other organophosphates, it is likely that these agents will be destroyed by high pH such as basic solutions. Use an aqueous caustic solution (minimum of 10% by weight sodium hydroxide or sodium carbonate) or use undiluted household bleach. Hydrolysis of Novichok agents will produce acidic by-products; therefore, a large excess of base will be needed to ensure complete destruction of the agents. Due to the extreme volume required, household bleach is not an efficient means of decontaminating large quantities of these agents. Solid hypochlorites (e.g., HTH, STB, and Dutch powder) should also be effective in destroying Novichok nerve agents. Reaction with hypochlorite, including household bleach, may produce toxic gases such as chlorine.

Although specific data have not been published in the unclassified literature, preliminary studies indicate that reactive oximes and their salts, such as potassium 2,3-butanedione monoximate found in commercially available RSDL, are extremely effective at rapidly detoxifying Novichok nerve agents. Also, based on similarities to other organophosphates, basic peroxides (e.g., a solution of baking soda, 30–50% hydrogen peroxide, and an alcohol) should rapidly detoxify Novichok agents.

Vapors
Casualties/personnel: Remove all clothing as it may continue to emit "trapped" agent vapor after contact with the vapor cloud has ceased. Shower using copious amounts of soap and water. Ensure that the hair has been washed and rinsed to remove potentially trapped vapor. If there is a potential that the eyes have been exposed to nerve agents, irrigate with water or 0.9% saline solution for a minimum of 15 minutes.

Liquids, Solutions, or Liquid Aerosols
Casualties/personnel: Remove all clothing immediately. Even clothing that has not come into direct contact with the agent may contain "trapped" vapor. To avoid further exposure of the head, neck, and face to the agent, cut off potentially contaminated clothing that must be pulled over the head. Remove as much of the nerve agent from the skin as fast as possible. If water is not immediately available, the agent can be absorbed with any convenient material such as paper towels, toilet paper, flour, talc, and so on. To minimize both spreading the agent and abrading the skin, do not rub the agent with the absorbent. Blot the contaminated skin with the absorbent. Use a sponge or cloth with liquid soap and copious amounts of water to wash the skin surface and hair at least three times. Do not delay decontamination to find warm or hot water if it is not readily available. Avoid rough scrubbing as this could abrade the skin and increase percutaneous absorption of residual agent. Rinse with copious amounts of water. If there is a potential that the eyes have been exposed to nerve agents, irrigate with water or 0.9% saline solution for a minimum of 15 minutes.

Alternatively, a household bleach solution can be used instead of soap and water. The bleach solution should be no more than one-part household bleach in nine parts water (i.e., 0.5% sodium hypochlorite) to avoid damaging the skin. Avoid any contact with sensitive areas such as the eyes. Rinse with copious amounts of water.

Like other organophosphate compounds, Novichok agents bind acetylcholinesterase preventing degradation of acetylcholine and producing the cholinergic or muscarinic toxidrome. The Novichok-acetylcholinesterase bond undergoes a similar aging process like other organophosphates, rendering acetylcholinesterase inactive and unable to metabolize acetylcholine, resulting in prolonged neurotoxicity and respiratory paralysis. Andrei Zheleznyakov's description of aerosolized exposure to Novichok-5 due to a malfunctioning fume hood in 1987 highlights early toxicity consisting of mydriasis and shortness of breath due to Broncho-rhea. These symptoms rapidly progress

to seizures, respiratory paralysis, bradycardia, coma, and death. In addition to their cholinergic effects, Novichok agents' binding to peripheral sensory nerves distinguishes this chemical class from organophosphates. Prolonged or high-dose exposures are result in a debilitating peripheral neuropathy.

Novichok Treatment

Treatment of Novichok or other nerve agent exposure is threefold. First, like any exposure to nerve agents, directed decontamination is important to prevent continued exposure to the patient and to emergency response staff. Clothing exposed to nerve agents can emit trapped vapors for up to 30 min. Although most nerve agents decompose slowly in water, raising the pH of decontamination solution may speed hydrolysis. Use of dry bleach powder should be avoided as it may hydrolyze nerve agents into toxic metabolites. In the case of Novichok agents, hydrolysis produces hydrofluoric acid, hydrochloric acid, hydrogen cyanide, and downstream oximes that can continue to produce cholinergic effects to the exposed individuals. Second, like other organophosphate nerve agents, clinicians should immediately administer intravenous atropine (2–6 mg every 5–10 min) until bradycardia, broncho-rhea and bronchospasm (e.g. muscarinic symptoms) resolve. Induced tachycardia is not a contraindication for escalating atropine doses. Seizures from nerve agent poisoning can be prevented and treated with diazepam. Hospital atropine stocks may be rapidly depleted in the treatment of poisoned victims due to the large dose of atropine typically required to reverse cholinergic symptoms and the volume of patients seeking medical care after a nerve agent attack. Clinicians should recognize possible alternative sources for atropine, including veterinary clinics (a DuoDote auto-injector containing Atropine and Pralidoxime chloride would be a good treatment for all nerve agents).

Mass-Casualty Triage Recommendations (including all individuals exposed to nerve agents)
Priority 1
A casualty with symptoms in two or more organ systems (not including miosis or rhinorrhea), who has a heartbeat and a palpable blood pressure. The casualty may or may not be conscious and/or breathing.
Priority 2
A casualty with known exposure to liquid agent but no apparent signs or symptoms, or a casualty who is recovering from a severe exposure after receiving treatment.
Priority 3
A casualty who is walking and talking, although miosis and/or rhinorrhea may be present.
Priority 4
A casualty who is not breathing and does not have a heartbeat or palpable blood pressure.

C01-A035 is one of several types of Novichok
[(Fluoromethoxyphosphinyl)oxy]carbonimidic dichloride
CAS: 17642-31-8
RTECS: —
C2H3Cl2FNO3P
Specific information on physical appearance is not available for this agent.

Exposure Hazards
Conversion Factor: 1 ppm = 8.59 mg/m3 at 77∘F
Human toxicity values have not been established or have not been published.
Novichok is **So Difficult to Detect?**

Specialists in the matter claim Novichok agents were designed to achieve four objectives:
- To be undetectable using standard 1970s and '80s NATO chemical-detection equipment
- To defeat NATO chemical-protective gear
- To be safer to handle
- To circumvent the Chemical Weapons Convention's list of controlled precursors
 Novichok is a "binary" chemical weapon, meaning it uses two or more chemical precursors that are either nontoxic or less toxic and become active only when mixed.
Though this makes Novichok safer to store, transport, and dispose of, it makes it harder to detect, as the precursors can be transported separately.

Another disadvantage is that careless preparation may produce a nonoptimal agent. This is perhaps why some presumed assassination attempts using Novichok have failed (e.g., Skripal and Navalni).

Capt. Adolph Eid is a CBRNe Safety & Security Officer (Master's Degree). CNSP & RPO, Radioactive Source Security Management/Radiation Detection Techniques Skills. Security X-Ray Specialist.

German Police Detain Iranian on Suspicion of Planning Chemical Attack

Source: https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/07/world/europe/german-ricin-cyanide-arrest.html

Investigators examining substances found during the search of a suspect's home in Castrop-Rauxel, Germany, on Sunday. Credit...Christoph Reichwein/picture alliance, via Getty Images

Jan 07 – The authorities in Germany said early Sunday that they had taken into custody a 32-year-old Iranian citizen suspected of procuring **cyanide and ricin** in an effort "to commit an Islamist-motivated attack."

In a brief statement released by the police in Münster, Germany, the authorities said that investigators had searched the suspect's home in the city of **Castrop-Rauxel** for toxins and other evidence.

"The accused is suspected of having prepared a serious act of violence that endangers the state," the statement said, adding that such a crime is punishable with a prison sentence of between six months and 10 years.

The police did not offer any additional information about the suspect. They said that they took one other person into custody in connection with the investigation, but provided no details about that person.
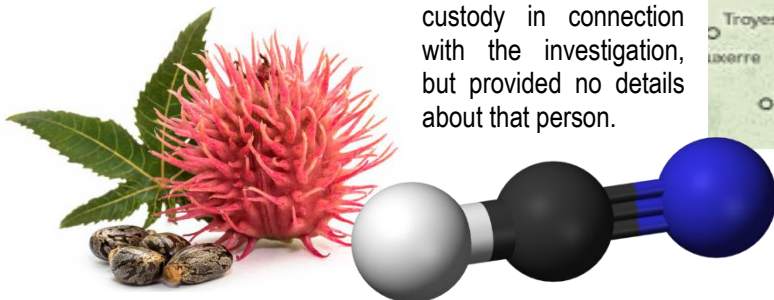
UPDATE (8/1): The SEK special forces who organised the operation reportedly arrived in the street in a fire engine in an effort to disguise themselves until the last minute.

A decontamination unit of officers and scientists from the government's agency for disease control and prevention, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), as well as a detonation unit, accompanied the operation.

According to a spokesperson for Düsseldorf's state prosecutor, no dangerous substances were found in the flat.

Reports in German media on Sunday said the FBI had been behind the tipoff after identifying the main suspect as a sympathiser

Still looking for the chemicals

of the terror group Islamic State, in whose name they said he had intended to carry out the attack. He is not believed to have been acting on behalf of the Iranian state, German security sources told the news agency DPA, describing him as being a supporter of a "Sunni Islamistic terror group".

The tabloid Bild, quoting security authorities, said the plans were well advanced, with security agents discovering that the main suspect had searched for ricin and cyanide on the internet and bought the substances, intending to build a bioweapon.

Initially, the man had intended to carry out an attack on New Year's Eve, but did not have enough materials to do so, and had subsequently managed to procure the missing items in the last few days.

EUROJUST CBRN-E HANDBOOK
Version VI, June 2017

Overview of EU and international legislation applicable to CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear) substances and Explosives

Supranational entities, systems and databases active in the field of CBRN-E

The goal of this Handbook is to provide EU practitioners, in particular prosecutors and police authorities, with an overview of EU and international legislation applicable to CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear) substances and Explosives and with a description of supranational entities, systems and databases active in the field of CBRN-E in support of investigations and prosecutions of transnational crimes involving the use of Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear substances and Explosives (CBRN-E).

Protection against Chemical Warfare Agents and Biological Threats Using Metal–Organic Frameworks as Active Layers

By Kaikai Ma, Yuk Ha Cheung, Kent O. Kirlikovali, et al.

Acc. Mater. Res. 2023, XXXX

Source [**full paper**]: https://pubs.acs.org/doi/full/10.1021/accountsmr.2c00200
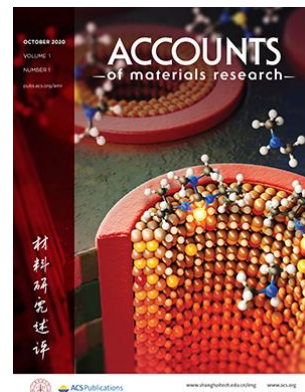
The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic outbreak and the unfortunate misuse of toxic chemical warfare agents (CWAs) highlight the importance of developing functional materials to protect against these chemical and pathogen threats. Metal–organic frameworks (MOFs), which comprise a tunable class of crystalline porous materials built from inorganic nodes and organic linkers, have emerged as a class of heterogeneous catalysts capable of rapid detoxification of multiple classes of these harmful chemical or biological hazards. In particular, zirconium-based MOFs (Zr-MOFs) feature Lewis acidic nodes that serve as active sites for a wide range of catalytic reactions, including the hydrolysis of organophosphorus nerve agents within seconds in basic aqueous solutions. In addition, post-synthetic modification of Zr-MOFs enables the release of active species capable of reacting with and deactivating harmful pathogens. Despite this impressive performance, utilizing Zr-MOFs in powder form is not practical for application in masks or protective uniforms.

To address this challenge, our team sought to develop MOF/fiber composite systems that could be adapted for use under realistic operating conditions to protect civilians, military personnel, and first responders from harmful pathogens and chemical warfare agents. Over the last several years, our group has designed and fabricated reactive and biocidal MOF/fiber composites that effectively capture and deactivate these toxic species. In this Account, we describe the evolution of these porous and reactive MOF/fiber composites and focus on key design challenges and considerations.

First, we devised a scalable method for the integration of Zr-MOFs onto textile substrates using aqueous precursor solutions and without using pretreated textiles, highlighting the potential scalability of this method. Moving beyond standard textiles, we also developed a microbial synthesis strategy to prepare hierarchically porous

MOF/bacterial cellulose nanofiber composite sponges that can both capture and detoxify nerve agents when exposed to contaminated gas flows.

Schematic illustration of protective MOF/fiber composite against chemical and biological risks.

The mass loading of the MOF in the nanofibrous composite sponge is up to 90%, affording higher work capacities compared to those of textile-fiber-based composites with relatively lower MOF loadings. Next, we demonstrated that heterogeneous polymeric bases are suitable replacements for volatile liquid bases typically used in solution-phase reactions, and we showed that these composite systems are capable of effectively hydrolyzing nerve agents in the solid state by using only water that is present as humidity. Moreover, incorporating a reactive dye precursor into the composite affords a dual function sensing and detoxifying material that changes color from white to orange upon reaction with the byproduct following nerve agent hydrolysis,

demonstrating the versatility of this platform for use in decontamination applications. We then created chlorine-loaded MOF/fiber composites that act as biocidal and reactive textiles that are capable of not only detoxifying sulfur-mustard-based chemical warfare agents and simulants but also deactivating both bacteria and the SARS-CoV-2 virus within minutes of exposure. Finally, we synthesized a mixed-metal Ti/Zr-MOF coating on cotton fibers to afford a photoactive biocidal cloth that shows fast and broad-spectrum biocidal performance against viruses and Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria under visible light irradiation.

Given the tunable, multifunctional nature of these MOF/fiber composites, we believe that this Account will offer new insights for the rational design and preparation of functional MOF/fiber composites and pave the way toward the development of next-generation reactive and protective textiles.

Suspect behind chemical attack claim against Turkish army convicted

Source: https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/suspect-behind-chemical-attack-claim-against-turkish-army-convicted/news

Jan 11 – An Istanbul court ruled on Wednesday for a prison term for Şebnem Korur Fincancı, head of the Turkish Medical Association (TTB), on charges of propaganda for the PKK terrorist group. Fincancı has claimed that the Turkish army might have used chemical weapons against PKK, echoing a discourse of propaganda by the terrorist group. The court, however, released Fincancı, who was **sentenced to two years, eight months, and 15 days in prison**, as is the case in most trials with anticipated prison terms below three years, while an appeals process will be held.

Fincancı was arrested last October after she made the remarks on a television program and faced a lawsuit over terrorist propaganda. The prosecutor had earlier asked for a prison term between one and a half years to seven and a half years for terrorism propaganda through media. The prosecutor's office also demanded that Fincancı be stripped of her position as the head of the association and that a new chair be elected. Korur drew harsh criticism from all circles of Türkiye after her accusations, while the Defense Ministry countered the claims. "Ammunition prohibited by international law and agreements is not used by our armed forces. This type of ammunition is not in the inventory of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK)," the Defense Ministry said.

The ministry described her remarks as the latest attempt to spread disinformation about the army, as a "futile last stand" by the PKK terrorist group that is weakening due to Türkiye's successful operations. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has accused Fincancı of "speaking the language of terrorism" and said she could not remain at the top of the doctors' union. "If necessary, we will ensure that this name is changed by legal regulation," he said after a weekly Cabinet meeting.

New worldwide threats prompt Pentagon to overhaul chem-bio defenses

Source: https://www.politico.com/news/2023/01/09/russia-china-chemical-biological-weapons-pentagon-00077035

Jan 09 – The Defense Department is overhauling its approach to countering biological and chemical weapons, as potential adversaries such as Russia and China rush to create threats that are easier to use and can evade traditional defenses.

Officials are launching a new plan to develop medical treatments, vaccines and personal protective equipment that can adapt to a range of evolving biological and chemical threats, said Ian Watson, DoD's deputy assistant secretary for chemical and biological defense.

That's a change for DoD, which traditionally has developed tools to counter a specific list of biological and chemical threats. Recent advances in technology allow potential adversaries to manipulate existing pathogens and toxins and create new ones, leading to an almost infinite number of new hazards for troops. Adding to the complexity of the problem, those dangers can be naturally occurring, accidental or deliberate, Watson said.

He previewed the new framework, officially called the Chemical and Biological Defense Program's Enhanced Medical Countermeasures Approach, in an exclusive interview.

It's no longer just the special operations forces fighting terrorists who might be exposed to chemical or biological weapons deployed by regional actors such as Iran or Syria, Watson said. Now, the problem has evolved to threaten the entire force.

U.S. officials are particularly concerned about adversaries that already have advanced chemical and biological capabilities and have proven themselves willing to use them. Russia and China now have the technology necessary both to tweak current threats — from toxins to naturally occurring pathogens — to make them more deadly and to create new weapons, Watson said.

"We see what we have to prepare for, for the National Defense Strategy, for the pacing threat of China and Russia," Watson said. "We see not only the technology, the intel, the intent, and also the potential impact it would have to our forces if we don't prepare."

"It's a different scale," he added, "and it's a different environment in which our soldiers are going to be asked to potentially find it."

The move to develop tests, treatments and vaccines for a range of threats marks a shift in strategy for the department. For years, DoD responded to potential chemical and biological attacks in the field by developing tools to combat a specific list of hazards. But the list continued to grow. Now, the U.S. is adapting, Watson said, adding that it will likely become more difficult over time to determine nature and origin.

"The technology is accelerating at such a pace that the threat profile and the diversity of the threat and the attributes of the threat have increased and will continue to do so at a quick clip," Watson said. "We can't develop a countermeasure for every single one of those, every single toxin, every single biological potentiality, every single chemical potentiality.

"Our ability to simply sink endless amounts of defense dollars into a single countermeasure for every single threat that can easily be modified by our adversaries is no longer a solution," he added.

DoD is releasing the new approach ahead of its first-ever Biodefense Posture Review, which Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin called for in November 2021. The strategy was slated to come out last fall; Watson said it is expected "soon."

Gregory Koblentz, the director of the Biodefense Graduate Program at George Mason University, said the decision by the administration to look more holistically at chemical and biological threats is a strategic national security decision — one that could help the U.S. keep pace with countries such as China, Russia and Iran.

"There's definitely a much higher kind of salience and appreciation of how nation-states are using these technologies," Koblentz said. "Until fairly recently, the focus has mostly been on ISIS and Al Qaeda using chemical and biological terrorism. This [strategy] might be another kind of paradigm shift."

The change in approach has been shaped in large part by the Covid-19 pandemic, Watson said. It can be impossible to tell whether a new threat is naturally occurring or intentionally manipulated by adversaries, but either way, the countermeasures are often the same, he stressed.

DoD learned lessons from the outbreak on the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt in March 2020, which sickened hundreds of crew members — one sailor died — and sidelined the ship in Guam for weeks. The incident had ramifications beyond the carrier: The captain was fired, the acting Navy secretary resigned, and the service was plunged into chaos.

The Roosevelt outbreak showed the importance of identifying a chemical or biological threat early to before it hits crews and affects military assets, Watson said.

"We took combat power off station because of a disease that took down the crew," Watson said. "And so the early indications and warnings where we can actually separate and identify those things preclude us from having to go down below readiness and keep our forces not only on station, but how they're supposed to operate."

DoD received an additional $200 million for fiscal 2023 to develop the new strategy and is planning to spend $1.2 billion over the next five years, Watson said, but more money is needed.

Watson said it is impossible for the U.S. to continue to pour millions of dollars into preparing for every known and future chemical and biological threat — it has to change course and develop a broad range of tools that will help protect troops in the field for whatever they may encounter.

"We can never ever protect the warfighter in entirety the way we've been doing if we don't start switching to this in the future," he said.

One problem is the evolving threat posed by pharmaceutical-based agents that are easy to stockpile and hide from traditional intelligence-gathering methods.

Over the past several years, China has ramped up its production of fentanyl, contributing to a global opioid crisis. And Russia has used nerve agents, namely Novichok, in assassination attempts. Experts warn that U.S. adversaries could use such pharmaceutical-based agents in large-scale attacks.

"Russia's use of Novichok on multiple occasions has definitely highlighted the threat that so-called fourth-generation agents pose," Koblentz said. "These are agents that we know existed, but people were not really focused on them because they were secret until recently."

DoD has concluded that a good offense is the best defense for many pharmaceutical-based threats. Instead of developing medical countermeasures against each toxin — such as Naloxone, an auto-injector designed to treat fentanyl intoxication — officials are looking at "modulating the immune system" through six metabolic routes to improve troops' defenses, Watson said.

The Pentagon is also targeting naturally occurring viruses, which adversaries may now be able to manipulate. For example, officials are developing monoclonal antibodies — also used to treat Covid-19 — as treatment for three viral families: Nipah/Hendra, Rift Valley Fever and Pan-Orthopox.

Officials are using advances in computing to rapidly develop new treatments. DoD has an agreement with Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory to use its El Capitan supercomputer to model new threats and generate vast numbers of potential treatments, similar to the way the U.S. responded to the Omicron variant of Covid, Watson said.

Out of those treatments, officials choose not only the most effective candidate, but also the one that can most easily be manufactured in large quantities. Once these treatments are on the shelves, they can be sent out rapidly to troops in the field in an emergency.

"You're modeling out very much like Formula One racing. They'll do thousands of designs in the computer," Watson said. "What that does for us is it allows us to be cost-effective."

As part of the new strategy, DoD is developing, standardizing and deploying biological sensors that troops can wear in the field, called "wearables," that can detect and identify the characteristics of a threat early on, for instance, if it's viral or bacterial. The devices use biological data such as the troops' blood oxygen levels and heart rate to come to a diagnosis.

These devices already exist across the department; Watson's shop is focused on standardizing them, he said.

"You can start indicating that you're ill four or five days before, like when [you catch Covid], you can see it spike three or four days before you ever saw symptoms," Watson said. "The more we're using those to do the tests, the algorithms are improving, so those biomarkers are giving us better indicators."

Another effort is wastewater surveillance, which local officials also used during the pandemic to identify Covid outbreaks quickly.

All of these pieces of the puzzle come together to help DoD better protect its forces, Watson said, likening the biodefense effort to integrated missile defense.

"Think about it like integrated missile defense, the handoff of multiple sensors, early warning to identify, you have a surveillance radar or something up there, you lock on with your fire control and you identify what it is," Watson said. "We do integrated, layered defense not only with our medical countermeasures but also the early warning detection."

The Center of Gravity for Chemical Threats

By Paul Strang
Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20230113-the-center-of-gravity-for-chemical-threats

Jan 13 – In late December, President Biden signed into law the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2023, which contains language solidifying our nation's commitment to comprehensively address chemical security threats and grants full legislative authorization to S&T's Chemical Security Analysis Center (CSAC). The facility, based in my home state of Maryland, addresses mission priorities involving chemical threats by using scientific data and analysis to tackle current and future challenges.

Located on the U.S. Army's Aberdeen Proving Ground, CSAC is the nation's only federal laboratory dedicated to assessing threats associated with large-scale chemical incidents or acts of chemical terrorism by using studies, analysis, and knowledge management to inform emergency planning and response. CSAC is the embodiment of the special partnership between the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the U.S. Army. The lab includes staff and facilities that produce benefits to the missions of both organizations without duplicating efforts. The recent opening of CSAC's Chemical Security Laboratory is a hallmark of that mission kinship.

Although CSAC was aligned to S&T in 2006, the work of its small but mighty team has supported the homeland security mission for nearly two decades without the statutory weight that comes with a designation as the principal national laboratory for chemical security analysis geared towards homeland security threats. Despite this fact, CSAC has been instrumental as part of S&T's efforts to support emergency response planning. CSAC provides DHS agencies and partners with the chemical expertise and advanced analyses needed to consider likely scenarios, evaluate risk mitigating measures, minimize anticipated response time, and ultimately save lives. These contributions have been put to practice to help stem the flow of illicit opioids, prepare for and respond to threats and hazards resulting from harmful chemical releases, enhance aviation security by modeling hazardous chemical dispersions on aircraft, and help safeguard our food supply.

Due to CSAC's strong track record, expertise, and 24/7 responsiveness, partners in the emergency response community see it as a first stop when searching for rapid and reliable information about chemical threat scenarios. Currently, CSAC provides chemical threat characterization through S&T's Probabilistic Analysis for National Hazards Threats and Risks (PANTHR) program. As part of the whole of government response to the synthetic opioid crisis facing our country, CSAC led an international mail facility analysis with U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to support the Synthetic Opioid Detection at Speed project, and leads production of S&T's Synthetic Opioids Master Questions List.

This NDAA authorization acknowledges the enduring importance of laboratory-based chemical security research and analysis. But more importantly, it reinforces to our DHS customers and partners that CSAC will continue to do the science that remains crucial to executing the homeland security mission.

Paul Strang is Director (Acting) of the Science and Technology Directorate's (S&T) Office of National Laboratories.

Ukrainian soldiers could be preparing chemical attack: Russian Embassy

Source: https://english.almayadeen.net/news/politics/ukrainian-soldiers-could-be-preparing-chemical-attack:-russi

Jan 14 – The Russian embassy in London said that the letters "OB" printed on Ukrainian gas cylinders mean "poisonous ammunition."
Ukrainian troops may be planning a chemical weapon attack on Russian soldiers, according to the Russian Embassy in the United Kingdom.
The embassy shared a video Friday on Twitter of drones and gas cylinders on a table. Some of the gas cylinders appear to be attached to the drones, and a man shows a refrigerator full of boxes containing the same gas cylinders.
"A video published by Ukrainian military apparently shows them preparing to use chemical weapons, possibly phosgene, prohibited by UN CWC [chemical weapons convention], against Russian military. **Letters 'OB' stand for toxic munition.** This also explains why the gas cylinders need to be stored in the fridge," the Russian embassy explained in its tweet.
Russia's Permanent Representative to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Alexander Shulgin, stated in December that Moscow had information that US contractors were assisting in the preparation of "chemical provocations" in Ukraine.
Earlier, in June 2022, the Russian Ministry of Defense issued similar warnings, claiming that Kiev planned to stage a "false flag" attack involving chemical weapons in order to frame Russia and provoke confrontations with NATO.

Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Follow — Russia government organization

A video published by Ukrainian military apparently shows them preparing to use #chemicalweapons, possibly #phosgene, prohibited by @UN CWC, against Russian military. Letters "OB" stand for toxic munition. This also explains why the gas cylinders need to be stored in the fridge.
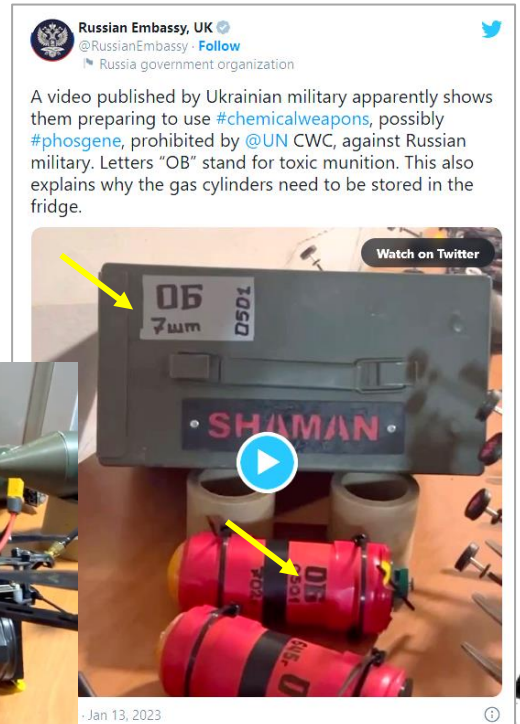
· Jan 13, 2023

Last year, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Oleg Syromolotov said in April, as reported by *Sputnik,* that Moscow considers the threat of chemical terrorism by Ukrainian nationalists and the military to be very real.
"We consider very real the threat of chemical terrorism by fascist nationalists, operating under the patronage of the current Kiev regime, and units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine under their control," Syromolotov said.

A novel wearable that saves lives

Source: https://www.cambridge-design.com/case-study/first-response-emergency-monitor/

The golden hour following a traumatic injury is the time when prompt medical treatment is most likely to prevent death. For a first responder in an intense and chaotic disaster or battlefield scenario, correctly identifying which patient to treat first can be a matter of life and death. Measuring and monitoring basic vital signs is a crucial part, yet it remains time-consuming using conventional approaches. The British Army identified the need for a better solution to monitor multiple casualties when the medic arrives on the scene.

The monitor had to be small, lightweight and easy to use.

Together with conventional sensors, we developed new approaches to increase performance.

The wearable is easily fitted and immediately provides a visual display of vital signs.
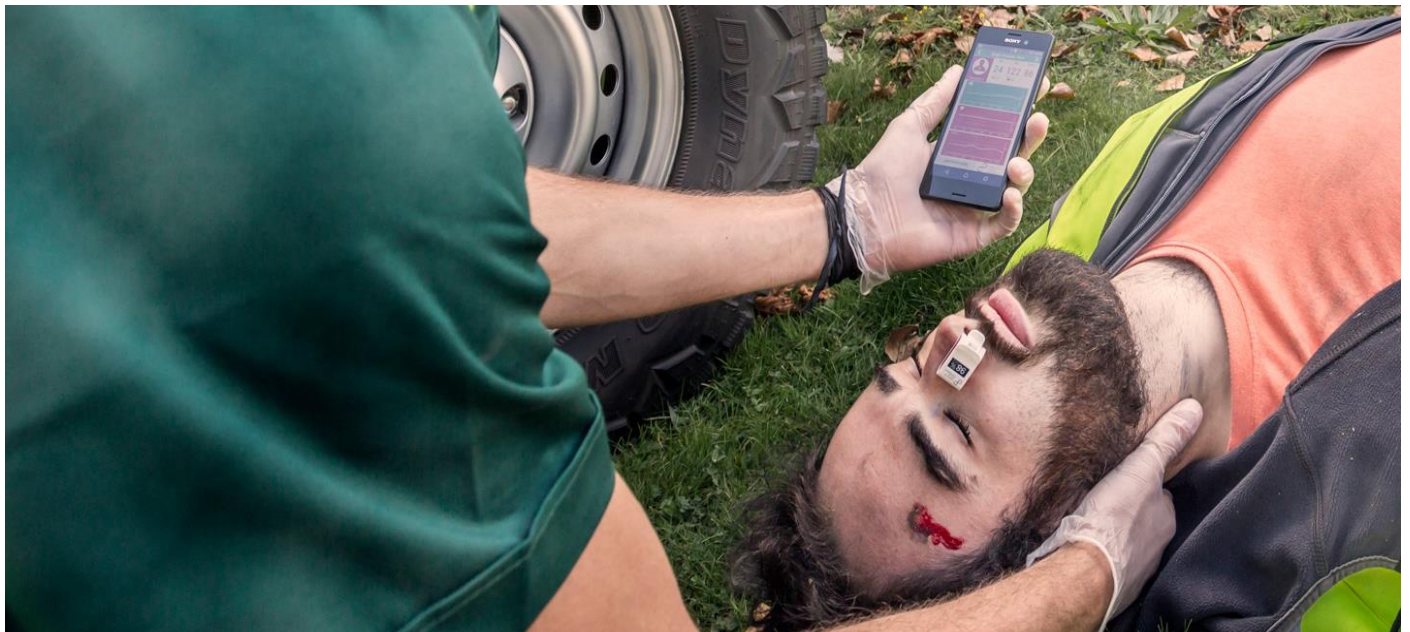
EDITOR'S COMMENT: A very good proposal for CBRN casualties at the incident site as well.

Pentagon Overhauls Chem-Bio Defense

Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20230116-pentagon-overhauls-chembio-defense

Jan 16 – DOD last week said it was overhauling its approach to countering chemical and biological weapons. Rather than continuing to focus on developing countermeasures for a specific list of threat agents, the Pentagon will develop measures that can adapt to a range of evolving biological and chemical threats.

Pandora Report notes:

Amid anticipation of the release of its first biodefense posture review, the Department of Defense (DoD) announced this week it is overhauling its approach to countering chemical and biological weapons. In a new document, "Approach for Research, Development and Acquisition of Medical Countermeasures and Test Products," the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Chemical and Biological Defense explains that the Chemical and Biological Defense Program will expand the foci of its medical countermeasure development efforts. According to *Politico*, rather than continuing to focus on developing countermeasures for a specific list of threat agents, "Officials are launching a new plan to develop medical treatments, vaccines and personal protective equipment that can adapt to a range of evolving biological and chemical threats, said Ian Watson, DoD's deputy assistant secretary for chemical and biological defense."

*Politico*continued, quoting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Chemical and Biological Defense Ian Watson-"U.S. officials are particularly concerned about adversaries that already have advanced chemical and biological capabilities and have proven themselves willing to use them. Russia and China now have the technology necessary both to tweak current threats — from toxins to naturally occurring pathogens — to make them more deadly and to create new weapons, Watson said."

The same article referenced Biodefense Graduate Program Director Dr. Gregory Koblentz, explaining "Gregory Koblentz…said the decision by the administration to look more holistically at chemical and biological threats is a strategic national security decision — one that could help the U.S. keep pace with countries such as China, Russia and Iran." Koblentz was quoted later, saying "There's definitely a much higher kind of salience and appreciation of how nation-states are using these technologies," Koblentz said. "Until fairly recently, the focus has mostly been on ISIS and Al Qaeda using chemical and biological terrorism. This [strategy] might be another kind of paradigm shift."

However, this announcement comes amid cuts to DoD's chem-bio program funding overall. *Roll Call* reported recently that the nearly $2 billion in funding dedicated to all these programs will be cut by about $126 million, even in light of their comparatively slow growth and concerns brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the Chemical Biological Defense Program received $1.26 billion in appropriations in the last omnibus spending bill-$66 million less than was requested.

*Roll Call*discussed these funding concerns with Andrew Weber, former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical & Biological Defense Programs under President Obama, and David Lasseter, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction under President Trump and a visiting fellow at George Mason's National Security Institute. Both indicated the funding for these programs needs to more than double, with Lasseter saying "Increasing the current investment to around $3 billion per year, while ensuring efficient and effective program execution, will enable the CBDP to develop cutting-edge capabilities like rapid, ruggedized point-of-care diagnostics, stand-off detection, predictive wearables, advanced protective suits and innovative platform technologies as well as stock and replenish existing medical countermeasures."

It isn't all doom and gloom, however. Check out this recent post from George Mason University about a Mason research team's work to help USAMRIID find broad-spectrum therapeutics for to treat HFV infections-"Mason Collaboration Receives $3.2 million to Help Military Personnel Combat Hemorrhagic Diseases"

Finland chosen as EU's common reserve of rescue equipment, medical supplies

Source: https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/finland-chosen-as-eus-common-reserve-of-rescue-equipment-medical-supplies/

Jan 18 – The project will be funded €242 million by the Commission and should be completed by autumn 2026. The first quantities of supplies are scheduled to be available by 2024. [Shutterstock/Microgen]

Finland is the chosen location for the EU's first chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear strategic reserve, which will be funded €242 million by the Commission and will be ready by 2026.

The reserve will include personal protective and measuring equipment, pharmaceuticals, and antibodies for chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) accidents that could affect first responders and civilians. The materials will be decentralised in secret locations around Finland.

The project will be funded €242 million by the Commission and should be completed by autumn 2026. The first quantities of supplies are scheduled to be available by 2024.

The use of a lot of the medicines and antidotes used in CBRN incidents is rare. But, if needed, the aim is to send the stored material to a disaster or crisis area within 12 hours of the offer of assistance being accepted. The EU upgraded its Civil Protection Mechanism in 2019 and launched rescEU – which the CBRN reserves in Finland will be part of – to protect citizens from disasters and manage emerging risks. "Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has confirmed the need to strengthen the EU CBRN preparedness. That's why the rescEU CBRN reserves will provide the EU with a significant safety pillow enabling a quick and coordinated response at the EU level. I would like to congratulate Finland for being the first Member State to develop a CBRN strategic reserve under rescEU," Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarčič said in a press release on Tuesday.

The project will be carried out by the Interior and Social Affairs Ministries together with the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, the National Emergency Supply Agency, and the Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: Not sure if this is a €242 million good idea. Perhaps for "B" only since with "C" and "R" either you have the necessary equipment and resources on site, or the game is over for those involved/exposed. It seems that *rescEU* people have no in-depth knowledge of CBRN threats and their effects on human health.

Is Fear Being Used as a Weapon of Mass Destruction?

Source: https://dorseteye.com/is-fear-being-used-as-a-weapon-of-mass-destruction/

Jan 17 – The late Maxi Jazz suggested in one of his songs, 'Fear is a weapon of mass destruction!" From the possibility of Iraq using chemical weapons in the day he sang that to covid and now the Ukraine war, I have to ask, is fear being used to control us?

What Scared You Most?

Over the last 30 years we as ordinary people have had a few things that put us on edge. With my underlying depression, I must say some things have affected me more than others. Let's look at the last 24 months:

- Sitting in your chair listening to your laboured breathing imagining you're going to be on a ventilator (or worse, actually being on one) with covid
- The possibility of being turned to ash by a nutty world leader after he nuked us
- Making ends meet in the so-called cost-of-living crisis
- Hearing that the global climate has climbed to 1.1 degrees above pre-industrial levels and knowing the millionaires and billionaires who rule over us don't give a tinker's cuss
- The wilful destruction of the NHS by the government
- The possibility of Iran planning to irradiate London with a dirty bomb

What scared you the most among these existential threats? Whether left wing or right, 'woke' or asleep, you will have been put on edge by multiples of these. Even if you're an anti-woke covid denier you won't feel too excited should you get the flu or a chest pains, and you may well be worrying about your job right now…

Could Our Fear be Deliberate?

Again, without getting too tinfoil-hat or political, there is a group of people out there unaffected by the apparent mess we face. Rolls Royce sold more cars than ever before in 2022, and £60,000 Teslas are among the best selling cars in Europe and the US. Yes, the wealthier you are the less this climate of fear will bother you. Forgetting the Tesla owners (generally leasing them through a tax dodge as a company car), the billionaire Ross Royce buyers are almost completely insulated from the issues we face. They isolated from covid on one of thousands of 30 metre+ long superyachts, of which Putin and his mates are a notable minority of owners. If you're a billionaire you may be affected by inflation but not job prospects, covid, the NHS, or being nuked.

Could that lot be gaslighting us? They pretend through showing up at big conferences like COP26 to care about the climate, but then give tax breaks to oil companies and have coal mines dug or expanded to further enrich themselves and buy bigger yachts.

Why Are We Better Afraid?

If the accusation of gaslighting is made then you need to have a fair idea that those gaslighting have an agenda. Imagine we had no killer bugs flying around, we didn't fear having to go to a food bank to supplement our working income and weren't scared of dying on a hospital trolley after having had a minor

heart attack, or another reason to lose sleep? Would we listen to our children's greatest fears and start demanding climate change gets sorted asap? Would the tiny number of us fighting the system currently be able to get together as one? Divide and rule has long been a tactic successfully used against the working and peasant classes to beat us into submission. Those who are 'not woke' will fear hordes of people without white skin sailing across the Channel on dinghies to 'steal are jobs'. Perhaps those who are not woke would demand a sufficient education to critically analyse the world around us and effectively wake up!

Five People
Who are you? Of those I am lucky to know and love there are five distinct types:
- Those who refuse to watch TV or listen to the radio (and probably won't read this!) to insulate themselves against the world
- Those who stay in shitty jobs with crap employers because they're frightened of the 'cost-of-living crisis' despite having the talent to tell their employer where to insert their job and go elsewhere for double the money
- Those who have become hardened to the news and focus on the next 30-40 years when they won't be able to care as they'll be asleep in a box
- Those who hate Europe/blame 'immigrunts' and generally do as they're told by the Daily Mail, Sun and Express
  Those who see their mates all too often at protests (and sometimes need to ask their friends in meetings to remind them just what cause they're meeting about as they see them so often in different campaigns)

Sadly the vast majority of us fall into the first four groups and aren't a danger to the system. Those of us in the fifth group would dearly like to see more of you from the other groups (OK, likely we'd be able to tolerate those from three of those!).

Fear is a horrible thing. I'll admit I've started taking quite powerful antidepressants lately on top of some pretty hardcore head meds I have been taking for over 20 years. Fear and negative emotion has cost me a lot of money in the last 12 months – it can and does get on top of even the hardcore activists among us. I've also cut back heavily on the amount of campaigning I do as it was starting to screw my head up.

Could True Freedom Be Not Being Afraid?
One recent Monday I had a slew of emails from different clients and it was looking to be a rough week. An old war cry from school entered my head and I sung out, "Come and have a go if you think you're hard enough!" In doing so I showed no fear and actually made the week tolerable. United as a mob, whether through the union movement, environmentalist movement or whatever we do to help take on the Rolls Royce buying bastards, we can unite together and chant that war cry. They can hurt you, but can't hurt us!

Verification of exposure to chemical warfare agents through analysis of persistent biomarkers in plants

By Mirjam de Bruin-Hoegée, Latifa Lamriti, Jan P. Langenberg, et al.

The continuing threats of military conflicts and terrorism may involve the misuse of chemical weapons. The present study aims to use environmental samples to find evidence of the release of such agents at an incident scene. A novel approach was developed for identifying protein adducts in plants. Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*), bay laurel leaf (*Laurus nobilis*) and stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*) were exposed to 2.5 to 150 mg m^{-3} sulfur mustard, 2.5 to 250 mg m^{-3} sarin, and 0.5 to 25 g m^{-3} chlorine gas. The vapors of the selected chemicals were generated under controlled conditions in a dedicated set-up. After sample preparation and digestion, the samples were analyzed by liquid chromatography tandem mass spectrometry (LC-MS/MS) and liquid chromatography high resolution tandem mass spectrometry (LC-HRMS/MS), respectively. In the case of chlorine exposure, it was found that 3-chloro- and 3,5-dichlorotyrosine adducts were formed. As a result of sarin exposure, the *o*-isopropyl methylphosphonic acid adduct to tyrosine could be analyzed, and after sulfur mustard exposure the N1- and N3-HETE-histidine adducts were identified. The lowest vapor exposure levels for which these plant adducts could
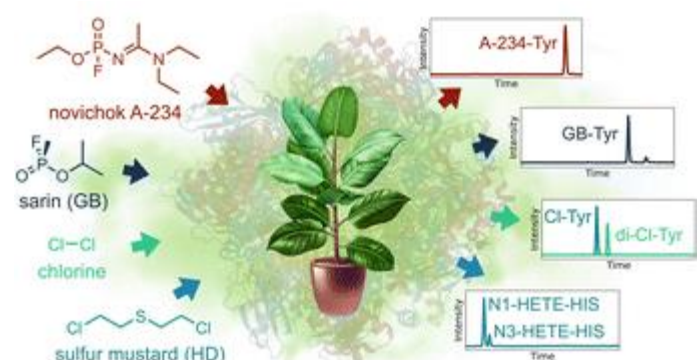
be detected, were 2.5 mg m⁻³ for sarin, 50 mg m⁻³ for chlorine and 12.5 mg m⁻³ for sulfur mustard. Additionally, protein adducts following a liquid exposure of only 2 nmol Novichock A-234, 0.4 nmol sarin and 0.2 nmol sulfur mustard could still be observed.
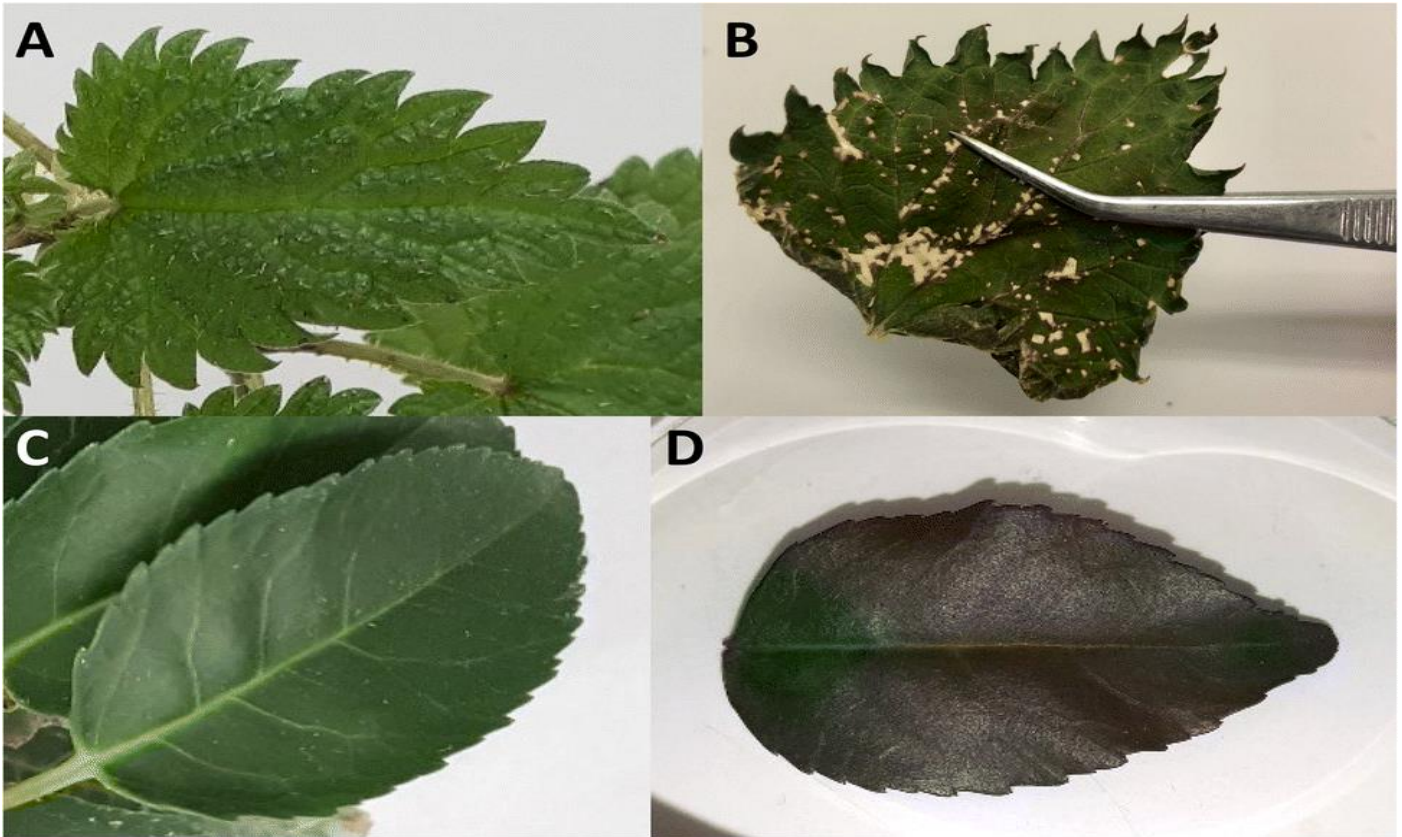
Physical state of nettle leaf upon chlorine gas exposure and laurel upon sulfur mustard exposure. (A) Nettle leaf before exposure, (B) Nettle leaf after 25 g m⁻³ chlorine exposure, (C) Laurel before exposure, (D) Laurel leaf after 20 μmol liquid sulfur mustard exposure.

For both vapor and liquid exposure, the amount of adduct formed increased with the level of exposure. In all cases, synthetic reference standards were used for unambiguous identification. The window of opportunity for investigation of agent exposure through the analysis of plant material was found to be remarkably long. Even three months after the actual exposure, the biomarkers could still be detected in living plants, as well as in dried leaves. An important benefit of the current method is that a relatively simple and generic sample work-up procedure can be applied to all agents studied. In conclusion, the presented work clearly demonstrates the possibility of analyzing chemical warfare agent biomarkers in plants, which is useful for forensic reconstructions, including the investigation into alleged use in conflict areas.

AUM: The Cult at the End of the World' Review: Fascinating Doc Examines the Pivot From Yoga to Terrorism

Source: https://www.thewrap.com/aum-the-cult-at-the-end-of-the-world-review-documentary/

Jan 20 – Nearly three decades since the group disbanded, this documentary finds parallels in modern-day politics of personality
It would be inappropriate to call cults "entertaining" — they're soul-sucking, exploitative enterprises that ruin people's lives — but if you're interested in learning about human behavior, particularly its extremes, there's no denying that cults are fascinating. Not just because people can do, say, and believe outlandish things as a result of cult mind control, but because of the social conditions that lead people to join them in the first place.
"AUM: The Cult at the End of the World," directed by newcomers Ben Braun and Chiaki Yanagimoto, certainly doesn't shy away from its subject's atrocities; in fact, it opens with their most infamous one. But

where less adept filmmakers might have resorted to shock value or bone-dry moralizing, the team behind "AUM" works hard to understand one cult in all its dazzling, horrifying complexity.

To reel you in, "AUM" opens with the cult's notorious 1995 sarin-gas attack on the Tokyo subway, but really this documentary begins at their beginning, in the 1980s. Japan's economy is booming and journalist Andrew Marshall has just moved to Tokyo. He describes the city as simultaneously "futuristic" and "backwards," a place straight out of "Blade Runner," where you could all too easily blow your apartment's electricity by plugging in multiple items.

That simultaneous prosperity and fragility likewise characterized Japan's people. Adrift in consumer culture, they sought something deeper, and many were drawn to the transmundane. Shoko Asahara, a charismatic yogi published in occult magazines who claimed he had gained superpowers through meditation, began cultivating a following. In 1987, that following became Aum Shinrikyo. By 1995, the cult would be found responsible for murder, chemical warfare, and terrorism.

Through archival footage and interviews, "AUM" unravels how such an organization developed and thrived, despite skepticism and outcry from lawyers, journalists, and members' loved ones. The film is based on "The Cult at the End of the World: The Terrifying Story of the Aum Doomsday Cult, from the Subways of Tokyo to the Nuclear Arsenals of Russia," which Marshall co-authored with David E. Kaplan, who also appears in the film. (Marshall and Kaplan are also credited as producers.) Their journalistic rigor — coupled with that of Japanese journalist Shoko Egawa, another interviewee — grounds what could otherwise be a sensationalist portrait of madness.

While the filmmakers interview the cult's victims, they also rely heavily on Fumihiro Joyu, a senior member of Aum Shinrikyo who leads its current iteration today. This is a boon rather than a betrayal, as Joyu speaks about what drew him to the organization and the role he eventually played.

He says he joined Aum Shinrikyo because, despite his education in space technology, he didn't want to be pulled into a galactic war. (To understand just how darkly ironic that assertion is, you'll have to watch the film.)

Despite Joyu's helpful contextualizing, the film hardly glorifies him: To hear Marshall tell it, the only reason Joyu wasn't put to death like the rest of his colleagues is because, during the cult's most heinous attacks on the Japanese public, he was overseeing its Russian membership. In perhaps the film's most badass moment, Eiko Nagaoka, whose husband was nearly murdered for leading the Aum Victims Support Organization, says of Joyu, "I cannot die so long as he is alive."

Before detailing the cult's penchants for sarin gas attacks and burying naysayers, "Aum" delves into the upbringing, psychology, and appeal of Asahara. This is particularly instructive, demonstrating why a film about a cult that dissolved nearly 30 years ago might still be relevant today. Asahara's charisma, cultural

literacy, and kookiness made him seem deceptively nonthreatening, even to those who should have known better.

Before Aum Shinrikyo ever had spies in the media and police force, journalists painted him as a harmless oddity. It's difficult to associate grave inhumanity with a portly man in fuschia robes who literally made himself into an anime character and had his followers dance around in papier-mâché imitations of his head.

But, as Marshall warns in the documentary's rather on-the-nose finale, this was Asahara's greatest trick. He asks what similar blindspots we might have now — including, say, the cult-like nature of American and British politics.

By the time the documentary gets there, you've likely already had that thought. Whether you're paranoid about the right or the left, so many elements of Aum Shinrikyo (their persecution complex, their political estrangement, their cooperation with the then-president of Russia) ring eerily familiar. (1980s Donald Trump even makes an appearance early on in the film.) There's no need to take viewers by the hand when your film has such an obvious destination.

Still, all along the journey, "AUM" balances perspective and tone with aplomb. The film zips by briskly, spending its 106-minute runtime well. Though it is ultimately a chronology, editor Keita Ideno ("Kusama: Infinity") peppers in just enough unsolved mysteries to keep you hanging on until the very end. Yet "AUM" feels neither exploitative nor maudlin. This is a polished, straightforward account of harrowing events, told with empathy and relative objectivity. If you're looking for an entrée into one of the most bizarre, complex chapters of human history, look no further.
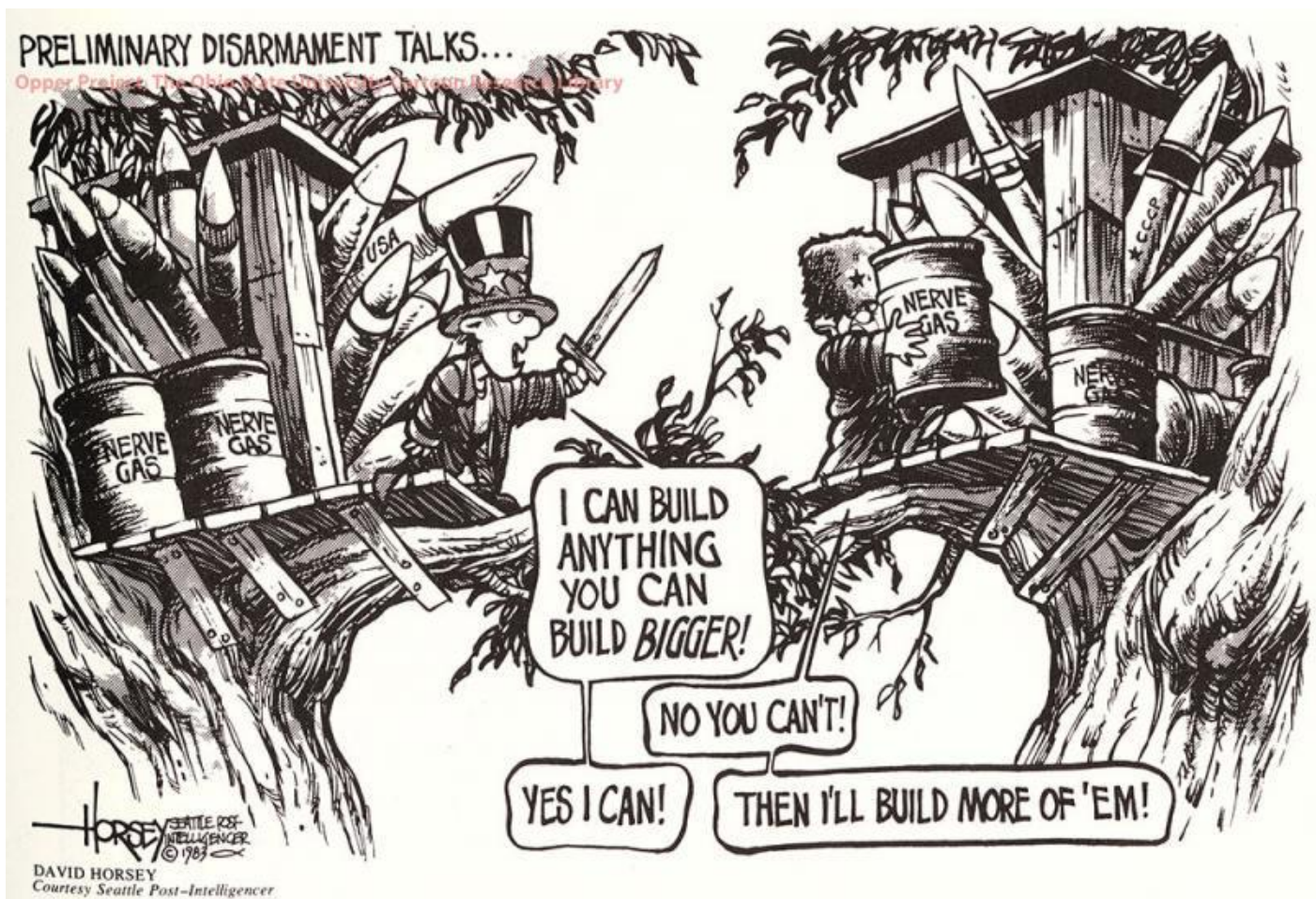
2023 CBRNE-RELATED CONFERENCES

15TH ANNIVERSARY
NUCLEAR DETERRENCE SUMMIT
February 13-15, 2023 | Hyatt Regency Crystal City | Arlington, VA

www.exchangemonitor.com/go/nuclear-deterrence-summit-2023/

NCT Europe 2023
VIEW EVENT

NCT South America 2023
VIEW EVENT

Riyadh, KSA
NCT Middle East 2023
VIEW EVENT

https://nct-events.com/event

04-08 September: NCT USA Aberdeen Proving Ground, Edgewood MD	**04-11 November: NCT Asia** Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

21-24 March 2023 | National Harbor, Washington DC

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The Fragile Balance of Terror: Deterrence in the Nuclear Age
Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC)
2 February, Stanford, United States
Website: https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/events/rose-mcdermott-and-amy-zegart-february-2023

Cyber Challenge 2023
Swedish Defence University and National Cyber Security Centre
9 February, Stockholm, Sweden
Website: https://www.fhs.se/en/swedish-defence-university/events/2022-09-29-cyber-challenge-2023---live-on-campus.html

Program on Cyber Security Studies (PCSS 23-03)
George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies
14-31 March, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany
Website: https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/event/program-cyber-security-studies-pcss-23-03

Cyber Symposium
Cranfield University
21-22 March, Cranfield, United Kingdom
Website: https://www.cranfield.ac.uk/events/symposia/cyber#Overview

Building on the success of the first 3 International Conferences « CBRNE Research and Innovation » which took place in Antibes (2015), Lyon (2017) and Nantes (2019), the online 4th edition in 2021, we want to give you a new opportunity to build up or strengthen collaborative networks in Lille (**May 3-6, 2022**). « Capital of Flanders », Lille is ideally located at a crossroad between Brussels, Paris, Amsterdam and London. Consequently, our main guideline for this 2022 edition of the Conference will be dedicated to **cross-border collaborations** to face CBRNE threats and risks-related challenges.

The CBRNE R&I Conference is specifically devoted to **scientific updates, responders' feedbacks and expression of needs**. It also includes **workshops** and **demonstrations** of innovative materials, technologies and procedures, **according to the following themes: DETECTION - IDENTIFICATION, PROTECTION - DECONTAMINATION, MEDICAL COUNTERMEASURES, RISKS & CRISIS MANAGEMENT.**

Mask mandates fail to make a comeback, despite pleas from public health experts

Source: https://news.yahoo.com/mask-mandates-fail-make-comeback-despite-pleas-public-health-experts-173251625.html

Dec 22 — Coronavirus infection rates rose steadily through the first half of November across Los Angeles County, then began to climb sharply around the long Thanksgiving weekend.

As a result, on Dec. 1, the county's public health director, Dr. Barbara Ferrer, made an announcement that some had been hoping for and others had been dreading: An indoor mask mandate could be coming back for the county's 10 million residents.

"L.A. County will follow the CDC guidance for communities designated at the 'high community level,' including universal indoor masking," Ferrer said, referencing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, whose guidelines local and state officials tend to use when making decisions about masking.

In stating her case, Ferrer cited not only COVID-19 but also influenza and the respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, which were creating a viral blizzard some call a "tripledemic."

Three weeks later, Los Angeles remains mandate-free.

To be sure, plenty of people continue to mask. But like other public health officials across the country, Ferrer chose not to impose a mandate, leaving masking as a matter of personal choice.

The reluctance to impose new mandates has frustrated some public health experts, who believe that anti-mask rhetoric has made even many Democrats fearful of a measure that could stop the spread of the coronavirus, as well as of other diseases. And with hundreds of people still dying from COVID-19 each day, they argue, not making masks mandatory in crowded spaces only puts people at risk.

"The science of universal masking has not changed — COVID spreads through the air, and masks reduce spread," Boston University public health expert Julia Raifman told Yahoo News. "Rational, data-driven approaches to mask policies when and where there are state or local surges could help mitigate the transmission of COVID and other respiratory diseases currently overwhelming pediatric hospitals."

The nation is now recording 48,000 new coronavirus infections and 450 new COVID-19 deaths per day.

Those numbers are far below what they were during the darkest days of the pandemic, before the advent of vaccines and therapeutics, but they suggest that the pandemic is not over.

Masking advocates say that with heavy travel expected in the next several weeks, and with people gathering for indoor get-togethers, masking makes as much sense now as it ever has, especially with hospital capacity strained in parts of the country.

"It's a small price to pay," Dr. Vin Gupta said during a recent MSNBC appearance.

So far, however, few municipalities or districts have been willing to pay it. Philadelphia will mandate masks in schools when students return from their winter break. School officials in Sacramento, Calif., considered bringing back masking earlier in December but have not done so thus far.

Oakland, Calif., has imposed a mask mandate in government buildings — but not in other indoor spaces. Private businesses, of course, are free to mandate masks, but many may be hesitant to do so without the force of a government edict backing up their decision.

In New York City, Mayor Eric Adams appeared at a pandemic-related press conference on Wednesday in a mask. He and the city's health commissioner, Dr. Ashwin Vasan, have both asked New Yorkers to put their masks back on — but they have not mandated that they do so.

Restaurants in Manhattan were packed throughout the previous weekend, as were other entertainment venues. Subways were crowded. Bars were full. And while masks were not uncommon, they were hardly universal, especially if eating and drinking were involved.

Public weariness with the pandemic would likely make enforcement of a new mandate difficult, potentially forcing bus drivers, fast food workers and others into the unwelcome position of trying to get the unwilling to mask up again.

"The data on masking to reduce transmission is pretty abysmal," says Dr. Lucy McBride, a Washington, D.C., physician who writes a newsletter about medicine. "And even if the data showed that masks work perfectly all the time (which they don't), we must consider the potential downsides of covering faces," she told Yahoo News.

"I tell my patients who want to protect themselves to mask if they want to because one-way masking has been shown to protect the wearer," McBride said.

Studies on masks are a matter of dispute (Raifman, the Boston University health expert, points to data showing that mask policies are effective). For one thing, it is notoriously difficult to reproduce real-life conditions in a laboratory. Some people wear masks incorrectly, without fully covering their noses and mouths. Others wear cloth masks that are ineffective. Even the ubiquitous surgical masks offer much less protection than the bowl-shaped N-95 respirators that — if properly fitted and consistently worn — offer the best kind of protection.

"Politics aside, mask mandates would help prevent Covid if folks wore the right masks, correctly. If not, they won't work," Dr. Bob Wachter, chairman of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, recently wrote on Twitter.

Proponents of masking point to the possibility of long COVID — a debilitating and little-understood condition — as well as to vaccination rates that have remained largely stagnant in recent months, with only modest uptake for the bivalent booster. Masking, they say, is the surest way to protect vulnerable people, including the immunocompromised and the elderly.

"Officials often like to blame the public for being too tired of masks, but the data tells us that this simply isn't true. Even almost three years into the pandemic, polls consistently show a majority of people in the U.S. support mask mandates, especially in communities of color," Dr. Lucky Tran, an outspoken advocate for a cautious approach to the pandemic, told Yahoo News in an email.

Parents in Boston recently petitioned educational officials there to reinstate a mandate. Simply making masking a choice, they argued, is not enough. "It has to be something like a mandate for people to follow it," one of those parents said.

So far, however, neither they nor like-minded Americans elsewhere have had much success in persuading public officials. White House officials say they fully support masking as an important tool in the fight against COVID-19, but they maintain that vaccination is the superior weapon against the virus.

In a recent interview with NPR, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said communities with high levels of virus spread should "wear masks."

But, she added, "we have certainly always said that masking is a personal choice."

That is not quite true. Walensky and other Biden administration officials masked assiduously — and urged Americans to do so — throughout 2021. But by the beginning of 2022, even some Democratic governors were becoming exhausted with pandemic restrictions.

They wanted to see schools reopened, stadiums packed — and masks off.

In late February the CDC issued new guidelines that, in effect, made it much easier for officials to justify going mask-free. Then, just weeks later, a court ruling struck down mask mandates on airplanes and other forms of travel.

Since then, Biden administration officials have said little about masks. West Wing officials now wear them only sporadically, if at all. That includes President Biden, who has been traveling heavily in recent months and holding holiday receptions at the White House. At those receptions, too, masks have been a rarity.

At a recent White House press briefing, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the president's top pandemic adviser, was asked why the administration was not doing more to emphasize masking ahead of the holiday season.

"We have multiple interventions and multiple actions we can take to protect ourselves. So there's a whole spectrum," Fauci answered. "Masking is one of them."

Here's How Long You Can Actually Wear That KN95 Mask For, According to Experts

Source: https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/heres-long-actually-wear-kn95-193459046.html

Dec 22 – Just like many people have a favorite pair of shoes right next to the front door, there's a good chance you have a go-to mask. Maybe it ends up in your purse, jacket pocket, or the floor of your car, but your trusty mask is there for you for every grocery store run or trip to the mall. So **how long exactly can you wear a KN95 mask?**

If you've had your mask for a while, you may be wondering if it's actually still as effective as it was when you first strapped it over your face. If you're putting in the effort to protect yourself (and others) you want to make sure your mask is actually working, right? PSA: Your KN95 mask loses its effectiveness over time and there's a very good chance you're overdue for a new one. Here's everything you need to know—and how to make your mask last as long as possible.

Why KN95 Masks Are So Effective At Protecting Against COVID-19

While infectious disease experts emphasize that any mask is better than no mask, the KN95 mask has become the gold standard in protecting against COVID-19. Dr. William Schaffner, MD, a professor of infectious diseases at the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, says the major reason for this is simply because KN95 masks fit better than fabric masks. "In the medical field, KN95 masks are called respirators because they are more effective than surgical masks," he says. Dr. Schaffner explains that when a KN95 mask is fit tightly around the nose, cheeks, and chin, a person breathes almost 100 percent through the material, which is not the case with cotton masks, which leave gaps.

Infectious disease specialist Dr. Michael Barry, PhD, says there's another reason why KN95 masks are so effective at protecting against COVID-19: the material. "The multiple layers [typically a polypropylene plastic polymer] overlap each other to create pores that only a certain size particle can pass through," he says.

In the medical field, KN95 masks are designed for one-time use, but both the experts and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say that the average person can use the same mask more than once. The CDC advises people to replace their mask after wearing it five times, based on the results of a scientific study published in the *American Journal of Infection Control*. However, there are other specific factors that play into how long your KN95 mask can last.

How to Make Your KN95 Mask Last As Long As Possible

Since one of the core reasons why KN95 masks are so effective is because of their tight fit, Dr. Schaffner says that one tell-tale sign that your mask should be thrown out is if it's losing its shape. "It's not a good idea to put your KN95 mask in your pocket, purse, or anywhere else it can easily get crumpled," he says. "I like to keep mine in the glove compartment of my car because there isn't much in there and my mask is able to maintain its shape," he says. He also says that properly storing your mask will prevent it from getting covered with debris as quickly.

Dr. Schaffner says that another way to make your KN95 mask last longer is to prevent it from getting wet, to the best of your ability. Water destroys the integrity of the mask's materials and a wet mask should be thrown out. This also means that attempting to sanitize your mask by washing it with soap and water won't work. In fact, Dr. Schaffner says there isn't a great way to disinfect a KN95 mask at all, so if it's dirty he recommends just throwing it out and getting a new one.

What about if you've worn your mask around someone that you know has COVID-19? Is it still okay to wear your mask a few more times? Dr. Barry says that it's safest to get a new mask. "Theoretically, COVID-19 has some shelf-life on solid surfaces," he says, but he adds that it's hard to truly know how much of a risk it is to continue wearing the same mask after a COVID-19 exposure. The bottom line is that there's a good chance you're wearing your KN95 mask a lot longer than is recommended. Again, it bears repeating that any mask is better than no mask. But if you

truly want to protect yourself from COVID-19 as best as possible, replace your mask after five wears and be sure to keep it somewhere clean, where it won't lose its shape. With this advice in mind, you'll have proper mask-wearing … well, covered.

Novel lipstick formula could offer protection against disease-causing microbes

Source: https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acsami.2c19460
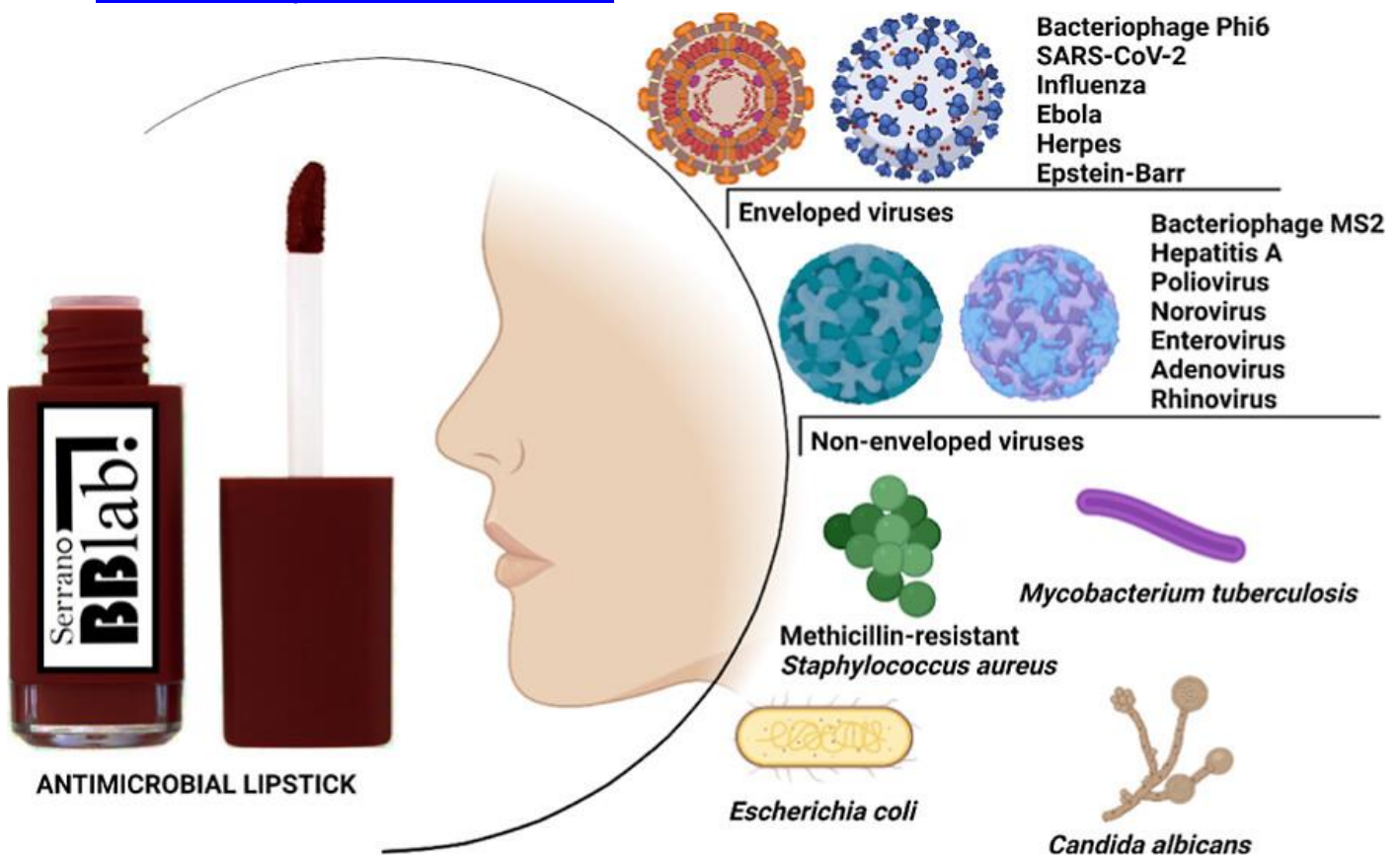
Dec 16 – Lipstick can be a confidence booster, enhance a costume and keep lips from chapping. But sharing a tube with a friend or family member can also spread infections. To develop a version with antimicrobial properties, researchers reporting in *ACS Applied Materials & Interfaces* have added cranberry extract to the formulation. Their deep red cream quickly inactivates disease-causing viruses, bacteria and a fungus that come in contact with it.

According to historians, people in ancient Egypt were the first to use make-up, applying pastes made from minerals and other substances in their environment. The formulations have evolved over the centuries, but now researchers have come full circle, looking again toward natural ingredients. For example, recent studies have reported that lipstick formulas incorporating natural colorants, such as red dragon fruit, can result in products with both vibrant colors and antimicrobial activity. And previously, cranberry extract has been shown to inactivate viruses, bacteria and fungi. So, Ángel Serrano-Aroca and colleagues wanted to use cranberry extract to create a deep red lip tint with antimicrobial properties.

The research team mixed cranberry extract into a lipstick cream base, which contained shea butter, vitamin E, provitamin B5, babassu oil and avocado oil. In experiments, the reddened cream was added to cultures containing different viruses, bacteria and one fungal species. Both enveloped and non-enveloped virus types were completely inactivated within a minute of contact with the cranberry-containing cream. And the multidrug-resistant bacteria, mycobacteria and fungus were substantially inactivated within five hours of applying the cream. The researchers suggest that their novel lipstick formula could offer protection against a variety of disease-causing microorganisms.

Source: American Chemical Society | **Journal reference:** Tuñón-Molina, A., *et al*. (2022) Antimicrobial Lipstick: Bio-based Composition against Viruses, Bacteria, and Fungi. *ACS Applied Materials & Interfaces*. doi.org/10.1021/acsami.2c19460.

The Ministry of Defense named the key persons involved in the Ukrainian military biological program

Source: https://oopstop.com/the-ministry-of-defense-named-the-key-persons-involved-in-the-ukrainian-military-biological-program/

Dec 24 – The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation has published a list of persons who are key figures in the Ukrainian military biological program.

The corresponding statement was made by the Chief of the Radiation, Chemical and Biological Protection Troops of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, Lieutenant General **Igor Kirillov**. Video of his briefing published on Saturday, December 24, the official resources of the military department.

The general noted that the Russian Federation had proposed a number of initiatives to strengthen the regime for the non-proliferation of biological weapons and improve confidence-building measures under the Convention.

First of all, it is the resumption of negotiations on the development of a legally binding protocol to the BTWC with an effective verification mechanism that would include lists of pathogenic microorganisms, toxins, specialized equipment, and would be comprehensive.

"At the same time, these proposals were blocked by the collective West. Only proposals to start negotiations on the formation of a Scientific Advisory Committee did not raise any objections, " – stated in the Ministry of Defense.

It is also noted that a number of participants in closed projects still remain in the shadows, although they are key figures in the Ukrainian military biological program.

Russian Defense Ministry illustration – enlarge page to read the labels (in Russian)

"Among them: the former director of DITRA **Kenneth Myers** executive vice president of the CIA-controlled venture fund In-Q-Tel **Tara O'Toole** Former director of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention **Thomas Frieden**, former director of the National Institutes of Health **Francis Collins** who served as executive director of the Battel Memorial Institute **Geoffrey Wadsworth** Chief Scientist and President of International Research, Development and Medicine at Pfizer and many others, Kirillov said.

He stressed that all the named persons, one way or another, are the beneficiaries of the Pentagon's biological projects and are associated with the US Democratic Party.

And the leaders of this party themselves act as the ideological inspirers of military biological research and the creators of secret money laundering schemes in the interests of a narrow circle of representatives of the American elite.

Another example of this is the important role that the son of the current US president played in the creation of American biological laboratories in Ukraine. **Hunter Biden**.

Kirillov provided evidence that funding for the creation of biological weapons components went through the companies he controlled Black and Veatch and Metabiota.

Previously **EADaily** reported on US biological warfare activities in Ukraine and unprecedented sums of money spent by the White House on so-called research to create hellish drugs.

Pathogen Early Warning

Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20221224-pathogen-early-warning

Dec 24 – The Council on Strategic Risks (CSR) recently released a report co-authored by Dr. Saskia Popescu, a Senior Fellow at the Council and an Assistant Professor at the Schar school. It builds on a previous CSR report, Toward a Global Pathogen Early Warning System: Building on the Landscape of Biosurveillance Today, by aiming to update public understanding of contemporary biosurveillance and pathogen early warning capabilities.

The new report is titled Pathogen Early Warning: A Progress Report & Path Forward. Here is its Executive Summary:

When COVID-19 struck in late 2019 and early 2020, governments worldwide were caught off guard. Despite decades spent improving global capacity to detect, track, and analyze disease threats, the virus still managed to rapidly spread around the globe within weeks. The systems that countries and international institutions established, particularly those designed to spot novel threats before they metastasized into something more dangerous, ultimately proved insufficient to halt COVID-19's spread.

In response to this fundamental challenge, the Council on Strategic Risks (CSR) published an assessment of the state of the global infrastructure designed to alert decision-makers to hazardous pathogens before they touch off significant outbreaks—henceforth referred to as pathogen early warning systems in this report. In July 2021, CSR released the results of this work in our report, *Toward a Global Pathogen Early Warning System: Building on the Landscape of Biosurveillance Today*.

Since then, the importance of effective early warning systems has only increased. COVID-19 has killed more than one million people in the United States alone, and the International Monetary Fund estimates that the global response will cost more than $12 trillion. Scientists are still working to understand SARS-CoV-2's lasting health impacts—ranging from antibiotic-resistant coinfections to a host of other lasting symptoms. Other diseases are also spreading in new and dangerous ways, including monkeypox (now referred to as mpox), a virus once limited to West and Central Africa that has traveled to 110 countries in less than one year. Ebola has resurfaced in Uganda, spreading to seven districts with infection control measures resulting in school closures. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, moreover, has sparked fears that Moscow might use biological weapons during the conflict.

In light of these developments, this new report aims to update public understanding of contemporary biosurveillance and pathogen early warning capabilities across three dimensions: the United States government, select regions worldwide, and ongoing efforts toward global pathogen early warning integration. This report also seeks to provide an overview of the structural and technical tools required to create effective early warning systems. In doing so, CSR's objective is to provide context for understanding the current state of biosurveillance, while also highlighting notable shifts since 2021. This includes:

- ❖ Major U.S. policy rollouts, including the updated National Biodefense Strategy & Implementation Guide, National Security Memorandum 15, the first annual review of the American Pandemic Prevention Plan, and the Department of Defense's (DoD) highly-anticipated inaugural Biodefense Posture Review expected in early 2023.
- ❖ The launch of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Center for Forecasting and Outbreak Analytics. The center is actively building its team and capacity as it defines its role in the U.S. pathogen early warning landscape.
- ❖ Growing international efforts to bolster effective biosurveillance and early warning capacity throughout Central Asia, Africa, Latin America, East Asia, and the Middle East.
- ❖ Increased dialogue by international organizations such as the WHO and the G7 Global Partnership on the future of biological threats and the need for robust global early warning systems.
- ❖ Despite these examples of progress, however, early warning systems in the United States and around the world remain far from comprehensive. Major structural, technical, and political gaps remain. Namely:

- ❖ Biosurveillance capabilities remain largely tied to specific pre-identified threats. Governments and international institutions need to develop a wider set of pathogen-agnostic tools designed to detect any potential novel or deliberate threat.
- ❖ Many biosurveillance and early warning efforts lack the resources necessary to be sustainable over the long term. Indeed, some existing capacities may see reduced or halted operations if new funding streams do not arise soon.
- ❖ The absence of a standardized approach to assessing the quality of early-warning systems and biosurveillance coverage.
- ❖ Within the United States in particular, data sharing and transparency are still insufficient, both across different federal agencies and from state and local public health systems to federal counterparts.
- ❖ Although major stakeholders around the world have highlighted the need for comprehensive global early warning systems, no state or international institution has advanced a concrete plan designed to take this challenge on.
- ❖ Although these gaps are significant, genuine pathogen early warning systems are not out of reach, and many of the necessary digital and technical tools are already available. CSR has therefore laid out a series of recommendations for immediate and near-term action across the U.S. interagency, the global community, and key U.S. partners. These include:
- ❖ The U.S. government must establish a clear strategy for the CDC's Center for Forecasting and Outbreak Analytics, including guidance for how the new center will engage with other agencies across the U.S. government.
- ❖ The Department of Defense (DoD) should ensure that its biosurveillance activities and agencies are optimally organized, integrated, and attached to its technology development planning to ensure it provides leaders with timely threat assessments from a variety of sources and evolves ahead of threats.
- ❖ DoD should plan and pilot a pathogen-agnostic early-warning system at several strategic military bases and facilities. This could act as a trial run for a larger national or international system.
- ❖ The U.S. government must increase its engagement with the private sector. Companies, including biotech firms, can provide unique data and advanced capabilities that are vital for effective biosurveillance and early warning.
- ❖ Governments around the world should prioritize developing interoperable biosurveillance systems. This should lay the groundwork for new cross-border and regional early-warning systems.
- ❖ Affluent states should extend existing partnerships and develop new programs designed to bolster biosurveillance efforts in resource-limited and remote settings across the globe.
- ❖ Governments and international organizations worldwide should actively pursue a global early-warning framework.
- ❖ CSR is releasing this report at a critical juncture for national and international biosecurity efforts. Fatigue from COVID-19 and decreasing interest in biological threat reduction pose a real threat to global efforts to address the outbreaks of today and the dangers of tomorrow. Returning to the status quo will not suffice, and experts agree that the drivers and incidence of biological threats will only increase over time.

As an independent nonprofit, CSR will continue its work to support and encourage stakeholders as they consider the guidance offered throughout this report, and help fill the gaps in efforts to chart actionable steps forward. Given how high the stakes are for all actors working to address biological threats, we must continue to push for urgent advancement toward effective pathogen early warning systems.

Analysis: How Accurate Are China's COVID-19 Death Numbers?

Source: https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/986008

Dec 23 – China's narrow criteria for identifying deaths caused by COVID-19 will underestimate the true toll of the pandemic's current wave there and could make it harder to communicate the best ways for people to protect themselves, foreign health experts warn.

Only deaths caused by pneumonia and respiratory failure after contracting COVID will be classified as having been caused by the coronavirus, a leading Chinese medical expert said on Tuesday.

Deaths from complications at other sites in the body, including underlying conditions made worse by the virus, would be excluded from the official toll, said Wang Guiqiang, head of the infectious disease department at Peking University First Hospital.

Experts familiar with hospital protocols in China told Reuters that such cases were not always excluded previously, though sometimes COVID would be ruled out as a cause of death if a formerly positive patient had tested negative a day or two before dying.

Wang said the criteria had changed because the Omicron variant is less likely to cause other life-threatening symptoms, though China's hospitals are still required to judge each case to ascertain precisely whether or not COVID was the ultimate cause.

The methods for counting COVID deaths have varied across countries in the nearly three years since the pandemic began. Yet disease experts outside of China say this specific approach would miss several other widely recognised types of potentially fatal COVID complications, from blood clots to heart attacks as well

as sepsis and kidney failure. Some of these complications can increase the chances of death at home, particularly for people who are not aware that they should seek care for these symptoms.

The new definition "clearly won't capture all deaths from COVID," said Dr. Aaron Glatt, an infectious diseases expert at Mount Sinai South Nassau Hospital in New York and a spokesperson for the Infectious Diseases Society of America. "To say you're going to ignore anything else going on in the body makes no sense and is scientifically inaccurate."

Last month, Korean researchers reported that 33% of Omicron-related deaths between July 2021 and March 2022 at one large hospital were due to causes other than pneumonia.

Can China's Covid data be trusted?

With one of the lowest COVID death tolls in the world, China has been routinely accused of downplaying infections and deaths for political reasons. A June 2020 study of the country's initial outbreak in Wuhan starting in late 2019 estimated 36,000 could have died at the time, or 10 times the official figure. A study published by the Lancet in April, which looked at COVID-related mortality in 74 countries and territories over 2020-2021, estimated there were 17,900 excess deaths in China over the period, compared to an official death toll of 4,820. Globally, the study estimated 18.2 million excess deaths in 2021-2022, compared with reported COVID deaths of 5.94 million. The new announcement from China raised concerns the government was seeking to disguise the true impact of relaxing its draconian "zero-COVID" controls after nearly three years of disruptive lockdowns and mandatory mass testing.

Despite widespread reports that funeral homes and crematoriums are struggling to cope with a surge in demand, China's official death numbers have not spiked, with no new fatalities reported for Dec. 21 and only seven deaths reported since the government announced on Dec. 8 that "zero-COVID" restrictions would be removed.

China actually cut its accumulated death toll by one on Dec. 20, bringing the total to 5,241.

China's National Health Commission did not immediately respond to requests for comment about the country's COVID statistics and excess mortality. Even if China were to continue defining COVID deaths more broadly, the official data is still unlikely to reflect the situation on the ground, given how quickly infections are now spreading, said Chen Jiming, a medical researcher at China's Foshan University. "The reported counts of cases and deaths are only a very small portion of the true values," he said.

Ben Cowling, an epidemiologist at the University of Hong Kong's School of Public Health, said the official death tally would be very low even if a broader definition were in use, "because so little testing is being done" now that China has discontinued mass surveillance. On the other hand, Cowling said, labeling every person who died while positive for COVID as having died from the disease could lead to an over-count. Such an approach "can also be criticised because it can, and has, included coincidental deaths such as in people hit by a bus while having mild COVID." Dr. Mai He, a pathologist at Washington University in St. Louis who was involved in the Wuhan study published in 2020, said there was still a lack of faith in the integrity of China's numbers.

"The persistent critical issue is a lack of transparency; people cannot use their data to do research and analysis, (or) provide guidance for the next step," he told Reuters. The lack of trust in China's statistics is also causing panic among members of the public, said Victoria Fan, senior fellow in global health at the Center for Global Development. "It's in the best interest of the government to be more transparent, because a lot of the behaviors that the public is exhibiting is because they don't have information," she said.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: Why this obsession with numbers? Will a few thousand or a few million (speaking about China) make a difference in the management of the pandemic? Will they change our inability to fight the enemy winning for three consequent years? Perhaps they are only good to blame the Chinese for something – not specifically defined …

Could Vaccines Provide Better Immunity Than COVID Infection?

By F. Perry Wilson, MD, MSCE
Source: https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/985798

Dec 20 – Welcome to *Impact Factor*, your weekly dose of commentary on a new medical study. I'm Dr F. Perry Wilson of the Yale School of Medicine.

An interesting paper started making the rounds last week, one with a conclusion that was compelling in its simplicity and appealed to some preexisting beliefs: Vaccination against COVID provides more protection than being infected by COVID. At first, you hear that and you're like, of course vaccination is better than infection. Infection makes you really sick and can kill you, and vaccination doesn't. But that's

not what the study was saying. It was saying that vaccination was better than infection even among those who recovered from their COVID infection. And that, if true, would be really important, but also really surprising.

What made COVID so dangerous initially was that it was a novel human pathogen — something none of our immune systems had encountered before. There are essentially two ways to educate your immune system about SARS-CoV-2: Get infected by it or expose your immune system to a vaccine. And, pretty clearly, the vaccine is better from a risk-benefit profile.

But what if you've already been infected? What if you, fortunately, made it through that initial infection? Are you as protected as you would have been had you been vaccinated? More protected? There's certainly an argument for the latter. After all, real COVID infections expose your immune systems to way more antigens than the vaccine — and likely in higher doses as well.

But to date we don't have a great head-to-head study on this topic. Until now.

I'm talking about this study "SARS-CoV-2 Infection, Hospitalization, and Death in Vaccinated and Infected Individuals by Age Groups in Indiana, 2021-2022," appearing in the *American Journal of Public Health.*

Researchers leveraged the fact that Indiana has a remarkably detailed accounting of patients infected with COVID and vaccinated against COVID to create a unique cohort study. Here's how it worked.
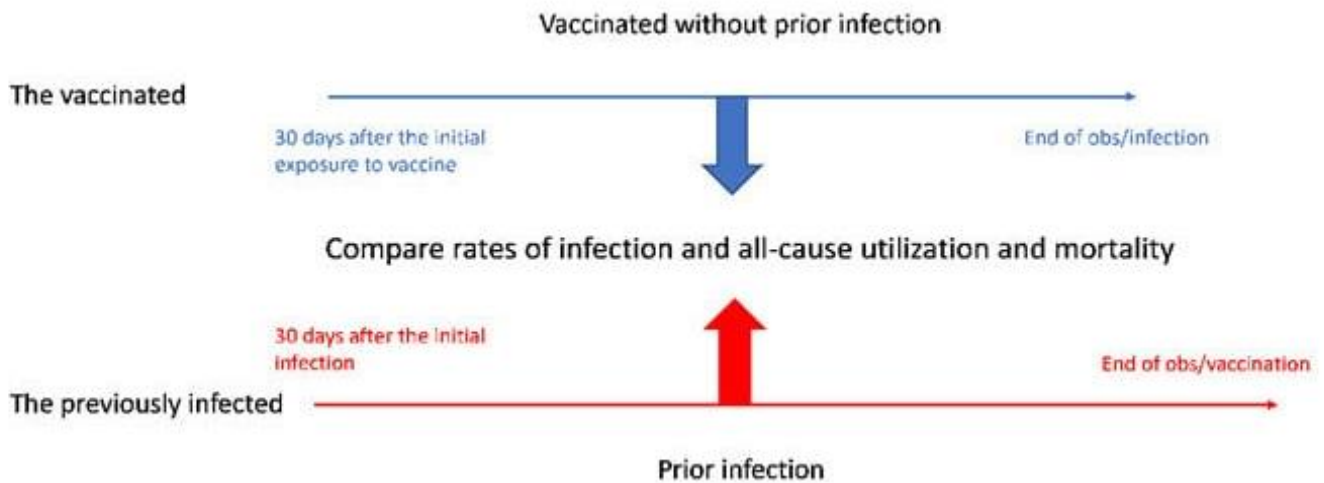
They identified people from the state who were infected with COVID and who had not been vaccinated, and people who had been but had never been infected. They then searched for matches between the groups. For each vaccinated person, they found a person
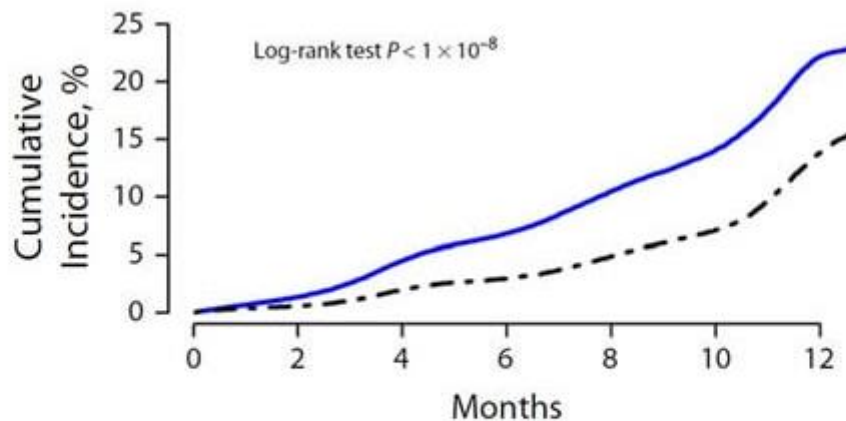
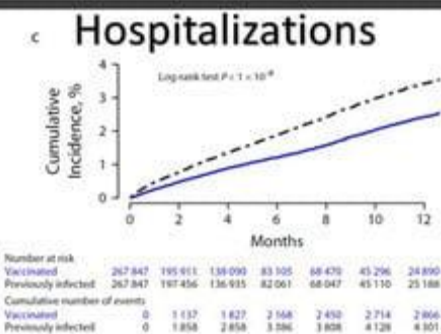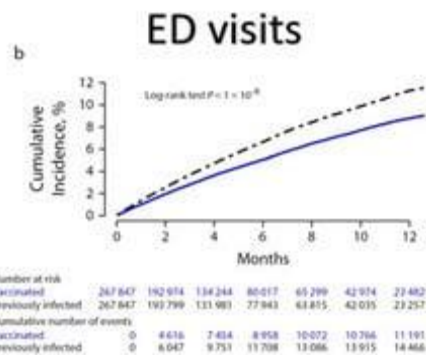| Number at risk							
Vaccinated	267 847	194 819	134 923	82 192	65 877	42 895	21 483
Previously infected	267 847	197 956	136 668	82 772	67 981	45 114	23 805
Cumulative number of events							
Vaccinated	0	3 209	8 368	10 958	13 931	16 116	19 461
Previously infected	0	1 363	3 683	4 757	6 252	7 564	10 220

who had been infected at around the same time, who had the same age, sex, race, zip code, and number of preexisting conditions. Thirty days after the event, vaccination or infection, the clock started ticking. The idea here is that, by 30 days later, immunity from that exposure has built up.

In total, they were able to create 267,847 matched pairs.

The analysis was fairly straightforward: You have a person who was vaccinated and a similar person who was infected at the same time. What would happen going forward?

The results are pretty interesting.

The vaccinated people were more likely to become infected in the next 6 months than the previously infected people — about two times as likely, actually.
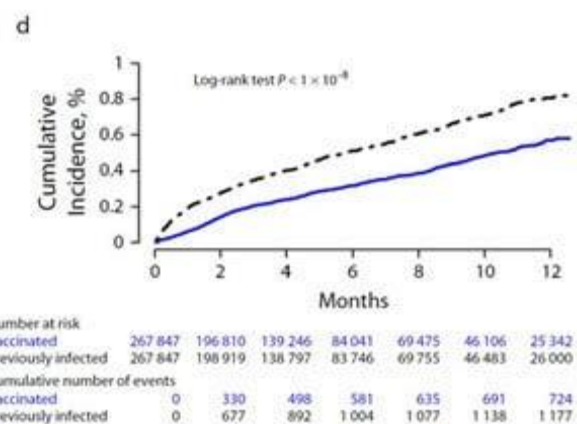
But in terms of the other outcomes — emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and death — the vaccinated people did better.

In other words, given the choice between infection and vaccination, it's pretty clear that you'd choose vaccination.

But let's be a bit careful here. Obviously, people who choose to get vaccinated are different from those who don't, and in ways that aren't captured by matching for age, race, sex, and zip code. People who get vaccinated might be healthier in many other ways; they might have been more careful about masking or washing their hands. The authors argue that this isn't a huge problem. After all, the infection rate was higher in the vaccinated group, but I'm not sure I buy it. Comparing initial infections and recurrent infections is pretty much apples and oranges.

The other question I have is one of biologic plausibility. Sure, vaccination is the safer way to educate your immune system, but assuming you survive your infection, you'd think the overall effects would be pretty similar. Multiple rounds of vaccination may have additive effects, but this analysis was conditioned on the first vaccine dose. One explanation could be that COVID infection hurts you in long-term ways, such that even if you survive the initial infection, your subsequent risk of bad events is higher.

There's a potentially bigger issue with this analysis as well. In the methods section, the authors write, "Matched pairs were censored when an infected participant received a vaccination or a vaccine recipient became infected."

At first, this might make sense. If a previously infected person is vaccinated, we are no longer seeing the "benefit" of prior infection alone. But the problem arises in the opposite case. Censoring a matched pair when the vaccinated member of the pair gets COVID means that you can never observe things like death from COVID in that individual; all events have to happen *before* infection. I suppose there is an argument that this is fair, since the infected person in the pair, by design, had survived their COVID infection for at least 30 days. But I am concerned that this would bias the results in favor of vaccination.

Of course, even if you believe the analysis, it isn't entirely relevant to the current status of COVID. Few of us are in the position that the study creates, never having been infected and deciding whether to obtain immunity through a vaccine or "naturally." Nowadays, the more relevant clinical question is whether those who have been previously infected, but not yet vaccinated, would do better in the long term if they bit the bullet and got the vaccine. When that study gets published, we'll cover it here.
For Medscape, I'm Perry Wilson.

F. Perry Wilson, MD, MSCE, is an associate professor of medicine and director of Yale's Clinical and Translational Research Accelerator. His science communication work can be found in the Huffington Post, on NPR, and here on Medscape. He tweets *@fperrywilson and his new book, How Medicine Works and When It Doesn't, is available for pre-order now.*

First "virovore" discovered: An organism that eats viruses

Source: https://newatlas.com/science/first-virovore-eats-viruses/

A microscope image of chloroviruses attacking a piece of algae (Kit Lee and Angie Fox)

Dec 28 – Name a type of organic matter and chances are some types of organism has evolved to eat it. Plants, meat, algae, insects and bacteria are all consumed by different creatures, but now scientists have discovered something new on the menu – viruses.
Since viruses are found absolutely everywhere, it's inevitable that organisms will consume them incidentally. But researcher John DeLong at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln wanted to find out if any microbes actively ate viruses, and whether such a diet could support the physiological growth of individuals and the population growth of a community.
"They're made up of really good stuff: nucleic acids, a lot of nitrogen and phosphorous," said DeLong. "Everything should want to eat them. So many things will eat anything they can get ahold of. Surely something would have learned how to eat these really good raw materials."

To test the hypothesis, DeLong and his team collected samples of pond water, isolated different microbes, and then added large amounts of chlorovirus, a freshwater inhabitant that infects green algae. Over the next few days the team tracked the population size of the viruses and the other microbes to see if the latter was eating the former.

And sure enough, one particular microbe seemed to be snacking on the viruses – a ciliate known as Halteria. In water samples with no other food source for the ciliates, Halteria populations grew by about 15 times within two days, while chlorovirus levels dropped 100-fold. In control samples without the virus, Halteria didn't grow at all.

In follow-up tests, the team tagged chlorovirus DNA with fluorescent dye, and found that Halteria cells soon began to glow. This helped confirm that Halteria was indeed consuming the virus.

These experiments show that the newly coined term "virovory" can now take its place among herbivory, carnivory et al, with Halteria crowned the first known virovore. But of course, it's unlikely to be the only one out there, and the researchers plan to continue investigating the phenomenon, including its effects on food webs and larger systems like the carbon cycle.

●▶ **The research was published in the journal** *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Global Biolabs

Source: https://thebulletin.org/2022/12/best-maps-of-2022/

The Bulletin's largest map project this year was the re-launch of the Global Biolabs mapping project, which tracks all the known biosafety level 4 (BSL-4) labs around the world. Through a partnership with Global Biolabs, the Bulletin redesigned and re-launch the map, which now also includes BSL-3+ labs. For countries with BSL-4 labs, the map provides scores that assess a country's approach to biorisk management and the country's national governance and stability.

The map allows users to investigate maximum containment labs at the global, country, and local levels— with zoom features and a wealth of data about every known BSL-4 and BSL-3+ lab.

There are at least 69 Biosafety Level 4 (BSL4) labs in operation, under construction, or planned in 27 countries around the world.

The Global Biolabs interactive maps were created using a combination of datasets that are visualized using Mapbox. Promotional videos for the project featured maps created with Google Earth Studio and Adobe After Effects.

Tackling Crowd Management in Subways During Pandemics

Source: https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20221229-tackling-crowd-management-in-subways-during-pandemics

Dec 29 – Mass transit, and subways in particular, are essential to the economic viability and environmental sustainability of cities across the globe. But public transit was hit hard during the COVID pandemic and subways especially experienced substantial drops in ridership. Spurred on by a Columbia Engineering Transit Design Challenge in 2020, researchers from across the University have been collaborating on a project to strengthen both the preparedness and resilience of transit communities facing public health disasters.

The team, led by Civil Engineering Professor Sharon Di, recently won a $2,500,000 four-year grant from the National Science Foundation to tackle crowd management in subways. The project—"Preparing for Future Pandemics: Subway Crowd Management to Minimize Airborne Transmission of Respiratory Viruses"—is focused on developing a system for public transit communities, including riders, workers, and

agencies, that will help transit riders to make informed decisions and adapt travel behavior accordingly and provide transit agencies engaged in planning and policymaking with recommendations for mitigating virus transmission risks to riders and workers.

"We think our system, which we're calling Way-CARE, will be transformative, especially for people in low-income communities who are among the most impacted by reduced accessibility to safer travel modes," said Di, who is a leader in transportation management. "We expect our project to improve the social, economic, and environmental well-being of those who live, work, and travel within cities."

The team, which includes Co-PIs Jeffrey Shaman (Columbia Climate School; Mailman School of Public Health); Marco Giometto, Xiaofan Jiang, and Faye McNeill (Columbia Engineering); Ester Fuchs (School of International and Public Affairs); and Kai Ruggeri (Columbia University Irving Medical Center), is working with New York City's Metropolitan Transportation Authority and local rider communities in Harlem and at Columbia on the Way-CARE project. They hope that their system will enable smart city transit operators to access real-time sensing information collected from subway stations and/or trains for crowd management.

The researchers are integrating sensing and crowd and airflow modeling with public health expertise on a microscale applied to subway crowd management. They are developing coupled airborne dispersion and epidemiological models that account for microscale processes—the transport of droplets and aerosols—that affect respiratory virus transmission. In addition, they are integrating behavioral science data that will help inform travel choices and policy making.

"This is an important interdisciplinary collaboration," said Shaman, an epidemiologist who is a leader in infectious disease modeling. "The transmission of respiratory viruses is not directly observed, and the microscale processes influencing infection risk are not well known. Our project will address these shortcomings by advancing understanding of the physical, biological, and behavioral features that enable transmission of respiratory viruses in subway settings, and equip transit officials and the public with real-time information that improves worker and rider safety."

As COVID turns 3, experts worry where the next pandemic will come from – and if we'll be ready

Source: https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2023/01/01/covid-anniversary-next-pandemic-expert-concern/10847848002/

Jan 03 – For years, public health experts warned of the possibility of an illness spreading across the globe killing millions. After all, it had happened before.

Measures were in place around the world to spot early signs of a never-before-seen bug with dangerous potential.

That's why on Dec. 31, 2019, China notified the World Health Organization that a novel pathogen was circulating in Wuhan, the most populous city in central China. A day later, in that city of 12 million, a wet market selling live animals was shuttered because of fears it was the source of the virus that would later be named SARS-CoV-2.

Three years later, the risk of a deadly pathogen spreading around the world remains.

Now, in addition to worrying about a virus that might jump from animals to humans, experts are concerned about research accidents and – what should be unthinkable – the possibility of someone intentionally unleashing a highly contagious and lethal pathogen.

A pandemic has long been known to be far riskier for global security than conventional, nuclear or chemical warfare, said Lawrence Gostin, a professor of public health law at Georgetown University and a leading expert in global health.

"We've seen that play out with COVID and COVID is far from the worst pandemic threat that we face," he said.

Although it has so far killed more than 6.6 million people worldwide, other pandemics have been more lethal. The 1918 flu, for instance, is estimated to have cost 50 million lives across the globe, and in the 14th century, the Black Death killed between 30% and 60% of all Europeans in just four years.

Public health and national defense experts worry the next pandemic will come at an even higher price than this one. And the nation needs to be ready.

"It's incumbent on the United States and other countries to be prepared for whatever comes from biology, whether it's from nature or from engineering or a laboratory accident," said Dr. Tom Inglesby, director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security at the Bloomberg School of Public Health.

The next pandemic could be worse

Gostin sees nature as the most likely source of the next pandemic. A highly lethal strain of bird or swine flu could mutate naturally to become contagious to humans. That scenario kept health experts like Gostin awake at night long before COVID-19.

But other causes are possible.

"We have a whole host of threats from lab leaks to bioterror to bioweapons to naturally occurring zoonotic spillovers," said Gostin, author of the 2021 book "Global Health Security: A Blueprint for the Future."
"All of that leads to quite a high probability that we're going to have more frequent pandemic-like threats and we need to take them seriously as a national security threat."

Dr. Joseph Varon hugs and comforts a patient in the COVID-19 intensive care unit during Thanksgiving at the United Memorial Medical Center on November 26, 2020 in Houston, Texas.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: After 3 Covid years Dr. Varon still does not know how to don properly his personal protective equipment. Or he thinks that he is immune or immortal or who cares!

The SARS-CoV-2 virus is the third coronavirus to pose a major health threat, following the first SARS and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome – both of which are far more lethal. Another coronavirus with the contagious potential of SARS-CoV-2 and the 30% death rate of MERS would threaten the economy, supply chains and the health care system, not to mention human life.
And those are just the direct impacts.
With COVID-19, we're likely to see indirect impacts for years, as people who skipped routine medical care are diagnosed with more advanced and deadlier cancers and children who missed routine vaccines fall ill with preventable diseases, among other consequences, Gostin said.
"If you think of a far worse pandemic, you can multiply that by 10- or even 50-fold in terms of the economic and social harms the United States would suffer," he said.
That means the world needs to have a better ongoing capacity to fight these threats, not spending money only after the crisis arrives, he and others said.
Right now, only about 5% of the country's health care dollars are spent on public health and preventing the next crisis. "That's a rounding error in the U.S. budget," Gostin said.

Manmade threats are real

The idea of engineering a deadly pathogen that sickens the world sounds like the stuff of science fiction or superhero movies. But it's no longer a fantasy.

Kevin Esvelt, an MIT biologist, said people in his own lab could theoretically assemble a dangerous virus from DNA ordered on the internet for under $1,000.

Once pandemic-capable viruses are identified, thousands of people worldwide have the scientific training to make them from mail-ordered synthetic DNA.

"Imagine a world where you can order weapons-grade plutonium in the mail," he said, "and there are thousands of engineers who have the skills to put together something that might be a bomb."

In less than 100 days last fall and winter, the omicron variant spread from southern Africa to the rest of the world, infecting 26% of Americans, Esvelt said, illustrating how fast a pandemic response needs to be.

Esvelt warned Congress earlier this year that pandemic virus identification would make pandemics widely accessible and recently released a 30-page plan preparing for a world in which it's feasible to unleash one.

The risk is real and growing over time as engineering biology becomes easier, agreed Jaime Yassif, vice president of the Nuclear Threat Initiative's Global Biological Policy and Programs. Still, it's not "trivial to create a biological weapon that would cause significant harm," she said.

COVID-19 made the threat more real, she and others said, by showing how much chaos a global pandemic can sow.

"Some people may have taken note of the impact and paid more attention than before," Yassif said. "It's reasonable to assume that the intentions are already there and they may be growing and that capabilities are increasingly within reach. That's my rational calculus about why I take it seriously."

The potential for bioterrorism

The global Biological Weapons Convention was enacted in March 1975 to prevent countries from ever developing or producing biological weapons. It has largely held ever since, though a few countries that signed onto the treaty are believed to have or have had secret programs.

The Soviets once tried to engineer Ebola into a more contagious pathogen, for instance, but it didn't work well, said Christine Parthemore, CEO of the Council on Strategic Risks, a nonprofit, nonpartisan security policy institute.

China and Iran may have come right up to the line, if not crossed it, making offensive weapons, she said. Based on U.S. government public assessments, for example, Iran may be using "botulinum toxin that we don't think is for Botox, at least not solely."

"The history is there," Parthemore said. "Countries have engineered pathogens."

The Defense Department initially became interested in mRNA vaccines, which were used to fight COVID-19, as a rapid way to counter state-based biological threats and engineered pathogens, she said.

And the vaccine that proved effective this summer against mpox (formerly known as monkeypox) was developed to counter the possibility that someone might try to unleash it's deadlier cousin smallpox on the world.

But the vast majority of countries are unlikely to try to unleash a deadly pathogen, she said, because it would be hard to protect their own people during a massive outbreak.

Still Parthemore worries nations are losing faith in international institutions and treaties. Russia's war against Ukraine and the United Nations' inability to stop it have weakened international agreements in the eyes of many nations, including those focused on biosecurity.

"The loss of faith in cooperation and the U.N. and collective action and Russia and others acting as they have further degrading the norms we've held onto so dearly for decades – it's pretty scary," she said.

Should research be regulated?

One question is how much regulation should be imposed on scientific work and researchers involved in synthesizing potential pathogens.

Yassif supports "more rules of the road" to safeguard the scientific advances that might be misused by bad actors.

In 2012, the scientific community and others debated research in the U.S. and the Netherlands that explored five mutations making avian influenza more contagious to humans. Some in the virology community defended that research as essential for understanding naturally emerging risks. Yassif and others worry it made creating a global hazard one step easier.

"The systems we have in place are not as broad in scope or as robust as they need to be," Yassif said.

The construction of new biosafety labs also has raised concerns among experts.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than a dozen countries have announced plans to build Level 4 labs, the highest level of security, designed to investigate the most dangerous pathogens.

These labs lack strong international oversight, Parthemore said. "Obviously, if you had an offensive program and you were trying to engineer pathogens in certain ways, a BSL-4 laboratory is where you would do the work," she said. "The lack of transparency in these labs and their proliferation is a huge problem."

It's also too easy to order the building blocks of a pathogen on the internet, Yassif said. Some companies screen orders to make sure they're not selling dangerous DNA sequences to bad actors, but they're not required to do so. "There's probably a sizeable market share that's not being screened and we're trying to close that gap," she said.

How to prepare for the next one

No single action can reduce the pandemic risk to zero, the experts said.

But there are plenty of options for actions and a "layered defense." Intervening at multiple points in the process a bad actor would use to create a biological weapon will make the world much safer.

Technology can solve the problem created by biology, Esvelt said. He envisions better protective gear, especially for health care and other essential workers, as well as germicidal lights that kill pathogens without harming the people who use the same indoor space. He wants wastewater and air surveillance at airports to detect new pathogens that might have a long incubation period before showing symptoms, as HIV does.

Preparedness isn't just about scientific breakthroughs. It also involves investing in people, said Dr. Raj Panjabi, senior director for global health security and biodefense on the United States National Security Council.

For decades, the U.S. has underinvested in those who deliver public and animal health, he said, including epidemiologists, veterinarians, public health nurses and community health workers.

In October, the Biden administration launched what it called a National Biodefense Strategy and Implementation Plan for Countering Biological Threats, Enhancing Pandemic Preparedness, and Achieving Global Health Security.

Panjabi described some of the strategy's goals and timelines in a webinar this fall:

- **Testing**: Enable testing for a new pathogen within 12 hours, surge testing within a week and pathogen-specific testing within 30 days
- **Vaccine**: A new vaccine should be developed within 100 days, enough manufactured for the entire U.S. population within 130 days, and for high-risk populations around the world within 200 days.
- **Treatments**: Drugs should be repurposed within 90 days and new therapeutics developed within 180 days.
- "Time is lives in an emergency," he said. "How well we respond depends on how well we prepare.
- The administration has asked for $88 billion over the next five years to implement the plan. "Billions to be invested now to save trillions in the future and an incalculable amount of human lives both American and around the world," Panjabi said.

Congress has not yet followed up with adequate funding to pursue this agenda.

"It makes no sense that Congress has not taken up the administration's proposed pandemic preparedness agenda," said Inglesby, who recently co-wrote a proposal for the development of diagnostics in a health emergency. He hopes the money will be allocated soon. Another disastrous pandemic is not inevitable, he and others said, but prevention requires preparation and forethought.

"Pathogens of various forms are very good at adapting and changing form. But modern science is very good at countering that," Gostin said. "If we're smart and well prepared and invest strongly and robustly in it, we can substantially lower the risk."

The potential efficacy of an aviation bioterrorist attack and its psychological consequences

By Olaf E. TRUSZCZYŃSKI[1], Łukasz MACANDER[2], and Marian MACANDER[3]
[1] Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski University in Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland
[2] Polish Society for Future Studies, Warsaw, Poland
[3] Military Institute of Aviation Medicine, Warsaw, Poland

The work concerns the analysis of the possibility of a bioterrorist attack using infected material using modern air transport carriers to infect the human population. It is possible to use passenger and transport planes, but the use of drones and mini-drones seems the most dangerous. A bioterrorist attack is very

specific and differs from other forms of terrorism, first of all in the possibility of self-replication of the pathogen, as well as the ability to "sleep" its operation even for many years and completely unexpectedly activate it. In such conditions, not only fast medical neutralizing action becomes crucial, but also calming psychosocial reactions and reasonable cooperation of the authorities and the media.

It seems that we are not taking China's outbreak seriously . . .

Families burn (Covid) bodies on the streets

What to Know About the New XBB.1.5 Variant
Source: https://time.com/6244167/covid-19-variant-xbb15/

Jan 03 – A new variant of the virus that causes COVID-19 is spreading in the U.S., raising concerns about a potential wave of infections and reinfections to start the new year.
The variant, called XBB.1.5, is a descendant of Omicron and a close relative of the XBB variant, which spread widely in Singapore and India this past fall. A December study in the journal *Cell* demonstrated that XBB is better at evading immune defenses gained from vaccination and prior infection, compared to other variants. This raises the risk of reinfection, a World Health Organization group warned in October—though the group said at the time that XBB does not appear to cause significantly more severe disease than previous strains.
Along with its adeptness at getting around immune blockades, XBB.1.5 appears to be highly transmissible, thanks to some key mutations picked up as the virus evolved. These tweaks are stoking concerns about a surge in cases this winter—particularly given low rates of booster uptake and relaxed disease-mitigation measures.
While there is limited research on **XBB.1.5 (a.k.a. Kraken)** at this point, here's what we know so far.

How widespread is XBB.1.5 in the U.S.?
During the week ending Dec. 31, XBB.1.5 accounted for 40.5% of new sequenced COVID-19 cases in the U.S., according to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It's currently causing roughly 75% of new cases in the Northeast, which is often a bellwether for the rest of the country.
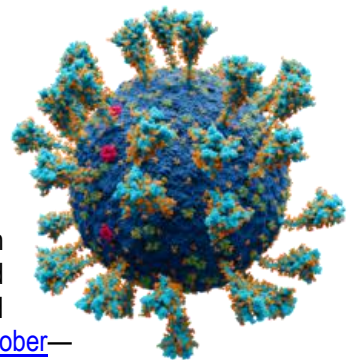
Nationally representative diagnostic data from Walgreens, a COVID-19 testing provider across the U.S., shows almost 40% of tests are now coming back positive, though it's not possible to say how many of those infections were due to XBB.1.5. Hospitalizations are also starting to tick upward nationwide, according to CDC data.

Do vaccines and treatments work against XBB.1.5?

While there isn't much data on XBB.1.5 yet, research on its relative XBB provides some clues. Research recently published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (and based on a small number of people) suggests that while XBB is more immune-evasive than previous versions of the virus, people who have received the updated bivalent booster are better protected against it than those who have not. Just 15% of people in the U.S. ages 5 and older have gotten a bivalent booster, according to the CDC, which means many people are currently not as protected as they could be against the new variant.

Whether or not monoclonal antibody treatments are effective against XBB.1.5 is another concern. In the fall of 2022, federal health officials acknowledged that some monoclonal antibody therapies do not work well against newer variants, which is particularly concerning for immunocompromised people who do not respond well to vaccines. The recent *Cell* study found that these therapies largely did not work against XBB, which suggests the same may be true for XBB.1.5.

Will XBB.1.5 lead to a new wave of Long COVID cases?

Long COVID, the name for enduring and often-debilitating symptoms that follow a case of COVID-19, can affect anyone infected by SARS-CoV-2, including those who are vaccinated and initially had mild disease. Some data suggest that people infected by earlier Omicron variants were less likely to develop Long COVID than those who caught Delta. But if XBB.1.5 spreads widely, even a small percentage of people developing long-term complications could mean lots of new Long COVID cases.

Avoiding infection is the best way to stay healthy in both the short and long term. To do that, follow all the usual advice: stay up-to-date on vaccines and boosters, wear a high-quality mask in public indoor areas, meet with others outdoors or in well-ventilated places if possible, and consider avoiding group gatherings if infection rates are high in your area.

Large COVID autopsy study finds SARS-CoV-2 all over the human body

Source: https://newatlas.com/science/covid-autopsy-study-virus-brain-body/

Jan 04 – In the most comprehensive autopsy tissue study conducted to date, researchers have found traces of the SARS-CoV-2 virus throughout the entire body, from the brain and the heart to the eyes. The findings indicate the virus can cause persistent infections in many parts of the body, months past an initial illness, and support the argument for further research into antiviral drugs as possible treatment for long COVID.

Three years have passed since the emergence of novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, and scientists are still working to understand exactly how this virus interacts with the human body. One ongoing mystery is how broadly SARS-CoV-2 infects different organs, beyond the respiratory system.

Several studies, for example, have come to differing conclusions as to whether the neurological effects of COVID are due to the virus directly infecting brain tissue. Most recently, a team from the Stanford School of Medicine closely analyzed post-mortem brain tissue samples from several COVID patients and couldn't find any traces of viral RNA.

That research did, on the other hand, detect significant inflammatory biomarkers, leading to the hypothesis that the short- and long-term neurological symptoms could be due to persistent immune system activity. This hypothesis has been backed up by subsequent autopsy studies finding neuroinflammation in COVID patients.

This new research, led by National Institutes of Health scientists in association with the University of Maryland, autopsied 44 patients who died from, or with, COVID-19. The study focused on harvesting tissue soon after death from a variety of different locations in the body.

"Our focus on short postmortem intervals, a comprehensive standardized approach to tissue collection, dissecting the brain before fixation, preserving tissue in RNA later and flash freezing of fresh tissue allowed us to detect and quantify SARS-CoV-2 RNA levels with high sensitivity by ddPCR [polymerase chain reaction] and ISH [in situ hybridization], as well as isolate virus in cell culture from multiple non-respiratory tissues including the brain, which are notable differences compared to other studies," the researchers write in the new study.

The findings revealed SARS-CoV-2 RNA could be detected in 84 different locations in the body. The highest burden of viral RNA was found in airway and lung tissue, however, the virus was also detected in the brain, gut, heart, kidney, eye, adrenal gland, and lymph nodes.
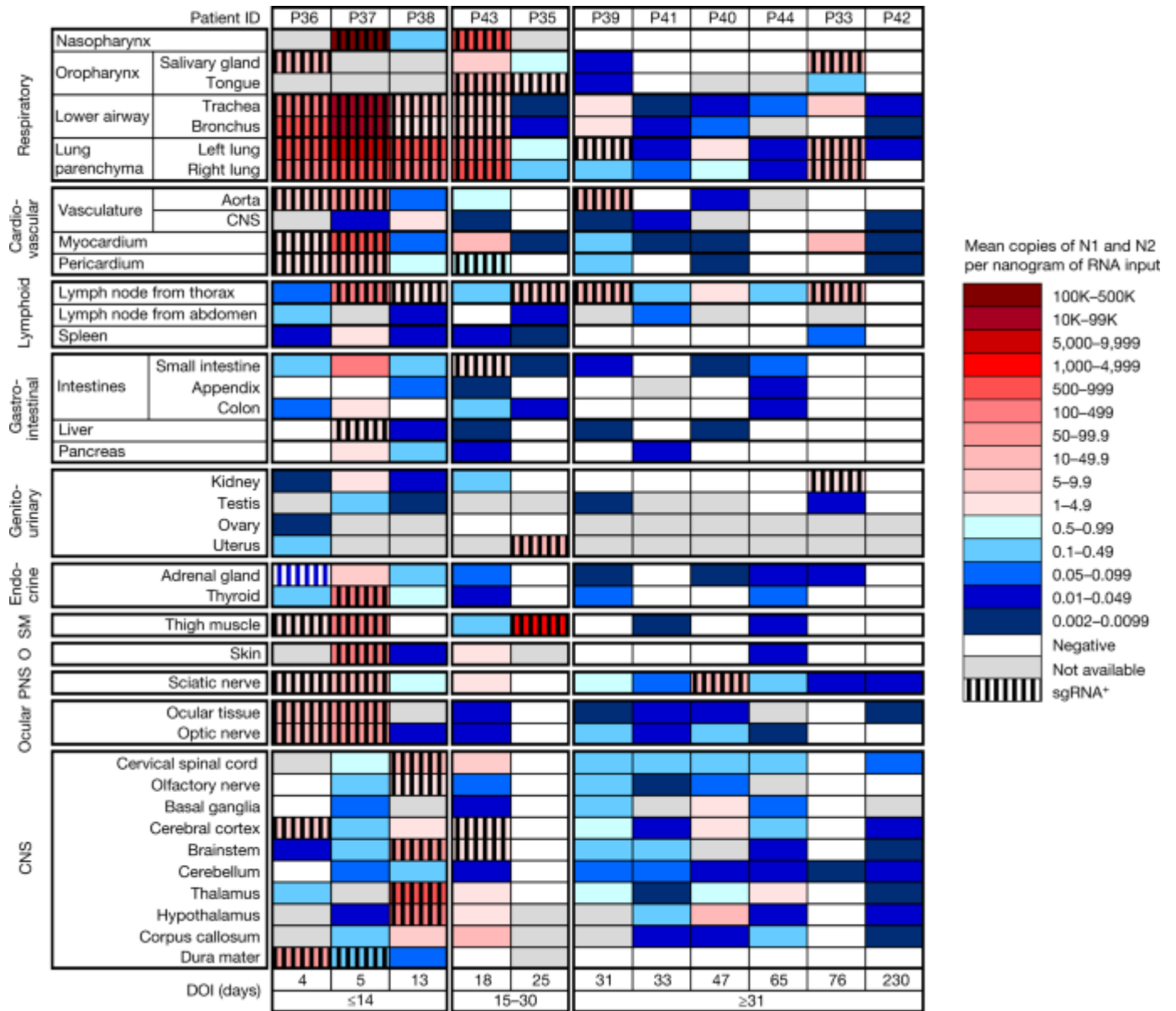
The heat map depicts the highest mean quantification of SARS-CoV-2 RNA (N) through ddPCR present in the autopsy tissues of 11 patients who died with COVID-19 and underwent whole-body and brain sampling. Patients are aligned from shortest to longest duration of illness (DOI) before death, listed at the bottom of the figure, and grouped into early (≤14 days), mid (15–30 days) and late (≥31 days) duration of illness. Tissues are organized by tissue group beginning with the respiratory tissues at the top and CNS at the bottom. Viral RNA levels range from 0.002 to 500,000 N gene copies per nanogram of RNA input, depicted as a gradient from dark blue at the lowest level to dark red at the highest level. Tissues that were also positive for subgenomic RNA (sgRNA⁺) through real-time RT–qPCR are shaded with black vertical bars. O, other; PNS, peripheral nervous system; SM, skeletal muscle.

The tissue tested came from patients at several different stages of infection, from the earliest stages (less than 14 days after symptom onset) up to nine months after the acute disease. The highest viral burden was unsurprisingly found in those patients at the earliest stages of an infection, but 14 of 27 patients beyond the two-week mark still showed the presence of virus in at least one non-respiratory tissue analyzed.

While the study's findings are certainly striking, what they mean is still unclear. All the patients included in the research were older, unvaccinated, autopsied during the first year of the pandemic, and suffered from many comorbidities. So it is unknown whether new variants of virus spread through vaccinated, younger people in similar ways.

Nevertheless, what this study does clearly illustrate is the potential for SARS-CoV-2 to spread through tissues across the entire body, including the brain. And the researchers are now asking whether this could play a role in which patients experience long COVID.
The next step for the research team is to gather postmortem tissue from deceased long COVID patients to understand whether the virus can be found months after an acute illness. This is part of a larger project dubbed RECOVER (Researching COVID to Enhance Recovery). Alongside the tissue pathology work, the RECOVER project is running a clinical trial testing the efficacy of antiviral Paxlovid in treating long COVID patients. The hypothesis is that if long COVID symptoms are triggered by persistent SARS-CoV-2 infections in certain parts of the body, then trying to eliminate the virus with antivirals should improve those symptoms.
The Paxlovid long COVID trial is set to begin this year and the RECOVER project is slated to run up to four years.

●▶ **The new research was published in** _Nature_.

CRISPR Gene Drives: A Weapon of Mass Destruction?
Source: https://medium.com/predict/crispr-gene-drives-a-weapon-of-mass-destruction-81dcc6be4e5b

Dec 29 – You've probably heard of the gene-editing tool CRISPR, often referred to as "word processing for DNA." Much of the attention given to this revolutionary tool has focused on medical research. But did you know it could also be used to drastically alter our environment as well? There is talk of using CRISPR to revive extinct animals like the Wooly Mammoth and the Tasmanian Tiger. But the tool can also do the opposite and _cause animal extinctions_ through gene drives. **Gene drives** allow scientists to "drive" new genes — and their associated traits — into wildlife populations at unprecedented rates. Here's a simplified explanation of how gene drives work. In normal sexual reproduction between species with two copies of chromosomes, each gene has a 50% chance of being inherited. However, there are particular DNA sequences called **"selfish genes"** whose frequency in the genome increases with each generation, even if this doesn't result in an evolutionary advantage for the offspring. In 2003, biologist Austin Burt proposed a new way to use selfish genes to spread traits more efficiently through a population and ensure that offspring have a 100% probability of inheriting a particular DNA segment. When Burt made this proposal, the technology wasn't available to make it possible. Today, however, that technology does exist, and research on gene drives has progressed rapidly. In 2014, a paper was published that proposed how to theoretically build a gene drive using CRISPR gene editing. Just a year later, CRISPR gene drives were experimentally demonstrated in fruit flies and mosquitoes.
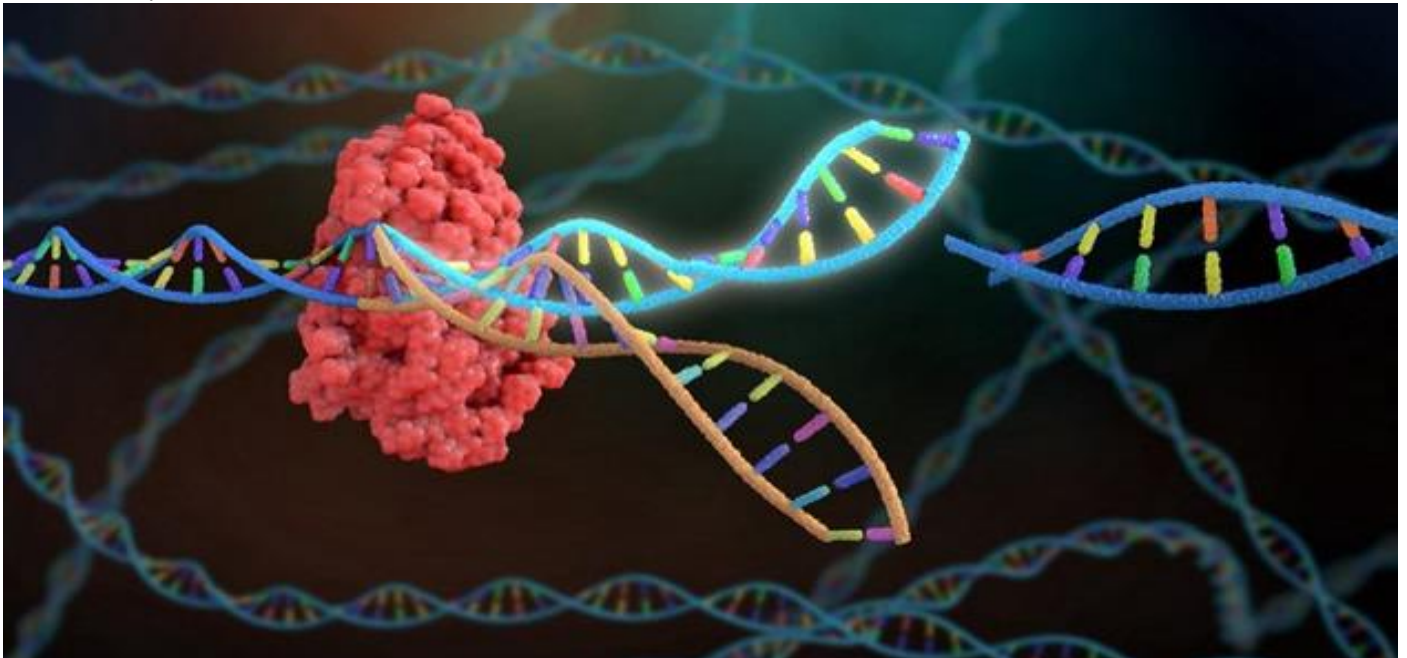
Artist's conception of the Cas9 protein (in red) using CRISPR-derived RNA to locate the matching DNA sequence and cut the target DNA. Source: Nathan Devery, via Shutterstock.

Here's how it was done. **CRISPR**, short for Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats, is a gene-editing technology that allows scientists to make precise changes to an organism's DNA. The

CRISPR system consists of two main components: a guide RNA molecule and a nuclease enzyme called Cas9. The guide RNA molecule binds to a specific site on the DNA double helix, and the Cas9 enzyme cuts the DNA at that site. Once the DNA is cut, scientists can use other tools to insert, delete, or modify the DNA at the specific site. You can read in detail about the science and history behind CRISPR gene editing here. To create a CRISPR gene drive, scientists would simply add genetic information coding for CRISPR itself to a portion of the newly added DNA. In this way, the CRISPR gene drive can copy itself independently into new chromosomes and spread unhindered through a population with each successive generation. The idea now is to combine the self-propagating CRISPR with other genetic "payloads"; that is, we can program CRISPR to copy itself and other DNA sequences.

And in 2015, scientists at the University of California San Diego did just that. The team reported the first successful demonstration of a CRISPR gene drive in common fruit flies. They used the gene drive to alter a defective pigmentation gene in their fruit fly population. 97% of the edited flies had a new light yellow color instead of the normal yellow-brown that is common in that species.

And again, six months later, the same team reported a successful CRISPR gene modification in mosquitoes. This time, a gene was inserted that gave the offspring resistance to Plasmodium Falciparum, the parasite responsible for hundreds of millions of malaria infections each year. This time, the gene transfer proved effective in 99.5% of the offspring.

These results have far-reaching implications. Few people would guess that the animal responsible for most human deaths worldwide is mosquitoes, killing over 1 million people each year. Interestingly, other humans are the "animal" responsible for the second most human deaths worldwide, but I digress. Mosquitoes aren't only a nuisance; they transmit deadly diseases like malaria, West Nile virus, and Zika virus. For the first time in human history, we have a viable and effective way to eliminate these diseases.

Furthermore, Austin Burt, the biologist who first ideated the gene drive, and a team of other scientists have developed a highly transmissible CRISPR gene drive that spreads the genes for female infertility in mosquitoes. In general, infertility is recessive. However, as the payload of a CRISPR gene drive, sterility genes could propagate rapidly in a wild population. And if enough females in the population acquired two copies of the gene, that population would suddenly collapse. Instead of genetically modifying mosquitoes to prevent them from transmitting diseases that affect us, this type of gene drive can decimate their entire population by interfering with their reproduction. The power of this technology cannot be underestimated. CRISPR gene drives impose a mode of inheritance on a population that outsmarts natural selection. The modified organisms spread the desired trait indefinitely, and that's what makes it so scary. What if altered organisms with CRISPR gene drives escaped from labs and mated with wild populations? If the lab organisms were modified with the sterility gene drive, they could quickly decimate the wild populations.

Or worse, what if rogue scientists weaponized CRISPR gene drives? One could imagine a gene drive being used to suppress pollinators, crippling an entire country's agriculture. Or how about gene drives being used to make mosquitoes more susceptible to transmitting deadly human diseases?

It's for reasons like these that the United States Intelligence Community, in its **2016 Worldwide Threat Assessment report, defined gene-editing as a "weapon of mass destruction," along with nuclear weapons and cruise missiles.**

In the nightmare scenario of nefarious scientists weaponizing genetic manipulation, is there any way humanity can defend itself? Fortunately, yes, with reversal drives. A **reversal drive** is itself a gene drive, which essentially overwrites all the changes in the genome made by the original gene drive. In this way, the original gene drive is inactivated and prevented from running amok.

Jennifer Doudna, a biochemist who won the 2020 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for her pioneering work in CRISPR, thinks the use of gene drives is frightening; however, it's hard to justify banning research on them. There is a legitimate concern that nefarious actors could use gene drives as a weapon, but there are simply too many potential benefits. For example, gene drives can address the genetic causes of herbicide and pesticide resistance in our crops. A sterility gene drive could be used to control populations of invasive species like Asian carp. I tend to agree with Doudna in cases like this. Technology is not inherently good or evil. However, it could be good or bad, depending on how you use it. For example, we can use our understanding of nuclear science to build nuclear reactors to provide energy for the masses. We can also build nuclear weapons to destroy the masses.

CRISPR gene drives are no different. We can do a lot of good with it, but that doesn't mean it's without its problems. It's up to us to make sure we reap the benefits of this technology while minimizing the harm it can impose. With all the potential benefits of gene drives, could we justify not taking the risk?

New Material Helps Train First Responders on Biothreats

Source: https://globalbiodefense.com/2023/01/04/new-material-helps-train-first-responders-on-biothreats/

Jan 04 – NIST developed a new harmless surrogate threat material based on yeast, rather than inactivated pathogens, which can be used to train those responding to biothreats. First responders who train to respond to unknown biological threat agents such as bacterial or viral pathogens need to do so in a safe

and careful manner. To help meet their needs, researchers from the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) have developed a new reference material based on harmless yeast cells.

The yeast reference material was developed to support first responder training against biothreats in a safe manner. The material is crushed into powdered form in a field exercise. Credit: N. Lin / NIST

Biothreats vary by severity and fall into one of three categories: A, B or C. Category A includes biological agents that could pose a national security risk or deliberately be released to harm people, animals, plants or other living organisms. Anthrax — a serious infectious disease caused by bacteria naturally found in soil — is one example. For all these biological agents, it can be a challenge to prepare in advance and train for an outbreak, and the use of a biothreat material could pose a risk to the first responders involved and the surrounding community.

Baker's Yeast Proves a Good Basis for New Biothreat Training Reference Material
Responders now have the option of using NIST Reference Material (RM) 8230, the new surrogate material developed by NIST researchers.
Researchers based the material on baker's yeast because it is harmless and a living biological material.

"Suspicious powder incidents occur regularly throughout the U.S., so first responders need routine training including simulated biothreat scenarios. There was a need to make this training accessible while also avoiding exposure to a real pathogen. With support from the Department of Homeland Security, we came up with this yeast reference material to support local training in a safe manner."
Sandra Da Silva, NIST researcher

But detecting baker's yeast is not a complete cakewalk. In multiple ways, yeast provides a challenge to technologies that detect genetic material similar to biothreat agents, which is what makes it a good surrogate.
The yeast reference material is modified with genomic sequences from a deep ocean organism called *Methanocaldococcus jannaschii.* The organism is a type of "extremophile," meaning it's found in extremely harsh temperature and high-pressure conditions, specifically in hydrothermal vents at the bottom of the ocean. The genomic sequence was taken from NIST SRM 2374, DNA Sequence Library for External RNA Controls, which contains a series of nucleic acid sequences from the NIST-hosted External RNA Controls Consortium.
"Baker's yeast has a thick wall that is hard to crack open to extract DNA, similar to *Bacillus anthracis* spores. We needed something to challenge DNA extraction methods, and the idea of using yeast came from previous efforts on extracting DNA from yeast cells," said Da Silva.

The modified yeast strain is called *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* NE095, and this sequence was chosen because it allows for specific detection of the yeast using nucleic acid detection technologies. **This means first responders can detect this strain of yeast during training exercises without worrying about obtaining a false positive from other yeast found in the environment.**
A unit of RM 8230 consists of 12 vials of the yeast cells plus four vials of the matrix without cells. The yeast has been freeze-dried, or lyophilized, to preserve the cells.
"The yeast is alive and surrounded by other materials to protect it during the freezing and drying processes. The four matrix-only vials contain those materials as a control. Once the yeast cells are analyzed, they're best used to set the baseline for whichever method researchers are using to quantify or detect cells," said Da Silva.

Field Testing with Frontline Responders and Laboratories
NIST researchers conducted interlaboratory studies with first responders and public health laboratories to assess the versatility of the yeast in existing field protocols. In one study, they were able to demonstrate that the material could be crushed into a powder and inserted into a typical workflow, where it remained viable and detectable using field protocols and technologies.

NIST researchers conducted interlaboratory studies with first responders and public health laboratories. In this field study, Jeremy Clancy, Battalion Chief of the Howard County Department of Fire Rescue Services, samples the yeast material in a powdered form using the existing field protocols. Credit: N. Lin / NIST

One field exercise demonstrated how the dried yeast material can be rehydrated and applied to surfaces. Those surfaces were swabbed by first responders as part of the field response, and the yeast cells were successfully detected in both mobile labs and public health laboratories.

Utility in Cell Counting, NAAT Workflows, and Microbiome Studies

The reference material is not only useful to the biothreat preparedness community. For instance, the yeast cells can be used to verify performance of microbial cell counting and Nucleic acid amplification testing workflows. This is relevant to the use of microbes as medicines and for the study of the microbiome. To support this work, NIST is quantifying the yeast cells using multiple measurement methods including flow cytometry, which detects and measures physical and chemical characteristics of cell populations.

"Microbes are increasingly recognized as critical contributors in many areas of our everyday life, from the environment and climate to human and animal health, agriculture and energy. The ability to count and characterize microbes is becoming increasingly important as users seek to understand and harness microbial capabilities. We need a control material to increase confidence in microbial quantification for these types of applications. Though first responders are the initial community of users, the reference material is applicable for a broader community," said Lin.

NIST researchers are building on the lessons learned with the yeast reference material and applying them to bacterial species, specifically in developing potential bacterial cell reference materials. Bacterial cells are typically smaller than yeast cells and more diverse in terms of their shape and tendency to aggregate, so they present new measurement challenges.

The new reference material, *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* NE095 for Cell Counting and DNA-based Detection (NIST RM 8230), is now available at the NIST RM webpage.

Personality Changes and Heart Damage After Covid Vaccine

By Dr. John Ure, MD

Source: https://newswithviews.com/personality-changes-and-heart-damage-after-covid-vaccine/

Dec 17 – Make no mistake about it we are in world war three at this time. It is not a war with bullets and bombs, but rather one of biologic warfare. I have been worried for years that we would be attacked by some nerve agent, or bacteria or virus. I never dreamed that it would be by a vaccine. Nor did I ever dream that people would be voluntarily standing in line and rolling up their sleeves to take it. In fact it is not a vaccine at all but composition of substances that will permanently alter your genetic makeup.   It has also been stated that the vaccination does not prevent one from acquiring Covid, nor does it show improvement in the healing course. See my previous article on News With Views titled "The Jab."

I became concerned that there was a real problem when I was talking with people and was told that coworkers, family and friends had changed. They were just behaving differently. It seemed that their ability to think and process information in problem solving had been diminished. I have noticed these changes in people that I know, and they are behaving abnormally.

Also the basic feeling of love, compassion, and warmth was gone. I have stated previously that we are electrochemical beings. It appears that the aura surrounding the vaccinated has been damaged. In giving a hug to someone vaccinated there is a feeling of coldness and uncaring instead of the warmth and pleasant feelings previously experienced.

I have searched the literature to find out just what is being transferred from the vaccinated to the unvaccinated, but so far I have not been able to uncover what is going on. I have concluded that something is happening, because it is reported that an unvaccinated woman who spent an evening with four vaccinated lady friends experienced an unusual menstrual flow outside of her normal cycle. It does not seem to be a good idea to be around vaccinated individuals, but this has not been conclusively substantiated.

Another finding that really upsets me is that it has been conclusively demonstrated that the swabs shoved deeply into the nose were in fact inoculating the individuals with the vaccine instead of testing them for Covid.

I had great difficulty finding the information that I am sharing with you now. I had to search in many ways until I found what I was looking for.

I have previously referred to an antigen antibody reaction. To keep it simple an antigen is any foreign invader to the body. A splinter could be referred to as an antigen. In this case however the antigen is the spike protein that the MRNA vaccine encodes. In other words every person that subjected themselves to the vaccine had the blueprint for a small portion of the corona virus injected into their bodies. These spike proteins travel throughout the blood stream and are found adhering to the inside wall of the blood vessels. When these antigens are found there is an antibody reaction that develops. Along with this there is a cascade that develops that is a sister to the clotting cascade and a blood clot develops. Now there is real trouble. It is referred to as multifocal because it occurs in many sites, and when the clots form then the tissue that is being supplied by the microcappilaries dies. This is referred to as tissue necrosis and expands through the tissue. Understand that this occurs in all body organs and tissues but for this article I am concentrating on the brain and heart. In the brain when these necrotic areas

develop one sees changes in the individual such as one sees in Alzheimers and Senile dementia. It has been likened to changes seen in individuals

who in the past underwent horrible medical treatment such as lobotomy, electroshock treatment, or insulin shock treatment. To see the effects of electroshock treatment, one can view the film "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest."

A lobotomy was done by shoving an ice pick into the upper part of the eye socket of each eye and then it was swished around. The frontal lobes were severely and permanently damaged.

Electroshock treatment consisted of placing an electrode over each sides of the junction of the temporal and frontal lobes and then passing large amounts of electric current through the brain. This caused much memory to be erased and the individuals lost a great deal of the love and compassion that one normally has.

Insulin shock treatment was done by administering large amounts of insulin to an individual until coma was induced and then they were recovered by giving sugar. When they regained consciousness they were happy to be alive but had become very docile individuals with totally changed personalities.

Anyone who has been following this so called plandemic has become aware that over 1000 athletes in all sports have dropped dead when engaged in strenuous activity. This is being caused by damage to the heart in a similar way as the brain is damaged. Pathologists have shown on the slides of the deceased vaccinated at autopsy that there is multifocal necrotic tissue as well as fibrotic scar tissue. Spike proteins were also visualized. These damaged hearts are not reparable.

Another frightening aspect is that the World Health Organization has now authorized all future vaccines to be of MRNA technology, for example making a flu vaccine with MRNA carrier.

It was revealed by my research that Bill Gates has moved to the number two position as backing the WHO. Who is now giving the WHO the most money? Germany!!! Germany has been at the forefront for years in the manufacturing of chemicals and many pharmaceuticals are manufactured there including the Covid vaccines.

One individual in my research stated that the Third Reich is raising its ugly head again. As stated earlier, we are in WW III, but not with bombs and bullets, but with biologic warfare.

All vaccinated for Covid are in grave trouble. Once the spike protein is in the body it cannot be taken out. I believe that many will die over the next few months. As if the above information was not bad enough, there will be many more dying as a result of auto immune diseases when the body attacks itself secondary to the antibodies that come from the spike proteins.

Do not look at the main stream media for evidence of what I have stated. They are all run by the Globalists and the true facts are covered up and not reported at all. The end game as stated by the Globalists is to get rid of the Useless Eaters. Do your own research. Do not get vaccinated if you have not already, and if you have had the vaccine do not take any additional boosters.

Dr. John Ure is an Emergency medicine and family practice physician for 40 years. Trained as a combat medic in the US Army. Obtain masters degree in environmental biology at university of Colorado. Vast experience working in numerous ER's including many military hospitals such as Fort Campbell, Kentucky, Fort Riley, Kansas, Whiteman Air Force Base, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He has also works for the Indian Health Services in northern Montana. He is a private pilot and missionary doctor. He has also been certified for treating opioid addiction.

COMMENTARY

Check for updates

Subacute thyroiditis after SARS-CoV-2 vaccination: a report of two sisters and summary of the literature

Sofia Chatzi[1] · Athina Karampela[1] · Chara Spiliopoulou[2] · Georgios Boutzios[1]

[1] Department of Pathophysiology, Medical School, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece
[2] Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, School of Medicine, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece

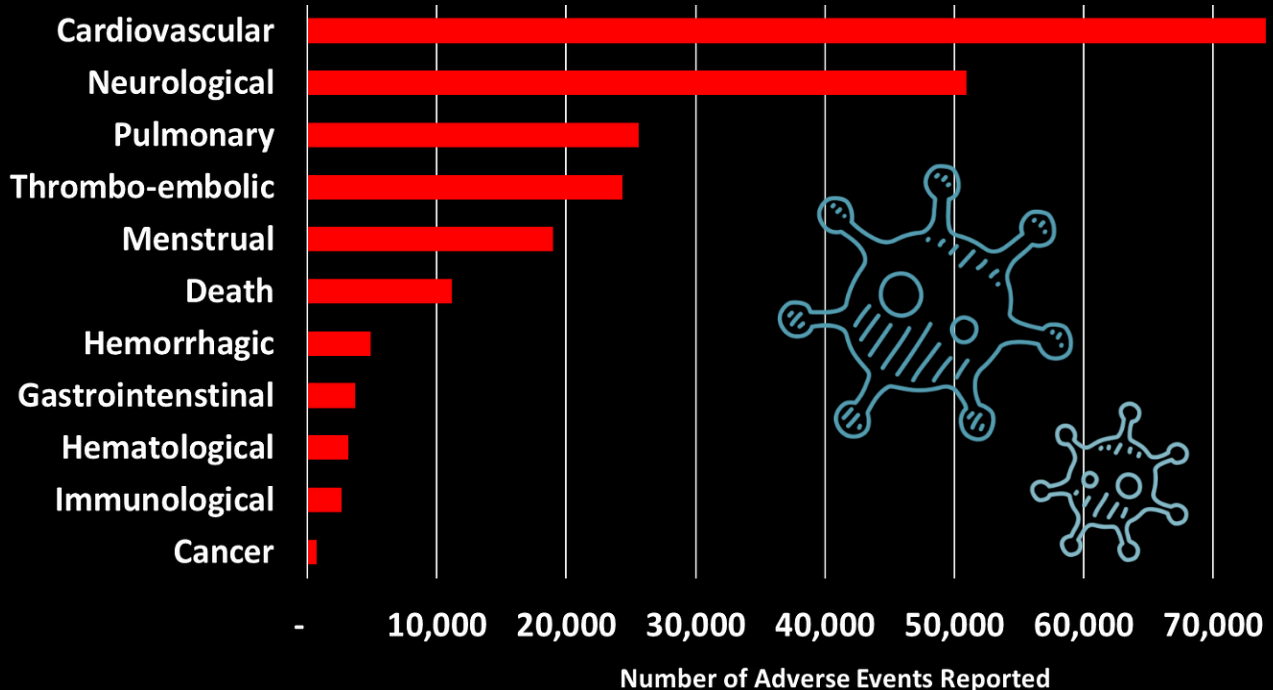# CDC Finally Released Its VAERS Safety Monitoring Analyses for COVID Vaccines via FOIA

And now it's clear why they tried to hide them.

By Josh Guetzkow

Source: https://jackanapes.substack.com/p/cdc-finally-released-its-vaers-safety

Safety Signals from CDC's Analysis of VAERS Reports for mRNA COVID Vaccines

Cardiovascular
Neurological
Pulmonary
Thrombo-embolic
Menstrual
Death
Hemorrhagic
Gastrointenstinal
Hematological
Immunological
Cancer

- 10,000 20,000 30,000 40,000 50,000 60,000 70,000

Number of Adverse Events Reported

The total number of AEs reported for each of the major categories of safety signals

Jan 04

SUMMARY

- CDC's VAERS safety signal analysis based on reports from Dec. 14, 2020 – July 29, 2022, for mRNA COVID-19 vaccines shows clear safety signals for death and a range of highly concerning thrombo-embolic, cardiac, neurological, hemorrhagic, hematological, immune-system and menstrual adverse events (AEs) among U.S. adults.
- There were 770 different types of adverse events that showed safety signals in ages 18+, of which over 500 (or 2/3) had a larger safety signal than myocarditis/pericarditis.
- The CDC analysis shows that the number of serious adverse events reported in less than two years for mRNA COVID-19 vaccines is 5.5 times larger than all serious reports for vaccines given to adults in the US since 2009 (~73,000 vs. ~13,000).
- Twice as many mRNA COVID-19 vaccine reports were classified as serious compared to all other vaccines given to adults (11% vs. 5.5%). This meets the CDC definition of a safety signal.
- There are 96 safety signals for 12-17 year-olds, which include: myocarditis, pericarditis, Bell's Palsy, genital ulcerations, high blood pressure and heartrate, menstrual irregularities, cardiac valve incompetencies, pulmonary embolism, cardiac arrhythmias, thromboses, pericardial and pleural effusion,

appendicitis and perforated appendix, immune thrombocytopenia, chest pain, increased troponin levels, being in intensive care, and having anticoagulant therapy.

- There are 66 safety signals for 5-11 year-olds, which include: myocarditis, pericarditis, ventricular dysfunction and cardiac valve incompetencies, pericardial and pleural effusion, chest pain, appendicitis & appendectomies, Kawasaki's disease, menstrual irregularities, vitiligo, and vaccine breakthrough infection.
- The safety signals cannot be dismissed as due to "stimulated," exaggerated, fraudulent or otherwise artificially inflated reporting, nor can they be dismissed due to the huge number of COVID vaccines administered. There are several reasons why, but the simplest one is this: the safety signal analysis does not depend on the number of reports, but whether or not some AEs are reported at a higher rate for these vaccines than for other non-COVID vaccines. Other reasons are discussed in the full post below.
- In August, 2022, the CDC told the Epoch Times that the results of their safety signal analysis "were generally consistent with EB [Empirical Bayesian] data mining [conducted by the FDA], revealing no additional unexpected safety signals." So either the FDA's data mining was consistent with the CDC's method—meaning they "generally" found the same large number of highly alarming safety signals—or the signals they did find were expected. Or they were lying. We may never know because the FDA has refused to release their data mining results.

●▶ **Read the full article at the source's URL.**

COVID Is Doing Something to Our Sleep, And Even to Our Dreams

By Jakke Tamminen and Rebecca Crowley
Source: https://www.sciencealert.com/covid-is-doing-something-to-our-sleep-and-even-to-our-dreams

Jan 06 – By the end of 2022, more than 650 million COVID infections had been reported to the World Health Organization.
With the true number likely much higher, and the tally increasing by hundreds of thousands every week, the scientific community has been focused on understanding the impact of COVID on our physical health, mental health and brain function.
In the early stage of the pandemic, sleep scientists charted the costs and benefits of lockdowns on sleep patterns. The main finding was that we slept more in lockdown but the quality of our sleep was worse.
Now a second wave of data is beginning to explain how becoming infected with COVID is affecting our sleep and even intruding into our dreams.
The most recent meta-analysis, a review of all the currently available scientific literature, estimates that 52 percent of people who contract COVID suffer from sleep disturbances during the infection.
The most common type of sleep disturbance reported is insomnia. People with insomnia typically find it difficult to fall asleep or stay asleep, and often wake up early in the mornings.

Worryingly, sleep problems sometimes persist even after recovery from the infection. A study in China found that 26 percent of people who were admitted to hospital with COVID showed symptoms of insomnia two weeks after discharge.

And a US study showed that people who had been infected with COVID were more likely than people who had never been infected to have trouble sleeping, even up to a month after a positive COVID test.

Sleep difficulties and long COVID

While most people recover from COVID quickly, some continue to have symptoms in the longer term. People suffering from long COVID seem very likely to face persistent sleep problems.

A 2021 study surveyed more than 3,000 people with long COVID. Almost 80 percent of participants self-reported sleep problems, most commonly insomnia.

A more recent study collected data on both sleep duration and quality using smart wristbands. Participants with long COVID slept less overall and got less deep sleep than participants who had never had COVID.

Loss of deep sleep is particularly concerning, as this type of sleep reduces how tired we feel and strengthens concentration and memory. Lack of deep sleep may be partly responsible for the commonly reported "brain fog" during and after COVID.

The fact COVID often interferes with sleep is also worrying because sleep helps our immune system to fight infections.

Why does COVID affect our sleep?

There are many reasons why a COVID infection might lead to poor sleep. One review identified physiological, psychological, and environmental factors. COVID can have a direct impact on the brain, including the areas that control both wake and sleep states. We don't yet have a clear understanding of how this works, but possible mechanisms could include the virus infecting the central nervous system or affecting the brain's blood supply.

Typical symptoms of COVID include fever, coughing, and breathing difficulties. These are also well known to disturb sleep.

Poor mental health can lead to sleep problems and vice versa. There's a strong link between catching COVID and mental health issues, particularly depression and anxiety. This can be caused by worries about recovery, loneliness, or social isolation. Such anxieties may make sleeping harder.

Meanwhile, hospitalized COVID patients can face additional difficulties trying to sleep in busy hospital environments where sleep is often disturbed by noise, treatment, and other patients.

What about dreams?

The International COVID-19 Sleep Study, a global research project involving sleep scientists from 14 countries, recently released its findings into dreaming.

The study surveyed infected and uninfected participants about their dreams. Both groups had more dreams after the start of the pandemic than before.

Intriguingly, the infected participants had more nightmares than the uninfected participants, while there was no difference between the groups before the pandemic.

There's no simple explanation for why catching COVID may increase nightmares, but mental health may again play a role. Poor mental health is often accompanied by nightmares. The International COVID-19 Sleep Study team found the infected group showed more symptoms of conditions such as anxiety and depression.

Getting help

The close links between sleep and both mental and physical health mean that prevention and treatment of disturbed sleep have never been more important, and will require creative solutions from governments and healthcare providers.

If you've had trouble sleeping during or after COVID, or are having more bad dreams than you used to, you're not alone.

Both short- and long-term insomnia can often be treated with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) that you may be able to access through your doctor.

For less severe sleep problems, the European Academy for Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Insomnia has compiled recommendations, some based on principles applied in CBT, that you can follow at home. These include:
- keeping a regular sleep-wake schedule
- restricting thinking about things that make you feel stressed to specific times of day
- using your bed only for sleep and sex
- going to bed and getting up when you naturally feel inclined to do so
- sharing feelings of stress and anxiety with family and friends

- reducing sleep disruption due to light exposure by making sure your bedroom is as dark as possible
- exercising regularly in daylight
- avoiding eating close to bedtime.

**Jakke Tamminen** is a Lecturer in Psychology @ Royal Holloway University of London.
Rebecca Crowley is a PhD Candidate, in Psychology @ Royal Holloway University of London.

Turkish analyst calls for a comprehensive investigation into U.S. military bio labs

Source: https://english.news.cn/20230107/f9ef8ee2974a49f3b34afacfbaf89467/c.html

Jan 07 – The international community should unite against and launch a comprehensive investigation into the military biological laboratories run by the United States in many parts of the world as the threat is immense, a prominent Turkish security analyst said. "All nations must unite to establish an international organization and openly and transparently audit them because the danger is significant," Cihat Yayci, a retired Turkish admiral known for his expertise in naval geopolitics, told Xinhua in a recent interview. Yayci emphasized that the United States controls 336 biological laboratories in 30 countries, noting that they pose global threats if used for military purposes under special services.
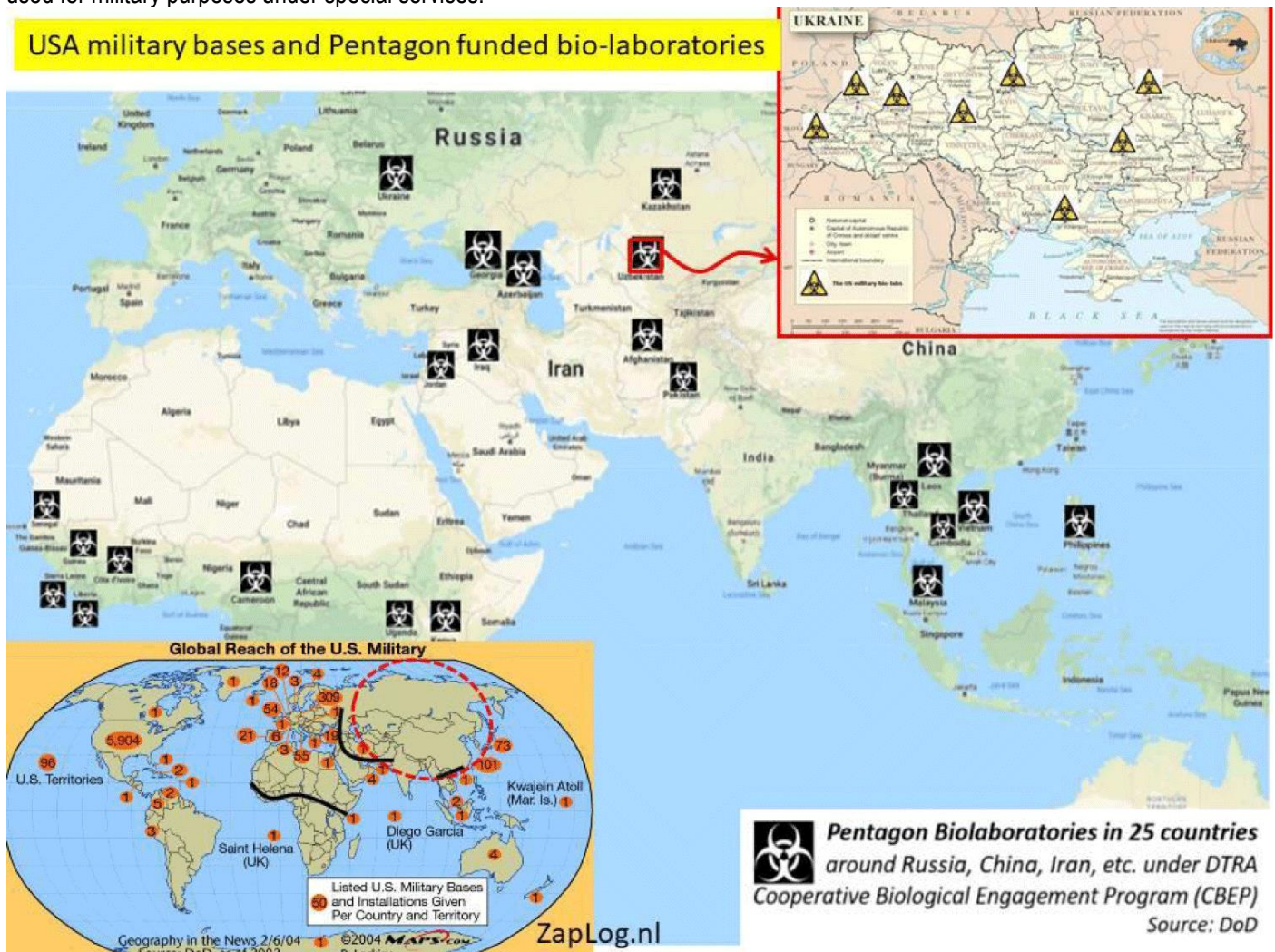
"COVID-19 might be over, but other menaces are likely to occur. As far as we have seen, some data suggest other (biological) threats have lurked behind the scene," said Yayci, adding that the world might see such threats become acute through insect vectors, migratory birds dispersing dangerous infectious diseases and biological agent targeting selected ethnic groups.

"That's why all nations and the United Nations should act together," he said.

According to the Turkish analyst, the United States has been concentrating on producing genetic weapons since the early 20th century and technology has become competent in this field in the 21st century.

U.S. intelligence agencies have been actively using almost every opportunity to develop genetics science since the 2000s. James Clapper, former director of National Intelligence of the United States, also stated that genetics could be among the weapons of mass destruction in the future, according to Yayci.

The Turkish analyst stressed the importance of establishing an independent international organization to launch an investigation into the U.S. laboratories as the United States, one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council with veto power, could exert its influence on the process if the probe is within the UN system.

Yayci cited the example that Washington threatened to withdraw from the World Health Organization (WHO) as the COVID-19 pandemic was gripping the globe in July 2020.

Such behavior hampered the WHO efforts during one of the world's worst pandemics and disabled the essential organ of the United Nations, he said.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: There is no smoke without a fire. What does the admiral know/hide?

Four distinct subtypes of long COVID defined in machine learning study

Source: https://newatlas.com/health-wellbeing/four-subtypes-long-covid-nature-study/
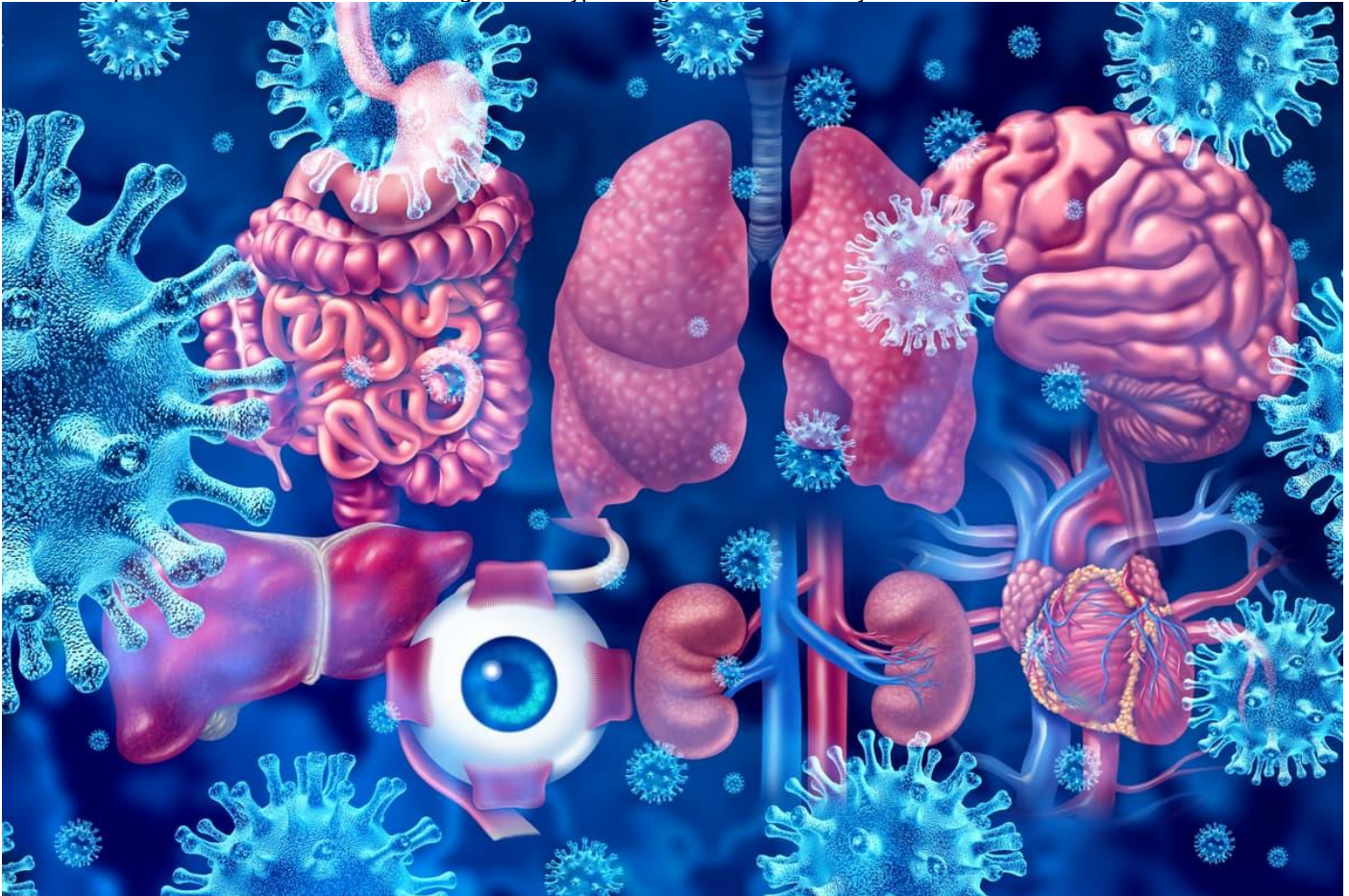
Jan 08 – Using machine learning to track symptom clusters in around 35,000 COVID patients, researchers have identified four distinct types of long COVID. The findings suggest long COVID is a diverse disease with a wide variety of clinical manifestations.

The new research looked at two large cohorts of patients, all with at least one persistent symptom lasting between 30 and 180 days following a SARS-CoV-2 infection. A machine learning algorithm sorted through the mass of data, covering around 137 different lingering symptoms.

In a new study published in *Nature Medicine*, the researchers describe "four subphenotypes dominated by new conditions of the cardiac and renal systems (Subphenotype 1); respiratory system, sleep and anxiety problems (Subphenotype 2); musculoskeletal and nervous systems (Subphenotype 3); and digestive and respiratory systems (Subphenotype 4)."

The first subtype was found to be the most common, accounting for 34% of long COVID patients in the dataset. This subtype included patients with heart and kidney problems, anemia and circulatory disorders.

This manifestation of long COVID was more common in older patients (with an average age of 65) and those suffering from severe COVID. Interestingly, this subtype of long COVID was most prominent in those infected during the very first wave of disease across the first half of 2020.

The second subtype identified, almost as common as the first, accounted for 33% of all cases. This appearance of long COVID was dominated by lingering respiratory symptoms, chest pain, anxiety, headache and insomnia.

Unlike the first subtype, this second type of long COVID was associated with a more mild acute disease. It also appeared more common in patients infected later in the pandemic (between November 2020 and November 2021).

The third subtype (23% of patients) was mostly linked with musculoskeletal and nervous system disorders, including nerve pain and headache. This subtype was most commonly seen in patients with preexisting autoimmune conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis and asthma.

The final subtype was the rarest, only seen in 10% of patients. It was dominated by gastrointestinal disorders, including stomach pain, nausea and gut problems. This final subtype was linked to the most mild acute disease.

Rainu Kaushal, from Department of Population Health Sciences at Weill Cornell Medicine and co-senior author on the new study, said better understanding the variety of clinical manifestations of long COVID not only helps doctors effectively treat patients but guides researchers working to develop new treatments for this chronic condition.

"Understanding the epidemiology of long COVID allows clinicians to help patients understand their symptoms and prognoses and facilitates multispecialty treatment for patients," said Kaushal. "Electronic health records offer a window into this condition, allowing us to better characterize long COVID symptoms, informing other types of research including foundational discoveries and clinical trials."

The study isn't the first to attempt to break long COVID down into distinct subtypes. A large UK study published in 2022 suggested the condition can be divided into three symptom clusters (cognitive, respiratory, and everything else).

However, these new findings offer the most robust and comprehensive categorization of long COVID subtypes to date. And the next step for the research team will be to better identify the risk factors for each long COVID subtype, and work out whether some treatments are more effective for certain subtypes than others.

●▶ **The new study was published in** *Nature Medicine*.

Despite risk-management gaps, countries press ahead with new labs that study deadly pathogens

By Matt Field
Source: https://thebulletin.org/2023/01/despite-risk-management-gaps-countries-press-ahead-with-new-labs-that-study-deadly-pathogens/

Jan 05 – How the times have changed.

A little over 17 years ago, in an auditorium at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston Texas, a motley crew of dignitaries gathered to celebrate the construction of a state-of-the-art biological laboratory. Biosafety-level (BSL)-4 labs like the Galveston National Laboratory are the sort of places where disease researchers don head-to-toe protective gear and breathe pumped-in air, lest they get exposed to any highly lethal and contagious pathogens. On hand that day were Anthony Fauci, then the head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and two top Republican officials, former Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison and former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay.

"We are going to be a one-stop shopping center for all of the bad things that might happen," Hutchison said, according to the *Galveston County Daily News*, "but more importantly, we are going to find the cures." DeLay, the paper said, told the crowd that the lab would be among the most secure and advanced in the world. "It's a place where ingenuity will be used as a shield and not a weapon," he said. "There are many, many threats, and we would not be able to respond to them without the kind of research that will take place in this laboratory," Fauci added.

Two decades later, it's difficult to imagine the same kind of gathering—Fauci, who retired last month, rubbing shoulders with leading Republican figures in Congress. Now, many Republicans say Fauci played

a role in improperly funding research on coronaviruses in a lab in China, and the party has made probing the origins of COVID-19 and US-government funded pathogen research in China a centerpiece of its agenda.

The pandemic and political polarization have placed research on the riskiest pathogens, the sort studied in BSL-4 labs, squarely in the center of a political hurricane in the United States. And that's not the only challenge BSL-4 and other so-called "high-containment" labs face. On the geopolitical front, the Russian government has dramatically escalated a disinformation campaign alleging that US-linked biological labs in Ukraine and other countries formed from former Soviet republics are fronts for bioweapons research—allegations that authorities at the United Nations and independent experts roundly dismiss.

In this era of disinformation targeting pathogen research labs and politicized mistrust of the facilities, a team of researchers now hopes to provide authoritative information about the most secure of these labs, via a map that gives the locations of BSL-3+ and BSL-4 labs and by assessing the governmental research policies that govern them.

George Mason University biosecurity expert Gregory Koblentz, who co-leads the project with Filippa Lentzos, a King's College London researcher, said shining a light on the proliferation of the labs can help cut through misinformation about them and allow for a clear-eyed look at how these beneficial, yet also potentially risky facilities are managed. "One of the goals of our project is to increase transparency and educate the public and policy-makers about these labs' activities and what governance measures are necessary to ensure they are operating safely, securely, and responsibly," Koblentz said. "Accurate information is a prerequisite for an informed debate on the benefits and risks posed by these labs." (The *Bulletin* partnered with the team to produce an interactive map featuring information on the labs.)

Why are many countries building new high-containment labs? Are there adequate regulations in place to ensure labs are managed safely? I talked to Koblentz to learn the answers to these questions and more.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a building boom in labs
Since the pandemic began, nine countries have announced the construction of 12 new BSL-4 labs. (Biosafety levels range from one to four.) For five of these countries, the labs would be their first maximum-containment facilities. Governments saw in the pandemic a justification for the large investment BSL-4 labs require, Koblentz speculated. The labs are important to research on diseases like Ebola, and a country might want to have one of them to stay ahead of the next emerging disease threat. Plus, Koblentz said, they also are a status symbol. "Countries also want the prestige of having a BSL-4 lab, which is more common than it used to be but still not that common," Koblentz said. "And there's also probably some bureaucratic politics and scientists who just want the new shiny toy, and so this is their time to get that." The team found a total of 69 BSL-4 labs in use or under development, 10 more than Koblentz and Lentzos found when they released the first version of their study in 2021.

It's not just the most secure labs that are proliferating
While BSL-4 labs are reserved for experiments involving the gnarliest germs, another group of high-end research facility has been proliferating, as well. BSL-3+ or "enhanced" labs are billed as having a higher level of biosafety than BSL-3 facilities. Koblentz and Lentzos added these labs to the most recent update to their project, finding at least 55 such facilities. BSL-3+ labs, Koblentz said, work on pathogens such as the 1918 influenza strain that killed some 50 million people or highly pathogenic avian influenza. They are also places where researchers enhance attributes like the virulence of pathogens in so-called "gain-of-function" experiments. Compared to BSL-4 labs, official governmental guidance on BSL-3+ labs is sparse, and there are significantly more of the facilities today than there were 10 years ago, the team found. "We want to highlight the growth in the number of these labs, as well as the lack of really comprehensive guidance from either national regulatory authorities or from international organizations about what these labs should be doing in order to make sure that they're conducting their work safely, both for the sake of their own researchers or for the wider community," Koblentz said.

Many countries with BSL-4 labs have gaps in their life sciences research governance
Since Koblentz and Lentzos released the first report in 2021, they've developed scorecards that assess the 27 countries that have or plan to have BSL-4 labs on what the pair call "biorisk management." The rankings "measure the ability of a country to safely, securely and responsibly operate high-consequence biomedical research facilities." The team has also used other pre-existing indices to score countries on "general governance and stability," Lentzos said in a Dec. 9 presentation on the team's work.

The biorisk rankings indicate, for example, whether countries have national laws on biosecurity or whether their policies require screening of synthetic DNA orders, among other criteria. Of the ranked countries, five have a low score on overall biorisk management, including some, like India, that are building new high-containment labs. Seven countries had a high score and 15 a medium one. "BSL-4 labs take a very long time to build. This is not something you announce, and then it gets built the next year. It can take five or 10 years to build it,"

Koblentz said. "So these countries have the time to develop the governance framework and the capacity to operate them successfully. But they need to start now."

Many countries lack dual-use research policies
Of all the rankings Koblentz and Lentzos put together, perhaps the most striking assesses countries on their dual-use policies. These are meant to ensure research is done with an eye to how it could be misused—a scary proposition given the work going on in BSL-4 labs. Only Canada scored highly on the dual-use policy ranking. Many countries scored zero. "For a lot of countries, they just got zero because they have nothing—either at the government level or at the lab level or within other stakeholders," Koblentz said. "And so definitely the biggest gap that we identified is this oversight of dual-use research."
While the United States has a dual-use research policy, it applies to government-funded research. "The United States gets partial points for having oversight by funding agencies, but we don't get full credit because this is a policy. This is not legislation, and it excludes privately funded research entirely." In all, 24 countries scored poorly on this ranking, including Germany, Japan, and other developed countries.

The rankings don't measure what actually happens, on the ground
The researchers stress that when looking at national policies on biosecurity or other aspects of lab governance, they are seeing only part of the picture. Local regulations could also play a role in some cases, Koblentz said. And it's difficult to know how well governments are enforcing regulations. The scorecards don't address implementation.
"Even with the best written regulations, it's still a matter of what happens when you operate a laboratory," Koblentz said, "And implementation, compliance, can be a problem in any country. In several countries there have been lab accidents at BSL-4 labs that have resulted in infections of researchers. So this remains a high-risk environment because they are doing work that is complicated." The governance and stability rankings, based on data from the World Bank and other organizations, serve as one way to assess how things might be operating in real life, Lentzos said at the Dec. 9 presentation. A look at these scores gives reason to worry. Most planned BSL-4 labs "are to be built in countries that scored 50 percent or lower on both governance and stability," she said. "To us this raises serious questions about the ability of these countries to effectively implement national biorisk management policies." While high-containment labs perform vital research on, say, vaccines, there have been accidents involving pathogens under study, including at the BSL-4 level. In 2015, for example, the CDC determined that live Ebola virus may have been transferred from the agency's Ebola lab to a facility with a lower level of biosafety, requiring a technician to undergo 21 days of monitoring. A decade earlier, a Russian scientist working on an Ebola vaccine died after accidentally pricking herself with a contaminated needle at the Vektor Research Institute of Molecular Biology. A 2011 workshop run by the National Research Council, found that over 1,200 laboratory acquired infections occurred between 1978 and 1999. In 22 of those cases, the accidents proved fatal.
Given the importance and risk profile of high-containment labs, it's critical to examine how well government policies address biosecurity and biosafety. But that effort could be complicated. In the United States, for instance, where the government is re-evaluating biosecurity policies, much of Congress's recent interest in the matter seems to have related to partisan investigations of Fauci or investigations into the origins of COVID that some perceive as "xenophobic." Strengthening biosecurity and biosafety policies, Koblentz said, "just gets a lot harder when the political environment is much more polarized and partisan." With so many labs in operation in the United States and elsewhere, and many more in the pipeline, weak biosecurity governance might not be a luxury the world can afford.

Matt Field is editor, biosecurity 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.

A New Test Could Help Find Hidden Viruses We've Never Seen Before
Source: https://www.sciencealert.com/a-new-test-could-help-find-hidden-viruses-weve-never-seen-before

Jan 10 – As the coronavirus pandemic has shown, it's not just known viruses we've got to worry about: scientists and doctors also need to be looking out for new, emerging variants that can evade current treatments and catch us unawares. There are a number of ways we can suss out new viruses that might be a threat to human health. Monitoring illness in animals, for example, could give us a heads-up on viruses that might yet jump species.

Unfortunately there's a huge amount of ground to cover in the search, and not all animal pathogens are destined to infect humans.
A nasal swab test developed by researchers from the Yale University could rapidly alert experts to the presence of an unknown menace starting to emerge in a population, without needing to detect the virus directly.

Based on initial tests, it could be a quick and effective way of spotting hidden viruses that would otherwise get missed.

"Although screening animal or pooled human samples might identify unrecognized viruses, this approach does not specifically identify viruses capable of causing human disease," write the researchers in their published paper. "Monitoring for unexplained outbreaks targets human pathogens but might find emerging viruses too late – i.e. after an epidemic has already begun."

The new study builds on previous research from some of the same team, which looked at an anomaly in results from nasal swabs that were already taken from patients with suspected respiratory infections. Typical tests on nasal swabs intend to detect around 10 to 15 known viruses, but the earlier research showed that in some cases there was still evidence that the body was fighting infection, even when no virus was recognized. Specifically, high levels of an antiviral protein made by the nasal lining called CXCL10 could be detected. In the new study, a thorough process of genetic sequencing was deployed to old nasal swab samples where CXCL10 had been found in abundance, turning up the presence of an rare influenza virus called influenza C.

Through the same process, the team found four cases of COVID-19 that had gone undetected at the time the samples were taken.
A typical hospital might get through hundreds of nasal swabs every week that show no sign of a recognized virus, but the presence of CXCL10 would indicate that the body had sensed that a virus was present – meaning the swab was worthy of a closer look.

In other words, even if we're missing viruses in samples, the reaction of the human body can alert us to new variants that aren't on record. Many more emerging viruses could be spotted and looked at in this way, the researchers suggest.

That suggests that scanning for CXCL10 could narrow down the samples that should be tested for unknown viruses. It wouldn't lead to a hit in every case, but it would improve efficiency in the search for new outbreaks.

"Since this approach relies on immune recognition of features common to many viruses, it requires no previous knowledge of the pathogen," write the researchers.

Future research could take a closer look at other proteins that might have the same association, and at how nasal bacteria could also point towards the presence of a virus – another link that the results from the new study hint at.

"Finding a dangerous new virus is like searching for a needle in a haystack," says immunobiologist Ellen Foxman, from the Yale School of Medicine in Connecticut. "We found a way to significantly reduce the size of the haystack."

●▶ **The research has been published in The Lancet Microbe.**

IMPLICATIONS DRAWN FROM A MILITARY BIOTERROR EXERCISE IN ISRAEL

Tamar Berger, Itay Fogel, Lion Poles, Adi Avniel Aran, Omri Shental, and Michael Kassirer

CBRN Medicine Branch, IDF Medical Corps, Surgeon General Headquarters, Tellashomer, Israel

Orange Flame is an Israeli preparedness build-up project, conducted by the Ministry of Health, that is aimed at improving national readiness and preparedness for unusual biological events. The project is intended for both medical and nonmedical organizations, and, since 2011, the exercise has also included operational units outside the medical corps. This has provided valuable insights into the consequences of bioterror or naturally occurring outbreaks for operative functionality and for the unique medical, logistical, and administrative efforts required from the armed forces in such an event. The 2-day drill reported on here executed a notional scenario in which category A bioterror agents were dispersed, causing civil and military casualties. Military personnel observed and assessed the performances of all participating organizations and observed the employment of emergency protocols during the drill. Military sustainment and operative capabilities were significantly affected by the occurrence of an unusual biological event. Comprehensive actions to be executed during such a scenario included quarantining military bases, considering postponement of military operations, and transferring on-call missions to other bases. Logistic consequences included the need for manpower and equipment reinforcement, as well as food and water supplies in cases of suspected source contamination. The project unveiled many operational and logistic quandaries and exposed various potential effects of a bioterror attack in the military. Lessons learned were used to revise preevent national and military doctrine for unusual biological events.
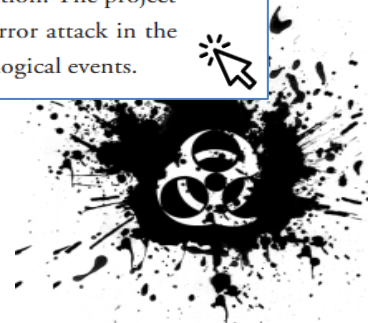
COVID: unvaccinated people may be seen as 'free riders' and face discrimination

By Alessandro Siani

Source: https://www.port.ac.uk/news-events-and-blogs/blogs/covid-unvaccinated-people-may-be-seen-as-free-riders-and-face-discrimination

Jan 06 – More than five billion people globally have now been vaccinated against COVID-19. Of course, many of the three billion or so who haven't may not yet have been able to access a COVID vaccine, particularly in low-income countries. But a portion of those who are unvaccinated have chosen not to get a shot.

Since COVID vaccines became available two years ago, we've seen increasingly wide and often bitter divergence between those who are vaccinated and those who have chosen not to be.

A recent study in Nature sought to investigate the extent of the intolerance and discrimination between people who are vaccinated and people who are unvaccinated against COVID. The researchers found that in most countries, people who are vaccinated display negative attitudes towards people who are not vaccinated. But interestingly, there was minimal evidence for the reverse.

The authors carried out three conjoint studies surveying more than 15,000 people from 21 countries across all inhabited continents. They used surveys designed to measure prejudice expressed in three forms: affective (for example, negative emotions towards a group), cognitive (for example, negative stereotypes) and attitudinal (for example, support for exclusion and removal of rights).

The surveys highlighted that vaccinated people expressed discriminatory attitudes towards unvaccinated people in all countries except Hungary and Romania.

Conversely, antipathy from unvaccinated people towards vaccinated people was only observed in Germany and the US.

In most countries, prejudice towards unvaccinated people was as high or higher than towards social groups who have traditionally been discriminated against, such as immigrants, ex-convicts and drug addicts.

The researchers found that many vaccinated people would not want their close relatives to marry someone who was not vaccinated (an example of affective expression). They also tended to perceive the unvaccinated as incompetent or less intelligent (cognitive expression).

A survey conducted only in the US as part of the wider study found people who are vaccinated believe unvaccinated people should be denied certain fundamental rights. This is an example of attitudinal expression.

For instance, some vaccinated people felt that unvaccinated people should face restrictions to their freedom of movement. A lower proportion advocated for restrictions to freedom of speech, access to US citizenship and welfare benefits.

A free ride?

Interestingly, the extent of discriminatory attitudes towards unvaccinated people was greater in countries with higher social trust and a stronger culture of cooperation. In such countries, people were more likely to agree with the statement "most people can be trusted", as opposed to countries with lower social trust where the majority felt "you need to be very careful in dealing with people".

The authors of the study interpret this finding through the lens of the psychology of human cooperation. That is, in countries with a pronounced sense of civic duty and individual responsibility towards the common good, people who benefit from the collective effort without contributing their part are perceived as "free riders".

In this context the shared effort is of course getting vaccinated, and the collective benefits include a lower risk of infection and therefore illness and death, the end of lockdowns, and so on.

Countries with higher trust and a cooperative culture are typically more effective at suppressing epidemics. So it's understandable and indeed natural that citizens in these countries in particular would harbour negative feeling towards these so-called free riders, whose choice to refuse vaccinations may endanger their peers and society at large.

Although this study found greater evidence that vaccinated people discriminate against those who aren't vaccinated, rather than the reverse, there are still vocal parts of the unvaccinated population that express hostility towards those who are vaccinated.

For example, some claim biological supremacy over the vaccinated, calling themselves "pure bloods". The unfounded idea that vaccinated people are biologically inferior has gained increasing popularity among hardline vaccine sceptics and conspiracy theorists, to the point where some patients refuse transfusions with blood "tainted" by the vaccines.

These are extreme, and, thankfully, relatively rare forms of vaccine hesitancy. But such examples show it's not just the vaccinated perpetuating negative attitudes.

Towards a polarised society

While social psychology offers an explanation for why vaccinated people may harbour resentment towards unvaccinated people, it's important to remember that blanket discrimination directed at any social group is detrimental, not just towards those being discriminated against, but for society at large.

The authors of the study warn that in the short term, prejudice towards the unvaccinated may complicate the management of the pandemic, for example by alienating part of the population and making them even less likely to comply with preventive measures. In the long run, they suggest it may mean societies leave the pandemic more polarised than they entered it.

While anti-vaxxers and conspiracy theorists are frequently the ones who attract the most controversy, they're not the only people who make up the unvaccinated population. For example, a person may refuse or delay vaccination due to medical conditions, mental health issues or needle phobia, or because they're part of a minority with negative past experience with health authorities.

This study reinforces how important it is for governments and healthcare workers to communicate public health information in a transparent and non-judgemental way. It's essential to understand the diverse reasons why people might hesitate about vaccinations, and to communicate the importance of preventive measures (for the individual and wider society) without discriminating or antagonising hesitant people or groups.

Alessandro Siani is Associate Head (Students), School of Biological Sciences, at the University of Portsmouth.

New Mpox Diagnostic EUA

On December 23, 2022, FDA issued an EUA for the VIASURE Monkeypox virus Real Time PCR Reagents for BD MAX System for the qualitative detection of DNA from monkeypox virus in human lesion swab specimens from individuals suspected of mpox by their health care provider. Emergency use of this test is limited to authorized laboratories. FDA

Guide to Implementing the Biological Weapons Convention

Download

The 2022 Guide to Implementing the Biological Weapons Convention has been developed by the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), with the support of the European Union and Norway and the contributions of a wide range of BWC experts, to assist States Parties in their efforts to implement the Convention at the national level.

The Guide is primarily intended to provide an overview of the national implementation process and obligations stemming from the BWC. Its primary audience is States Parties initiating or already engaged in the BWC implementation process or States Parties interested in assessing their implementing framework. The Guide outlines the types of legislative, regulatory and other measures that States Parties may consider developing and adopting in order to effectively implement the BWC.

Killing Anthrax More Quickly with Hot Air Decontamination

Source: https://globalbiodefense.com/2023/01/04/killing-anthrax-more-quickly-with-hot-air-decontamination/

Jan 04 – New method to decrease the amount of time it takes for hot air decontamination to kill bacterial spores, such as *Bacillus anthracis* (anthrax), within and on aircraft.

While hot air decontamination inactivates viruses in as few as 2 hours, it presently requires more than 72 hours to kill bacterial spores. A reduction in time and temperature to kill bacterial spores will reduce costs, improve compatibility of materials, and return the aircraft to mission faster.

Researchers at the Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren Division (NSWC-DD) set out to reduce the temperature and time requirements of the hot air decontamination process used by the military's Joint Biological Agent Decontamination System (JBADS).

In this 2020 photo, the Joint Biological Agent Decontamination System (JBADS) is being used on a C-130 airplane interior to extinguish mold. Credit: Donna Lindner, Air Force Research Laboratory

Spore life cycle showing the stages of spore formation, germination, revival, and vegetative cell growth for a Bacillus species. The target within the cycle for HAD is the committed cell, after germinant addition and immediately after loss of dormancy but prior to outgrowth and vegetative growth. (Dr. Glenn Lawson image)
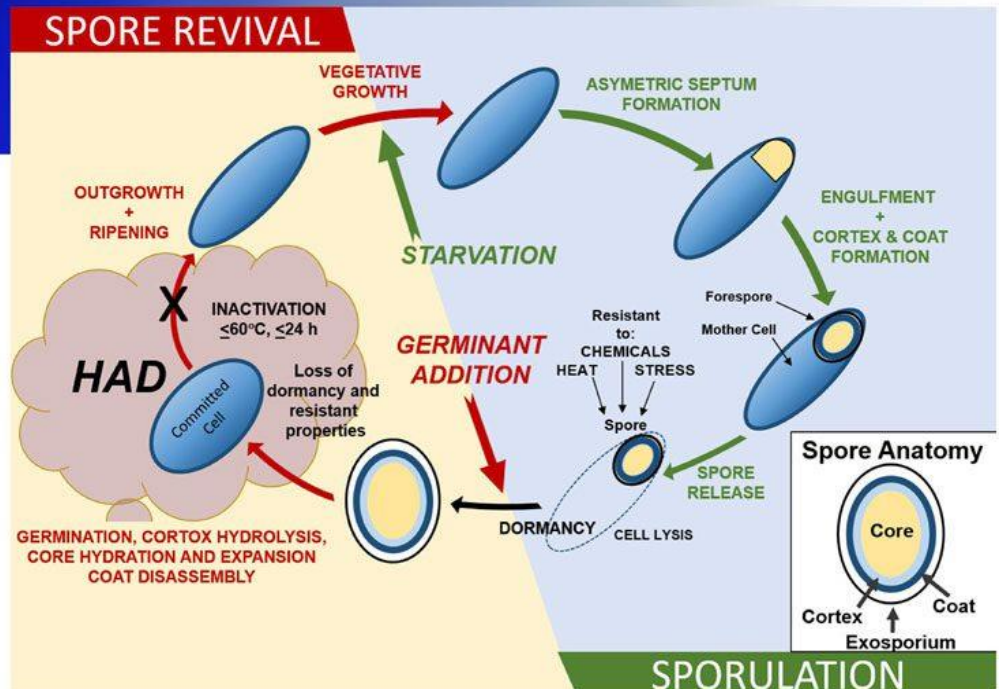
Spore life cycle showing the stages of spore formation, germination, revival, and vegetative cell growth for a Bacillus species. The target within the cycle for HAD is the committed cell, after germinant addition and immediately after loss of dormancy but prior to outgrowth and vegetative growth. Credit: Dr. Glenn Lawson

JBADS returns a biologically contaminated aircraft to full service without risking exposure of the biological weapons agents to aircrew members and support personnel and without corrosive or reactive decontaminants. Hot, humid air is sustained inside the enclosure for up to several days until both the interior and exterior of the aircraft are decontaminated and can be returned to operation. Although the hot air decontamination process is within materials specifications for aircraft, extended hot air exposure may affect sensitive systems, so a reduction in the required time to complete decon not only returns the aircraft to mission sooner but also improves its survivability.

Presently, the goal is to reduce the JBADS parameters for bacterial spores from greater than 167°F and 70%–90% relative humidity for at least 72 hours to lower than 140°F (60°C) for fewer than 24 hours.

The research by NSWC-DD tested a new bacterial spore germination method to make bacterial spores more susceptible to HAD at lower temperatures. Germination occurs when a bacterial spore develops into a growing, vegetative bacterial cell. While spores are resistant to environmental extremes such as heat, most vegetative bacterial cells are susceptible to higher temperatures, so causing germination and raising ambient temperature is one way kill bacterial spores.

The NSWC-DD team used a derelict C-130 aircraft and a human-safe bacterial surrogate for *Bacillus anthracis* to field test the bacterial spore germination process. **Using a fog machine, the team evenly spread over 100 million surrogate bacterial spores per square meter on the interior surfaces of the C-130.** After the spores dried, the team then applied a spore germination solution with no reactive chemicals that minimized risk to personnel and maintained aircraft materials compatibility. The team applied the germination solution with a battery-powered backpack electrostatic sprayer that was designed to evenly coat surfaces with a thin layer of the solution that included soaps to improve spreading. Because germination requires wet surfaces, the team continued to spray interior aircraft surfaces with germination solution at regular intervals of 2 hours to keep surfaces wet. After a 2-hour drying interval, the team repeated the process. The team then sampled surfaces at each interval to monitor the status of spore germination. After the final drying step, the team took samples to determine how many viable spores remained, and securely transported all samples to their laboratory for analysis.

Researchers found that the spore-germination process reduced biological spore and virus contamination by more than 99.9%. In a real situation, this would reduce risk to the Joint Forces as they pilot the contaminated aircraft to the JBADS location. In combination with JBADS, the entire process will inactivate biological contamination of aircraft to clearance levels and rapidly return the aircraft to mission. A spore-germination process will also reduce the time and temperature needed for JBADS aircraft decontamination, logistics needs, and impact to the aircraft components.

U.S. ending arrival Ebola screening for travelers from Uganda
Source: https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-ending-arrival-ebola-screening-travelers-uganda-2023-01-11/

Jan 11 – The Biden administration said on Wednesday it has lifted restrictions imposed in October that redirected U.S.-bound travelers who had been to Uganda within the previous 21 days to five major American airports to be screened for Ebola. The Department of Homeland Security said as of late November there have been no new confirmed Ebola disease cases reported in Uganda and two 21-day incubation periods have passed and the restrictions were no longer necessary.

> **EDITOR'S COMMENT:** At 180 days (6 months) after the Ebola treatment unit (ETU) discharge, the EBOV RNA semen positive rate was 75.4% (95% CI 66.9%-82.0%). The median persistence duration was 204 days, with 50% of men having cleared their semen of EBOV RNA after this time. In one case Ebola survived 565 days! Have they forgotten this small detail?

Are Your Patients Using This Anti-COVID Secret Weapon?
Source: https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/986761

Jan 10 – If your patients vowed to start exercising this year, here's another incentive to help them stick to their guns: They could protect themselves from potentially devastating COVID-19 outcomes like hospitalization and even death.

The evidence is piling up that physical activity can lower the risk of getting very sick from COVID. The CDC, based on a systematic review of the evidence, has reported that "physical activity is associated with a decrease in COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths, while inactivity increases that risk." Other research has linked regular physical activity with a lower risk of infection, hospitalization, and death from COVID.

The latest such study, from Kaiser Permanente, suggests that exercise in almost any amount can cut the risk of severe or fatal COVID even among high-risk patients like those with hypertension or cardiovascular disease.
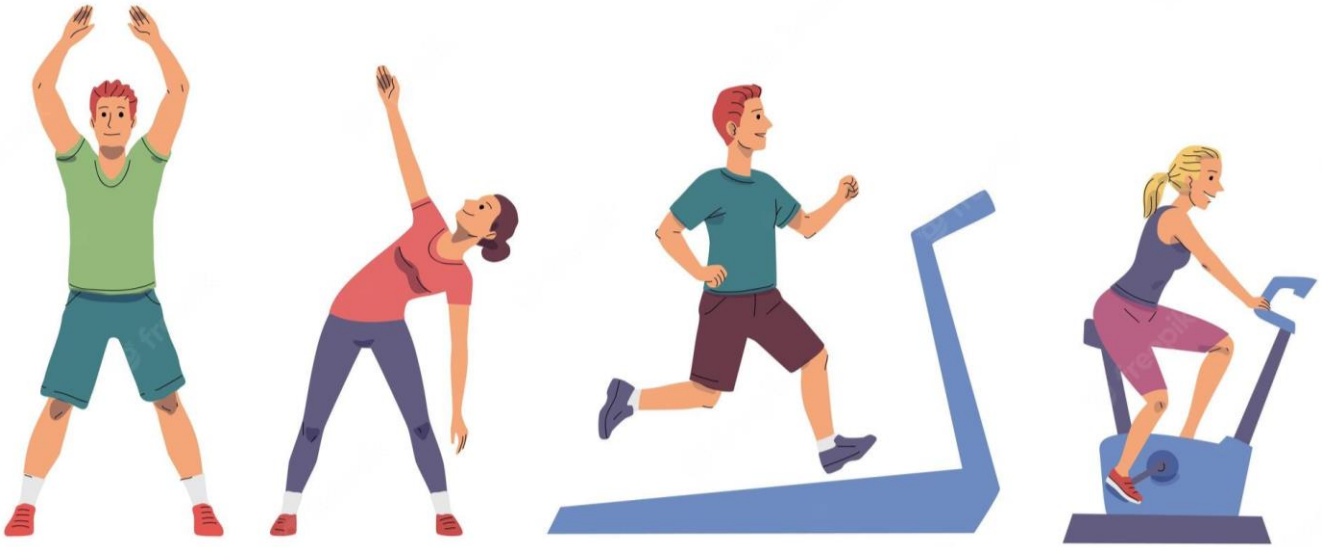
 "We found that every level of physical activity provided some level of protection," says lead study author Deborah Rohm Young, PhD, director of the Division of Behavioral Research for Kaiser's Southern California Department of Research and Evaluation. "Even a 10-minute walk [per] week is associated with better COVID-19 outcomes."

The best outcomes were seen among "those who are consistently meeting our national guidelines of greater than 150 minutes a week of at least brisk walking," she says. That's 30 minutes of exercise 5 days a week. However, "every bit is beneficial."

Yet, 1 in 4 adults don't get any physical activity outside of their jobs, according to the CDC. That matters as we move into January and COVID numbers trend up. As of press time, the CDC is reporting more than 470,000 weekly cases, compared to about 265,000 for the week ending Oct. 12. On average, over 6,000 people were admitted to the hospital per day from Dec. 31 to Jan. 6, and deaths totaled 2,731 weekly as of Jan. 4.

"The missing aspect in our response to the public health challenge of COVID has been the heightened need for personal and community well-health," says Gene Olinger, PhD, chief science advisor for research company MRI Global, and an adjunct associate professor at Boston University School of Medicine. "Proactive medicine – where individuals optimize nutrition, exercise, sleep, and whole-body meditation – is not a priority in the current health ecosystem. It is changing, and this is good news."

Of course, everyone should still get vaccinated, Young cautions, and not rely on exercise and healthy living alone to ward off severe COVID. "The more we can do to protect ourselves from having bad COVID, it should all be done."

The More Activity Prior to Infection, the Better

In the Kaiser study, the researchers looked at health records for 194,191 Kaiser adult patients who tested positive for COVID-19 between January 2020 and May 2021.

Patients' activity levels were assessed using a self-report system that Kaiser has used since 2009 involving two questions: "On average, how many days per week do you engage in moderate to strenuous exercise (like a brisk walk)?" and, "On average, how many minutes do you engage in exercise at this level?" To be included in the study, participants had to have completed at least three of these assessments in the 2 years before infection.

The more active a patient was, the better their outcomes tended to be, the researchers found. Likewise, less active patients saw worse outcomes.

In the most dramatic gap, those who were consistently inactive (less than 10 minutes of activity per week) before getting COVID-19 were 91% more likely to be hospitalized, and 291% more likely to die from the disease, than active patients.

Like all studies, this one had limitations. Because it took place before vaccinations were easier to get, it could not assess whether physical activity improved outcomes among the vaccinated. It also did not look at exercise's impact on those with repeat COVID-19 infections. Still, the study suggests that inactive folks should boost their activity to help ward off severe COVID-19.

The exercise benefits come as no surprise to physician Kwadwo Kyeremanteng, MD, head of critical care at the Ottawa Hospital, in Canada, and an associate professor at the University of Ottawa.

"As an ICU physician who has been taking care of COVID patients from day one, I saw on a regular basis that people in poor metabolic health had bad outcomes," says Kyeremanteng, who was not involved in the study. "It was clear early on [that] obesity, diabetes, and metabolic disease [were] risk factors for severe COVID and dying from COVID. Basically, the results of the study correlate with what we saw on the front lines."

Fitness Is No Guarantee
It's important to note that all trends have outliers. Even highly conditioned athletes who exercise often and hard can — and do — become very ill with COVID and can have lingering symptoms like shortness of breath, severe fatigue, and brain fog.
"In younger athletes and those who are optimally fit, there is evidence that COVID can cause myocardial inflammation [heart damage] in one out of 100," says Olinger. "Fortunately, it is almost always reversible."
And while controversial, the concept of over-exercising (aka overtraining syndrome) has been associated with suppressed immune function and more cases of upper respiratory tract infection, he says.
"However, the level of exercise that one can achieve varies widely," Olinger says. "The data is clear that vaccinations for COVID and regular exercise are key to a lifelong resistance to disease and infections."

What About Exercising After You Get COVID?
Another caution: While the evidence shows that exercise *before* getting COVID-19 can help improve outcomes, other research has found that returning to exercise too soon *after* contracting the virus can be dangerous, regardless of one's fitness level. In fact, exercise is likely to make long COVID symptoms worse.
After a bout with COVID-19, return to exercise gradually, says Kyeremanteng. Let your symptoms be your guide. A study in the *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport* suggests that athletes with no or minimal symptoms should return to their pre-COVID exercise habits in a "graduated fashion" over 7 to 14 days. "Those with pre-existing medical comorbidities should adopt a more cautious approach," the study says. "Listen to your body," says Olinger. "You are the only one who knows what feels right."

Which Treatments Improve Long-term Outcomes of Critical COVID Illness?
Source: https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/986848

Jan 11 – Treatment with interleukin 6 (IL-6) receptor antagonists or antiplatelet agents improves survival and outcomes at 6 months for critically ill patients with COVID-19, according to new data.
However, survival wasn't improved with therapeutic anticoagulation, convalescent plasma, or lopinavir-ritonavir, and survival was worsened with hydroxychloroquine.
"After critically ill patients leave the hospital, there's a high risk of readmission, death after discharge, or exacerbations of chronic illness," study author Patrick Lawler, MD, a clinician-scientist at the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre at University Health Network and an assistant professor of medicine at the University of Toronto, told *Medscape Medical News*.
"When looking at the impact of treatment, we don't want to improve short-term outcomes yet worsen long-term disability," he said. "That long-term, 6-month horizon is what matters most to patients."

Investigating Treatments
The investigators analyzed data from an ongoing platform trial called Randomized Embedded Multifactorial Adaptive Platform for Community Acquired Pneumonia (REMAP-CAP). The trial is evaluating treatments for patients with severe pneumonia in pandemic and nonpandemic settings.
In the trial, patients are randomly assigned to receive one or more interventions within the following six treatment domains: immune modulators, convalescent plasma, antiplatelet therapy, anticoagulation, antivirals, and corticosteroids. The trial's primary outcome for patients with COVID-19 is hospital survival and organ support–free days up to 21 days. Researchers previously observed improvement after treatment with IL-6 receptor antagonists (which are immune modulators).
For this study, the research team analyzed data for 4869 critically ill adult patients with COVID-19 who were enrolled between March 2020 and June 2021 at 197 sites in 14 countries. A 180-day follow-up was completed in March 2022. The critically ill patients had been admitted to an intensive care unit and had received respiratory or cardiovascular organ support.
The researchers examined survival through day 180. A hazard ratio (HR) <1 represented improved survival, and an HR >1 represented harm. Futility was represented by a relative improvement in outcome of <20%, which was shown by an HR >0.83.

Among the 4869 patients, 4107 patients had a known mortality status, and 2590 were alive at day 180. Among the 1517 patients who died by day 180, 91 deaths (6%) occurred between hospital discharge and day 180.

Overall, use of IL-6 receptor antagonists (either tocilizumab or sarilumab) had a greater than 99.9% probability of improving 6-month survival, and use of antiplatelet agents (aspirin or a P2Y12 inhibitor such as clopidogrel, prasugrel, or ticagrelor) had a 95% probability of improving 6-month survival, compared with control therapies.

In contrast, long-term survival wasn't improved with therapeutic anticoagulation (11.5%), convalescent plasma (54.7%), or lopinavir-ritonavir (31.9%). The probability of trial-defined statistical futility was high for anticoagulation (99.9%), convalescent plasma (99.2%), and lopinavir-ritonavir (96.6%).

Long-term survival was worsened with hydroxychloroquine, with a posterior probability of harm of 96.9%. In addition, the combination of lopinavir-ritonavir and hydroxychloroquine had a 96.8% probability of harm.

Corticosteroids didn't improve long-term outcomes, although enrollment in the treatment domain was terminated early in response to external evidence. The probability of improving 6-month survival ranged from 57.1% to 61.6% for various hydrocortisone dosing strategies.

Consistent Treatment Effects

When considered along with previously reported short-term results from the REMAP-CAP trial, the findings indicate that initial in-hospital treatment effects were consistent for most therapies through 6 months.

"We were very relieved to see that treatments with a favorable benefit for patients in the short term also appeared to be beneficial through 180 days," said Lawler. "This supports the current clinical practice strategy in providing treatment to critically ill patients with COVID-19." In a subgroup analysis of 989 patients, health-related quality of life at day 180 was higher among those treated with IL-6 receptor antagonists and antiplatelet agents. The average quality-of-life score for the lopinavir-ritonavir group was lower than for control patients. Among 720 survivors, 273 patients (37.9%) had moderate, severe, or complete disability at day 180. IL-6 receptor antagonists had a 92.6% probability of reducing disability, and anakinra (an IL-1 receptor antagonist) had a 90.8% probability of reducing disability. However, lopinavir-ritonavir had a 91.7% probability of worsening disability.

The REMAP-CAP trial investigators will continue to assess treatment domains and long-term outcomes among COVID-19 patients. They will evaluate additional data regarding disability, quality of life, and long-COVID outcomes.

"Reassuring" Results

Commenting on the study for Medscape, Angela Cheung, MD, PhD, a professor of medicine at the University of Toronto and senior scientist at the Toronto General Research Institute, said, "It is important to look at the longer-term effects of these therapies, as sometimes we may improve things in the short term, but that may not translate to longer-term gains. Historically, most trials conducted in this patient population assess only short outcomes, such as organ failure or 28-day mortality."

Cheung, who wasn't involved with this study, serves as the co-lead for the Canadian COVID-19 Prospective Cohort Study (CANCOV) and the Recovering From COVID-19 Lingering Symptoms Adaptive Integrative Medicine Trial (RECLAIM). These studies are also analyzing long-term outcomes among COVID-19 patients.

"It is reassuring to see that the 6-month outcomes are consistent with the short-term outcomes," she said. "This study will help guide critical care medicine physicians in their treatment of critically ill patients with COVID-19."

●▶ **The study was published online on December 16 in** *JAMA*.

Add This to the List of Long COVID Symptoms: Stigma

Source: https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/986969

Jan 13 – People with long COVID may have dizziness, headaches, sleep problems, sluggish thinking, and many other problems. But they can also face another problem — stigma.

Most people with long COVID find they're facing stigma due to their condition, according to a new report from researchers in the United Kingdom. In short: Relatives and friends may not believe they're truly sick.

The U.K. team found that more than three-quarters of people studied had experienced stigma often or always.

In fact, 95% of people with long COVID faced at least one type of stigma at least sometimes, according to the study, published in November in the journal *PLOS One.* Those conclusions had surprised the study's lead researcher, Marija Pantelic, PhD, a public health lecturer at Brighton and Sussex Medical School.

"After years of working on HIV-related stigma, I was shocked to see how many people were turning a blind eye to and dismissing the difficulties experienced by people with long COVID," Pantelic says. "It has also been clear to me from the start that this stigma is detrimental not just for people's dignity, but also public health."

Even some doctors argue that the growing attention paid to long COVID is excessive.

"It's often normal to experience mild fatigue or weaknesses for weeks after being sick and inactive and not eating well. Calling these cases long COVID is the medicalization of modern life," Marty Makary, MD, a surgeon and public policy researcher at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, wrote in a commentary in *The Wall Street Journal.*

Other doctors strongly disagree, including Alba Azola, MD, co-director of the Johns Hopkins Post-Acute COVID-19 Team and an expert in the stigma surrounding long COVID.

"Putting that spin on things, it's just hurting people," she says.

One example is people who cannot return to work.

"A lot of their family members tell me that they're being lazy," Azola says. "That's part of the public stigma, that these are people just trying to get out of work."

Some experts say the U.K. study represents a landmark.

"When you have data like this on long COVID stigma, it becomes more difficult to deny its existence or address it," says Naomi Torres-Mackie, PhD, a clinical psychologist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. She also is head of research at the New York-based Mental Health Coalition, a group of experts working to end the stigma surrounding mental health.

She recalls her first patient with long COVID.

"She experienced the discomfort and pain itself, and then she had this crushing feeling that it wasn't valid, or real. She felt very alone in it," Torres-Mackie says.

Another one of her patients is working at her job from home but facing doubt about her condition from her employers.

"Every month, her medical doctor has to produce a letter confirming her medical condition," Torres-Mackie says.

Taking part in the British stigma survey were 1,166 people, including 966 residents of the United Kingdom, with the average age of 48. Nearly 85% were female, and more than three-quarters were educated at the university level or higher.

Half of them said they had a clinical diagnosis of long COVID.

More than 60% of them said that at least some of the time, they were cautious about who they talked to about their condition. And fully 34% of those who did disclose their diagnosis said that they regretted having done so.

That's a difficult experience for those with long COVID, says Leonard Jason, PhD, a professor of psychology at DePaul University in Chicago.

"It's like they're traumatized by the initial experience of being sick, and retraumatized by the response of others to them," he says.

Unexplained illnesses are not well-regarded by the general public, Jason says.

He gave the example of multiple sclerosis. Before the 1980s, those with MS were considered to have a psychological illness, he says. "Then, in the 1980s, there were biomarkers that said, 'Here's the evidence.' "

The British study described three types of stigma stemming from the long COVID diagnosis of those questioned:
- **Enacted stigma**: People were directly treated unfairly because of their condition.
- **Internalized stigma**: People felt embarrassed by that condition.
- **Anticipated stigma**: People expected they would be treated poorly because of their diagnosis.

Azola calls the medical community a major problem when it comes to dealing with long COVID.

"What I see with my patients is medical trauma," she says. They may have symptoms that send them to the emergency room, and then the tests come back negative. "Instead of tracking the patients' symptoms, patients get told, 'Everything looks good, you can go home, this is a panic attack,' " she says.

Some people go online to search for treatments, sometimes launching GoFundMe campaigns to raise money for unreliable treatments.

Long COVID patients may have gone through five to 10 doctors before they arrive for treatment with the Hopkins Post-Acute COVID-19 Team. The clinic began in April 2020 remotely and in August of that year in person.

Today, the clinic staff spends an hour with a first-time long COVID patient, hearing their stories and helping relieve anxiety, Azola says.

The phenomenon of long COVID is similar to what patients have had with chronic fatigue syndrome, lupus, or fibromyalgia, where people have symptoms that are hard to explain, says Jennifer Chevinsky, MD, deputy public health officer for Riverside County, CA.

"Stigma within medicine or health care is nothing new," she says.

In Chicago, Jason notes that the federal government's decision to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in long COVID research "shows the government is helping destigmatize it."

Pantelic says she and her colleagues are continuing their research.

"We are interested in understanding the impacts of this stigma, and how to mitigate any adverse outcomes for patients and services," she says.

An illustrated history of the world's deadliest epidemics, from ancient Rome to Covid-19

By Erik English

Source: https://thebulletin.org/2023/01/deadliest-pandemics/

Jan 16 – How does the COVID-19 pandemic compare to viral outbreaks of the past? As the world lurches into a fourth year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the official death count based on public disclosures is currently 6.7 million, but estimates of excess deaths put the true toll closer to 21 million. Due to the unreliability of official figures, it can be tricky to nail down an exact number. This is nothing new, even at a time when analytics reign supreme.

The history of human civilization is riddled with grizzly stories of epidemics, many with wide ranges of uncertainty around the true toll of their devastation. Unfortunately, the only certainty is that more pandemics are coming. Since the transition from hunter-gatherers to agricultural societies, the conditions for the spread of disease have grown. As early empires stretched across the global landscape, global trade networks, industrialization, and war would further add to the body count. Today, climate change, environmental degradation, and rapid global travel make it easier than ever for viruses to "spill over" from animals to humans and spread rapidly.

COVID-19 is just one of multiple outbreaks occurring today; HIV/AIDS has claimed more than 40 million lives, and even bubonic plague still claims lives. In that light, it is worth looking at how past epidemics have changed the course of history and shaped the modern world. After all, as David McCullough points out, "history is who we are and why we are the way we are." Inevitably, epidemics are a part of that history.

●▶ **Read the full article at the source's URL.**

Erik English is an associate multimedia editor at the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. He has worked at the International Atomic Energy Agency, the US Department of State, and the US African Development Foundation. Erik was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Benin from 2009 to 2011 and received his master's degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in 2015.

Supramolecular filaments for concurrent ACE2 docking and enzymatic activity silencing enable coronavirus capture and infection prevention

By Caleb F. Anderson, Qiong Wang, David Stern, et al.

Cell | December 12, 2022

Source: https://www.cell.com/matter/fulltext/S2590-2385(22)00658-0

Highlights

- ❖ Supramolecular filaments dock ACE2 via enzyme-substrate complexation
- ❖ Docking affords delivery and preservation of ACE2 in inhalable aerosols
- ❖ Filaments enhance and extend inhibition of viral entry of SARS coronaviruses

Progress and potential

The structural and functional instability of therapeutic proteins represents a big challenge for their effective delivery and eventual use in the clinic. This work evidence enhanced deposition and retention of therapeutic proteins in the lungs through their complexation with high-affinity supramolecular filaments. Our results suggest that supramolecular filaments not only allow facile incorporation of peptide-based substrates on their surfaces for binding and delivering therapeutic proteins through enzyme-substrate interactions but also provide a means of preserving the proteins' structure and function as the filament and cargo endure harsh interfacial forces during aerosol formation. This eventually led to prolonged inhibition of coronavirus infection *in vitro* and *in vivo.* The materials showcased here possess high translational potential to curb coronavirus infections and establish a new platform for inhalable delivery of protein therapeutic agents for other human diseases.

Summary

Coronaviruses have historically precipitated global pandemics of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) into devastating public health crises. Despite the virus's rapid rate of mutation, all SARS coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) variants are known to gain entry into host cells primarily through complexation with angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE2). Although ACE2 has potential as a druggable decoy to block viral entry, its clinical use is complicated by its essential biological role as a carboxypeptidase and hindered by its structural and chemical instability. Here we designed supramolecular filaments, called fACE2, that can silence ACE2's enzymatic activity and immobilize ACE2 to their surface through enzyme-substrate complexation. This docking strategy enables ACE2 to be effectively delivered in inhalable aerosols and improves its structural stability and functional preservation. fACE2 exhibits enhanced and prolonged inhibition of viral entry compared with ACE2 alone while mitigating lung injury *in vivo*.
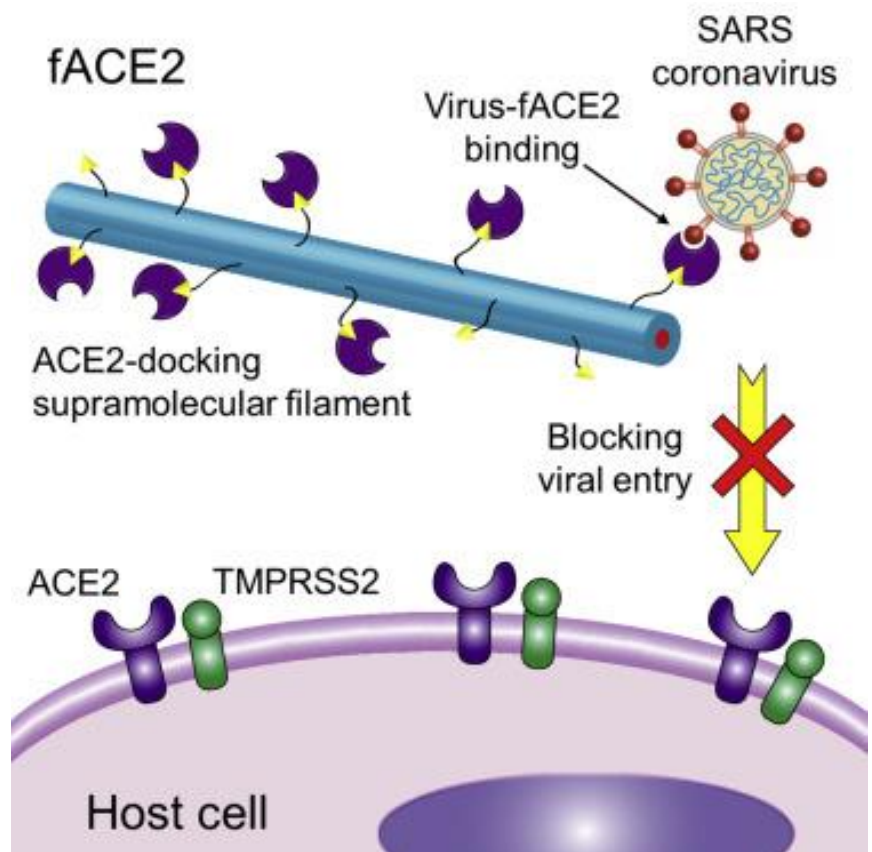
The generic all-hazards risk assessment and planning tool for mass gathering events

Source: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2023-Generic-Mass-gatherings-All-Hazards-RAtool-2023-1

●▶ Download (702.6 kB)

Overview

Jan 12 – The Generic All-Hazards Risk Assessment and Planning Tool for Mass Gathering Events ("All-Hazards MG RA Tool") aims to support Member States and mass gathering events organizers.

The tool is based on the principles of the World Health Organization's Strategic Toolkit for Assessing Risk (STAR) as well as lessons learned identified from the COVID-19 Risk Assessment Tool for Mass Gatherings. The purpose of the All-Hazards Mass Gatherings Risk Assessment tool is to identify hazards related to the event, assess and quantify the overall level of risk, identify and account for precautionary measures that may reduce the risk, making the event safer.

The tool provides a systematic evidence-based approach to identifying and classifying priority risks; a description of the level of national preparedness and readiness to mitigate specific hazards; guidance on the implementation of a comprehensive and strategic risk assessment to inform preparedness and response plans ahead of the mass gathering; and an estimated assessment of the host country capacity to identify and respond to potential negative health impacts.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: Michael Hopmeier, member of the Editorial Team of the *C²BRNE Diary* contributed (development, testing and implementation) to this important publication1

Did you know?

Since January 2021 1598 athletes have suffered cardiac arrest, 1101 of whom have died. And we compare that number to a publication done in 2006 that counted athletes who had heart attacks from 1966 to 2004. 1100 people died, the same number, which makes us an average of 29 people a year - which practically means that in one year we had the same number of deaths over a period of 38 years.

Dramatic increase in young athletes collapsing
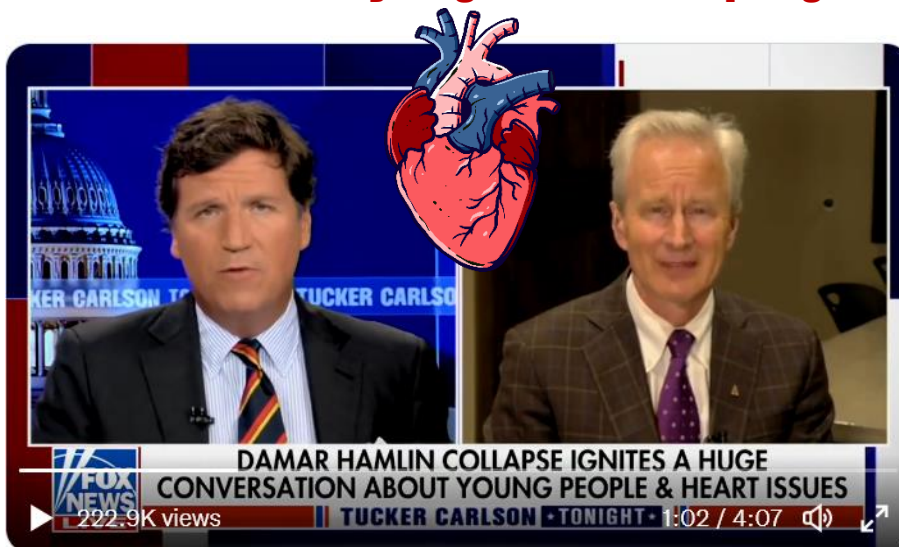
Cardiologist Dr. Peter McCullough discusses his findings with Tucker Carlson on the disturbing trend of more young athletes collapsing on the field with heart issues than ever before. "The leading concern here is vaccine-induced myocarditis, if indeed he's taken the vaccine."

Possible Bivalent Vaccine Link to Strokes in People Over 65

Source: https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/987016

Jan 17 – **A vaccine database found a possible link between the Pfizer/BioNTech bivalent COVID-19 vaccine and ischemic strokes in people over 65 who got the shot,** the CDC and the FDA said in a joint news release.

The release did not recommend people change their vaccine practices, saying the database finding probably did not represent a "true clinical risk." The CDC said everybody, including people over 65, should stay up to date on their COVID vaccines, including the bivalent booster. The news release said the Vaccine Safety Datalink (VSD), "a near real-time surveillance system," raised a safety concern about the Pfizer/BioNTech booster.

"Rapid-response investigation of the signal in the VSD raised a question of whether people 65 and older who have received the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine, Bivalent were more likely to have an ischemic stroke in the 21 days following vaccination compared with days 22-44 following vaccination," the news release said.

Ischemic strokes are blockages of blood to the brain, often caused by blood clots.

"Although the totality of the data currently suggests that it is very unlikely that the signal in VSD (Vaccine Safety Datalink) represents a true clinical risk, we believe it is important to share this information with the public, as we have in the past, when one of our safety monitoring systems detects a signal." the release said.

No higher likelihood of strokes linked to the Pfizer bivalent vaccine had been found by Pfizer/BioNTech, the Veterans Administration, the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) maintained by the CDC and the FDA, or other agencies that monitor reactions of vaccines, the news release said. No safety issues about strokes have been identified with the Modera bivalent vaccine. CNN, citing a CDC official, reported that about 550,000 seniors who got Pfizer bivalent boosters were tracked by the VSD, and 130 of them had strokes within three weeks of getting the shot. None of those 130 people died, CNN said. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to share the data.

The issue will be discussed at the January meeting of the FDA's Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee.

In a joint statement, Pfizer and BioNTech said: "Neither Pfizer and BioNTech nor the CDC or FDA have observed similar findings across numerous other monitoring systems in the U.S. and globally and there is no evidence to conclude that ischemic stroke is associated with the use of the companies' COVID-19 vaccines."

Bivalent boosters contain two strains of vaccine – one to protect against the original COVID-19 virus and another targeting Omicron subvariants.

Omicron sub-variants Orthrus, Kraken may soon become dominant Covid strains in UK

Source: https://www.wionews.com/world/omicron-sub-variants-orthrus-kraken-may-soon-become-dominant-covid-strains-in-uk-553612

Jan 18 – Two Omicron sub-variants Orthrus and Kraken are driving surge in Covid cases in the UK in recent weeks.

Orthrus, a heavily mutated Omicron spinoff that causes Covid infection, now accounts for a fourth of all Covid infections in the United Kingdom. First detected in late 2021, the CH.1.1 variant is reportedly worrying the health professionals in the United Kingdom. A number of mutations allow it to bind to the cells along the respiratory tract more tightly, making it more infectious.

Surveillance data shows that the strain has now snowballed since it was first detected in November last year.

Data from the Sanger Institute, one of the UK's largest surveillance sites tasked with analysing strains circulating in the United Kingdom, shows Orthrus, nicknamed after a mythical two-headed dog, accounted for 23.3 per cent of all Covid tests analysed in England on January 7.

Orthrus or Kraken

Health chiefs of various bodies in the UK have warned that Orthrus or another Omicron sub-lineage nicknamed the 'Kraken' could soon become dominant. While Orthrus is behind more infections, experts

have said Kraken appears to be growing faster and is said to be more transmissible and capable of evading the human immune system than other strains in circulation.

Which is more dangerous?
Orthrus has a mutation called P681R — which was also on the Delta variant (that caused the devastating second wave of Covid outbreak in India in 2021) — and is thought to make it better attack cells and cause more severe illness. Kraken has the mutation called F486P, which helps it to bypass Covid-fighting antibodies.

> In Greek mythology, Orthrus or Orthus was, according to the mythographer Apollodorus, a two-headed dog who guarded Geryon's cattle and was killed by Heracles. He was the offspring of the monsters Echidna and Typhon, and the brother of Cerberus, who was also a multi-headed guard dog.

COVID Dramatically Increases Death Risk During Pregnancy: Study
Source: https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/987041

Jan 17 – Women infected with COVID-19 during pregnancy are seven times more likely to die during childbirth or during the pregnancy than uninfected pregnant women, a new study shows. The new report also warns of many other severe complications linked with the virus during pregnancy, as well as risks to the baby after birth.
But the researchers said they did not find that COVID-19 infection during pregnancy impacted the risk of stillbirth or a baby's growth rate during pregnancy.
The study, which was a meta-analysis of previous research, was published Monday in the journal *BMJ Global Health*. Data from 12 studies from 12 countries were combined so researchers could analyze outcomes for 13,136 pregnant women.
Babies born to mothers who were infected with COVID during pregnancy had almost double the risk of needing stays in the neonatal intensive care unit and also were more likely to be born preterm, compared to babies who were born to pregnant women who didn't get COVID.
The researchers also found that pregnant women who got COVID were more likely to be admitted to intensive care units, need a ventilator to help them survive, develop dangerous blood clots, or develop preeclampsia, which is a high blood pressure disorder that can be fatal for the mother or baby.
One of the strengths of the study was that it included women in different trimesters during pregnancy.
"That's something new here too is that COVID at any time during pregnancy did bring this extra risk onto mom and babies," said lead author Emily R. Smith, ScD, MPH, assistant professor of global health at the George Washington University, in a video statement.
The report is prompting calls for improved efforts to convince pregnant women to get vaccinated for COVID-19. The rate among them remains low: About 1 in 5 pregnant women had received the most updated COVID-19 booster as of Jan. 7, according to the CDC.
"The implications here are that it's really important that if you're pregnant or if you're thinking about becoming pregnant, to get vaccinated," Smith said. "This can really reduce the risk of having some of these bad outcomes for mom or for baby."

Ancient Empires Used Bioweapons to Strike Terror More Than 3,000 Years Ago
Source: https://www.discovermagazine.com/the-sciences/ancient-empires-used-bioweapons-to-strike-terror-more-than-3-000-years-ago

Jan 19 – Biological weapons may seem like relatively modern entrants into the bloody history of human conflict, and why not? The term itself wasn't coined until the 20th century, entering the lexicon during the horrors of World War I. Its shorter synonym, bioweapon, didn't even appear in dictionaries until the 1960s.
Today, the United Nations describes biological weapons as devices or methods that "disseminate disease-causing organisms or toxins to harm or kill humans, animals or plants," as chillingly succinct a definition as anyone would care to have.
But the concept of biological warfare is indisputably ancient — and as weapons of mass destruction, bioweapons of centuries past were just as terrifying to soldiers and civilians then as their modern equivalents are to us today.
Ancient Bioweapons
A surprisingly wide variety of bioweapons were available in the ancient world. After all, arrows and spears technically became bioweapons the moment their tips were dipped into poison, excrement or even simple,

microbe-rich dirt. Infected and putrefying corpses, whether animal or human, were readymade bioweapons when dumped into an enemy's water supply or launched over a city wall, bringing dismay as well as disease.

Some military leaders of the past were more diabolically creative than others in their waging of biological warfare. They didn't understand the science behind the methods they deployed; they just knew what worked.

But because history's biological warmongers didn't fully comprehend (or control) the forces they wielded, their ancient bioweapons often had unintended consequences, doing their own people harm, and sometimes causing catastrophic collateral damage that stretched around the globe and across the centuries.

14th Century B.C.: The Hittite Plague

(Credit: Toronut/Shutterstock)

The Hittite empire originated around 1600 B.C. in what is now Turkey. Their domain was sizable, with the empire becoming a significant power in the Middle East. They are mentioned frequently in the Bible — in the Old Testament, they were said to be powerful neighbors to King Solomon. To their credit, history records that the Hittites, along with Egypt, signed one of the first known peace accords, the Treaty of Kadesh. But the Hittites may also have the dubious honor of engaging in one of the earliest examples of biological warfare.

Some researchers allege that around 1320 B.C. the Hittites released infected rams and donkeys along a trade route used by their enemies, who brought the strays back to their villages. Along with the animals came tularemia, a bacterial disease that, though treatable now, caused significant disability and death in ancient times.

Intended to weaken only their enemies, the so-called "Hittite Plague" had wider ramifications, triggering an epidemic that spread from Cyprus to Iraq and from Israel to Syria. Even today, tularemia is considered a serious biohazard and was once stockpiled by both the U.S. and the former Soviet Union as a potential biological weapon.

Third Century B.C.: Rome's Mosquito Army

The Pontine Marshes historically inhabited more than 300 square miles to the south and east of Rome. They created a natural impediment to invading armies, and not merely because marshland offers an exhausting, unrelenting slog for men on the march. The Pontine Marshes' greatest asset was that they were home to ancient Rome's most devastating army: malaria-inducing mosquitos.

Although they were well aware of the marshes' ability to sap the strength of an invader, the Romans didn't actively weaponize malaria. In ancient times, they had no way of confirming that mosquitos were the delivery system for the devastating ailment.

Indeed, they blamed the condition on the noxious atmosphere of marshy areas — when the disease was eventually named, malaria was derived from the Italian words that literally meant bad air. Malaria proved

a formidable biodefense for centuries. Even the great Hannibal (who deployed creative bioweapons of his own) was thwarted by the disease. Still, perhaps those marshes were too formidable: As time went on, malaria became an endemic threat to Roman citizens and may well have contributed to the downfall of the empire. By the 20th century, various efforts to drain the marshes had mitigated the disease. But during World War II, the German army, mindful of history, flooded the marshes once more. They turned the marshes again into a bioweapon barrier, this time to obstruct the advance of Allied forces. But the ploy also impacted Italy itself, causing a malarial outbreak in the region in 1944.

Second Century B.C.: Hannibal's Venomous Vanguard

(Credit: Talukdar David/Shutterstock)

One of the greatest foes that ancient Rome ever faced, Hannibal of Carthage, possessed a tactical and martial genius that made him an enduring legend. It's true that he was ultimately defeated and took his own life. Nevertheless, people remember Hannibal for his daring, which sometimes seemed to border on insanity.

One of his most epic feats involved advancing on Rome by crossing the Alps. And he did this with no fewer than 40,000 troops, thousands of horses and about 40 trained war elephants. Talk about biological weapons.

Alas, after an impressive run on northern Italy, Hannibal was defeated, spending his waning years working for other powers that might make use of his military intellect. Thus it was that, around 184 B.C., Hannibal ended up in what is now modern-day Turkey, in a war between Bithynia and Pergamon. Fighting for the outmatched Bithynians, Hannibal commanded their navy. In an era before cannons, Hannibal attacked his enemy — whose fleet included the king's own ship — with a different sort of bombardment.

In De Viris Illustribus, an early biographical collection of the lives of "illustrious men," scribe Cornelius Nepos (c. 110-24 B.C.) relates that Hannibal ordered his men to gather a large number of venomous snakes, which were placed into clay pots. Nepos' account is fuzzy on how exactly Hannibal managed to gather enough snakes (and pots) to mount an effective defense against a fleet of 400+ enemy ships, but never mind.

History records that Hannibal launched his snake bombs, paying special attention to the king's ship. The king's nerve failed, he fled with his navy, and Hannibal once again left his mark in the annals of military history.

14th Century: Black Death Bombs

A medieval painting showing the bubonic plague's characteristic buboes. (Credit: Everett Historical/Shutterstock)

Over the course of history, plenty of armies hurled the bodies of dead animals and people over city walls to harass their enemies. Manure — of both the human and animal varieties — was a popular bioweapon to throw at besieged opponents, too. But the Mongol army has dubious pride of place for using the technique, with world-changing consequences.

Around 1346, during the siege of Caffa, the Mongols reportedly flung corpses over the walls, corpses that were infected with bubonic plague — the Black Death.

Unfortunately for Caffa, and at least — at least — 25 million other people, Genoese traders brought the plague from Caffa to Europe, delivering a disease that swiftly killed 70 to 80 percent of its hosts. Even worse, plague outbreaks would recur several times over the next five centuries. Although treatable today with modern antibiotics (if treated quickly), plague remains a serious bioterrorism threat, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Some bomb blasts continue to reverberate through the ages.

We Might Have Been Wrong About The Role Rats Played in The Black Death

By Samuel Cohn and Philip Slavin
Source: https://www.sciencealert.com/we-might-have-been-wrong-about-the-role-rats-played-in-the-black-death

Jan 19 – The Black Death ravaged Europe between 1347 and 1353, killing millions. Plague outbreaks in Europe then continued until the 19th century.

One of the most commonly recited facts about plague in Europe was that it was spread by rats. In some parts of the world, the bacterium that causes plague, *Yersinia pestis*, maintains a long-term presence in wild rodents and their fleas. This is called an animal "reservoir".

While plague begins in rodents, it sometimes spills over to humans. Europe may have once hosted animal reservoirs that sparked plague pandemics. But plague could have also been repeatedly reintroduced from Asia. Which of these scenarios was present remains a topic of scientific controversy.

Our recent research, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*, has shown that environmental conditions in Europe would have prevented plague from surviving in persistent, long-term animal reservoirs. How, then, did plague persevere in Europe for so long?

Our study offers two possibilities. One, the plague was being reintroduced from Asian reservoirs. Second, there could have been short- or medium-term temporary reservoirs in Europe. In addition, the two scenarios might have been mutually supportive.

However, the rapid spread of the Black Death and subsequent outbreaks of the next few centuries also suggest slow-moving rats may not have played the critical role in transmitting the disease that is often portrayed.
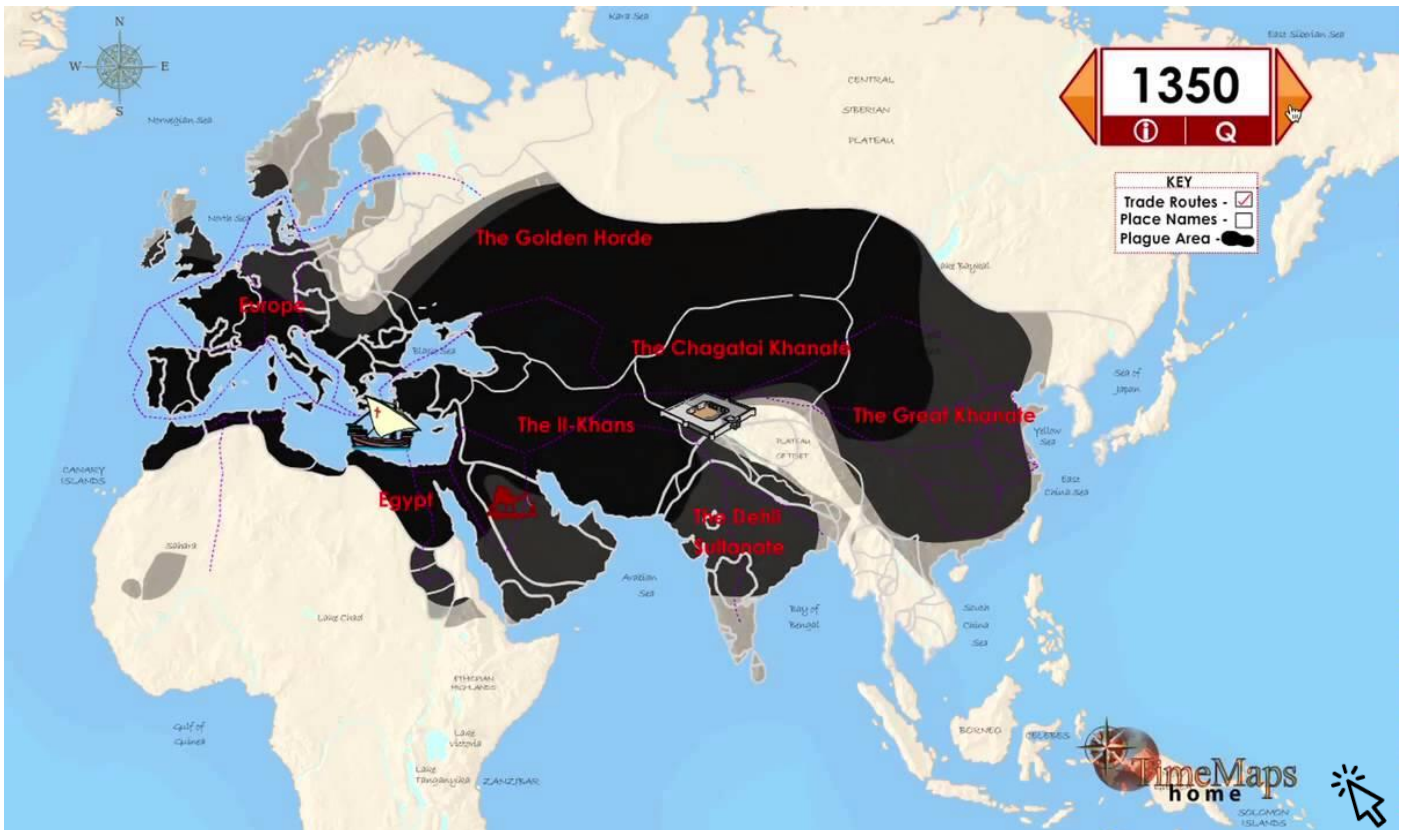
Click on the map (video)

European climate

To work out whether plague could survive in long-term animal reservoirs in Europe, we examined factors such as soil characteristics, climatic conditions, terrain types and rodent varieties. These all seem to affect whether plague can hold on in reservoirs.

For example, high concentrations of some elements in soil, including copper, iron, magnesium, as well as a high soil pH (whether it is acidic or alkaline), cooler temperatures, higher altitudes and lower rainfall appear to favor the development of persistent reservoirs, though it is not entirely clear why, at this stage.

Based on our comparative analysis, centuries-long wild rodent plague reservoirs were even less likely to have existed from the Black Death of 1348 to the early 19th century than today, when comprehensive research rules out any such reservoirs within Europe.

This contrasts sharply with regions across China and the western US, where all the above conditions for persistent *Yersinia pestis* reservoirs in wild rodents are found.

In central Asia, long-term and persistent rodent reservoirs may have existed for millennia. As ancient DNA and textual evidence hints, once plague crossed into Europe from central Asia, it appears to have seeded a short- or medium-term reservoir or reservoirs in European wild rodents. The most likely place for this to have been was in central Europe.

However, as local soil and climatic conditions did not favor long-term and persistent reservoirs, the disease had to be re-imported, at least in some instances. Importantly, the two scenarios are not mutually exclusive.

Radical difference

To go deeper into the role of rats in spreading plague in Europe, we can compare different outbreaks of the disease.

The first plague pandemic began in the early sixth century and lasted until the later eighth century. The second pandemic (which included the Black Death) began in the 1330s and lasted five centuries. A third pandemic began in 1894 and remains with us today in places such as Madagascar and California.

These pandemics overwhelmingly involved the bubonic form of plague, where the bacteria infect the human lymphatic system (which is part of the body's immune defenses). In pneumonic plague, the bacteria infect the lungs.

The plagues of the second pandemic differed radically in their character and transmission from more recent outbreaks. First, there were strikingly different levels of mortality, with some second pandemic outbreaks reaching 50 percent, while those of the third pandemic rarely exceeded 1 percent. In Europe, figures for the third pandemic were even lower.

Second, there were different rates and patterns of transmission between these two plague epochs. There were massive differences in the frequency and speed of transporting goods, animals, and people between the late middle ages and today (or the late 19th century). Yet the Black Death and many of its subsequent waves spread with astonishing speed. Over land, it raced almost as fast each day as the modern outbreaks do over a year.

As described by contemporary chroniclers, physicians, and others – and as reconstructed quantitatively from archival documents – the plagues of the second pandemic spread faster and more widely than any other disease during the middle ages. Indeed they were faster than in any period until the cholera outbreaks from 1830 or the great influenza of 1918-20.

Regardless of how the various European waves of the second pandemic began, both wild and non-wild rodents – rats, first and foremost – move much slower than the pace of transmission around the continent.

Third, the seasonality of plague also shows wide discrepancies. Plagues of the third pandemic (except for the rare ones, principally of pneumonic plague) have closely followed the fertility cycles of rat fleas. These rise with relatively humid conditions (although lower rainfall is important for plague reservoirs to first become established) and within a temperature band between 10 °C and 25 °C (50 to 77 °F). By contrast, plagues of the second pandemic could cross winter months in bubonic form, as seen across the Baltic regions from 1709-13. But in Mediterranean climes, plague from 1348 through the 15th century was a summer contagion that peaked in June or July – during the hottest and driest months.

This deviates strikingly from plague seasons in these regions in the 20th century. Because of the low relative humidity and high temperatures, these months were then the least likely times for plague to break out among rats or humans.

These differences raise a crucial question about whether the bubonic form of the plague depended on slow-moving rodents for its transmission when instead it could spread much more efficiently directly, from person to person. Scientists have speculated that this could have occurred because of ectoparasites (fleas and possibly lice), or through people's respiratory systems and through touch.

Questions such as the precise roles played by humans and rats in past plague pandemics need further work to resolve. But as shown by this study, and others, major steps forward can be made when scientists and historians work together.

Samuel Cohn is a Professor of History @ University of Glasgow.
Philip Slavin is an Associate Professor of History @ University of Stirling.

Researchers hacked a lab's pathogen containment system. Was it a good idea to publish the results?

By George Poste and David Gillum
Source: https://thebulletin.org/2023/01/researchers-hacked-a-labs-pathogen-containment-system-was-it-a-good-idea-to-publish-the-results/

Jan 19 – Negative pressure systems help keep dangerous pathogens contained in laboratories and hospital rooms. Given the potentially dire results should microbes escape one of these containment facilities, researchers at a major US university sought to probe whether negative pressure systems could be hacked. The team not only disrupted such a system at a real laboratory, but the researchers also laid out in great detail how to perform the hack.

While addressing loopholes in lab security is critical, by posting their paper online, the researchers broadcast the study's potentially dangerous results to anyone with an internet connection. It's a paper that highlights a worrisome trend in the life sciences. Scientists are conducting dual-use research—research in which knowledge generated with beneficial aims can also serve malicious ends—with little

oversight and then freely disseminating their findings. The paper on hacking biological containment controls came in the wake of another publication from Boston University. Researchers there created a hybrid COVID virus that while less deadly to mice than an ancestral version of SARS-CoV-2, was deadlier than the omicron variant. In another controversial case, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) proposed hybridizing the monkeypox virus to see which genes made it more virulent.

Researchers wearing positive pressure personnel suits at a US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases biosafety level 4 lab. Credit: National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

For policymakers, the studies underscore a long-standing problem: How to encourage as much scientific and technological progress as possible, giving researchers broad leeway and allowing them to share their results widely, while placing restrictions on research that might be too risky to pursue or to share widely. Dual-use concerns exist in other fields, like physics. But to a seemingly greater degree than in other areas, the life sciences are struggling with a lack of clarity on oversight policies for dual-use research, including those regarding publication. This confusion is occurring against the backdrop of accelerating advances in genetics, synthetic biology and artificial intelligence which mean that an ever-increasing fraction of research in biotechnology poses potential dual-use risks. A terrorist group or adversarial country could try to obtain dual-use research and incorporate it in weapons or use it for some other nefarious purpose, as has happened in other areas such as nuclear weapons and pathogen research in the past

Some prominent journals have developed enhanced review processes for dual-use pathogen research. But protestations about limiting academic enquiry have helped limit past efforts to control how dual-use research is published in journals. While journals may have overly lax standards, these days much research doesn't even go through these gatekeepers, at least initially. So-called "pre-print" servers allow authors to post papers directly to the internet. Authors can bypass the editorial and peer review process adopted by credentialed scientific journals. This trend is gaining momentum, complicating proactive scrutiny of potential risks.

The rationale offered by researchers who publish information that could be exploited by adversaries is that revealing vulnerabilities will stimulate development of remedial countermeasures. Indeed, the negative air pressure systems researchers included methods to counteract the hack they outlined in their paper. The question is, of course, would the labs, hospitals, and biotechnology companies that operate negative air pressure systems implement the proposed fix before a malicious actor could exploit the hack?

The negative air pressure systems researchers could have chosen not to place their research in the public domain and communicate instead with those with who might be able to implement risk control measures. These include: the manufacturers of the vulnerable control systems; government agencies with laboratory security oversight; and the American Biological Safety Association, an association for biosafety professionals, which could be contacted to distribute knowledge and information about the vulnerability to networks. The cybersecurity

community has long adopted a "white hat" practice of sharing discovered software and hardware flaws with the relevant vendor companies to allow design and installation of patches ahead of public disclosure.

The seeming lack of appreciation for dual-use risks of publication echoes a broader confusion over regulations and policies related to dual-use life sciences research.

Other than formal regulation of the most lethal pathogens, oversight of dual-use biotechnology research has been erratic, driven largely by reactive, ad hoc responses to the latest controversial publication. Policy relies heavily on guidelines that are vague, allow for broad interpretation, lack enforceability, and often apply only to federally funded research.

When it comes to the security of biological materials, there are also very few requirements to protect information. The most recognized regulation that addresses security of biologicals is the Federal Select Agent regulations, which relates to access to a very specific list of biological agents and toxins. These regulations do not expressly dictate what someone can or cannot say about biological materials, although it is common practice for those authorized to work with the materials to not share anything related to how to gain access to them.

Under current policies, the Boston study, the negative air pressure systems study, and the NIH's monkeypox proposal did not meet the criteria for prepublication government review, a process the NIH has for federally-funded researchers working with one or more of 15 agents. The NIH states that one of the goals of the review process is "to ameliorate dual-use concerns before publication review." Absent a more coherent oversight framework for dual-use research, self-regulation by the academic community has become the default position in decisions about what research to carry out and whether to limit the risk from open publication.

The challenge in managing the risks of dual-use research lies in balancing oversight to prevent accidental harm or adversarial exploitation without slowing scientific progress for public good and national competitiveness in technology innovation. This challenge was met in the Cold War era. Government, academia and industry achieved consensus on how advances in physics, engineering and computing could be partitioned to meet national security needs that never entered the public domain, without hindering the academic and corporate innovation that led to today's US industrial leadership in aerospace and digital technologies. The time has come for public and private sector stakeholders to bring similar pragmatic wisdom and foresight to the biosecurity challenge.

George Poste is Regents' Professor, Del E. Webb Chair in Health Innovation and Director of the Complex Adaptive Systems Initiative at Arizona State University. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, ex-officio member of the Bipartisan Commission on Biodefense and prior member of the US Defense Science Board.

David Gillum is a PhD student in the School for the Future of Innovation in Society at Arizona State University. David is also the assistant vice president of environmental health and safety at Arizona State University, an associate editor of Applied Biosafety, and past president of the American Biological Safety Association (ABSA) International.

COVID-19 Infection May Induce Fetal Brain Hemorrhages, Scientists Warn

Source: https://www.sciencealert.com/covid-19-infection-may-induce-fetal-brain-hemorrhages-scientists-warn

Jan 23 – There are already plenty of reasons to worry about COVID-19, but there's another to add to the list: There's evidence of the virus in fetal brain tissue in instances of pregnant people passing the infection to their children.

So it's not just the effects of the illness on our bodies that are of concern, but also the effects on the bodies of still-gestating babies – something that scientists have already been urgently looking into.

The team studied 661 human fetal tissue samples collected between July 2020 and April 2022, observing hemorrhages in 26 of them. COVID-19 was present in all of the tissue samples with evidence of hemorrhaging.

All the samples were collected from electively terminated pregnancies.

"While hemorrhages do occasionally occur in developing brains, it is extremely unusual for there to be this many instances within a 21-month period," says neurobiologist Katie Long from King's College London in the UK.

"It is now of the utmost importance that we follow up with children that were prenatally exposed to COVID-19 so that we can establish if there are any long-lasting neurodevelopmental effects."

Researchers highlighted signs of a reduction in blood vessel integrity and an increase in immune cells infiltrating the brain as being linked to tissue damage. This may be a direct result of the COVID-19 infection or an indirect result of the mother's immune response.

Though the coronavirus was only confirmed in the fetus tissues, it can be safely assumed that the infections were transferred from an infection in their mothers. Whether the hemorrhaging was a direct consequence of the mother's COVID or the fetus's infection – or if the relationship involves some unknown factor – isn't clear. But the link is strong enough to be a concern.

What's more, most of the samples with signs of hemorrhaging were from the late first and early second trimester of gestation, suggesting that the fetal brain can be affected at the earliest stages of its development. We already know that this is a crucial time for the developing brain, as it creates barriers to defend itself.

"We know that severe viral infection may influence the fetal brain, but this important study is the first to suggest that this may occur in pregnancies affected by COVID infection," says physiologist Lucilla Poston from King's College London. Poston was not involved in the study. "Whatever the cause, a direct effect of the virus or an indirect consequence of maternal infection, this study highlights the need for pregnant women to be vaccinated against COVID-19, thus avoiding complications for both mother and baby."

Traces of SARS-CoV-2 were also detected in tissue samples taken from the placenta, amnion, and umbilical cord, suggesting that there's the potential for further complications to be caused by the presence of COVID-19.

Viral infections in mothers are regularly associated with neurological damage in children; the Zika virus is one of the more high-profile cases in recent years showing how significant these effects can be.

We have earlier studies linking health problems in fetuses with cases of COVID-19 in pregnant mothers, but so far, the pool of data on the topic is relatively small – something that scientists will be looking to change in the future.

"Our findings suggest that there is an association between the early development of human fetal brain tissue and vulnerability to infection from COVID-19," says neurobiologist Marco Massimo from King's College London.

●▶ **The research has been published in** *Brain*.

Pandemic by numbers (as of January 24, 2023)
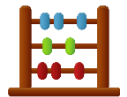
	CASES	DEATHS	COUNTRIES & TERRITORIES	MOST AFFECTED COUNTRIES*
COVID-19	(644,117,458) **673,522,769**	(6,629,552) **6,748,144**	229	USA, India, Brazil, France, Germany, Japan, S. Korea

* over 30 million cases

Some remarks about the "C²BRNE DIARY"

✓ **The articles included in the** *Editor's Corner* **are those that attracted the attention of the Editor. Usually, they are addressing issues regarding international security, the war in Ukraine, the SE Mediterranean countries, and the Middle East/GCC area, cruelty to pets, illegal immigration, injustice in payments regarding first responders and entertainers worldwide, women and children rights, and everything else that cannot be classified in the specific chapters of the magazine.**

✓ **The comments under certain articles or pictures or videos are those of the Editor-in-Chief, not the International CBRNE Institute.**

✓ **Many photos have been deleted as irrelevant to the content of the article or replaced by others closer to the title of the article.**

✓ **Maps, tables, and charts are often added for the reader to have a more holistic understanding of the content.**

✓ **Sources and authors are included in detail in almost all articles. If a source or link is missed it was not done on purpose – please notify the Editor to correct the omission.**

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www.ici-belgium.be