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DIARY

December 2023

Happy
New Year

PART A



Hope

**Taliban About to Buy
A North Korean
Nuclear Weapon**

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Topics that attracted attention!

EDITOR'S CORNER





Editorial

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

Editor-in-Chief
ICI C²BRNE Diary

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Dear Colleagues,

The situation remains the same: two wars (one proxy; one terrorist); a future war on the way (China – Taiwan), a (ongoing) pandemic; and a combination of dislike for peace and growing human stupidity.

The unexpected: Japan Meteorological Agency says a powerful 7.6-magnitude earthquake has struck Ishikawa Prefecture (01 Jan 2024) generating 5m high tsunami. This is where the Ishikawa nuclear power plant is located.

Olympic Games: The 2024 Summer Olympic Games will be held in Paris, France (16 July to 11 August). There will be a total of 35 venues, with fourteen sites hosting 24 Olympic sports located within 10km of the Olympic Village. The Games will take place in several locations around Paris such as les Yvelines, Hauts-de-Seine, Seine-et-Marne and Seine-Saint-Denis. However, the Paris 2024 Games will extend to many other areas of France, with the football tournament being played in six other cities (Bordeaux, Nantes, Lyon, Saint-Etienne, Nice and Marseille), sailing taking place in Marseille and surfing held at the Teahupo'o site in Tahiti. The opening ceremony will be held on the river Seine attracting 400,000 to 600,000 spectators. Innovation is not always clever, and this time is an invitation for terrorism.

Nuclear Europe: Europe needs to upgrade its military with nuclear weapons as Russia unsettles the West with its war against Ukraine, *Bild* reported on January 1, citing German military expert Carlo Masala. If Europe can no longer rely on America, it should upgrade its armies to ensure the security of the Continent. Masala's solution: "We need a *European nuclear umbrella*." Germany could pay for France's nuclear weapons program, he suggested, and in return, France would defend neighboring European states. Germany lost two world wars and Germany does not forget! It would be a lethal mistake to let Germany go nuclear. Russia is not a threat other than in their brains (e.g., German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius has called on Germans to prepare for a Russian invasion of Eastern Europe). A confidential document drawn up by the German Ministry of Defense (MoD) envisions how a possible escalation of the war in Ukraine could potentially develop. The hypothetical development involves Russia and NATO each gradually increasing troop build-up in eastern Europe until hundreds of thousands of troops face off against each other at the Suwałki Gap in June 2025—and leaves the outcome of the confrontation open. Berlin's exercise scenario ("Alliance Defense 2025"), according to the German daily *Bild*, heavily relies on a set of assumptions that would all need to occur before further escalation, but each component of the chain of events is presented as the next logical step.

Background Truths: (1) the Ukraine proxy war is about lithium; (2) the Gaza T-war escalation is about future demographics.

Gaza T-War: A number of countries (Malaysia, Turkey, Bolivia, Nicaragua, The Maldives, Venezuela, Namibia, Jordan, Morocco, Iran, Bangladesh, Pakistan and 48 more) have endorsed South Africa's Genocide Convention [Lawsuit](#) against Israel at the International Court of Justice.



ICI C²BRNE DIARY – January 2024

What if Hamas attacked their countries in the savage way they did in Israel? Would they respond in a more “civilized way”? The greatness of hypocrisy!

Proxy War: U.S. assistance for Ukraine in its war against Russia has stopped, the White House said on Thursday (12/01), as negotiations continued in Washington over an aid package that could be tied to an overhaul of border security measures. Perhaps this will shed a beam of hope for peace.

Yemen/Houthis: Top US CENTCOM officials are recommending to the White House to proceed with an air landing in western Yemen and to bomb the areas of Iran which are the points from which the Iranians send all kinds of supplies, from ammunition and spare parts to medical personnel to the Houthi militia. According to CENTCOM, only in this way will the action of the Houthis be suppressed and there will be safe passage of ships in the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. The involvement of ground forces involves landings and control of ports such as Hodaida in western Yemen. “Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I’m not sure about the universe” (Albert Einstein).

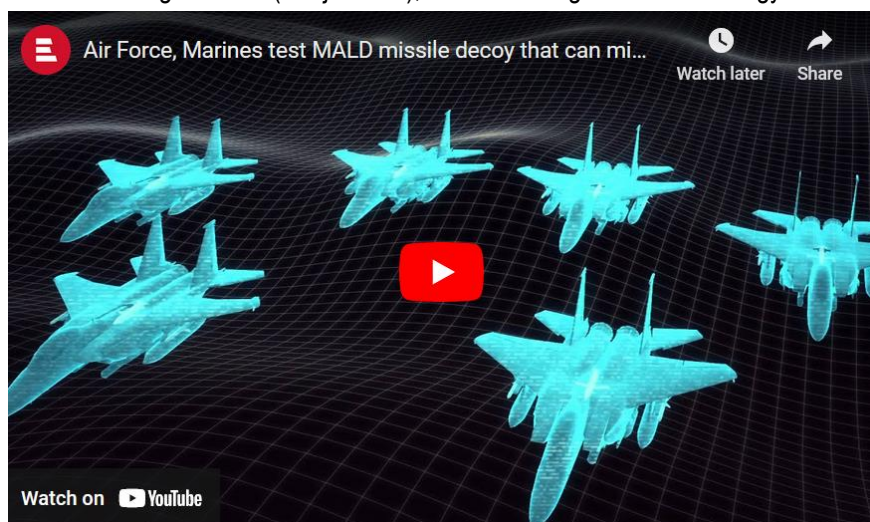
The Editor-in-Chief



Hiding in Plain Sight – New Material Disguises Missiles as Passenger Jets

Source: <https://i-hls.com/archives/122225>

Dec 26 – Chinese scientists developed a new device called the “Golden Veil” that deceives air defense systems by disguising cruise missiles as large aircraft (like jetliners), revolutionizing stealth technology.



According to Interesting Engineering, the “Golden Veil” comprises gold-plated fine metal threads that form a complex web. The South China Morning Post (SCMP) reports that this device can significantly improve the radar cross-section of a flying target and can mimic large commercial aircraft from certain angles.

Making missiles appear like other aircraft on radars is not a new concept- for example, the US uses radar reflectors on some missiles, making missiles appear like airplanes on radar screens. Additionally, some military aircraft that are designed to be stealthy carry Luneburg lenses, which are removable and enable the aircraft to become visible to civilian air traffic control while still hiding their true radar signature.

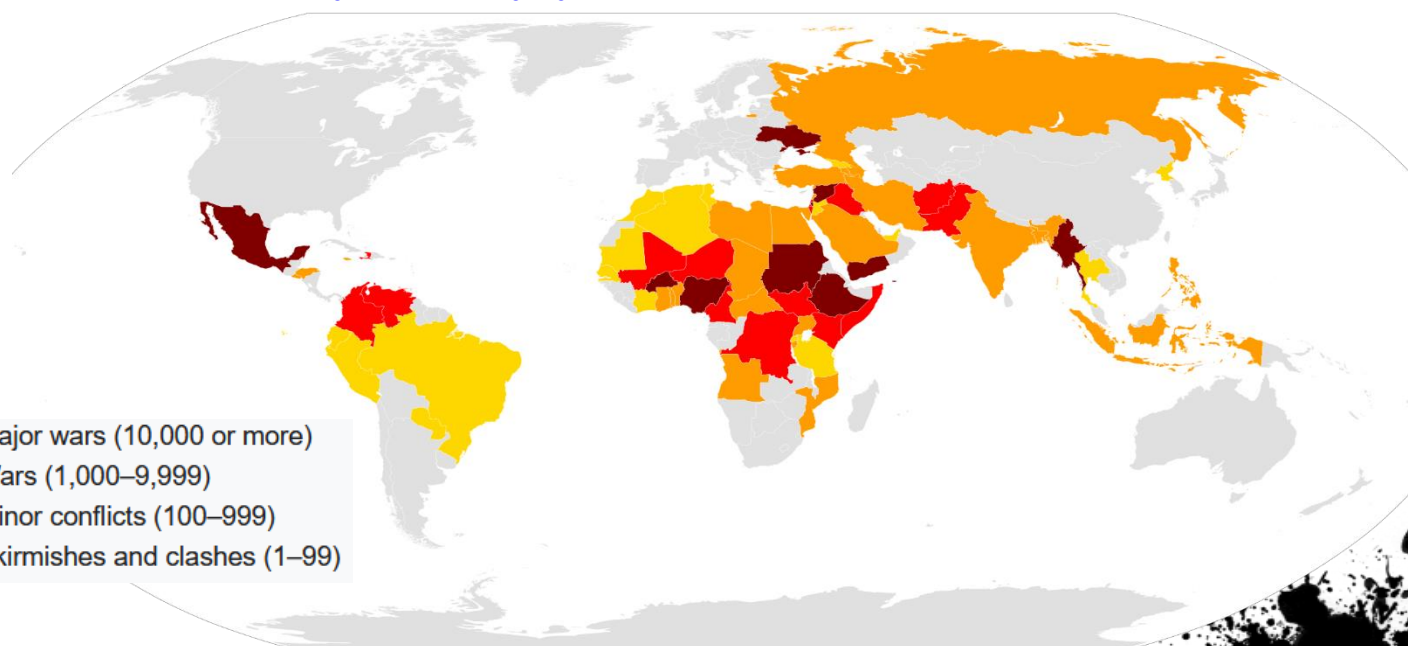
Lead researcher Zong Yali said in a paper: “Electronic warfare has become more complex than ever. New electronic countermeasure equipment and tools are entering service at an unprecedented speed,” and concluded that “they are changing the face of war.”

The folding and supportive structure of the veil is made of carbon fiber materials, which can randomly change shape and size, generating strange patterns that confuse computer or radar operators. One of its key advantages is its relatively low cost and weight, which make it more attractive than the expensive powerful transmitters that can also generate signals to confuse enemy radar.

The veil weighs only 1kg (significantly lighter than most reflectors currently being used or developed) and can be mounted on warships and land vehicles. The device being low cost, lightweight, and versatile means there will probably be a huge demand for it in the future, but the researchers report of difficulties when it comes to mass production but conclude that the technology is still under development.

Areas of the world currently experiencing armed conflict

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ongoing_armed_conflicts



Why Is the Gaza War Different?

By Jonathan Spyer

Source: <https://www.meforum.org/65400/why-is-the-gaza-war-different>

Dec 31 – The current Israeli operation in Gaza has led to an unprecedented wave of fury against the Jewish state in Western capitals. Massive demonstrations have brought hundreds of thousands of people to the streets in Washington, London, Paris and elsewhere. Muslim residents of these cities are clearly over-represented among the demonstrators, but they are not the only participants.

The official slogans of such protests tend to focus on a call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. Many of the banners and slogans on display, however, are unambiguous in their support for Hamas, the Islamist movement that governs Gaza and which carried out the Oct. 7 massacres that precipitated the current war.

The scale and volume of these protests are without precedent. The Gaza war itself, however, and the massacre that preceded it, are neither unique nor without very recent parallel. This raises an interesting question as to the reasons for the particular virulence and fury currently directed against the Israeli war effort.

The closest recent parallel to the current Gaza war, both in terms of the actions that triggered it and regarding the way it is being conducted from a military point of view is the U.S.-led Coalition's war against Islamic State in the period 2014-19. This war indeed contained a number of episodes of urban combat that directly resemble the current action being undertaken by the Israel Defense Forces in the Gaza Strip.

Mosul and Gaza

I am one of the fairly small group of journalists who covered the ISIS war from close up and who are currently engaged in reporting on the Gaza war. Both the similarities in the wars and the enormous difference in Western perception of them are striking.

Regarding the actions that triggered the conflicts, the similarities are unmistakable. In each case, an Arab movement of Sunni political Islam set out on a campaign of wholesale slaughter against a non-Arab and non-Muslim population in the Levant: Kurdish-speaking Yazidis in the ISIS case, Israeli Jews in that of Hamas.

But can one usefully compare the 21st century, Start-Up Nation, Westernized Israelis with the beleaguered, impoverished non-Arab minorities of northern Syria? The answer is yes. The similarity lies not in the area of their technological development, but rather in the intentions of their enemies towards them.

This became apparent on Oct. 7, 2023. For around 12 hours on that day, the ultra-modern technological defense structures of the State of Israel malfunctioned and ceased to operate. In that mercifully short period, there was little to differentiate between the treatment meted out to the Israeli Jewish communities of the "Gaza envelope," and that afforded the non-Arab, non-Muslim minorities that faced the onslaught of ISIS on the Nineveh Plains in the summer of 2014.

I was in the Gaza area on Oct. 8, 2023, and in Syria in August 2014. The murderous, indiscriminate slaughter that triggered the ISIS and Hamas wars was of a piece.

When one turns to look at the response, there are also clear parallels. The war to destroy Islamic State required the conquest of an area far larger than that of the Gaza Strip. But in the episodes of urban combat which this included, the similarities are striking.

The current Israeli campaign in Gaza particularly resembles the Coalition's battle against ISIS in the Iraqi city of Mosul. The latter was the largest urban center that the ISIS jihadis controlled. Getting them out of there took nine months of fighting. The brunt on the ground was borne by units of the Iraqi armed forces, with U.S. air support crucial to their eventual success.

The Mosul fighting—involving the slow enveloping by conventional infantry and armored forces of a well-dug-in jihadi enemy—closely resembled what has been taking place in Gaza since the Israeli ground incursion began on Oct. 27.

The Ratio of the Dead

Examination of the casualty rates of civilian and military dead in Mosul and currently in Gaza further indicates the similarities. In both cases, the figures must be treated with some skepticism.

Regarding Mosul, estimates vary widely. Figures for the number of ISIS fighters killed range from 7,000 to 25,000. Regarding the number of civilians killed, again, the span is wide. At the lower end, the *Associated Press* quoted figures suggesting between 9,000 and 11,000 civilians died in the course of the Mosul fighting. The Iraqi Kurdish Asayish intelligence service, meanwhile, estimates that around 40,000 civilians were killed. In terms of ratio, this means that estimates suggest that there were anywhere between one and four civilians killed in Mosul for each ISIS fighter slain. Regarding Gaza, the Hamas-controlled Health Ministry in the Strip claims that 20,000 Gazans have been killed so far in the Israeli incursion. The 'ministry' records that all those killed are civilians, i.e., it asks observers to believe that not a single Hamas fighter



has lost his life in the fighting. Ron Ben-Yishai, most veteran of Israel's war correspondents (and very far from an apologist for the current Israeli government), quoted Israeli military sources this week as estimating that somewhere between 7,000 and 9,000 Hamas fighters have been killed in the fighting. In so far as it can be currently ascertained, the ratio of civilian to military dead in Gaza appears then to broadly resemble that of Mosul. So similar precipitating events, and comparable military campaigns. Yet the response in the West has been starkly different. No one demonstrated for the civilians killed by coalition bombing during the ISIS war (I personally witnessed enormous mass graves in Raqqa city, rapidly dug by Islamic State to bury the victims of that bombing). There were no furious crowds in Western cities denouncing "genocide." Most in the West understood, rather, that the deeds of Islamic State and its ideology made it necessary that it be removed from power, in spite of the undoubted ugliness and the deaths of innocents that this would involve. So, what's the answer? Why this stark contrast? It is difficult not to conclude that the unique place of the Jew in parts of both Islamic and Western political culture and consciousness lies somewhere at the root of the cause. Perhaps some more pleasant explanation can be found. The discrepancy, in any case, is obvious, and enormous.

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

USA Today ...





Is It Time to Sink the Iranian Navy?

By Michael Rubin

Source: <https://www.meforum.org/65401/is-it-time-to-sink-the-iranian-navy>

Dec 30 – On Dec. 23, 2023, the Pentagon reported [Iran](#) had directly targeted international shipping. "The motor vessel CHEM PLUTO, a Liberia-flagged, Japanese-owned, and Netherlands-operated chemical tanker was struck at approximately 10 a.m. local time today... by a one-way attack drone fired from Iran," a spokesman said. While the Lebanese [Hezbollah](#), the Yemen-based [Houthis](#), and Gaza-based Hamas have previously targeted shipping with drones and missiles, the Iranian leadership traditionally denies responsibility. Tehran's proxy warfare constitutes a core component of its strategy of plausible deniability.



Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps](#) have long viewed the Iranian navy, alongside the IRGC's external operation Qods Force, as twin pillars of Iran's force projection, especially after the 2007 decision by then-IRGC chief Mohammad Ali Jafari to redirect the broader IRGC toward internal repression.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps](#) have long viewed the Iranian navy, alongside the IRGC's external operation Qods Force, as twin pillars of Iran's force projection, especially after the 2007 decision by then-IRGC chief Mohammad Ali Jafari to redirect the broader IRGC toward internal repression.

On July 23, 2011, Khamenei visited Iran's main naval base in Bandar Abbas and [declared](#), "Both the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy and the Revolutionary Guards' Navy are the symbols of the might of the Iranian nation." His visit coincided with the return of an Iranian submarine from a 68-day deployment to the Red Sea, a region his lieutenants subsequently declared within Iran's strategic boundaries.

Shortly after, the main IRGC newspaper interviewed Ali Fadavi, the head of the IRGC navy, who explained, "The military power of the United States is maritime. Naturally, the main battlefield is the sea." This is why, after President Barack Obama repeatedly offered an "outstretched hand" to Tehran, Khamenei responded by demanding that the United States must first abandon the "iron fist under the velvet glove," a metaphorical reference to the U.S. Navy. As the IRGC navy hijacked cargo ships, attached limpet mines to others, and even detained U.S. sailors, the Obama administration rationalized, falsely blamed rogues, or otherwise downplayed Iranian behavior. Their logic was that to hold Iran to account might erode support for an already shaky nuclear deal.

The lesson Iran took was not American sincerity but rather American weakness. This is why first Obama's and then President Joe Biden's outreach made the region more dangerous: Ideology and overconfidence, not water and oil, cause war in the Middle East. The Islamic republic concluded America was a paper tiger. Deterrence disappeared.

The U.S. has been here before. In 1980, Iraq invaded Iran. The Islamic republic initially took a beating. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's purges had decimated the Iranian military, and sanctions prevented the delivery of jet fighters that the shah had purchased in his final years. Iran also could not get spare parts for the military systems it did have. On Nov. 27, 1980, the Iranian navy launched "Operation Morvarid," a Pearl Harbor-like air and sea attack that took out the Iraqi navy. It was the adrenaline Khomeini and the IRGC needed to continue the war. To date, Iran still celebrates "Navy Day" on Morvarid's anniversary.

In some ways, though, Morvarid was a Pyrrhic victory by infusing the Iranian navy with unmerited confidence. The IRGC convinced itself it could take on the U.S. Navy, especially after the U.S. began reflagging and escorting Kuwaiti tankers. After the USS *Samuel B. Roberts* hit a mine, President Ronald Reagan had enough. He ordered [Operation Praying Mantis](#) to take out Iranian oil platforms. When the Iranian navy responded, the U.S. sank five of its ships. The Iranian military learned the price of defying the U.S. Navy or attacking shipping. It is time to reteach that lesson. The White House and Pentagon believe sporadic retaliation against Iranian proxies sends a signal, but it is the wrong one: They signal Iran can act with impunity. The Iranian regime looks down on Arabs and believes their lives are expendable.





According to the Iranian news outlet IRIB News, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy received 110 indigenously made combat speedboats on December 11 during a ceremony in Bandar Abbas. This is the seventh delivery of such vessels. Their speed has climbed from 55 knots to 75 and 90 knots, with the next stage reaching 110 knots. The boats are equipped with missiles and rockets and are capable of operating efficiently under the IRGC's indigenous radar network.

If Biden truly wants peace, he cannot simply absorb Iranian blows. Instead, he must eliminate the Iranian navy. He should publicly warn Iranian sailors to defect, desert, or die. Navy SEALs might disable at sea Iran's already [accident-prone](#) ships. The U.S. might take offline Iran's submarine base at Jask, an isolated town far from Iran's main population centers.

Americans self-flagellate, but it was Iranian insincerity that condemned diplomacy to fail. Peace now requires meaningful deterrence. Sinking the Iranian navy would be a good place to start.

[Michael Rubin](#) is director of policy analysis at the Middle East Forum and a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: I love pompous titles! But it is also useful to immerse tongue to brain from time to time! By the way, how many wars the US have won after the WWII?

Plagues, Cyborgs, and Supersoldiers: The Human Domain of War

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20240103-plagues-cyborgs-and-supersoldiers-the-human-domain-of-war>

Jan 03 – A complex, high-threat landscape is emerging in which future wars might be fought with humans controlling hyper-sophisticated machines with their thoughts; the military-industrial base is disturbed by synthetically generated, genomically targeted plagues; and the future warfighter goes beyond the baseline genome to become an enhanced warfighter who is capable of survival in the harshest of combat environments.

The authors of a new [report](#) from the [RAND Corporation](#) examine the existing and potential future uses of biotechnology in warfare and battle and look at the human body as a warfighting domain. They envision a future in which biotechnology is used by both state and nonstate actors to affect warfighting. Sophisticated future actors may use pathogens, brain-computer interfaces (BCIs), genomic enhancements, and wearable technology to supplement and strengthen warfighters.

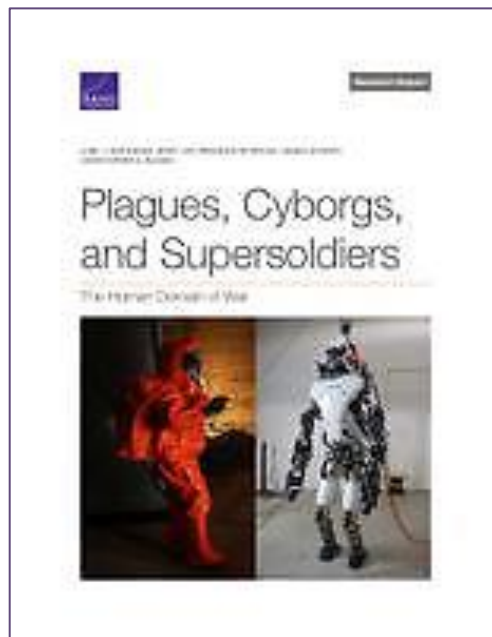


Key Findings

- ❖ Several countries have advantages—when compared with the United States—in their abilities to deal with the effects of a globally released, person-to-person transmissible bioweapon.
- ❖ State actors are more likely to use person-to-person transmissible bioweapons than they are to use nontransmissible ones because it is inherently difficult to identify the natural or artificial origins of person-to-person transmissible pathogens.
- ❖ Internet of Bodies (IoB) technology will continue to advance, and the United States must be especially cognizant that any deployed technology can also be hacked.
- ❖ Genomic surveillance is the most likely near-term technology to affect warfighting, but genomic enhancement could have profound consequences should it become more feasible technically.
- ❖ State actors may find the inherent ambiguity of origins for person-to-person transmissible pathogens to be a strategic asset.

Recommendations

- ❖ Governments should revise the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) to include strong protections, such as independent monitoring of biosafety level (BSL)–rated laboratories in a manner akin to chemical and nuclear weapons treaties. Failing BWC revisions, the United States should pursue stronger bilateral agreements for biosafety.
- ❖ Governments should continue scrutinizing adversary biotechnology advancements to identify and publicize BWC violations.
- ❖ Members of Congress should resist anti-vaccine populism that is at the expense of military readiness.
- ❖ The U.S. government should continue to be vigilant about entities that misuse biotechnologies and should continue working to enhance the information security of IoB devices.
- ❖ Stakeholders should focus the allocation of funding on projects to identify and manage risks and opportunities arising from genomic surveillance.
- ❖ DoD should develop clear guidance on integrating biological warfighting capabilities.
- ❖ DoD should develop warfighting conventions on the use of IoB devices, particularly BCIs.
- ❖ DoD should develop ways to employ genomic surveillance for improvements in military personnel selection or assignments.
- ❖ Stakeholders should research mitigation strategies for novel pathogen potentialities to anticipate and counter adversary biotechnology threats.



Why I am now a Christian

By Ayaan Hirsi Ali

Source: <https://unherd.com/2023/11/why-i-am-now-a-christian/>

November 2023 – In 2002, I discovered a 1927 lecture by Bertrand Russell entitled “Why I am Not a Christian”. It did not cross my mind, as I read it, that one day, nearly a century after he delivered it to the South London branch of the National Secular Society, I would be compelled to write an essay with precisely the opposite title.

The year before, I had publicly condemned the terrorist attacks of the 19 men who had hijacked passenger jets and crashed them into the twin towers in New York. They had done it in the name of my religion, Islam. I was a Muslim then, although not a practising one. If I truly condemned their actions, then where did that leave me? The underlying principle that justified the attacks was religious, after all: the idea of Jihad or Holy War against the infidels. Was it possible for me, as for many members of the Muslim community, simply to distance myself from the action and its horrific results?

At the time, there were many eminent leaders in the West — politicians, scholars, journalists, and other experts — who insisted that the terrorists were motivated by reasons other than the ones they



and their leader Osama Bin Laden had articulated so clearly. So, Islam had an alibi. This excuse-making was not only condescending towards Muslims. It also gave many Westerners a chance to retreat into denial. Blaming the errors of US foreign policy was easier than contemplating the possibility that we were confronted with a religious war. We have seen a similar tendency in the past five weeks, as millions of people sympathetic to the plight of Gazans seek to rationalise the October 7 terrorist attacks as a justified response to the policies of the Israeli government.

When I read Russell's lecture, I found my cognitive dissonance easing. It was a relief to adopt an attitude of scepticism towards religious doctrine, discard my faith in God and declare that no such entity existed. Best of all, I could reject the existence of hell and the danger of everlasting punishment.

Russell's assertion that religion is based primarily on fear resonated with me. I had lived for too long in terror of all the gruesome punishments that awaited me. While I had abandoned all the rational reasons for believing in God, that irrational fear of hellfire still lingered. Russell's conclusion thus came as something of a relief: "When I die, I shall rot."

To understand why I became an atheist 20 years ago, you first need to understand the kind of Muslim I had been. I was a teenager when the Muslim Brotherhood penetrated my community in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1985. I don't think I had even understood religious practice before the coming of the Brotherhood. I had endured the rituals of ablutions, prayers and fasting as tedious and pointless.

The preachers of the Muslim Brotherhood changed this. They articulated a direction: the straight path. A purpose: to work towards admission into Allah's paradise after death. A method: the Prophet's instruction manual of do's and don'ts — the *halal* and the *haram*. As a detailed supplement to the Qur'an, the *hadeeth* spelled out how to put into practice the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, God and the devil. The Brotherhood preachers left nothing to the imagination. They gave us a choice. Strive to live by the Prophet's manual and reap the glorious rewards in the hereafter. On this earth, meanwhile, the greatest achievement possible was to die as a martyr for the sake of Allah. The alternative, indulging in the pleasures of the world, was to earn Allah's wrath and be condemned to an eternal life in hellfire. Some of the "worldly pleasures" they were decrying included reading novels, listening to music, dancing, and going to the cinema — all of which I was ashamed to admit that I adored.

The most striking quality of the Muslim Brotherhood was their ability to transform me and my fellow teenagers from passive believers into activists, almost overnight. We didn't just say things or pray for things: we *did* things. As girls we donned the burka and swore off Western fashion and make-up. The boys cultivated their facial hair to the greatest extent possible. They wore the white dress-like *tawb* worn in Arab countries or had their trousers shortened above their ankle bones. We operated in groups and volunteered our services in charity to the poor, the old, the disabled and the weak. We urged fellow Muslims to pray and demanded that non-Muslims convert to Islam. During Islamic study sessions, we shared with the preacher in charge of the session our worries. For instance, what should we do about the friends we loved and felt loyal to but who refused to accept our *dawa* (invitation to the faith)? In response, we were reminded repeatedly about the clarity of the Prophet's instructions. We were told in no uncertain terms that we could not be loyal to Allah and Muhammad while also maintaining friendships and loyalty towards the unbelievers. If they explicitly rejected our summons to Islam, we were to hate and curse them.

Here, a special hatred was reserved for one subset of unbeliever: the Jew. We cursed the Jews multiple times a day and expressed horror, disgust and anger at the litany of offences he had allegedly committed. The Jew had betrayed our Prophet. He had occupied the Holy Mosque in Jerusalem. He continued to spread corruption of the heart, mind and soul.

You can see why, to someone who had been through such a religious schooling, atheism seemed so appealing. Bertrand Russell offered a simple, zero-cost escape from an unbearable life of self-denial and harassment of other people. For him, there was no credible case for the existence of God. Religion, Russell argued, was rooted in fear: "Fear is the basis of the whole thing — fear of the mysterious, fear of defeat, fear of death." As an atheist, I thought I would lose that fear. I also found an entirely new circle of friends, as different from the preachers of the Muslim Brotherhood as one could imagine. The more time I spent with them — people such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins — the more confident I felt that I had made the right choice. For the atheists were clever. They were also a great deal of fun. So, what changed? Why do I call myself a Christian now?

Part of the answer is global. Western civilisation is under threat from three different but related forces: the resurgence of great-power authoritarianism and expansionism in the forms of the Chinese Communist Party and Vladimir Putin's Russia; the rise of global Islamism, which threatens to mobilise a vast population against the West; and the viral spread of woke ideology, which is eating into the moral fibre of the next generation. We endeavour to fend off these threats with modern, secular tools: military, economic, diplomatic and technological efforts to defeat, bribe, persuade, appease or surveil. And yet, with every round of conflict, we find ourselves losing ground. We are either running out of money, with our national debt in the tens of trillions of dollars, or we are losing our lead in the technological race with China.

But we can't fight off these formidable forces unless we can answer the question: what is it that unites us? The response that "God is dead!" seems insufficient. So, too, does the attempt to find solace in "the rules-based liberal international order". The only credible answer, I believe, lies in our desire to uphold the legacy



of the Judeo-Christian tradition. That legacy consists of an elaborate set of ideas and institutions designed to safeguard human life, freedom and dignity — from the nation state and the rule of law to the institutions of science, health and learning. As Tom Holland has shown in his marvellous book [Dominion](#), all sorts of apparently secular freedoms — of the market, of conscience and of the press — find their roots in Christianity.

And so I have come to realise that Russell and my atheist friends failed to see the wood for the trees. The wood is the civilisation built on the Judeo-Christian tradition; it is the story of the West, warts and all. Russell's critique of those contradictions in Christian doctrine is serious, but it is also too narrow in scope. For instance, he gave his lecture in a room full of (former or at least doubting) Christians in a Christian country. Think about how unique that was nearly a century ago, and how rare it still is in non-Western civilisations. Could a Muslim philosopher stand before any audience in a Muslim country — then or now — and deliver a lecture with the title "Why I am not a Muslim"? In fact, [a book](#) with that title exists, written by an ex-Muslim. But the author published it in America under the pseudonym Ibn Warraq. It would have been too dangerous to do otherwise. To me, this freedom of conscience and speech is perhaps the greatest benefit of Western civilisation. It does not come naturally to man. It is the product of centuries of debate within Jewish and Christian communities. It was these debates that advanced science and reason, diminished cruelty, suppressed superstitions, and built institutions to order and protect life, while guaranteeing freedom to as many people as possible. Unlike Islam, Christianity outgrew its dogmatic stage. It became increasingly clear that Christ's teaching implied not only a circumscribed role for religion as something separate from politics. It also implied compassion for the sinner and humility for the believer. Yet I would not be truthful if I attributed my embrace of Christianity solely to the realisation that atheism is too weak and divisive a doctrine to fortify us against our menacing foes. I have also turned to Christianity because I ultimately found life without any spiritual solace unendurable — indeed very nearly self-destructive. Atheism failed to answer a simple question: what is the meaning and purpose of life? Russell and other activist atheists believed that with the rejection of God we would enter an age of reason and intelligent humanism. But the "God hole" — the void left by the retreat of the church — has merely been filled by a jumble of irrational quasi-religious dogma. The result is a world where modern cults prey on the dislocated masses, offering them spurious reasons for being and action — mostly by engaging in virtue-signalling theatre on behalf of a victimised minority or our supposedly doomed planet. The line often attributed to G.K. Chesterton has turned into a prophecy: "When men choose not to believe in God, they do not thereafter believe in nothing, they then become capable of believing in anything." In this nihilistic vacuum, the challenge before us becomes civilisational. We can't withstand China, Russia and Iran if we can't explain to our populations why it matters that we do. We can't fight woke ideology if we can't defend the civilisation that it is determined to destroy. And we can't counter Islamism with purely secular tools. To win the hearts and minds of Muslims here in the West, we have to offer them something more than videos on TikTok. The lesson I learned from my years with the Muslim Brotherhood was the power of a unifying story, embedded in the foundational texts of Islam, to attract, engage and mobilise the Muslim masses. Unless we offer something as meaningful, I fear the erosion of our civilisation will continue. And fortunately, there is no need to look for some new-age concoction of medication and mindfulness. Christianity has it all.

That is why I no longer consider myself a Muslim apostate, but a lapsed atheist. Of course, I still have a great deal to learn about Christianity. I discover a little more at church each Sunday. But I have recognised, in my own long journey through a wilderness of fear and self-doubt, that there is a better way to manage the challenges of existence than either Islam or unbelief had to offer.

[Ayaan Hirsi Ali](#) is an UnHerd columnist. She is also a research fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, Founder of the AHA Foundation, and host of *The Ayaan Hirsi Ali Podcast*. Her new book is *Prey: Immigration, Islam, and the Erosion of Women's Rights*.

This Kinetic Weapon Can Disable Tanks with the Lightest Impact

Source: <https://i-hls.com/archives/122318>

Jan 04 – Scientists from China claim to have developed a new high-speed kinetic energy weapon that could shake apart a tank. What's more, the new 20 kg weapon only needs to land a glancing blow to do so.

The study, which follows an in-depth assessment of kinetic weapons through experiments and numerical simulations by the research team, states that the new solid spherical projectile can travel at Mach 4 and carries around roughly 7 kilowatt-hours of electricity. Although it may seem improbable that a tank weighing up to 60 tons and protected by thick layers of armor could be disabled by such a small amount of energy, the researchers seem to be convinced of their findings. It seems that unlike traditional anti-tank weapons that require high speed, penetrative capability, and a large number of



explosives to defeat a tank, high-speed kinetic projectiles can potentially achieve lethal damage even upon light contact.



According to Interesting Engineering, the team discovered during the simulations that while the tank appeared outwardly undamaged on impact, its internal parts were irreparably harmed. More specifically, the bolts that connected important equipment to the inner cabin wall would fracture, and even if the crew survived the impact, they could not return the tank to its functioning combat state. When it comes to assessing the damage caused by kinetic projectiles as part of the research, the team reportedly discovered that the task was much more challenging than expected. When evaluating the damage caused by conventional armor-piercing rounds the testing could be easily done on a piece of alloy armor, but testing for kinetic projectiles requires considering the structure of the entire tank. The reason for this issue is that the shock wave generated by the impact travels through the entire vehicle in a very complex manner which causes stress to concentrate in areas like bolts- leading to distortion or even fracture.

ARGUMENT *An expert's point of view on a current event.*



The United States Needs to Play Hardball With Turkey

A tough stance toward Ankara is the only way to defend U.S. regional interests and stop Erdogan's mercurial and manipulative policies.

By **Eric S. Edelman**, counselor at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments and a former U.S. ambassador to Turkey, and **Sinan Ciddi**, an associate professor of national security studies at Marine Corps University and a nonresident senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

The EU Is Willing to Go To War Over **Lithium?**

By **Phil Butler**

Source: <https://tallbloke.wordpress.com/2024/01/03/the-eu-is-willing-to-go-to-war-over-lithium/>



Jan 03 – The riddle of unhinged EU support for the Zelensky regime in Kyiv is now solved. Anyone inclined can unravel why the Germans, in particular, backstabbed Russia in the Minsk peace boondoggle. Lithium.

Energy Monitor's parent company, GlobalData, recently released [a report](#) showing that Europe's biggest lithium reserves lie in the Donbass region of Russia. The former Ukrainian Shevchenkivske field in the Donetsk region and the Kruta Balka block in the Zaporizhzhia region are now part of Russia. These reserves add tremendously to Russia's humongous Lithium deposits (now 1.5M metric tons) and solidify the country's top ten position globally. If we consider other BRICS nations' reserves, including China (2M metric tons), EU industry is at a leverage point.





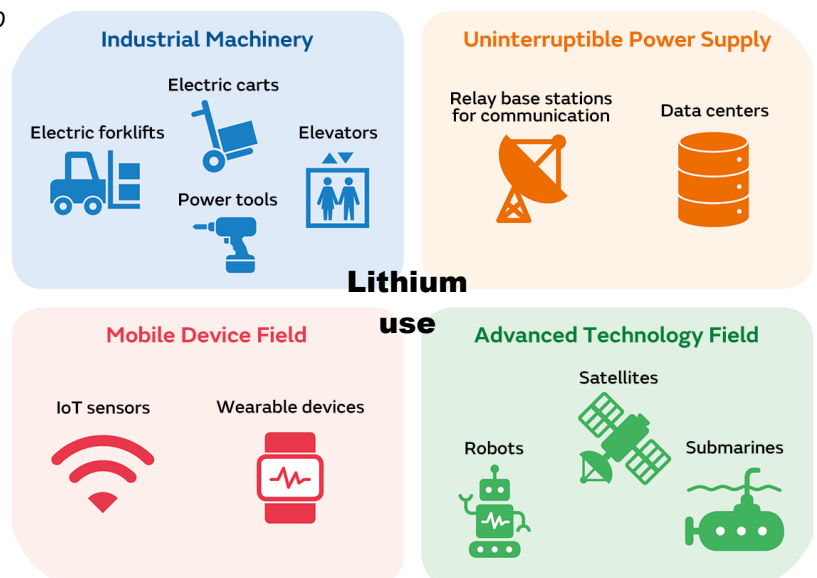
What's most significant about this is that the EU, and Germany in particular, desperately need the rare mineral to manufacture green energy technologies such as wind turbines, [electric vehicles](#), and a wide variety of electronic devices. This text from the Critical Minerals Thematic Intelligence Report overview is telling: "Critical minerals are key to transitioning to a low-carbon world. There are over 70 countries globally that have set net-zero targets and pledged to lower their emissions. However, these widespread measures for a greener future are straining natural resources, especially the minerals required to produce energy transition technologies such as electric vehicles (EVs) and solar panels..."

The report goes on to reveal how these rare minerals are monopolized by just a few regions and how supply chain problems affect their recovery and distribution. In short, if Europe does not procure more Lithium, the energy transition EU President Ursula von der Leyen toots her horn about every other day will either be delayed or made unfeasible because of demand shortages.

While the United States, Australia, and a few Latin American countries hold the lion's share of Lithium reserves, EU access to these supplies will be

expensive. In addition, the U.S. and these emerging nations will surely use the biggest part of their reserves for domestic needs. The demand (need) for European Lithium supply is so intense, German CDU MP Roderich Kiesewetter came right out and admitted the Russia-Ukraine conflict is all about the 500,000 tons or more of the mineral under the ground of the Donbass region. Kiesewetter said, "The European Union supports Ukraine because of lithium deposits in the Donbass." The politician also took note of the Donbass being part of Russia now, means Berlin's dependence on Moscow.

Kiesewetter, a retired colonel, is also suggesting that Germany provide Zelensky's regime with the highly accurate Taurus cruise missiles, which have a 500km range. The Swedish/German air-launched missile



carries a 1,100-pound warhead and is essentially a bunker-buster type weapon. The missiles would be far more useful for Zelensky's remaining Nazi battalions than a few rusty old Leopard tanks. What the MP's statements mean, however, is that Germany and the EU intend on taking Ukraine's vast resources by force now. The Euromaidan Coup only got the Western elites' feet in the door, and now the singular order has few options left since the failed Ukraine offensive.

The EU commissars are in the process of slitting their own throats. Just the other day, the commission passed another round of sanctions aimed at Russia's luxury diamond exports to the bloc. This will not affect the average EU citizen, but the upper-middle class and the wealthy will have to fork over more Euros to get pretty round diamonds. The Americans (or British) blowing up the gas pipelines, the potential for grain shortages in the EU, and other key minerals Russia and nations friendly to her export begin to take their toll on an already shaky confederation of member states.

Consider what EU member states manufacture and export to elevate their GNP. In the [lists here](#), you'll click on two vital exports. Cars and/or refined petroleum are vital to every country. Cars are, by far, the biggest import and export commodities. So, when these autos finally go electric, just imagine how desperate EU industry and consumers will be for Lithium! The Europeans will flounder if forced to import quantities of this strategic mineral from distant sources that have their own batteries to make. If there is a WWII over the Russia/Ukraine situation, I am sure we'll be able to name it "The Great Lithium War."

Phil Butler, is a policy investigator and analyst, a political scientist and expert on Eastern Europe, he's an author of the recent bestseller "[Putin's Praetorians](#)" and other books. He writes exclusively for the online magazine "[New Eastern Outlook](#)".

Outrage in Iran after woman whipped for refusing to wear hijab

Source: <https://www.euronews.com/2024/01/08/outrage-in-iran-after-woman-whipped-for-refusing-to-wear-hijab>



Jan 08 – The flogging of an Iranian woman who refused to wear the mandatory hijab has sparked widespread horror and condemnation. Iranian authorities carried out the sentence against **Roya Heshmati** last Wednesday, prompting a torrent of outrage on social media. Mazyar Tataei, Heshmati's lawyer, told local newspaper Shargh that his client was detained at her home in April by so-called morality police, who confiscated her mobile phone and laptop and placed her in detention for 11 days.

He added that initially, Heshmati was sentenced to 13 years and nine months in prison, a 112,500,000 rials fine and 148 lashes, but a review of the verdict brought the penalty down to 12,500,000 rials and 74 lashes. Heshmati shared the story of her sentence on Instagram, prompting a flood of reactions.



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The 23-year-old said that she removed her headscarf upon arriving at court to receive her sentence, throwing aside another that a group of female officers forcibly placed on her head.

In a harrowing story, she said she was eventually handcuffed and forced to wear a headscarf, shackled to a bed in a room that resembled a "gruesome" medieval torture chamber, and whipped on her shoulders, back, waist, thighs, calves and buttocks.

Heshmati said she tried not to show pain during the ordeal, whispering the words "In the name of women, in the name of life, the clothes of slavery are torn, our black night will dawn, and all the whips will be axed...", while lashes rained down upon her and the shackles bruised her wrists.

She was subsequently taken before the judge while a female officer ensured her headscarf remained in place. She described her conversation with the judge on Instagram, claiming he told her she could leave the country if she wanted to live differently.

"This country belongs to everyone," Heshmati said. "Let the law do its job; we will continue our resistance."

She said that she removed her headscarf upon leaving court. Mizan News Agency, affiliated with Iran's judiciary system, reported that Heshmati engaged in "behaviours outside the norm".

Additionally, it mentioned that she was "present in a very inappropriate condition on the streets of Tehran".

The term "inappropriate condition" likely refers to an image depicting her walking on the streets of Tehran without a headscarf, wearing a short-sleeved T-shirt and a long skirt.

Following the widespread reactions to the news, characterised as "violence and brutality by the authorities of the Islamic Republic", various figures expressed their condemnation, including artist and politician Zahra Rahnavaard, who, along with her husband former Prime Minister Mir Hossein Mousavi, has been under house arrest stating, "You lash Roya Heshmati, but with her awakened conscience and resilience, she laughs at you. I am disgusted with your governance."

In response to the escalating reactions to her story, Roya Heshmati shared a new post on Instagram, expressing gratitude for the solidarity shown. She said that she did not expect her story to gain such attention.

Hashemi clarified that she shared the story privately on her page, emphasising that she is not a "public figure" and has no interest in changing that status. As a result, she said she had decided to "voluntarily" deactivate her Facebook and Instagram accounts to avoid controversy.

EDITOR'S COMMENT:

The box was intentionally left blank.

Joe Broke The Planet – You Pay The Price

By Sam Faddis

Source: <https://andmagazine.substack.com/p/joe-broke-the-planet-you-pay-the>

Jan 09 – Ever since Joe Biden sat down in the White House a great many people, myself included, have been talking about the possible dire consequences down the road of a Biden Presidency. Putting a mentally incompetent Chinese puppet in the Oval Office seemed calculated to turn out badly. "Eventually, we will pay the price" has been the standard refrain.

"Eventually" is today.

The Iranians, via their Houthi surrogates, have [closed](#) the Red Sea. Ninety-five percent of the commercial shipping that would have normally transited the Red Sea and the Suez Canal is now taking the [long way](#) around Africa instead.



for years since 2010. Rahnavaard addressed the authorities, "You lash Roya Heshmati, but with her awakened conscience and resilience, she laughs at you. I am disgusted with your governance."





Shipping costs have [skyrocketed](#) by 60% already. Insurance costs are up 20%. You will pay the price for that at the pump, the grocery store, and in all your purchases. Orders of merchandise will be delayed by weeks in delivery.

The U.S. Navy is conducting a pointless and toothless exercise called *Operation Prosperity Guardian*. It accomplishes nothing. We shoot down cheap throwaway drones that cost less than \$2000 and junk missiles with 2 million dollar interceptors. The Houthi missile batteries on shore remain untouched and intact. Our forces across the Middle East are under almost continuous attack by other Iranian surrogates. Every once in a great while we strike a target of no real significance. Mostly, we pretend like it is not happening. We are at war. We are under continuous assault. We take no meaningful action to defend ourselves.

The Communist Chinese are ramping up for action against Taiwan. At least twenty Chinese [spy balloons](#) have passed over Taiwan in the last week. The CCP just

launched a "satellite" directly over Taiwan. That launch was initially mistaken for a missile attack on the island. Chinese officials are making almost continuous statements regarding the inevitability of "reunification" between the mainland and Taipei.

Bloomberg Economics just issued a report assessing the economic impact of a Chinese move on Taiwan. Bloomberg estimated the cost to the world economy at around \$10 billion. That's 10% of [world GDP](#). You won't sit that out warm and dry here in the United States. The whole world's economy will tank.

Yesterday China began live fire drills in the waters near Taiwan.

North Korea is making noises about a "showdown" with the United States and its allies. Kim Jong Un recently visited a factory making North Korean ballistic missiles and called for an increase in production. He is shipping arms to Russia, arming Hamas, and in discussions with the [Taliban](#) about providing them nuclear weapons.

There are unconfirmed reports that South Korea is moving troops and armored vehicles north to the DMZ with North Korea.



Inconvenient Truths by Jennifer Zeng 曾錚真言
@jenniferzeng97

Breaking: #China Will Conduct Live Firing Drills in East China Sea on Jan 8-9, Right Before #Taiwan's Election

According to Reuters, "China will conduct live firing drills in some areas in the East China Sea from 10 a.m. (0200 GMT) to 3 p.m. on Monday and Tuesday, according to the China maritime safety administration.

"No vessels are allowed to enter the designated area, the administration said in a statement on Monday.

"The drills are in the waters off the coast of Ningbo and Zhoushan, port cities that lie just south of the financial hub of Shanghai, said the statement."

I didn't find this statement on the website of China's Maritime Safety Administration, but I found another announcement issued on Jan 5, saying that from 16:00 (I guess Beijing time) to 16:00 on January 14, at Bohai Strait, northern Yellow Sea, in the range withing 38-51.7N121-38.2E, 38-34.2N121-38.2E, 38-33.9N121-07.9E, 38-48.2N121-14.1E, all entry is prohibited as there will be military tasks."

Since sitting down in the Oval Office Biden has waged war on the fossil fuel industry and done everything in his power to push us toward a "green economy." In practice that means making us more dependent on Communist China which has a stranglehold on the world's production of the rare earth minerals necessary for most "green" technologies. The Chinese produce 60% of the world's rare earth minerals, but they process 90% of the world's supply.



There have been limited efforts by the United States to break this monopoly and restart domestic production of rare earth minerals. That means developing our own processing capability. In response, the Chinese just **banned the export of their rare earth processing technology**. They [cut us off](#). They can stop the export of the minerals anytime they want. This entire “green” economy Biden has championed can be killed with an off switch in Beijing.

The Chinese have launched what amounts to invasions of the territorial waters of both Vietnam and the Philippines. In the case of the Philippines, the Chinese have physically attacked Filipino vessels. There has been no meaningful response by the United States. For the Philippines already the reality is that they have [lost control](#) over their territorial waters, which are now under Chinese occupation.

In December the Iranians initiated a threefold increase in the rate of nuclear enrichment. Rough estimates are that the [Iranians](#) now already have enough HEU to build at least three nuclear weapons. We do not begin to have the capability to detect the construction of these weapons in time to prevent it. The delivery systems already exist. Functionally, we are now in a world where we have to consider revolutionary Iran a nuclear-armed state.

In three years, we have gone from peace, stability, and a booming economy to chaos. We are not facing the possibility that our standing in the world will be diminished. We are diminished. We are being attacked worldwide right now.

Joe did it. Joe broke the planet. But, as usual, you will pay the price.

Macron, in France's Game of Thrones, Plays a 34-Year-Old Trump Card Named Gabriel Attal

By Michel Gurfinkiel

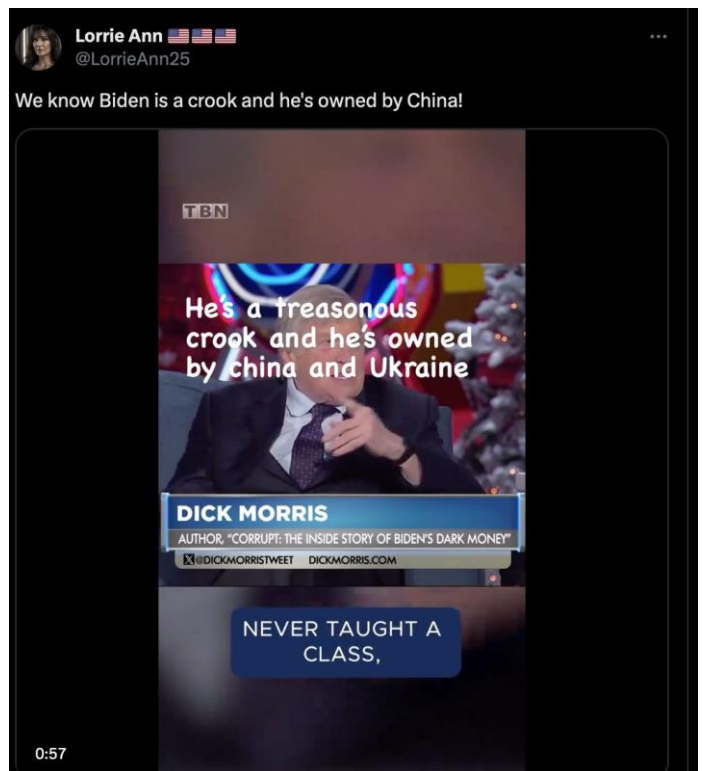
Source: <https://www.meforum.org/65435/macron-in-france-game-of-thrones-plays-a-34-year>

Jan 10 – At age 34, Gabriel Attal — who succeeds today Elisabeth Borne, 62 — is the youngest prime minister ever in French history. Until now, the record was held by Laurent Fabius, who had been appointed by President Mitterrand in 1984, at the age of 37.

Mr. Attal was probably groomed for his present task last summer, when he was transferred at President Macron's insistence to the ministry of Education from the ministry of Budget. On the face of it, that was hardly a promotion. The ministry of Education is commonly described as “mission impossible”: it is simply too big, too bureaucratic and too centralized — and handling too many issues — to be managed effectively. However, Mr. Attal's agenda was not really to salvage it, but rather to use it as the background of an ideological turn to the right.

Indeed, his first decision as Education minister was to ban *abaya* at public schools. A full-length female garment that conceals the body from shoulders to ankles, *abaya* is all the rage among French Muslim women and girls, either out of religious zeal, peer pressure, or ethnic pride. Non-Muslims, on the contrary, reject it almost unanimously as incompatible with the French way of life.

According to an Ifop poll for *Charlie Hebdo*, 81 percent of the French said the ban was the right decision. More significantly, self-described liberal or leftwing voters did not differ much on this issue from conservatives or right-wingers: 79 percent of the ecologists, 73 percent of the socialists, and even 58 percent of the leftwing radicals supported the ban.



Mr. Attal then doubled down on other issues: "Education means hard work," he insisted on December 5. Likewise, "teachers must be respected and obeyed," and school programs centered again around such basics as the French language, the study of national history, and mathematics. Here again, public opinion was on the minister's side. His own image as a tough, no-nonsense conservative was burnished. No doubt Mr. Attal is an ambitious young man. The twice-elected Mr. Macron — 2017 and 2022 — cannot run for a third mandate in 2027, under a somewhat demagogic constitutional amendment only introduced in 2008. No other centrist candidate looks charismatic enough in front of the rightwing populist, Marine Le Pen.

In 2027, Mr. Attal will be 38, almost the same age as Mr. Macron when, in 2017, he was first elected president. When combined with achievement, youth can be a decisive asset. Mr. Attal has already achieved more than Mr. Macron did at the same stage.

Mr. Attal was elected to the National Assembly at 28, became a junior minister of Education at 29, and the minister of the Budget at 33. Mr. Macron never ran for office prior to the 2017 presidential election and was, in 2016, made minister of the Economy at 36.

The new prime minister is quite good-looking (always an asset) and eloquent. On the other hand, he is gay and in partnership with Stéphane Séjourné, a 38-year-old member of the European Parliament; but Mr. Macron, whose wife Brigitte is 25 years older than him, has faced rumors about his own love life as well. Sexual orientation may not be a sensitive factor anymore in French politics, especially if the concerned person seems to lead a stable "monogamous" life.

The same may be said of religious roots. Since Mr. Attal's mother is an Eastern Orthodox Christian, he is not Jewish under traditional Jewish law, even if his father was a Sephardic Jew from North Africa; nor does he identify religiously with Judaism. He acknowledges having been subject to antisemitic verbal abuse because of his name, and feeling close to the French Jewish community for that matter. Yet Jewishness has ceased to be problematic in French politics. Nobody seems to care that the outgoing Prime Minister had a Jewish father and publicly identifies with the Jewish community, or that the chairwoman of the National Assembly, Yaël Braun-Privet, is Jewish; even on the Far Right, a Jewish journalist and writer, Eric Zemmour, rose to prominence two years ago. Things might change, however, if Islam gets truly assertive in the country.

Mr. Macron may have considered other politicians to replace Madame. Borne. The minister of the Interior, Gerald Darmanin, 40, was for a while a frontrunner. Yet he failed to garner a substantial majority last month for a new law on immigration. As for the minister of Finance, Bruno Le Maire, 54, he is not quite popular outside the business community.

Clearly, Mr. Attal is Mr. Macron's trump card in the French game of thrones.

Michel Gurfinkiel is the founder and president of the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute, a Milstein Writing Fellow at Middle East Forum, and editor emeritus of *Valeurs Actuelles*.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: What a fine example for the French upper-class young generation! Coming from a wealthy family, never worked in his life, limited to no experience, homosexual, and good-looking -the perfect recipe for success.

Aquellum – The new Saudi Arabia wonder!

Source: <https://www.neom.com/en-us/regions/aquellum>

wuau!



The Board of Directors of NEOM has announced [Aquellum](#), a luxury and experiential space embedded within the mountains, and the latest striking addition to the ongoing regional development in northwest Saudi Arabia. With its foundations steeped in cutting-edge technology, avant-garde architecture and forward-thinking concepts, Aquellum will offer guests a taste of futuristic living through its array of pioneering experiences.

Concealed from the outside along the Gulf of Aqaba coastline, Aquellum is hidden within a breathtaking, **450-meter-high mountain** range and represents a futuristic ecosystem that is harmoniously integrated into the natural surroundings. Crafted to inspire originality and imagination, Aquellum will push the boundaries of conventional design and construction possibilities.

To access Aquellum, visitors will embark on an extraordinary journey, beginning at the world's first floating marina. Here, guests will board a specially designed vessel to enter Aquellum through a concealed underground canal, unveiling a hidden community that offers an incredible sensory journey.

Once inside, visitors will be treated to an exhilarating, 100-meter-high vertical experience with an impressive courtyard space stretching from the water to the sky. This subterranean digitalized community creates vibrancy and interconnectivity through seamlessly blending hotel accommodation, apartments, retail spaces, leisure and entertainment zones and innovative hubs. A dynamic boulevard winds through the courtyard, connecting diverse social spaces, world-class hospitality, immersive arts, events, shopping and dining. A signature space, dubbed 'The



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Generator', houses unique research labs for disruptors, innovators, and creative thinkers, offering a platform where the future is reimaged.



An omnidirectional internal transit system facilitates easy access to upper floors, transporting residents and visitors to their homes and hotels, ascending to rooftop gardens with breathtaking coastal views.

Guided by its unwavering commitment to crafting spaces in nature that epitomize the future of luxury, innovation and lifestyle, Aquellum stands as a testament to the fusion of cutting-edge design and construction techniques.

Aligned with NEOM's commitment to conservation and innovation, Aquellum complements its coastal location. This new development follows recent announcements of [Leyja](#), [Epicon](#), [Siranna](#), [Utamo](#), and [Norlana](#), which are also sustainable tourism destinations located in the Gulf of Aqaba.

Leaked German Defense Document Sketches out Russian War Scenario

By Tamás Orbán

Source: <https://europeanconservative.com/articles/news/leaked-german-defense-document-sketches-out-russian-war-scenario/>

Jan 15 – A confidential document drawn up by the German Ministry of Defense (MoD) envisions how a possible escalation of the war in Ukraine could potentially develop. The hypothetical development involves Russia and NATO each gradually increasing troop build-up in eastern Europe until hundreds of thousands of troops face off against each other at the Suwałki Gap in June 2025—and leaves the outcome of the confrontation open.

Berlin's exercise scenario, [according to](#) the German daily *Bild*, heavily relies on a set of assumptions that would all need to occur before further escalation, but each component of the chain of events is presented as the next logical step.

The scenario, titled "Alliance Defense 2025," starts with Russia beginning a new wave of mobilizations by calling up an additional 200,000 recruits in February 2024, who then manage to weaken the Ukrainian positions along the line of contact in the next spring offensive. In July 2024, Russia would then begin covert cyber-attacks and other forms of hybrid warfare on the West and East Central Europe in particular, while inciting Russian-speaking minorities in Baltic countries. The political crisis in the Baltics would eventually be used to justify a massive military exercise (similar to the one in 2021), called 'Zapad 2024' in September, involving at least 50,000 Russian troops in Belarus and western Russia.



Responding to Western media and politicians' inevitable alarm, the document pictures Russia in October starting to spread propaganda of an impending NATO attack and continuing to build up troops in Belarus as well as shipping medium-range missiles to its Kaliningrad enclave. It would then become obvious that Moscow's ultimate goal is to occupy the Suwałki Gap—the Polish-Lithuanian land bridge between Belarus and Kaliningrad.

With everything prepared, the outline suggests, Russia would wait until the U.S. election to begin the second phase of its plan. Anticipating that a narrow defeat of President Biden and a heavily contested outcome would cripple the U.S. for at least a few months, Moscow could begin to induce artificial 'border conflicts' and deadly riots around the Gap in December 2024, to eventually repeat the 2022 invasion on NATO soil. While Poland and the Baltic countries would report an increasing threat and request immediate assistance from NATO, Moscow would use their actions to accuse the West of planning an invasion against Russia at the UN Security Council's emergency meeting in January, ordering even more troops in the area to 'defend' itself.

By March 2025, under this scenario, Russia has two tank divisions, a mechanized infantry division, and a deployable division headquarters lined up just outside of NATO borders, with over 70,000 troops in Belarus alone.

This would lead to a situation where, by May 2025, NATO has no other option but to approve "measures for credible deterrence" to forestall a Russian invasion of Poland and the Baltics. On "Day X," NATO orders the transfer of 300,000 troops to the area, including 30,000 Bundeswehr soldiers. The scenario ends thirty days after "Day X," but without specifying whether NATO's deterrence strategy worked or led to an open war between Russia and the West.

There's not much to suggest any of this will play out in real life, but the potential is there, nonetheless. We will have to wait and see whether the first assumption—a new wave of Russian mobilization ahead of a coming spring offensive—becomes a reality. So far, Moscow denies that it would plan to bring in any recruits besides the occasional volunteers, but [certain signs](#) are pointing toward the opposite. In any case, Berlin seems to take its assessment seriously, as last week, it [announced](#) a military exercise with armored infantry divisions between April 21-26th in Poland and Lithuania, the two countries flanking the Suwałki Gap.

While the scenario contains no big surprise to those familiar with wargames, the timing of the leak led analysts to [suggest](#) that it may have been intentional. The document signals to Moscow that Berlin is paying attention and is getting ready for confrontation while showing Europe's more reluctant countries that they need to take Russia seriously and that escalation is possible.

The leak might also be a message to the German people so that they understand the gravity of the situation. Recently, German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius [warned](#) that the country may only have 5-8 years to prepare for the next major conflict, hinting at the need to revisit compulsory military service as well. In case the Germans didn't understand what he meant, the leaked document paints a pretty good picture.

The Swedish government recently had a similar idea of preparing the population for the worst, although Stockholm's plan backfired spectacularly. Last week, [panic buying](#) ensued while teenagers and worried parents took to support hotlines after the government's ominous social media (including TikTok) campaign went live, telling Swedes that "[War is Coming](#)."

PM Ulf Kristersson's government ended up having to [apologize](#) for scaring children with the campaign, saying that they meant only to warn about a hypothetical but plausible scenario. Perhaps that's why Berlin chose to go the extra mile and leak its entire rationale instead of just running a similarly simple ad campaign. After all, it does want Germans to accept the new reality, but whether the threat is real is a different question.

[Tamás Orbán](#) is a political journalist for *The European Conservative*, based in Brussels. Born in Transylvania, he studied history and international relations in Kolozsvár, and worked for several political research institutes in Budapest. His interests include current affairs, social movements, geopolitics, and Central European security.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: Germany is envisioning a new world war in 2025. They did it once; they did it twice; they will never learn and neither the rest of the world! Of course, some might say that the military is always working on various scenarios but ...

The world in 2024

Source: https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-com/en_ql/topics/geostrategy/ey-2024-geostrategic-outlook-report.pdf

The late 2010s and early 2020s have been characterized by rising geopolitical tensions and significant policy shifts in key markets. Heading into the middle of the decade, the global environment will remain volatile and unstable.

As executives seek to anticipate and plan for geopolitical disruptions, two key themes will be important to keep in mind in 2024. The first theme is multipolarity. The geopolitical environment is increasingly likely to



be upended in a variety of geographies and issue areas. The future of the relationships between the great powers (the US, EU and China) remains uncertain. Geopolitical swing states will expand their influence regarding the topics on the global agenda and how issues are addressed. Emerging and frontier markets will be increasingly vocal about what they perceive to be double standards of Western governments. And smaller actors — including both governments and non-state actors — are likely to assert themselves both locally and regionally.

This multipolarity is likely to reinforce existing economic diversification trends and the importance of supply chain resiliency. These trends will be driven in large part by heightened competition between geopolitical blocs or alliance networks. At the same time, multipolarity will likely continue to create challenges in global policy coordination, elevating the uncertainty and severity of any transnational crises that may emerge or expand as the year unfolds.



Top 10 geopolitical developments in 2024

Click on each development number to read more.



There are two key themes for the top 10 geopolitical developments in 2024:

● Multipolarity ○ De-risking

The second theme is de-risking. Building on trends in recent years, governments will continue to reengage in or expand their reliance on industrial policy to promote greater domestic manufacturing of critical products. This coupling of economic policy with foreign or national security policies will become more prevalent and overt in 2024. Governments will seek to reduce global dependencies, prioritizing national security (broadly defined) over purely economic considerations when designing and implementing policies.

The extent of de-risking policies and regulations will vary across sectors, with the greatest focus on products that governments deem to be strategic. Companies that produce semiconductors, telecommunications networks, renewable energy technologies, electric vehicles (EVs) and biotechnologies are among those that will face more government intervention in their supply chains and investment decisions. More broadly, these economic security policies could fuel inflation and hinder the global spread of innovation.

Multipolarity and de-risking will manifest in many ways throughout the year, with the most visible and impactful areas for business making

our top 10 list of geopolitical developments in 2024.

Most of them will not be wholly new but rather an evolution of developments from previous years (see Figure 1 on page 3). In fact, all but one of the top 10 developments in 2023 are expected to evolve into various aspects of the key developments in 2024.



The top 10 developments in 2024 will also be important signposts in anticipating how globalization is likely to evolve in the coming years. In the future of globalization scenarios, EY analysis identified geopolitical relations and countries' economic policy stances as two key strategic uncertainties that will shape the global operating environment. The multipolar developments are likely to push the geopolitical environment toward more distinct blocs or networks of alliances. The de-risking developments point toward greater nationalist competition in economic policies, at least for strategic sectors, although in many cases these policies are organized around trading blocs. The outlook for 2024 is therefore a hardening of the trend in recent years toward a more fragmented global economy.

Is North Korea Preparing for War in 2024?

By Julian Ryall | Japan-based freelance journalist

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20240116-is-north-korea-preparing-for-war-in-2024>

Jan 16 – North Korean leader [Kim Jong Un](#) ended 2023 with a fiery policy speech to the Communist Party leadership, dispensing with the possibility of peaceful reunification with [South Korea](#) while characterizing the relationship as “between two hostile countries and two belligerents at war,” state-run news agency KCNA reported.

Kim called for the “exponential” expansion of North Korea’s nuclear arsenal and a [ramp-up of ballistic missile testing](#). He also pledged to [launch three new spy satellites](#).

In the speech, Kim accused [South Korea and the United States](#) of “reckless moves” in preparation for “invasion” and warned that a “war can break out at any time on the Korean peninsula.”

[North Korea](#) launched a record number of missiles in 2023, including what it claimed in December to be a nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) that could reach anywhere in the US. It also launched a rocket in late 2023 that put a spy satellite into orbit.

In its [latest launch on Sunday](#), the North said it successfully fired an intermediate-range hypersonic ballistic missile.

On January 6, Seoul said the [North fired at least 60 artillery rounds](#) into waters close to South Korea’s Yeonpyeong Island at the sea border off the west coast of the peninsula.

Additionally, US satellites have detected the modernization and expansion of the North Korean Manpho Unha Chemical Complex, linked to the production of chemicals used for missile fuel and reagents for nuclear weapons.

In December, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported that a [second nuclear reactor](#) is operational at Yongbyon and could be used to produce weapons-grade fuel.

Korean Situation “Most Dangerous” in Decades

A [recent article](#) published by 38 North, a North Korea analysis website run by the Washington-based Stimson Center think tank, has warned that Kim’s latest moves may [go beyond the usual bluster](#).

Robert Carlin, a former head of the Northeast Asia Division at the US State Department, and Siegfried Hecker, a professor of nonproliferation studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterrey, warn that the security situation on the Korean Peninsula is “more dangerous than it has been at any time since early June 1950,” when the Korean War broke out.

“That may sound overly dramatic, but we believe that, like his grandfather in 1950, Kim Jong Un has made a strategic decision to go to war,” the authors said.

“We do not know when or how Kim plans to pull the trigger, but the danger is already far beyond the routine warnings in Washington, Seoul and Tokyo about Pyongyang’s ‘provocations,’” the analysts said.

“We do not see the [war preparation themes](#) in North Korean media appearing since the beginning of last year as typical bluster,” they added.

What Has Changed?

The analysts said their warning is centered on the North Korean regime abandoning their long-held goal of “normalizing” relations with the United States. Pyongyang may now believe such normalization is impossible.

They argue that analysts and policymakers underestimate the importance of this normalization goal in providing a guardrail to Kim’s strategic thinking.

It is “crucially important” to understand “how central the goal of improving relations with the United States was to all three of the Kims who led North Korea,” the article said.

The North “completely abandoning that goal has profoundly changed the strategic landscape in and around Korea,” the analysts added.



ICI C²BRNE DIARY – January 2024

The failure of the 2019 Hanoi summit between Kim and former US President [Donald Trump](#) was a “traumatic loss of face for Kim.” Talks had centered on the possibility of sanctions relief in exchange for North Korea pledging to wind down its weapons program, neither of which panned out.

Five years later, North Korea believes that “the time is ripe for the status quo to be challenged,” the analysts said.

The North is developing ties with Russia and is supporting [Moscow’s war in Ukraine](#) with artillery rounds. At the same time, Pyongyang considers the US to be in a “global retreat.”



New super-large multiple rocket launchers are presented before a plenary meeting of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea at an undisclosed location, in a photo released on Sunday by North Korean state media. Photograph: North Korea's Korean Central News Agency/Reuters

Does North Korea Remain “Rational?”

However, other analysts are skeptical about whether North Korea is preparing to launch a war.

“Calls to arm for war are not unusual in North Korea,” said Garren Mulloy, a professor of international relations at Daito Bunka University in Tokyo and a specialist in military issues.

“We shouldn’t be smug that this is meaningless, but nor should we imagine that it means war,” he told DW.

The worry, he said, is that “any sign of weakness by the West” in the Middle East, Ukraine or elsewhere could give Kim the impression “that this may be an unrepeatable opportunity, too good to pass up.”

Ryo Hinata-Yamaguchi, an assistant professor of international relations at the University of Tokyo, agrees that the timing of a military adventure would not seem to favor North Korea at present.

“The North has made progress in cultivating China and Russia as allies, and I can see no reason why they would want to fight at this point in time,” he told DW.

“And while the North might rely on Moscow and Beijing for support, they do not trust them enough to be confident they would come to the North’s aid in the event of a war,” he added.

“My sense is that the North Korean leadership is not stupid and that Kim and his sister [Kim Yo Jong] are using words as strategic leverage to make an impact, elaborate actions that signal war without going that far,” he said.

“My big concern, however, is not so much a planned attack on South Korea or Japan, but saber-rattling that leads to misunderstandings and an unintended conflict.”



However, Carlin and Hecker insist that the world needs to seriously consider a worst-case scenario coming to pass and that the North “could be planning to move in ways that completely defy our calculations.”

This includes the “by-now routine argument that Kim Jong Un would not dare” launch an attack on South Korea or US military positions because he “knows” Washington and Seoul would “destroy his regime if he does so.”

“The literature on surprise attacks should make us wary of the comfortable assumptions that resonate in Washington’s echo chamber but might not have purchase in Pyongyang,” they write.

In turn, Mulloy said the narrative of North Korea having no options except war — because it failed to engage with the US — “jumps many gaps in logic and motivation.”

“Kim is no lunatic; he is very much a rational actor,” Mulloy said, pointing out that the North Korean dictator benefits from a closer alliance with Russia. According to the analyst, Kim’s regime is presently not showing any signs of internal dissent or collapse.

Could an Extremist Soon Head a German State Government?

By Hans Pfeifer

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20240117-could-an-extremist-soon-head-a-german-state-government>

Jan 17 – The revelation this month of secret plans by politicians from the [Alternative for Germany \(AfD\)](#) and [right-wing extremists to expel migrants](#) has led an increasing number of political scientists and Holocaust survivors to suggest banning the party on the grounds that it has become radicalized.

After years in the opposition, AfD members themselves believe that the party is on the verge of a breakthrough. According to opinion polls, it is set for major success in local, state and European Parliament elections.

In eastern Germany, the party is well ahead of its opponents, polling at over 30%. AfD members have set their sights on the premiership of the small state of Thuringia in 2024.

The candidate they have in mind, [Björn Höcke](#), is particularly radical.

Höcke, the chairman of the AfD parliamentary group in the state parliament, is a former high school teacher and has in the past marched alongside neo-Nazis.

In a letter in 2015, the AfD Executive Board accused Höcke of publishing writings under the pseudonym “Landolf Ladig” that were “extremely close to National Socialism.” Höcke denied that he had done so, but refused to sign an affidavit stating as much.

In 2017, the AfD tried to expel Höcke without success. The party’s Federal Executive Committee started expulsion proceedings against him following his controversial speech at a party event in Dresden where he criticized Germany’s remembrance of the [Holocaust](#). He called the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin a “monument of shame” and added: “These stupid politics of coming to grips with the past cripple us — we need nothing other than a 180-degree reversal on the politics of remembrance.” The Thuringian Court of Arbitration rejected the expulsion.

Since then, [the party has become radicalized](#) and is more aligned with Höcke’s positions. His supporters are shaping the party’s platform.

Ascendant German Right

Since the murderous rule of the National Socialists under Adolf Hitler from 1933 to 1945, any ideological or symbolic invocation of Nazi values has been considered out of bounds in Germany. During the Nazi era, Germans murdered over six million Jews and were responsible for the deadliest conflict in world history, [World War Two](#).

Today, numerous AfD figures have attracted attention for statements reminiscent of National Socialism. In 2019, a German court ruled that Björn Höcke can legally be described as a “fascist,” based on a “verifiable factual basis.”

Now, Höcke could become the first far-right politician in postwar Germany to be elected head of government in one of the 16 federal states. That office has considerable political power: Premiers are largely responsible for the education and media policy of their state and decide on the details of executing the federal government’s asylum policy. The AfD has long been calling for a radical change of course in asylum and immigration rules.

Attacking Public Media

At an AfD meeting in November, Höcke promised far-reaching measures if he were elected. He said: “We will stop the fight against the right!” — and was cheered by supporters. Höcke also wants to make major changes to public media:

“What will happen if Höcke becomes state premier? Will he cancel the state media contracts? Yes, that’s what Höcke will do! Yes!” he shouted to more applause from his AfD members.



After years of critical reporting, the AfD has called for the abolition or restructuring of public broadcasting in Germany. Inspired by former US President Donald Trump, the AfD relies on so-called “alternative media” and disseminates its policies via its own far-reaching party channels on social media. In December, the legal analysis website *Verfassungsblog* (Constitution Blog) outlined just how realistic the scenario of an AfD state premier might be. According to its analysis, the relatively low-profile office of state parliament president could be key. In Germany, the job usually goes to the most successful party in state elections. And in Thuringia, the AfD is clearly ahead in opinion polls. This means that it has a legitimate chance of winning this office.

“The damage that an authoritarian populist party that holds this office could do to democracy as a whole is immense,” the *Verfassungsblog* warned. This is because the president of the state parliament organizes parliamentary procedures.

If the AfD were to emerge as the strongest party in Thuringia as predicted — with about 35% of the vote, no less — lawmakers could put Björn Höcke forward as their candidate for head of government. Höcke would likely fail to get over 50% support in the first two rounds of voting if all other parties vote against him. But, in the third round of voting, a simple majority would suffice.

The only hope for the other parties would be to put their differences aside and team up in an unusual alliance to name a joint candidate. For that, the conservative [Christian Democrats](#) and the Socialist [Left Party](#) would have to work together after years of bitterness and strife that have marred state politics in Thuringia.

No AfD Ban — but a Höcke Ban?

In January 2024, anti-far-right activists launched a petition calling on the German government to file an application with the Federal Constitutional Court to forfeit certain fundamental rights of the Thuringian AfD leader.

This would curtail his freedom of expression or freedom of assembly. The court could also revoke the right to vote and the right to be elected — and the ability to hold public office. If its lead candidate Björn Höcke were affected, the AfD in Thuringia could be severely affected.

Forget about securing the border. It won't work.

By Eduardo Porter

Source: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/01/18/border-migrants-gop-immigration/>

A group of migrants negotiate razor wire as they cross the Rio Grande near Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, in September. (Michael Robinson Chávez/The Washington Post)



Jan 18 – Calls to “secure the border” have never been anything but political theater — slogans to prove commitment to a safe homeland. Migrants have kept coming regardless, pushed from precarious lives, and pulled by the promise of security and economic progress in the United States.

Managing migration demands a different conversation, one that focuses less on the border's impregnability and more on the mechanisms and incentives driving people toward it; one that speaks of [the coordination needed](#) with other countries on the migration path to jointly manage the flow of people across the hemisphere; one that takes account of migrants' [contribution to the nation's prosperity](#).

Washington, unfortunately, is incapable of this kind of talk. The Biden administration seems out of ideas. And standing behind a standard-bearer [deploying xenophobia](#) as a selling point in a hotly contested bid for reelection, Republican calls to “secure the border” amount to little more than a political bludgeon.

Consider the demands presented by House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) in a [letter to President Biden](#) last month. Johnson objects to asylum seekers being released to wait for their day in immigration court and would like to see more of them quickly expelled. He wants Mexico's help to house and retain migrants. He wants to end the parole program offered by the Biden administration to encourage asylum seekers to apply through official channels rather than crossing the border. And, of course, he also wants the wall.



Nothing in recent U.S. history suggests this wish list can achieve the speaker's goal of stopping large numbers of migrants from coming to the United States. Immigrants in the 1980s were, for the most part, not seeking asylum. But millions still flocked to the United States. They were largely from Mexico, but also from Central America. Fleeing destitution and hungry for jobs, they crossed the border surreptitiously and settled in the United States as best they could — without legal authorization. Walls and fences have gone up since then; motion sensors and drones have been deployed to detect and pursue people crossing the border. Border Patrol staffing has increased fivefold since the early 1990s, [from around 4,000 to around 20,000](#). Nevertheless, the number of immigrants living in the United States without authorization climbed to [more than 11 million](#) in 2018, up [from 3.5 million](#) in 1990.

Today, migrants come from further afield, including from South America, Asia and Africa. And there are more of them: Border Patrol agents ran into prospective migrants [more than 2 million times](#) in fiscal 2023, [surpassing the peaks](#) of 1986 and 2000. About 1.1 million more showed up at official ports of entry. Most hope to apply for asylum. And yet they are driven by the same goals as those who sought the United States decades before: a safe environment that provides an opportunity to survive and, hopefully, flourish. Republicans are right that whatever the Biden administration is doing is not working. The president's new strategy — to draw migrants toward official channels — isn't working to stem the flow. The backlog of migrants waiting for their day in immigration court [passed 3 million in November](#). Border agents are encountering more than [300,000 migrants each month](#). Encounters exceeded 3 million last year. The very concept of asylum is losing public support.

But the GOP has nothing better to offer. Its ideas are born of the myth that President Donald Trump's draconian policies — forcing Mexico to house Central Americans; separating kids from their families; putting some in cages — were successful. But migrants kept coming: U.S. agents encountered almost 860,000 migrants at the border in fiscal 2019, before the outbreak of covid-19 began to hold them back. That figure is almost double what it was before Trump took office. The backlog in immigration court increased by 142 percent during his administration, to nearly 1.3 million.

The White House has already bent to the GOP's will. It convinced Mexico to continue to take returned Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans who passed through Mexico on their way to the U.S. border. It seems willing to make it tougher to claim asylum in the United States. It's not surprising that Republicans remain dissatisfied. It is, after all, an election year. And yet their additional, central demand — that the Biden administration stop using parole to provide legal paths for asylum seekers that would otherwise launch themselves at the border — would only increase the chaos they claim they want to end. (Perhaps that is the cynical intention.) The U.S. political system has always struggled with immigration. The last major shot at comprehensive immigration reform, passed in 1986 during the Reagan administration, was thoughtful by today's standards. Provisions to offer legal status to the unauthorized population, alongside new temporary work visas and a threat to bring criminal charges against employers who hired unauthorized immigrants in the future, aspired to address all the main issues.

Unfortunately, it didn't work. Employers had to require proof of workers' legal status, but it didn't matter how solid that proof might be. Migrants armed with bogus papers kept coming to work. Employers kept hiring them. Temporary work visas gathered dust in a filing cabinet somewhere in D.C. As a result, the idea of a grand bargain was poisoned.

Migration demands a different bargain today. It, too, must be comprehensive. It must restore [discipline to the asylum process](#), tightening rules to ensure it remains a viable option for people truly fleeing for their lives, pursued by a predatory state or organized crime. But it also must acknowledge that a large number of migrants are driven by broader pressures — such as hunger, climate change and a desire for opportunity. Hardening the border will not keep them out.

Given the large numbers, any new deal will probably require other countries in the hemisphere to help shoulder the responsibility; to offer migrants a viable new home rather than simply a passageway to the north. And in the United States, it will require something that might look like that old reform of 1986 — a plan that acknowledges migrants' contribution to American prosperity, and that treats migration not as a threat but as an opportunity.

Eduardo Porter is an editorial writer and columnist at The Washington Post. He formerly worked at the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg Opinion and Notimex. He is the author of "American Poison" and "The Price of Everything."

One fifth of the world is now too dangerous to visit

Source: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/advice/where-is-safe-foreign-office-map/>

The addition of Israel, Lebanon and Palestine to the FCDO travel black list means 66 destinations are now partially or entirely off-limits.

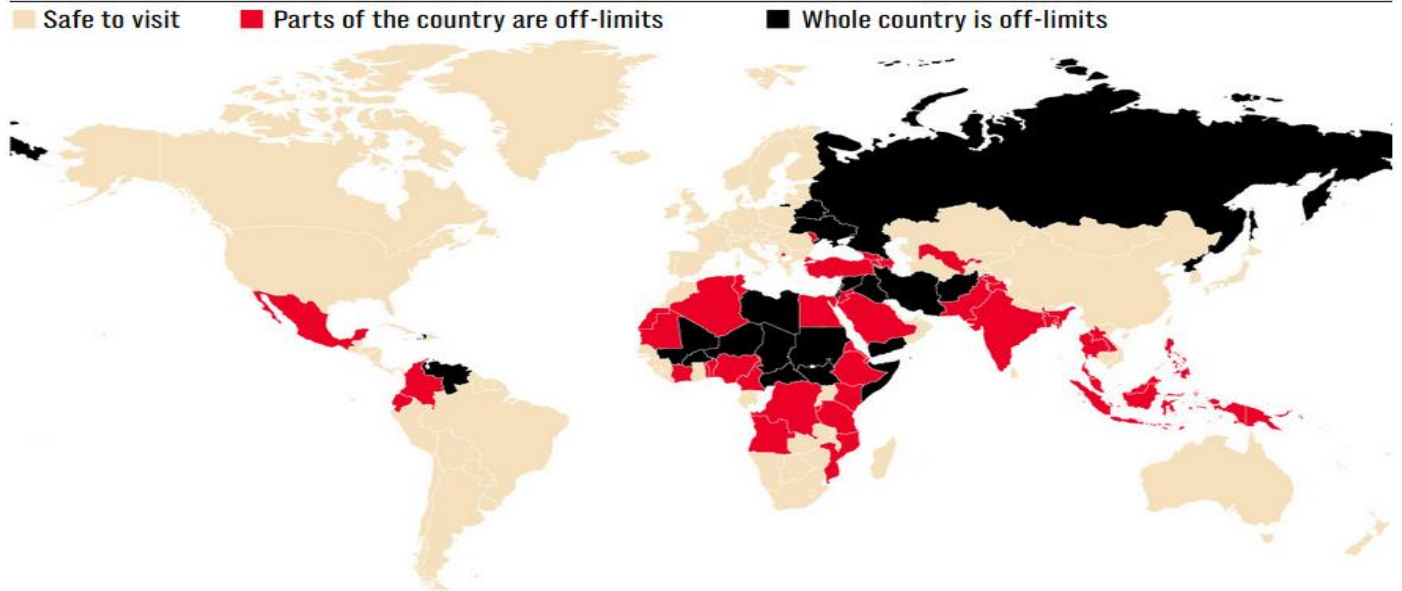
Five years ago, a British globetrotter's travel wish list might have included the cultural wonders of St Petersburg and the cozy cafes of Lviv. The enthralling architecture of Isfahan and the tranquil gardens of



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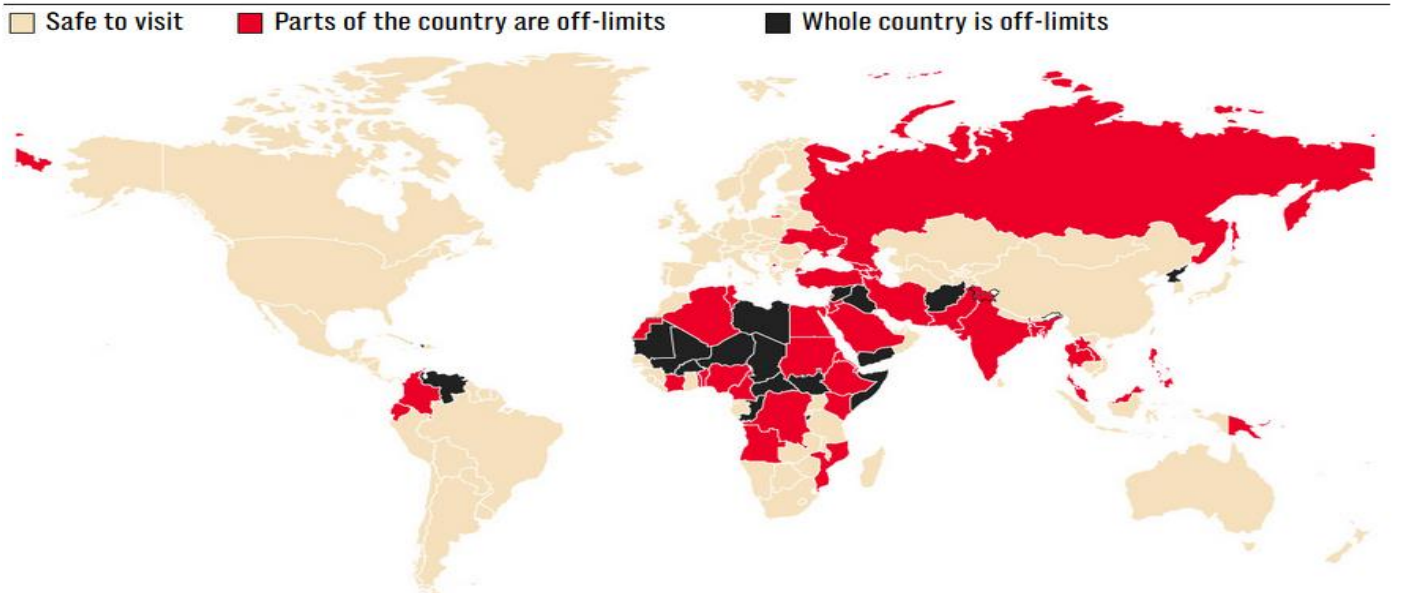
Shiraz were on the radars of more ambitious holidaymakers, along with the lesser-known pyramids of Meroe. Beirut and Tel Aviv were options for a hip city break. This reporter, in late 2018, spent a weekend in Chernobyl.

Where is safe to travel in 2024



SOURCE: UK FOREIGN OFFICE

Where is safe to travel in 2019



Trips to all of these places are now either impossible or extremely ill-advised. Russia, Ukraine, Iran, Sudan, Lebanon and Israel, along with Belarus and the Palestinian territories, represent the eight newest additions to the Foreign Office (FCDO)'s travel black list, where trips to the entire country are deemed perilous and which now numbers a depressing 24 destinations, representing 30,965,383 square kilometers – or 20.8 per cent of the world's landmass. A further 42 countries are partially out of bounds. It is hard to recall a time when so much of the world was off-limits due to war, terrorism and unrest.



It isn't all bad news. The security situation has improved in two countries. Back in 2019, Burundi and Mauritania – while never likely to star in travel brochures – were also entirely off-limits. Now most of Burundi is deemed safe to visit, as is a significant chunk of Mauritania, including its coastal areas and capital, Nouakchott. But the overall picture is one of diminishing horizons.

Does Khamenei Want Iran to Be Bombed?

By Michael Rubin

Source: <https://www.meforum.org/65463/does-khamenei-want-iran-to-be-bombed>



Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, 85 and ailing, may try to goad Washington into striking Iran in an attempt to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat and distract the Iranian public from the Islamic Republic's failings. (Photo: YouTube screenshot)

Jan 18 – Does Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei want the United States to attack Iran? It may sound counterintuitive, but Iranian behavior has changed in recent months. For decades, the Islamic Republic attacked Americans, but [eschewed responsibility](#). Revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini blamed the 1979 attack on the US embassy on radical students unconnected to his regime, no matter how they coordinated behind-the-scenes. Iranian proxy groups then bombed the American embassies in Kuwait and Lebanon and the US Marine barracks in Beirut. The FBI investigation into the 1996 Khobar Towers attack fingered the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), though President Bill Clinton recalled the findings to prevent any impediment to his rapprochement drive.

Prior to the 2003 Iraq War, the Iranian government pledged non-interference. Instead, the Revolutionary Guards [inserted](#) thousands of its officers and Iraqi militiamen they trained. Over subsequent years, Iran conspired directly or by proxy to murder and maim hundreds of Americans utilizing explosively-formed projectiles. Through it all, both Republican and Democratic administrations avoided responding directly against Iran, instead targeting proxies in Syria, Iraq, and now Yemen. The only exception to this was President Donald Trump's elimination of Quds Force chief Qassem Soleimani on January 3, 2020.

Traditionally, Iran sought to attack its adversaries while maintaining enough [deniability](#) to avoid accountability. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei is a dictator by omission rather than commission: He instructs his agents only about what they cannot do rather than risk any smoking gun on an order to attack.

In recent weeks, however, Khamenei has removed any doubt about where attacks originate. Iranian drones [attacked](#) Indian Ocean shipping directly. Iranian support and supply for Houthis is beyond doubt. Iran [launched ballistic missiles](#) at the Iraqi Kurdish capital Erbil to compel Iraqi Kurdish authorities to distance themselves from Washington. The IRGC has [promised Hamas](#) anti-aircraft missiles. On Tuesday, Iran [acknowledged launching](#) missiles at Baluch militants in Pakistan. Iranian authorities shed no tears that Pakistan [today attacked](#) inside Iran.

Why has Tehran started claiming credit for such attacks? The answer may be that Khamenei feels he is losing control.

Khamenei is weak. As the regime prepares to celebrate the 45th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in two weeks, the future of the Islamic Republic is uncertain. First, there is Khamenei himself. He is about to turn 85. A 1981 [assassination attempt](#) partially paralyzed him. A decade ago, he had [prostate cancer](#) surgery and, just two years ago, a sudden [health crisis](#) prompted his plane to make an emergency landing. There is no clear successor. [Civil war in Iran](#) could loom.

Khamenei fears declining revolutionary fervor among youth. In a July 12, 2023, [speech](#), for example, he described a war between the Islamic front and liberal democracy, and lamented how the internet and satellite television today inspire young Iranians more than the mosque. On December 16, 2019, he [complained](#) to Iranian veterans about declining revolutionary fervor.

The Islamic Republic has been here before. One day before Iranian revolutionaries seized the US embassy, Steven Erlanger, at the time a young journalist who would one day rise to become the *New York*



Times's chief diplomatic correspondent filed a dispatch eulogizing the Islamic Republic. "The religious phase is drawing to a close even as it is becoming formalized," he explained.

The embassy crisis helped Khomeini purge the revolutionary coalition of all but the most radical religious fringe. Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's subsequent invasion of Iran likely saved the Islamic Revolution. Iranians had lost faith in clerical dictatorship, but they were proud nationalists. Iraq's aggression enabled Khomeini to wrap ordinary Iranians in a nationalist flag, especially given Saddam's cynical efforts to play the ethnic card in Iran. The war years and crisis allowed Khomeini to ingrain revolutionary structures in a way he could never during peacetime.

Khamenei today likely recognizes he needs an external crisis. He knows President Joe Biden would never invade Iran as George W. Bush did Iraq, but if he could goad Washington into even a single strike on Iran proper, he might snatch victory from the jaws of defeat and distract the Iranian public from the Islamic Republic's failings.

The danger then becomes that Khamenei believes he has a win-win strategy: He can humiliate Americans reluctant to respond, but also benefit from retaliation. An astute White House could thread the needle: Hit Iran in its purse with "Maximum pressure." Target Khamenei directly and declare open season on any Iranian military official outside Iran itself.

Michael Rubin is director of policy analysis at the Middle East Forum and a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

What If the West Only Accepted Christian Refugees from the Muslim World?

By Raymond Ibrahim

Source: <https://www.meforum.org/65468/what-if-the-west-only-accepted-christian-refugees>



Jan 12 – For years now, a number of [mostly Eastern European nations](#) have been arguing that, if they are going to accept any refugees from the Muslim world, they prefer Christians. Hungary, for example, has apparently been [doing just that](#).

To this, the official western response has been to cry "racism!" Barack Obama, for instance, once [called such a suggestion](#) "shameful," loftily adding: "That's not American. That's not who we are. We don't have religious tests to our compassion." It was later revealed that his administration was doing [precisely that](#) -- but in reverse: discriminating against persecuted Christian asylum seekers, while favoring Muslims.



All emotionalism and name-calling aside -- that is, the stuff of American politics -- there are, in fact, several objective reasons why the West should give priority, if not exclusivity, to Christian refugees from the Muslim world -- and some of these are actually to the benefit of Western nations. Consider:

Christians are *real* victims of persecution

From a humanitarian point of view -- and humanitarianism is the chief reason cited in accepting refugees -- Christians should receive top priority simply because they are the [most persecuted group in the Middle East](#). As former Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop once put it, "I think that Christian minorities are being persecuted in Syria and even if the conflict were over they would still be persecuted."

Indeed. While they are especially targeted by the Islamic State and other professional jihadists, before ISIS, Christians were and continue to be targeted by *Muslims* -- Muslim mobs, Muslim individuals, Muslim regimes, and Muslim terrorists, from Muslim countries of all races (Arab, African, Asian, etc.) -- and for the same reason: Christians are infidel number one. (See [Crucified Again: Exposing Islam's New War on Christians](#) for hundreds of anecdotes *before* the rise of ISIS as well as the Muslim doctrines that create such hate and contempt for Christians.)

Conversely, Muslim refugees are not fleeing direct persecution, but chaos created by the violent and intolerant teachings of their own religion, Islam -- hence why violence and intolerance follows Muslims into Europe.

Muslim persecution of Christians has been further enabled by western policies

Western nations should accept Christian refugees on the basis that western actions in the Middle East are directly responsible for exacerbating the plight of Christian minorities. Christians were not terrorized in Bashar Assad's Syria, or Saddam Hussein's Iraq, or Muamar Gaddafi's Libya. Their persecution grew exponentially only *after* the U.S. and other western states interfered in those nations in the name of "democracy." All they did is unleash the jihadist forces that the dictators had long kept suppressed.

Unlike Muslims, Christians are easily assimilated in western countries, due to a shared Christian heritage

As a [Slovakian official once explained](#), Muslims would not fit in, including because there are no mosques in the Slavic nation. Conversely, "Slovakia as a Christian country can really help Christians from Syria to find a new home in Slovakia."

This too is common sense. The same Christian teachings that molded Europe over the centuries are the same ones that mold Middle Eastern Christians -- whether Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant. As San Diego's [Father Noel once said](#), Mideast Christians "who come here [America] 'want to be good citizens' and many who came here a decade ago are now lawyers, teachers, or other productive members of society."

Meanwhile, Muslims follow a completely different blueprint, the Koran -- which condemns Christians by name, calls for constant war (jihad) against all non-Muslims, and advocates any number of distinctly anti-Western practices. Hence it is no surprise that many Muslim migrants are anti-western at heart.

Mideast Christians bring *trustworthy* language and cultural skills that are beneficial to the West

They understand the Middle Eastern -- including Islamic -- mindset and can help the West understand it. Moreover, unlike Muslims, Christians have no "conflicting loyalty" issues: Islamic law forbids Muslims from aiding "infidels" against fellow Muslims ([click here](#) to see some of the treachery this leads to in the U.S. [and see the treachery Christians have suffered from their longtime Muslim neighbors and "friends"](#)). Subversive Muslims are working to infiltrate every corner of the U.S. government. No such threat exists among Mideast Christians. They too render unto God what is God's and unto Caesar what is Caesar's.

Finally, it goes without saying that Mideast Christians have no sympathy for the ideology that made their lives a living hell -- the ideology that is also hostile to everything in the West. Thus a win-win: the West and Mideast Christians complement each other, if only in that they share the same threat.

All the above reasons -- from those that offer humanitarian relief to the true victims of persecution, to those that offer benefits to the West -- are unassailable in their logic and wisdom. Yet, because western progressives prioritize politically correct ideals and fantasies over stark reality, there is little chance that they will be considered.

Quite the reverse: [all throughout the West](#), masses of Muslims have been and continue to be granted easy asylum, while the few Christian applicants are scrutinized and often rejected.

The reason for this is simple: for the progressive (now "woke") mindset -- which dominates western governments, media, and academia -- taking in refugees has little to do with altruism and everything to do with egoism: It matters little who is *really* being persecuted -- as seen, the West is directly responsible for greatly exacerbating the sufferings of Christians around the world.



No, what's important is that the progressives "feel good" about themselves. By taking in "foreign" Muslims, as opposed to "siding" with same-old, same-old Christians, they get to feel "enlightened," "open-minded," "tolerant," and "multicultural" -- and that's all that matters here.

Meanwhile, reality marches on: The same Islamic mentality that persecutes and slaughters "infidel" Christians in the Middle East continues to grow at an alarming rate in the West.

Raymond Ibrahim, author of [Defenders of the West](#) and [Sword and Scimitar](#) is the Distinguished Senior Shillman Fellow at the Gatestone Institute and the Judith Rosen Friedman Fellow at the Middle East Forum.

What happens if the West abandons Ukraine?

By Anna Husarska and Mykola Viknianskiy

Source: <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/what-happens-if-the-west-abandons-ukraine/>



Jan 22 – Western leaders are well aware of the dangers of a Russian victory in Ukraine. 'When dictators and autocrats are allowed to run roughshod in Europe,' US President [Joe Biden](#) recently [observed](#), 'the risk rises that the United States gets pulled in directly,' with the consequences reverberating around the world. Specifically, he [noted](#) previously, if Russian President Vladimir Putin attacks a NATO ally, 'we'll have something that we don't seek and that we don't have today: American troops fighting Russian troops.' Similarly, NATO Secretary-General [Jens Stoltenberg](#) recently [warned](#) that if Putin wins in Ukraine, there is real risk that his aggression will not end there.

Let us play Cassandra. The US has failed to deliver the [\\$60 billion](#) in aid it has promised to Ukraine, and the European Union has likewise proved unable to fulfill its [€50 billion](#) (US\$54.8 billion) pledge. Because these failures are rooted solely in internal politics, no amount of charisma and persuasion on the part of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, or pluck and perseverance on the part of the soldiers fighting under General Valery Zaluzhny, can make much difference.



Suppose that aid never materialises. Without sufficient weapons and munitions, Ukraine's military would eventually have to capitulate to Russia. As commentator Simon Kuper recently [pointed out](#), Russia has already carried out 'mass executions, castrations, rapes, torture, and abductions of children' in Ukraine, there is good reason to think that such a surrender would not end the violence there. Putin's forces – comprising largely ex-convicts and untrained soldiers – may well inflict terrible 'victor's justice' as they occupy all of Ukraine's territory. Russian occupation would not necessarily lead to total occupation and annexation, as was the case for [Crimea](#), and later for partially occupied Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson. Putin might choose, instead, to install a puppet regime and claim to have achieved the 'demilitarised,' 'denazified,' and 'neutral' Ukraine he [sought all along](#).

But would Putin's revanchist agenda end there? **We believe that Putin would then set his sights on NATO countries, beginning with Poland.** Frequently targeted in Russian [propaganda](#), Poland is not only a member of both NATO and the EU—and Polish voters recently rejected right-wing populism in favor of a [strongly pro-Western government](#). This makes it a prime target for a Russian invasion. Officially, it might not be Russian soldiers who descend on Poland. Putin has been known to preserve deniability by sending [proxy](#) armies and troops without insignia (such as the 'little green men' who seized Crimea in 2014) and flying made-up flags in made-up [people's republics](#). One should not be surprised if soldiers enter Poland wearing Ukrainian uniforms, carrying Ukrainian passports, and flying Ukrainian flags. Putin may already be rehearsing such a scenario. There have been [reports](#) of Ukrainian prisoners of war being drafted to fight against the Armed Forces of Ukraine. In a dispatch by [RIA-Novosti](#), one of the 70 POWs fighting in the 'Khmelnytsky' unit, Kirill Spassky, describes the POWs in combat and mentions that there were no Russian 'barriers' standing behind them with their guns ready to prevent them from deserting.

Kremlin propaganda would spin any apparent clash between Ukraine (by then a Russian puppet state like Belarus) and Poland as a result of, say, [grain disputes](#), while highlighting old animosities going back to the 1943 [Wolyn/Volhynia](#) massacre. With the Kremlin already regularly perpetuating the lie that Poland dreams of taking back Western Ukraine, it would be no great leap for it to claim that Ukraine had little choice but to strike first in what was an inevitable conflict. (In Putin's [own words](#), he learned in the streets of his hometown of Leningrad that 'when a fight is inevitable, you have to hit first.')

This narrative might even convince some Ukrainians. After all, this scenario begins with the US breaking its [promise](#) to stand with Ukraine 'for as long as it takes', and the EU failing to provide anywhere near the one million rounds of artillery ammunition it [pledged](#) in March 2023. Ukrainians have shown courage, determination, and patriotism in the fight against Russia, but if Western aid dries up, they will feel utterly betrayed.

A faux-Ukrainian invasion of Poland certainly should trigger [Article 5](#) of the NATO Charter, which states that an armed attack against one or more NATO members 'shall be considered an attack against them all'. But there is reason to believe that NATO might choose not to act. Already, some commentators are laying the groundwork for such a betrayal. 'Article 5 isn't sacrosanct,' Kuper writes.

It would not be the first time Poland was left high and dry by those who had promised to protect it. When Hitler attacked Poland in 1939 and divided it with the Soviet Union, **Poland's allies, Britain and France, did not intervene.** Likewise, both the US and the United Kingdom have shirked their obligation under the 1994 [Budapest Memorandum](#) to guarantee Ukraine's sovereignty.

So, are we headed toward World War III by proxy? Will Russia manage not only effectively to seize Ukraine, but also to invade Poland (and potentially other countries), without ever having to face NATO head-on? Putin is, after all, a master of deniability. Russians even have a saying for blunt disavowal of responsibility: *ja nie ja* ('I am not me').

Such an outcome is hardly far-fetched, nor is it inevitable. The US and the EU can avert this nightmare scenario by delivering the aid to Ukraine that they have promised. One hopes that recognising the possible consequences of abandoning Ukraine will provide the wake-up call they need.

Anna Husarska, a [Polish](#) journalist and political analyst, is a former senior policy adviser at the International Rescue Committee and a former senior political analyst at the International Crisis Group.

Mykola Viknianskiy is a [Ukrainian](#) businessman and humanitarian activist.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: Biased articles like this are supporting wars and stupidity! Especially the use of the word "proxy"!





T - NEWS

France completes military withdrawal from Niger in major blow to counterterrorism ops in West Africa

By Aavek Banerjee

Source: <https://www.indiatvnews.com/news/world/france-completes-military-withdrawal-from-niger-in-major-blow-to-counterterrorism-ops-in-west-africa-coup-junta-tensions-latest-updates-2023-12-23-908658>



Image Source : REUTERS French troops completing the withdrawal from Niger.

Dec 23 – The last of French military personnel deployed to junta-ruled Niger to combat the decade-old Islamist insurgency and terrorism in West Africa's Sahel region left the country on Friday, completing the military withdrawal that dealt a heavy blow to France's influence in the area, along with the counterterrorism operations.

The military junta in Niger seized power in July and ousted democratically elected Mohamed Bazoum, and made France's military withdrawal one of their key demands, echoing similar actions by juntas in neighbouring Burkina Faso and Mali who severed long-standing security ties with France in coups in 2020-22. After putting up a defiant face to the military regime in Niger for several weeks, French President Emmanuel Macron finally relented and announced the withdrawal of around 1,500 French troops from the country, along with his ambassador to Niamey. This followed a full withdrawal from Mali in 2022 and the end of military cooperation with Burkina Faso in February even as they faced worsening attacks from Islamist insurgents. A document marking the official end of France's military engagement with Niger was signed by both parties in the capital Niamey on Friday and the last group of soldiers in fatigues and backpacks boarded a military plane that took off shortly after. The military coup and the subsequent military withdrawal is a major setback for Western countries in West Africa. Under Bazoum, Niger had



remained a key security partner of France and the United States and was considered the last ally in the Sahel to combat Islamist groups like Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State that have killed and displaced thousands.



Ties between France and Niger

Relations between France and Niger soured dramatically after the July military coup, beginning with several protests around the French military base and an attack on the French embassy in Niamey. Niger severed military ties with the latter and closed the Nigerien airspace for French commercial and military planes.

France had repeatedly refused an order from the junta regime in Niger for its ambassador Sylvain Itte to leave the country, saying it does not recognise the coup leaders as legitimate and called for the reinstatement of ousted President Mohamed Bazoum. Macron also alleged that French diplomats were surviving on military rations as they were 'held hostage' in the embassy. Diplomatic sources said this week that France had decided to close its embassy in Niamey as it was unable to carry out diplomatic tasks due to restrictions imposed by the junta. After Macron decided to withdraw the military following a conversation with the deposed Bazoum, the Nigerien junta said that the announcement signals a "new step towards the sovereignty" of the country. The military junta ordered the French envoy to leave the country and gave him a 48-hour deadline, revoking his visa and instructing the police to expel him. However, Itte defied the order and chose to remain, as French authorities reiterated that they didn't recognise the authority of the military regime.

Why are Nigeriens hostile towards France?

The Nigerien military has exploited grievances against former coloniser France and has also turned to Russia's mercenary group Wagner for help after severing connections with the European country. One of the major reasons for Niger's hostile stance towards France can be alluded to the failure of security forces to eradicate the threat of Islamic terrorism in the region. Notably, Niger is a major producer of uranium, a vital component of nuclear arsenals across the world. A majority of the uranium produced in Niger goes to European countries, especially France.

Many people in Niger still believe that despite their independence in 1960, France has continued to act as an imperial power by robbing its resources and dictating its economic policies. Many citizens hold France to be responsible for the nation's current financial situation by exploiting their resources.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: Looks like the Afghanistan case but in a more organized fashion. This is what happens when you only "take" from a country giving nothing back.



How Pak finances terror in Kashmir

By Anil Trigunayat

Source: <https://sundayguardianlive.com/investigation/how-pak-finances-terror-in-kashmir>



Dec 24 – For any counter-terrorism expert, including practitioners and academic experts, the field of terror financing has been a subject of great interest from both academic and operational points of view. Eminent experts on terrorism have written several books and papers highlighting diverse aspects of terror financing; however, the Kashmir theatre has remained largely unexplored.

Over time, since the formal beginning of a violent separatist and Islamist insurgency in 1990, Pakistan has created a highly complex, sophisticated, and layered system of terror financing. Dr Abhinav Pandya's book, *Terror Financing in Kashmir*, published by Routledge Taylor and Francis on 6 December 2023, fills this gap.

In an insightful investigative journey, this book unravels the murky, complex, and layered world of Kashmir's terror financing and the intelligence wars between Pakistan's ISI and India's R&AW.

EARLY PHASE: 1990-96

Dr Pandya says that in the early 1990s, funds were primarily sent through cash couriers. Since the border was porous, it was convenient to cross the Line of Control (de facto border between India and Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir) to deliver cash inside the Indian territory from where the local handlers collected it. Besides, Jamaat-e-Islami, a Pak-supported separatist and Islamist group, collected money through donations and extortion. Initially, Pakistan's strategic planners had not expected to get a robust response to their proxy war strategy; however, witnessing the massive interest among the youth in joining terrorist groups, they decided to create a proper system, including the financial modules, to run militancy. As a result, a political separatist entity viz. Hurriyat Conference was created in 1993 by amalgamating 26 separatist parties. Now, the money was needed to run Hurriyat's offices, pay its cadres, finance its publicity and media operations, and foreign travel. In parallel existed extremist groups like Jamaat-e-Islami and terrorist groups like Hizbul Mujahideen and Jammu-Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). By 1993, new terrorist groups emerged, such as Harkat-ulMujahideen. These terrorist groups needed funds to buy weapons, maintain Over Ground Workers (OGWs), and execute terrorist operations.

With the above-mentioned expansion of militancy, terror funding was also becoming specialized and systematic. Funds came to be centrally distributed from Pakistan and primarily routed through the Hurriyat and the commanders of terrorist groups. Along with cash, narcotics smuggling became a potent method



of raising and moving money. Terrorist organizations started funneling drugs through terrorist cadres and couriers who infiltrated into Indian side of Kashmir.

The book discusses at length the drug routes along with a comparative analysis of the price differential that existed between the place of origin in the Af-Pak border and the Indian markets where they were sold.

SECOND PHASE: 1996-2005

By 1996, the Indian security forces had almost crushed the first wave of militancy in Kashmir. However, Pakistan was determined to continue the asymmetric war against India due to the latter's superiority in a conventional war. New terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Tayyaba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, which were under the firm grip of Pakistan, entered Kashmir's terror scenario.

When Indian security forces tightened the noose on infiltration and drug smuggling, Islamabad separated the drugs channels from the terrorist infiltration/weapons smuggling channels, to keep the former safe. Secondly, hawala came to be used as a major way of routing terror money.

THIRD PHASE: 2005 ONWARDS

In this phase, many new methods were employed to raise funds. Raising money by selling medical seats was a unique and novel method of generating terror funds. This method is still in use, though post-2019, the Government of India has introduced some checks by invalidating the degrees awarded in Pakistan-based medical and engineering institutions. Another method that continues to be in practice is raising money through haj tours and travels.

In the second phase, terrorist organizations used the LoC trade to smuggle weapons, cash, and drugs. The author discusses a range of other methods, such as over-invoicing and underinvoicing, money generated through Zakat and Usra donations (Islamic taxes), remittances and donations received from the diaspora, money generated by Islamic charities from domestic and international sources, mirror trading, direct allotment of funds by Pakistan's intelligence, money raised by Jamaat through its schools, orphanages and facilitating government recruitments and appointments.

With the rapid rise of Ahli-Hadith in Kashmir in the 2000s, there was a massive influx of funds from the Arab world. The money, in turn, was spent on building ornate and lavish Salafi mosques. These mosques became breeding grounds for producing highly radicalized and separatist individuals.

TERROR FINANCING PORTFOLIO: DIVERSITY AND COMPLEXITY

A rough estimate based on field surveys and interviews suggested that Pakistan, on average, spends less than INR 2.5 to 3 lakh in producing one militant, whereas Indian security forces spend roughly INR 60 to 70 lakh every day in counter-terror cordon and search operations in addition to spending huge amounts of money on narrative building and countering Pakistani narrative, maintaining a huge presence of armed forces, goodwill and development projects, etc.

The sheer difference between the figures mentioned above is sufficient to explain why Pakistan's proxy war strategy is a robust way of bleeding India white. The author discusses another interesting feature of terror financing that emerged in Kashmir— the major involvement of mainstream institutions of politics, administration, banking, academics, and media in the terror financing dragnet.

This author has done detailed research on this aspect and discussed how mainstream institutions became a crucial part of it. The book argues that terror masterminds based in Pakistan and their state sponsors created an intricate world of terror financing, developing stakes for everyone in it, including the conflict elites like separatist leaders, politicians, militant commanders, and the common ordinary middle-class individuals, who found various ways in terror funding dragnet to earn money.

In a way, it almost became a parallel economy of the state. The book is the product of extensive fieldwork in Jammu and Kashmir and interviews conducted with Kashmiri separatists and hawala coordinators in India and abroad.

The author's detailed interviews with active and former terrorists, the Over Ground Workers of terrorist groups, Islamist clerics, senior, mid-level, and junior leaders of extremist organizations like Jamaat-Ilslami, Jamiat Ahl-i-Hadith, Hurriyat Conference, police, military and intelligence officials of India and Pakistan, hawala operator and ISI's financial

However, due to the subject's sensitive nature, in several cases, the identity of the sources and interviewees have been kept confidential. So far, this subject has remained unexplored because the fragile security situation and hurdles in accessing the key stakeholders have prevented the researchers from venturing into this conflict. The absence of any systematic research in this field explains the paucity of data in the open domain and academic literature; hence, it had to be overcome with extensive fieldwork, which the author has done to tell a story that has never been told earlier.

The book will have firsthand insights for academics, counterterrorism researchers, law enforcement officials, diplomats, and the intelligence community. Lastly, it is one of the rarest books, probably the first,



published by a highly prestigious international publisher, objectively analyzing Pakistan's role in Kashmir militancy without anti-India bias.

Ambassador Anil Trigunayat is a former Indian envoy to Libya, Malta, and Jordan, presently a distinguished fellow at VIF and independent director at WAPCOS.

Could Islamists, and jihadists turn Bangladesh into neo-Taliban state?

By Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury

Source: <https://www.jpost.com/international/islamic-terrorism/article-779080>



Anti-militancy elite force Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) in Bangladesh. (photo credit: Weekly Blitz)

Bangladesh, the third-largest Muslim country in the world, is at a crossroads. Its next general election is scheduled to be held on January 7, 2024, at a time when antisemitic, anti-Israel, anti-West radical Islamist, and jihadist groups are openly showing fangs, generating extreme wariness among the people in the country and the region, as an Islamist takeover of Bangladesh would turn it into another neo-Taliban state. Such fear is gradually getting intensified, as in recent years the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which is termed as a “tier-3 terrorist organization” by a number of US courts, and its ideological allies – such as Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) and pro-Caliphate Hefazat-e-Islam (HeI) – are getting exposed sympathy of the Biden administration.

Biden administration's recent actions may have severe consequences for Bangladesh, potentially turning it into a neo-Taliban state. Following the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, many Afghans who had supported and collaborated with US forces were left in a vulnerable position, targeted by extremist groups. Now Biden is making a similar mistake in Bangladesh, a South Asian country, by seemingly supporting Islamist forces with a long history of anti-American, antisemitic, and anti-Western sentiments, where these Islamist bigots were on record for setting fire to American flags and chanted slogans such as “Death to America” and “We shall become Taliban, Bangla [Bangladesh] will be Afghan.” During the 2001-2006 rule of the coalition government of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), there were



several incidents in Bangladesh where American flags were burnt by protesters. These protests were often triggered by various factors, such as political developments, international events, and public sentiment.

The Biden administration's disturbing diplomacy has raised concerns about the long-standing relationship between the United States and Bangladesh, potentially jeopardizing the 51-year history of cooperation between the two nations. Since the US recognized the newly independent Bangladesh in 1971 after its victory over Pakistani occupation forces, the relationship had been marked by cordial cooperation and significant development partnership. However, this positive trajectory now seems to be taking a troubling turn due to President Joe Biden's diplomatic approach.

In recent years, the Biden administration has claimed to uphold democracy but has shown hostility towards Bangladesh's ruling secularist Awami League government, while seemingly collaborating with the ultra-Islamist Bangladesh Nationalist Party and its jihadist allies, including Jamaat-e-Islami. This approach is dangerously pushing Bangladesh towards a future reminiscent of a neo-Taliban state or even a caliphate.



Weapons recovered from a militancy hideout in Bangladesh. (credit: Weekly Blitz)

Bangladeshi Hamas-Hezbollah links

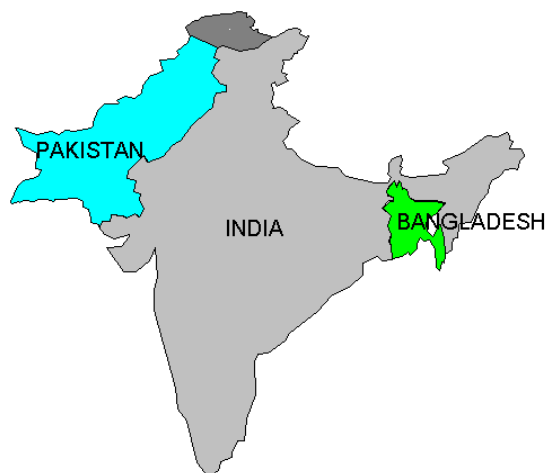
It is essential to note that BNP and its Islamist partners have a history of harboring anti-American, antisemitic, and anti-Western sentiments. As mentioned, these Islamist groups have been on record for setting fire to the American flag and chanting slogans like "Death to America."

In a deeply concerning move, during the 2001-2006 rule of the BNP-Jamaat coalition government, they even named a bridge "Hezbollah" as a "mark of honor," openly expressing their support for the Lebanese resistance group, which the United States has designated as a terrorist organization. The BNP-Jamaat coalition government's junior communications minister, Salahuddin Ahmed, told French news agency AFP, "I named the bridge Hezbollah because of our love for the Lebanese resistance group. Hezbollah is the only group which is fighting Israel, and the bridge is named after the group as a mark of honor."

Then-foreign minister Morshed Khan went as far as to label Israel's actions as "state terrorism" and "religious terrorism," while accusing the United States of sponsoring it. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party



and Jamaat-e-Islami consider Jews and Israel as “the enemy” and support the “elimination of the Jewish state from the world map”, while they recognize [Lebanese Hezbollah](#) and Palestinian Hamas as “ideological allies.”



Biden’s recent actions in Bangladesh could have dire consequences – potentially, as mentioned, turning the country into a neo- Taliban state. Following the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, many Afghans who had supported the US found themselves vulnerable and targeted by extremist groups. Unfortunately, it appears that a similar mistake is being made in Bangladesh, with President Biden seemingly aligning with forces known for their vehement anti-American sentiments.

Of further concern is the active support for Islamist groups, including BNP, Jel, and [Hefazat-e-Islam](#) (Hel), by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and officials at the State Department. The US ambassador in Dhaka, Peter D. Haas, has been observed associating with individuals who burn American flags and even threatening Bangladeshi media outlets with visa-related consequences to coerce them into promoting the agenda of these Islamist forces. By supporting the BNP, the Biden administration may inadvertently bolster an organization with an agenda that contradicts American values and foreign policy objectives. The BNP’s aim is to establish Sharia Law in

Bangladesh with the backing of Islamist allies, potentially transforming the nation into an antisemitic caliphate, mirroring the Afghan model. Such a development could significantly undermine US interests in the region.

Inadvertently empowering Islamist groups in Bangladesh could lead the country down a path toward becoming a neo-Taliban state, with far-reaching implications for American foreign policy and the global fight against terrorism. These decisions demand careful consideration and a reevaluation of the US approach to Bangladesh to ensure the preservation of shared values and interests.

Looking back before 2009

Almost two decades ago, during 2001-2006, when an ultra-Islamist and ruthlessly antisemitic government comprising BNP and Jel was in power, eminent journalist and counterterrorism expert Alex Perry in his article in Time magazine on April 14, 2002, saw Bangladesh as a “deadly cargo,” as it had become a breeding ground and safe haven for terrorists, insurgents, and militants.

Following publication of Alex Perry’s article, journalist Bertil Lintner, in an article in South Asia Terrorism Portal, wrote: “While Bangladesh is yet far from becoming another Pakistan, Islamist forces are no doubt on the rise, and extremist influence is growing, especially in the countryside. According to a foreign diplomat in Dhaka, ‘In the 1960s and 1970s, it was the leftists who were seen as incorruptible purists. Today, the role model for many young men in rural areas is the dedicated Islamic cleric with his skull cap, flowing robes and beard.’”

Commenting on the 2001 general election and the Islamist coalition government of BNP and Jel returning to power, Bertil Lintner wrote: “Since last year’s election, however, extremist Islamist groups have once again become more blatant in their attacks on the country’s minorities and secular forces. The HuJI especially has attracted the attention of security planners in the region. The group was formed in 1992 reportedly with funds from Osama bin Laden. The existence of firm links between the new Bangladeshi militants and Al Qaeda were first proven when Fazlur Rahman, leader of the Jihad Movement in Bangladesh” (to which HuJI belongs), signed the official declaration of ‘holy war’ against the United States on February 23, 1998. Other signatories included bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri (chief of the Jihad Group in Egypt), Rifa’i Ahmad Taha aka Abu-Yasir (Egyptian Islamic Group), and Sheikh Mir Hamzah (secretary of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Pakistan).”

Western nations’ bias

Since 2001 in particular, when the BNP-Jamaat coalition comprising hard-line Islamists, antisemites, jihadists and anti-Hindu elements succeeded in returning to power, Bangladesh quickly started becoming another Pakistan or Afghanistan. Within this troubled and polarized atmosphere, there has been a surge in Islamist militancy in the name of “defending Islam.” Ahmadi fell victims of extreme cruelty from various groups, namely Khatmey Nabuwat Andolan (KNA) and the Khatmey Nabuwat Movement (KNM), which were getting direct patronization from BNP, Jel, and a few other Islamist groups in the country. Well entrenched but subdued Deobandi militant groups like Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Harkat-ul-Jihad al Islami-Bangladesh (HuJI-B), both of which trace their lineage to Jel, became increasingly militant and energized. New groups had also emerged such as Ansar al-Islam, which acted as the Bangladeshi wing of al-Qaeda



in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS); and Jund al-Tawheed wal Khilafah (JTK), whose loyalties lie with the Islamic State, making Bangladesh a new field of competition for the global jihadist powerhouses.

The conducive atmosphere of Bangladesh for Islamist militancy has been broadly created by two historical factors: the country's political patronage of Islamism that nourished over a dozen extremist groups over the decades; and the rise and consolidation of the Deobandi-oriented Jel organization and its clamor for sharia-based governance in Bangladesh.

Ever since Bangladesh emerged as a nominally secularist state in 1971 after a war against Pakistan, the country has witnessed a sporadic, internal politico-religious tug-of-war. Even though the constitution emphasizes secularism as one of its four state principles and has banned the use of religion in politics, the clamor for a sharia-based Islamic state, ostensibly propounded by the Jel, which was later joined by BNP, has powerful backers in the country even today. The Jel-BNP nexus has strong connections with a myriad of militant groups that have mushroomed throughout the country in recent decades under its patronage. These groups look at Jel-BNP as their spiritual and ideological fountainhead.

There was a respite of 17 years from Islamist-related violence after a crackdown on Islamist groups after the military intervened in January 2007 to impose a caretaker government, and during the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government which came to power in 2009 following a landslide victory in the December 2008 general election. At this stage, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) – the elite force of Bangladesh Police – played a magnificent and extremely courageous role in continuing offensives of terrorists and jihadists, where Awami League government under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina vowed to eliminate Islamist, jihadist, and terrorists from the soil of Bangladesh.

But the period of relative calm ended with the Islamist backlash against secularists in 2013, unleashing violence onto Bangladesh's streets as BNP and Jel launched countrywide arson and bomb attacks, followed by the murder of Awami League leaders, thus creating a fearsome atmosphere. This notoriety continued for months – this time again – RAB played a key role in saving the country from turning into another Afghanistan or Pakistan.

It may be recalled here that in 2013, a few months away from the 2014 general elections, while pro-caliphate Hefazat-e-Islam (Hel) had gathered hundreds and thousands of madrassa teachers and students, including dozens of individuals who had fought in Afghanistan against Soviet Union and Palestine against Israel as "mujahedeen" had also joined these gatherings, thus demanding enforcement of caliphate in Bangladesh, with Hel chief as ameer of the caliphate. Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Jamaat-e-Islami, and the Jatiya Party had openly declared solidarity with Hefazat's dangerous bids. It was later revealed that BNP, Jamaat, and other Islamist forces in Bangladesh had secretly chalked out a blueprint of establishing Sharia rule in Bangladesh by staging an Islamic revolution – xeroxing that of Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic revolution in Iran.

Following the 2014 general election, which was boycotted by BNP and Jamaat, this nexus of Islamists carried out systematic bombings and arson attacks on religious minorities, singling out the minority Hindu community, for the "crimes" of voting for the Awami League. While Hefazat was demanding turning Bangladesh into a caliphate, BNP and Jamaat demanded the appointment of a "caretaker government" system to oversee elections – a practice Bangladesh's Jatiya Sangshad (National Parliament) had abolished. Violence continued unabated, while dozens of Hindu homes and temples came under arson and bombing attacks. Hindu religious scriptures were burned to ashes, while deities were demolished by the members of BNP, Jamaat, Hefazat and their Islamist cohorts. Hindu girls and women were raped by these Islamist thugs, thus establishing a total reign of terror on Hindus in Bangladesh. Conspirators of turning a secularist Bangladesh into a Sharia nation would have succeeded in 2013 unless members of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) had not intervened into the matter and driven away thousands of Hel members when they laid a siege of Dhaka city's Motijheel commercial area. As the conspiracy of unseating the secularist Awami League government through Hefazat-e-Islam's attempted a midnight revolution, the BNP-Jamaat nexus immediately began massive propaganda in the Western countries by bringing false accusations of "violating human rights" and "mass murder of Hefazat men." At this stage, an NGO called Odhikar, under the leadership of Adilur Rahman Khan – a leader of the (BNP – began false propaganda with the agenda of misleading various international rights groups such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International, while the BNP-Jamaat nexus continued spending millions of dollars towards lobbyist activities in the Western nations – especially the United States – with the goal of gaining sympathy and misleading the Western policymakers against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the Awami League, and the country's law enforcement agencies, including Rapid Action Battalion.

Radical Islam poses a continuous threat

Although the people of Bangladesh rejected the Islamist-jihadist conglomerate of BNP-Jel and voted a secularist Awami League into power through a landslide victory during the general election in December 2008, it became a herculean task for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her government to check the rise of militancy and terrorism and eliminate the existence of training camps and hideouts of the anti-India separatist group ULFA. It was also



a difficult task to fight jihadist outfits such as JMB, HuJI, and later the Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), which had formed an alliance with al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS).

These militant outfits had turned disparate in destabilizing the law and order situation in Bangladesh with the ulterior goal of unseating Sheikh Hasina from power. Well-orchestrated attacks targeting secularist individuals, journalists, bloggers, and even foreigners became almost a regular occurrence. At this juncture, the Awami League government under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina began taking tougher actions against these elements, where the international community, including the United States, played an extremely effective role by training members of law enforcement agencies, including Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), thus enabling these agencies to effectively combat terrorism and militancy in the country. Due to such rigorous efforts, militant outfits, although forced underground, continued heinous jihadist attacks. Two of the victims of these attacks were US citizen Avijit Roy and his wife, Rafida Bonya Ahmed. On February 26, 2015, Roy and Ahmed, both Bangladesh-born US citizens, were visiting Dhaka to attend a book fair when they were attacked by assailants with machetes. Roy was killed, and Ahmed survived with critical wounds.

Two related groups have claimed responsibility. The Ansarullah Bangla Team, an al-Qaeda-inspired terrorist group based in Bangladesh, claimed responsibility for the attack. Shortly thereafter, Asim Umar, the now-deceased leader of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, posted a widely circulated video claiming that AQIS followers were responsible for the attack on Roy and Ahmed.

In 2016, the US State Department designated AQIS as a Foreign Terrorist Organization under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, and a Specially Designated Global Terrorist under Executive Order 13224, which provides authority to sanction terrorists and those who support terrorists or terrorist acts.

On December 20, 2021, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, through the Rewards for Justice (RFJ) office, authorized a reward of up to \$5 million for information for information leading to the arrest or conviction of anyone involved in the murder of Avijit Roy and the attack on Rafida Bonya Ahmed.

In July 2016, there was a jihadist attack in Bangladesh at the Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka's Gulshan area. During this gruesome massacre, several foreign nationals, as well as locals, were brutally murdered by the members of Islamic State.

Since the coalition government of BNP and Jel came to power in 2001, counterterrorism experts throughout the world were seeing the country as a "breeding ground of militancy and terrorism," while others saw the country becoming "another Afghanistan or Pakistan." During 2001-2006, BNP-Jel coalition rule, several militant outfits, including Jamaatul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB) – which later formed a franchise with Islamic State (ISIS) and Hakratul Jihad-e-Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B), were gaining strength under the direct patronization of the government. At the same time, separatist groups in the northeastern states of India – particularly United Liberation Front of Assom (ULFA) – were allowed by the BNP-Jel regime to use Bangladesh soil in continuing cross-border terrorism in India, while ULFA was also allowed to establish its training camps and hideouts within Bangladesh. Additionally, the BNP-Jel government was actively collaborating with ULFA by coordinating and implementing a supply of weapons and explosives sent by Pakistani ISI and other foreign elements for these separatist groups.

Biden administration's maneuvers

The recent maneuvers by the Biden administration could have a considerable impact on Bangladesh. Antony Blinken, along with other officials from the State Department, seem to be extending support to Islamist factions in Bangladesh, including the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami. Peter D. Haas, the US ambassador stationed in Dhaka, has allegedly been spotted socializing with figures who have articulated anti-American views. Such conduct contravenes established diplomatic protocols and could conceivably result in the ousting of the US Embassy from Bangladesh. The Biden administration's strategy risks unsettling Bangladesh and creating an environment conducive for extremist entities to ascend to power. While this could potentially serve American objectives related to resource acquisition and geopolitical leverage, it imperils regional stability.

Further complicating matters are the swirling allegations surrounding [Hunter Biden's](#) lobbying endeavors in favor of the BNP. The BNP has been instrumental in fomenting anti-American sentiment, endorsing terrorism, and promoting militancy.

The US State Department's imposition of visa restrictions on Bangladesh is thought to be influenced by Hunter Biden's lobbying for the BNP – a perplexing move, considering the BNP's recent classification as an "undesignated tier-3 terrorist organization" by a US court. The Biden administration's backing of the BNP, a party designated as a tier-3 terrorist organization by the United States, has elicited concern from various sectors. Such endorsement could potentially turn Bangladesh into a sanctuary for extremist ideologies.

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Houthi Terror and the Global Threat to Freedom of Shipping: The Need for a Multinational Maritime Alliance

By Manuel Trajtenberg, Yuval Eylon, Yigal Maor, and Alon Berkman

Source: <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/houthi-threat/>

Dec 25 – Since the terror attack by Hamas on October 7 in the western Negev and the start of the Swords of Iron war in Gaza, a growing number of incidents by the Houthi terror organization have disrupted global navigation in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. The Houthis in Yemen, one of Iran's most important proxies in the Middle East, joined the "axis of resistance" against Israel and its "aggression" in the Gaza Strip and the region, and operate on two parallel channels: the first involves repeated ballistic missile and drone attacks on Israeli territory, particularly Eilat. So far these have been successfully neutralized by Israeli, US, and Saudi air defense systems. This threat, however, should not be underestimated, since no defense system is effective in all cases, and one successful strike could cause significant damage to people and property. The second and currently more significant channel is the Houthi activity in the maritime realm. The organization has threatened to disrupt ships linked directly or indirectly with Israel, including ships that are partly or fully owned by Israelis, or ships making their way between Israel and Asia. So far, in most cases the Houthis have in fact attacked ships that have no link to Israel or Israeli/Jewish ownership. Therefore, these incidents should be viewed as a revival of marine piracy in the Red Sea, which was ostensibly eradicated in recent years, and as a threat to global trade and the global economy.

Global Trade and the Maritime Realm

Changes in global trade over recent decades, and the centrality of the route from Bab el-Mandeb to the Suez Canal within this system, highlight the threat posed by the Houthi activity to the global economy. The importance of the maritime realm has increased in recent decades: it has assumed an expanded role in global trade, and in effect the global economy has taken to the seas. Almost 100 percent of Israel's foreign trade (in weight and volume) is transported at sea through its ports. Today's global trade, particularly in the field of liner shipping (container transportation), has morphed from a network of national shipping lines into a web of global and international matrices, unprecedented in their complexity and scope and in the size of the ships engaged. This revolution means that ships today carry cargoes for a range of international destinations, not just to one country.

In the framework of the revolution in maritime trade, the Arabian Sea in the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, from Bab el-Mandeb in the south to the Suez Canal in the north, are important routes, with considerable effect on global supply chains. Indeed, it is hard to overstate the importance of these maritime routes for the global economy. Since its construction 150 years ago, the Suez Canal has become the main route for transporting goods between Asia and the countries of Europe and the Mediterranean. An estimated 12 percent of global marine trade traverses the route from Bab el-Mandeb to the Suez Canal, carrying cargoes of energy (oil, coal, gas, etc.), raw materials, and consumer goods. The total number of containers passing through the Suez Canal is equivalent to about 30 percent of the total global container trade, and worth about one trillion dollars annually. Israel is one of many countries in the region whose economy is dependent to a large extent on the safety of maritime trade in the Red Sea and through the Bab el-Mandeb route. In order to protect global trade, international law and its instruments have determined that these routes and others like it throughout the world must be open and safe for everyone, without question.

However, freedom of navigation in the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea has been challenged since the start of the 21st century by piracy incidents launched by various groups. From 2006 to 2010 there was a sharp leap in the number of incidents threatening maritime trade through the Bab el-Mandeb strait by pirate groups from Somalia, who demanded ransom from the owners and operators of hundreds of ships that they boarded in the area of the Arabian Sea and the northwest of the Indian Ocean. An analysis by the World Bank in 2013 estimated the cost to the global economy of Somali piracy at \$18 billion, equal to a rise of one percent in the costs of global trade. In response to this threat, a multilateral task force was set up, led by the United States, to protect shipping routes, and 120 war ships from 20 different fleets were deployed in the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea. These actions have managed to eliminate the Somali threat almost completely. However, in recent years there has once again been a rise in attempts to attack cargo ships on these routes, by countries and by terror organizations, characterized by a growing degree of violence, sophistication, and use of advanced weapons. Since October 7, 2023, the threats to the freedom of navigation have intensified, following piratical activity by Iran and its Houthi proxies.

The Threat from Iran and the Houthis to the Freedom of Navigation

Iran and its proxies have long threatened the freedom of global navigation and have steadily developed the capabilities and means to disrupt the maritime activity of countries around the Mediterranean, the Red



Sea, the Arabian Sea, and the Persian Gulf. In the last two months, since the start of the war in Gaza, the Houthi terror army has significantly increased its provocations around the Red Sea. The Houthis comprise a Shi'ite-Zaydi terror organization that has been active in northwest Yemen and the Arabian Peninsula for about two decades. It numbers some 300,000-400,000 active members, and it is a central element of the Iranian "axis of resistance" in the Middle East, whose overall aims are the destruction of Israel, harm to US interests in the region, and undermining of moderate Sunni regimes that cooperate with the United States and Israel. The Houthi terror army demonstrates a wide spectrum of capabilities in the maritime dimension, where it is possible to discern Iranian influence, including attacking ships sailing to and from the Red Sea using USVs (Unmanned Surface Vehicles) and UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles), as well as planting naval mines and firing shore-to-sea missiles.

While Houthi rhetoric is directed against Israel and threatens ships linked to Israel, whether directly or indirectly, Houthi aggression has actually impacted a wide range of countries, and essentially threatens global maritime trade in general. For example, three ships damaged by the Houthis on December 3 had no link to Israeli trade, and were transporting cargoes to or from China. In another incident, the Houthis took control of a car carrier called *Galaxy Leader* that was transporting automobiles between India and Turkey. The ship is British-owned, operated by a Japanese company, and flies the flag of the Bahamas, and its crew are from a range of nations. This is a clear example of the international nature of commercial ships today, making the identification of the nationality of a specific ship an extremely difficult, if not impossible task. In fact, commercial ships are practically a non-national means of transportation, serving the international community in general for global trade.

It is clear, therefore, that Houthi attempts to attack ships with a connection to Israel are a threat to all global maritime trade between Asia and the Mediterranean, Europe, and even the United States, passing through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait to the Suez Canal. It is already possible to see the signs of the Houthi threat in the discourse relating to global maritime trade and in the actions of companies operating in this field, some of whom have announced that they will divert their shipping routes and even extend them in response to the threat. In the near future, the physical damage to cargo ships is likely to lead to a further increase in war risk insurance premiums in the shipping market. In the extreme scenario, if large transportation companies decide to avoid crossing the Bab el-Mandeb Strait to the Suez Canal and instead sail around Africa to the west, it is possible to predict huge disruptions of global supply chains and significant rises in the costs of international trade. The extra time required by ships choosing the route round Africa instead of the Suez Canal is about two to three weeks, according to the speed of the specific ship. As a result of the delay, countries and companies will have to invest in enlarging their stocks. An event that testifies to the dangers inherent in the Houthi threat is the obstruction of the Suez Canal for six days by the ship *Ever Given* in March 2021, which caused considerable international economic damage by delaying hundreds of ships trying to cross the Suez Canal, while others took the alternative route around Africa.

The challenges to the freedom of navigation and the global economy have intensified following recent statements by the Houthis, in which they threatened to create a de facto maritime blockade by attacking every vessel sailing toward Israeli ports. With this rhetoric the Houthis have significantly expanded the number of ships under threat. International companies will find it hard to stop services to Israeli ports, when even transshipment or announcing a "termination of voyage"^[1] in a port outside Israel will make them a legitimate target in the eyes of the Houthis. The escalation of the threats from the Houthis and their international implications were brought into greater focus after the attack on the French military vessel (FS *Languedoc – D653*), which intercepted two drones aimed at it about 70 miles northwest of the area controlled by the Houthis. This apparently marks a big step forward in the Houthi threat to global maritime trade, which will demand special attention from the international community in the near future.

Addressing the Houthi Maritime Threat

In view of the global nature of the Iranian and Houthi threat to shipping routes in the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea, a coordinated and determined multi-national strategy is required, as was used successfully in the past in the struggle against Somali piracy. A failure of the free world to respond in a clear and resolute manner to the Houthi threats will damage global maritime trade and set a dangerous precedent of succumbing to terror on the seas, thus giving legitimacy to actions by other countries and organizations designed to disrupt the free passage of vessels at other chokepoints based on political discrimination.^[2] Therefore, the required response to Iranian-Houthi aggression is a multi-national marine alliance led by the United States and with the participation of other countries, including pragmatic Sunni countries in the region.

In an encouraging development, on December 19, the United States launched a multinational maritime task force to safeguard ships passing through the shipping lanes in the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea from Iranian-Houthi threats. The initiative, named Operation Prosperity Guardian, was joined by France, the United Kingdom, Canada, Italy, Australia, Greece, and Bahrain, among other countries. The task force also includes contributors that have not been named. This is a welcome development that Israel should support.

The Abraham Accords, together with the reassignment of US-Israeli military cooperation from the European Command (EUCOM) to the Central Command (CENTCOM), enable Israel to become an active

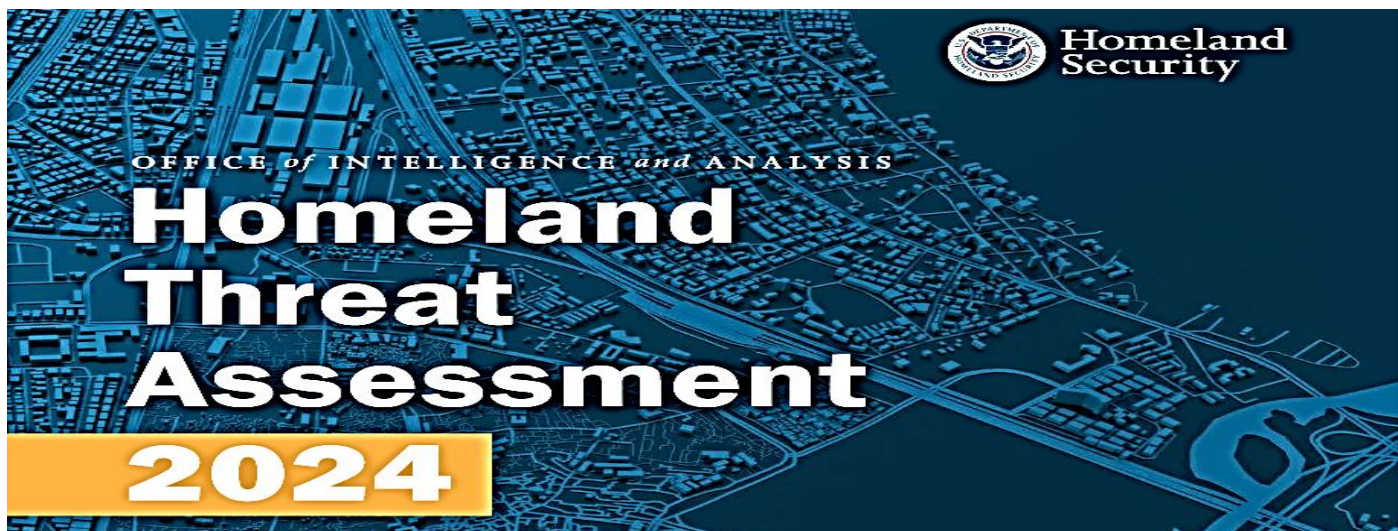


partner in the new maritime alliance. The Israeli navy has a large variety of vessels, capabilities, and units that can participate in a wide range of task forces, from humanitarian missions, through assistance and the securing of freedom of navigation in threatened areas, to tasks of building situational awareness or the collection of intelligence, to obstruction of maritime terror activity and weapons smuggling. Maritime forces could operate overtly and covertly, using a combination of various fleets in the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and other places. All these are of course very relevant to tackling the threat from Iran and its proxies. In addition, the security industries of Israel are at the forefront in a range of maritime technologies and can make an important contribution to any alliance. Implementation of the proposed policy through the advancement of marine diplomacy as a tool for intensifying and expanding the Abraham Accords at a time when they are challenged by the war in Gaza could help Israel turn the Houthi threat into a strategic opportunity. Maritime diplomacy is considered an effective tool for promoting cooperation between companies, thanks to the shared language of seafarers that permits them to bypass existing diplomatic obstacles.

[1] The ability of a cargo ship to unload its cargo in a different port from the one stated in the bill of landing (the transportation contract) for reasons defined in the contract, including war, force majeure, and more.

[2] Chokepoints: between seas/oceans and other geographically restricted sailing routes whose blockage damages free maritime trade.

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Source: https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2023-09/23_0913_ia_23-333-ia_u_homeland-threat-assessment-2024_508C_V6_13Sep23.pdf

Terrorism, both foreign and domestic, remains a top threat to the Homeland, but other threats are increasingly crowding the threat space. During the next year, we assess that the threat of violence from individuals radicalized in the United States will remain high, but largely unchanged, marked by lone offenders or small group attacks that occur with little warning. Foreign terrorist groups like al-Qa'ida and ISIS are seeking to rebuild overseas, and they maintain worldwide networks of supporters that could seek to target the Homeland. In addition to the enduring terrorism threat, we expect illegal drugs produced in Mexico and sold in the United States will continue to kill more Americans than any other threat. During the past year, US-based traffickers have become more involved in the mixing and pressing of fentanyl, contributing to more lethal mixes of this already deadly drug.

This year, record encounters of migrants arriving from a growing number of countries have complicated border and immigration security. While monthly encounters have fallen from record highs in December, overall encounters for the fiscal year are on pace to nearly match 2022's record-high total. As part of the



overall increase in migration, we have also encountered a growing number of individuals in the Terrorist Screening Data Set (TSDS), also known as the “watchlist.” Inclusion in the TSDS ranges from known associates of watchlisted individuals, such as family members, to individuals directly engaged in terrorist activity.

Domestic and foreign adversaries will likely continue to target our critical infrastructure over the next year, in part because they perceive targeting these sectors would be detrimental to US industries and the American way of life. While cyber-attacks seeking to compromise networks or disrupt services for geopolitical or financial purposes continue apace, we noted an uptick over the last year of physical attacks on critical infrastructure. We expect the 2024 election cycle will be a key event for possible violence and foreign influence targeting our election infrastructure, processes, and personnel.

Against this backdrop of traditional homeland security threats, we expect the People’s Republic of China (PRC) will continue to use predatory economic practices to advantage its firms and industries over ours. The PRC will likely continue to manipulate markets, employ economic espionage and coercive economic tools, and seek to illicitly acquire our technologies and intellectual property. Concurrently, financially motivated criminal actors are adapting new methods to improve their ability to financially extort victims and will likely continue to impose significant financial costs on the US economy over the next year.

Climate change, natural disasters, and technological advances have the potential to compound many of these threats. Climate-related disasters, such as heat waves, droughts, wildfires, coastal storms, and inland flooding, have the potential to disrupt regional economies, foster health crises like disease outbreaks, and tax law enforcement resources. Meanwhile, the proliferation of accessible artificial intelligence (AI) tools likely will bolster our adversaries’ tactics. Nation-states seeking to undermine trust in our government institutions, social cohesion, and democratic processes are using AI to create more believable mis-, dis-, and misinformation campaigns, while cyber actors use AI to develop new tools and accesses that allow them to compromise more victims and enable larger-scale, faster, more efficient, and more evasive cyber attacks.

Terrorism, cyber attacks main Paris 2024 threats as security plan finalised

Source: <https://www.reuters.com/sports/terrorism-cyber-attacks-main-paris-2024-threats-security-plan-finalised-2023-11-23/>

Terrorism and cyber attacks are the two main risks the Paris Olympics faces, with a potentially highly exposed opening ceremony, but organisers are confident they will be ready to face the challenge next year.

Paris 2024 is launching the third of four waves of tenders for private security, which will result in the presence of 17,000-22,000 agents a day - including 2,000 for the opening ceremony, which will be a long parade on the Seine River attended by possibly 600,000 people.

Some 30,000 police officers and soldiers will also be mobilised to secure the surroundings on July 26.

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

He added that the security budget of 320 million euros (\$349.02 million) was unchanged.

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

He was deputy head of safety and security for official sites at the Euro 2016 soccer finals seven months after the Nov. 2015 Islamist attacks which involved a simultaneous assault by gunmen and suicide bombers on entertainment venues and cafes in Paris. "Since 2015, the terrorist risk has been taken into account. Cyber threat is the other main risk," added Collomb. "Drones are also a subject, armies have been facing that risk for a while now. It has been in the security plan for the Games since 2019."

Last week, Paris 2024 called for vigilance after French security services said they had uncovered a disinformation campaign emanating from Azerbaijan that aimed to undermine the French capital's capacity to hold the event. 'MAJOR CHALLENGE'

In January, France's top audit body warned that the opening ceremony on the River Seine posed a "major challenge", highlighting concerns about a reliance on private security operators to protect the Games. Le Ray, who was Paris's military governor at the time of the 2015 Paris attacks, said the private security market was "tense", with



an estimated shortage of 20,000 agents nationwide, but insisted the recruitment process through tenders was "on time".

"The opening ceremony is the biggest event from a security perspective we've seen in a long time in Europe," Brittany Jacobs, sport management department chair at American Public University System, told Reuters.

"I think there will always be something that goes wrong but the question is are you ready for something that goes wrong.

"There are concerns about drones, and terrorist groups, something inevitably will go wrong whenever you have an event like this in open space." Jacobs, however, believes organisers are nowadays "more prepared" than in 1996 when one person was killed and 111 others injured in the Atlanta Olympic Park bombing during the Games.

"The risks and rewards are both potentially really high. We will be talking about it (the Paris opening ceremony) for decades," she added.

(\$1 = 0.9168 euros)

Hamas Attack: It Wasn't An "Intelligence Failure"

By Dr. Dan Steinbock

Source: <https://modern diplomacy.eu/2023/12/25/hamas-attack-it-wasnt-an-intelligence-failure/>

Dec 25 – Withing hours after October 7, Israeli headlines told the story: "This is our 9/11." In reality, the Hamas-Israel War is about ethnic cleansing coupled with economic struggle for energy. In effect, Israeli intelligence did not fail. The far-right political leadership did. Recently, the *New York Times* reported that "Israel knew Hamas's attack plan more than a year ago." Code-named "Jericho Wall," the 40-page blueprint outlined the kind of lethal invasion that resulted in the death of some 1,200 Israelis. The document was circulated widely among Israeli military and intelligence leaders, but experts determined an attack of that scale and ambition was beyond Hamas's capabilities.^[i] The *Times* report reverberated internationally. But it wasn't a scoop.

Neglect of warnings, gender bias

After October 7, Israeli media has released *several* critical pieces indicating that many intelligence analysts' warnings were ignored. What was new in the *Times* piece was the blueprint document. Underpinning all these ignored warnings was the flawed belief that Hamas lacked the capability to attack and would not dare to do so.

This belief was fostered by two tacit factors. First, gender bias and sexism. The longer that the militarization has prevailed in Israel, the more the country's gender gap has deepened. Today, Israel ranks at the level of El Salvador and Uganda in this regard.^[ii] Since October 7, testimonies from members of the mainly female look-out units have bolstered accusations that Netanyahu's leadership fatally misread the dangers from Gaza.

THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

"It's infuriating," she told Kan of the intelligence failure. "We saw what was happening, we told them about it, and we were the ones who were murdered."

The Hamas terrorists would train at the border fence nonstop, Desiatnik told Kan. At first, it was once a week, then once a day, and then nearly constantly.

In addition to passing on information about the frequency of the training going on at the fence, the surveillance soldier said she collected evidence of the content of the training, which included how to drive a tank and how to cross into Israel via a tunnel. As the activity on the border increased, she realized that "it was just a matter of time" until something happened.



Maya Desiatnik (Kan TV screenshot, used in accordance with clause 27a of the Copyright Law)

evidence, Hamas militants trained for the brutal attacks in at least six sites across Gaza in plain sight and less than a 1.5 km from Israel's heavily fortified and monitored border, as even CNN reported in early October.^[iii]

Not just Netanyahu, but senior politicians from across the political spectrum bought into the idea, which was also touted by Israel Defense Forces and eventually Shin Bet. "It's infuriating," said Maya Desiatnik soon after October 7. "We saw what was happening, we told them about it, and we were the ones who were murdered."

Desiatnik is from Nahal Oz, where 20 women border surveillance soldiers were murdered by Hamas.

Figure 1 Maya Desiatnik: "We saw what was happening"
Source: "Surveillance soldiers warned of Hamas activity on Gaza border for months before Oct. 7." *Times of Israel*, Oct 26, 2023

Intelligence failure – or not

Second, half a century of occupation has left an impact not just on popular opinion but on analytical assessments. The idea that Hamas lacked capability to attack was predicated on the notion that "they" wouldn't be as imaginative as "we" can be. Based on 1-2 years of



Worse, many testimonies by Israeli witnesses to the Hamas attack add to growing evidence that the Israeli military killed its own citizens as it struggled to neutralize Palestinian gunmen. As one witness said to Israel Radio: “[Israeli special forces] eliminated everyone, including the hostages.”^[iv]

In the 1980s, the Operation Cyclone led the U.S. to train, arm and finance a generation of Islamist fedayeen in Afghanistan, including Osama Bin Laden. Netanyahu’s governments thought they could exploit Hamas; not that Hamas could exploit them.

But if the intelligence failure wasn’t a failure at all, what was it?

From the start, Israel’s counter-offensive has relied on a rhetoric of targeted killing, but with actual focus on the destruction of Gaza. In view of the Israeli military, their operation comprises tactical military targets; underground targets such as tunnels; but particularly power targets like high-rises and residential towers; and operatives’ family homes. In past wars, military and underground targets were in the key role. Now it belongs to power and family-home targets. The real objective is maximum harm to the Palestinian civil society.^[v]

A prelude to the West Bank?

There are almost no Palestinians remaining in the vast area stretching east from Ramallah to the outskirts of Jericho. Most of the communities who lived in the area have fled for their lives in recent months as a result of intensifying Israeli settler violence and land seizures, backed by the Israeli army and state institutions. Israeli settlers have chased out entire Palestinian communities in Area C.^[vi] The area that just happens to stand “above sizeable reservoirs of oil and natural gas wealth,” as UNCTAD stressed already in the late 2010s.

In the past, ethnic cleansing had mainly demographic objectives. Today, it also serves economic agendas. The consequent damage can no longer be considered *collateral* but *intended*.



International media “discovered” the West Bank’s settler violence mainly in fall 2023. But it’s not a new phenomenon. But it turned more open, blatant and destructive after the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in the mid-’90s (Figure 2)

Figure 2 Intimidation of the West Bank’s Palestinians. Graffiti on a house: “Graffiti such as “Die Arab Sand-Niggers!” is often sprayed on Palestinian houses by Israeli settlers. Hebron, West Bank, Palestine. Date: May 3, 2002 - Source: Wikimedia Commons

The prospect of the *Second Nakba*

What once stood between the Netanyahu government and the grandiose plans for a Greater Jewish Israel with abundant energy reserves was Gaza. Hence, the frantic activity of the Biden administration and the subdued silence of Brussels. Both like the ensuing

energy scenarios, but detest the bad PR. Ultimately, it is the demographic agendas, deeply ingrained in decades of ethnic cleansing, that are now coupled with economic energy aspirations.

In this view, the Israeli intelligence did *not* fail on October 7. It did its job; it warned the policymakers about the impending threat. It’s the political leadership that failed.

Purposeful or not, this neglect serves the far-right government’s tacit political objectives to neutralize Gaza and Palestinian sovereignty by displacing the Gazans; and to advance preconditions for Palestinian expulsions from the West Bank (Figure 3).

There is a dark trade-off, though. The ensuing Israel would no longer be the secular, Jewish-Arab democracy it was once supposed to become. Rather, it may trend toward a militarized, neoliberal Jewish autocracy that most Israelis intensely oppose, but American financiers prefer. Milton Friedmans need their Pinochets. The external chasm between Jews and Palestinians would be replaced by internal divides between rich and poor, secular and religious, Western and Eastern Jews.

Here’s the inconvenient truth: The First Nakba resulted from ethnic expulsions most of which preceded the Israeli independence in 1948. The Second Nakba would also be about sovereignty over gas and oil, should international community allow it. And if it will, make no mistake about it: Our humanity will no longer be the same. What happens in Palestine won’t stay in Palestine.



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Trends In Terrorism: What's On The Horizon In 2024? – Analysis

By Colin P. Clarke

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Dec 26 – On the morning of October 7, Hamas terrorists breached the border fence between Gaza and Israel under the cover of a withering rocket barrage. Within hours, the Palestinian militant group had killed 1,200 innocent people in Israel, kidnapped over 240, and plunged the region into its most dangerous crisis in decades.

The brutal attack on October 7, and Israel's military response, has made the war in Gaza a central component of the terrorist threat landscape heading into 2024. In the United States, FBI director Christopher Wray has [warned on numerous occasions](#) ever since about the elevated terrorism threat level, stating before Congress that "We assess that the actions of Hamas and its allies will serve as an inspiration the likes of which we haven't seen since ISIS launched its so-called caliphate years ago."

Europeans are also worried. EU Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson [recently stated](#): "With the war between Israel and Hamas, and the polarization it causes in our society, with the upcoming holiday season, there is a huge risk of terrorist attacks in the European Union." The conflict between Israel and Hamas looms large and will, in all likelihood, serve as a catalyst for terrorist plots and attacks outside of the conflict zone itself, spurring radicalized individuals, small cells, and decentralized networks to strike at targets associated with one side or the other. Indeed, this has already occurred, with [seven individuals](#) arrested across Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands for planning terrorist attacks against Jewish institutions in Europe. Some of the men were believed to be Hamas members.

While the conflict in Gaza will occupy a substantial amount of global counterterrorism bandwidth, the center of gravity for terrorism in the near future is likely to remain the Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa. The Sahel has been plagued by porous borders, weak security forces and illegitimate military juntas. Throughout this region, jihadist groups, including Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), [Islamic State Sahel Province \(ISSP\)](#), and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), will continue to operate with near impunity, taking advantage of failed states and ungoverned spaces. The Sahel has seen a string of successive military coups in recent years, leaving Kremlin-friendly regimes in power in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Accordingly, this has opened the door to further Russian influence through the deployment of mercenaries from the Wagner Group, a private military company in the midst of a transition following the death of its leader [Yevgeny Prigozhin](#) in a plane crash that most believe was orchestrated at the behest of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Wagner has exacerbated the terrorism issue throughout the Sahel, since its coup-proofing operations are conducted with a heavy hand, leading to significant civilian casualties and collateral damage, pushing civilians into the arms of JNIM and ISSP, growing their ranks.

Along with al-Shabaab in Somalia, JNIM remains among the most potent al-Qaeda-linked affiliates and is looking to expand its operations from the Sahel into coastal West Africa. Yet globally, some counterterrorism analysts are sanguine about the group's impending demise. Writing in *Foreign Policy* in July, terrorism scholar Daniel Byman [remarked upon](#) "the organization's decline in both capabilities and ideological influence." Others, including this author, are not



quite ready to write al-Qaeda's obituary, given the organization's historic resilience and propensity to regenerate when offered sanctuary in failed states, as it has now with the Taliban government in Afghanistan.

Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent and the Tehrik-i-Taliban's (TTP) [longstanding relationship](#) with al-Qaeda make South Asia a [natural fit](#) for al-Qaeda's rebirth. Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, Pakistan has suffered from a spike in terrorist attacks planned and executed by jihadist militant groups, some of whom use Afghanistan as a safe haven. As Asfandiyar Mir [has noted](#), "Pakistan faces an increasingly formidable threat from the insurgency of the TTP." An attack in [mid-December](#) featuring gunmen and suicide bombers targeted a Pakistani army post, killing twenty-three soldiers. If the Pakistani security forces are unable to quell the insurgency, 2024 could see widespread instability sweep the country, plunging Pakistan back into chaos as jihadist groups threaten the state.

Much like al-Qaeda, the overall picture with the Islamic State is mixed. Core Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has been attenuated, with [several successive leaders](#) successfully eliminated on the battlefield. Yet it has stubbornly persisted as its fighters wage a low-level insurgency in the Badia, a swath of desert territory in central Syria. There are also unresolved issues of detention facilities and prisoner camps throughout northeastern Syria, including al-Hol, which has been described as an incubator for radicalization. These camps are also potential targets for ISIS prison breaks, a lingering obsession dating back to the group's "Breaking the Walls" campaign. ISIS attacks have declined substantially, but its leaders are working to implement shadow governance throughout eastern Syria, positioning the group for a future comeback if conditions become more favorable. The United States retains approximately 900 special operations forces troops in Syria, holding the line against both the Islamic State and Iran's expanding influence.

The threat posed by the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) in Afghanistan has largely been contained to South Asia. However, that could change if the group is able to reconstitute its external attack operations network. Europe would be particularly vulnerable to attacks launched from Afghanistan, based on geographical proximity and Central Asian diaspora networks that could play a role, as they did in a [disrupted plot](#) targeting US and NATO military bases in Germany. Even ISIS in Southeast Asia, which has been relatively quiet over the past two years, is now beginning to increase its [operational tempo](#), launching a bombing attack at a Roman Catholic mass in the embattled city of Marawi in the southern Philippines. ISIS affiliates in Somalia, Yemen, Libya, and Egypt's Sinai peninsula continue to struggle to regain momentum, although conflict dynamics in each of those countries could increase risk and associated threat level.

The future of terrorism in the Middle East could see something of a shift, at least temporarily, from a paradigm largely dominated by Salafi-jihadist groups (Sunni) to Shia groups sponsored by Iran. While Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) are both Sunni groups, there are other members of Iran's [axis of resistance](#), including Lebanese Hezbollah, the [Houthis in Yemen](#), and various Iraqi Shia militia groups, especially Kata'ib Hezbollah, that will continue to pose a major challenge to the region and beyond. Iran has been able to play the role of spoiler through its sponsorship of a vast network of terrorist proxies and will only be emboldened by the perceived success of Hamas's October 7 attack into southern Israel. There are also political and security dynamics in the Middle East that could impact the trajectory of terrorism in the region.

The longer the conflict in Gaza drags on, the greater potential radicalizing effect it could have among domestic populations of Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia. Suppose Riyadh is perceived by its own population of abandoning the Palestinians to continue normalization talks with Jerusalem. In that case, it is not difficult to imagine a backlash within Saudi society, sparking a return to a situation similar to the post-9/11 period, when al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) posed a domestic terrorism threat before being degraded and pushed over the border into Yemen. There is a growing chasm between how the so-called "Arab Street" views the conflict in Gaza and how the leadership in the Gulf does, the latter viewing it as a nuisance impeding broader economic and technological progress.

Racially and ethnically motivated violent extremist (REMVE) actors remain largely decentralized, with small cells communicating online, as groups like the Atomwaffen Division, The Base, and the Nordic Resistance Movement have largely faded from the headlines. Still, the [Russian Imperial Movement \(RIM\)](#) has been revitalized by Russia's war in Ukraine, ramping up recruitment, propaganda, and paramilitary training efforts. As the war in Ukraine approaches its third year, and with questions surrounding continued Western financial and military support for Kyiv, this conflict could produce violent extremists motivated by REMVE ideology committed to launching attacks in the West. Far-right extremists and lone actors motivated by violent white supremacy and/or neo-Nazi ideology are also a threat, with individuals inspired by terrorists, including Anders Breivik and Brenton Tarrant, remaining a constant threat to authorities who seek to prevent large-scale terrorist attacks. Online propaganda networks often single out migrants as a target, and with far-right populist groups once again enjoying electoral success in Europe, xenophobic attacks motivated by racism remain a constant concern of law enforcement and intelligence services.

"Salad bar" terrorism, where extremists pick and choose different components of ideology across the spectrum, will also likely endure, facilitated by Internet culture, memetics, and the connective sinew of misogyny, anti-Semitism, QAnon-like conspiracy theories, and anti-LGBTQ propaganda that often



accompanies the online diets of today's violent extremists. Neo-Luddites and technophobes, individuals concerned about the ubiquity of technology in modern society, could also resort to terrorism, with growing attacks against 5G cell towers and targets associated with artificial intelligence. There is also the threat of what the Federal Bureau of Investigation has called "special interest" terrorism (sometimes referred to as "single-issue" terrorism), which includes a range of mostly, though not exclusively, left-wing causes such as animal rights and "ecological resistance." Individuals and groups motivated by pro-life and pro-choice issues—abortion-related violent extremists—are also a concern in the terrorism threat landscape.

At the core of terrorism is the threat of politically motivated violence, so it will be important to monitor elections in 2024, when eight of the ten [most populous countries](#) in the world will hold elections, including Brazil, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, and the United States, among others. Each of these countries has experienced varying levels of political violence related to elections in recent years, and in the United States, the potential for domestic terrorism and anti-government extremism is palpable. There are also high-profile events next year that will garner much attention from those seeking to do harm, including the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, France, a highly visible and symbolic target for terrorists, including those who seek to master emerging technologies such as drones and 3-D printed weapons, to conduct attacks.

The terrorism threat is far from static. When a group suffers setbacks, including leadership decapitation, it rarely signals extinction. Time and time again, these groups are resuscitated or go through several iterations before surging back. And with advancements in technology, communications, and transportation, the organizational structure of a group itself is a less salient variable than it has been historically. But organizational structure should not be an afterthought, as it can be a true force multiplier, elevating a terrorist group's ability to launch complex attacks. With the United States pivoting away from counterterrorism and toward "near-peer" competition, there are fewer resources to deal with transnational jihadist groups and a paucity of intelligence assets available to evaluate metastasizing threats. The bench is thin across the US counterterrorism community, as resources and expertise are reallocated to China, Russia, and other great power-related portfolios. The shift has resulted in damaged morale within parts of the intelligence community and made it more difficult to recruit top-tier talent to focus on counterterrorism in government and academia. In a worst-case scenario, an overreliance on technology and over-the-horizon counterterrorism capabilities could make the United States and its allies vulnerable to another spectacular attack, especially against embassies and military bases abroad.

Projecting where new threats will emerge is rarely linear, as the Hamas attack itself proves. For a significant swath of the counterterrorism community, Hamas has mostly been an [afterthought](#) for much of the past decade, relegated down toward the bottom of the list of priorities, after affiliates and franchise groups belonging to the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, far-right extremists such as white supremacists and neo-Nazis, and Shia groups including Lebanese Hezbollah. Not only did the devastating terrorist attack of October 7 demonstrate a capability and intent that few believed Hamas to possess, but it also led counterterrorism analysts worldwide to re-interrogate their prior assumptions about the conventional wisdom in terms of the most potent threats. This should be a continuous process, as analysts seek to measure and assess a wide range of factors and variables that contribute to the ever-evolving nature of transnational terrorism.

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A preliminary overview of the **lessons learned** from the war of October 7, 2023 – Regarding Civil Defense

By Brigadier General (res.) Avi Bachar

Dec 2023 – On Saturday, October 7, thousands of fighters of the terrorist organization Hamas breached the border fence of the Gaza Strip in over thirty places. This breach was carried out in the early hours of the morning and simultaneously with the firing of thousands of rockets at the State of Israel, mainly on the towns near the border of the Gaza Strip but also as far as Tel Aviv.

The terrorists were able to enter almost unhindered to the towns and cities along the border as well as IDF bases. During the day, the civilian "rapid response squads" of the villages, the soldiers who were in the bases, policemen and soldiers who arrived without an orderly call participated in the battles and fought in the area.

The purpose of the Hamas attack was to kill as many people as possible: men, women, and children, as well as to kidnap as many civilians and soldiers as possible, so they could be used for the purposes of protecting Hamas inside Gaza, as well as to extort the release of terrorists from Israeli prisons.



By nightfall, control over all of the towns was achieved and most of the terrorists who infiltrated were killed. Then it was revealed to the people in the area the horror that the terrorists left behind, including many people who were shot, burned, or beheaded. A total of nearly 1,400 people were killed that day, women, children, soldiers, and female soldiers. Also, about 240 people were kidnapped into Gaza.

From the time until the writing of this initial document, 37 days have already passed in which the IDF has been attacking from the air and on the ground in order to eliminate Hamas' Militia forces and its ability to continue to control the Gaza Strip.

During all this time, Hamas continues to launch missiles in Israel while at the same time Hezbollah from Lebanon is firing Surface-to-surface missiles and anti-tank missiles in the north of the country.

In this summary, I do not intend to deal with perhaps the most important and interesting question of how it happened that the IDF was not aware of Hamas' plan to carry out such an invasion, which almost resulted in the complete paralysis of the units that were deployed along the border.

In this article I will deal with the lessons that can be drawn from this war from the points of view of Civil Defence concentrating on:

1. Border protection systems, their weaknesses and (initial) recommendations/lessons learned that can be concluded today.
2. The lessons learned that can be drawn from the Israeli civil defense system and its importance to the resilience of communities and individuals.

Border protection systems, their weaknesses and (initial) recommendations/lessons learned that can be concluded today.

1. In the world, border protection takes place on the basis of a risk assessment carried out by the Military HQ responsible for the border. Based on the risk assessment, a passive and active protection defense system is established, which includes:
 - a) Establishment of an obstacle that can **delay** the enemy forces from breaking into the protected area. The obstacle will be built against people and against vehicles according to the enemy's capability and risk Assessment. In our case, an extremely massive fence was built, and an underground concrete wall was also built to prevent the possibility of digging tunnels under the fence to infiltrate across the border and surprise the defenders. The main purpose of the obstacle is to monitor the enemy's infiltration until the arrival of a significant military force that can eliminate the infiltrators and prevent their entry into the territory of the defender. That obstacle, however strong and massive it may be, is not the whole answer, but only a part of it. A full response will be given by military forces who will quickly arrive at the scene and eliminate the attackers.
 - b) Installation of electronic systems that will give a warning, ahead of time, to the approach of attackers to the obstacle, to allow the responding forces to arrive on time.
 - c) Strongholds should be built along the border which will be used by the soldiers and technology for the purpose of conducting observations, patrols along the barrier and of course immediate force to stop any attempt at infiltration. The amount and the quality of the force that will be stationed along the border should be of a quantity and quality that can respond to the various possible scenarios.
2. Main issues regarding border protection in the world :
 - a) The assessments and operational readiness of the forces should be based on responding to the worst/reasonable scenarios according to the capability of the enemy, **and not on assessments regarding the enemy's desire to carry out an attack.**
In our case: the scenarios prepared by the IDF were indeed very close to what happened on October 7th, but the assessments were based on an idea that Hamas has no interest in starting a war that would cause it a heavy disaster.
 - b) When a conflict between countries arises from one or more of the following reasons, the defender must prepare for the worst:
 - 1) Struggle for territory: especially when the weak side educates to hatred due to the "dispossession" of the land that belongs to them on a historical basis or on a propaganda basis.
 - 2) Religious conflict: This is the most difficult and destructive problem in human history, religion has been used since the beginning of history as the strongest motivation for wars and the destruction of other nations (sometimes they have the same religion but different denomination).
 - 3) A Wealthy country next to a poor country: A situation where on one side there is a wealthy and flourishing country and on the other side there is a poor and failing country. The common idea in the wealthy side, is that, if they allow citizens from the poor country to come and work in the wealthy country it will reduce the desire to conquer/attack the wealthy country. the truth is completely different, working among the wealthy citizens only increases the jealousy and the desire to have a better life even if it will cause the destruction of the wealthy country.
 - c) Do not rely only on efficient and advanced electronic systems, no matter how advanced they are, you always need enough human guards and observers who can warn and act immediately, even when



the technology fails. this is certainly true since advanced technological systems are vulnerable to malfunctions, to active enemy attack and of course to cyber-attacks.

- d) Having the ability to send large reinforcements in a very short time to the attacked area based on rear units/training bases. This, according to prior planning and training of the reinforcements, including knowledge of the area, the towns and the people living there, which will allow for a high effectiveness of the response forces and the grouping of the deployed forces in the field.

The lessons that can be drawn from the Israeli Civil Defense system and its importance to the National Resilience, the communities, and individuals

1. The civil defense system is based on several layers:

- a) A **preliminary detection system** that is based on intelligence and advanced technology that can give an indication of missile attacks on civilian population.
- b) A **warning system** for the population and infrastructures based on the alarm system and the ability to transmit a warning also with advanced technological devices (smartphones, television, etc.) it is important to have the ability to focus the warning on limited areas that are in danger.
- c) An **active defense system** such as "Iron Dome" to significantly reduce the number of missiles that will be landed in the populated areas.
- d) **Passive Defense and protection**, building a "protective space" (shelters) for citizen's homes, workplaces, schools, hospitals, and other facilities.
- e) **First responders** for immediate response, including: establishment of search and rescue units, units for assisting the population, reinforcement for the fire department, units to handle CBRN incidents, etc.

2. In this review, I would like to focus on the issue of passive defense and protection systems. And the lessons learned.

- a) Based on the lessons of World War II, the first Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, established the civil defense organization under the Ministry of Defense and the IDF.
- b) The responsibility of this organization was to establish standards for the construction of shelters in every building in the country, public shelters in rural areas, as well as the establishment of a warning system, the distribution of CBRN masks to the population, etc.
- c) After the First Gulf War of the USA against Iraq in August 1990 - in which 40 Scud missiles were fired at Israel. it was decided in Israel to establish a Civil Defense Command named Home Front Command (HFC). In addition, the concept of the shelters changed into residential protected spaces. That means that every apartment will have one room that will be built in a way that can provide protection against rocket fire on Israel and CBRN.

Note: **At the establishment of the HFC I served as the chief of staff of the HFC and in fact I was in charge of the establishment of this system and the determination of the standards required for the construction of the protected space (shelter) in Israel.**

3. The main events in the Home Front in the October 7th war and lessons/conclusions that need to be drawn (at this stage)

- a) Since the war began (until today) almost 10,000 missiles were fired at Israel. About 12% of the missiles landed in said of Gaza. 90% of the missiles that were on the way to an urban area were intercepted by the Iron Dome system. Several dozens of missiles hit urban areas which resulted in a few dozen casualties and several fatalities.

It is very important to note that according to the reports, all those who were inside the protected spaces were not injured even when the missile hit the apartment itself!!!

All the victims were those who were not in the protected spaces when the alarm was sounded. It should also be noted that, in principle, the population knows how to behave and acts in accordance with HFC's instructions.

- b) During the first week of the war, about 70,000 people were evacuated from the towns that are 7km away from the border of Gaza, and about 80,000 people from the towns and villages near the Lebanon border in the north of Israel. The people were evacuated to hotels in safer parts of Israel.

Lesson learned: There was a plan to absorb such a large population in schools. the government decided otherwise. of course, from the point of view of the evacuees this is a better solution, but this expensive solution obliged the government to reduce as much as possible the evacuated communities, so that many communities which are near the border or in a dangerous area did not get an evacuation order.



c) An effort was made to concentrate a village's population in one hotel, so that the community could be together in the same place.

Lesson learned: important and correct.

d) The assistance to the evacuees in the hotels and private homes is mainly done by civilian volunteers by many organizations and NGOs that were established right from the first day.

Lesson learned: Of course, the harnessing of the various organizations for the sake of the population as well as for the soldiers is to be welcomed. But this activity was not planned or directed by a coordination center. Therefore, a mechanism must be developed within the government (possibly under the responsibility of National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to coordinate this activity.

e) Local municipalities took responsibility for the evacuees in their areas.

Lesson learned: The municipal authorities took responsibility without receiving any guidance or budgetary coverage for their activities. There must be legislation that will define the local authority as the "cornerstone" of the civil defense regarding tacking care to the population, that should determine legislation including the payments that the Municipality will receive for supporting citizens evacuated to their jurisdiction.

f) The Home Front Command (HFC) deployed officers and soldiers in all the hotels, to be used to connect the evacuees with the various organizations.

Lesson learned: The deployment of HFC in the hotels contributed to the feeling of security, however, the role of these teams must be consolidated with the local authority and the various government ministries, including the Ministry of Welfare.

g) In all local authorities, government offices and infrastructure facilities, control centers were opened to respond to the resilience of the residents and the critical systems, this activity was carried out based on the procedures of HFC and NEMA, and as practiced for many years.

Lesson learned: Generally well executed, however, levels of alertness should be determined according to the intensity of the war in the Home Front.

h) Humanitarian aid to populations with special needs was carried out by the Municipalities even though the needs increased greatly considering the fear of these populations leaving their homes. both, because of the missile attacks and because of the fear of terrorists who may be roaming the streets.

Lesson learned: Military HFC Mobilization units must be established within the cities based on place of residence to be operated by the Municipalities for the purpose of providing a response to the population in their area for any necessary need, including: operation and security of large public shelters, distribution of food to those in need, operation of day care centers (together with the Ministry of Education), A replacement for foreign workers that will leave, and so on.

i) Operation of "Resilience Centers" to provide treatment for people that have experienced stressful situations and need unique psychological assistance. Also, the activation of social workers of the local and from the evacuating municipalities for mental assistance as much as possible.

Lesson learned: Even in a routine time, mental health care systems collapse under the load. In a war situation, some of the caregivers are mobilizing to the army or must stay at home with their children. leads to a situation where there is no ability to meet the scope of the needs during a war, and on the 7th of October. To overcome these needs, an online training system or even an application must be developed that will allow a lot of people to receive basic training for "mental first aid" for themselves and those around them. something that can significantly reduce the need for prolonged and expensive treatments, which are not usually available to the population.

j) Activation of the information and instruction system of the HFC regarding people's behavior when the alarm siren is sounded (or when receiving an alert on a smartphone). These instructions really save lives as was seen in the casualty rate in the same places where damage to property did occur.

Lesson learned: The directives of the HFC regarding protection were clear and good. However, there was a great lack of a national explainer (possible on behalf of NEMA or the Prime Minister's Office) who would give clear instructions regarding the operation of the economy. and providing answers to the population in all economic, mental and consumer areas.

k) In Israel, as in many wealthy countries in the world, there is a reliance on foreign workers who sometimes make up a significant percentage of the country's workforce. During an emergency, which is a continuous danger, these workers who do not have a sense of partnership/patriotism with the country under attack, will leave the country and will cause a severe crisis in the industries in which they are working, such as: agriculture, construction, hospitalization, caregivers for disabled residents and more.



Lesson learned: The country must be ready to provide a partial response to this situation, possibly by preparing a list of volunteers in advance who will study the subjects and be able to be activated immediately. A second, and more realistic option: providing a response by soldiers of the HFC.

l) On October 7th, to be protected from the terrorists that raided the villages, many families entered the protected rooms and stayed there until the arrival of IDF forces who arrived and evacuated them to a safe place.

Note: the “Protected Space” (shelter) were originally intended for short-term protection against rocket fire on civilian population. In this war, the residential protected rooms saved more civilians in one day than in all the years since the standard was introduced in 1992.

Lessons learned regarding the “protected spaces”:

- The idea of a protected space in every apartment is the right solution for all possible and future threats in Israel, as well as in any country that wants to build survivability and resilience for the population in time of emergency.
- It is necessary to rethink about a strategic plan that will quickly lead to the provision of protection and strengthening the protected space against to all threatened areas both in terms of war/terror/CBRNE risks and in terms of natural disaster resistance. Such a plan was presented by me to the last two governments in Israel, I believe that the war will return this plan to a serious discussion soon.
- The protected space in factories and for essential service providers allows continuity of operation even in ongoing emergency situations. Includes: hospitals, clinics, personal resilience centers, hotels, schools, food manufacturing, supermarkets and shopping centers, water facilities, electricity, fuel storage, seaports, airports, control centers in cities and government offices, etc.
- A conclusion: the protected space available everywhere increases and contributes significantly to the national resilience and the systems and the population, which increases the sense of capability. This situation allows the government and the army HQ the freedom of action in war when they have the backing of the population who feel that their needs are well met, both in terms of preserving their lives and in terms of preventing shortages of essential supplies and services.

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Is Al Qaeda an “Existential Threat”? What Is the Meaning of Al Qaeda in Arabic?

Al Qaeda: The Computer Data Base



MICHEL CHOSSUDOVSKY
DEC 28, 2023



Online Jihadist Propaganda - 2022 in review

Source: https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/Online_jihadist_propaganda_2022_in_review.pdf

Dec 18 – This report is the fifth edition of the annual review of online jihadist propaganda. It analyses the major trends and developments in the propaganda of the most prominent Sunni jihadist organisations – the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda (AQ) – as well as their branches and offshoots.

The review addresses the trajectories of these groups, and how they have responded to shifting dynamics and attempted to overcome setbacks. It further identifies the dominant themes and types of productions exploited by the two groups during this period, while highlighting changes in key areas related to online jihadist propaganda, such as main narratives and the abuse of technology for propaganda dissemination. In order to shed light on changes in the groups’ narratives and online communication patterns, the research examined primary sources, including the groups’ operational claims, publications, statements, videos and audio speeches.



The aim of the review is to contribute to a deeper understanding of jihadist propaganda and to raise awareness among law enforcement practitioners, hosting service providers and the public of how jihadist organisations and their supporters abuse technology to broadcast their messages to intended audiences.

Key findings

- ▶ The so-called Islamic State (IS) lost and replaced two ‘caliphs’ within 8 months. IS has repeatedly highlighted that the killing of its leaders should not be seen as a setback. It should instead renew its militants’ strength to pursue the fight and die for the cause, as IS leaders have done.
- ▶ IS was able to leverage its global affiliates in propaganda releases that portrayed the group as continuing to expand to new territories, while concealing actual capacity in the Levant.
- ▶ Sub-Saharan Africa remained at the core of a rampant jihadist crisis led by insurgencies that graft onto local grievances while vaunting links to either al-Qaeda or IS. Propaganda documented violent clashes between IS Sahel province and Jama’at Nusra al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), both parties also sparring against security forces of Sahelian countries and the Russian private military company Wagner group.
- ▶ IS propaganda presented Africa as a destination for religious migration (hijra) and displayed the group’s endeavours to consolidate territorial control and provide governance, especially in Nigeria.
- ▶ IS’s communication strategy in Afghanistan focused on exposing the Taliban’s incapacity to provide stability and security in Afghanistan, thus harming its quest for international recognition.
- ▶ The IS online ecosystem, still dominated by the productions of IS-supporting media, saw multilingual and translation outlets play a leading role in 2022.
- ▶ IS propaganda gained a larger foothold on blockchain-based video sharing platforms. IS supporters also experimented with non-fungible tokens (NFTs), which were created with official IS statements to enhance their online resilience and potentially for trading and financing purposes.
- ▶ 2022 saw frequent messages issued by al-Qaeda Core and its global branches, including video releases featuring al-Qaeda’s leader Ayman al-Zawahiri (now deceased), some of them providing proof of life. Al-Zawahiri was later killed in a US drone strike in Kabul in July 2022. At the time of writing, al-Qaeda has yet to acknowledge his death or declare a successor.
- ▶ The sustained flow of official propaganda messages by the al-Qaeda network was matched by productions by its supporting media. The turnover of branded media outlets supportive of al-Qaeda was observed in 2022, with new entities being introduced to replace discontinued outlets.
- ▶ Al-Qaeda’s Core leadership has predicted that al-Shabab, which further consolidated its control of southern and central Somalia, would seize power in Somalia following the Taliban’s example.
- ▶ Since the Taliban’s return to power in Afghanistan, the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) emerged as emboldened and intensified its attacks against the Pakistani state.
- ▶ In 2022, Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) continued its communication strategy to rebrand HTS as the defender of the Syrian people from the current regime and its allies, as well the only actor able to mitigate the effects of the ongoing conflict on Syria’s social fabric and economy.



Iran Threatens to Take Red Sea Disruption to New Waters

By Elisabeth Braw (*Foreign Policy*)

Source: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/12/28/iran-red-sea-shipping-houthi-attacks/>

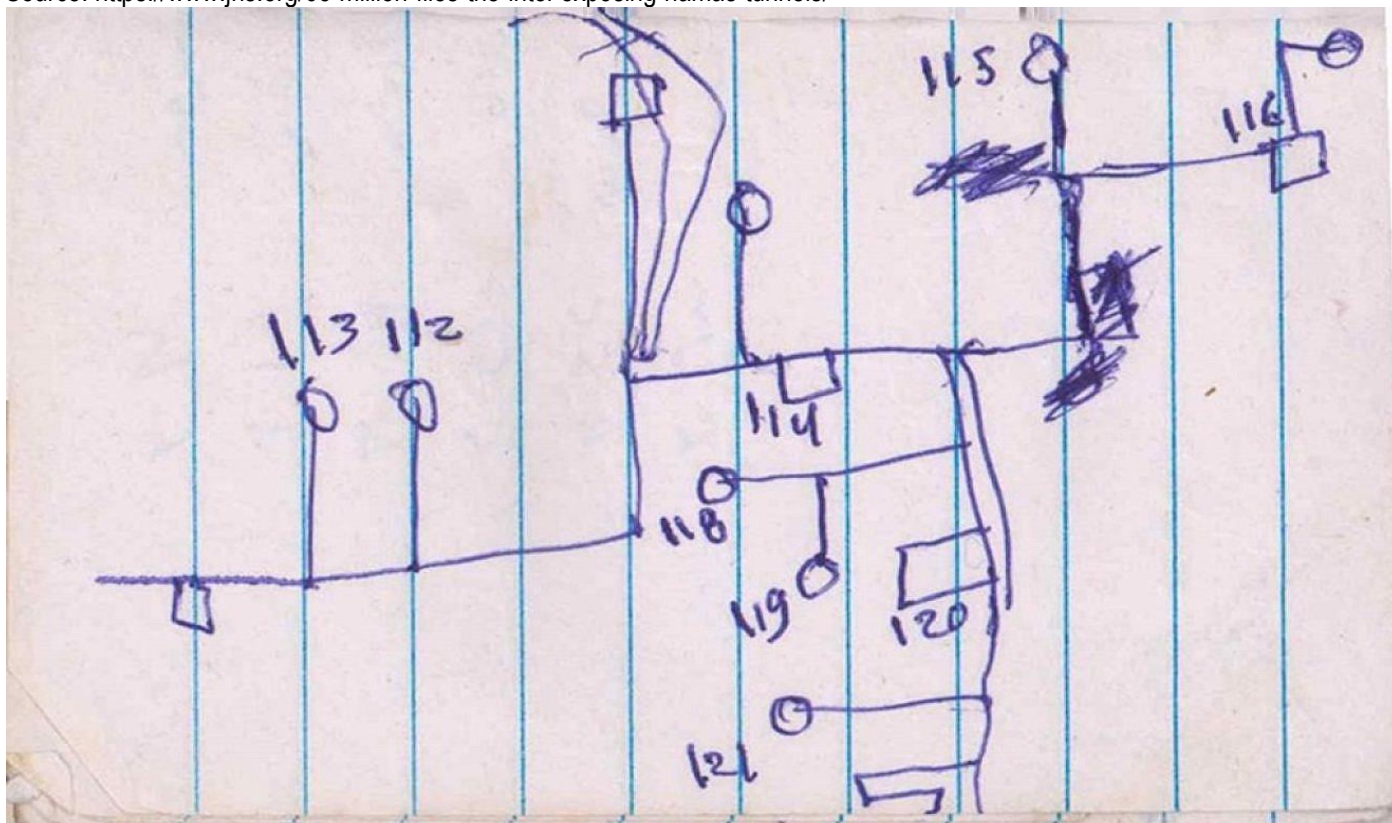
Dec 28 – So risky has the Red Sea become since Houthi militants started their attacks on shipping that, since late November, over 350 container ships—plus all manner of tankers, bulk carriers, car carriers, and other merchant vessels—have diverted to other routes. That means massive logistical challenges that involve not just new charts and more fuel but getting crews and cargo to alternative staging posts. Because shipping is extraordinarily efficient, most won’t notice a thing. But if the attacks on shipping continue, we’ll start paying for the service. And we would do well to anticipate Houthi-like campaigns in other waters. Not a day passes without more turbulence in the Red Sea. Since Christmas Eve, the inlet that links countries including Egypt and Saudi Arabia has seen multiple Houthi attacks, including against a Swiss-owned [container ship](#) and a [Norwegian tanker](#).



Drama in the Red Sea is, of course, nothing new, going all the way back to the biblical book of Exodus. Yet today's users of the Red Sea can't hope for divine intervention. To be sure, the U.S. military has launched Operation Sea Guardian to protect Red Sea shipping, and since Christmas Eve the force has, among other things, [shot down](#) 12 attack drones and five missiles launched by the Yemen-based, Iran-backed Houthis. But counterfire from Western navies in response to Houthi attacks doesn't yield the sort of chartable sailing environment shipping lines need. It may help solve the problem in the long-term, but it does little right now.

65 million files: The intel exposing Hamas tunnels

Source: <https://www.jns.org/65-million-files-the-intel-exposing-hamas-tunnels/>



A map of a Hamas tunnel network discovered by Israeli soldiers in the Gaza Strip. Credit: IDF.

Dec 29 The Israel Defense Forces' search for terror tunnels is being aided by a trove of intelligence seized by soldiers, namely 65 million digital files and a half-million physical documents, the IDF disclosed on Thursday. Tasked with sorting through the intelligence finds is Amshat, a unit within the IDF Military Intelligence Directorate. Amshat is the Hebrew acronym for "Document and Technical Means Collection Unit." Laptops, flash drives, notebooks, maps, ledgers, bodycams and other items that soldiers find in Hamas tunnels, strongholds, hideouts, or on the bodies of terrorists eventually reach Amshat.

"The huge amount of material that comes in from the field generates many intelligence opportunities to help front-line soldiers," explained Capt. (res.) S. of Amshat. Among the documents found was a map of tunnel shafts seized by the 252nd Division in the residence of a company commander in the Beit Hanoun Battalion of Hamas in the northeast of the Gaza Strip. A key explaining the map was located and collected by the division at the residence of another operative.

When the research team collated the data, the important link between the map and the key was created—making it possible to locate and destroy tunnel shafts in the field. In addition, a document was seized with the location of a hidden weapons stockpile in the Beit Hanoun area. After analyzing the document, Amshat was able to direct ground forces to the location of the armaments cache, which was destroyed. IDF Spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said on Thursday that troops were fighting in tunnels underneath Khan Yunis, [Hamas](#)'s stronghold in the southern Gaza Strip. Hagari said finding the tunnel shafts, destroying Hamas terror infrastructure and the killing of terrorists is a lengthy process.

"These are ambitious but important war aims because there is no other way to defeat Hamas, and it will take time," he said.



Should the State Department Designate Malaysia a Terror Sponsor?

By Michael Rubin

Source: <https://www.meforum.org/65397/should-the-state-department-designate-malaysia>

Dec 29 – Even the world's most anti-Semitic leaders often try to hide or deny their anti-Semitism. Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei may be the world's most prominent anti-Semite, but he likes to [couch](#) his deep-seeded [hatred of Jews](#) in the [language of anti-Zionism](#) and the [destruction of Israel](#).



Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, too, says he is not anti-Semitic; he is just opposed to Israel. Turkey's Jews are the [canary in the coalmine](#), though. Under Erdogan, their numbers have plummeted. When Erdogan wants to inflame his base or when he does not need anything from the West, he lets [his anti-Semitism](#) shine through. Long before Jewish space lasers became a thing among fringe conspiracy theorists, Erdogan's top advisor suggested Jews killed Turks via [telekinesis](#). Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia's senior statesman who served close to 25 years as the Southeast Asian country's prime minister, abides no such nuance. In a December 29, 2023 [tweet](#), Mohamad (who has long been [open](#) about his [anti-Semitism](#)), outlines his theory about the Jewish control of the United States. "Who owns America?" he asks, before explaining, "Obviously, the Zionist Jews

because they control the different media and they own most of the big American corporations."

American officials might dismiss Mohamad's rant as the ravings of a has-been 98-year-old but this would be a mistake both because Mohamad [inspires](#) Islamist extremism in the West and because the infrastructure of terror support Mohamad introduced continues to cultivate and support terrorists. Consider: In 2018, Malaysia [accused](#) the Mossad of assassinating a Hamas engineer on a Kuala Lumpur street. Whether Israel was behind the assassination is immaterial to the fact that Malaysia was hosting a prominent Hamas weapons specialist. In November 2022, Turkey [blew the whistle](#) on an alleged Israeli operation to nab "Omar A," a Palestinian hacker who had disrupted Iron Dome in 2015 and 2016 to enable Hamas rockets to strike Israel. As is increasingly common, initial interrogation occurs by video, in this case from a cabin about 30 miles outside Kuala Lumpur. After the Turkish tip-off, Malaysian officials [rescued the Hamas hacker](#) and arrested the Mossad's Malaysian informants.

That Malaysian connection for Hamas is now the rule rather than the exception. While Hamas terrorists reportedly practiced their October 7 attack in Gaza itself, the exception was the mechanized paragliders who could not do so without attracting Israeli attention. Enter Malaysia to [host their training](#).

The current Israel-Hamas War should be a wake-up call for the West. Hamas is a transnational terror group that finds fertile ground in Iran, Turkey, and now Malaysia. Just as with Afghanistan pre-2001 (and perhaps post-2021), safe-havens allow terror to metastasize. Mohamad laid the infrastructure for terror to thrive in Malaysia, his successor has done nothing to uproot it, and so its cancer now grows. Counter-terror policy is most effective when it is based on fact rather than wishful thinking. At a minimum, Malaysia should be on the Financial Action Task Force [grey or black lists](#). Simultaneously, it is time the State Department consider designating Malaysia to be a [state sponsor of terrorism](#).

Michael Rubin is director of policy analysis at the Middle East Forum.

Why Are Islamists Claiming Non-Muslim Land?

By Uzay Bulut

Source:

- The government of Turkey has threatened to invade and annex Greek islands in the Aegean Sea for at least the past five years.
- [T]he Turkish media continues to falsely and repeatedly to claim that "152 Greek islands and islets in the Aegean belong to Turkey". These islands historically and legally... belong to Greece.



- Since its inception in Arabia in the seventh century, Islam has been spread throughout the world by means of the sword. According to the Islamic law, the entire world is divided into the "dar al-Islam" (territory of submission to Allah -- the word "Islam" is Arabic for "submission"), which denotes regions where Islam prevails, and the "dar al-harb" (territory of war), which refers to non-Muslim lands, yet to be conquered.
- Islamists believe that once a land has come under Islamic occupation and colonialism, the land conquered is forever Islamic... Islamic supremacists such as Erdogan believe that because Thessaloniki was once under the occupation of the Islamic Ottoman Empire, it is a Muslim land *eternally* and must be returned to its rightful owner.
- Jerusalem was under Ottoman occupation for four centuries (1517-1917). The Jewish people, however, reversing that pattern of Islamic colonialism and imperialism, re-established their homeland, now Israel, in 1948. Islamic supremacists still have not healed from the perceived affront by Israel's indigenous Jewish people to Islamic conquest.
- Islamists therefore say they want to reconquer Jerusalem and the rest of Israel. According to doctrine, the only religion that should rule over these lands -- or any lands, for that matter -- is Islam. Christians and Jews could be only *dhimmis*, second-class, tolerated subjects of an Islamic state where they are only allowed to stay alive on sufferance by paying a high "protection" tax, the *jizya*.
- Theologically, according to Islamic scriptures, Judaism and Christianity are merely distorted versions of Islam. In the Islamic view, originally there was only Islam, which the Jews and Christians later distorted into Judaism and Christianity. All history, in this mindset, is therefore originally Islamic history and all major figures of Biblical history, from Adam and Eve, are therefore Muslim. According to Islam, Abraham, David, Moses and Jesus are also Muslim. So, any place related to them, in that view, is Muslim territory.
- Many others see these events as the Jews, who were the indigenous population of what is now Israel, having had *their* land "stolen" by the Ottomans, similarly to how the Turkish military invaded the northern part of the Republic of Cyprus in 1974, or how the Christian Byzantine (Eastern Roman) Empire was "stolen" by Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II and his troops on May 29, 1453 when they stormed Constantinople and triumphantly entered the Cathedral of the Hagia Sophia, after besieging the city for 55 days.
- Many Islamists are therefore obsessed with conquering Israel, Spain and Portugal (Muslim-occupied al-Andalus), Greece, Cyprus and India for Allah -- then the rest of the non-Muslim world.

Dec 06 – Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan keeps increasingly referring to places outside Turkey as "our lands." The government of Turkey has threatened to invade and annex Greek islands in the Aegean Sea for at least the past five years. Pictured: Erdogan speaks at the Turkish Grand National Assembly in Ankara on November 29, 2023. (Photo by Adem Altan/AFP via Getty Images)

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan keeps increasingly referring to places outside Turkey as "our lands." In his [statement](#) following the presidential cabinet meeting on November 20, Erdogan said:

"Karabakh [in the South Caucasus] has the same place in our hearts as Gaza. Just as we do not distinguish between Bosnia and Aleppo [in Syria]; Tripoli [in Libya]; Balkh [in Afghanistan]; Thessaloniki [in Greece] and Mosul [in Iraq], we see our own ancient cities and Jerusalem as the same."

"Karabakh" is the Armenian Republic of Artsakh, currently occupied by Azerbaijan after it – with the help of Turkey – seized it in September after a [genocide](#) against the indigenous Armenians there, that lasted from 2020-2023.

On November 17, Erdogan once again [announced](#) his government's expansionist goals. "Whoever says 'We do not care about Syria, Iraq, Karabakh, Libya, Bosnia, and Jerusalem' is either intentionally or unintentionally impeding Turkey's great march," he stated.

On October 28, at a demonstration condemning Israel's war against Hamas, he also [said](#) that a century ago, Gaza was what Adana [a city in Turkey] was for Turks:

"Edirne [in Turkey] was the same [to us] as Skopje [a city in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia]; Kırklareli [in Turkey] was the same as Thessaloniki [in Greece]; Mardin [in Turkey] was the same as Mosul [in Iraq]; and Gaziantep [in Turkey] as Aleppo [in Syria]. Just like Gaza, they were all part of our homeland that we thought was inseparable from us. Look what we have become now..."

"They [the West] unfortunately separated the Turkish nation from all these lands that belong to [Turks] as much as their blood, life and love. They not only separated us [from those cities] physically; they also used all kinds of tricks to remove them from our hearts and minds."

The cities in Turkey that Erdogan referred to (such as Edirne, Adana, Kırklareli, Mardin, and Antep) were built and enriched by Greeks, Armenians, Assyrians and other indigenous peoples thousands of years



ago. These cities were later wiped of their indigenous Christian residents as a result of centuries-long Islamic oppression that culminated in the [1913-23 genocide](#) in Ottoman Turkey.

Meanwhile, the Turkish media continues to falsely and repeatedly to [claim](#) that "152 Greek islands and islets in the Aegean belong to Turkey". These islands [historically](#) and [legally](#) (mainly through the 1924 Treaty of Lausanne, 1932 Turkish-Italian Agreements and 1947 Paris Treaty) belong to Greece.

In October, Greek media [reported](#) that Turkey annexed an Aegean Greek islet rock (Zourafa, or Ladoxera).

According to the Turkish media, Turkey [sent](#) a "notam" [notice to airmen] that "the region [waters surrounding Zourafa] where the Turkish Army recently started a drill is under Turkey's sovereignty".

The government of Turkey has [threatened to invade](#) and annex Greek islands in the Aegean Sea for at least the past five years.

Meanwhile, Turkish troops continue to violate the UN-controlled buffer zone in the Republic of Cyprus, 36% of which the Turkish army has illegally occupied since 1974. The Cypriot media [reported](#) that on November 27, "around 40 Turkish soldiers entered a two-story residence [in the buffer zone]... The mayor of Agios Dometios, Kostas Petrou, said that 'there has been intense activity in the area by the Turkish Army for about 1.5 months....'"



Territorial expansionism is apparently a major part of Erdogan's government's foreign policy agenda. Unfortunately, political Islam is an ideology of conquest and dominance.

Since its inception in Arabia in the seventh century, Islam has been spread throughout the world by means of the sword. According to the [Islamic law](#), the entire world is divided into the "dar al-Islam" (territory of submission to Allah -- the word "Islam" is Arabic for "submission"), which denotes regions where Islam prevails, and the "dar al-harb" (territory of war), which refers to non-Muslim lands, yet to be conquered.

Islamists believe that once a land has come under Islamic occupation and colonialism, the land conquered is forever Islamic. The Greek city of Thessaloniki, for instance, was once under Ottoman Muslim occupation. [According](#) to the official website of the Municipality of Thessaloniki, while it was under Ottoman rule (1430-1912), almost all Christian churches, parishes and monasteries were converted into mosques. Thessaloniki was liberated from the Ottoman Empire in 1912.

Islamic supremacists such as Erdogan believe that because Thessaloniki was once under the occupation of the Islamic Ottoman Empire, it is a Muslim land *eternally* and must be returned to its rightful owner.



From the mid-15th century until the proclamation of the first Hellenic Republic in 1822, the territory constituting modern Greece was occupied by the Ottoman Empire. Erdogan has been [open about his goal](#) of resurrecting the Ottoman Empire, which would include expanding Turkish territory considerably. In 2016, he [said](#):

"There are physical borders and there are borders in our hearts.

"Some people ask us: 'Why do you take an interest in Iraq, Syria, Georgia, Crimea, Karabakh, Azerbaijan, the Balkans, and North Africa?'... None of these lands is foreign to us. Is it possible to divide Rize [in Turkey] from Batumi [in Georgia]? How can we consider Edirne [in Turkey] to be separate from Thessaloniki [in Greece]? How can we think that Gaziantep [in Turkey] has nothing to do with Aleppo [in Syria]; Mardin [in Turkey] with Al-Hasakah [in Syria]; or Siirt [in Turkey] with Mosul [in Iraq]?"

"From Thrace to Eastern Europe, with every step you take, you will see traces of our ancestors... We would need to deny our true selves for us to think Gaza, with whom we speak the same language and share the same culture, is separate from us, as far away as Siberia. To take an interest in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Crimea, Karabakh, Bosnia and other brotherly regions is both the duty and the right of Turkey. Turkey is not just Turkey. The day we give up on these things will be the day we give up on our freedom and future." Erdogan also referred to the *Misak-ı Milli* ("National Pact"), a set of decisions made by the Ottoman Parliament in 1920 concerning the borders of the future Turkish state. The National Pact is commonly [referenced](#) by Turks when calling for Turkish territorial expansion.

The Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet* [wrote](#) in 2016:

"Some historians say that according to the National Pact, the Turkish borders include -- in addition to the current borders of Turkey - Cyprus, Aleppo [in Syria], Mosul, Erbil, Kirkuk [in Iraq], Batumi [in Georgia], Thessaloniki [in Greece], Kardzhali, Varna [in Bulgaria], and the Aegean islands."

In the 13th century, the Turkic tribe known as Ottomans formed a state in western Anatolia, on land they invaded and captured from the Greek-speaking Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire. They conquered Constantinople (Istanbul) in the 15th century, bringing an end to the Byzantine Empire.

For more than 600 years, from its founding in 1299 in Anatolia (present-day Turkey) to its end in 1922, the Ottoman Turks invaded and occupied nations across three continents. These nations included, among others, most of the [Balkans](#), (such as Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Albania and Romania), Hungary, Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan and Israel (then called Palestine), Lebanon, Syria, some of Arabia and a considerable amount of North Africa. During this period, [many crimes](#) were systematically committed against non-Muslims, including:

- The *ghulam* system: the enslavement, conversion, and training of non-Muslims to become warriors and statesmen;
- The *devshirme* system: the forced recruitment of Christian boys who were taken from their families, converted to Islam and enslaved for service to the sultan in his palace and to join his janissaries ("new corps");
- Compulsory and voluntary Islamization: the latter resulting from social, religious and economic pressure;
- The sexual slavery of women and children, deportations and massacres.

Jerusalem was under Ottoman occupation for four centuries (1517-1917). The Jewish people, however, reversing that pattern of Islamic colonialism and imperialism, re-established their homeland, now Israel, in 1948. Islamic supremacists still have not healed from the perceived affront by Israel's indigenous Jewish people to Islamic conquest.

Islamists therefore say they want to reconquer Jerusalem and the rest of Israel. According to doctrine, the only religion that should rule over these lands -- or any lands, for that matter -- is Islam. Christians and Jews could be only *dhimmi*s, second-class, tolerated subjects of an Islamic state where they are only allowed to stay alive on sufferance by paying a high "protection" tax, the *jizya*.

In 2018, during a rally, Erdogan [said](#), "For us, Jerusalem is what Çanakkale is." (Also, where Troy was.)

In 2020, Erdogan [opened](#) the Turkish parliament's legislative session with a long speech that again addressed Jerusalem: "Jerusalem is our city, a city from us."

Theologically, according to Islamic scriptures, Judaism and Christianity are merely [distorted versions of Islam](#). In the Islamic view, originally there was only Islam, which the Jews and Christians later distorted into Judaism and Christianity. All history, in this mindset, is therefore originally Islamic history and all major figures of Biblical history, from Adam and Eve, are therefore Muslim. According to Islam, Abraham, David, Moses and Jesus are also Muslim. So, any place related to them, in that view, is Muslim territory.

Moshe Sharon, Professor Emeritus of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, [calls](#) these views the "Islamization of history" and "Islamization of geography".

Philip Carl Salzman, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at McGill University, [noted](#):

"Israel exists on territory once governed and dominated by Arab and later Turkish Muslims. The Arab invasions in the 7th century displaced and replaced the Jews who were the majority population, those who survived the wars of the Romans against the Jews. Almost a thousand years later, the Ottoman Turks became the rulers of the Holy Land. According to Islamic law, land once governed by Muslims is owned



by Muslims forevermore. Notwithstanding the Jews' prior occupation of the Holy Land, Muslims regard the region as theirs and theirs alone and Israel as having stolen their land."

Many others see these events as the Jews, who were the indigenous population of what is now Israel, having had *their* land "stolen" by the Ottomans, similarly to how the Turkish military invaded the northern part of the Republic of Cyprus in 1974, or how the Christian Byzantine (Eastern Roman) Empire was "stolen" by Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II and his troops on May 29, 1453 when they stormed Constantinople and triumphantly entered the Cathedral of the Hagia Sophia, after besieging the city for 55 days.

Many Islamists are therefore obsessed with conquering Israel, Spain and Portugal (Muslim-occupied al-Andalus), Greece, Cyprus and India for Allah -- then [the rest](#) of the non-Muslim world.

[Uzay Bulut, a Turkish journalist, a research fellow for the Philos Project, and a Distinguished Senior Fellow at Gatestone Institute.](#)

The Wave of Islamic Terrorism in France: Political and Social Effects

By Yaron Gamburg

INSS Insight No. 1806, December 31, 2023

Source: <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/france-islamic-radicalization/>

In recent months, France has weathered a wave of severe violence rooted in Islamic radicalization. The tentative and inconsistent government response has increased public outrage and strengthened the far-right parties. Mass demonstrations by Hamas supporters have triggered antisemitic violence, and the attempt to present a united front in the fight against antisemitism was met with President Macron's indecisive stance and the left's refusal to condemn Hamas. Domestic considerations have also influenced the President's viewpoint on the war in Gaza, joined by efforts to appease Muslim immigrants and prevent escalation. The political dynamics in France are challenging and compel Israel to prepare for what lies ahead.



Since October 2023, France has confronted a new wave of violence attributed to Islamic radicalization in the country. On October 13, a young Chechen Muslim murdered a literature teacher in the northern French city of Arras, three years after a similar attack shook the country. On December 2, a young man of Iranian descent murdered a tourist in central Paris, avenging the death of Muslims "from Gaza to Afghanistan." The killers were known to the security forces as Islamic radicals and were branded as a threat. Government representatives claimed that one of the attackers had a psychiatric disorder, and this was perceived by the public as further proof of the government's incompetence.

France was particularly outraged by a violent incident on November 18 in the town of Crépol in southern France, an outlying agricultural area that is less exposed to the Islamization threat. During a party of young people, about ten Muslim youths from a nearby town raided the party, shouted that they would "kill all whites," brutally attacked the participants, and murdered a 16-year-old boy. Apart from the event's racist and brutal nature, the public was outraged over the government's response. Law enforcement authorities delayed announcing the suspects' names to avoid exposing their Muslim heritage, and the government even attempted to bar demonstrations in solidarity with the victim, claiming it was an initiative of the radical right-wing and a danger to public order. The public and media accused the government of bias and recalled the riots that erupted throughout France in June 2023 after a young Muslim who had disobeyed police orders was killed. It noted the government's incompetence regarding vandalism of public property, assault of police officers, and terrorization of civilians. Instead of taking Islamic radicalization seriously, the French media charged, the government continues to divert the discussion to the danger of the "radical right" – a threat that most of the public perceives as irrelevant.

The French public is mindful of the real dangers that threaten public order. According to a recent survey, about 87 percent of the country fear a civil war as a result of the loss of control over immigration and Islamic radicalization. The phrase "civil war" has been particularly prevalent in the public discourse across the political spectrum. While far-right leaders Marine Le Pen and Eric Zemmour reflect sentiments of concerned citizens, President Macron and his government seem at a loss, unable to rise to the challenge. In fact, since entering the Elysée Palace six years ago, Macron has failed to present a clear and firm policy on immigration and radical Islam. His endeavors have been geared toward maintaining quiet in the "suburbs" and "popular towns," a euphemism for Muslim immigrant communities.

Although Macron weathered socio-economic protests ("yellow vests," strikes against pension reform) and handled the COVID-19 crisis thanks to his economic and administrative expertise, he has displayed weakness when confronting the migration and radicalization crises, including the current crisis. In early



December, the French Parliament rejected the government's immigration bill that was in preparation for over a year and a half. To avoid a severe political defeat and obtain a majority to pass the bill, the President was compelled to incorporate the amendments demanded by the right-wing parties. This caused a crisis in the ruling party; many members voted against it, one of the senior ministers resigned, and the President's zigzagging policy was heavily attacked.

President Macron, who has habitually cultivated his media image, has been absent from the public discourse regarding the violent incident in Crépol and the recent terror attacks. The President was also absent from an event of major national importance – a demonstration of solidarity with the Jewish community and against antisemitism initiated by the President of the Senate and the President of the National Assembly. The event was held against the backdrop of a sharp rise in antisemitism in France following the massacre by Hamas in the Negev (about 1600 antisemitic incidents in the last month and a half, compared with 450 in all of 2022). His failure to attend the demonstration undermined the organizers' aspiration to create a united national front in the fight against antisemitism, and aided the far left in portraying the event as biased and controversial. The leader of the far-left party, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who refuses to condemn Hamas and draws most of his electoral support from France's Muslim community, boycotted the demonstration of solidarity, and praised President Macron for not participating. In politically troubled times, one mistake leads to another: To express solidarity with the Jews, the President invited the Chief Rabbi of France to the palace on the first night of Hanukkah. This endeavor is contrary to the principle of secularism and separation of church and state, and therefore led to various condemnations, including from the president of Crif, an umbrella organization of the Jewish organizations in France.

The President's absence from the demonstration damaged his image and boosted his main rival, Marine Le Pen, the leader of the right-wing National Rally party. Le Pen expressed solidarity with Israel's struggle against Hamas and announced her participation in the demonstration. Government representatives attempted to obstruct her participation, claiming that it was an extreme right wing party, but their opposition led to the opposite outcome. Influential public figures, Jewish and pro-Israel, praised Le Pen's participation in the demonstration, boosting her efforts to gain broad public legitimacy. According to recent polls, Le Pen is viewed as the second preferred political figure of the French (the first being former Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, a potential presidential candidate in the 2027 elections). Her party surpasses the ruling party by a considerable margin ahead of next year's European Parliament elections.

The attempt to balance conflicting interests has induced a vacillating position in French foreign policy, as well as in the domestic arena. After the October 7 atrocities in Israel, the French President expressed support for Israel's right to defend itself. On October 24, Macron visited Israel and surprised many, including his Foreign Ministry staff, by announcing France's initiative to foster an international coalition against Hamas, similar to the coalition against ISIS. The initiative, which was President Macron's improvisation alone, was dropped from the agenda two weeks after he visited Israel when in a television interview, the President called on Israel to immediately stop the murder of innocents in Gaza, and at the COP28 conference in Dubai even claimed that eliminating Hamas "is not a clear enough objective and would mean the war might last ten years."

In practice, France has focused its efforts on providing humanitarian aid. On November 9, Paris convened an international conference on Gaza reconstruction, in which the participating countries pledged to establish a one billion dollar fund for aid. Previously, France sent a mobile hospital aboard a helicopter carrier docked in El Arish and continues its endeavors to construct a field hospital in the southern Gaza Strip. France also supports the initiative to increase sanctions against Hamas, headed by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs vis-a-vis the European Union, and convened a conference on the topic on December 12. In parallel, France voted in favor of the Security Council and UN General Assembly resolutions for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

It would not be an overstatement that President Macron views the Middle East through the prism of his country's volatile social situation and walks a tightrope between his desire not to outrage the suburbs and simultaneously support Israel and ensure the safety of the French Jewish community. At the same time, he strives to be portrayed as a supporter of an immediate ceasefire and to provide humanitarian aid to the Gaza population while demonstrating a certain distance from Israel. It appears that, in his mind, this stance helps him to not be perceived by France's Muslim population as collaborating with Israel. The dubious effectiveness of this policy suggests it is a strategy likely prompted by his close confidants, such as Moroccan-born comedian Yassine Belattar, who reportedly assists him in understanding the suburbs' climate. All this has brought to light and honed the French government's strategy in dealing with domestic affairs – balancing conflicting interests to prevent escalation and a surge in violence. This is a challenging task in a country with the largest Muslim population (about 7 million) and the largest Jewish community (about 450,000) in Europe, with the security of the Jewish community and even its existence in France at stake. Beyond the fate of the Jews, Islamic radicalization undermines the French way of life and the fundamental values of the country, primarily its traditional secularism (*laïcité*). An IFOP French poll published on December 7 found that nearly 80 percent of the country's Muslim population opposes French secularism. Meantime, social polarization deepens and the far right parties grow stronger. Israel's strategy in managing its relations with France should consider these trends. Bilateral cooperation between the countries should be heightened – inter alia, based on President Macron's appreciation of



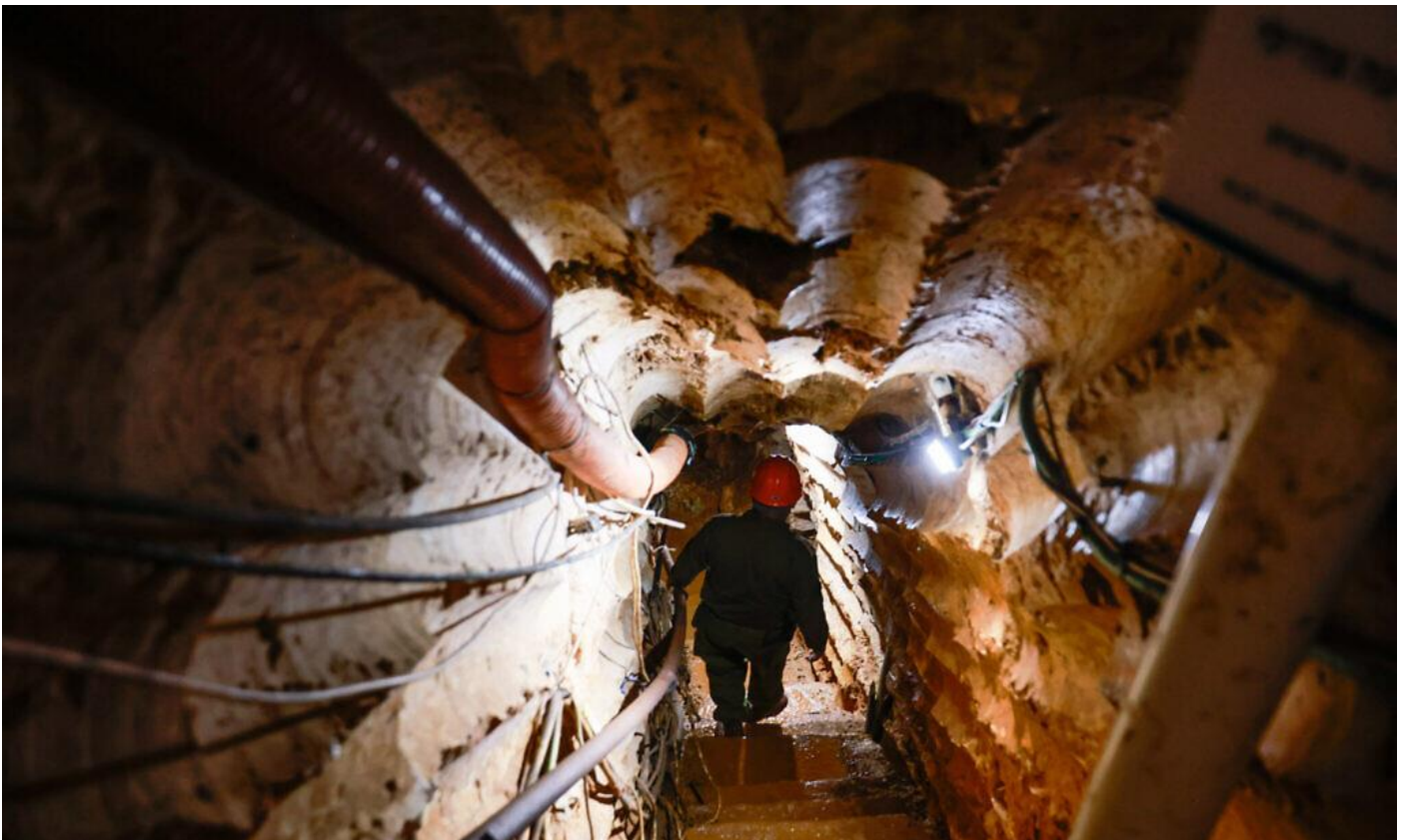
Israeli technological excellence. France's willingness to assist in the fight against Hamas, even if it is far from its original declaration of a broad international coalition, contributes to Israel's struggle. It is essential to support the French government's efforts to combat antisemitism and anti-Zionism that is currently associated with the alliance between the extreme left and radical Islam. In addition, it is vital to heed the changes in the French right wing camp regarding its position on the fight against antisemitism and support for Israel, and its efforts to establish Marine Le Pen as a legitimate actor in the political arena. These issues require innovative thinking and policy formulation to address subsequent challenges.

Yaron Gamburg is a Scholarship Holder in the Russia program at the INSS and a Ph.D. student at the University of Paris Seine-Saint-Denis. His academic research focuses on anti-Semitism and discourse on the Holocaust in post-Soviet Russia. Gamburg joined the Foreign Service in 1999 and held multiple positions abroad and at the MFA's headquarters in Israel. He served as spokesman of the Embassy of Israel to Russia (2000-2003) and France (2010-2014), Deputy Consul General in California (2005-2008), Head of Public Diplomacy at the Embassy of Israel to the USA (2015-2018) and Deputy Chief of Mission to International Organizations in Paris (2019-2022). He also served as Director of a cadet course and Director of the Diplomatic Strategy department.

Expert: Hezbollah has built a vast tunnel network far more sophisticated than Hamas's

By Tal Schneider

Source: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/expert-hezbollah-has-built-a-vast-tunnel-network-far-more-sophisticated-than-hamass/>



View inside a Hezbollah tunnel that crosses from Lebanon to Israel, on the border between Israel and Lebanon in northern Israel, on February 14, 2023. (Yossi Zamir/Flash90)

Two weeks ago, the IDF spokesman [revealed](#) one of the biggest attack tunnels in the Gaza Strip — four kilometers long, wide enough for vehicles to drive through, and running from Jabaliya, north of Gaza City, up until some 400 meters from the Erez border crossing into Israel. While the tunnel did not cross the border, it presumably could have enabled terrorists on motorcycles and other vehicles to drive



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underground from the Jabaliya area and exit close to the border before IDF surveillance soldiers or patrols could block them. The IDF did not specify whether this was the case when 3,000 Hamas-led terrorists poured into Israel on October 7, slaughtering 1,200 people and abducting 240.

The uncovering of this vast tunnel, of which there are several more in Gaza, has revived discussion of similar tunnels near, at and under the Lebanon border — especially amid the ongoing clashes there with the Iranian-backed Hezbollah terrorist army, the forced evacuation of tens of thousands of Israeli residents of the north, and the Israeli leadership's repeated insistence that Hezbollah must be forced back from the border and deterred.

The Lebanon tunnel project was begun and developed long before the one in Gaza. Existing intelligence indicates a vast tunnel network in southern Lebanon, deep and multi-pronged.

At the Alma Research and Education Center, which focuses on the security challenges on Israel's northern border, researchers have spent many years investigating Lebanon's underworld. Tal Beeri, the director of Alma's Research Department, who served for decades in IDF intelligence units, has exposed that subterranean network in material based on considerable open-source intelligence.

Several years ago, Beeri managed to track down on the internet a "map of polygons," covering what he called the "Land of the Tunnels" in southern Lebanon. "The map is marked, by an unknown party, with polygons (circles) indicating 36 geographic regions, towns and villages," he [wrote](#) in 2021 paper.



Hezbollah's Map of Polygons (Alma Research and Education Center)

"In our assessment, these polygons mark Hezbollah's staging centers as part of the 'defense' plan against an Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Each local staging center ('defense') possesses a network of local underground tunnels. Between all these centers, an infrastructure of regional tunnels was built, interconnected [with] them."

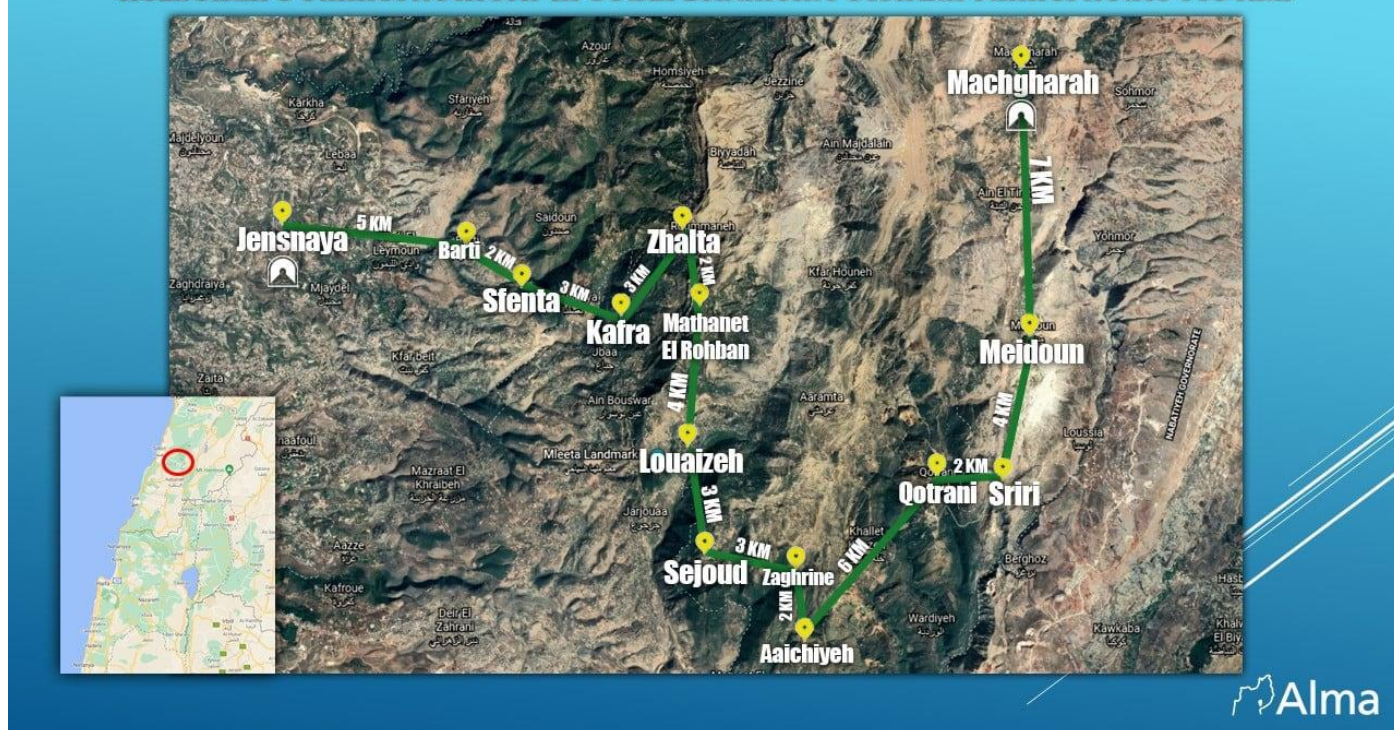
Beeri assessed that the cumulative length of Hezbollah's tunnel network in south Lebanon amounts to hundreds of kilometers. In an interview, Beeri recalls that the research paper on Hezbollah's "Land of the Tunnels" was published immediately after 2021's Operation Guardian of the Walls — where the IDF had



engaged in tackling Hamas's underground "metro" in Gaza, an operation that in retrospect did not achieve its goal of destroying the tunnels in the enclave.

The paper also featured a map assessing the likely 45-kilometer route of one "attack tunnel" in south Lebanon.

Hezbollah's Tunnel Network in South Lebanon: Potential Tunnel Route (45 KM)



The likely route of a 45 km Hezbollah tunnel in southern Lebanon (Alma Research and Education Center)

"A lot of people were quizzical because we relied on open sources," says Beeri. "But we compiled and collected information from a series of sources and videos about the work on the tunnels, including a 2007 video in which Imad Mughniyeh, the Hezbollah number two who was assassinated in February 2008, was seen inside the attack tunnel. We attached an original map that we found online, on which somebody had marked the route, and we did 'reverse engineering.' That's how we put together what seemed to be the route of the 45-kilometer tunnel."

Adds Beeri: "We found additional materials, including footage of pickup trucks inside a tunnel with various connecting branches. That particular video we decided not to publish initially, because we didn't have definitive proof that it was filmed in a tunnel in Lebanon. We thought it was possible that somebody was deliberately trying to mislead us. Nonetheless, in the wake of several checks that we did, including looking at the vegetation, the kinds of vehicles and the route, we think it's extremely likely that this is inside Lebanon."

The Times of Israel: The army's publicization in November of the Jebaliya-Erez tunnel highlighted the need to intensify your work?

Tal Beeri: Absolutely, because we see the work that Hamas has been doing. And if that's what's been going on with the digging and building of the tunnels in Gaza, well, in Lebanon, it's more sophisticated.

We have identified several kinds of tunnels in Lebanon: First, what everybody calls attack tunnels, particularly large and long tunnels that lead from area to area. One can enter them in vehicles and even medium-sized trucks.

Along with them, there are tactical tunnels, which the IDF exposed and destroyed in [Operation Northern Shield](#) in January 2019. They are intended for people only to move around in, and in extreme circumstances, maybe a motorcycle. Tactical tunnels are close to villages, and they enable terrorists to fight from underground — to fire from tunnel shafts and duck back in, to rearm from weapons stores inside, to rest, and emerge again.

In our assessment, it could be that there are also "proximate tunnels." These are similar to the attack tunnels that the IDF thwarted in 2019 but don't cross the border. They enable access almost to the border, and from there to emerge and attack. We're talking about activities such as those by the Radwan force that has been planning to invade Galilee. An additional kind of tunnel are explosive tunnels. They are dug for the sole purpose of



placing explosives inside, with the devices to be detonated when the IDF maneuvers on the ground inside Lebanon.

North Korea's role in Hezbollah's tunnel project was researched until 2014. What do you know since then?

Digging tunnels in Lebanon was done from the start with the assistance of North Korea — as far back as the 1980s and especially toward the end of the 90s. There is evidence of this. North Korea has historic expertise in the digging of tunnels in mountainous and rocky areas.

After the second Lebanon War in 2006, the connection with North Korea was maintained, and aid was also received from Iran.

Eventually, Hezbollah got everything it needed from the Koreans. By 2014, they'd had 25 years of interaction, in the course of which Hezbollah received knowledge and technology to the point where it was able to dig and build the tunnels by itself.

Subsequently, it set up civilian companies, Shiite-owned, that worked ostensibly on civilian infrastructure in the Baalbek region. These projects were overseen by a company called Jihad Construction, that presented itself as ostensibly carrying out agricultural

projects and building reconstruction for the benefit of the Shiite community, but actually took on the building of the tunnels.

The Mustafa Commercial and Contracting Company at work on a tunnel in southern Lebanon (Alma Research and Education Center)



In the course of the work, additional “civilian” companies were established. One of them, the Mustafa Commercial and Contracting Company, even [interacted](#) with the United Nations Development Program, as a civil construction contractor.

How do Hezbollah's precision-guided missiles, capable of hitting anywhere in Israel, fit into the tunneling picture?

It's not complicated from their point of view. Fateh 110 [surface-to-surface ballistic] missiles are carried on trucks. The subterranean infrastructure enables a truck to transit to the place where the missile is to be fired. In theory, at the launch site, a platform can be constructed, or a slope leading up from the tunnel. The truck exits the tunnel, fires and goes back down.

Simulation of a missile launch from a tunnel entrance in southern Lebanon (Alma Research and Education Center)

When one flies over the site, all one can see is the mountain. It's very hard to find the launch site. They are able to carry out a fast, mobile launch of missiles.



IDF's Subterranean Challenge: Profiling Gaza Metro, Hamas's Center of Gravity

By Rajneesh Singh

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20240102-idf-s-subterranean-challenge-profiling-gaza-metro-hamas-s-center-of-gravity>

Jan 02 – Hamas has developed a complex subterranean infrastructure consisting of tunnels, command and control centers, living accommodation, stores and contingency fighting positions. The tunnels also have designated spaces for rocket-assembly lines, explosive stores, and warhead fabrication workshops.¹ This infrastructure is famously known as the 'Gaza Metro'. The Metro is reinforced by concrete and other building material and protected by blast doors, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and booby traps.

The tunnels have been in use since at least the early 1980s, and members of various Palestinian insurgent organizations have been known to use them since the first Intifada, beginning in 1987.² In the aftermath of the 2021 Israel–Hamas conflict, Hamas leader, Yahya Sinwar claimed that Hamas has 500 kilometers of tunnel system and that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has damaged only 5 per cent of it.³ There is no way to verify Sinwar's claim but is indicative of the magnitude of challenge the IDF faces in the ongoing war.

Tunnel warfare is not new and dates to the ancient times. Jews used them against Romans in Judea in the first century.⁴ In the more recent times, the tunnels have been used in the battles of the Vimy Ridge, Messines and Somme of World War I, by the Viet Congs in Vietnam and in Mariupol, Bakhmut, and Soledar during the ongoing war in Ukraine.⁵

The Brief delves into the multifaceted dimensions of the Gaza Metro and seeks to flag its origins, development, and the strategic implications on the ongoing war. It also focusses on the IDF's concerted efforts in developing technologies and deploying specialized forces to detect and dismantle this clandestine infrastructure.

Gaza Metro is more than a just any military infrastructure. It is the center of gravity (COG) of Hamas's military wing.⁶ The Brief also attempts to analyze various aspects of operational significance of Gaza Metro using certain facets of the theoretical construct of COG advanced by Colonel John A. Warden of the US Air Force, Professor Joe Strange and Colonel Richard Iron, and Professor Antulio J. Echevarria II, retired US Army officer.

History of Gaza Metro

The tunnels in Gaza predate Hamas. It is believed that they have been in use since the early 1980s⁷ after the city of Rafah was divided by the new border recognized in the 1979 peace treaty between Egypt and Israel.⁸ It was initially used by the divided families to communicate among themselves and by smugglers to transport goods. Hamas was raised in 1987 and soon it realized the military importance of the tunnels. It began digging tunnels in the mid-1990s, when Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was granted some degree of self-rule in Gaza by Israel. The group began tunnelling in earnest since 2005, when Israel withdrew from Gaza, and later when Hamas assumed power in 2006 election.⁹

Among the early success of Hamas, using the tunnels, was abduction of IDF soldier Gilad Shalit and killing of soldiers Hanan Barak and Pavel Slutzker in a cross-border raid on 25 June 2006. Later Israel freed 1,027 Palestinian prisoners in return for Shalit's release in October 2011.¹⁰

As per the reports, the tunnels in 1990s were approximately one meter wide and smugglers used winch motors to haul goods along the sandy tunnel floors in hollowed-out petrol barrels.¹¹ Hamas has since gained considerable expertise in tunnelling and construction of underground infrastructure which has advanced security features, sewage disposal and air-conditioning systems, etc.

Hamas and Gaza Metro

The Gaza Strip has an approximate area of 365 square kilometers. If Yahya Sinwar's claim of 2021 of Hamas having built 500 kilometers of tunnel system is true, then it would be equivalent of having 10 parallel north to south tunnel systems and eight parallel interconnecting tunnels running east to west.¹² The Gaza Metro is so designed that there may be dozens of shafts leading to a tunnel at depths of between 20 and 80 meters. As per some accounts, the density of tunnels is so high that some crisscross at different depths.¹³ To create a subterranean system of this magnitude requires a dedicated organization, high level of technological expertise, and resources in terms of trained manpower, equipment and money.

Israeli officials have reported that Mohammad Sinwar, the brother of Yahya Sinwar, is heading the tunnel building project.¹⁴ Gaza has been under land, sea and air blockade by Israel and Egypt since 2007 and it was not expected to possess capability or resources to dig such an infrastructure. It was appreciated



that Hamas has employed diggers using basic tools, used basic electrical fittings, and diverted concrete meant for civilian and humanitarian purposes towards tunnel building project. However, two of the tunnel systems discovered during the ongoing war, viz. near al Shifa Hospital and other close to the Erez crossing belies this assessment. The details of these tunnels have been discussed later in the Brief.

During its operation in the house of Yahya Sinwar in Khan Yunis, the IDF collected significant amount of Hamas intelligence including Hamas's report of financial transactions that gives details of more than a million dollars spent to construct tunnels in 2022.¹⁵

Tunnel under al-Shifa Hospital

In the second week of November 2023, IDF's 162nd Division was operating in Hamas's "security quarter" of Gaza City, adjacent to al-Shifa Hospital. The troops of Givati Infantry Brigade reportedly found intelligence materials, weapons manufacturing plants, anti-tank missile launch positions and tunnels.¹⁶

On 17 November, the IDF located one of the shafts which led to the entrance of a bigger tunnel. This tunnel led to a blast door leading to a complex which had multiple rooms and one of them "was a spacious bedroom with two large beds and a large modern air conditioning unit, a kitchenette, a bathroom, and other facilities, as well as extensive plumbing and electrical wiring to enable all of the infrastructure".¹⁷ The tunnel shaft leading to the main tunnel was approximately 2 meters high, lined with stones and concrete. The complex under the hospital was reportedly being used by Hamas as a command and control centre.¹⁸

Tunnel near Erez Crossing

The IDF reported on 17 December that it had discovered largest tunnel ever—four kilometer long and 50 meters deep—near the Erez crossing. The tunnel reinforced with concrete had electrical fittings and was wide enough to allow a vehicle to pass through. The IDF also released a video of Mohammad Sinwar driving a car through a tunnel. In another video released by the IDF, Hamas fighters were seen using a large drill. In the tunnel near the Erez crossing, the IDF reportedly found "unspecified digging machines" not reported earlier.¹⁹ One section of the tunnel was approximately 400 meters from the Israeli border.

The IDF has informed that the Combat Engineering Corps' elite Yahaom unit and Gaza Division's Northern Brigade used "advanced intelligence and technological means" to uncover the tunnel network.²⁰

Operational Employment of Subterranean Infrastructure

The infrastructure is the pivot of Hamas's irregular warfare strategy and allows it to undertake both offensive and defensive operations. It offers Hamas asymmetric advantage, negating some of the technological advantages available to the IDF. The fact that Hamas has constructed the subterranean system under one of the world's densest urban locations complicates the matter further for IDF. The system is designed to withstand IDF's aerial and ground bombardment. The design and construction enable Hamas to locate its leadership, combat units, headquarters, command and control centers, weapons and supplies inside the complex. It also enables various military echelons to move freely between various prepared contingency positions. Hamas has located power generation and air-conditioning systems, plumbing and sewage disposal arrangements and food supplies within the infrastructure. This is helping its fighters to better withstand the siege laid by the IDF in the ongoing war. The tunnels also allow the fighters to escape the combat zone when they are decisively surrounded by the IDF, as was the case in battle near the al-Shifa Hospital.

Hamas fighters are using tunnels to undertake offensive operations by infiltrating behind IDF positions and launching surprise attacks using snipers, rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) and other weapon systems. It enables small teams to appear undetected behind IDF lines, strike and withdraw. It is also assessed that Hamas has booby trapped the tunnels and will initiate the devices causing the tunnels to collapse over the advancing IDF troops.

Gaza Metro as Centre of Gravity

Clausewitz originated the concept of attacking the enemy's center of gravity which he described as "the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which all our energies should be directed."²¹ A fighting force can have multiple centers of gravity and each center will have an effect of some kind on the others. Hamas too has multiple centres²² and some analysts have described Gaza Metro as one of them.²³

Warden's Five-Ring Model

Warden has conceptualized "Five-Ring Model" related to COG, of which infrastructure is the third critical ring. The infrastructure relates to enemy's transportation system—that moves civil and military goods and services in the combat zone. Gaza Metro is essential to move troops, warlike stores, command instructions and intelligence around the battlefield and if the IDF can disrupt the movement, Hamas will have lesser



ability to resist it. Although Warden agrees with Clausewitz's description of COG as "the hub of all power and movement", he goes further to describe it as "that point where the enemy is most vulnerable and the point where an attack will have the best chance of being decisive".²⁴ Warden's first ring and the "most critical" ring is the command ring, which refers to the leadership and communication resources.²⁵ It is assessed that Hamas's leadership,²⁶ including Yahya Sinwar, leader of the Hamas movement within the Gaza Strip, Mohammed Deif, commander-in-chief of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, and Marwan Issa, the deputy commander are hiding in the subterranean complex.

Neutralization of Hamas leadership is likely to have a decisive impact on the outcome of war. It is also expected that Hamas leadership would have constructed multiple safe hideouts inside the subterranean infrastructure, from where they can direct their subordinate commanders and units. It is also likely that only the most trusted Hamas members would be aware of these locations. It would require sustained intelligence operations by Israel to generate actionable intelligence. However, once the Hamas leadership is cordoned inside the tunnels, they would be extremely vulnerable to IDF operations.

For the moment, the IDF is unaware of the exact location of the leadership and is destroying as much of this subterranean complex, as is possible to cause "strategic paralysis—by destroying one or more of the outer strategic rings or centers of gravity"²⁷—the infrastructure ring—the Gaza Metro.

Strange and Iron's Theory

The Strange and Iron's theory is helpful to identify the location of COG and the impact of operations against it. The theory aligns with the J.J. Graham's translation of *On War*, published in 1874 which postulates that: "As a center of gravity is always situated where the greatest mass of matter is collected, and as a shock against the center of gravity of a body always produces the greatest effect, and further, as the most effective blow is struck with the center of gravity of the power used, so it is also in war."²⁸

Hamas is cognizant of the incredible capability and resources of Mossad and Shin Bet to generate actionable intelligence and doctrinal, technological, and material superiority of the IDF to undertake combat operations. To counter Israel's operational superiority, Hamas relies on low-tech solution in the form of subterranean infrastructure. The nature of infrastructure provides Hamas inherent physical protection, ease of movement and concealment to command and control elements and, combat, and logistic units. The Gaza Strip is one of the densest urban locations anywhere in the world. Tunnels in conjunction with urban infrastructure helps to create extremely potent defensive localities and killing grounds. The IDF hopes to find the leadership and fighters of the al-Qassam Brigades inside the Gaza Metro. Hamas has claimed that Gaza Metro is spread over 500 kilometers. Hamas is expected to dissipate its forces all along the Metro to avoid presenting a concentrated target to the IDF. However, once located, and fixed, the IDF will be able to neutralize Hamas forces with relative ease inside the tunnel system.

The Strange and Iron's theory also introduces a model of COG analysis with three additional sub-concepts²⁹:

- ❖ **Critical Capabilities (CC):** CC is the primary ability of the COG within a given context.
- ❖ **Critical Requirements (CR):** CR relate to conditions, resources and means essential for the COG to achieve its CC.
- ❖ **Critical Vulnerabilities (CV):** CV refers to those CRs or components that are vulnerable to neutralization in a way that will contribute to a COG failing to achieve its CC.

In the context of Gaza Metro, the subterranean nature of the infrastructure reinforced with concrete and other building material and further hardened using Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and booby traps are the CCs. The camouflage and concealment arrangement to prevent detection of tunnels are the CRs while entry and exit points, ventilation and sewage arrangements, and communication infrastructure to enable command of Hamas fighters are the CVs.

Echevarria's Theory

Echevarria postulates COG is identified to achieve total collapse of the enemy—which is considered both as an effect and an objective.³⁰ He further elaborates on the construct to suggest that the COG helps in identifying "way"—course of action—within an "ends-ways-means" construct to achieve annihilation of the enemy.³¹ This aspect may not be true when fighting an ideologically motivated and radical organization like Hamas. It is possible that the IDF may identify and destroy Hamas's tunnel system and thereby achieve destruction of Hamas's military leadership and fighting units, however, in all probability the organization will survive and grow, perhaps even more radical. "Terrorist groups are known to survive the loss of their leaders and members. It is quite likely that even if Israel destroys Hamas's military wing, the idea of Hamas may survive."³²

IDF's Tunnel Warfare Capability

Development of Technological Capabilities

The IDF has been aware of Hamas's underground infrastructure and has been working towards new technologies and doctrinal concepts. When the first tunnel was discovered, the IDF established a



laboratory, manned by engineers, physicists, geologists and intelligence operatives under the Gaza Division. The laboratory employed innovative soil research techniques, including scanning and decoding signals, and developed new detection techniques. In 2018, a review of then IDF's underground combat capability was undertaken and a new training manual was published.[33](#)

The Israeli scientists and engineers have developed several new innovations, most of them are classified. The IDF's specialized units have been equipped with special conical penetrators, drills, robotic systems that can inject special 'emulsions' either to seal or destroy the tunnels.[34](#) IDF also makes innovative use of technologies such as ground and aerial sensors, ground penetrating radars, geophones, fiber optics, microphones, special drilling equipment and others.

The Israeli scientists have developed radio and navigation equipment which can work underground, night vision devices that work in complete darkness and remote and wire-controlled robots that can see and map tunnels without risking the lives of the soldiers. The IDF has training simulators to train soldiers in near realistic situations. Israel has also developed variety of explosives and ground penetrating munitions, like the GBU-28 which can penetrate 20 feet of concrete or 100 feet of earth.[35](#)

Israel, over the years, has used satellite imageries, aerostat cameras and radars to map the tunnel system. These assets cannot reveal the layout of the tunnels but have been used to monitor location where cement-mixture trucks have halted over the years. The general area around these locations are possible entrances of the tunnels and may be probed using low-frequency, earth-penetrating radars, or basic probes.[36](#)

US and Israel have also been collaborating to develop newer technologies. Since 2016, Congress has appropriated US\$ 320 million towards the project.[37](#)

IDF's Special Units

Fighting enemy inside subterranean system requires specialized units. The Gazan tunnels were first discovered during the first Intifada and the IDF recognized the need to raise specialized units. It raised 'Yahalom', specialist commandos from Israel's Combat Engineering Corps. Yahalom specializes in discovering, clearing, and destroying tunnels and has the "Yael" Company to undertake engineering reconnaissance, "Sayfan" to neutralize the threat of non-conventional weapons (weapons of mass destruction). In addition, there are two explosive ordinance disposal units, and "Samur", which specializes in tunnel warfare.[38](#)

The IDF has a specialized canine unit, "Oketz", whose dogs are trained in special tasks such as attack, search and rescue, explosive detection, and weapon location.[39](#) In addition, police and intelligence services too have specialist units—"like Sayeret Matkal, the Yamam, and others—who share best practices for dealing with terrorists and combatants underground."[40](#)

IDF's Subterranean Operations

The IDF's doctrine of subterranean warfare has evolved with the development of newer technologies to counter Hamas's underground infrastructure, which too has become increasingly sophisticated and more potent with the passage of time.

Hamas fighters have advantage in narrow, dark, collapsible tunnels with which they are familiar. The IDF protocol demands that soldiers do not enter the underground structures unless it has been cleared of Hamas presence.[41](#) It uses many of the newly developed technologies including tracker robots and explosives to map and clear the tunnels.

During the ongoing war, Hamas prisoners have also provided intelligence about the tunnels. These prisoners do not have the complete picture of the Gaza Strip but have excellent knowledge of the underground system under their villages and localities.[42](#)

Namer Establishes Cordon

Israel has one of the world's best protected armored vehicles, 70-ton *Namer*, to assist in tunnel demolition. It is armed with active defense system to intercept incoming rockets and missiles and machine guns to fight enemy on ground. The vehicle is equipped with cameras which allows the crew to operate in the safe environment from within the vehicle. The IDF employs *Namer* to provide protection by establishing a security cordon around the combat engineers who undertake the task of demolishing underground infrastructure.[43](#)

Having secured the area of operation, the IDF maps the structure either by using 'exploding gel' or other technologies. Thereafter, it has an option of either demolish the underground infrastructure using explosives or flood it with sea water.

IDF uses 'Exploding Gel' to Map Underground Infrastructure

The 'exploding gel' is used to map the underground structure. Having located the entrance to the tunnels, the army engineers fill the passage with 'exploding gel' and fire it using detonators. The smoke travels the passage way and is used to map the underground infrastructure and also cause casualties to anyone



inside the tunnels. The composition of the gel is classified and is brought in trucks because the scale in which it is used is huge. Several tons of gel are required every few hundred metres.⁴⁴

The tunnel system runs for hundreds of kilometers. It is unclear how cost and resource effective this technology is.

IDF Deploys Pumps to Flood the Tunnels

The IDF maintains a tunnel flooding plan. In the middle of November 2023, it deployed five very large capacity pumps, approximately three kilometers north of Al-Shati refugee camp. Each of these pumps is reported to have capacity to draw thousands of cubic meters of water per hour from the Mediterranean Sea and flood the tunnels within weeks.⁴⁵ On 12 December, *The Wall Street Journal* reported “Israel’s military has begun pumping seawater into Hamas’s vast complex of tunnels in Gaza.”⁴⁶

It is still unclear how effective this tactic will be to achieve its intended objective of demolishing the underground infrastructure. The plan, however, has a downside since it is likely to contaminate Gaza’s fresh water supply.⁴⁷

Conclusion

Hamas has expended a large percentage of its resources—money, material, and man-hours—to develop the subterranean infrastructure as a counter to technological and resource superiority of the IDF. It is the pivot around which Hamas’s defensive and offensive operations are planned and executed. The IDF, on the other hand, has been working to develop newer and more effective counters, however, there are yet to achieve the desired result. The ongoing Israel–Hamas war will bring out several new lessons of interest to Indian Army.

The concept of COG originally advanced by Clausewitz applied to conventional wars fought by regular armies. The world today faces challenge from religious and ideologically motivated non-state actors and the concept does not provide adequate explanation when planning operations against such organizations. This aspect requires greater deliberation.

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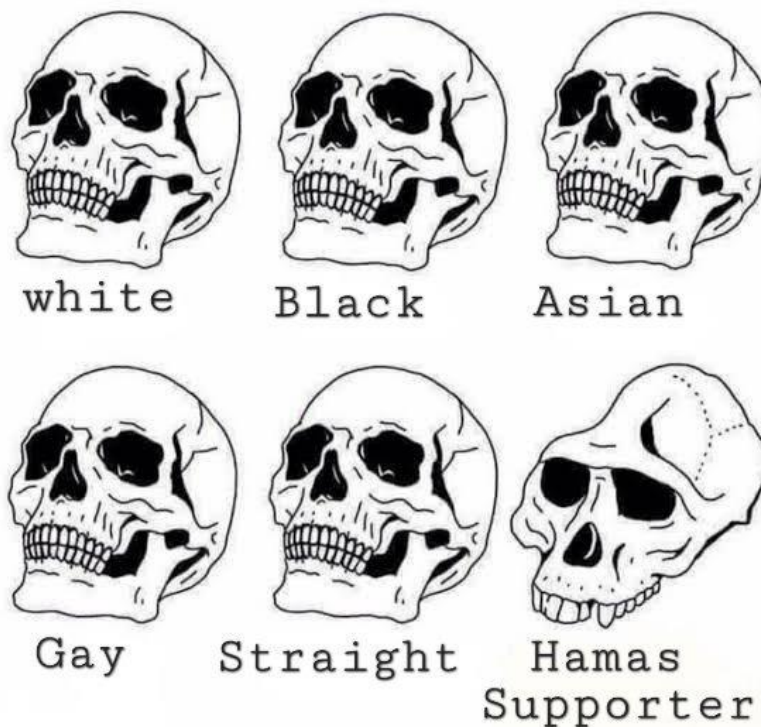
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45. Nancy A. Youssef, Warren P. Strobel and Gordon Lubold, "[Israel Weighs Plan to Flood Gaza Tunnels With Seawater](#)", *The Wall Street Journal*, 4 December 2023.
46. Nancy A. Youssef, Carrie Keller-Lynn, Michael R. Gordon and Dov Lieber, "[Israel Begins Pumping Seawater Into Hamas's Gaza Tunnels](#)", *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 December 2023.
47. In 2015, Egypt had flooded 10 tunnels dug beneath the Gaza–Egypt border. See "[Steinitz: 'Egypt Floods Hamas Tunnels, in part due to Israel's Request'](#)", *The Jerusalem Post*, 6 February 2016.

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How Hamas arms children for terrorism: previously unseen images revealed by IDF

Source: <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel-at-war/1704305666-how-hamas-arms-children-for-terrorism-previously-unseen-images-revealed-by-idf>



Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip IDF Spokesperson

"Children receive military training from a young age, both theoretical and practical,"

Jan 03 – Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) presented previously unseen images on Wednesday, shedding light on how terrorist organizations, primarily Hamas and Islamic Jihad, exploit children in the Gaza Strip for military activities and indoctrinate them with hatred towards Israel and Jews.

The IDF statement emphasized that children in Gaza are subjected to early education in animosity, both in schools and through youth movements and camps.

"Children receive military training from a young age, both theoretical and practical," the IDF statement noted. Even during times of relative calm, Hamas organizes summer camps where children are taught various military skills, including shooting guns, navigating tunnels, confronting tanks, and even engaging in simulated soldier kidnappings. These camps serve as initial training grounds for the military wing of Hamas.

Israeli intelligence estimates that a considerable number of minors are actively involved with terrorist organizations like Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Disturbingly, during the ongoing conflict, Hamas continues to exploit minors for various tasks, including sending children to deliver messages and munitions.





Palestinian children and Hamas terrorists in the Gaza Strip IDF Spokesperson

The IDF highlighted a previous [disclosure regarding Hamas' "Zeytoun" battalion](#), exposing the terrorist group's strategy of using children to transport ammunition, as the [IDF is less likely to harm them intentionally](#).

One tactic outlined in the IDF's findings involves hiding explosives within bags of [vegetables carried by children](#).

The belief is that the IDF would avoid targeting children, inadvertently turning them into unwitting carriers of dangerous payloads. Additionally, children are dispatched into combat zones after attacks to assess damage and relay information to terrorists hiding in shelters.



A Palestinian child in the Gaza Strip IDF Spokesperson

EDITOR'S COMMENT: Some try to separate Palestinian people from Hamas. These children are not from Hamas families but Palestinians who are doing nothing to stop Hamas and terrorism.



Israel in Secret Talks to ‘Resettle’ Palestinians in Congo, Report Says

Source: <https://www.thedailybeast.com/israel-in-secret-talks-to-resettle-palestinians-in-congo-report-says>



Jan 03 – [Israeli](#) authorities have reportedly been engaged in secret talks with [Congo](#) to “resettle” [Palestinians from Gaza](#) in the Central African country. That’s according to The Times of Israel, which cites its Hebrew-language sister site Zman Israel to report that Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#)’s coalition is looking at the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** as well as other countries for the “voluntary” resettlement plan. “Congo will be willing to take in migrants, and we’re in talks with others,” an unnamed source in the security cabinet is quoted as saying. Saudi Arabia has also reportedly been floated as an option. The news comes after the U.S. State Department on Tuesday singled out two far-right Israeli ministers who’ve been pushing to resettle Palestinians outside Gaza, blasting their “inflammatory and irresponsible” rhetoric. While Netanyahu’s office has not officially said it had plans to “resettle” Palestinians, the prime minister reportedly told a meeting last Monday that work is underway to facilitate “voluntary migration” of Palestinians to other countries.

EDITOR’S COMMENT: Gazans in Africa? Boko Haram and ISIS will be so happy to have new supporters and Hamas experts will transfer their knowledge on making new terrorism fronts.

On Point: Six Strategic Challenges For 2024

By Austin Bay

Source: http://www.strategypage.com/on_point/2024010593230.aspx

Jan 05 – Here’s 2024’s strategic challenges column -- challenges to our so-called international strategic order, meaning threats to human life and economic well-being on a continent-regional or global scale.

Take this as gospel. Order is a despicably misleading term. The post-World War II international order never managed to “order” the world in any commonsense meaning of the word. WWII ended and the Cold War emerged, with the threat of nuclear destruction imposing an order based on mutual annihilation. The Korean War erupted. In 2024 a violent armistice marks the tentative border between North and South Korea, not a definitive peace treaty.

In late 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed -- the same year Operation Desert Storm drove Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein’s forces from Kuwait. Peace dividend? Not in the Balkans, as Yugoslavia fragmented into genocidal civil war.

Welcome to 2024. The challenges are not ranked with this caveat: Wars employing nuclear and/or biological weapons raise the body count from tens of thousands to the millions. Enhanced biological weapons could kill billions. This is not a sensationalist headline; it’s a plea for sanity.

Challenge No. 1: Imperialist powers bent on recovering lost empires (and fulfilling the grandiose dreams of their current leaders.) 2023 comment: Russia in Ukraine, China threatening Taiwan. 2024 comment: Imperial Iran bent on recovering Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Persian Gulf.

The ayatollah dictatorship has Iranian imperial ambitions, based on the Iranian (Persian) empire circa 400 B.C.

Hidden from the world, or at least the Western mainstream media, is China’s hideous racist dimension. Xi Jinping’s propagandists believe in the racial superiority of the Han ethnic group. The Han constitutes roughly 85% of China’s population.

Russia, China and Iran are states with near-peer military power (possessing modern weapons) capable of challenging the U.S. and its technologically sophisticated allies. Caveat: they may not have military personnel capable of successfully employing the weapons (Russia in Ukraine being an example).

Challenge No. 2: Radical, militant, megalomaniacal dictatorships (North Korea) and terrorist organizations (the Islamic State group) attempting to acquire weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, chemical, biological) and the ways and means to use them to kill with history-changing, lethal surprise.

Challenge No. 3: The pervasive corruption of influential but venal individuals and venal institutions in democratic nations. The corruption is so internally corrosive to these nations that timely and effective political and military response to Challenges Nos. 1 through 3 is systemically delayed, undermined or immobilized.

Challenge No. 4: Big Debt. It was No. 5 last year but it is a byproduct of No. 4’s political corruption and malfeasance. 2022’s hyperinflation and government budget excess justified it last year. Now the inflation is embedded in all U.S. economic action. Fact: Big Debt has become unsustainable.

Challenge No. 5: Flailing states, failed states and totally fake states immersed in anarchic violence that spills over political borders. (Note: “Flailing” means collapsing. In fake states, local thugs control the capital,



the U.N. seat and little else.) 2023 comment applicable to 2024: During the past year, Mexico has been exposed as a borderline flailing state.

Challenge No. 6: America's Southern Front. In 2023, "flailing states" (states immersed in anarchic violence that spills over political borders or states unable to control their own borders) were challenge No. 2. America's southern border crisis has created a hybrid war front --California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas are a hybrid-war front line.

In fiscal year 2023, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol apprehended 736 known or suspected terrorists (KSTs) on terror watch lists along the southern and northern U.S. borders. Fact: there were 1.7 million illegal alien getaways. If two or three out of a 1,000 getaways are KSTs, that's 3,000 to 5,000 violent enemies infiltrating America's home front.

Mass terror attack on the home front? To stop it takes aggressive deterrence -- by smart and courageous leaders.

Austin Bay's resume is manifold: Author and syndicated columnist, professor, developmental aid advocate, radio commentator, retired reserve soldier, war game designer, consultant in organizational planning and training simulations. To date, Bay has authored two non-fiction books, three novels, and one pamphlet (*Embrace the Suck*) on language and military lingo. *Embrace the Suck* is now in an expanded second edition. Bay's latest non-fiction book is *Cocktails from Hell* (Bombardier Books, 2018). The book analyzes how belligerents in five 21st century wars create and attempt to employ power combinations – power cocktails made with the "elements of power," to include diplomacy, information, military and economic power. The book discusses "narrative warfare" as an integrated element in Russian operations (covert and overt) and Chinese strategic warfare. The wars *Cocktails...* addresses are Korea, China in the South China Sea and Himalayas, Russia in Ukraine, Iran in Yemen and Congo in anarchy.

Is ISIS Really a Defeated Terrorist Organization?

By Mahmut Cengiz

Source: <https://www.hstoday.us/featured/is-isis-really-a-defeated-terrorist-organization/>

Dec 19 – The world has failed so far to predict and prevent notable attacks from terrorist organizations. The list includes many but is not limited to Hamas's brutal massacre on October 7, 2023, in which Hamas [conducted](#) a complex coordinated terrorist attack and killed 1,300 Israeli civilians, military, and law enforcement. The Israeli government receives harsh criticisms for missing the attacks despite the firm footsteps of the group's increasing operational capacity in the region. Other attacks in this list are the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States (US), the March 2004 Madrid bombings, the July 2005 London bombings, the November 2008 Mumbai attacks, and the November 2015 Paris attacks.

Every notable terrorist attack by Salafi-jihadist groups has recorded debates and comments on intelligence weakness, and the governments were accused of failing to prevent these attacks. These debates have faded over the years, and the low-profile attacks of jihadist organizations have sent a message to the Western governments that these groups are no more threats to global security. Today, the narrative in the Western world is that these groups, including the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), have been nailed down and are local threats. This article, using the Global Terrorism and Trends Analysis Center (GTTAC) Records of Incidents Database ([GRID](#)), examines whether ISIS is a defeated organization.

ISIS is unique in the history of terrorism from various perspectives: First, it was Al-Qaeda's regional branch in Iraq in the early 2000s, but it evolved into today's ISIS in the Middle East. The terrorist group controlled territory in Iraq and Syria, acted like a de facto state and ruled more than six million people. At its peak in 2014 and 2015, the organization recruited more than 30,000 militants from more than 90 countries. Second, it is considered a [role-model organization](#) in which other groups emulate its violent tactics, such as [beheadings](#), burning people alive, and suicide bombings. Third, the group actively [uses](#) social media and recruits militants. Fourth, its ideology is more inspirational to European- or US-born individuals. Today, lone actors who are inspired by ISIS ideology are more than any other Salafi-jihadist terrorist group. Fourth, ISIS was able to [generate](#) two billion dollars yearly in revenue from charities and donations, as well as its involvement in illicit trade such as oil smuggling and antiquities trafficking. Fifth, ISIS has a regional-level [representation](#) with its affiliated regional organizations. The affiliated group is [defined](#) as pledging allegiance, declaring loyalty, breaking away from the group but still being linked by finance, communications, technical work, recruitment, or being a splinter/offshoot organization. ISIS's growing popularity has led other jihadist groups to convene under its flag to benefit from its fame and become a well-known terrorist organization, given the fact that they are aware of how this strategy brings them more recruits and funds. For example, the Ansar al-Sunna group, which operated in northern Cabo Delgado, pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2017 and changed its name to ISIS-Mozambique (ISIS-M). Later years recorded brutality of ISIS-M and involvement in beheading attacks and [ending up](#) in the Department of State's Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) list.



The narrative of ISIS’s defeat is based on several arguments. The Western world believes that ISIS and its affiliated organizations are confined to the regions and are primarily regional threats. Moreover, these groups have recently failed to make notable attacks and are the perpetrators of low-profile attacks, mainly targeting local military forces and state institutions. Additionally, the Western world is overconfident in the results of decapitation strategies that target the leader of a Salafi-jihadist terrorist organization. For example, two of ISIS’s successive leaders were killed in US military operations in 2019 and 2021. However, these strategies have little impact on jihadist groups as it takes only several hours to replace the decapitated leader.

Contrary to the common belief about ISIS’s defeat, the GRID recorded a rising number of attacks by ISIS and its affiliated organizations from 2018 to 2022, as seen in Figure 1 below. Its attacks steadily grew in this period, with 1,313 attacks in 2022.

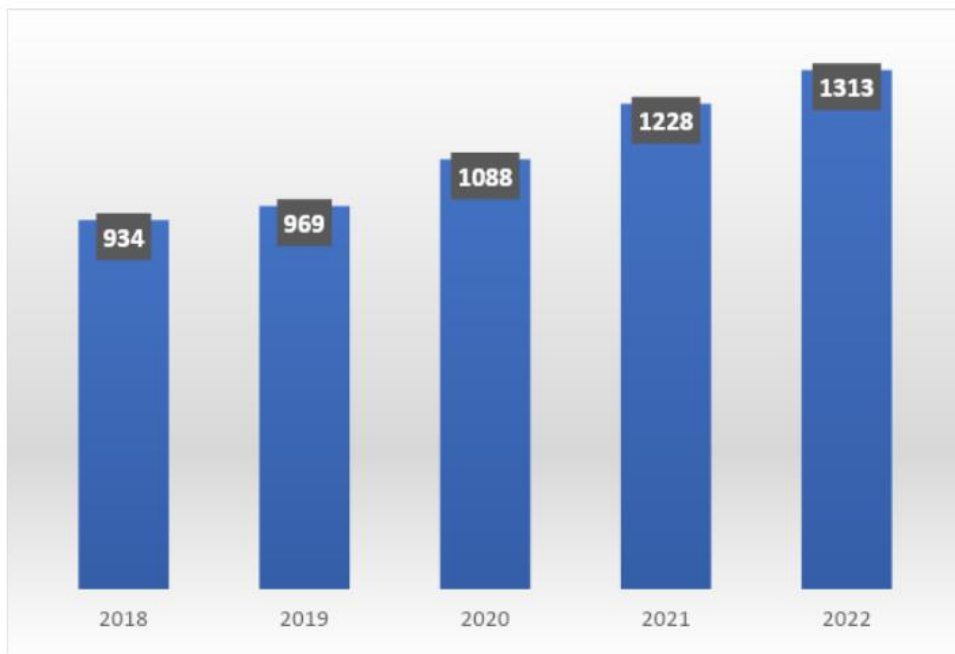
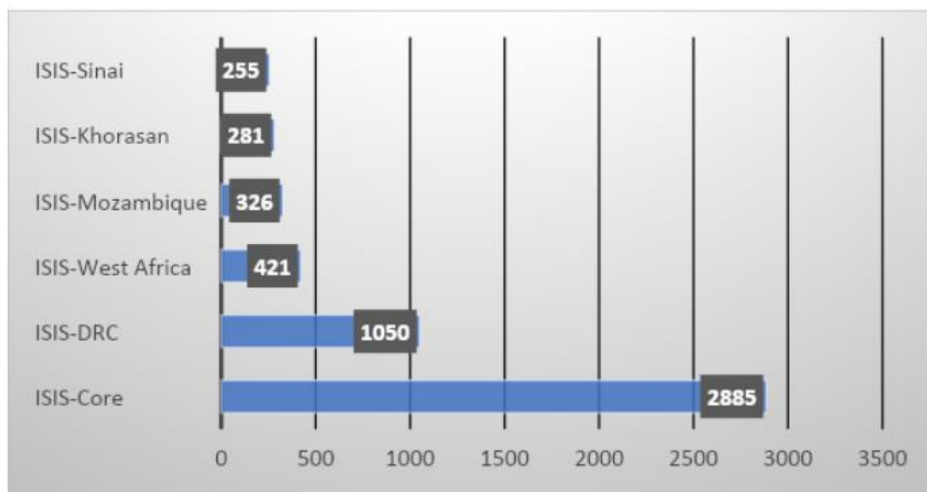


Figure 1: ISIS and Its affiliated Organizations’ Attacks from 2018 to 2022

Figure 2 below indicates the most active six ISIS groups. The ISIS-Core is still based in Syria and Iraq, and it is the leading group with the most incidents. The group was the perpetrator of 2,885 attacks from 2018 to 2022. International reports underline that ISIS militants left Iraq and Syria and moved to other conflict zones, including the countries in the Sahel. ISIS is far from its former prominence and operational capacity of 2014 and

2015; however, the group maintains its presence in the region, mainly the Deir ez-Zur province of Syria. Whereas most of its attacks are low-profile and recorded several people killed or wounded in Iraq and Syria, the steadily increasing attacks over the years seem to be alarming and require a close approach to ISIS-Core in the Middle East.

Figure 2: Top Six ISIS and Its Affiliated Groups with the Most Incidents from 2018 to 2022



ISIS-DRC, also known as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), is responsible for many attacks across North Kivu and Ituri provinces. The group was designated as a terrorist organization by the Department of State in 2021. The group is notorious for its deadly violence against Congolese citizens and regional military forces. ISIS-DRC conducted 1,050 attacks from 2018 to 2022. ISIS-West Africa is based in Nigeria and has competed with the Boko Haram terrorist organization to be the regional hegemon in Western Africa. In 2023, ISIS-West Africa continued its attacks in the region and used Katyusha rockets in several of its attacks, targeting the military in Niger on November 2023. Iran has supplied these rockets to organizations in Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria. It was the first use of these rockets by ISIS-West Africa. It is a question of how ISIS-West Africa procures these rockets, but the records of Katyusha rockets in the Middle East make Iran the biggest suspect as a supplier. ISIS-Mozambique (ISIS-M) is another organization that committed 281 attacks from 2018 to 2022. Designated as a terrorist organization



in 2021, ISIS-M is one of the deadliest ISIS regional affiliates due to its use of beheadings as a terrorist tactic. Another ISIS group on the list is its affiliate in Afghanistan. ISIS-K has become a regional threat and expanded its operational capacity in Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

In 2023, ISIS and its affiliated organizations have continued its attacks. In the first nine months of 2023, GRID recorded 813 attacks. ISIS-Core was the leading organization with 392 attacks in Syria and Iraq, followed by ISIS-DRC with 204 attacks, ISIS-West Africa with 57, ISIS-M with 49, and ISIS-K with 39 attacks. Also, ISIS affiliates in the Philippines garner special attention due to their increasing attacks in the region. For example, ISIS [claimed](#) responsibility for a deadly explosion that ripped through a Catholic mass service, killing four and wounding dozens of others on November 2023.

Figure 3 below shows the top ten terrorist tactics that ISIS and its affiliated organizations deployed from 2018 to 2022. These tactics have been strong indicators of ISIS’s operational capacity. The groups’ most used tactic was shooting, followed by planting mines/IEDs, bombing, kidnapping, ambush, executions, and suicide bombings. Similarly, the first nine months of 2023 recorded the same tactics used by ISIS, such as shooting in 397 incidents, planting mines/IEDs in 105 incidents, bombing in 50, kidnapping in 102, ambush in 43, executions in 44, suicide bombing in 19, and assassinations in 5 incidents. These complex tactics made ISIS one of the deadliest terrorist organizations. The Department of State’s top ten deadliest terror groups [listed](#) ISIS-Core, ISIS-K, ISIS-West Africa, and ISIS-M in 2021.

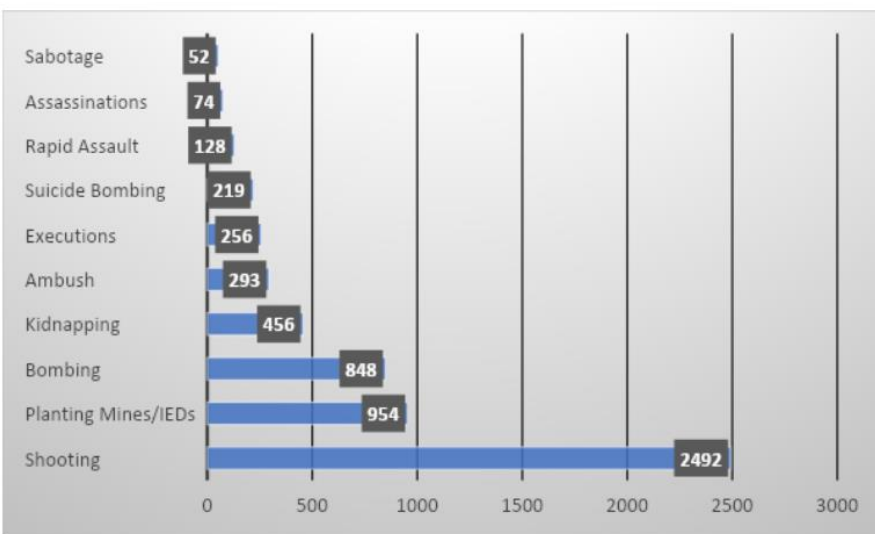


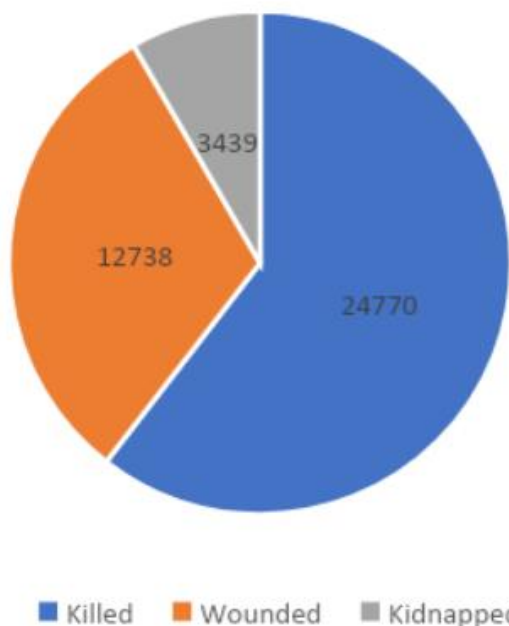
Figure 3: The Top Ten ISIS Tactics from 2018 to 2022

Figure 4 below [shows](#) the number of casualties by ISIS from 2018 to 2022. ISIS killed 24,770 people in this period, which accounted for 28 percent of total killings worldwide. The first nine months of 2023 recorded 3,467 killings by ISIS and its affiliated organizations. ISIS-DRC seems to be the

deadliest ISIS branch in 2023, which killed 1,232 people, followed by ISIS-West Africa, which killed 863, which is more than ISIS-Core, with 787 killings. ISIS branch in the Sahel killed 213 people in its attacks in the same period.

Figure 4: Casualties (Killed, Wounded, and Kidnapped) by ISIS from 2018 to 2022

To conclude, ISIS and its affiliated organizations have continued their brutal attacks in 2023. It seems that ISIS has kept its operational capacity and threatened regional and global security. More specifically, ISIS affiliates in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Nigeria, the Philippines, and the Sahel region receive special attention in terms of their increasing threat levels. These groups procured similar weapons and explosives in 2023, but ISIS-West Africa’s using Katyusha rockets in several attacks in Niger has brought to mind the likely connections of Iran with global jihadist groups. Based on global terrorism databases that track and record terrorist incidents, it is crucial to review counterterrorism strategies and specify likely hot spots of ISIS and its affiliated groups. The current governments that register ISIS activities in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia lack the resources and capacity to fight against these groups.



Nonetheless, the intelligence communities in the Western world need to focus on these organizations' elevated threat levels.

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.

UAE charges more than 80 suspects with terrorism offences

Source: <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/government/2024/01/06/attorney-general-refers-84-defendants-to-state-security-court-on-terrorism-charges/>

Jan 06 – The [Public Prosecutor](#) has referred 84 defendants to Abu Dhabi Federal Court of Appeal, otherwise known as the State Security Court, for trial on terrorism charges.



Most of the defendants referred to the court by **Attorney General Dr Hamad Al Shamsi** were said to be members of the [Muslim Brotherhood](#) in the UAE.

The charges refer directly to establishing "another clandestine organisation for the purpose of committing acts of violence and terrorism on UAE soil", according to state news agency Wam.

"The defendants had concealed this crime and its evidence before they were arrested and tried in the Case No (17) of 2013 – State Security," Wam reported. "Acting on a body of evidence gathered by investigation, the Attorney General ordered a probe into the details of this crime, with legal representation assigned for each suspect.

"After nearly six months of investigation yielding sufficient evidence of its commission, the Attorney

General referred the defendants for trial."

Proceedings have begun, with lawyers appointed for defendants who did not have representation. The court has also begun hearing from witnesses in the case and the public trial procedures are continuing.

Mass killer tries to sue Norway for alleged human rights breach

Source: <https://www.euronews.com/2024/01/07/mass-killer-tries-to-sue-norway-for-alleged-human-rights-breach>

Jan 07 – Norway's most prolific peacetime killer is claiming his prison life in solitary confinement is illegal.

Anders Behring Breivik, the Norwegian right-wing extremist who killed 77 people in a bomb and gun rampage in 2011, will try for the second time on Monday to sue the Norwegian state for allegedly breaching his human rights.

Breivik claims his solitary confinement since being imprisoned in 2012 amounts to inhumane treatment under the European Convention of Human Rights. Norway favours rehabilitation over retribution - and **Breivik is held in a two-story complex with a kitchen, dining room and TV room with an Xbox, several armchairs and black and white pictures of the Eiffel Tower on the wall.**



He also has a fitness room with weights, treadmill and rowing machine, while three parakeets fly around the complex.



Mourners push the coffin of Bano Abobakar Rashid, 18, the first victim of the shooting rampage at Utoeya to be buried, at a church in Nesodden, near Oslo, Norway in 2011 [Lefteris Pitarakis/AP/File](#)

Even so, his lawyer, Øystein Storrvik, says it is impossible for Breivik - who now goes by the name Fjotolf Hansen - to have any meaningful relationships with anyone from the outside world.

He adds preventing his client from sending letters is another breach of his human rights.

A similar claim made by Breivik in 2016 was accepted, but the case was later overturned in a higher court. It was then rejected by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

The killer sought parole in 2022 but was judged to have shown no signs of rehabilitation.

On 22 July 2011, Breivik killed eight people in a bomb attack in Oslo before heading to a youth camp for a centre-left political group on Utøya island. Dressed as a police officer, he stalked and gunned down 69 people, mostly teenagers.

The following year, Breivik was handed the maximum 21-year sentence with a clause - rarely used in Norway's justice system - that he could be held indefinitely if he was still considered a danger to society.

Since then, he has shown no remorse for his attacks, which he portrayed as a crusade against multiculturalism in Norway.

Many regard Breivik's flirtations with the courts as an attempt to draw attention to his cause and even bask once again in the international limelight. He was accused of doing this during his criminal trial.

Lisbeth Kristine Røynealand, who leads a support group for survivors of the attacks and bereaved families, says she is "satisfied with the decision" not to allow a live stream of his comments from this court case.

The state rejects Breivik's claims of human rights offences.

In a letter to the court, government attorney Andreas Hjetland wrote that Breivik had so far shown himself to be unreceptive to rehabilitative work.



It was “therefore difficult to imagine which major reliefs in terms of sentencing are possible and justifiable.” The trial will be held on Monday in the gymnasium in Ringerike prison, a stone’s throw from Utøya. Any person who feels that their rights have been violated by a state can take their case to the ECHR. If the court finds that to be the case, it can rule against a state and order them to pay compensation. However, the court is not empowered to overrule national decisions or annul national laws.

EDITOR’S COMMENT: Do us all a favor and execute this arrogant trash!

Iranian who crossed Biden’s open border: ‘Nothing’ stopping terrorists from entering U.S.

Source: <https://www.worldtribune.com/iranian-who-crossed-bidens-open-border-nothing-stopping-terrorists-from-entering-u-s/>

Jan 07 – An illegal immigrant from Iran who crossed Joe Biden’s open border said terrorists can easily do the same. In a Saturday interview, Real America’s Voice correspondent Ben Bergquam asked the illegal alien: “What was the route you took from Iran?”



A number of terrorists have likely already crossed the U.S. southern border, an Iranian migrant said.

“Turkey to Mexico, Mexico to U.S.,” he answered.

“So what is it that would prevent a terrorist from doing the same thing?” Bergquam asked.

“Nothing,” the man answered.

The man said the Biden Administration is ignoring Islamic radicalization in America, telling Bergquam that there are “lots of terrorists” in the United States who have come through the border. He added that he expects the terrorists will carry out acts of

violence.

Arizona rancher Jim Chilton, told Fox News Digital he is concerned about the potential terrorist infiltration at the southern border. He also said he had experiences of encountering MS-13 members and cartel activities on his ranch, emphasizing the need for enhanced border security and the completion of the border wall.

“We have no security on our ranch nor in most places along the border anymore. It’s not good. It’s not better in any sense. It’s still outrageous,” Chilton said. “I’m very concerned that terrorists are coming across the border.”

Chilton continued: “We have cartel scouts on our mountains.” The cartels “really have control of everything. It’s a method of controlling where everybody goes. It’s a method for opening up other routes for crossing really bad guys, drug packers.

“You shouldn’t give a message to the world that the border is open, and all you have to do is come through, and you’ll get processed, captured, and released into the United States,” Chilton said. “It’s a national security issue.”

Bergquam has reported extensively on the crisis at the border and how Team Biden is billing taxpayers to fly the migrants to destinations across the country.

Ben Bergquam - Real America's Voice (RAV-TV) News   [@BenBergquam · Follow](#)

This might be the most insightful and terrifying interview I've ever done. Iranian national who crossed illegally into Jacumba, California, warns me and America of what's coming. You must watch the whole thing! Listen to what he says about Trump versus Biden, it truly is... [Show more](#)

[Watch on X](#)



REAL AMERICA'S VOICE



Daily Jihad in France

By Guy Millière

Source: <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/20220/france-jihad>



Paris, December 2, 2023. 9 pm. A man shouting "Allahu Akbar!" ("Allah is the greatest!") [stabbed a German tourist](#) walking along the Seine near the Eiffel Tower, an area considered safe. On the way to the hospital, the victim died. The murderer, again shouting, "Allahu Akbar!", attacked two more people, seriously wounding them, before the police arrested him. A government press release quickly mentioned that the killer was a French citizen, born in France, with the exceedingly French first name of [Armand](#).

Then reality struck. Armand was indeed born in France in 1997, but his original first name was Iman (full name: [Iman Rajabpour-Miyandoab](#)) -- until 2003, when his Iranian parents, who had fled the Islamic Republic, became French citizens and changed his name to Armand. In 2015-2016, he proclaimed his allegiance to the Islamic State (ISIS) and [made contact](#) on social networks with many Islamists who had perpetrated terror attacks in France in that time period, and he [planned a terrorist attack](#) in Paris.

Before he could execute his plan, in 2016, he was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison. He was released after four years, and placed [on the state's list](#) of particularly dangerous individuals. On the afternoon of December 2, 2023, he [filmed a video](#) in which he announced that he wanted to "avenge the Muslims" and kill infidels – exactly what he did a few hours later. Commenting on the attack, Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin [insisted](#) that the murderer had been under "close monitoring" and "psychiatric treatment" and spoke of a "psychiatric failure".

The murder was widely reported. Many journalists [noted](#) that the murder of a tourist in Paris by an Islamist ex-convict could create panic among foreign visitors, and the fact that an Islamic extremist considered dangerous by the authorities was walking about free could cause even more concern, especially with the mention of "psychiatric treatment". Similarly, Kobili Traoré, who murdered Sarah Halimi in 2017 and was sent to a mental hospital, was recently [declared not responsible](#) for his actions and will [soon be free](#).

What *should* cause concern in France, however, is the widespread rise in Islamic violence. Official statistics show that every day in France, there are on average [120 knife attacks](#), many of which result in death.



Although acts filled with Islamic hatred against non-Muslims are becoming more and more numerous, most are passed over in silence. Some, however, are so disgusting that the mainstream media cannot ignore them. The murder in Marseille, for instance, of Laura Paumier and Mauranne Harel, two young students [slaughtered and disemboweled](#) with a butcher's knife by an illegal immigrant, [Ahmed Hanachi](#), in front of a horrified crowd in 2017, delivered a particular shock. Similarly, again in Marseille, Mohamed L., a [radicalized](#) drug dealer, in 2022 [slit the throat](#) of Alban Gervaise, a military doctor, in front of his two young children while he was picking them up from school. Butchering a father in front of his children seemed particularly shocking and barbaric. On both occasions, the murderers were proudly shouting "Allahu Akbar".

Jean-Baptiste Salvaing and Jessica Schneider, two police officers, were [tortured and slaughtered](#) in front of their young son at their home near Paris in 2016, by [Larossi Abballa](#), an Islamist.

The murder of [Fabienne Broly Verhaeghe](#), a 68-year-old nurse, in Lille on October 18, 2023, also reached a level of savagery difficult to imagine: Mohamed B., a 17-year-old illegal immigrant born in the Ivory Coast, broke into her apartment, then raped, scalped and disemboweled her, and cut off her hands.

On October 16, 2020, the [beheading of Samuel Paty](#) near the high school where he taught, by [Abdoullakh Anzorov](#), an 18-year-old Chechen refugee, led President Emmanuel Macron to [promise](#) actions that would allow teachers to [work in complete safety](#). Nothing was done. Another teacher, Dominique Bernard, had his [throat slit](#) where he taught, in Arras, on October 13, 2023. The murderer, [Mohammed Mogouchkov](#) was a 20 years old Ingush refugee subject to an expulsion procedure.

Anti-Semitic attacks in France are also becoming ever more frequent, and have exploded since the atrocious attacks in Israel on October 7 by the terrorist group Hamas. In 2022, there were [436 anti-Semitic acts](#) officially recorded in France. In the few weeks between October 7 and December 1, 2023, there were [1,518 anti-Semitic acts](#) recorded, many of them physical assaults. From examining the police reports, done by the French National Bureau for Vigilance against Anti-Semitism, [BNVCA](#), it is sadly clear that all of them apparently came from Islamic anti-Semites. From the murder of [Sébastien Sellam](#) in 2003 to that of [Mireille Knoll](#) in 2018, all murders of Jews in France have been committed by radicalized Muslims.

Jews throughout France can [no longer wear skullcaps](#) or a Star of David on the street. They remove their names from their mailboxes. "For the first time since 1945," [said](#) French author Elisabeth Badinter, "many French Jews are afraid to the point of hiding."

Ethnic Muslim gangs raid shopping centers and parties in rural villages. Most of these assaults are also never mentioned in the media. One, however, recently attracted attention: at a party on November 19 in the town hall of Crépol, a village of five hundred people, members of a [Muslim gang](#) armed with long butcher knives came from the neighboring town, Romans-sur-Isère. Shouting "we are coming to kill white people", they [attacked](#), murdering Thomas Perotto, aged 17, who had his [throat slit](#). Seventeen other people were wounded, some seriously. Criminologist Xavier Raufer, asked about the attack, [replied](#) that raids like that take place throughout the country every week.

The government [concealed the names](#) of the attackers and clearly did everything it could to hide what had happened. A conservative journalist, [Damien Rieu](#), obtained and disclosed them. Although the prosecutor in charge of the case received multiple testimonies that the attackers said they were "coming to kill white people," authorities maintain that the motive for the attack is "[unknown](#)".

On November 25, a group of young "right-wing" French people who had [planned to demonstrate](#) in Romans-sur-Isère were arrested by the police upon their arrival and taken before a judge. He accused them of an "intentional racist attack" and [immediately sentenced](#) them to six-to-ten months in prison. They had not attacked anyone. The banner they brought said only: "Justice for Thomas". The sole victim of violence on that day was one of the French demonstrators who managed to elude the police. He was chased down in the town and later found [naked and unconscious](#), his body lacerated, in the lobby of a building.

On November 29, French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne proclaimed that the young people sent to prison deserved it and that they had embodied a "serious threat to democracy" in France: the "[ultra-right](#)". The "ultra-right," she added, cryptically, was even more dangerous than the "extreme right." Not a word, however, about Islamic violence.

The French government is clearly aware that Islamic "[no-go zones](#)" are growing and that riots can break out at any moment. In June 2023, a police traffic stop gone wrong led to the [death of Nahel Merzouk](#), a 17 year old Muslim criminal, and resulted in three weeks of [riots and destruction](#) that spread to many towns. Although [French authorities banned](#) pro-Hamas demonstrations planned for October and November, they took place anyway, complete with [anti-Jewish](#) and anti-French chants. The police were ordered not to intervene.

The French mainstream media has [spoken](#) extensively about the "extreme danger posed by the ultra-right." Again, not a word about Islamic violence.

Some commentators and political leaders, have spoken out all the same. Columnist Ivan Rioufol [wrote](#): "The racial outbreak which, in France, accompanied the satanic carnage of Hamas against Israeli civilians, revealed the state of tearing of the nation, close to rupture. Two irreconcilable Frances are already confronting each other in broad daylight: French France and Islamized France."



Éric Zemmour, president of the Reconquest Party, [wrote](#):

"Two peoples live in France, one of whom must constantly flee the attacks of an increasingly violent faction of the other, not only the attacks perpetrated with shouts of Allah Akbar, but this real daily jihad that the French suffer."

Marine Le Pen, president of the National Rally, [said](#):

"[M]any French people now feel it: no one is safe anywhere anymore. A new threshold has been crossed. We are witnessing organized attacks emanating from a certain number of criminogenic suburbs in which there are armed 'militias' carrying out raids."

While the influence of fundamentalist Islam is less marked among older Muslims, [74% of Muslims](#) between the ages of 18 and 25 in France say they place Islamic sharia law above the laws of the French Republic.

Television journalist Christian Malard, who had access to the results of confidential inquiries carried out for the French Ministry of the Interior, [said](#) they show that more than half of the imams in France proclaim the superiority of Islam over Western culture and the need to Islamize France, even if that means using force. Malard added that the main French Muslim organization, "Muslims of France," which is the French branch of the Muslim Brotherhood -- a movement banned in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Egypt -- has a monopoly on training imams in France and has been infiltrating French universities, sports clubs and political parties.

"Left-wing" politicians and journalists, who try to demonize "far-right" parties by accusing them of anti-Semitism, are having trouble making the label stick. Zemmour is a Jew who strongly [supports Israel](#). Le Pen's party also supports Israel and [denounces anti-Semitism](#) without the slightest ambiguity. Accusing the Reconquest and the National Rally parties of "Islamophobia" no longer has any impact; Islamic violence spreading in France has convinced an increasing number of French people that it is legitimate to be afraid of Islam.

According to recent surveys, [78% of French people](#) think that Islamism constitutes a mortal threat to France. [91% say they are worried](#) or very worried about the sharp rise in violence in the country. The anti-Jewish atrocities by Hamas on October 7 reinforced a distrust of Islam, and for the first time in years, a [majority](#) of French people support Israel's fight in the ongoing war.

The main [anti-Semitic party](#) in France now is a leftist one, Rebellious France. Its leader, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, has accused Israel -- not Hamas -- of genocide, and has [claimed](#) that Hamas is a "resistance" movement. He [concluded](#) one of his recent meetings with, "Long live Gaza" and "Eternal glory to those who resist".

If a presidential election were to take place in France today, Zemmour would receive more votes than he did in 2022, and Le Pen would [top the first round](#) of voting, receiving [between 31% -33% of the votes](#), far more than in 2022. Whoever her opponent would be in the second round, she would easily win it.

An election victory for Le Pen would confirm that a huge change could still take shape within Europe. In Italy, [Giorgia Meloni won](#) the Italian legislative elections on September 25, 2022 by denouncing the Islamization of Europe, and became prime minister. On November 22, in the Netherlands, [Geert Wilders' party](#) won the most seats in legislative elections.

Security expert Éric Delbecque, whose recent book, *Permanent Insecurity*, details the growing violence plaguing France, recently [stated](#): "The French seem to understand that their country could die. They are beginning to react."

[Dr. Guy Millière, a professor at the University of Paris, is the author of 27 books on France and Europe.](#)

A strategy to eliminate piracy

By Captain Glenn Mathias

Source: <https://www.thedcn.com.au/news/law-regulation-trade/opinion-a-strategy-to-eliminate-piracy/>

Jan 09 – Piracy is flourishing in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean off Somalia – the RSGAI area – because leaders of countries who could prevent such activity are looking for leadership in establishing an international force to eliminate such activity. That leadership is best provided by the International Maritime Organization, which is MIA. The purpose of this article is two-fold: first, to highlight the impacts of piracy on two classes of people viz the seafarer and the common man or woman at the end of the supply chain. Secondly, to recommend a strategy to eliminate piracy in the RSGAI area. Elimination of piracy would ensure seafarer safety and security of supply chains.

Impacts of piracy – seafarers

Shipowners have known for years that seafarers have been injured and taken hostage by pirates. Despite such knowledge, the question is: what actions have shipowners taken to eliminate piracy and protect seafarers? None!





US military personnel from USS Chosin boarding a suspected pirate dhow in the Gulf of Aden in 2009. Image: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Scott Taylor/public domain

Shipowners cannot protest the answer because their inaction demonstrates that their business models accept such injuries and hostage-taking as the cost of doing business. If shipowners believed that seafarer welfare and safety was important – because without seafarers there would be no ships and no shipping industry – they would have forced the IMO to take action to eliminate piracy years ago; they have not done so. The shame of ignoring seafarer welfare and safety is not limited to shipowners, but to other organisations whose livelihoods are directly dependent upon ships, including P&I clubs; International Transport Workers' Federation; International Chamber of Shipping; and not the least, the IMO.

Shipowners need only look to the courts to understand the reasons seafarers are a special class of persons demanding of protection of the law. Lord Stowell's seminal judgement in *The Minerva* (1825) 1 Hagg 347, resulted in the High Court of Admiralty exercising sole authority over wage claims by seafarers, regardless of the nature of the contract. In the US case of *Harden v Gordon*, 11 F Cas 480, 500 (1823), Story J said this about seafarers:

Every court should watch with jealousy an encroachment upon the rights of seamen, because they are unprotected and need counsel; because they are thoughtless and require indulgence; because they are credulous and complying; and are easily overreached. But courts of maritime law have been in the constant habit of extending towards them a peculiar, protecting favor and guardianship. They are emphatically the wards of the admiralty ...

More recently, in the *ANL Progress* [20 Feb 2002] HC, NZ, AD1/02 [28], Salmon J noted:



There is obviously a disparity of power between them [seafarers] and the owners of the ship. It is appropriate to continue to adopt a benevolent and protective attitude. Although the cases related to seafarers' claims for wages, generally, the statements reflect the special protection afforded by the law to seafarers. Despite their favoured and unique position in law, the fact that seafarers are not so regarded by shipowners indicates that seafarer welfare and safety are not factored into shipowners' business models.

Impacts of piracy – Common man and woman

Turning now to the common man and woman at the end of the supply chain. As a consequence of covid-19, the common man and woman endured shortages of food and other basic necessities, and the burden of exorbitant prices. (Those in the upper socio-economic brackets were less affected by such prices). Ironically, container companies made astronomical profits due to covid-19, as Drewry noted in December 2021:

DMFR, the investment research arm of global shipping consultancy Drewry, remains bullish about continued high stock prices and rising profitability in the booming container carrier sector. The strong performance in the global container shipping sector has generated very handsome spill-over benefits for stock investors. The returns since the start of 2020 have been astronomical. Asian liner operators were the top performers; with Yang Ming up by 1,583% (as of mid-December 2021), followed by Evergreen Marine's gain of 987% and Wan Hai's 976%. HMM generated returns of 621%. More modest growth was seen in Europe, where Hapag-Lloyd shares increased by 192% and Maersk's by 123%. Clearly the pandemic and ensuing supply chain crisis that supercharged carrier profits has been the primary driver for the share price bonanza. (emphasis added)

While shipping companies reaped astronomical profits during the supply chain crisis, the contributions towards those profits fell hardest on society's common man and woman at the end of the supply chain. With piracy prompting shipowners to re-route their ships away from the RSGAI area and around South Africa, such re-routing could cause another supply chain crisis. And there is no prize for guessing which members of our society would shoulder the heavier burden of profits flowing from such a crisis. But then again, the welfare of the common man and woman is not factored into shipowners' business models.

Previous actions to deal with piracy

Much is currently being written about the UN/IMO issuing resolutions about the piracy in the RSGAI area; however, resolutions are not a language pirates understand.

An extract from UNCTAD's Maritime Piracy, An Overview of Trends, Costs and Trade-Related Implications, (Studies in Transport Law & Policy, Part 1, 2014), provides a concise view of UN actions in dealing with piracy off Somalia:

Since 2008, the United Nations Security Council has adopted a number of resolutions to support counter piracy action in East African waters. The European Union, the African Union, the League of Arab States, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are all active in fighting piracy off the coast of Somalia. Over 40 countries are involved in counter piracy operations in East Africa, either in a national capacity or through joint forces (for example, the European Union Naval Force Somalia – Operation Atalanta; the Standing Naval Group of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – NATO Operation Ocean Shield; and Combined Task Force 151). Reflecting actions by international navies, as well as preventive measures by merchant ships, including the deployment of privately contracted armed security personnel in the region, the share of East Africa in the total number of piracy incidents occurring in African waters, has dropped from nearly 50 per cent in 2008 to about one third in 2010 and 17.3 per cent in 2012. Yet, despite the apparent drop in incidents since 2010, maritime piracy remains a major concern, including for the shipping industry which has welcomed the "clampdown" on piracy in East African waters, but has also cautioned against any potential complacency. The fear is that pirates off the coast of Somalia may not have totally given up on maritime piracy as a source of revenue but instead, may be changing their strategy by increasingly targeting ships at anchorage.

The fact that piracy has increased in the RSGAI area indicates that the UN actions failed to eliminate or reduce piracy.

Before discussing the strategy to eliminate piracy, it is important to understand the issues that sustain piracy. First, the success of piracy is its business model: Upside – enormous profits. Downside? Almost none. (The loss of a pirate life or two is part of their business model: uncannily similar to that of shipowners – harsh, but true).

Piracy can be eliminated if their business model is broken by overwhelming, and when necessary, deadly force, that ensures only downside, no upside.

Secondly, pirates attack ships because pirates wield superior, and at times deadly force against a ship. It is well accepted that, in most situations, superior force will triumph. Recall, that Russia invaded and annexed Ukraine's Crimea in March 2014, because of its superior military force. China engages in certain activities in the South China Sea despite protests by the IMO and some neighbouring countries because of its superior military force over those countries and the IMOs irrelevance in such situations. When Ronald Reagan was President, the then USSR feared him; those fears increased when, in November 1983, NATO forces conducted their nuclear weapons exercise



Able Archer 83. This was a routine annual exercise but in 1983, the USSR put their forces on high alert, believing the exercise to be a smoke screen for a nuclear strike.

Finally, piracy could be eliminated in the RSGAI area, if the IMO exercised leadership. Its failure thus far, has caused certain countries in recent times, most recently Denmark and India, to send a warship to the area. IMO's failure has also prompted US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin to announce the creation of a multinational operation to counter piracy in the RSGAI area.

"This is an international challenge that demands collective action. Therefore today I am announcing the establishment of Operation Prosperity Guardian, an important new multinational security initiative," he said in a statement on 18 December. No reference to the IMO.

Strategy to eliminate piracy

Despite the US, with good reason, pre-empting the IMO, the latter must join the US and prevail upon countries who may resist joining a US-led force, to join an international force of naval vessels. IMO leadership will lend a degree of gravitas to a naval force assembled under an IMO initiative rather than a US one.

The critical aspect of an international naval force is that it presents as an overwhelming force, because that is the only language pirates understand.

The international naval force would have just one objective: the elimination of piracy. The objective could be achieved through a three-fold strategy: first, patrolling the RSGAI coastlines to detect departing pirate vessels; second, tracking those vessels and, if they approach ships, warning them against such approaches; and finally, using whatever force, including deadly force, when those vessels attempt to board ships.

If the strategy is properly implemented, piracy in the RSGAI area would cease within a month of such implementation. Its elimination would take a little longer.

To reiterate, piracy will only be eliminated through actions pirates understand: overwhelming and, when necessary, deadly force.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: Agree with the last sentence of this article. Coalition forces are aware of the pirates' strongholds on shore; they even know where their leaders are living and their routes of communication. Aerial destruction will make them think twice about repeating the same mistakes.

The Signal in the Noise: The 2023 Threats and Those on the Horizon

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20240109-the-signal-in-the-noise-the-2023-threats-and-those-on-the-horizon>

Jan 09 – A review of terrorist activity over the past year—focused on designated [foreign terrorist organizations](#) and U.S.-based violent extremists—reveals the foundations of a shifting terrorism landscape. Overseas and at home, the past year brought major terrorist attacks and notable counterterrorism operations. These, considered alongside what we know about thwarted and failed plots over the past year, offer holistic insight into the character, depth, and breadth of the morphing terrorism threat to U.S. security and interests.

Austin Doctor, writing in [Lawfare](#), analyzes terrorist-related developments in 2023 in different parts of the world, then focuses on the such developments in the United States:

The United States homeland and U.S. forces faced a steady and diverse set of terrorism threats in 2023. The international terrorism threat to U.S. homeland security was mixed, severe along some dimensions—attacks on U.S. military assets abroad and attempts to inspire U.S.-based homegrown violent extremist attacks—and less so on others—large-scale attacks on the U.S. homeland with direct planning and coordination from abroad). As described above, U.S. forces and assets abroad were attacked by terrorist actors throughout the year. In publicly available media and government reporting, there was little indication of an imminent external attack, such as the [one thwarted in 2019](#). However, much of the terrorism threat in 2023 maintained a distinct international character—one that should not be overlooked. Aspiring foreign terrorist fighters in the U.S., many of whom are U.S. citizens, are still attempting to join the [Islamic State](#) and [al-Qaeda](#), though many fewer than attempted to do so between 2013 and 2019. Many foreign terrorist networks and designated organizations also seek to inspire U.S.-based individuals to attack at home. A May 2023 Department of Homeland Security [threat advisory bulletin](#) warned that "foreign terrorists continue to use media to call for lone offender attacks in the West, condemn US foreign policy, and attempt to expand their reach and grow global support networks." And this [threat ramped up](#) in the aftermath of the Oct. 7 attack. The international



terrorism threat, of course, is not limited to jihadist violent extremism. Domestic violent extremists, including racially and ethnically motivated extremists, for example, are [also increasingly connected](#) with transnational networks of [like-minded extremists](#), such as the [Russian Imperial Movement](#).

Domestically, threats emerged from different corners of the violent extremist landscape, including from racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists, anti-government and anti-authority violent extremists, and homegrown violent extremists. In February, two American white supremacist violent extremists were [charged with conspiring to destroy an energy facility](#) in the Baltimore, Maryland area—with an aim to jumpstart a broader cycle of violent instability. In August 2023, [authorities arrested a 17-year-old resident of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania](#), alleging that “he was preparing to build bombs and select targets after being in touch with an al-Qaida affiliate in Syria.” As the [war in Gaza continues](#), and as known terrorists around the world [call for violent action in support of Hamas](#), American officials recently [issued a warning](#) that the spillover threat to the U.S. remains significant.

In the United States, violent extremists faced considerable pressure in 2023. The lack of a major, high casualty terrorist incident in the United States last year is a testament to a diligent and dogged counterterrorism workforce. [As of September, the FBI was conducting](#) approximately 2,700 domestic terrorism program investigations—a number which has reportedly [more than doubled](#) since spring 2020. In that same period, the FBI was also conducting approximately 4,000 investigations related to international terrorism. Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio and Oath Keepers head Stewart Rhodes were sentenced to prison, 22 years and 18 years respectively, for terrorism-related crimes associated with the Jan. 6 assault on the U.S. Capitol. In addition, U.S. law enforcement and intelligence efforts prevented a number of terrorist plots, two of which are described above.

Still, there is need for improved organization of the counterterrorism effort, and for tools suited to the present threat. In June 2023, for example, the Office of the Inspector General [completed an audit](#) of the Department of Justice’s approach to the domestic violent extremism (DVE) threat while safeguarding civil rights and civil liberties, finding that Justice Department has faced challenges in [establishing a cohesive DVE strategy](#), limiting the domestic counterterrorism mission community’s capacity for necessary intra-governmental coordination. A major point of debate [over the past year](#) in the counterterrorism policy and law space has been the reauthorization of Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), a critical intelligence collection authority that enables the intelligence community to collect, analyze, and share foreign intelligence information about national security threats. It is both a [highly-valuable and controversial](#) tool. In mid-December, the U.S. House of Representatives [voted to include a four-month extension](#) of Section 702 with the National Defense Authorization Act it passed on to President Biden’s desk [to be signed](#). This also extends the debate on Section 702’s reauthorization into the coming months. Matthew Olsen, assistant attorney general for the Justice Department National Security Division, said [recently](#), “allowing Section 702 to lapse even temporarily would be catastrophic to U.S. national security and the safety of the American people. We cannot afford to be blinded to the many threats we face from foreign adversaries...like Hamas and ISIS”

Doctor writes that these regional and domestic threat summaries offer crucial clues as to where vigilance will be especially critical as we enter a new year. Where should attention be focused? And where should the increasingly limited resources of the U.S. counterterrorism workforce be directed?

Four Terrorist Threats to Watch in 2024

A review of 2023 reveals a dynamic, diverse, and diffuse terrorism threat landscape. In the coming year (and beyond), U.S. national and homeland security is likely to be challenged by an assortment of terrorism threats. Some will be similar to those that have persisted for years. Others will be newly emerging. By design, threats in this latter category tend to reveal or exploit latent knowledge or capability gaps in a state’s security apparatus, allowing for a window of outsized impact.

The risk of an external, coordinated attack on the U.S. homeland—a September 11 repeat—remains credible; however, the most probable violent terrorist threat to the U.S. comes from within. That said, the line separating international and domestic threats is becoming increasingly thin, meaning that much of the locally sourced terrorism threat in the U.S. in the coming year may stem from individuals or groups connected with cross-border extremist networks or may be inspired by terrorist activity abroad. While neither exhaustive nor ordered by their relative urgency, the following four cross-cutting categories of threats reflect some of the more notable anticipated dangers that are likely to drive the terrorism-related threat to the United States in 2024.

Inspired (and increasingly young) U.S.-based violent extremists

In light of the thwarted attacks in the U.S. over the last year, it is [clear that lone attackers](#)—individual extremist offenders based in the U.S. who act outside the explicit direction of a [known terrorist organization](#)—present a daily challenge to intelligence and law enforcement



practitioners. This threat is exacerbated by the lack of a clear profile. While many lone offenders in recent past have espoused a [racially and ethnically motivated violent extremist](#) ideology, this violent motley crew also consists of Salafi-jihadist inspired extremists, anti-government radicals, and others. They tend to radicalize in isolation, a process often supercharged online, and plan their attacks quietly. And they are hard to identify.

Within this threat vector, there also appears to be a quiet but steady upward trend in young terrorist offenders. In October 2023, [FBI Director Wray told the](#) International Association of Chiefs of Police that “hardly a week goes by when I’m not briefed on a juvenile here in the United States motivated to commit violence by some foreign terrorist organization or other ideology.” Juvenile offenders can be inspired by foreign or domestic terrorist organizations, in addition to [other violent extremist ideologies](#).

Nation-state involvement in terrorism

The current intensity of global great power competition incentivizes states to pursue coercive influence through a variety of tools—including empowering militant groups to commit violent acts. It’s cheap, sufficiently effective, and offers sponsoring states some degree of plausible deniability. Historically, this is a well-established practice, but the [recent surge of activity](#) by Iran-backed militias against American forces, assets, and global partners indicates that this threat has reached new levels of maturity and complexity. Iran has cultivated an especially robust network of [aligned militant proxies](#), but other U.S. adversaries, such as Russia, have also demonstrated their ability to leverage non-state groups and paramilitary organizations to threaten American security and interests. U.S. state adversaries may also try to manipulate or provoke attacks by U.S.-based extremists through information campaigns.

The democratization of technology

The increasing sophistication and [rapid democratization](#) of emerging commercial technologies [raise new concerns for](#) the future of terrorism, both in the near and long term. Most terrorist incidents involve creative and not-so-creative uses of rudimentary tech, such as radio transmitters. This issue warrants continued and resourced attention. But counterterrorism officials must also monitor the use of emerging technologies—which have the potential to be used as [force-multiplying instruments](#) in various terrorist activities. These include radicalization and recruitment; planning and conducting an attack; and financial operations, among others. And some emerging technologies [have been key elements of](#) recent terror plots and attacks. As emerging technologies become more affordable, reliable, and available, the threat they present will become more pervasive. Responding to these threats effectively will require continued exploration of how emerging technologies—such as unmanned systems, extended reality and related platforms, artificial intelligence, advanced telecommunication networks and the Internet of Things, and additive manufacturing—may be exploited to facilitate terrorist activities.

A critical mass of the “resistance against the oppressor” narrative

Over the past year this sentiment and slogan have been reflected widely across the violent ideological spectrum. While each element gives the accused oppressor a slightly different face—whether it be the Biden administration and public officials, federal law enforcement, corporate America, some combination of these elements, or others—there seems to be a convergence around this narrative. In the coming year, with public trust in the U.S. government [near historic lows](#), we may see this narrative manifest in various parts of the violent extremist landscape.

First, there is an enduring threat posed by [sovereign citizen](#) and militia violent extremists who view the U.S. government as unfair, unfit, corrupt, overreaching, or as some combination of these descriptors. These beliefs about the government have recently been connected to a [marked increase in violent threats against public officials](#), including federal law enforcement and elected representatives.

Second, environmental violent extremists seem to exhibit a growing appetite for destructive action. To be sure, in the coming year, the greatest volume of lethal terrorist activity in the United States will likely be driven by other segments of the violent extremist ecosystem. But escalating concerns about [the deteriorating natural environment](#) is galvanizing a growing coalition of activists who may be willing to use violence to incite fear to attempt to compel change in environmental policy or corporate activities. The energy, transportation, [and agriculture sectors](#) would be especially symbolic targets. A year ago, for example, environmental activist Joseph Dibee [pleaded guilty for his role in two arson conspiracies](#) seeking to destroy private and government animal processing sites in Oregon and California.

[Anarchist violent extremists](#) may pursue more active violent resistance against perceived government abuse or harmful corporate activities. The [ongoing tensions regarding the](#) the \$90 million “Cop City” construction project in Atlanta, for example, has brought hostile direct action back to the top of our news cycles. And amplified by local and international protests in support of Gazan civilians facing a [lethal Israeli counteroffensive](#), open support for violence as a solution is [gaining support in large cities](#) and



among younger Americans generally. There is a risk that this narrative will continue to seep from the fringe into the mainstream.

These four anticipated terrorism threat vectors highlighted above suggest that certain events may be gravitational centers for violent extremism in the coming year.

The first and most fluid is the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas. Not only have Hamas and other violent Islamist organizations intentionally aimed to inspire sympathetic attacks in the U.S., but divided domestic public opinion on the war has also led to mobilized protests and isolated acts of violence on opposing sides of the Israel-Palestine issue. As a result, the related terrorism threat to the United States may come from foreign terrorist organizations, homegrown violent extremists, or domestic violent extremists. There is [an especially high risk](#) that U.S.-based homegrown extremists will be mobilized by violent Islamist foreign terrorist organizations' ongoing calls for attacks. Karrem Nasr, a U.S. citizen from New Jersey, was [charged in December for attempting to materially support](#) al-Shabaab, explicitly motivated by the Oct. 7 Hamas attack. Racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists may also work to target minorities, including [American Muslims and Jews](#).

At home, the 2024 U.S. presidential election may also prompt a surge of related terrorist threats in the coming year. The risks are conditioned on a number of factors such as the perceived competitiveness of the race, candidates' rhetoric, and the perceived fairness of the election by American violent extremists. The risk of open violence between extremist collectives, such as anarchists and white supremacists, will be heightened during this season. Likely scapegoats and targets of violence are marginalized communities, such as LGBTQ+ persons as well as ethnic and religious minorities. With primaries running through July and August, the threat of election-related terrorist violence will likely be highest in the months leading up to the November election and those immediately following.

Doctor concludes:

We enter the new year with ["blinking lights everywhere."](#) The success of the Hamas terrorist operation on October 7 reflected, in part, [a failure by Israeli authorities](#) to see the signal through the noise. From a U.S. homeland security perspective, the terrorism threat in 2023 can be summarized as diverse, diffuse, and active. In 2024, we are likely to continue to see signs of continuing shifts in the terrorism landscape—such as the threats posed by lone juvenile offenders, the malign use of democratized technologies, and "violent resistance" narratives adopted across the extremist ecosystem. These changes should prompt a proactive reassessment of the assumptions that underlie conclusions—as well as how we move from assumptions to conclusions—regarding the anticipated nature of the near-term terrorism threat. With a series of catalyzing events in the coming year—most prominently, the continued war in Gaza and the U.S. presidential election cycle—it will be especially important to carefully consider which terrorist threats we should expect to endure and maintain an open mind to those which may begin to emerge.

Politics and piracy: How Houthi attacks in Red Sea are different from the earlier Somali hijackings

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/everyday-explainers/houthi-attacks-red-sea-somali-piracy-hijacking-comparison-9102168/>

Jan 09 – Since November last year, Yemen's Houthi militia has been [attacking merchant ships in the Red Sea](#), a narrow body of water between Africa and Asia that links to the Mediterranean Sea and Europe through the Suez Canal, and provides a crucial trade corridor that allows ships on east-west routes to avoid the long voyage around the African continent.

The attacks have raised concerns over potential disruptions to global supply chains, and shipping firms have been reported to be weighing the difficult choice between paying significantly higher insurance premiums on the risky Red Sea route and taking the longer and costlier way around the Cape of Good Hope.

A US-led force has been deployed in the Red Sea, and American warships have attacked and sunk Houthi vessels, but the dangers to shipping have persisted. The Houthis have targeted their attacks on certain kinds of ships such as automobile carriers, but have generally left oil tankers alone.

Why are the Houthis targeting merchant ships?

Essentially in support of Hamas, the Palestinian group against which Israel has been carrying out a punishing operation in the Gaza Strip.

Since the start of the war, provoked by the October 7 Hamas attacks in southern Israel, the Houthis have launched more than 15 attacks on international vessels in the Red Sea, using drones and rockets fired



from land. In November, the Houthis claimed they had captured an Israeli cargo vehicle. They have said that the attacks against interests aligned with Israel and the US would continue.

The Houthis are a militant group backed and armed by Iran, who have been fighting a protracted civil war in Yemen. The Houthis have links with Hamas, and are believed by some to have helped plan the October 7 attacks. However, Hamas are Sunni, while the Houthis, like the regime in Tehran as well as Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed militant group in Lebanon, are Shia.

How is the current phase of attacks on shipping in the Red Sea different from the threats posed by Somali pirates in the region in an earlier phase?

Between 2000 and 2016, merchant ships in the Gulf of Aden (into which the Red Sea opens in the south through the Bab al-Mandab Strait), Guardafui Channel (at the tip of the Horn of Africa) and the Somali Sea were under constant threat from Somali pirates.

Unlike the attacks by the Houthis, the Somali pirate actions had no overt political agenda or goals, and were essentially hijackings for ransom. Gangs of young Somali men with light arms would try to board ships and commandeer them. If they managed to seize control, they would negotiate a ransom for the release of the vessel. They would generally not be violent with the ship's crew, and would work through negotiators who were often on land in or around Somalia.

After 2016, there was a significant decline in piracy. Combined efforts by the international community in terms of military cooperation and intelligence-sharing helped reduce the risks. The Indian Navy also sent some warships to the region.

"From 2016 to 2022 there were no pirate attacks in the Gulf of Aden area, and from being an HRA (High Risk Area) it had been designated an HSA (Heightened Security Area). While armed guards were still escorting merchant vessels, incidents and risks had come down to a minimum, also due to [NATO](#) and the French Navy and Army destroying everything related to piracy attacks in Somalia," a former Merchant Navy officer told [The Indian Express](#).

Misogyny Is a Precursor to Terrorism

By Jessica Roy

Source: <https://time.com/6553509/misogyny-precursor-terrorism-essay/>

Jan 10 – As the [last](#) of the January 6 rioters received their sentences in December 2023, the American justice system continues to reel from one of the most egregious acts of domestic terrorism in decades without really having reckoned with one of the key problems at its core: misogyny. While we frequently ascribe acts of terror to political or religious extremism, violence against women is actually one of the leading precursors to terrorism—both domestically, like in the [case](#) of the January 6 rioters, and [internationally](#), with groups like the Islamic State and Al Qaeda.

The story is the same all over the world. The Manchester Arena bomber, Salman Abedi, who killed 22 people and wounded more than a thousand in an ISIS-affiliated attack in 2017, punched a female fellow student in the head because he thought her skirt was too short while studying at Manchester College in 2012.

Elliot Rodger, the 22-year-old "involuntary celibate" who went on a killing spree in Isla Vista, California, in 2014, cited his immense hatred for women as his motivation for the attack. ("There is no creature more evil and depraved than the human female," Rodger wrote in his notorious 141-page manifesto.) Dylann Roof, the white supremacist who killed nine people in Charleston, South Carolina, in a racism-fueled domestic terrorism attack, cited a form of patriarchal control over women as partial motivation for the shooting. (A witness reported [Roof said](#), "You rape our women and you're taking over our country" as he opened fire on a Bible study group at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, all of whom were Black.)

The list goes on: The Orlando, Florida, shooter Omar Mateen had a history of abusing his own wife; Connor Betts, who killed nine people, including his own sister, in Dayton, Ohio, in 2019, had been suspended from school for circulating a list of girls he wanted to rape. At least nine of the January 6th insurrectionists had histories of violence against women; Guy Reffitt, a member of two far-right militias who was sentenced to 87 months in federal prison for his actions during the January 6th riot, admitted to police in a 2018 interview that he had choked his wife during a domestic



dispute. Mass shootings, a form of terrorism that occurs frequently in the U.S., are committed overwhelmingly by men with histories of gender-based violence: One [2019 analysis](#) by *Mother Jones* found that more than a third of the perpetrators of mass shootings since 2011 had a documented history of violence against women. Violence often leads to more violence, and women are typically the first target. This was especially evident in the case of Moussa Elhassani and his wife Samantha Elhassani, also known as Samantha Sally. When then 31-year-old Moussa joined the Islamic State in April 2015 as a sniper, his friends and family back in Elkhart, Indiana were genuinely surprised. Unlike his brother Abdelhadi, who also joined ISIS after crossing the border with Moussa from Turkey into Syria, Moussa wasn't some zealot. In fact, he wasn't even really religious at all. But for Moussa and so many other men who have pledged allegiance to ISIS, going to Syria wasn't about ideology, or religion, or fanaticism. Rather, the allure involved entitlement, control, and violence—particularly against women. Long before Moussa made the decision to join the Islamic State and terrorize entire nations, the victims of his violence were much closer to home. His ex-wife, Amber, and the woman he was married to when he died, Samantha, both say he was physically, emotionally, and verbally abusive. After Moussa hit her in a fight, Amber eventually broke up with him. But for Samantha, who had a child with him and no income of her own, leaving was much more complicated. When Moussa left the U.S. to join the Islamic State and live in Syria, she left with him, thereby becoming an accomplice to his heinous crimes. Samantha [served time](#) in an American prison for her role in aiding and abetting the Islamic State, making her both a victim and perpetrator of violence. Domestic abuse is insidious, and Samantha's was no exception. By the time she realized that her partner wasn't the charming man she fell in love with—on the contrary, he was controlling and violent—she was trapped. Who could have expected her to know where the relationship would take her when even experts in the geopolitics of global terrorism struggle to spot the straight line between patriarchal violence at home and extremist violence in the streets? According to a [2022 study](#) from Westpoint's Combating Terrorism center, "One-third (36%) of all Islamic State defendants with a criminal history had prior arrests for domestic abuse and/or assault, which correlates to 11% of all Islamic State defendants." This is unsurprising, considering male violence, misogyny, and conservative gender roles are part of the ideological fabric of terrorist groups like ISIS, used as both a recruiting tool and a justification for horrors. The Islamic State's slickly-produced propaganda promised potential recruits the option to live in a sex-segregated, male-controlled utopia, where non-Muslim women could be used as sex slaves and violence against women as a tool of control wasn't just permissible but encouraged. Never seriously punished for his marital abuse, Moussa eventually became desensitized to violence and confident in his power. He became brazen enough to commit violent acts in public. America's culture around intimate partner violence—underreported, under-punished, often ignored—kept us from spotting a budding terrorist in the making. "The female relatives of extremists are often their first victims," writes Joan Smith in *Home Grown: How Domestic Violence Turns Men Into Terrorists*. "Domestic violence is a useful apprenticeship for men who are planning to crush passers-by under the wheels of an SUV or stab strangers with kitchen knives; men who have become desensitized to violence in the home are very dangerous." Not all men who commit domestic abuse become terrorists, of course; most do not. But in the cases of many men who become terrorists, including Moussa Elhassani, the willingness to commit violence and the susceptibility to misogynistic thinking are already there long before they make the decision to commit an act of terror.

Violence against women isn't a shameful family secret, one to be sorted out in private amongst family members; instead, it's a warning sign of the possibility of more violence to come, on a larger scale, and at great public cost. Despite this, domestic abuse is often dismissed, and abusers receive very limited punishment. In Indiana, for example, where Moussa and Samantha Elhassani lived before leaving for Syria, domestic abuse such as pulling hair, shoving and "improper touching" is a misdemeanor that often results in a fine and no meaningful criminal punishment. If we want to stop the next terrorist attack, whether at home or abroad, we must start to treat the crime of domestic violence with the seriousness it deserves. That means listening to victims, establishing effective criminal punishments, and breaking the cycle of abuse—before it escalates.

[Jessica Roy](#) is a journalist and editor who splits her time between Paris and the United States. Previously, she served as the Digital Director of *Elle* magazine, where she oversaw content and strategy for the website. She is the author of [American Girls: One Woman's Journey into the Islamic State and Her Sister's Fight to Bring Her Home](#).

Don't Bomb the Houthis

By Alexandra Stark

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/yemen/dont-bomb-houthis>

Jan 11 – The conflict between the United States and the Houthis in the Red Sea is steadily escalating. On December 31, Houthi small boats attempted to attack a commercial vessel; after U.S. naval helicopters responded to the attack, the Houthis—a rebel group that controls territory inhabited by 80 percent of



Yemen's population—fired on them. U.S. forces returned fire, sinking three Houthi boats and killing ten crew members. Then on January 9, the Houthis launched one of their largest attacks in the Red Sea to date including 18 drones, two antiship cruise missiles, and one antiship ballistic missile, which were intercepted by U.S. and British forces.

This engagement represented just the latest in a series of attacks in the Red Sea. Since mid-November, the Houthis have launched more than 20 attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea, a strategically critical strait that is transited by 15 percent of global trade. Characterizing their attacks as a response to the Israel-Hamas war, they have also fired missiles and drones toward southern Israel. The Red Sea attacks have forced some shipping companies to temporarily suspend sailing through the Suez Canal, routing instead around the Horn of Africa, a change that adds about ten days to their journey. The attacks have not yet led to a significant disruption in global trade, but over the long term, the rising shipping costs they provoke are likely to increase oil prices and the cost of consumer goods worldwide.

In response, the United States has mobilized international partners, launching in mid-December a multinational initiative aimed at protecting commercial vessels in the Red Sea. And on January 3, these partners issued a joint statement that U.S. officials indicated should serve as a final warning to the Houthis before Washington took more drastic action. U.S. officials are now considering military attacks on Houthi targets.

Because the Houthi attacks could have serious consequences for global commerce, the United States is under substantial pressure to respond militarily. **But instead of retaliatory strikes, the U.S. should favor a diplomatic approach.** The Houthis may be recent entrants into international newspaper headlines, but they have been challenging the United States and its Gulf partners for two decades. And the use of force against the Houthis in the past, whether by former President Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime or by a Saudi-led effort to reinstate the government the Houthis overturned in the mid-2010s, has merely allowed the group to refine its military capabilities and portray itself as a heroic resistance movement, bolstering its legitimacy at home.

Indeed, the group needed a boost: it faced growing domestic resistance before October 7. Now, however, its response to Israel's operations in Gaza appears to have won support in Yemen and across the region. Retaliatory strikes would also increase the likelihood that the Israel-Hamas war will expand across the region and that the civil war in Yemen will resume. Over the past year and a half, a UN-negotiated truce kept serious conflict in Yemen at bay, but direct U.S. strikes on Houthi targets could reignite internal warfare. The United States has few good options to respond to Houthi attacks. But a diplomatic push for a sustainable peace in the war in Yemen while continuing efforts to deter Houthi attacks alongside international partners is the least bad of them.

Blast resistance

The Houthi movement began in the 1990s, when a group then calling itself Ansar Allah ("Supporters of God") began to resist Saudi proselytizing of Wahabism and to assert Zaidi identity and religious practice across Yemen. Zaidism is a variant of Shiism local to northern Yemen and parts of southern Saudi Arabia. There are important doctrinal differences between mainstream Shiism and Zaidi Islam: mainstream Shiites recognize 12 imams, for instance, while Zaidis recognize only five.

But as the movement came to oppose the corruption endemic in Saleh's regime—and his partnership with the United States in the global "war on terror"—it gained Yemeni supporters beyond the Zaidi community. Media accounts sometimes portray Yemen's long-running civil conflict as sectarian strife between Sunnis and Shiites. In fact, throughout the early years of the twenty-first century, notes Marieke Brandt, an anthropologist who has studied the Houthis extensively, the Ansar Allah movement expanded to become "a catalyst with the potential to unite all those [in northern Yemen] . . . who felt economically neglected, politically ostracized and religiously marginalized."

In response to the movement's rising prominence, beginning in 2004, Saleh's government launched six brutal rounds of fighting—killing the group's charismatic leader, Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi. But these military efforts failed to root out the movement. Instead, Ansar Allah gained new adherents and enshrined its founders' family members as its leaders.

When the Arab Spring came to Yemen in 2011, Saleh was eventually forced to step down, yielding to his vice president, Abd-Rabu Mansur Hadi. But the country's democratic consolidation faltered when the National Dialogue Conference, a 2013–14 process meant to negotiate a transition to democracy, fell apart. Recognizing a power vacuum, the Houthis took over Yemen's capital, Sanaa, in September 2014 and then attempted to extend their influence south, seizing control of most of the country.

The Houthis' 2014 rise provoked alarm in neighboring countries, most notably Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Around this time, the Houthis also began to receive support from Iran and their proxy Hezbollah—adversaries to the Saudis and Emiratis. In 2015, a coalition led by those two countries—and supported by the United States, the United Kingdom, and France—intervened militarily, launching airstrikes to support other military organizations that nominally backed Hadi's government.

But instead of restoring peace, the airstrikes helped aggravate a war that resulted in what the United Nations has called the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. Between 2015 and 2022, airstrikes by the



Saudi-led coalition—backed by U.S. intelligence-sharing, aerial refueling, and aircraft maintenance—killed an estimated 9,000 Yemeni civilians. **Four-and-a-half million Yemenis are displaced, and more than 21 million, or two-thirds of Yemen's population, remain in need of humanitarian assistance and protection.**

Growth opportunity

As the Houthis solidified their control over much of northern Yemen, they began to seek more visibility on the regional stage. Their slickly produced, Beirut-based media channel, Al Masirah, produces content in both Arabic and English to share their perspective with a broader audience. Houthi traditional poems, set to music and video and widely shared on social media, declare Houthi opposition to Israel and the United States.

To understand the Houthis' goals, it is worth taking seriously what they themselves say they want. Since about 2003, the Houthis' *sarkha*—their motto, usually printed in green and red—echoes the slogan of revolutionary Iran and proclaims Houthi values and aims in no uncertain terms: **“God is great, death to America, death to Israel, a curse on the Jews, victory to Islam.”** In their public statements, Houthi leaders have repeatedly framed their current attacks as a response to Israeli operations in Gaza. Their intent, they say, is to pressure Israel to de-escalate its war against Hamas.

But this rhetorical posturing has also allowed the Houthis to build legitimacy in Yemen and across the Middle East, diverting attention from their failures at home, where their popularity has eroded in recent years. They have been unable to deliver economic growth to the poorest country in the Middle East and North Africa. The Houthis are also brutally repressive, torturing and executing journalists, arresting and detaining peaceful protesters, and restricting the rights of women and girls. Many Yemenis increasingly see the Houthis as driven by a desire to establish a totalitarian religious state that protects Zaidi elites' power.

In September 2023, protests against the Houthis for failing to pay public-sector salaries were followed by arrests, but the Houthi leadership recognized it had a problem. In September 2023, they announced they were preparing a “radical change” to their government to address corruption and economic problems—before the Israel-Hamas war gave them a new opportunity to gain legitimacy. A Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research poll conducted in late November and early December of 2023 found that residents of Gaza and the West Bank ranked Yemen's response to the Israel-Hamas war as the most satisfying among regional actors. The Houthis have trumpeted Yemeni pro-Palestine demonstrations as evidence of their support for the Palestinian people.

Regionally, the Houthis have used their attacks in the Red Sea and on Israel to demonstrate their importance to Iran's “axis of resistance,” the network of state and nonstate actors that Iran has leveraged to spread its influence across the region and encircle its opponents, including Israel and Saudi Arabia. The partnership between Iran and the Houthis deepened substantially over the course of Yemen's civil war. Iran values the Houthis because they allow Tehran to act more widely while maintaining plausible deniability. The Houthis, for instance, claimed responsibility for a September 2019 drone attack on Saudi oil facilities, but the attack is widely believed to have been carried out by Iran. Until the April 2022 truce in Yemen, the Houthis were also launching an escalating series of strikes facilitated by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps—Quds Force on territory within Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The Quds Force has helped the Houthis build stockpiles of sophisticated weapons, including unmanned aerial vehicles and missiles. Since approximately 2016, Iran has helped the Houthis learn to assemble their own weapons using parts from abroad, outrunning the international community's efforts to prevent the smuggling of weapons into Yemen. The fact that the Houthis are now able to launch missiles directed at Israel and commercial vessels—while, thus far, avoiding significant retaliation—is undoubtedly further demonstrating the group's strategic value to Iran. Tehran has offered support to the Houthi attacks, sharing intelligence to assist attacks in the Red Sea and moving its own warship into those waters.

Strike out

International actors must respond to the Houthis' attacks, both to preserve the Red Sea shipping route and to prevent further regional escalation. But the United States is confronted by an array of bad and worse options for how to do so. Some politicians and analysts have argued that the best way to counter Houthi aggression is with military escalation designed to “restore deterrence.” This perspective sees the United States' eventual decision, in 2021, to push for peace negotiations in Yemen as a failed policy of appeasement.

But proponents of airstrikes against the Houthis cannot articulate what should happen afterward. It is hard to see how airstrikes would deter Houthi attacks now when they have failed to do so over the past decade. Airstrikes against Houthi targets might marginally erode the Houthis' ability to launch missiles and drones, but it will be much harder to effectively target and eradicate the Houthis' small, cheap manned and unmanned boats.

Likewise, designating the Houthis a foreign terrorist organization, as the Trump administration did briefly in 2020, would likely have little effect. Their leaders have long been under U.S. sanctions, and they would



no doubt simply use the designation as further proof that they can get a rise out of powerful adversaries. But the FTO designation would certainly make the delivery of humanitarian aid to Yemen more difficult.

An approach that combines diplomacy with deterrence is the least bad way for the United States to deal with this intractable problem in the near term. There is little international appetite for a military response. Even Saudi Arabia, which led the 2015 military intervention against the Houthis, is now cautioning the United States to act with restraint.

Washington cannot count on public support from its Gulf partners. Although some of the commercial ships the Houthis have targeted have no apparent links to Israel, the fact that they have repeatedly called their attacks an effort to support Palestinians limits the degree to which Arab states can respond to Houthi aggression, even if they were inclined to get involved. Public opinion in Saudi Arabia, for instance, has turned even further against establishing diplomatic ties with Israel. Gulf states have little incentive to risk the wrath of their publics. **Aside from Bahrain, the Arab states have been reluctant to publicly associate themselves with the multinational operation that the Pentagon announced in mid-December.**

Still, that operation is a useful first step to demonstrate international opposition to Houthi aggression and to intercept and deter attacks. The United States must also continue to support the UN's efforts to negotiate a sustainable peace in Yemen. The 2022 truce agreement has held, more or less, and the parties are close to a deal that would make the cease-fire permanent and launch talks about the long-term future of Yemen's governance.

To deal with the threat posed by the Houthis, ultimately the United States must push for an end to the war between Israel and Hamas—as well as to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in general. Like it or not, the Houthis have linked their aggression to Israel's operations in Gaza and have won domestic and regional support for doing so. Finding a sustainable, long-term approach to both conflicts will be critical to de-escalating tensions across the region and getting the Houthis to call off their attacks on commercial vessels. Such attacks would have limited utility in the absence of these conflicts.

These measures cannot fully address the threat that the Houthis pose to U.S. interests and to stability in the region more broadly. But they remain the best among bad options—and the United States has only bad options because of its failed approaches to Yemen over the past 20 years. Washington must not repeat its mistakes. Decades of experience have shown, by now, that military efforts to dislodge the Houthis are unlikely to be effective. Instead, they may merely further devastate the lives of the already struggling people of Yemen.

[Alexandra Stark](#) is an Associate Policy Researcher at the RAND Corporation and the author of the forthcoming book [The Yemen Model](#).

EDITOR'S COMMENT: Seriously?

Terror TV Station Established in Canada, Supported by U.S. and European Radicals

By Sam Westrop

Source: <https://www.meforum.org/65439/terror-tv-station-established-in-canada-supported>



Jan 11 – A television station established by a global coalition of terror activists is operating and fundraising in Canada, assisted by a global coalition of radical activists and violent extremists from designated terrorist organizations.

Established in the wake of the October 7th attacks, [Free Palestine TV \(FPTV\)](#) offers a steady diet of Hamas and Hezbollah propaganda. Its broadcasts are consistently extreme, and its social media channels [comprise](#) video clips of terrorist acts and propaganda messaging provided directly by terror groups, as well as posts glorifying the killing of Israelis.

FPTV was established by terror-activists, and serves to promote designated terror groups' interests. As FPTV's director [stated](#) in November, "We

built live broadcasting units to go from the front in South Lebanon, with North Palestine, and bring in



journalists from inside Palestine to give us updates." FPTV was set up, he explains, "to translate the speeches of all the resistance



leadership, and as they happen, all their videos of their operations that they're releasing on a daily basis, and to air it on the internet."

The director in question is Laith Marouf, a Canadian radical activist widely accused in mainstream media of overt extremism. Marouf is not the sole reason for the channel, however. FPTV was founded, [as noted](#) by Iranian regime "journalist" Marwa Osman, "by good people in Beirut."

The "good people" with whom Marouf works and who explicitly claim credit for establishing FPTV are in fact members of Al-Tajammu, a Lebanese group with members across the world, better known in English as the Global Gathering to Support the Choice of Resistance.

On October 27th, Al-Tajammu [organized](#) an online meeting of its "coordinators" in Europe, the United States, Canada, Latin America, and Australia, during which the establishment of FPTV was announced.

Al-Tajammu's secretary-general, Yahya Ghaddar, prefaced the launch news by marveling at the October 7th slaughter in Israel, [stating](#): "God Almighty has granted the Qassam Brigades a tremendous victory." Ghaddar credited Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah with predicting this "great war," which spreads all over the Middle East, from the Mediterranean to Iran. Ghaddar further praised Iranian-aligned "Mujahideen" for "doing well by targeting American bases in Syria and Iraq." With the assistance of Al-Tajammu's support for the "resistance," the "cancerous entity" of Israel will be "eliminated" and America "defeated."

Al-Tajammu reports that Ghaddar and Al-Tajammu's Middle Eastern and African "coordinators" were full of delight over the "dream" and wonder of

the Al-Aqsa Flood, and expressed enthusiasm for FPTV and support for Marouf, the station's newly appointed director.

Al-Tajammu's Western "coordinators" [echoed](#) these thoughts.

Paul Larudee, the "coordinator of the North American branch," was present at the meeting, along with various "peace activists" from the American far-Left. Larudee [declared](#) he would support the resistance through "words and money. ... We support broadcasting efforts from the Lebanese-Palestinian border with all the resources we can. We are confident that the Palestinian resistance, its advisors and supporters know what they are doing and are prepared for its consequences, and we wish them success."

He runs his own nonprofit in the United States, the Association for Investment in Popular Action Committees, which funds a variety of pro-Iran initiatives and [backs](#) the Assad regime.

[Paul Larudee and other radical activists with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh](#)

Tim Anderson, a [disgraced](#) Australian academic, as well as Roberta Rivolta in Italy, offered similar comments at the meeting. From France, Alain Corvez, a retired military officer who [appears](#) frequently in Iranian regime media, declared that the "heroic struggle against the Nazi-Zionist state" through the October 7th attacks are "supported and admired by people all



over the world." Such rhetoric was praised by fellow meeting attendee Ihsan Ataya, Al-Tajammu's "coordinator" in Palestine. Ataya is also the chief representative in Lebanon of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a designated terrorist organization, which took part in the October 7th pogrom. As analyst Michael Barak has previously [uncovered](#) in meticulous detail, Al-Tajammu's network includes dozens of other members across Europe and North America, as well as other officials and members of known terrorist organizations, such as PIJ, the PFLP, the Houthi terrorist movement in Yemen and various Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq tied closely to the Iranian regime. In Australia, Tim Anderson's fellow Al-Tajammu member, Jay Tharappel,



was [reportedly](#) expelled from the New South Wales Labor Party for wearing a Houthi badge containing the terror group's slogan: "Curse on the Jews" and "Death to Israel."

Barak's paper, published in 2021, also extensively illustrates Al-Tajammu's close involvement with Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The most cursory of searches shows that still to be true today. In 2023, Iranian media [reported](#) that Seyyed Ibrahim Al-Sayed, the head of Hezbollah's political council, attended an Al-Tajammu conference in Beirut. Hezbollah operatives were joined by Australian's Tim Anderson as well as Laith Marouf's wife, Gretchen King, who is quoted celebrating the anniversary of Lebanon's "resistance and liberation" against Israel.

Al-Tajammu's other activities have been equally extreme. Previous meetings have celebrated and mourned the slain IRGC terror commander [Qasem Soleimani](#), the recently "martyred" Hamas leader [Saleh Al-Aroui](#) and have offered [explicit praise](#) for the "heroic operations" of "martyrs" upon "killing ... Zionist settlers." Members attending and supporting the rhetoric at these events include Western radical activists from the United States, Canada, Germany, Czech Republic, Italy, France, Australia and elsewhere.

At the subsequent launch of FPTV at an Al-Tajammu in October, Marouf appeared at home among these terror-supporters. He responded to all the praise by asking Al-Tajammu's members for "donations" for the FPTV project, [proclaiming](#): "We are all volunteers and work for Palestine and confront the Zionist enemy."



But while FPTV is "[based in Lebanon](#)," and solicits donations through Al-Tajammu, the channel also fundraises directly in the West. In December, FPTV held a fundraiser in Canada that [featured](#) "indigenous leaders."

A donation link previously promoted by FPTV to the fundraising platform DonorBox, was [previously used](#) by Marouf's organization, the Montreal-based Community Media Advocacy Centre (CMAC) to fundraise for Marouf's efforts opposing a Canadian government campaign against anti-Semitism.

It seems that FPTV, an online broadcaster established with the help of terrorist organizations and which aims to amplify terrorist messaging, is now fundraising through CMAC, a registered Canadian nonprofit.

In 2022, Canada's *National Post* [reported](#) that Marouf's nonprofit in Canada has received \$600,000 from the Canadian government.

The Trudeau government [cancelled](#) one grant agreement in light of the reporting into Marouf's extremism, with government ministers [condemning](#) Marouf's "hate and racism."

Indeed, Marouf is reviled by mainstream media. He has reportedly [referred](#) to Jews as "bags of human feces" worthy only of a "bullet to the head." On Twitter, Marouf reportedly [referred](#) to black Canadians as "house slaves." Elsewhere, he declared "nothing is more harmful to any decolonisation movements in the world ... than Jewish White Boys/Girls."



As with his wife, Marouf appears happy to work with Hezbollah. In late October,

Marouf [appeared](#) on Hezbollah's Al-Mayadeen television channel, to explain that the "Al-Aqsa Flood" attacks were the inevitable response to the West's alliance with Israel and its purported "racist agenda" against Arabs.

As with Al-Tajammu, FPTV appears committed to backing Iran and its chief proxy, the Lebanese terrorist organization Hezbollah.

[As noted](#) by disgraced academic David Miller, who works for the Iranian regime's own media outlet Press TV, FPTV was apparently chosen to broadcast Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah's speech in November, along

with [live English translations](#). In the run-up to that speech, Marouf [told](#) FPTV that he expects "more valiant, honorable positions from Seyed Hassan Nasrallah." Marouf subsequently [explained](#): "During the speech of Seyed Hassan Nasrallah, we [FPTV] were the only channel that was doing English, live-interpretation



Nothing is more harmful to any decolonisation movements in the world, especially Palestine, than Jewish White Boys/Girls. In my opinion, allowing them any space in our struggle is dependent on their complete abandonment of personal opinion & only parroting Palestinian voices.

7:25 AM · Mar 23, 2022 · Twitter for Android

2 Retweets 2 Likes





Mayssaloune Toufailey recites a poem at an SSNP meeting

Another [FPTV supporter](#) is Marwa Osman, a prominent Lebanese advocate for the Iranian regime. Osman is [openly aligned](#) with Hezbollah, and was present at the Al-Tajammu meeting at which FPTV's formation was announced.

Interestingly, in January, for unknown reasons, Osman distanced herself from FPTV, [declaring](#) that she had "stopped all affiliation with anything related to FPTV. ...I no longer have any connections or any affiliations with FPTV or its managers."

Perhaps Osman fears future legal trouble. So far, however, FPTV appears to operate with complete impunity.

Glorification of terrorism laws are statute books across Europe. Even in the United States, given Al-Tajammu's discussions of financing, and the explicit decision to use FPTV to support the "resistance," [material support statutes](#) are seemingly being broken as well.

But Western governments have long been curiously Janus-faced on such prosecutions. While support for Salafi-jihadists have been prosecuted almost instantly, funding and public support for terrorist organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah have rarely led to arrests. In the United Kingdom, following the October 7th attacks, the Home Secretary even accused British police forces of [disobeying](#) orders to prosecute lawbreaking by pro-Hamas mobs.

of the speech. Many of the international agencies carried this interpretation, and upwards of a 1,700,000 were watching on our feed here."

But also as with Al-Tajammu, FPTV attracts a range of extremists.

One of FPTV's regular presenters is Rouba Haddad, a young Lebanese "journalist" who is an enthusiastic member and supporter of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), a violent organization responsible for decades of assassinations and bombings and whose flag is a swastika. Indeed, the *Atlantic* has [written](#) that the SSNP pays homage to 1930s European Nazism, with members greeting leaders with a "Hitlerian salute."

[FPTV journalist Rouba Haddad leads an SSNP march, featuring swastika flags, in praise of SSNP "martyr" Khaled Alwan, who murdered an Israeli army officer in 1982.](#)

Another FPTV journalist, Mayssaloune Toufailey, when not [recruiting](#) new staff for the channel, [speaks](#) at SSNP meetings, [mourns](#) its martyrs killed fighting Israel, while her social media is replete with SSNP, Hezbollah and Hamas insignia.



In mainland Europe, meanwhile, the European Union, and various national governments, draw a disingenuous distinction between Hezbollah's political and military wings. As analysts have [noted](#), Hezbollah itself explicitly denies any such distinction. FPTV and its parent organization Al-Tajammu operate openly in the West as a propaganda arm for hostile foreign powers and multiple terrorist organizations. Given government inaction, private prosecutions, media scrutiny and legislative pressure are perhaps the only means by which this terror movement's Western operations can, and must, be stopped.

[Sam Westrop](#) is director of Islamist Watch, a project of the Middle East Forum.

Hezbollah Ties Cause for Concern in Brazil

By Juan Delgado (Diálogo)

Source: <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/hezbollah-ties-cause-for-concern-in-brazil/>



Jan 11 – Brazilian security forces are shining the light on the relationship some Shiite communities that inhabit the Triple-Border shared by Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay with Lebanese terrorist organization Hezbollah, through illegal financial operations and smuggling.

“Given the presence of these groups, cooperation measures to monitor terrorism, for example in the area of the Triple-Border, are in force,” Juan Battaleme, professor of International Relations at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) in Argentina, told *Diálogo* about the security protocols of South American countries.

Christian Vianna, special agent of the Brazilian Federal Police and undersecretary of Intelligence and Integration of the State Secretariat of Justice and Public Security of Minas Gerais, highlighted this link during the special post-graduate course “Terrorism and the Radicalization of Violence in the Southern Cone,” organized by the UBA’s Center for Studies on Hemispheric Security, Terrorism, and Financial Crime that ended in early December.

Specialists in terrorism and security spoke at the seminar, which was supported by Buenos Aires’ Financial Intelligence Research Foundation (FININT), Argentine news site *Infobae* reported.

“Around 1 million Lebanese Shiites in Foz do Iguacu, São Paulo, and Curitiba, maintain close ties with Hezbollah,” Vianna said, according to *Infobae*. “Operation Mendaz, in 2015, discovered that a network of



Islamic State sympathizers illegally moved for five years more than \$10 million, which were bound for Lebanon.”

The criminals had companies that they used to launder money from activities such as smuggling, which then sent the assets to Lebanon and from there to Syria, Vianna explained.

In addition, *Infobae* reported, during Operation Hashtag, authorities uncovered the plans of 10 Brazilians who were not of Arab descent, but who were radicalized. In early 2015 they formed a network using Facebook and Telegram and began planning a scheme they would tentatively carry out during the Rio de Janeiro Olympics in 2016.

The extremists were arrested 15 days before the start of that event to be tried and convicted for promoting a terrorist organization, preparatory act, criminal association, recruitment for terrorist act, and corruption of minors. The group intended to add chemicals to the water tanks in the Olympic Village to poison the athletes.

On November 9, 2023, during Operation Trapiche, the Brazilian Federal Police arrested two alleged terrorists linked to Hezbollah, amid the climate of alert following the October 7 Hamas attack against Israel, Argentine newspaper *La Nación* reported.

“Two Brazilians who had been recruited by Hezbollah and were financed by the terrorist group were arrested in São Paulo,” *La Nación* reported. “In addition, 11 search and seizure warrants were executed in São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and Brasilia; and there are arrests orders for two individuals who are in Lebanon.”

According to the investigation, the group planned to carry out attacks against Jewish buildings in Brazil, including synagogues.

The FBI had alerted Brazilian authorities on November 1 that people suspected of having ties to Hezbollah were planning to carry out terrorist attacks in Brazil, which led to the arrests, *Agencia Brasil* reported.

Juan Félix Marteau, president of FININT, told *Infobae* that there is a risk map on the financing of terrorism and transnational organized crime that “warns us of the need for our countries to have adequate preventive and repressive mechanisms and to act cooperatively.” In the Triple-Border, several investigations have found links between organized crime and terrorist networks. Illicit trade in the region includes drug trafficking, smuggling, arms trafficking, human trafficking, wildlife smuggling, counterfeit tobacco and alcohol products, and gold trafficking, among others.

Hezbollah’s presence in Latin America has been documented since the 1990s. The organization, which controls much of southern Lebanon with the support of Iran, expanded throughout the world, sheltered by the Lebanese communities resulting from the exodus caused by the civil war between 1975 and 1990.

“It’s important to emphasize that not all members of these communities participate in the activities of support and financing of Hezbollah, but whenever there is the presence of networks linked to that organization, they are mixed and mimicked in those Shiite communities,” said Emanuele Ottolenghi, of the Washington-based Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD), German news network *Deutsche Welle* (DW) reported.

Juan Martens, a researcher at Paraguay’s National University of Pilar, said that the porous nature of the Tri-Border region makes it “a paradise” for criminal organizations, *DW* reported.

For this reason, the keys to guaranteeing security are to control the borders, increase investment in intelligence, expand cooperation between the three countries involved, and have more resources to fight the criminal activities that finance terrorism.

“The important thing is that there is joint monitoring of the combination of these factors, which are organized crime and terrorism,” said Battaleme, who recommends improving communication between all parties and working on this common problem despite the existing political differences. “The failure is not in the lack of cooperation, but in the mechanisms of each country to know what is happening within their own borders,” he concluded.

ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in December 2023

By Gregory Waters (Research Analyst)

Source: <https://www.counterextremism.com/blog/isis-redux-central-syria-insurgency-december-2023>

Following is the December 2023 installment of “ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency,” a monthly chronicle of attacks by the terrorist group ISIS in central Syria. A review of developments throughout 2022 and 2021 can be found [here](#) and [here](#). The January 2023 edition of ISIS Redux can be found [here](#), February’s [here](#), March’s [here](#), April’s [here](#), May’s [here](#), June’s [here](#), July’s [here](#), August’s [here](#), September’s [here](#), October’s [here](#), and November’s [here](#). A full background and analysis of ISIS’s resurgence in Syria, including the methodology used to collect this data, can also be explored [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

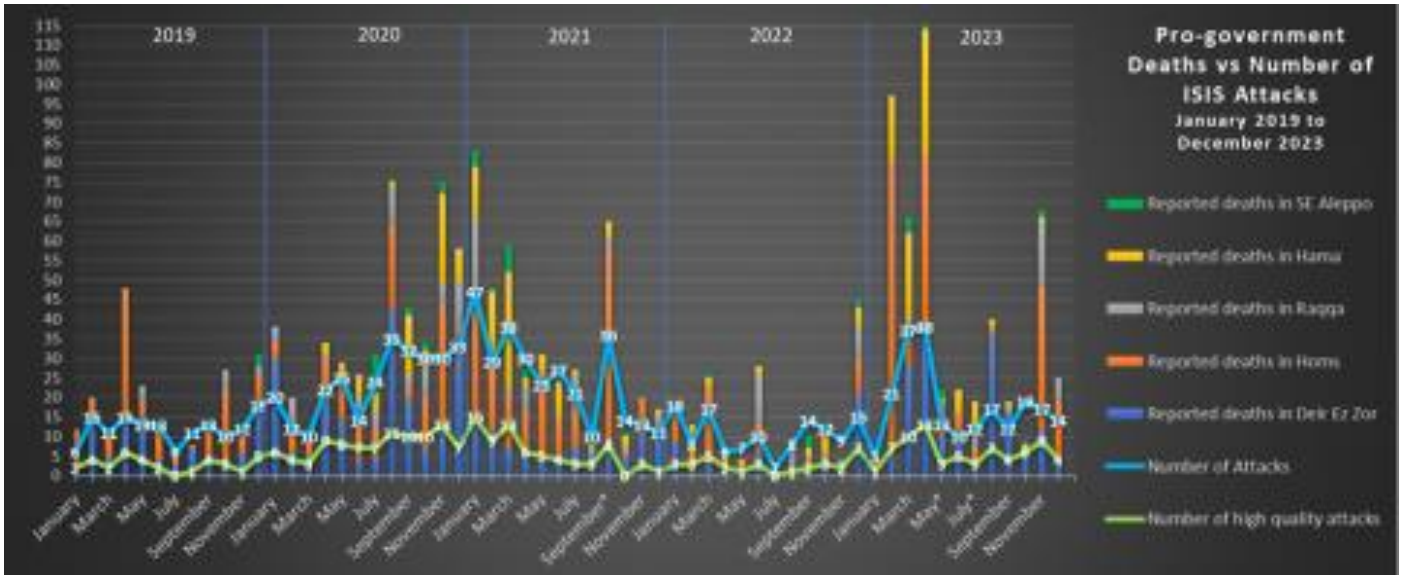
Jan 12 – ISIS carried out at least 14 confirmed attacks in December in the Homs, Hama, Raqqa, Aleppo, and Deir Ez Zor governorates. These attacks killed at least 19 pro-Assad regime soldiers and six civilians and wounded at least 14 more soldiers and civilians. There were also four high quality* attacks during the



ICI C²BRNE DIARY – January 2024

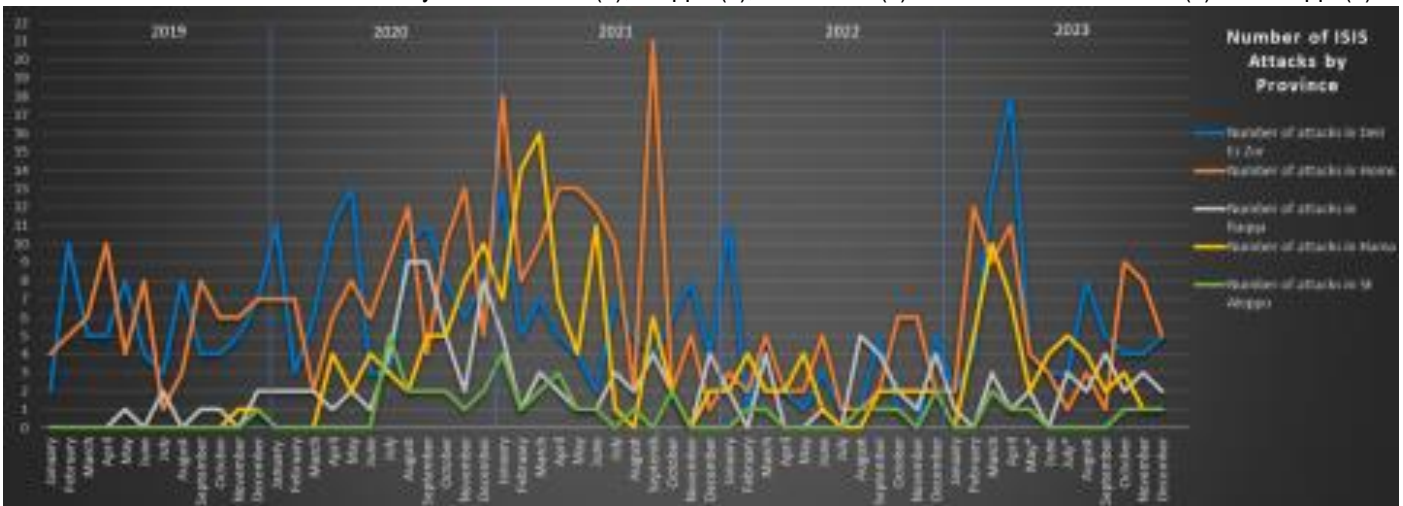
month. The decrease in confirmed ISIS activity in December compared to November is largely due to the end of active fighting inside the Doubayat Oil Field in Homs. ISIS's capture of this field in October, and the regime's offensive to retake it in November, drove much of the Badia activity during those months. With the regime's full recapture of the field by early December, activity in the area dropped significantly. Nevertheless, ISIS cells continued to conduct intermittent ambushes around the field while increasing attacks in Deir Ez Zor and maintaining a low level of activity in eastern Hama and Raqqa.

ISIS claimed one attack in central Syria this month, following the two claims last month, which came after three months of media silence. December's claim was retroactively made in the January 4, 2024 edition of ISIS's Naba magazine. ISIS began making limited official claims for Badia activity in June 2023, after releasing no information on its activities in the region for six months.



*Indicates attacks in Damascus City claimed by ISIS. Two additional IED attacks occurred in Homs City in June 2023 that went unclaimed but were suspected to be conducted by ISIS.

Confirmed ISIS attacks remained steady in Deir Ez Zor (5), Aleppo (1), and Hama (1) and decreased in Homs (5) and Raqqa (2).



Deir Ez Zor and Raqqa

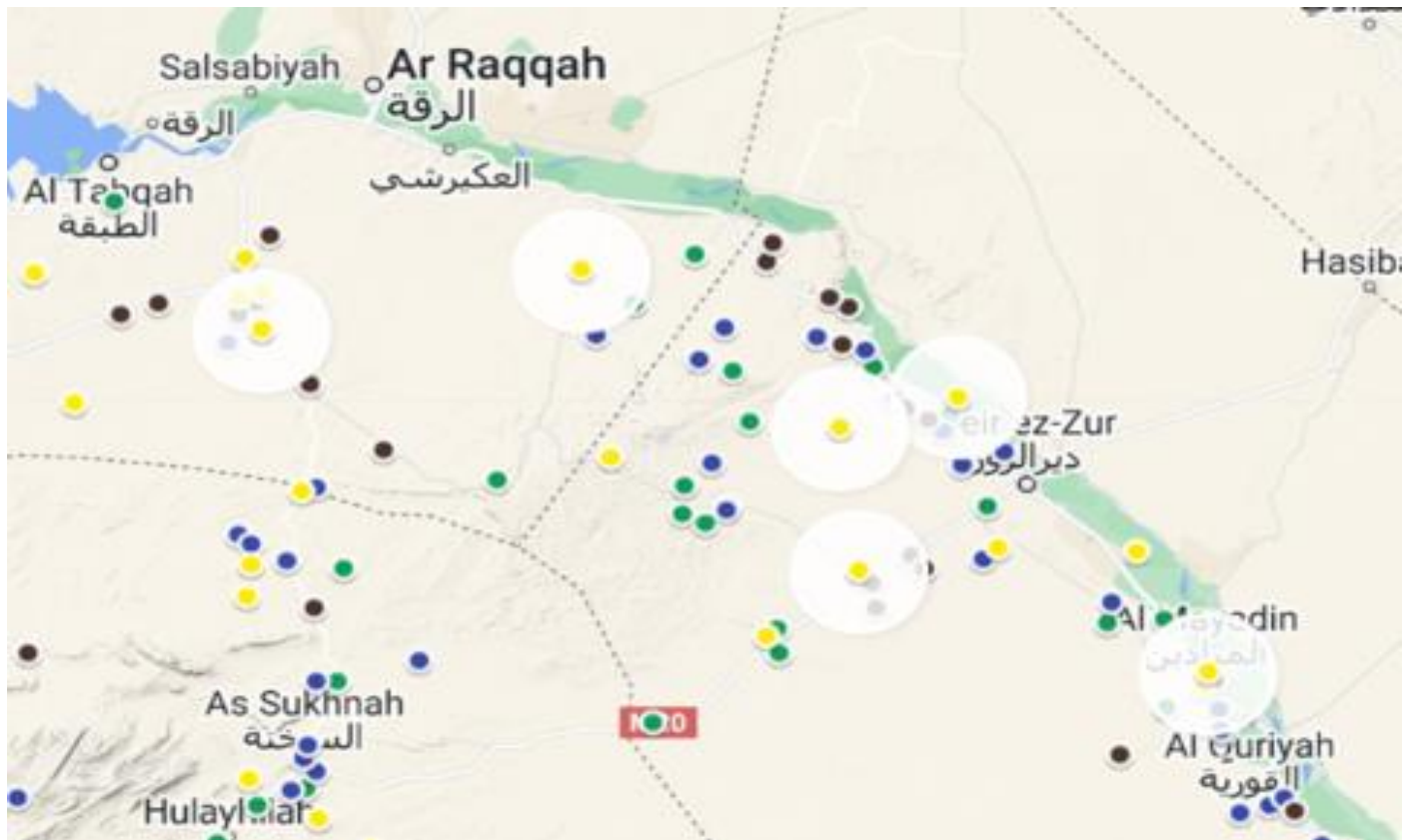
ISIS continues to conduct a low-level insurgency within the urban belt of Deir Ez Zor. On December 7, a soldier was reported killed somewhere in the Deir Ez Zor countryside. On December 12, pro-regime media reported an ISIS attack against security forces in the western countryside and a local militia fighter was shot to death in Mayadeen. This was the second murder of a militia fighter in Mayadeen in as many months. On December 14, a Republican Guard soldier was killed by a mine or improvised explosive device (IED) near Shoula. On December 28 local pro-regime media reported the death of a veteran security officer in Kharitah. According to journalist Zain al-Abidin,



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the man was assassinated by masked gunmen on a motorbike in the center of town. This is a tactic being used extensively right now by ISIS across the Euphrates River against Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) fighters in eastern Deir Ez Zor.

In Raqqa, ISIS members attacked a Republican Guard position near Resafa on December 5. On December 10, locals reported the deaths of six men in the Hajar Hamma region of southeast Raqqa. Three of the men were civilians working in the nearby stone quarry while the other three were local militia members. Local reports included conflicting details, with some saying the men were killed by explosives, while others said small arms. According to journalist Zain al-Abidin, ISIS kidnapped a group of four quarry workers that day, executing three and allowing the elderly fourth one to return to his town. The bodies were then rigged with explosives, which resulted in the deaths of the three militiamen and the wounding of two others during a recovery attempt.



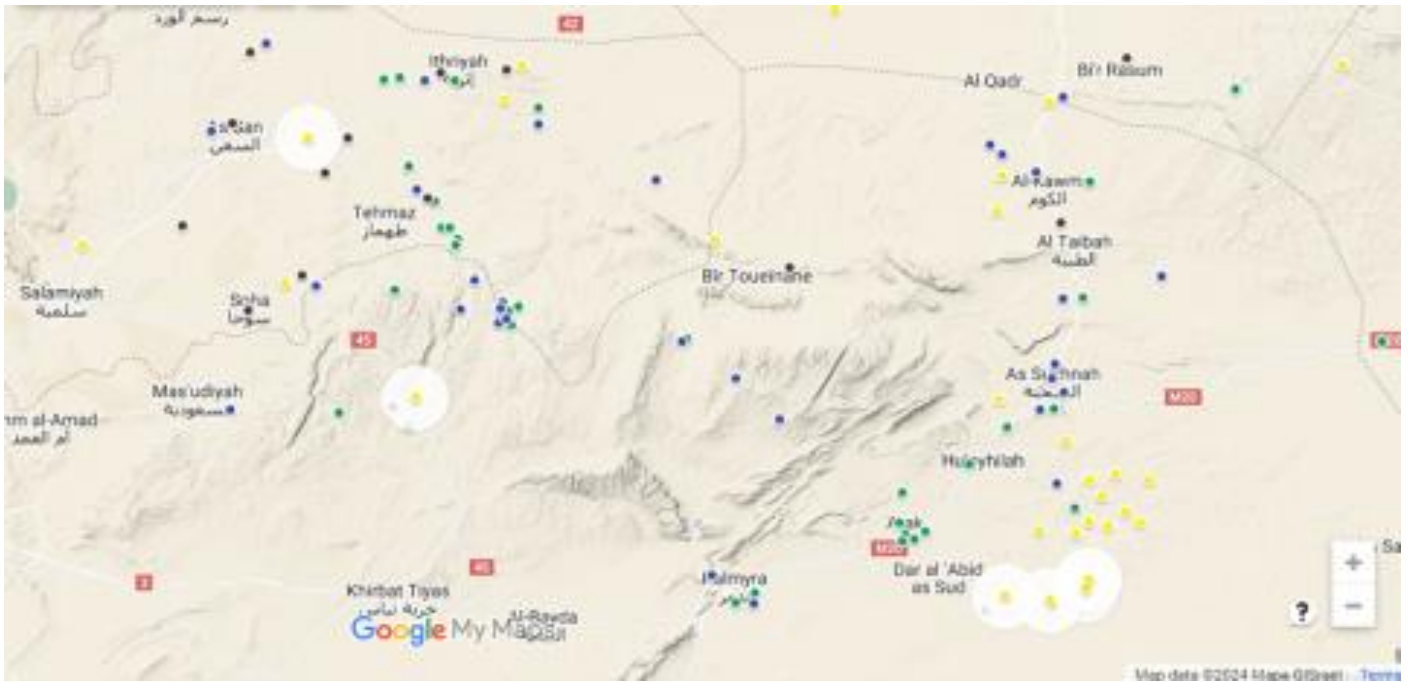
Map of locatable ISIS attacks in Dier Ez Zor and Raqqa (highlighted) in December 2023 alongside all other attacks in 2023. Not mapped is one attack that occurred somewhere in the Deir Ez Zor countryside.

Homs, Hama and Aleppo

ISIS activity in eastern Homs decreased in December, but remained focused around the Doubayat Oil Field. On December 3, a vehicle carrying members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-backed Zainebiyoun Brigade hit a mine or IED on the road between the T3 Pumping Station and Doubayat, leaving two dead. On December 17, pro-regime media reported fighting south of Sukhnah. According to journalist Zain al-Abidin, the reports described an ISIS small arms ambush against another Zainebiyoun truck on the same road, this time killing three of the foreign fighters. Three days later on December 20, ISIS militants detonated an IED against a bus carrying members of the Syrian Army's 18th Division near the T3 Station. Seven soldiers were killed and 10 wounded. ISIS would officially claim responsibility for this attack on January 4, 2024. On December 23, ISIS militants again tried to ambush an army bus on the T3-Doubayat road using small arms fire and an IED. However, the IED missed its mark and the vehicle escaped undamaged. On December 30, three shepherds were killed and their flock stolen near the Huwaysis hamlet. This hamlet is far from the main areas of ISIS activity in the Badia but nevertheless witnessed several similar attacks against civilians and security forces early in 2023.

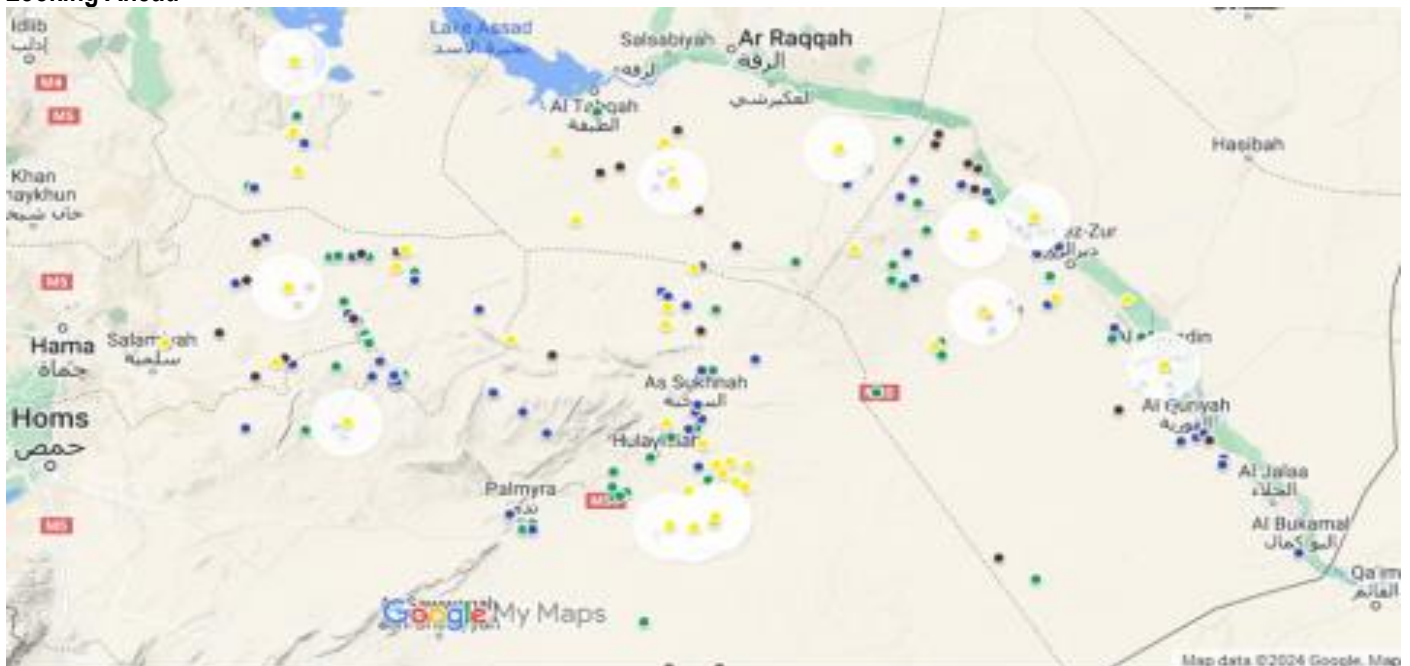
As in November, there was only one attack reported in eastern Hama and southern Aleppo this month. On December 5, a child was wounded by an explosive device in the Safira countryside of Aleppo. And on December 9, a civilian was wounded by an explosive device in the Sheikh Hilal region of eastern Hama.





Map of locatable ISIS attacks in Homs and Hama (highlighted) in December 2023 alongside all other attacks in 2023.

Looking Ahead



Map of locatable ISIS attacks (highlighted) in December 2023 alongside all other attacks in 2023 (green for Quarter 1, blue for Quarter 2, and black for Quarter 3). Not shown is one attack somewhere in Deir Ez Zor. To view an interactive version of this map, please click [here](#).

While the regime successfully recaptured Doubayat after ISIS held the field for six weeks, it has clearly been unable to push the militants out of the area. This was the key question at the end of November – whether ISIS could cede the oil field without taking heavy losses. The consistent ambushes on the western side of the field in December – and heavy fighting south of Palmyra in early January 2024 – shows the group has not given up its plans to pressure the regime in this key area of eastern Homs. Meanwhile, the attacks across both western and central Deir Ez



Zor, while intermittent, have remained consistent for several months now, suggesting ISIS cells in the regions are entrenched and confident in their ability to operate without taking unsustainable losses.

Thus, 2023 has ended with ISIS clearly on the upswing, taking full advantage of the withdrawal of Russia's Wagner PMC from the Badia at the end of September. Iran and its foreign fighters have been able to provide additional bodies for the fight but it is not yet clear if this is enough. It is also unclear if the Russian Air Force will return to its former level of activity in central Syria. Russian jets and attack helicopters had been key in pushing back ISIS in 2022, but appear to have been pulled back. This could have been a result of deteriorating relations between the Russian Ministry of Defense and Wagner during the summer, or Russian equipment needs for the war in Ukraine leading them to limit flights in Syria.

The fate of central Syria and northeast Syria (under control of the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces) remain intricately linked. A surging ISIS in the Badia will always increase the threat to the northeast as long as the Euphrates River remains unsecured and heavily permeated by smuggling routes. As this author has argued for years, at its most basic role, the Badia serves as a strategic reserve for the group. Successful attacks on regime forces only further strengthen ISIS, providing more weapons, ammunition, and at times high tech equipment like thermal optics. This dynamic means that ISIS attacks can decrease significantly in the northeast for long periods of time before spiking when resources are shifted over from the Badia. This was most recently seen in the first week of 2024. Between January 2 and January 7, ISIS claimed 20 attacks in the northeast (more attacks in one week than in almost every month of 2023). Both the SDF and the Syrian regime must focus on ISIS transit routes in this border area in 2024. Severing the group's ability to move fighters and resources between the two arenas is the key to preventing a true resurgence of ISIS in Syria.

*High quality attacks are defined as attacks behind frontlines, those that result in seized positions, target regime officers, involve coordinated attacks on multiple positions, fake checkpoints, ambushes on military convoys, or attacks on checkpoints that kill at least three soldiers or lead to POWs.

Apartheid as a Crime Against Humanity: A Submission to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission



Ronald C. Slye
Seattle University School of Law

Michigan Journal of International Law | Volume 20, issue 2, 1999

Iran may try to close Strait of Gibraltar if UK attacks Houthis, says Major General Chip Chapman

Source: <https://www.gbnews.com/news/houthi-rebels-latest-iran-may-close-gibraltar-if-uk-attacks-says-major-general>

Jan 12 – Iran may seek to make good on a threat to close the Strait of Gibraltar if the UK retaliates against the Houthi rebel force for drone and missile attacks on ships in the Red Sea, a military expert has warned.

Major General Chip Chapman, a former head of counter-terrorism at the MoD, told [GB News](#): “One of the things which could be done...if you take the Houthis as one of their proxy forces [Iran], is that they've said that they might close the Strait of Gibraltar.

“You might say they haven't got the capability to do that but they've also got a proxy force with the Polisario Front in Morocco.

“So, although it might seem unlikely, it doesn't mean that it wouldn't happen.”

In a discussion with Jacob Rees-Mogg, he said: “I think we are getting to the stage where, one of the guys that I used to work with was the former Centcom commander General Frank McKenzie has said, using a baseball analogy, that at the moment we're catching, that is catching in a defensive posture with Operation Prosperity Guardian.

“What we'll probably be doing in the future is pitching. That is, we'll have to take offensive action against some of these Houthi aspects and destroy the cruise missiles and the radar sites to try and further deter them.

“Now, the thing which is difficult about that is not the actual kinetic action itself but is this to be a single strike or is it to be an elongated campaign?

“There's always a risk if you go into an elongated campaign, because we've had since 2015 Operation Decisive Storm by Saudi Arabia and the UAE in Yemen, which is neither decisive nor a storm.”

He added: “In essence, this is what the Houthis would say is part of the theatre of war against the Israelis.





“And from both their perspective and the Iranian perspective that is a unity of fronts and a ring of fire around the Israelis.”

EDITOR’S COMMENT: A possible cooperation plan of three terrorist organizations, which also have an armed militia, with the high supervision of Iran (which has ballistic missiles) might evolve. We are talking about the unholy alliance Houthi-Polisario (Morocco) which will be supplemented by our well-known Hezbollah – and why not Somali pirates. The target is Suez and Gibraltar, the strategic points of entry and exit for thousands of ships every week, and a strike would strike the western system of power and trade hard, with dire consequences.

Germany: Muslim students reportedly called for Sharia law to be imposed at their school

Source: <https://newsbulletin247.com/world/464938.html>

Jan 12 – North Rhine-Westphalia’s Interior Minister Herbert Reuhl said the school in question has applied to be included in the prevention program for radical Islamists.

Four Muslim students demanded the implementation of Islamic rules in their school, in North Rhine-Westphalia including the use of headscarves and gender segregation in classrooms.

According to reports of the West German public broadcaster WDR, the students suggested to the administration of their school in the city of Neuss that Sharia be imposed as a school regulation. Muslims should be able to leave their class early for Friday prayer,

female students should wear headscarves and be in separate classes from their peers, while gender segregation should also apply in swimming class, not only for the students, but also for the teachers, **the four boys, who explicitly stated that they reject democracy**, are reported to have said. Some of them even presented themselves as Sharia “policemen” and made remarks about “bad Muslims”, while, as pointed out in the report, similar incidents had also occurred last year and a police investigation is underway, in consultation with the state government, the federal Ministry of the Interior and the Constitution Protection Service.

The Minister of the Interior of North Rhine-Westphalia, Herbert Royle, said that the school in question has **submitted a request to be included in the prevention program for radical Islamists** and for this reason has invited a specialist scientist. However, according to the police report, the scheme did not work.



How the West can stop the Houthis

By David Rundell

Source: <https://unherd.com/2024/01/how-the-west-can-stop-the-houthis/>

Jan 12 – With armed Houthi rebels prowling the Red Sea, attacking cargo ships and holding crew at gunpoint, America and its allies appear to be preparing for war. When asked about potential strikes in Yemen earlier this week, the UK Defence Secretary, Grant Shapps, said: “Watch this space.” Last night, any uncertainty about what this might mean evaporated as the US and UK launched military strikes in Yemen.

Today, as the dust settles, the global community cannot afford to let this threat escalate. The Houthi attacks, combined with the worsening Israel-Iran confrontation, have raised oil prices and forced [20% of the world's](#) container ships to avoid the Red Sea — instead taking the far longer route around the southern tip of Africa. Increased insurance rates and freight charges will soon be passed on to consumers. There is a clear need for international action to restore freedom of navigation — yet the West finds itself with few good options.

But before we go to war with the Houthis, or launch further strikes, it is probably a good idea to understand exactly who they are. “Houthi” is a derogatory name for Yemen’s Ansar Allah or Supporters of God movement, which was founded in the Nineties by Hussein al-Houthi and, since his death in 2004, led by his brother, Abdul Malik al-Houthi. Hussein was a gifted orator whose message found many listeners in Yemen’s neglected and impoverished northern Sa’dah province, where most inhabitants belong to the Zaydi branch of Shia Islam. The Houthi brothers called for a Zaydi religious revival, opposition to Yemen’s central government, and hatred of Israel. Their signature chant remains “Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse the Jews, God is Great”.

In 2011, when Arab Spring protests brought Yemen’s government down, the Houthis seized control of Sa’dah province. Then, in 2014, they joined forces with the deposed dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh to overthrow the internationally recognised transition government of Abdu Rabbu Hadi. With Saleh’s help, they advanced from their homeland in the north all the way to Aden in southern Yemen in just two months. Then the Houthis turned on Saleh and killed him. The United Nations condemned the Houthi’s coup and human rights violations, while also authorising the inspection of vessels bound for Yemen in order to confiscate weapons.

Today, the Houthis nominally control most of Yemen, where they have imposed a vicious police state — although much of the country is in fact ruled by local tribes and war lords. The multinational naval blockade has caused great suffering in a nation that imports most of its food, fuel and medicine, and rampant corruption in Houthi-controlled ports has made delivering foreign assistance difficult. Thousands of Yemenis have died from fighting, disease and malnutrition; millions have been made homeless and unemployed. The Yemeni people are not looking for another war.

Iran did not create the Houthis but, recognising them as fellow Shia Muslims, it has long provided the movement with funds, arms, training and advice. And for more than a decade, Iran has aggressively used the Houthis — along with other paramilitary proxy militias, including Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon — as a vehicle to expand its influence in the Arabian Peninsula and undermine its traditional rival Saudi Arabia.

Yet Washington also bears some responsibility for today’s Houthi crisis due to its failure to maintain its longstanding security partnership with Saudi Arabia. In 2015, the Saudis tried to prevent the Houthi takeover of Yemen. They had numerous reasons for doing so: they wanted to limit the smuggling of weapons, drugs and people across their southern border; they did not want al-Qaeda terrorists fleeing from Saudi Arabia to find a haven in Yemen; and they did not share the Houthi’s view that much of southern Saudi Arabia should belong to Yemen. Above all, the Saudis did not want Iran to expand its influence in Yemen.

The Saudi effort was largely confined to an air campaign which at various times relied on American weapons, refuelling and intelligence. Like all bombing campaigns, this resulted in civilian casualties — remember that more French civilians died on D-Day as a result of the pre-invasion allied bombardment than allied troops died on the Normandy beaches. While it seems unlikely that the Saudis spent expensive munitions deliberately targeting school buses, such incidents prompted harsh criticism of Riyadh, the termination of some US military assistance, and eventually the effective end to their campaign.

Washington’s tepid support for the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis caused the Saudis to doubt the credibility of US security commitments, especially when threats to cut off arms sales became almost routine. And American hesitancy to supply the Saudis with drone technology forced them to turn to Italy and China. When the Biden administration removed the Houthis from the list of designated terrorist groups and withdrew Patriot air defence systems from Saudi Arabia, the Saudis had even more reason to doubt America.

The Saudis soon found themselves in a difficult situation, wishing to devote financial resources to economic development rather than an endless war in Yemen. With Washington appearing to ignore their security concerns and facing persistent Houthi missile attacks, the Saudis changed course. In 2023,



Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince, renewed diplomatic relations with Iran, reopened his country's Embassy in Tehran after seven years and welcomed a series of high-level Iranian officials to Riyadh. The reconciliation between Tehran and Riyadh was brokered by Beijing, not Washington. Part of this process involved a ceasefire in Yemen which continues today.

It would have been much wiser for America to have supported Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates when they were willing to commit their own troops to defeat the Houthis. Now, these two states benefit from a fragile peace with Iran and are not interested in a renewed confrontation with Iran's proxies in Yemen. As a result, although the Saudis and Emiratis have a long history of cooperation with the US Navy, they have politely declined to join Operation Prosperity Guardian, the US-led attempt to protect Red Sea shipping. They are even less likely to participate in any offensive actions against the Houthis.

The broader problem is the emergence of a multipolar global order in which the United States is no longer the controlling superpower. In 1990, when America successfully led an international coalition to liberate Kuwait from Iraq's invasion, Russia supported Operation Desert Storm, China remained neutral, Saudi Arabia underwrote the costs and Israel stayed on the sidelines. None of that is likely to happen today if the United States goes to war against the Houthis. Indeed, both Russia and China abstained from voting for Wednesday's UN resolution demanding a ceasefire.

America's hands have been also tied by the war in Gaza. By claiming that their attacks are made in support of the Palestinians, the Houthis have transformed themselves from pirates into resistance fighters. Much of the world agrees with them that Israel should withdraw its forces from Gaza, which has made forming a multinational coalition against them difficult: not wishing to be accused of supporting Netanyahu, the rest are happy to free ride.

Meanwhile, Tehran's quest for regional hegemony is also influencing events in the Red Sea. Without Iranian missiles and drones, the Houthis' attacks would be much less effective. However, dealing with Iran is a long-term problem. The immediate issue for the West is protecting commercial shipping in the Red Sea. There are no good solutions: doing nothing poses serious risks for global trade; taking offensive action against the Houthis risks igniting a larger war that could jeopardise Middle East oil production.

Most probably, the war in Gaza will end, and when it does, the Houthis' justification for their attacks will evaporate. If they continue after the war is over, most nations will regard them as dangerous terrorists. Yet, once started, a war with the Houthis may not end quickly or easily. Before beginning another "as long as it takes" conflict, Washington should consider less risky options: expanding a formal convoy system such as the one used to protect Kuwaiti tankers during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) appears to be the least bad option, at least initially.

And with this, there is no reason why protecting freedom of navigation in the Red Sea should be the sole responsibility of the United States, Britain and a few willing partners. Most of the cargoes transiting the Suez Canal are bound for Europe and Asia, not the United States or Great Britain. Many nations, including China, Japan, Korea and Germany, do not want their trade disrupted by Houthi attacks on commercial shipping. Nor do they want their energy supplies disrupted by a large-scale war to eliminate the Houthis. They have very tangible interests in finding a peaceful solution to the Houthi problem.

Transforming Prosperity Guardian into a truly multinational operation would increase its effectiveness, reduce its costs for each participant and isolate the Houthis. Perhaps more important, it would demonstrate clearly that all options short of war had been tried and thus help to justify any offensive military action in the eyes of global public opinion. But creating a more multinational operation is a political and economic problem, not a military one. Finding a solution is a job for creative diplomats, not admirals. Support for a more multinational operation need not involve sending ships: statements of public support condemning maritime terrorism would help, so would financial contributions and logistical support. The justification to emphasise is that the war in Gaza and piracy in the Red Sea are two different issues and that secure global trade is in everyone's interest. Before we enter yet another easily expandable armed conflict, we should use diplomacy to convince the rest of the world of this.

David H. Rundell is a former chief of mission at the American Embassy in Saudi Arabia and the author of [Vision or Mirage: Saudi Arabia at the Crossroads](#).

Charging Israel with Genocide is Orwellian

By Lawrence J. Haas

Source: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/charging-israel-genocide-orwellian-208514>

Three months after a genocidal, anti-semitic terrorist group slaughtered 1,200 of its citizens in a barbaric fashion, Israel sits in the docket of the International Court of Justice, accused of committing genocide because it hasn't defended itself from future attack as pristinely as the world demands. The court is [holding hearings](#) this week on an application that South Africa filed in late December, asking the court to begin proceedings against Israel



for committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. “Acts and omissions by Israel,” South Africa [wrote](#), “... are genocidal in character, as they are committed with the requisite specific intent... to destroy Palestinians in Gaza as a part of the broader Palestinian national, racial and ethnical group,” putting Israel “in violation of its obligations under the Genocide Convention.”

It is a quintessentially Orwellian affair, a spectacle of the victim as the perpetrator, and it fits within a longstanding pattern of the global community holding the singular Jewish state to a singular human rights standard. No one should buy it.

In its “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,” the United Nations General Assembly [defined](#) genocide as action “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.”

Ironically, it is Hamas, created in 1987 as the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, which has set out to commit that very crime—against Israel and the Jewish people. In its covenant of 1988, Hamas [states](#), “Our struggle against the Jews is very great and very serious... The Movement is but one squadron that should be supported by more and more squadrons from this vast Arab and Islamic world, until the enemy is vanquished and Allah's victory is realised [sic].” “The Islamic Resistance Movement,” it continues, “is one of the links in the chain of the struggle against the Zionist invaders,” and it “aspires to the realisation of Allah's promise... The Day of Judgement will not come about until Moslems fight the Jews (killing the Jews), when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees.” Some thirty-five years later, the group has lost none of its genocidal luster. After October 7, when Hamas' terrorists [beheaded men](#), [slaughtered babies](#), [raped women](#), [desecrated bodies](#), and, in some cases, took [videos](#) of their deeds. The group's deputy foreign minister, Ghazi Hamad, [vowed](#) to repeat such attacks until Israel is destroyed.

Where does Israel fit into this maelstrom?

The Jewish State unilaterally withdrew from Gaza in 2005, leaving it to the Palestinian Authority. Two years later, Hamas seized Gaza in a violent coup and ruled its two million residents with an iron fist, [brooking no dissent](#) and murdering those who work with or seek peace with Israel. Israel responded to the barbarism of October 7 as one might expect, vowing to destroy the terrorist group so it could never again attack the Jewish state. What Israel is promising is nothing more than any responsible government would pursue in the aftermath of such an attack by such a group. Israel's military campaign is multi-faceted, arduous, and, yes, bloody. What began with heavy bombing has morphed into a harrowing firefight. But, notwithstanding the charge of genocide that Israel's critics around the world are so quick to level, who's really trying to boost civilian casualties?

While searching for Hamas operatives, Israel's military has dropped leaflets, made phone calls, and sent texts, [warning](#) Palestinians to flee areas where it plans to mount operations. That is no different than what Israel has done for years during its multiple wars and skirmishes with Hamas. Hamas, as usual, embeds its fighters and weaponry in schools, hospitals, and mosques, purposely boosting civilian casualties to swing global public opinion against Israel. Hamas has told Palestinians to ignore Israel's warnings to flee or has [prevented](#) them from doing so. One Hamas official [suggested](#) that civilians serve as human shields, sacrificing themselves to protect Hamas' assets. This week's spectacle in The Hague is part of a larger international picture, marked by an obsession with the Jewish state. [With war raging in Ukraine](#) and elsewhere and autocrats brutalizing their people all over the world, the General Assembly last year [condemned](#) Israel fourteen times and the rest of the world just seven. Meanwhile, the UN's Human Rights Council remains a cesspool of [anti-Israeli activity](#) that has 1) made Israel its only permanent agenda item and 2) condemned and subjected it to more special sessions and commissions than any other country. The council has passed no resolutions to condemn human rights abuses in such nations as Algeria, China, Cuba, Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, and Zimbabwe.

Are innocent Palestinians dying in Gaza? Yes. Is Israel seeking to wipe out the Palestinians, as per the charge of genocide? No. The allegation is either rooted in willful blindness or moral bankruptcy—or both.

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Home Secretary declares Hizb ut-Tahrir as terrorists

Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-declares-hizb-ut-tahrir-as-terrorists>

Jan 15 – The Home Secretary, James Cleverly, has today (15 January) laid a draft order before Parliament to proscribe the international Sunni Islamist political organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir under the Terrorism Act 2000.

If agreed by Parliament, the order will come into force on 19 January 2024. This means that belonging to, inviting support for and displaying articles in a public place in a way that arouses suspicion of membership or support for the group will be a criminal offence. Certain proscription offences can be punishable by up to 14 years in prison, which can be handed down by a court alongside or in place of a fine. The resources of a proscribed organisation are terrorist property





and may be seized. Once a group is proscribed its ability to operate openly in the UK will be significantly degraded because of the offences attached to membership and inviting support.

Founded in 1953, Hizb ut-Tahrir is an international political group with a long-term goal of establishing a Caliphate ruled under Islamic law. While their headquarters are in Lebanon, the group operates in at least 32 countries including the UK, United States, Canada and Australia. The proscription of Hizb ut-Tahrir includes the global organisation, as well as all regional branches, including Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain.

Home Secretary, James Cleverly said: **Hizb ut-Tahrir is an antisemitic organisation that actively promotes and encourages terrorism, including praising and celebrating the appalling 7 October attacks.**

Proscribing this terrorist group will ensure that anyone who belongs to and invites supports for them will face consequences. It will curb Hizb ut-Tahrir's ability to operate as it currently does.

Hizb ut-Tahrir's praise of the 7 October attacks and associated incidents, as well as describing Hamas as 'heroes' on their central website constitutes promoting and encouraging terrorism.

Hizb ut-Tahrir has a history of praising and celebrating attacks against Israel and attacks against Jews more widely. The UK stands strongly against antisemitism and will not tolerate the promotion of terrorism in any form.

This group's antisemitic ideology and praise of attacks against innocent civilians in Israel outlines the necessity of its proscription.

Security Minister, Tom Tugendhat said: Hizb ut-Tahrir clearly encourage and promote terrorism.

Their celebration of Hamas' appalling attacks on Israel, going so far as to call the terrorists who raped and murdered Israeli citizens 'heroes', is disgraceful.

We stand firmly against antisemitism and hatred against the Jewish community in the UK.

Several countries have banned Hizb ut-Tahrir for their various activities, including Germany, Egypt, Bangladesh, Pakistan and several Central Asian and Arab countries. Austria banned symbols of the group in May 2021. The order will be debated in Parliament during this week and, if approved, Hizb ut-Tahrir will become the 80th organisation to be proscribed in the UK. Other groups who have been proscribed by the British government include al-Qaeda, ISIS, National Action and most recently the Wagner Group.





**Sergeant Adir Tahar
was murdered by Hamas
on October 7
and his decapitated head
was put up for sale in Gaza
after Hamas terrorists abused and
dismembered his slain body**



They were Israel's 'eyes on the border' - but their Hamas warnings went unheard

By Alice Cuddy | BBC News, Israel

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67958260>



Jan 15 - They are known as Israel's eyes on the Gaza border.

For years, units of young female conscripts had one job here. It was to sit in surveillance bases for hours, looking for signs of anything suspicious. In the months leading up to the 7 October attacks by Hamas, they did begin to see things: practice raids, mock hostage-taking, and farmers behaving strangely on the other side of the fence. Noa, not her real name, says they would pass information about what they were seeing to intelligence and higher-ranking officers, but were powerless to do more. "We were just the eyes," she says. It was clear to some of these women that Hamas was planning something big - that there was, in Noa's words, a "balloon that was going to burst".

The BBC has now spoken to these young women about the escalation in suspicious activity they observed, the reports they filed, and what they saw as a lack of response from senior Israel Defense Forces (IDF) officers.

We have also seen WhatsApp messages the women sent in the months before 7 October, talking about incidents at the border. To some of them it became a dark joke: who would be on duty when the inevitable attack came?



These women were not the only ones raising the alarm, and as more testimony is gathered, anger at the Israeli state - and questions over its response - are mounting.

The BBC has spoken also to the grieving families who have now lost their daughters, and to experts who see the IDF's response to these women as part of a broader intelligence failure. The IDF said it was "currently focused on eliminating the threat from the terrorist organisation Hamas" and declined to answer the BBC's questions.

"The problem is that they [the military] didn't connect the dots," a former commander at one of the border units tells the BBC. If they had, she says, they would have realised that Hamas was preparing something unprecedented. **Shai Ashram**, 19, was one of the women on duty on 7 October. In a call with her family, where they could hear gunshots ringing in the background, she said there were "terrorists in the base and that there was going to be a

really big event". She was one of more than a dozen surveillance soldiers killed. Others were taken hostage. As Hamas attacked, the women at Nahal Oz, a base about a kilometre from the Gaza border, began to say goodbye to one another on their shared WhatsApp group.



Noa, who was not on duty and was reading the messages from home, remembers thinking "this is it". The attack they had long feared was now actually happening.

Because of the locations of their bases, the women of this military unit - known as **tatzpitaniyot** in Hebrew - were among the first Israelis that Hamas reached after rampaging out of Gaza.

'Our job is to protect all residents'

The women sit inside rooms close to the border, staring for hours every day at live surveillance footage captured by cameras along the high-tech fence, and balloons that hover over Gaza.

There are several of these units next to the Gaza fence, and others at different positions along Israel's borders. They are all made up of young women, aged in their late teens to early 20s. They do not carry guns.



In their free time, the young women would learn dance routines, cook dinners together, and watch TV programmes. For many, their time in the military was their first time living away from their families, and they describe forming sisterly bonds.

But they say they took their responsibilities seriously. "Our job is to protect all residents. We have a very hard job - you sit on shift and you are not allowed to squint or move your eyes even a little. You must always be focused," Noa says.

An article published by the IDF in late September lists the tatzpitaniyot alongside Israel's elite intelligence units as those that "know everything about the enemy".

When the women see something suspicious they log it with their commander and on a computer system to be assessed by more senior officials.

Retired IDF Maj Gen Eitan Dangot says the tatzpitaniyot play a major role in "pushing the button that says something is wrong", and that concerns they raise with a commander should be passed up the chain "to create an intelligence picture".

He says the look-outs provide key "pieces of the puzzle" in understanding any threats.

In the months leading up to the Hamas attacks, senior Israeli officials gave public statements suggesting that the threat posed by Hamas had been contained.

But there were many signs along the border that something was very wrong.

In late September, an observer at Nahal Oz writes in a WhatsApp group of friends in the unit: "What, there is another event?"

A reply quickly follows by voicenote: "Girl, where've you been? We've had one every day for the past two weeks."

The look-outs we speak to describe a range of incidents they observed in real-time in the months before 7 October, leading some to have concerns that an attack was coming.

"We would see them practising every day what the raid would look like," Noa, who is still serving in the military, tells the BBC. "They even had a model tank that they were practising how to take over.

"They also had a model of weapons on the fence and they would also show how they would blow it up, and co-ordinate how to take over the forces and kill and kidnap."

Eden Hadar, another observer from the base, remembers that at the start of her service, Hamas fighters were doing mainly fitness training in the section she looked over. But in the months before she left the military in August, she noticed a shift to "actual military training".



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At a different base along the border, Gal (not her real name), says she was also watching as the training increased.

She watched, via surveillance balloon, as a replica model of an automated Israeli weapon on the border was built "in the heart of Gaza", she says.

Several women also describe bombs being planted and detonated near the fence - known as Israel's Iron Wall - seemingly to test its strength. Footage from 7 October would later show large explosions before Hamas fighters race through on motorbikes.

For former observer **Roni Lifshitz**, who was still in service but not working when Hamas attacked, the most concerning thing she saw in the preceding weeks was the regular patrol of vehicles full of Hamas fighters, which would stop at watch posts on the other side of the fence.

She remembers the men "talking, pointing at the cameras and the fence, taking pictures".

She says she was able to identify them as being from Hamas' elite Nukhba Force because of their clothing. Israel has said this was one of the "leading forces" behind the October attacks.

Roni's account matches that of another woman at the base who spoke to the BBC.



An observation tower operated by Hamas at a position along the border with Israel

Some of the watchwomen also speak of growing incidents of attempted incursions.

Messages shared with us by one female soldier make reference in code to vans along the border, as well as to the IDF stopping people trying to cross into Israel, which she says was happening more frequently. Members of the unit congratulate each other on these interceptions with heart emojis and GIFs.

In a message observer Shahaf Nissani sent to her mum in July, she writes: "Good morning mummy. I finished a shift now and we had an [attempted border incursion] but this event was really nerve wracking... like it was an event that no one had ever encountered."

The women also started to see strange changes in patterns of behaviour along the border.

Gazan farmers, bird catchers and sheep herders began moving closer to the border fence, they say. The look-outs now believe these men were collecting intelligence ahead of the attacks.



"We know each one by face and know exactly their routine and hours. Suddenly we started seeing bird catchers and farmers we don't know. We have seen them move to new territories. Their routine has changed," says observer Avigail, who requested anonymity to speak out over what she saw.

Noa also remembers them getting "closer and closer" to the fence.

"The birders would put their cages right on the fence. It's strange because they can put the cage anywhere. The farmers would also go down right next to the fence in an area that is not agricultural and there is no reason other than to gather information about the system and see how they can pass it. It seemed suspicious to us," she says.

"We talked about it all the time."

Not everyone we spoke to had been aware of the significance of what they were observing.

Hamas was always training for an attack, and some of the women didn't anticipate that it was preparing for anything on the scale of 7 October, one said.

Several watchwomen who did fear a major attack was coming have told the BBC they felt their concerns were not being listened to. When she noticed the vans on the border, Roni says the protocol was to alert her commander and then to keep watching until the vehicles were no longer in her section. She would then file it in a computer system where it would be "passed on".

But, she says, she has "no idea" where these reports actually went.

"Probably to intelligence but whether they do something with it or not, I don't really know," she says. "No one gave us an answer back about what we had reported and conveyed."

Noa says she couldn't count how many times she had filed reports. Within the unit, everyone "took it seriously and would pass it on but in the end they [people outside of the unit] didn't do anything about it".

Avigail says that even when senior officials came to the base "no-one would talk to us or ask our opinion or tell us a little about what was going on". "They just came, gave a task and left," she says.

'Why are we here if no-one's listening?'

As a commander at her unit, Gal says observers would pass information to her which she then passed to her supervisor.

But she says that while this was included in "situation assessments" - when higher-ups at the base would discuss the reports filed by the observers - nothing seemed to be done beyond that.

Several of the women say they voiced their frustrations and worries with their families.

Shahaf's mother, Ilana, remembers her saying: "Why are we here if no-one's listening?"

"She told me that the girls see that there is a mess. And I asked, 'Are you complaining?'

"And I don't exactly understand the army, but I understood that it's not the base, it's the ranks above" that needed to take action, she says. But despite Shahaf's worries, her family, like others, had full confidence in the army and the Israeli state, and believed that even if something was being planned, it would be dealt with quickly.



Shahaf, on the left, pictured here with her mother

"In the last months she said again and again there will be a war, you will see. And we laughed at her for exaggerating," Ilana recalls, taking deep breaths between words.

Shahaf was among the first people to be killed on 7 October, when Hamas overran Nahal Oz.

It would come to be the deadliest day in Israel's history, with some 1,300 people killed, according to the prime minister's office, and 240 taken hostage.

Air and ground assaults launched by Israel in response to the attacks have gone on to kill more than 23,000 people in Gaza, according to the Hamas-run health ministry.

While they did not know it at the time, the tatzpitaniyot were not the only ones raising concerns, and their observations were not the only intelligence that something was coming.

According [to a report in the New York Times](#), a lengthy blueprint detailing Hamas's plans had been in the hands of Israeli officials for more than a year before 7 October, but was dismissed as aspirational. A veteran analyst in Israel's intelligence agency Unit 8200 warned three months before the attacks that



Hamas had conducted an intense training exercise that appeared similar to that outlined in the blueprint, but her concerns were brushed off, the newspaper reports.

The drills conducted by Hamas and other armed groups had also been posted publicly on social media, as seen in [this BBC investigation](#).



The women 'didn't get attention they should have'

"The signs were bubbling," says retired Maj Gen Eitan Dangot. "When you collect all the signs, you would make an earlier decision and do something to stop it.

"Unfortunately this is something that was not done."

He says that while a full investigation has not yet been conducted, it is clear that the reports from the watchwomen "didn't get the attention they should have".

"Sometimes it has to do with the self-confidence of senior officers... 'OK, I hear you, but I know better than you. I have the experience. I am older than you. I have the strategic picture, and it cannot be what you are telling me,' for example.

"Or sometimes it can also be chauvinism," he says. "In intelligence, you have to sit at a round table and collect information and then build your puzzle. With these people, when you want to know what's really going on, you have to sit with them, to listen carefully to what they are telling you, what is their way of analysing it."

Brig Gen Amir Avivi, former deputy commander of the Gaza division, does not believe sexism was a factor, but agrees that more should have been done to address the lookouts' concerns.

"I cannot say for sure exactly what happened but I can say what is expected," he says.

"What is expected is that when people on the border do their job and they have concerns and they see things that need to be looked at and assessed, you need to listen. Because they are the professionals. They are the ones who are really the eyes of the battalion and the brigade and the division."

He says the "biggest failure" was the "assumption that they [Hamis] are deterred" - the assumption that "yes they're training, yes they have a plan but they're not going to execute it".



The IDF has promised a future investigation, and responded to BBC requests by saying: "Questions of this kind will be looked into at a later stage."

The observers have different opinions about why their reports didn't get a bigger response, but Avigail shares the view of several we spoke to: "It's because we are the lowest soldier in the system... so our word is considered less professional."

"Everyone saw us only as eyes, they don't see a soldier," says Roni.

Three months after the attacks, the surviving tatzpitaniyot and grieving families of those killed are struggling to come to terms with what happened as they wait for an investigation.

In Shai Ashram's bedroom, military berets are hung on a dressing table, upon which there are drawings and photos of her dressed in uniform.

Her dad, Dror, says he sometimes walks into the room and cries.

"She loved her job very much. She loved the army and she loved being a soldier," he says.

"I'm a taxi driver and I pick up people from the train station and when I see a soldier whose father is picking her up, it hurts me. I'm jealous."

'It is with me everywhere'

At her own family home, Noa looks every day at old social media videos of her friends singing and dancing at the base. She sleeps on the sofa every night, afraid to be on her own in her bedroom.

"It is with me everywhere - in nightmares and thoughts, in lack of sleep and lack of appetite," she says. "I am not the same person I was."

Scrolling through the WhatsApp chat she shared with other tatzpitaniyot, she points at their names, saying "killed" or "kidnapped".

At her base, Nahal Oz, the room where the tatzpitaniyot worked now lies in ruins, and the screens they looked through as Hamas prepared for its attack are burned and blackened.

As Hamas surged through Nahal Oz, they killed dozens of people.

Among the dead are many of the women who watched the border so closely for the Israeli state, and who had dared to fear - despite knowing the immense might and resources of Israel - that something like this might one day happen.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: "Connecting the dots" – a universal problem within the intelligence services both civilian and military (personal experience).

What's Driving the Houthis?

By Ari Heistein and Jason Brodsky

Source: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/what%E2%80%99s-driving-houthis-208562>

Jan 12 – When the Houthis began launching drones, rockets, and missiles at [Israel](#) and [maritime traffic](#) in the Red Sea, it was natural to ask what the group sought to achieve. After all, Yemen has no tangible interests in the Israel-Palestinian conflict, nor does it stand to reap any material benefit from harassing international shipping. As the U.S.-led coalition [responds](#) to Houthi [attacks](#)—a back-and-forth that could last for some time—designing an effective strategy to restore deterrence requires understanding the adversary's motives.

As it stands, the Houthis are well-positioned to attain five overlapping objectives in their intervention on behalf of Hamas as Israel fights to dislodge it from Gaza following the October 7 attacks. Iran has also secured numerous achievements via the Houthis as it wages its own multifront and multidimensional conflict.

First, the Houthis are seeking quick wins in the international arena during a dismal time in the domestic arena.

Second, the Houthis may have sought to provoke responses from the international community, like the airstrikes launched on January 11, to justify the continued misery of Yemenis.

Third, to avoid being targeted or pressured by its neighbors who prefer stability over chaos, the Houthis have sought to cower regional states.

Fourth, the regime in Sanaa seeks to demonstrate its value to its sponsors in Tehran.

Fifth, by targeting U.S. and Israeli interests in ways that are difficult to respond to, the Houthis are aiming to erode U.S. and Israeli prestige in the region.



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Houthi Attacks: What Happens Next?

By Lawrence Freedman

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20240115-houthi-attacks-what-happens-next>

Jan 15 – The longer the Gaza War goes on the greater the concern that it will escalate into something much larger. Iran is being watched most closely because it orchestrates the ‘axis of resistance’ of which Hamas is a part and could give the other members, including Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen, a green light to raise the level of their attacks.

Most attention has focused on Hezbollah on Israel's northern border. The exchanges between the two have stopped short of full-scale hostilities, but only just. The clashes began after Hamas's attacks on 7 October, when Hezbollah fired rockets and artillery ‘in solidarity’. It continues to do so and Israel takes out Hamas positions in Lebanon. Over [the past three months](#) nine Israeli soldiers and four civilians have been killed, while 123 have reportedly died in Lebanon, including at least 21 civilians. More than 80,000 Israelis residents have been evacuated away from the border areas.

After Wissam Tawil, a commander of Hezbollah's elite Radwan forces, was killed by an Israeli strike, Hezbollah retaliated with a drone attack on Israeli army headquarters in Safed, northern Israel, though without apparently causing damage or casualties. Hezbollah [deputy leader Naim Qassem](#) also emphasized that the group did not want to expand the war, adding that if it was expanded by Israel ‘the response is inevitable to the maximum extent required to deter Israel.’ Lebanon is in no fit state to cope with a major confrontation. US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken has been pressing Israel not to add to the current regional chaos by embarking on a major war with Hezbollah.

In addition, US troops in Iraq and Syria, still there after the fight against ISIS, have [been attacked by Iran-backed militias](#) 130 times since 17 October. There have been no American fatalities but occasional injuries. These have prompted US responses, of which there have been fewer than ten so far. The most serious came on 4 January when a militia leader blamed for the attacks was killed in Baghdad.

The most dramatic escalation has been with the Houthis in Yemen. The threat their actions pose to international shipping led to US and UK strikes early on Friday morning. As the dust settles on these strikes and the Houthis threaten retaliation, has this brought us closer to a wider war?

Who Are the Houthis?

The Houthis, who prefer to be known as Ansar Allah (‘Partisans of God’), are not Iranian puppets – they make their own decisions – but their interests are aligned and their capabilities have been built up with substantial Iranian support. Though they are part of the ‘axis of resistance,’ they have their own distinctive characteristics and interests. Their roots are in North Yemen, which joined with the former British Colony of South Yemen to form a unified, but subsequently fractious, state in 1990. In religious terms they are Zaydi Shi'ite, which is relatively moderate. Their politics over the years has been flexible, and while based on the Houthi tribe they enjoy broader support. (For an excellent introduction to the Houthis see this piece by [Eilsabeth Kendall](#)).

Their Shi'ite identity in a largely Sunni state (they make up about a third of the population) turned them into a radical force in Yemeni politics. The Yemeni government tried to suppress them in fighting which lasted from 2004 to 2010, with the Saudis joining in directly in 2010. But then during the 2011 Arab spring uprising they joined in an attempt to forge a new political order for Yemen. Unfortunately they soon became disenchanted with the process and decided instead, in September 2014, to take up arms against the government. They took over the capital, Sanaa, ousted the President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi, and sought to broaden their appeal by stressing the need to fight corruption and incompetence. As they gained in strength in the civil war, Hadi, who was still recognized internationally as president, sought outside support. This came in the form of a coalition led by the Saudis who found themselves in a far more daunting fight than expected. Instead of a quick victory they got caught up in a long and painful war, in which they were accused of causing the deaths of some 20,000 civilians, with a blockade of Yemeni ports creating a humanitarian crisis.

The war shaped the Houthis. During its course the group became more hardline, repressive, and closer to Iran. This was the context in which they developed attack drones and long-range missiles and used them to mount regular attacks on oil-related facilities in both Saudi Arabia and the UAE. At first they attacked targets close to the border but over time their attacks became more sophisticated and of longer range. They developed indigenous



manufacturing capabilities for their long-range aerial and naval drones, with parts smuggled in from Iran. In December 2021 [the Saudis reported](#) that the Houthis had fired 430 ballistic missiles and 851 armed drones at Saudi Arabia since the war had begun in 2015, killing 59 Saudi civilians. Ironically it was the threat posed by these capabilities that [encouraged these](#) countries to develop closer ties with Israel in the hope of getting access to their defensive technology.

Joe Biden was much cooler to Riyadh than Donald Trump, and when he became president he sought to ease the humanitarian situation by removing the Houthis designation as a terrorist organization, only recently imposed, as this risked preventing aid getting to Yemen. The Saudis concluded that they had little choice but to engage with the Houthis to end the war, although a peace formula has yet to be found. An uneasy truce was reached in April 2022, which has thus far lasted beyond its original six months. It has left the Houthis in control of northern Yemen, and more than two thirds of the total population of 20 million. As [the Economist](#) has reported, the country has been left immiserated by the fighting:

The UN estimates that 223,000 people have died from hunger and lack of medical care since the war began. 80% of the population now lives in poverty. None of this bothered the Houthis, who stole food aid, imposed a raft of taxes to raise funds and relied on Iran for military support. They have maintained a long siege on the south-western city of Taiz, barring civilians from bringing in food and medicine—exactly as they accuse Israel of doing in Gaza.

Operation Prosperity Guardian

On 8 October 2023, the day after the Hamas attacks on Israel, the US deployed a carrier strike group, including a cruiser and three destroyers, to the Eastern Mediterranean. This was largely to warn Iran against any direct interventions. Houthi attacks on commercial shipping began on the same day. On 19 October one of the destroyers, USS *Carney* intercepted four cruise missiles and 15 drones launched by the Houthis, apparently directed against Israel. On 19 November, perhaps having decided that they could not get at Israel directly, they turned their attention to commercial shipping, seizing a cargo ship, the *Galaxy Leader*, and diverting it to the port of Hodeidah. They [claimed this](#) to be linked to Israel although it was British owned and Japanese operated. This remains their main success to date. On 3 December *Carney* along with some commercial ships were attacked in international waters with anti-ship ballistic missiles fired from Yemen. Three commercial ships were struck, while *Carney* shot down three drones.

After this the Americans stepped up their response. Sanctions against 13 individuals and entities alleged to be funding the Houthis were announced on 7 December, and then more entities were sanctioned at the end of the month for conveying money from Iran to Houthi forces. On 19 December Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced that a coalition had been formed of twenty nations that would send ships to oppose the attacks on shipping in the Red Sea. [This was not easy](#) to put together. Most states shared the concern about the threat to shipping but were nervous about being associated with anything that might be seen to be helping Israel. So eight out of the twenty sought to remain anonymous. Italy and Spain both put some distance between themselves and the force. Given their past fraught relations with the Houthis, the Saudis and the UAE wanted nothing to do with the joint force, at least publicly, as they [still wish to extricate themselves from the war in Yemen](#). France said it also wanted to protect freedom of navigation but that its ships would remain under French command. India has taken a similar position, sending destroyers to the Gulf of Aden after one of its ships had been attacked.

Over the past few weeks the level of concern has grown over the extent of the threat to shipping. The Red Sea is the entry point for ships using the Suez Canal, which handles about 12% of worldwide trade. Because of the Houthi attacks many ships have rerouted around Africa's Cape of Good Hope, substantially increasing sailing time and costs, and disrupting supply chains.

On New Year's eve the *Maersk Hangzhou*, a container ship, reported that it was coming under fire from four small Houthi ships, and that there had been attempts to board. An on-board security team was holding off the intruders. The aircraft carrier USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower* and destroyer USS *Gravelly* responded to the distress call. According to US [Central Command](#), as the warships issued 'verbal calls' to the small boats,

the small boats fired upon the U.S. helicopters with crew served weapons and small arms. The U.S. Navy helicopters returned fire in self-defense, sinking three of the four small boats, and killing the crews. The fourth boat fled the area. There was no damage to U.S. personnel or equipment.

Then on 10 January US task force ships along with *HMS Diamond* from the Royal Navy shot down 18 drones, two cruise missiles and one ballistic missile. This was the largest attack to date from the Houthis.

The threat could no longer be gainsaid. Already on 3 January the UK, US, Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, South Korea and Singapore had warned that

'The Houthis will bear the responsibility for the consequences should they continue to threaten lives, the global economy, or the free flow of commerce in the region's critical waterways.'

After the 10 January attack, the 26th on commercial shipping lanes in the Red Sea since 19 November, it was even possible to get a Security Council resolution, sponsored by the US and Japan. [This demanded](#)



‘that the Houthis immediately cease all such attacks, which impede global commerce and undermine navigational rights and freedoms as well as regional peace and security.’

Importantly, it allowed member states, in accordance with international law, ‘to defend their vessels from attack, including those that undermine navigational rights and freedoms.’

Eleven nations voted for it, though Russia, China, Mozambique and Algeria abstained.

Then last Thursday, 11 January, the 27th attack occurred when an anti-ship ballistic missile was fired close to a commercial ship, although it only hit the water. Having warned the Houthis not to continue to mount attacks the members of what was now called ‘Operation Prosperity Guardian’ (who thinks up these names?) were always likely to respond.

The Response

The strikes mounted by the US and UK against Houthi capabilities in Yemen early on Friday morning were not designed to punish or ‘send a message’. They were designed to make it very difficult for the Houthis to continue with their anti-shipping campaign. The targets were not simply, as the BBC suggested, ‘symbolic.’ Attacks were carried out against the sensors that enabled the Houthis to identify and track targets, as well as missiles and drones, factories that produce them and storage. Some 100 precision weapons hit 60 targets in 16 locations. The four RAF Typhoons attacked two sites, both used to launch reconnaissance and attack drones, and missiles. The targets appear to have been hit as intended. The importance of getting the sensors explains the follow-up strike on Saturday morning against a radar, which presumably had survived a first attempt to take it out on Friday.

Collateral damage was limited. The majority of the targets were not in built-up locations. The Houthis have reported that five soldiers were killed and six injured in the strikes. Despite President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s rhetoric about turning the Red Sea into a ‘sea of blood’ this is not what happened. In addition, no Houthi leaders or Iranian advisors were targeted. This was not about regime change.

In terms of what happens next this is not irrelevant. Substantial civilian casualties, especially in the light of what is going on in Gaza, would have made the demands for retaliation more intense. An attempt to remove the leadership could lead to a much more serious conflict. But as much as these strikes can be, these were precise and discrete with a limited purpose. The group’s leader Mohammed al-Bukhaiti said the US and UK would ‘soon realize’ the action was ‘the greatest folly in their history.’ But that was while the strikes were ongoing and before they had a chance to assess the damage. How much they will have degraded Houthi capabilities is, however, hard to know as intelligence on their overall missile inventories is limited (for what is known see this [from IISS](#)), and the strikes were telegraphed sufficiently in advance for some systems to have already been moved to a safer place.

There is a narrative battle already underway. The Houthis have claimed that their aim is to hurt Israel and show solidarity with the people of Gaza, currently an extremely popular cause in the Middle East. But most of their attacks have been directed against whatever ships came into view and range, whether or not they had Israeli links. If this continues for much longer it will damage the international economy. Some might think it serves the international community right for not doing more to stop the Israelis, but so far the big losers are those countries that get their income from the shipping route, most notably [Egypt](#), whose revenues from the Suez Canal have dropped by at least 40 percent. Whatever happens now, it will take some time before the shipping companies, and their insurers, conclude that the route has become safe.

A lot will depend on Iran’s attitude. According [to one source](#) on X/twitter the Iranian ship that had helped the Houthis target shipping left the area on Wednesday. This suggests that they did not want to get caught up in any US strikes. If it stays away that will also limit Houthi intelligence on potential retaliatory targets. There is no reason to suppose that Iran is any keener on picking a fight with the US than it was three months ago. One view is that it would rather wait for its nuclear weapons program to yield results before it embarks on a full showdown. It also learning a lot about how sea trade might be throttled in a future confrontation, with the Bab el-Mandeb Strait now added to the Strait of Hormuz. For now, it is happy to see unrest bubble up around the region.

Teheran’s attitude will affect the Houthi’s response. They certainly will want to do something. A lot depends on whether they wish to show that they are not cowed or determined to sustain their anti-shipping campaign or even retaliate in some other way. These tit-for-tat exchanges need not lead to massive escalation. For example when General Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Quds force, was assassinated on the orders of Donald Trump, as a response to attacks by Iranian-backed militias on US forces in Iraq, retribution was promised. On 8 January 2020, Iranian forces launched ballistic missiles at an airbase in Iraq where US personnel were based. Initially no American casualties were reported, although it later transpired that some had been wounded. From the Iranian perspective honor had been satisfied. The US had no need to take the matter further. President Biden has linked any further US action to whether the Houthis carry on attacking shipping (‘We will make sure that we respond to the Houthis if they continue this outrageous behavior.’)

It would be embarrassing for then US if attacks on shipping resume. Friday night’s strikes were expensive and naval air defense missiles cost a lot more than Houthi drones. Nonetheless, their systems, including



intelligence collection, have been degraded and they might have difficulty mounting an effective strike. One was attempted on Friday but the target turned out to be a tanker carrying Russian oil. The missile missed the target. Three small craft were there to follow up but they left the scene. There is no point persisting with the campaign if they keep on failing. This is more likely in the short term while the US and UK forces will be on high alert, and many potential targets are making themselves scarce by avoiding the Red Sea. It should also be relevant that very few ships actually linked to Israel are there to be attacked.

So long as the Houthis are capable of resuming their campaign the problem may be one of persuading commercial shipping to return to the Red Sea route. The obvious way to reduce the risks would be to get a cease-fire in Gaza. Western governments are looking for ways to wind the war down even if it cannot be stopped completely, but this is because they are exasperated by the Israeli government's policies and alarmed by the growing risk of disease and famine in Gaza, not because of problems with shipping.

The region is very unsettled and there are other flashpoints. This remains a worrying time. But Friday's strikes are not in themselves likely to lead to a major escalation. This is not the start of a big new Western intervention in a Middle Eastern country. The aims of the strikes were limited, to make a point about freedom of navigation. No ground forces are being employed, and there is certainly no intention to oust the Houthis from their position in Yemen.

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The Houthis: Four Things You Will Want to Know About the Yemeni Militia Targeted by U.K. and U.S. Military Strikes

By Natasha Lindstaedt

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20240115-the-houthis-four-things-you-will-want-to-know-about-the-yemeni-militia-targeted-by-u-k-and-u-s-military-strikes>

Jan 15 – The Houthis, also known as Ansar Allah (or “supporters of God”), are a violent militia group that currently exercise de facto control over much of northern Yemen. Formed in the 1990s, the group was named after its founder, Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, and they follow the Zaidi branch of Shia Islam which represents [20-30% of Yemen's population](#).

The group's leadership has been drawn from the Houthi tribe, which is part of one of the three major tribal confederations in Yemen: the Hashid, the Madhaj and the Bakil. The Houthis are part of the Bakil confederation, the largest tribal [group in Yemen](#). As the UK and US launch [military strikes](#) on the Yemeni group, after a spate of attacks by the Iran-backed militia on Red Sea shipping, here's four things that you need to know about them.

1. Why Did the Houthis Form?

In order to understand the rise of the Houthis, it's first important to lay out the turbulent history of Yemen. Yemen has struggled to build a unified and effective state and has been plagued by weak institutions, weak nationalism, insurgency and secessionism since its formation in 1990. The area that comprises Yemen today was split [into two territories, north and south](#) from the 19th century to 1990. After the collapse of the Ottoman empire, [North Yemen became independent in 1918](#). The south of Yemen was under British control until 1967. The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen ([South Yemen](#)) was independent from 1967 to 1990. The two were unified in 1990.

Tribal identities remain strong, particularly in the north, and many different groups have held power. The Zaydi Shiites have fought for control of the territory that we now know as Yemen for thousands of years, with [some success](#), and under the Houthis, control parts of northern Yemen.

If we fast forward to the modern era, Yemen has faced constant conflict and state failure. The north was ruled by former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh (a dictator who is part of another tribal group), since 1978, who then took over as president of a [newly unified Yemen](#) in 1990. Saleh's relatives controlled core parts of the army and economy – and [corruption was rife](#).

Tensions arose over the vast majority of Yemen's resources flowing to Sana'a, the capital of north Yemen, and in particular to Saleh's Sanhan clan, which is a part of the [Hashid federation](#). Though the central government managed to keep the country together (Saleh notably claimed that ruling Yemen was like “[dancing over the heads](#) of snakes”) after the south attempted to secede in 1994, there were many groups that held grievances against the Saleh-led government.

The most notable group to challenge the central government in Yemen were the Houthis. In addition to enduring decades of political marginalization, neglect, economic exclusion and sometimes terror by the central government, the Houthis were concerned by rising Saudi influence in the country — and with the growing power of [Salafism and Wahhabism](#) (seen as imported Saudi religious doctrines) in particular.



But the tipping point for the Houthi movement was likely the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Influenced by the success of Lebanon-based militants Hezbollah in repelling western forces, the Houthis drew inspiration and gained support from the Lebanese-based group, as well as Iran — though their officials [deny their connection](#).

2. How Did the Houthis Gain Power?

To address the growing power of the Houthis, Saleh launched a military campaign in 2003, with the help of Saudi Arabia. Though Saleh's forces managed to kill Houthi leader, Hussein al-Houthi in 2004, the Houthis often bested Saleh and the Saudi army in spite of billions of dollars [spent by the latter](#).

Indeed, the Houthis proved to be a formidable force for the Saudis to contest with, daring to cross into Saudi Arabia in 2009, and forcing the kingdom to deploy its army to address the [growing Houthi threat](#).

Since the Yemeni revolution erupted in 2011, the Houthis fought to oust Saleh from power, only to later join forces [with Saleh in 2015](#). When their alliance crumbled, it was the Houthis who had the upper hand, with the rebel group [killing Saleh](#) in December 2017. The Houthis have also been a major force in the ongoing Yemeni civil war (which began in 2014), which has caused an estimated [377,000 deaths](#), many of them civilians. Though it is the government in the south that is internationally recognized, the Houthis have taken over much of northern Yemen, since they stormed Sana'a in 2014. They control the key port of Hodeidah, which generates up to US\$1 billion (£784,000,000) in revenues for [the Houthi government](#).

3. What Is Their Regional Influence?

Today, the Houthis have an [estimated 20,000 fighters](#). Since the death of al-Houthi, the movement has been primarily led by his brother, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, who has stated that he will not hesitate to attack [the US and its allies](#).

Since the war started in Gaza in October, the Houthis have tried to capitalize on the conflict to raise their international profile, and as a show of power that could gain them more negotiating influence. Claiming to be in solidarity with the Palestinian people, the Houthis initiated a series of attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea, the narrow end of which is overlooked by Yemen. The most brazen attack took place on November 19 2023, when militants used a helicopter to abduct the crew of a car carrier that was linked to [an Israeli businessman](#).

4. Do They Control Red Sea Access?

Though most of the Houthi attacks on the Red Sea have not been successful, they have forced thousands of ships to bypass the route and divert around South Africa—adding [significant costs and time](#).

In retaliation for the dozens of attacks on the Red Sea, the US and the UK have responded with their largest attack against the [Houthis since 2016](#), when the US struck three Houthi missile sites with cruise missiles after the Houthis fired on the US navy and commercial vessels. This called a temporary halt to Houthi attacks. But now, with the Houthis confident that they have been victorious against the Saudis and the west in Yemen, the rebels seem more eager than ever to [take on the US head on](#).

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Israeli War with Hezbollah Is Inevitable and Necessary

By Nave Dromi

Source: <https://www.meforum.org/65451/israeli-war-with-hezbollah-is-inevitable>

Jan 15 – Over the years, it has become de rigeur and increasingly predictable to state that "there is no military solution to the conflict" regarding Israel's long-standing conflict with its enemies. Nonetheless, the [Hamas massacre of October 7](#) has demonstrated that, regardless of the frequency of its usage, it is increasingly understood not to be untrue.

Regarding Gaza, Israel has tried any number of other solutions, whether diplomacy during the Gaza-First phase of Oslo: autonomy, disengagement, and enfranchisement. None of them worked to end Hamas's irredentist and extremist beliefs and goals. In fact, its leadership has gone on record claiming that it was precisely these policies and the attempted enrichment of Gaza by Israel that were used to lull the Jewish State into the widely-held belief that the Islamist terror group's military ambitions had been contained and constrained.

The State of Israel has been forced into the military solution to [destroy Hamas](#) because it seems that nothing short of this goal will end the threat to Israel.



Israel-Hezbollah: The Crisis on the Northern Border

On Israel's northern border, the situation is even more complex. Since the IDF's retreat from southern Lebanon in 2000, the Islamic Republic of Iran's proxy Hezbollah has entrenched itself on Israel's northern border, threatening the Jewish State's civilian communities.

After the Second Lebanon War, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 called for the disarmament of Hezbollah and no "armed forces other than UNIFIL [UN Interim Force in Lebanon]" to be based south of the Litani River" in southern Lebanon. Lebanon and Israel accepted the conditions and the Jewish state fully implemented its part of the deal – following the conflict that had been instigated by Hezbollah's unprovoked attack. Hezbollah, however, did not disarm and instead strengthened its presence on Israel's border – with a reported 100,000 trained fighters and a missile arsenal of around 150,000 which can reach every inch of Israeli territory with impressive accuracy. Thus, the attempted diplomatic solution to this conflict failed.

Now that Hezbollah has decided to unilaterally attack the Jewish state once again, forcing Israel into evacuating around 100,000 of its citizens from the North, it is clear that this problem requires a military solution.

At the moment, US envoy Amos Hochstein is trying to find a non-military solution to this conflict, but he will likely fail.

The emphasis by the international community has been on Resolution 1701, thus aiming to adopt a strategy that has already shown its uselessness. There will be attempts to buttress UNIFIL – a peacekeeping mission established in 1978 that has singularly failed in its mission to keep the peace. UNIFIL soldiers have been constantly threatened and humiliated by Hezbollah and its only role appears to be to ensure that its own soldiers don't get killed.

Even if negotiations yield some type of show of a retreat by Hezbollah to beyond the Litani River, it will only be a matter of time before the global focus recedes, before the Shi'ite terrorist group returns. The major problem is that Hezbollah has no ambition – and every interest to remain exactly where it is and provide a strong deterrent for its paymasters in Tehran, should Israeli leaders decide to act against Iran's nuclear weapons capability, which is an existential threat to the Jewish State.

The ayatollahs require [Hezbollah's threat against Israel](#) to deepen and not weaken, so there is no possibility that it will divest its genocidal intentions and rid itself of its massive military capabilities.

This really only leads us to consider a military solution to the problem with Hezbollah. Simply put, the IDF will have to fight and defeat them. Even though their goal is to eliminate Israel, Hezbollah clearly doesn't want an escalation or a war specifically at this time, and its leader Hassan Nasrallah has made this abundantly clear in his long rants against the Jewish State. So, perhaps now is precisely the time to strike. Israel cannot return its citizens to the border until it does.

Hezbollah has the capability to dwarf the massacres of October 7 and cause many times the number of deaths. It must eventually be dealt with, especially if Israel seeks to deal a devastating blow to the Iran-led "Axis of Resistance," which is attacking the Jewish State on seven fronts. In addition, if Israel is serious about ensuring that the Islamic Republic never acquires nuclear weapons capability, it will need to remove Iran's most vicious and powerful proxy in the region.

It is certainly a difficult task and not one to be taken lightly, but it is clear that all other options have been tried and have failed. Entering into war is not an enjoyable or enviable task, but throughout history, wars have led to enduring peaceful solutions. It is not a matter of if Israel has to go to war with Hezbollah, but when. Eventually, it will have to forcefully defeat the Shi'ite Islamist army – the question is whether it will do so after a massive invasion and attack on Israel, with unprecedented bloodshed, or before.

It is unfortunately clear what the inevitable answer must be.

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

The Uphill Struggle to Break German Ties with Hamas

By Benjamin Weinthal

Source: <https://www.meforum.org/65452/the-uphill-struggle-to-break-german-ties-with>

Jan 14 – Front organizations maintained by illegal Islamist organizations are continuing to conduct business-as-usual in a number of European countries, despite the efforts of counter Islamist campaigners. Recent events in Germany, involving *Focus on Western Islamism (FWI)* reporters demonstrate the effectiveness of public pressure on bodies enabling these activities. Much, however, remains to be done.

The mayor of Stuttgart recently deleted references to a pro-Hamas charity that raises money for a designated terrorist organization from the municipality's website. That's good news, but the next step is to



stop the organization from conducting its banking in the city. It's not a slam dunk, given the difficulties in getting Stuttgart Mayor Frank Nopper to move against the organization in question, the Palästinakomitee Stuttgart.



Nopper didn't remove the entry highlighting Palästinakomitee Stuttgart from his city's website because it provides funds to terror-supporters in Gaza. Instead, he made the decision in response to the threat of a lawsuit from an Israeli legal organization and numerous journalistic inquiries from *FWI*.

"October 7 wasn't enough for the mayor of Stuttgart to act?" asked Rabbi Abraham Cooper, director of global action at the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center. " Hamas suicide bombings? Massive missile attacks? Its genocidal antisemitic founding document wasn't enough? Disgusting!"

The decision was made public when Susanne Kaufmann, a spokeswoman for Nopper, told *FWI* in an email dated December 28 that "Based on a careful examination of current developments, the state capital Stuttgart has decided to no longer list the Palästinakomitee Stuttgart as a cultural association on the city's homepage."

It was a change of policy from mid-November when Kaufmann [invoked bogus legal excuses](#) after this reporter contacted the mayor about Stuttgart enabling material support for jihadi terrorists on its website.

Nitsana Darshan-Leitner, a lawyer who runs the Israel Law Center, which specializes in combating terror finance, told *FWI* "It is outrageous that the Stuttgart Palestine Committee, a Hamas front organization, would be allowed by the City of Stuttgart to post its information on its homepage. They are plainly soliciting funds for the Islamic terrorist groups in Gaza."

Darshan-Leitner added that "It's shocking that only two months after the brutal murder of German citizen, Shani Louk, by Hamas terrorists from Gaza, that Stuttgart's Mayor was so resistant to shutting down this source of funding to her murderers. Shani's blood calls out from the ground for justice."

The controversy surrounding Stuttgart's aid to the pro-Hamas group came to a head in December when Israeli diplomats pushed Nopper to remove pro-Hamas propaganda from the taxpayer-funded city website. Israeli officials acted after this reporter forwarded articles and background information to Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Israeli embassy in Berlin.

The German city of Bremen was much quicker to act, [expunging straight away contact information for a pro-Hamas group](#), Bremer Friedensforum, from its municipal website after *FWI* contacted officials about the organization's agenda in late October.

While the Palästinakomitee Stuttgart can no longer count on Stuttgart municipal officials to promote its work, it apparently still [conducts](#) its banking in the city, in contravention of German law. *FWI* has learned



that Stuttgart-based bank, Landesbank Baden-Württemberg (LBBW), provides an account to the PCS. (Stuttgart is the capital of the German state Baden-Württemberg.)

It's not something that bank officials are eager to talk about. Bernd Wagner, a spokesman for the LBBW, told *FWI* "At the outset, we would like to make it clear that we strongly condemn Hamas's terrorist attack on Israel. As a German company, we take a clear stance against any form of hatred and antisemitism." Wagner added, "Please understand that LBBW is not allowed to and cannot provide any information about individual customer relationships due to banking secrecy in Germany."

Public officials are not more forthcoming. A spokesperson for Germany's Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community told *FWI* that "It is the responsibility of the competent security authorities and ultimately the judiciary to answer this question. The Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community cannot comment on this."

When *FWI* asked the German federal ministry of finance for a response about LBBW's alleged enabling of Hamas, a spokesperson said "Please understand though that we cannot comment on individual cases. If you have questions regarding the LBBW, please contact them directly."

FWI turned to the German Federal Financial Supervisory Authority (BaFin) for answers. A BaFin spokesman told *FWI* "BaFin expects the institutions it supervises to comply with the law. ... BaFin investigates and takes supervisory action within the scope of its powers if the institutions it supervises violate legal requirements."

According to the BaFin spokesman, "Irrespective of this, BaFin maintains a regular and ad hoc dialogue with the government agencies involved in the prevention of terrorism and the fight against its financing. This also applies to financial support for Hamas and its sub-groups, which are designated as a terrorist organisation."

Palästinakomitee Stuttgart did not respond to numerous inquiries from *FWI*.

The State of Baden-Württemberg and Stuttgart's tolerance for the LBBW is an embarrassment for the state and municipal governments because they own a substantial part of the LBBW. Rachel Ehrenfeld, a counter-terrorism expert, told *FWI* that "It is disturbing that the appeals to the mayor, the state and the German government did not result in closing the Hamas and the BDS accounts, as their laws dictate. Apparently, they don't wish to upset Turkey, Iran, and Qatar, the leading sponsors of Hamas."

All of this helps explain why the state of Baden-Württemberg is a stronghold for pro-Islamist organizations and movements. According to a recent [domestic intelligence agency report](#), there are currently 70 active Hezbollah operatives in Baden-Württemberg. After massive Israeli and American pressure on Berlin, Germany's Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community outlawed all Hezbollah activities in 2020. Despite the ban of Hezbollah on paper, the Baden-Württemberg Green party governor Winfried Kretschmann—a former Maoist—has not clamped down on Hezbollah's activities. The failure of LBBW—and its public owners—to pull the plug on the Palästinakomitee Stuttgart account is emblematic of a larger Islamist problem in the southwestern German state.

[Benjamin Weinthal](#), a Milstein Writing Fellow at the Middle East Forum, reports on Israel, Iran, Syria, Turkey and Europe for Fox News Digital.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: If I remember well and not mistaken, Germany was also involved in provision CWA components in Iraq and nuclear equipment to Iran. *Business über alles!*

HSToday Expert Threat Forecast: Part One – Terrorism

By Kristina Tanasichuk

Source: <https://www.hstoday.us/featured/hstoday-expert-threat-forecast-part-one-terrorism/>

Jan 16 – *Homeland Security Today* is proud to share our Editorial Board and expert community's 2024 Threat Forecast. In an election year, with tremendous risks and vulnerabilities facing the nation, we take stock each year by asking our cadre of experienced homeland security practitioners what they would like to share with you, our community of readers. This year is our most comprehensive collection to date from a diverse group of professionals who have served both in and outside government.

This year's piece is presented in three parts:

1. **Terrorism**- experts discuss both external and internal threats from terrorists, terrorist groups, and lone wolves.
2. **Cyber & Advanced Technology** – experts discuss the varied and persistent threats from cyber attackers and from rapidly advancing technology.
3. **Internal Threat** – this year many of our experts cited the numerous threats to our nation and our democracy from internal threats.



Key takeaways:

- Internal dissension and disagreement puts America and its institutions at great peril, from our elections to foreign policy to border security.
- Misinformation is misunderstood and our ability to combat it will determine the outcome of many critical challenges facing the country.
- Misunderstanding the activity, strength, and strategy of foreign nation's like Iran, China, Russia, North Korea, and foreign terrorist groups like Hezbollah, Hamas, Al-Qaeda, and ISIS leads to a heightened risk and threat environment
- Our nation must devote more focus to strategic foresight and mitigate against "strategic surprise" by nurturing our people's understanding, and mastery of, complexity.
- Allowing the potential of AI and quantum computing to benefit us while balancing the need for security will be pivotal to our future – collaboration is key to understanding the technology and its implications.
- Specific threats like lone wolf terrorism, drones, biological threats, and vulnerabilities like lack of preparedness for natural disasters, continue to increase
- Ransomware is increasing exponentially and poses a considerable threat to critical infrastructure.

Part I: TERRORISM

The global counterterrorism strategies in the Middle East have been overfocused on ISIS and Al-Qaeda and their regional affiliates and have ignored the strengthening Shia militia groups backed by Iran. These [militia groups](#) have been even more capable than ISIS in Iraq to threaten the US's regional interests since 2018. In Syria, they are well-settled and operate under the command of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The Global Terrorism and Trends Analysis Center (GTTAC) Records of Incidents Database (GRID) recorded 518 terrorist attacks by Iran-backed militia groups worldwide in 2021, which accounted for 6.2 percent of total incidents of the same year. It was 6 percent, with 440 attacks in 2022. The post-Hamas October 7 attacks period has recorded how these groups are capable of targeting American facilities in the Middle East. For instance, the newly formed Islamic Resistance in Iraq was able to [conduct](#) tens of rockets and missile attacks in the region. It should be noted that Hezbollah deserves particular attention in the list of terrorist groups backed by Iran. The group acts like a transnational criminal group with its involvement in trafficking and smuggling activities, as well as like a terrorist group that is involved in conflicts in the Middle East. Hezbollah [conducted](#) more than 200 terrorist attacks in the first month of the October 7 attacks, and 2024 will likely be recording increasing attacks by Hezbollah and other Iran-backed militia groups.

One of the consequences of the September 11, 2001 attacks in the world was its impact on the relationships between the Western world and Muslim countries. The generalizations and accusations about the Muslim communities created gaps, and both sides became biased toward each other for many years. These gaps were exploited and filled by jihadist ideologies in the Middle East and Africa (MENA), and these regions recorded the mushrooming of jihadist terror groups in many MENA countries. The counterterrorism strategies of the Western have focused on closing these gaps and establishing bridges with the Muslim world. As a result, these biases have faded over the years. However, Hamas's October 7 terrorist attacks have damaged these bridges. Debates have revolved around whether Palestinians or Israelis are right in their causes but ignored Hamas's capacity to use acts of terrorism and Israel's overreactions that bring collateral damages. The results of Hamas's October 7 terrorist attacks have already exceeded the borders of the region and have significant impacts worldwide. The radicalization trends within the Muslim communities will likely increase in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Salafi-jihadist terrorist groups will continue to exploit ongoing conflict in the region and aim to get more recruits and funding.

The global coalitions against ISIS and Al Qaeda have made terrorism the most critical issue. This period also has recorded how non-democratic regimes have exploited terrorism. Seeing terrorism as a strong and convincing term, these regimes have labeled the opposition as terrorists using scant and ungrounded evidence. Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Iran are several countries that exploit terrorism and accuse the opposition of terrorists. For example, the GRID [recorded](#) 432 terrorist attacks, committed mainly by the PKK terrorist organization, from January 2018 to 2023 in Turkiye, but the Turkish government has [launched](#) more than 2.2 million terrorist investigations against its own people in the same period. These non-democratic regimes will likely continue to exploit counterterrorism strategies and repress their own people with ungrounded terrorism charges. It is crucial for the Western World to be aware of how these regimes exploit terrorism and harm counterterrorism strategies.

Mahmut Cengiz, Ph.D.

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While terrorist group use and exploitation of technology is not a recent development (e.g. al Qaeda’s Asrar al Mujahideen encryption tool; exploitation of Tor Browser or Cyberghost VPN, etc.), **their current strength does not primarily stem from their capacity to produce or own sophisticated technologies but rather their aptitude in leveraging available technologies alongside more traditional, less sophisticated automated data collection and dissemination tools** (e.g. bots). The exploitation of generative AI remains particularly worrisome, as it allows for creation of new extremist and terrorist content (e.g. *images, memes, deepfakes, etc.*). For instance, although most of the deepfakes shared by terrorist groups online exhibit poor quality, rendering them discernible to even untrained observers, terrorist groups continue to demonstrate their potential to exploit deepfake technologies to engage in sophisticated targeting campaigns centered around disinformation, misleading content, and discrediting counter-messaging. Terrorist group exploitation of AI technology has the potential to significantly engulf existing social media content detection and removal infrastructures. Case in point, the speed and scale with which new terrorist content is created may present long-term challenges in terms of timely detection and swift removal of such content from online platforms. Equally confounding is the fact that current hash-based detection systems may become overwhelmed by voluminous and constant modifications to existing terrorist content, coupled with sophisticated “*deep learning*” models designed to assimilate insights from previous removal and take-down efforts and aid terrorists in channeling a constant flow of evasive terrorist content.

In 2024, the counterterrorism efforts should focus on observing and understanding terrorist group historical and current adaptability to AI-driven technologies and the manner in which such technologies serve to facilitate recruitment, spread ideologies, and disseminate terrorist content. The vast repositories of terrorist content online (“*digital libraries*”) and the widespread exploitation of encrypted social media apps further underline the danger posed by terrorist groups in the way of mobilizing support, providing access to terrorist content, and enabling immersive settings for radicalization and training terrorist attack scenarios. Lastly, the advancement of Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) and sophisticated AI tools and methodologies stand poised to facilitate real-time threat assessments and analyses of terrorist group activity online and beyond.

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For the past four years, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and his leadership have held an annual rally, attended by thousands, for the assassination of former head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps – Qasem Soleimani. This event has become a pseudo “State of the Union” in which Iranian leadership sets out their “goals” for avenging and carrying out the late Soleimani’s military strategy.

During the January 2022 commemoration Khamenei and his deputies promised revenge against specific former U.S. officials for the killing of Soleimani. In 2023, Ayatollah Khamenei and other Iranian leadership directed their efforts at strengthening the “Ring of Fire” – an amalgamation of strategic Iranian proxy military capabilities from Iraq through Syria, Lebanon, Gaza and Yemen. Of particular note, they emphasized transforming HAMAS and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza from “fighting with stones” to a heavily armed and capable fighting force, noting that Iran’s enemies would not “sleep easy;” foreshadowing HAMAS’ terrorist attack on October 7th. They called for use of cyber-attacks and media messaging as elements of Iranian military capability. We are witnessing this real-time as U.S. infrastructure has seen an uptick in cyber-attacks and social media networks flooded with disinformation aimed at influencing domestic U.S. politics. And Iranian proxies have played a significant role in attacks on Israeli assets and global trade through the Bab-Al-Mandab Strait and Red Sea, and on U.S. Forces and diplomatic assets in the region. Additionally, several arrests have been made in Brazil, Argentina, and Europe related to Iranian Proxy terrorist threats since the Israel-HAMAS war started.

On January 3, 2024, thousands once again gathered to commemorate the assassination of Soleimani. While this event was meant to be an address aimed at unifying proxies across the globe, two bombs killed approximately 80 attendees and wounded hundreds of others. On January 4th ISIS took credit for the bombings which is consistent with a similar attack in 2017. ISIS was likely taking advantage of Iran’s focus vis-à-vis the Israel-HAMAS war to strike a blow against a distracted regime. While ISIS is an enemy of both the US and Israel, they also were a chief target of Soleimani given their attacks against Shiite entities in the region. This attack, combined with continued escalation of conflict in the region, will undoubtedly heighten tension and probability of additional threats globally.

The Homeland Security community must be ready to prevent and mitigate the action that could result from the exponentially increasing conflict in the region.

“We must be ready for attacks on U.S. bases and international trade routes as well as heightened cyber-attacks on U.S. critical infrastructure and instigation of locally based actors. International locations where Iran proxies operate, such as South America, should be on a higher alert.”



We must plan for increased disinformation and campaigns across social media seeking to garner support for the “resistance cause” across the Middle East, Europe, and the U.S.

If we have learned anything from the January 2023 address and increasing intensity of attacks in the Middle East region, it is that the U.S. and regional partners should take such threats with the utmost seriousness.

Moshe Nelson

**Former Legislative Fellow, U.S. House Subcommittee for the Middle East
Partner, Guidehouse – Defense and National Security Practice**

Ransomware attacks, a persistent threat in recent years, are expected to continue their upward trajectory in 2024. Cybercriminals are likely to target not only corporations, but also critical infrastructure and municipal services. The potential for disruption and financial loss remains significant, necessitating organizations to prioritize robust backup solutions, table-top exercises, and vulnerability assessments to mitigate the impact of ransomware.

Attacks on the homeland by domestic extremist groups have been on the rise in the last several years, spurred on by political strife, conspiracy theories, overseas wars and other tensions. This trend will continue as we march closer and closer to the Presidential election. These attacks will **be** motivated by the spread of misinformation propagated throughout social media channels.

The expanding Internet of Things landscape will introduce new vulnerabilities in 2024. Many IoT devices lack adequate security measures, making them attractive targets for hackers. Addressing IoT security issues promptly is essential, as these devices continue to become more integrated into daily lives and critical infrastructure. Manufacturers and consumers must prioritize security features, firmware updates and robust authentication mechanisms to protect against IoT-related threats.

Lastly, **supply chain attacks will persist, with threat actors focusing on compromising software and hardware providers to infiltrate downstream targets.** These attacks can have geopolitical roots and significant, far-reaching consequences. Businesses must implement stringent supply chain security measures, conduct thorough vendor assessments, and adopt a proactive approach to detecting and mitigating potential threats.

Brian Harrell

**Former Assistant Secretary for Infrastructure Protection
U.S. Department of Homeland Security**

The threat to the Homeland from drones continues to increase. Drones are dropping contraband into prisons, transporting drugs across borders, disrupting law enforcement operations, evading border patrol officers, delivering explosives to rival gangs and disrupting major sporting events. The NFL alone saw 2200 drone incursions during live games. INTERPOL reported that criminal use of drones has increased by 10 percent over the last year.

This drone threat combined with the border invasion and the highest number of people on the terror watch list is dangerous; the threat level is at the highest ever as stated by FBI Director Christopher Wray due to numerous factors.

Congress continues to slow walk giving the authority for SLTT agencies to detect and mitigate drone threats. Even if Congress passed legislation today, it would take years to train and implement these programs. The clock is ticking and time is running out.

Chief Charles L. Werner (Emeritus-RET)

**Former Acting Deputy State Coordinator & Senior Advisor UAS Program, Virginia Department of Emergency Management
Former Fire Chief, Charlottesville, VA**

**Director, DRONERESPONDERS Public Safety Alliance
Homeland Security Today Person of the Year 2019**

We have multiple military threats, (symmetrical) as well as from non-state actors and terrorist organizations (asymmetrical). We have a significant issue on our borders and are facing an array of new technologies that can be used against our most vital critical infrastructure. I believe **we will experience a significant threat from the use of drones or Unmanned Airborne Systems (UAS) against our Homeland and in particular our transportation infrastructure.** Looking at the use of drones in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and by Houthi rebels to attack international shipping is a clear foreshadowing of the threat we face. Unfortunately, in my opinion we are not ready to face the UAS threat. Unlike our military, our Homeland Security agencies face the challenge of legal restrictions, lack of technology and lack of training against the UAS threat.

John Halinski

**Former Deputy Administrator, U.S. Transportation Security Administration
President, Raloid Corp
Editorial Board Member, Homeland Security Today**



The greatest evolving threat to the homeland in 2024 will come from individual violent perpetrators who fly under the radar, thereby avoiding identity and detection until after they strike. These will include lone wolf terrorists from across the political and religious spectrum, many of whom will not follow any radicalization process but instead react spontaneously to events both at home or overseas. There will also be a growing threat of mass shootings and other forms of violence by individuals who are motivated solely by personal grievances or mental disorders. Since individual violent perpetrators can strike anytime, anywhere without any early warning indicators, they will pose the greatest threat for security personnel in both the public and private sectors.

Jeffrey D. Simon

Author, *The Bulldog Detective: William J. Flynn and America's First War Against the Mafia, Spies, and Terrorists; America's Forgotten Terrorists: The Rise and Fall of the Galleanists*
President, Political Risk Assessment Company

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) management of the Chemical Facility Anti-Terrorism Standards (CFATS) program brings stability to the chemical industry and our nation's high-risk chemical facilities. Its primary objective is preventing acts of terror on these facilities, which play a critical role in the manufacturing, storage, transportation, use, and delivery of essential chemicals used in nearly every U.S. industry, including agriculture, energy, electronics, paint and coatings, water treatment, health care, pharmaceuticals, and more. Initially authorized by Congress in 2006 through the DHS Appropriations Act of 2007 and created in mid-2007, this program, developed in collaboration with, and supported by, regulated industries, requires high-risk chemical facilities to prepare Security Vulnerability Assessments and implement Site Security Plans that meet the risk-based, performance-based security standards appropriate to their unique security challenges and risk-tier level.

Congress has reauthorized the CFATS program four times – each time on an overwhelmingly bipartisan basis. Despite near-unanimous bipartisan support in both chambers of Congress, the CFATS program unexpectedly expired last July and has yet to be reauthorized. The expiration of this program leaves our nation's sensitive chemical facilities grappling with a multitude of national security risks —ranging from physical threats to cyber and emerging artificial intelligence risks. The CFATS program plays an indispensable role in securing our nation's high-risk chemical facilities against potential terrorist threats. *Reinstating the CFATS program is crucial to protecting U.S. critical infrastructure, bolstering supply chain resilience, and preventing the misuse of chemicals for malicious intent.* By implementing robust security measures and risk-based performance standards, CFATS fortifies our defenses, mitigates risks, and enhances the resilience of chemical facilities across the country.

Eric R. Byer

President & CEO, Alliance for Chemical Distribution (ACD)
Editorial Board Member, Homeland Security Today

The greatest evolving threat to our country in the field of biometrics is the increasing sophistication of deepfake technology and its potential to undermine identity verification systems. *Homeland security professionals should be vigilant against malicious actors utilizing advanced AI algorithms to create convincing forged biometric data, compromising the integrity of security protocols.* In 2024, anticipatory measures should include enhanced biometric encryption, continuous system updates, and interdisciplinary collaboration to stay ahead of emerging threats and protect national security.

Antonio J. Trindade

Former Associate Chief, United States Border Patrol
Vice President, Dev Technology Group, Inc.

Kristina Tanasichuk is Executive Editor of Homeland Security Today and CEO of the Government Technology & Services Coalition. She founded GTSC to advance communication and collaboration between the public and private sector in defense of our homeland. A leader in homeland security public private partnership, critical infrastructure protection, cyber security, STEM, innovation, commercialization and much more, she brings to HSToday decades of experience and expertise in the intersection of the public and private sectors in support of our homeland's security. Tanasichuk worked for Chairman Tom Bliley on electric utility restructuring for the House Commerce Committee, represented municipal electric utilities sorting out deregulation, the American Enterprise Institute, a think tank in Washington, D.C. and ran the largest homeland security conference and trade show in the country. Immediately after 9/11 she represented public works departments in homeland security and emergency management. She is also the president and founder of Women in Homeland Security and served as president of InfraGard of the National Capital Region, a member of the Fairfax County Law Enforcement Foundation, the U.S. Coast Guard Enlisted Memorial Foundation and on the Board of USCG Mutual Assistance. She has an MPA from George Mason University and has attended the FBI and DEA Citizens Academies and the Marine



Corps Executive Leadership Program. Most recently she was awarded the "Above & Beyond Award" by the Intelligence & Law Enforcement Training Seminar (INLETS) and was awarded Small Business Person of the Year by AFCEA International.

U.S. to Return Houthis to Terrorism List

By Michael Crowley

Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/16/us/politics/houthis-terrorism-designation.html>



Houthi fighters and tribal supporters during a protest against recent U.S.-led strikes on Houthi targets this week. Credit...Khaled Abdullah/Reuters

Jan 16 – The Biden administration will designate Yemen's Houthi militia as a terrorist organization, partly reimposing penalties it lifted nearly three years ago on the Iran-backed group whose attacks on regional shipping traffic have drawn a U.S. military response. Beginning in mid-February, the United States will consider the Houthis a "specially designated global terrorist" group, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said in a statement on Wednesday, blocking its access to the global financial system, among other penalties. But Biden officials stopped short of applying a second, more severe designation — that of "foreign terrorist organization" — which the Trump administration imposed on the Houthis in its final days. The State Department revoked both designations shortly after President Biden took office in early 2021.

That further step would have made it far easier to prosecute criminally anyone who knowingly provides the Houthis with money, supplies, training or other "material support." But aid groups are already warning that it could also impede humanitarian assistance to Yemen.

The move comes as a response to, and an effort to halt, weeks of Houthi missile and drone attacks on maritime traffic off Yemen's coast. Those attacks, which the group describes as a show of solidarity with Palestinians under Israeli bombardment in Gaza, have forced some major shipping companies to reroute their vessels, leading to delays and higher shipping costs worldwide. After issuing multiple warnings to the Houthis, Mr. Biden ordered dozens of strikes on their facilities in Yemen, although [U.S. officials say](#) the group retains most of its ability to attack commerce in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.



But the designation also reflects an effort to strike a balance, one that protects the flow of desperately needed humanitarian aid to the people of Yemen, who have endured famine, disease and displacement through more than a decade of civil war after the Houthis seized the country's capital in September 2014.

David Schenker, a former assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs in the Trump administration, said the Biden administration had chosen to "split the difference."

"I think they were trying to find a half-measure that would reflect their frustration with the Houthis while trying to minimize the potential risk of further humanitarian hardship," he said.

Hazem al-Assad, a member of the Houthis, said in a statement that the group would not be intimidated by the United States and that the designation would not affect its operations.

U.S. officials worry that branding the Houthis a foreign terrorist organization could cause aid groups to stop sending supplies into Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen, for fear it could be deemed "material support" subject to criminal liability.

"The Houthis must be held accountable for their actions, but it should not be at the expense of Yemeni civilians," Mr. Blinken said in his statement. He added that the United States would work with aid providers and others in the next 30 days before the designation takes effect to help them navigate the new environment.

The Treasury Department will publish licenses authorizing "certain transactions related to the provision of food, medicine and fuel, as well as personal remittances, telecommunications and mail, and port and airport operations on which the Yemeni people rely," Mr. Blinken said.

Despite those assurances, some aid organizations were alarmed by the U.S. action.

Anastasia Moran, associate director for U.S. advocacy at the International Rescue Committee, predicted a "serious chilling effect" from the new designation, which she said would likely "affect Yemeni civilians more than anyone else."

"We are concerned some private-sector actors, including food importers and banks facilitating transactions for humanitarian organizations, may choose to disengage altogether," Ms. Moran said.

According to the United Nations' World Food Program, [Yemen has the world's highest malnutrition rate](#), with at least 2.2 million children under the age of 5 in need of urgent treatment for the condition.

It also remains unclear whether the terrorism designation would jeopardize fragile U.S. and Saudi efforts to construct a lasting peace deal to end the conflict in Yemen. When Mr. Blinken reversed the Trump-era designations in early 2021, American officials said the move would help to facilitate dialogue between the warring parties.

U.S. officials concluded that the risks of action were outweighed by new powers they will have to sanction and prosecute front companies and intermediaries that assist the Houthis, which have developed a formidable military arsenal.

Mr. Blinken said the designation could be removed if the Houthis stopped their aggressive behavior. After Israel's military response in Gaza after the Hamas attacks on Oct. 7, the Houthis have sought to show solidarity with the Palestinians by attacking ships they believe to be bound for Israel. The Houthis, a religiously inspired Shiite group, profess hatred of Israel.

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on Tuesday, Jake Sullivan, Mr. Biden's national security adviser, said that it was important to signal that "the entire world rejects wholesale the idea that a group like the Houthis can basically hijack the world, as they are doing."

U.S. officials have not accused the Houthis of plotting terrorist attacks beyond the region, and the group [has battled Yemen's local affiliate of Al Qaeda](#), according to an October 2023 report by the Sana Center for Strategic Studies.

Yemen's civil conflict was exacerbated by the intervention of neighboring Saudi Arabia and, for a time, the United Arab Emirates, which both regard the Houthis as dangerous proxies for Iran, which lends them financial and military support.

The conflict created a humanitarian catastrophe that Mr. Biden, as a candidate in 2020, vowed to address. Led by Tim Lenderking, the U.S. special envoy for Yemen, the Biden administration helped to secure a truce in the conflict and has been trying to help clinch a lasting peace deal.

Following a debate within the Trump administration, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo designated the Houthis a foreign terrorist organization and a specially designated global terrorist group in mid-January 2021. Iran hawks were eager to punish the Houthis for striking at Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as global shipping. Officials in places like the U.S. Agency for International Development and the United Nations feared the impact of the move on humanitarian aid and said it could lead to famine. In February 2021, less than three weeks after Mr. Biden took office, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken reversed Mr. Pompeo's designations. At the time, Mr. Blinken said that "the designations could have a devastating impact on Yemenis' access to basic commodities like food and fuel," and that the reversals were "intended to ensure that relevant U.S. policies do not impede assistance to those already suffering what has been called the world's worst humanitarian crisis."



Speaking to reporters at a daily briefing, the State Department spokesman, Matthew Miller, said the harsher Trump-era designation of the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organization had “a deterrent effect on groups that really wanted to provide just humanitarian aid, and nothing else.”

Mr. Schenker disputed that characterization, and expressed doubt that the new action would restrain the Houthis. “I don’t think this is going to have a great effect,” he said, adding that the group was “highly ideological” and backed by an emboldened Iran.

In a statement on Tuesday after [The Associated Press first reported](#) the planned action, Senator Tom Cotton, Republican of Arkansas, denounced Mr. Biden’s 2021 removal of the Houthis from the terrorist list as a show of “weakness.”

“Removing them from the list of terror organizations was a deadly mistake and another failed attempt to appease the ayatollah,” Mr. Cotton said, referring to Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

In a statement on Wednesday, Representative Michael McCaul of Texas, the Republican chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, questioned the Biden administration’s decision not to redesignate the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organization, which he said “brings more impact and more penalties” than the specially designated global terrorist label.

Mr. Biden has been contemplating the move for at least two years, telling reporters in January 2022 that restoring the Houthis’ terrorist designation was “under consideration” after the group conducted a lethal cross-border strike on the United Arab Emirates.

Asked by a reporter last week whether he considered the Houthis a terrorist group, Mr. Biden did not equivocate. “I think they are,” he replied.

●► Read also: Returning the [Houthis](#) to the US Terrorist List.

EDITOR’S COMMENT: Canada is [thinking](#) of doing the same. Most probably, when Houthis sink a Canadian-flag vessel.

Revisiting International Law in the Gaza Context

By Nicholas Rostow

Source: <https://www.justsecurity.org/91258/revisiting-international-law-in-the-gaza-context/>

Jan 17 – When it comes to the laws of war, a substantial number of commentators can play the notes but not the music. This essay examines the Hamas-Israel War in light of this ever-evolving body of law. The set of rules has grown from wars and conflict over the last 500 years and is at least partly reflected in codification efforts in the last century. This history explains why little in the Hague or Geneva Conventions (or Protocols) is absolute. The laws of war reflect the unsolvable tension between military necessity and the need to limit engagement with civilian populations. In no conflict has urban warfare been pretty or quick. It is with both feet in this reality that one should consider what the law is and how to apply it. Our verified knowledge of the situation and fighting in Gaza is limited.^[1]

I. Relevant International Law

Israel’s authority to use force and conduct military operations is rooted in international law. Hamas is an armed band and has no legal authority under international or any other law to engage in attacks against Israel and Israelis, including specifically the kind of attacks it favors—missiles launched at civilian targets, terrorist attacks on civilians, and other efforts using force to destroy the State of Israel.^[2]

The relevant international law has two parts—the law governing the resort to force or the *jus ad bellum* and the law governing military operations during the conflict, the *jus in bello*.^[3] Both use similar terms to summarize their requirements—“necessity” and “proportionality”—but with different meanings. The *jus ad bellum* requires that a State’s use of force in self-defense be necessary: “necessity” means that there is no reasonable alternative to a use of force to achieve the goals of self-defense, namely, the termination of the situation giving rise to the right to use force in self-defense in the first place. It is the last reasonable resort. “Proportionality” in this context flows naturally from “necessity:” it is the minimum force reasonably required to bring an end to the situation giving rise to the right of self-defense and to prevent its recurrence. The ideal of economy of force is embedded in notions of proportionality.

The lawful purposes encapsulated in the right to use force in self-defense inescapably influence the conduct of military operations and the application of the *jus in bello*. Under the *jus in bello*, necessity means military necessity—the advantage to be attained by attacking a particular military target. The *jus in bello* standard to which everybody points is set forth in [Article 57](#) of the 1977 Protocol I Additional to the 1949 Geneva Conventions: “those who plan or decide upon an attack shall ... refrain from deciding to launch any attack which may be expected to cause



incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.” States, even those States such as Israel and the United States that are not parties to the Protocol, accept this statement as accurately reflecting customary international law binding on all States. Proportionality means that commanders must weigh the advantage from attacking the target against possible or reasonably foreseeable civilian or other collateral damage. At the same time, the selection of military targets and the determination of their importance are made in the context of efforts to achieve the lawful purposes of the use of force.

II. Hamas-Israel War

Hamas has waged war against Israel almost continuously since the Gaza elections in 2006 made it the governing authority in the Gaza Strip. To celebrate its election victory, Hamas launched missiles against Israel, captured Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier, and attacked Israeli civilians.^[4] Hamas has repeated such attacks almost continuously since then. Substantial conflict erupted on four occasions before October 7, 2023: 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2021. In each case, Israel’s strategic choices were difficult, and the use of force against Hamas was one lawful option.^[5]

Hamas’s stated goals include the elimination of Israel.^[6] In context, that is a genocidal goal, completely at odds with, and in violation of, international law. On October 7, 2023, Hamas forces invaded Israel and launched barrages of missiles at Israel from cities within highly populated urban areas of the Gaza Strip. Hamas instructed its fighters, literally, “Kill as many people and take as many hostages as possible.” Hamas directed the attacks from a system of subterranean tunnels under cities, mosques, hospitals, schools, and other civilian centers in the Gaza Strip. With or without the consent of the governed, Hamas already had turned the Gaza Strip into an urbanized fortress, which could not be attacked without causing substantial destruction and casualties. In fact, the purpose of Hamas’s actions on October 7, 2023 was to ensure that Israel would attack Hamas fighters in the urban context of Gaza. This Hamas strategic decision itself violated *jus in bello* prohibitions on locating military installations in or near civilian infrastructure of whatever kind. The continuing attacks confronted Israel with no alternative to a use of force against Hamas with the object of putting an end to the attacks. No diplomatic, international effort has been successful in trying to persuade Hamas to give up its goals and determination to fight and destroy the State of Israel and its Jewish inhabitants (notwithstanding the 2017 Hamas Charter statement that Hamas’s “conflict is with the Zionist project not with the Jews because of their religion”). No such diplomatic effort today has a reasonable chance of success. The most international diplomacy has achieved with respect to the series of Hamas-Israel conflicts since 2006 has been ceasefires, which, rather than being a prelude to peace, only have allowed Hamas to rebuild its forces and attack once again.

Israel’s use of force against Hamas has had a number of related objectives and characteristics. The foremost goal has been the elimination of Hamas as a demonstrated, continuing, lethal threat to Israel and innocent Israeli civilians. Hamas does not regard such Israelis as innocent. That is the message of the Hamas Charter as a whole. In this long Hamas-Israel conflict, tunnels have proved essential to Hamas’s ability in secret to arm itself, manufacture weapons and maintain weapons caches, establish command and control centers, and hide and launch missiles at Israel. Destruction or at least neutralization of those tunnels is a reasonable and lawful military objective.

Hamas has raised the use of civilian cover for military operations to a high art. The tunnels run throughout the Strip, beneath civilian population centers, below mosques and other religious structures, beneath hospitals and schools. Often, entrances are built into those structures. As one report put it, the tunnels compound “the immense difficulties of fighting in a dense urban environment.”

As a matter of law, any civilian facility that is repurposed for military use, whether an apartment building, a house of worship, a hospital, or a school, loses its civilian status and becomes a lawful target if its importance warrants targeting. Proportionality constraints operate but the enemy force has put remaining non-combatant civilians at risk. In the present conflict, Hamas has used all of these and other civilian structures to advance its military goals. The most notorious example is the case of the al-Shifa hospital, now recognized by U.S. declassified intelligence and other sources as linked to the tunnel system and used as an Hamas command center until only “shortly before” the Israeli military went in. (In the 2014 conflict, Amnesty International reported that “Hamas forces used the abandoned areas of al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City, including the outpatients’ clinic area, to detain, interrogate, torture and otherwise ill-treat suspects.”)

The use of civilian structures for military operations transforms them into military objects that lawfully can be attacked. Civilians who volunteer to assist military operations from such repurposed structures lose their civilian status. (Military tend to identify people as combatants or non-combatants, which clarifies status for operational purposes.) Using civilian structures for military purposes inevitably puts all other civilians at risk because the military purpose makes the structure, as in the case of Israel’s conflict with Hamas, a lawful and important military target. In the urban warfare being conducted in the particular facts relating to Gaza, Israel’s use of force necessarily involves destruction of infrastructure as part of attacks on Hamas’s tunnel system and, as a matter of international law, depending on the



circumstances that would make an attack reasonable or unreasonable, would not be “excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage” that Israel anticipates. The fact that a commander may not be certain about the actions of civilians that were civilian but have now become legitimate military targets compounds the difficulty of battlefield decision-making.^[7] As General Wolfe, the victor on the Plains of Abraham, wrote in the eighteenth century, war “is an option of difficulties.”^[8]

In its effort to destroy Hamas’s tunnel system and structures, Israel has inflicted [enormous physical damage](#) on the Gaza Strip. While [not even Israel disputes](#) that there also have been substantial numbers of civilian casualties, claims by Hamas that Israel has killed more than 20,000 civilians and fighters are impossible to verify at this time. In past Israel clashes with Palestinians, casualty claims made during the course of operations have not been substantiated by subsequent investigation.^[9]

Documentation is widespread of Israeli efforts to warn Gazans of impending attacks, urging them to leave specific areas and otherwise take cover. Such warnings comply with customary international law requirements to distinguish between civilian and military targets and to take all “feasible” steps to ensure that targets are not civilian and to protect the civilian population.^[10] Israel’s efforts in this regard are public. The problem is that Gazans have few options with respect to leaving the scene of battle because Hamas has so constructed its military infrastructure as to be almost inseparable from the civilian population of Gaza itself.^[11] It is hard to escape the conclusion that maximizing civilian casualties among Gazans so as to make Israel appear legally and morally culpable is a Hamas strategic goal. Multiple [statements](#) by the group’s senior officials support that assessment. One of the most notorious was by the group’s leader Ayman Shanaa in a television interview in late November. He [said](#), “Let us examine history. Let us look at Algeria, Vietnam, and other countries that we liberated. How many did they sacrifice? Millions of martyrs. Therefore, I am saying that there is a high price to pay on the path of resistance, and we will bear this price.” In addition, since 1948, successive Egyptian governments have insisted that the Gaza Strip is not part of Egypt even while they administered it and [refused](#) to allow Gazans to move to Egypt.

Conclusion

War is not a game. Urban warfare makes especially difficult the process of evaluating costs and benefits and reaching reasonable conclusions about target selection. Efforts to notify inhabitants of an area for targeting so that they can move out of the way are characteristic of Israeli methods of warfare and consistent with contemporary international law outlined in treaties that accurately reflect customary international law. In the case of the current Hamas-Israel conflict, Israel has told civilians to move out of harm’s way; at the same time, Hamas and to some extent Egypt have impeded the ability of such civilians to move.

By turning so much of Gaza into a fortress, laced with tunnels containing command centers and weapons and through which troops move on their attack vectors, Hamas intentionally has put civilians at risk. Doing so does not mean Israel’s use of force against Hamas is disproportionate, [much less](#), as the South African submission to the International Court of Justice claims, genocide. Hamas’s celebration of Palestinian casualties and calculated acceptance of physical destruction in Gaza brought on by its own actions against Israel, make clear that any alternative to Israel’s campaign must protect Israelis and Palestinians from Hamas.

Notes

[1] The starkly different [Israeli](#) and [South African](#) accounts of the source of much of the infrastructure damage in Gaza and the identity of the known dead before the International Court of Justice on January 11 and 12, 2024, drive this point home.

[2] Hamas is not a State. It therefore does not possess a right of self-defense. The UN Charter affirmation of the right of self-defense is clear on the point: “Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security.” UN Charter Art. 51. Only States may be members of the United Nations. *Id.* at Art. 4.

[3] *Jus in bello* is supposed to be interchangeable as a term with “the laws of war,” “the law of armed conflict,” and “international humanitarian law.” The Latin term and “the laws of war” focus attention on the fact that, as the St. Petersburg Declaration of 1868 put it, the goal is “alleviating as much as possible the calamities of war; [and] That the only legitimate object which States should endeavor to accomplish during war is to weaken the military forces of the enemy.” In contemporary *jus in bello*, this Declaration is regarded as the source of the notion that means of warfare causing unnecessary suffering are prohibited. Adam Roberts & Richard Guelff, eds., *Documents on the Laws of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 1989), 29. Terms like “international humanitarian law” introduce unnecessary confusion about the boundary between international human rights law and the laws of war. Therefore, this essay uses the Latin, *jus in bello*, because it emphasizes that the laws of war govern the specific subject of military operations. See also W. Michael Reisman & Chris Antoniou, eds., *The Laws of War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xxi-xxii.

[4] After 5 years, Hamas exchanged Shalit for more than 1,000 prisoners in Israeli jails. Gershon Baskin, [“I Negotiated Israel’s Hardest Hostage Deal: Here’s What’s Next in Gaza.”](#) *The New York Times*, Oct. 21, 2023.

[5] See Michael Oren, [“How Gaza Became Israel’s Unsolvable Problem.”](#) *Mosaicmagazine.com*, June 7, 2021.

[6] See the 2017 version of the Hamas Charter (e.g., Arts. 14-23, among other things declaring the nullification of all international legal documents underpinning the existence of the State of Israel (the “Zionist Project” in the words of



the Hamas Charter). For a discussion about how Hamas changed its charter as a matter of tactics and strategic rebranding, see Colin P. Clarke, "[Hamas's Strategic Rebranding](#)," TheRANDBlog, May 17, 2017.

[7] See, e.g., U.S. Department of Defense, [Law of War Manual](#) (Updated July 2023) at §5.12.3.4.

[8] James N. Wolfe to William Rickson, Nov. 5, 1757, Beckles Willson, *The Life and Letters of James Wolfe* (London: William Heineman, 1909), 339.

[9] The 2002 Jenin episode is a cautionary tale. Israel was accused of causing at least 1,000 Palestinian deaths. The reality turned out to be fewer than 60. See, e.g., Martin Sieff, "[How Europe's Media Lost Out](#)," UPI, May 5, 2002; Mark Steyn, "[The UN is Running Out of Blind Eyes to Turn](#)," *The Daily Telegraph*, Apr. 20, 2002.

[10] See, e.g., Protocol I, *supra* note 3, at Arts. 57-58. See also the U.S. construction that this requirement shall be applied reasonably. U.S. Dept't of Defense, [Law of War Manual](#), *supra* note 7, at §5.14.

[11] That population is estimated to be about 2 million or more. No census seems ever to have been taken.

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EDITOR'S COMMENT: Perhaps it is time to revise International Law and add a new chapter about the "Terrorism War".

The Hidden Cost of Being Branded a Terrorist by the U.S. Government

By Masood Farivar

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20240117-the-hidden-cost-of-being-branded-a-terrorist-by-the-u-s-government>

Jan 17 – Mirakhmat Muminov's American dream came crashing down on a snowy road near Great Falls, Montana.

It was December 2009. Muminov, then 30, was a refugee from persecution in his native Uzbekistan. He had recently obtained an American green card and bought his own truck, hauling cars from the East Coast to the Canadian border. He thought he had found freedom and opportunity in his adopted country.

But as he waited outside a service center, he had a surprise encounter with agents of the Department of Homeland Security.

With guns drawn, the agents forced him on the slush-covered ground, handcuffed and searched him, and then drove him to a DHS office in Great Falls.

There, in small room with blackened windows, they grilled him for hours about his past, his faith, his mosque.

Who are you? Are you a Shia? Are you a Sunni? Do you speak Arabic? Do you understand Arabic? Do you like America?

After more than four hours of relentless questioning, the agents released Muminov without any charges, saying only that he had been picked up randomly.

Muminov felt as if he were back in Uzbekistan, where security forces routinely rounded up devout Muslims and political activists like him. Shaken by his ordeal, Muminov sought guidance from the Council on American-Islamic Relations, an advocacy group.

"What you're describing," Muminov recalls a CAIR lawyer telling him, "is what we see over and over all across the country."

Then, the lawyer dropped a bombshell. "You're definitely on the watchlist," the lawyer declared.

Muminov was stunned. He had been fully vetted before being allowed to migrate to the United States three years earlier.

It must be a mistake, he thought, sure he could clear his name with a lawyer's help.

"I was saying, 'This is America. You can fight for your rights,'" Muminov recalls telling CAIR. "I could file a lawsuit or a complaint. I was saying to the CAIR officials, 'Let's do the file.'"

But exonerating himself proved harder than he imagined. Once on the watchlist, it was nearly impossible to get off. There was no appeal process. Warned by CAIR, he braced for security hassles at airports and border crossings. That was the price of being watchlisted. Little did he know that this was just the beginning of a long and painful struggle that would upend his life and eventually force him into a tough decision to relocate out of the country he'd come to love.

For over a decade, Muminov faced endless obstacles and setbacks as he sought to become an American citizen, secure his wife a green card and bring his widowed mother to America.

"Unfortunately," he says, "all my nightmares started a couple of years after arriving in America."

Terrorism Suspects

Except in its details, Muminov's story is unexceptional. It exemplifies the experience of thousands of others swept up by a screening system the FBI credits with keeping the country safe, but which critics see as an unconstitutional tool that ensnares innocent Muslims.



The watchlist, created after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, contains more than 1.5 million names of “known or suspected terrorists,” including an estimated 15,000 U.S. citizens and permanent residents. A CAIR analysis found that 98% of the names on the list are Muslim names such as Mohamed and Ali.

The FBI says it only watchlists “people reasonably suspected of terrorism” based on “specific intelligence-related criteria.”

“Individuals are not watchlisted based solely on race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, or any First Amendment-protected activities,” the FBI said in response to a list of questions from VOA.

But security agencies take no chances.

“When there’s a close call to be made, there is no reward for erring on the side of, ‘I don’t think I have enough here to watchlist someone,’” said Jeffrey Kahn, a former Justice Department official and a current law professor at Southern Methodist University who has written extensively about the watchlist.

That means anyone can land on the list based on the most tenuous link to terrorism, from posting a suspicious social media comment to being related or associated with someone already on the list. A recently leaked version of the No Fly List, a subset of the larger watchlist, had names of children as young as 10.

Most people discover they’re on the list at an airport when they are issued a boarding pass stamped with “SSSS,” short for Special Security Screening Selection.

They’re thoroughly searched and questioned before being allowed to board their flight. But their troubles don’t end there.

Because the FBI shares the list with thousands of entities outside the federal government, from financial institutions to local police departments, people may be affected in unexpected ways.

Some have had their bank accounts closed. Others have been blocked from wiring money to relatives back home. A Massachusetts man was denied a gun license. Muminov failed to get a coveted federal ID that gives drivers access to the secure areas of sea ports. But many other immigrants like Muminov face another harsh reality: yearslong delays or denials of their applications for citizenship, an immigration status changes and visas for their relatives.

The immigration consequences of being watchlisted can be “far-reaching,” said Jennifer Nimer, a former CAIR attorney who is now in private practice and represents Muminov.

The punitive consequences can extend to friends and family seeking visas to the United States.

“When a consular officer sees a potential or an existing database hit, it’s a much safer option to either deny or refuse to decide rather than to be the one officer that let in the person that later poses a threat to the United States,” said Maryland-based immigration lawyer Sandra Grossman.

In recent years, CAIR and other civil rights groups have repeatedly sued the FBI and other federal agencies on behalf of watchlisted Muslim Americans. The strategy has helped get a handful of people off the list.

Muminov has not been so lucky. He is part of a 2018 class action lawsuit that is still pending in federal court in Maryland.

In September, as the watchlist turned 20, CAIR filed a new class action lawsuit in Boston on behalf of a dozen watchlisted Muslim Americans, accusing the federal government of sentencing them “to lifetime second-class citizenship.”

Like Muminov, several plaintiffs named in the lawsuit have faced immigration woes.

Ahmad Mirzay, a permanent U.S. resident from Afghanistan since 1999, has been twice denied citizenship because of his watchlist status.

Nusratillah Abdukhamidov, an Uzbek national and permanent U.S. resident, has had his citizenship case placed in indefinite “administrative processing” — government lingo for a background security check.

Talha Mohamed, a mosque leader and asylum-seeker from Egypt, claims the State Department denied visas to his mother and revoked a visa for one of his friends.

The lawsuit wants the government to reform “the watchlisting system to eliminate the discriminatory focus on Muslim identity and religious practice.” Several agencies named in the lawsuit declined to comment when contacted by VOA.

While critics such as the American Civil Liberties Union decry the watchlist as an “affront to the constitution,” many lawmakers see it as a useful national security and public safety tool.

Republicans want border agents to use the list to stop suspected terrorists from crossing into the U.S., while Democrats want people on the list banned from buying guns, arguing that would prevent mass shootings and domestic terrorism.

‘Moderate and Modern Muslim’

Muminov says his life is an open book to the FBI. Born in 1979 when Uzbekistan was still a Soviet republic, he grew up in a secular family that indulged in American movies, and dreamed of visiting the U.S.

But following Uzbekistan’s independence in 1991, Muminov, like many young Uzbeks, turned to religion, praying five times a day.



To the authorities, that simple act of piety was a potential red flag. Fearing an Islamist takeover, the government of Islam Karimov, a former Soviet apparatchik, cracked down on religion, building its own list of devout Muslims.

“If I pray five times a day, they call [me] a religious person, but they don’t know there are 1 billion people praying five times a day,” Muminov says.

A long-time Uzbek friend describes Muminov as a “moderate and modern Muslim.”

“If I thought he was an extremist, if I saw him as dangerous, I wouldn’t come close to him,” said the friend, who has known Muminov for 20 years.

But Muminov’s faith was not the only reason for his troubles. While a student, he began following a charismatic cleric named Obidkhon Qori Nazarov.

Muminov says Nazarov championed democracy and opposed terrorism, but Karimov’s government viewed him as a threat, banning him from leading religious services and gatherings and eventually forcing him into exile.

Muminov clung to his faith, speaking out in online posts and interviews with foreign news outlets against the Karimov government’s repressive policies.

“He’s just straightforward,” the friend says. “If he sees something that’s against religion or against society, he’d say, ‘Hey, that’s wrong.’”

Muminov’s activism made him an enemy of the state. He says he was expelled from a Ph.D. program and arrested several times, once when he tried to flee to neighboring Kazakhstan in 2004.

“They tortured me for almost three days,” he says.

Arrested again later that year, he says he literally ran away from police “with my only two feet and \$50 in my pocket,” joining several dozen other dissidents living in exile in Kazakhstan.

He was 24 and a well-known activist.

Over the next two years, the U.N. refugee agency in Kazakhstan helped resettle several dozen dissident Uzbeks in Western countries.

Muminov was given several options. Without a second thought, he picked the U.S., the country of his childhood dreams.

“I was really happy when it was offered by the embassy that they could take me to the United States,” Muminov says.

But before leaving for the U.S. in 2006, he was questioned for hours by refugee and consular officers.

“I gave them my entire life,” he says.

American Dream

Aided by a refugee resettlement agency, Muminov moved to Akron, Ohio, where he was welcomed by a small community of Uzbek refugees.

To earn a living, he took any job he could find anywhere — first as a sanitation worker at the local mosque, then as an air conditioning technician for McDonald’s in the Washington, D.C., area.

But he soon found a new dream — owning a long-haul truck and driving across the country.

He got his big break in 2008, when he attended a truck driving school in Philadelphia and got his commercial driver’s license, a coveted credential among many Uzbek immigrants.

Returning to Ohio the next year, he bought his own truck and hit the road as an independent owner-operator.

He went on to found UNI Trans, a trucking company that employs about 130 drivers, many hired from the Uzbek diaspora.

“America should be lucky to have him,” said Abdurashid Yakubov, an Uzbek refugee. “He’s helping people around him. He’s creating jobs.”

In the 14 years since he started driving a truck, he’s put in over 3 million miles “with zero accident,” he says.

“During COVID, we were on the frontlines to work for the American people,” he says. “I was very proud of that.”

Muminov proudly says that he never depended on government assistance for more than a month after moving to the U.S.

“I was always working,” he said.

He was living the good life.

But even as he led a thriving trucking business, he remained an activist at heart, a blunt-spoken critic of repression in Uzbekistan.

In social media videos recorded on the road and in exchanges with fellow mosque-goers, he often railed at clerics that supported the Uzbek government but did not uphold democracy.

“We come in for prayer to this masjid (mosque), that’s it,” said a member of the Akron Uzbek community.

“He’s talking about imams working for the government.”

The community member, who spoke on condition of anonymity, suspects that Muminov’s outspokenness may have landed him on the FBI watchlist.



Muminov defends his activism.

“Mr. Muminov’s passion for democracy leads him to speak out against leaders and forces that he worries are pushing against freedom in the direction of more authoritarianism,” said CAIR lawyer Hannah Mullen.

Questions, No Answers

Following his detention in Great Falls, Muminov queried DHS to find out why he had been stopped but received a boilerplate answer. “DHS TRIP can neither confirm nor deny any information about you which may be within federal watchlists or reveal any law enforcement sensitive information,” the cryptic response read.

But if there were any doubts that he’d been placed on the watchlist, they vanished when he was detained again in 2013, this time while returning from a business trip to Canada.

The agents posed the same set of questions he had been asked in 2009. Muminov wanted to know why he was being questioned, but he got no answer.

“Mentally, I was very depressed,” Muminov says. “Even in Uzbekistan, which you call a dictator country, you have some voice [and can ask] why you’re taking me and what you’re doing to me.”

But not if you’re a watchlisted person in the United States. Over the years, Muminov has filed multiple inquiries with DHS. But when it became clear they “were having no effect on his treatment, [he] stopped submitting them,” Mullen says.

DHS did not respond to a request for comment.

Immigration lawyers and security experts interviewed by VOA say Muminov could be on the watchlist for any number of reasons, some more plausible than others. Watchlisting guidelines give government agencies wide latitude to nominate individuals for inclusion on the list.

“It might be that he shares a name with a suspected terrorist, or there was a typo,” said Jordan Strauss, a managing director at security firm Kroll.

“Maybe he had friends over, and he gave his phone to a friend, and his friend called somebody who was being watched,” Strauss, a former federal prosecutor, said.

“It’s possible that his name was given to a human source or an intelligence collector or an FBI agent,” Strauss said.

Or the reason could be something more nefarious, he said, “as security concerns mean the public isn’t often in a position to know why a particular name was added.”

CAIR lawyer Mullen has a different theory. She said people like Muminov are likely picked up by computer algorithms that the government uses to analyze travel patterns, demographics and other suspicious indicators.

“It seems very likely that much of these processes for nomination are automated,” Mullen said. “People can get pushed toward being watchlisted by computers without any individual intelligence analysts paging through their social media.”

Application Denied

Whatever the reason, Muminov’s watchlist status soon came back to haunt him.

In 2011, after five years of U.S. residency, Muminov reached a crucial milestone: He became eligible for citizenship.

He knew he was watchlisted, but that didn’t stop him from applying. He hired a lawyer to help him file a naturalization application. Five months later, he was called in for an interview. He aced his citizenship test and waited for good news.

Instead, he received bad news. His application was rejected for leaving out a temporary Pennsylvania address he used to obtain his commercial driver’s license. The government accused him of “false testimony” and “fraud,” showing a “lack of good moral character.” But Nimer, Muminov’s new immigration lawyer, suspected the real reason. Muminov, Nimer says, had been likely “CARRPed,” a victim of a secret U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services program known as the Controlled Application Review and Resolution Program.

[CARRP was created in 2008](#) to prevent people with “national security concerns,” including those on the watchlist, from receiving immigration benefits such as naturalization.

“They deny people benefits for reasons that they would sort of look the other way for any other applicant,” said Patrick Taurel, an immigration attorney in Maryland.

Muminov had to wait another five years to reapply while the government watched him. But his case stalled again as a deadly terror attack by an Uzbek refugee in New York brought the Uzbek community under law enforcement scrutiny.

Muminov knew the attacker, Saypullo Saipov, and gave media interviews to denounce him. He then met with FBI agents in Cleveland and shared everything he knew.

He thought he was doing his civic duty. But he felt the government punished him by delaying his case.

“He felt really betrayed,” Nimer says.



He's not alone. Several other Ohio-based Uzbek refugees that contacted the FBI experienced similar delays, according to Nimer and Uzbek-American activists.

The FBI did not respond to a question about the situation.

Nimer then sued USCIS in federal court. The judge dismissed the suit, but the government gave up after an appeal.

Muminov was called in for an interview and soon received his "naturalization letter from Mr. Trump," Muminov recalls with a laugh. It was March 2019.

"I felt back to life," he says. "A miracle had happened. I didn't believe it."

He hoped his citizenship would end his ordeal. He'd fight for his rights and reclaim his dignity. He'd sponsor his wife for a green card. He'd bring his mother to his adopted country.

Brimming with optimism, he booked a flight to Saudi Arabia to fulfill a lifelong dream to perform the Muslim pilgrimage of Hajj.

He had no trouble on his flight there and back. But the reprieve didn't last long.

"The first couple of times, I was having no issue. Then, everything started again after the third or fourth flight," he recalls.

Visas Denied

Muminov cherished his American citizenship, but it brought him little comfort in his mother's and wife's visa and immigration woes. His mother, Fazila Muminova, had visited him several times after he arrived in the United States, but then the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent stopped issuing her a visitor visa.

"Once, she was issued a visa. But it was revoked the next day," Muminov says.

He suspected his watchlist status was the reason.

Immigration lawyers say relatives of watchlisted individuals often face visa denials.

"That can happen, for sure," said Anna Kerner Andersson, a former senior consular officer who is now an immigration lawyer in South Dakota.

Muminov says his mother only wanted to visit him and his family. But with no hope for a visitor visa, he tried another option as a citizen: sponsoring her for a green card.

The petition was approved quickly, but the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent put her case on hold, he says. He has no idea when or if she will get a visa.

"We always call the embassy, and they say please contact the State Department in Washington," Muminov says. When they try the embassy, the reply is, "We cannot give you an answer."

The State Department did not respond to a request for comment on her case.

Muminov never told his mother about his watchlist status or how it might have affected her attempts to get a U.S. visa.

"She has a heart problem," Muminov said. "If I [mention] these problems, maybe she'll think I'm also [one of] the bad people, like in Uzbekistan."

Meanwhile, Muminov's wife, Nargiza Abdullaeva, has been trapped in a bureaucratic nightmare of her own as she has sought to get a green card.

The couple met and married shortly after Muminov arrived in Akron in 2006. She was a college student in Missouri; he was an industrious fellow Uzbek.

Muminov filed a petition for her to get a green card, but it was turned down, and she was put in removal proceedings.

Facing deportation, her lawyer advised her to apply for asylum. But immigration officials kept stalling her case, according to Muminov.

"They were giving different reasons every time she applied," Muminov recalls. "They just kept saying come back in three, four or five years."

In 2019, Muminov's naturalization gave the family a glimmer of hope. As a citizen, he could sponsor his wife for a green card.

He filed a petition. She was called in for an interview, but then nothing.

"We have no hope," Muminov says. "We waited a long time."

Abdullaeva applied for a travel document, but that, too, was denied. "They took my family hostage," Muminov said.

Nimer says some but not all of the delays are due to Muminov's watchlist status.

"It was just sitting waiting for him to naturalize," she says. "I do believe that at this point, the delay is probably because of him being watchlisted." USCIS did not respond to a request for comment on Abdullaeva's case.

New Life in Dubai

Muminov reached a breaking point. Years of stress had taken a toll. He'd developed diabetes. He could no longer bear the indignities and injustices that plagued his life in America.

So in 2022, he packed up his family and moved to Dubai.



But even as they left, they endured one last humiliation at Washington's Dulles airport.

As usual, their boarding passes were stamped with SSSS.

"They took all my four kids, and they searched everything," he said. "They checked their notebooks and even checked [their] "Captain Underpants" [books] to see what's inside."

His voice rising, Muminov continued, "This is very bad. What did I [do] wrong to this country?"

Muminov never told his children about his watchlist status. He says he's taught them that "this is a great country," and he wants them to love America.

"I always say, 'This is a mistake. A government mistake. Sorry about that, kids,'" Muminov says. "Next time, it's not going to happen." For now, though, he's found solace in Dubai. He has his own business there, though he frequently travels to the U.S. for work and still undergoes extra security screening. His children attend the American school there. His mother can visit them from Uzbekistan. And he feels at home among fellow Muslims.

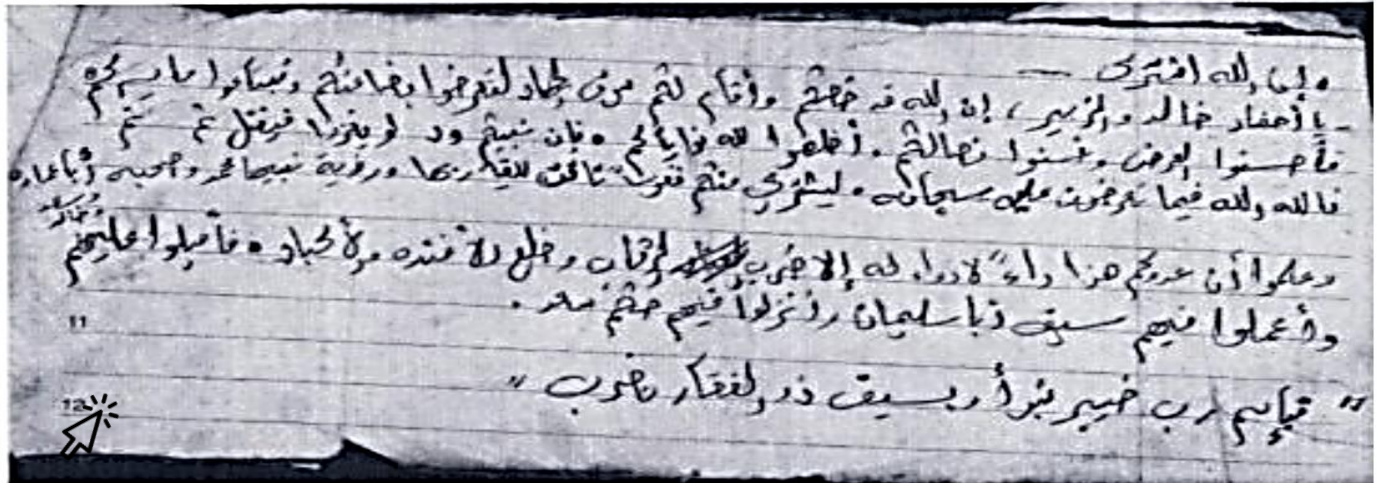
"I want to have peace and harmony a little bit here," he said from Dubai.

Asked if he could not have peace in the United States, he replied, "Not right now. Not until I get this lawsuit successful or until I get ... my rights, guarantee my protection. Then, we're going to come back, of course."

Masood Farivar covers the Justice Department and the FBI for Voice of America.

Documents brought back from the Gaza Strip indicate that Hamas premeditated its atrocities against Israelis and to kidnap and maltreat them

Published: 20/01/2024



The handwritten note in which the commander of the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades calls on his subordinates to murder Jews

'We Have to Kill Those Who Preach Christianity': The Persecution of Christians, December 2023 (Christmas Edition)

by **Raymond Ibrahim**
January 21, 2024 at 5:00 am



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



Eyewitness Report: London Street Demonstrators Rally for Hamas

By Hannah Baldock | *UK-based researcher on radicalization and terrorism.*

Source: <https://www.meforum.org/65481/eyewitness-report-london-street-demonstrators>

► Additional photos from the rally are available in the original [Focus on Western Islamism](#) version.



Islamists and leftists made common cause against Israel at a rally in London on January 13. (Photo Hannah Baldock)

Jan 20 – A coalition of Islamists and hard left activists marched through London on Saturday, January 13, demanding an end to Israeli military action in Gaza. The protesters, who numbered in the tens of thousands, called for a ceasefire while expressing no concern for the 131 hostages, including two Britons, still held by Hamas 100 days after the October 7 massacre, which prompted Israel's invasion of Gaza. I joined the demonstration, listened to the speeches, and spoke with participants.

Ugly caricatures of UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak featured prominently at the Islamist-organized anti-Israel rally that took place in London on January 13, 2024. (Photo Hannah Baldock)

The January 13 protest was relatively tame compared to the protests that took place soon after the massacre when some protesters wore images of paragliders and called for "jihad" and "an intifada from London to Gaza." The somewhat toned down protest is likely the result of a warning from Lord Walney, the government's independent advisor on political violence, who [declared](#) that anyone chanting "jihad" on Saturday should be arrested on sight.

A review submitted to the Home Office by Walney in December [urged](#) a change in the law to give the police discretion to ban pro-Palestinian



marches because of the [explosion](#) of anti-Semitic incidents linked to the marches, which rose 1,350 percent between October 7 and 20, 2023 [according](#) to Metropolitan Police figures. Nevertheless, there were troubling signs of continued radicalism and hostility on the part of protesters at the January 13 rally. In a speech, Mohammed El-Kurd, affiliated with Friends of Al-Aqsa, one of the lead organizers of the rally, [declared](#) that "we must normalize massacres as the status quo."

Activists from the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party assisted in the Islamist campaign to portray Hamas's war crimes as a legitimate act of self-defense. They gathered signatures for a ceasefire petition at a stall at head of the march and distributed copies of the *Socialist Worker* newspaper the front cover of which portrayed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, U.S. President Joe Biden, and UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak as "Guilty of Genocide." "Socialist Worker" placards displayed at the march declared "From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will be Free." As I spoke with protesters massed at the head of the march at Bank Junction, a middle-aged woman in a hijab accompanied by her husband, carried a placard that accused Netanyahu, Biden, and Sunak of "mass murder," displaying the three alongside an image of Hitler. The woman denied that her placard was inflammatory. She was unaware that a senior Hamas figure, Sami Abu Zuhri, had [called](#) for "violent acts against American and British interests everywhere, as well as the interests of all the countries that support the occupation on Al Aqsa TV (Hamas-Gaza) on December 13, or that the following day, seven suspected Hamas operatives were [arrested](#) across Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands accused of trying to locate a weapons cache in preparation for carrying out attacks in Europe.

[A flash mob of Islamist activists plastered the windows of a McDonald's restaurant during the anti-Israel rally in London. \(Photo Hannah Baldock\)](#)



She said she did not consider Hamas was a terror group, and doubted that it had committed the atrocities reported from Israel on October 7. Shaking her head, she said "Thank goodness for the internet, so we know what is happening, after all the lies told by Israel and the BBC." She claimed Israel funded Hamas, that Israel did not want a two-state solution, and that Israelis "could have lived peacefully alongside the Palestinians instead of taking more and more land, humiliating them with blockades and checkpoints." The activist shook her head at the suggestion that the blockade of Gaza was the inevitable response to Hamas launching rockets at Israel from a huge arsenal they had amassed to fight "jihad" for a caliphate in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. She denied that Hamas is motivated by a Jew-hatred expressed in its charter, which itself quotes a hadith that expresses contempt for the Jews. "I do not know any Muslims who are antisemitic," she declared. She also lamented that members of Parliament had roundly [defeated](#) a motion for a ceasefire brought by the Scottish National Party in the House of Commons on November 23. The vote was "shameful" and the MPs who voted against it "had no morals," she said. Which candidates would she be voting for in the general election later this year? "None of them."

As the march advanced past St. Paul's Cathedral towards the Royal Courts of Justice in Temple, a protestor in a Rishi Sunak mask waved a wad of fake dollar bills and a sickle. Another protestor in a Netanyahu mask and a magazine of imitation bullets around his neck carried a baby doll drenched in red paint, signifying blood. As the freezing weather began to bite, I and others attempting to buy a coffee in McDonald's found its door locked and being selectively unlocked, due to a flash mob of Islamist activists having plastered its windows with campaign stickers including "This Brand Supports Genocide" and "Boycott! This Company Supports Israel's Genocide on Gaza" alongside gunsight targets.

Further down the procession, another protestor carried a giant effigy of Keir Starmer, the Labour opposition leader who opposed the vote in parliament calling for a ceasefire, with the slogan "Starmer for genocide." Activists prostrated themselves in Muslim prayer on the lawn outside the iconic St Paul's Cathedral, which serves as the seat of the Bishop of London. On the Embankment, a young woman carrying a placard bearing the slogan "Exist, Resist, Return," and the logo of the "Muslim Association of Britain" acknowledged that the group she was promoting was a front of the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Hamas was the Palestinian arm.

When asked if she thought Hamas was a terror group, she said "I think it's a movement that is trying to liberate its people." She said she was against "the killing of innocent civilians, women and children, whatever their ethnicity, race or creed, but if you keep kicking a dog, don't be surprised if it bites you." At Trafalgar Square, an activist who said he had spent years living in Gaza, told me it was the lack of freedom in the Gaza Strip, not Hamas's extremism, that was the cause of the current conflict and that in any event, "Hamas is a creation of Israel! Hamas was funded by Israel



ICI C²BRNE DIARY – January 2024

because it preferred to promote Islamist extremists with an impossible 'all or nothing' agenda rather than secular nationalists to whom it might actually have to cede land in a two-state solution."

There are signs that British leaders are getting tired of the protests. Sir Julian Lewis, the chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee, [told](#) the House of Commons on Monday that the "well-funded organisers" of the demonstrations that have taken place since October 7 should foot the bill for policing the endless protests, the cost of which was [estimated](#) to total £20 million by December 10. Home Secretary James Cleverly stated that "We recognise that there is legitimacy to public protests; we do also recognise that the unprecedented and unwarranted pressure that this is putting on policing around the country is having an impact on communities," he said. "My view is that the organizers have made their point, repeating it does not strengthen their argument."

The persistence of the protests demonstrate how Islamists in the UK have taken effective advantage of recent conflict, warns Steven Greer, author of *Tackling Terrorism in Britain: Threats, Responses, and Challenges Twenty Years After 9/11*.

"The problem that the West has with Islamism is that it is losing the propaganda war, particularly with the youth," he said. "People tend to buy into this narrative that Muslims in the West are oppressed by the state and by society, and that we live in an 'Islamophobic' environment. To sustain that narrative requires a great deal of effort and finance."

Lord Carlile, a Crossbench member of the House of Lords and former Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, said the notion that Hamas is not a terror group, an idea promoted by many of the attendees, is of extreme concern. One can criticize Israel's prosecution of the war, but Hamas's atrocities against Israeli civilians should be the "starting point" of any real discussion of the conflict, he said.

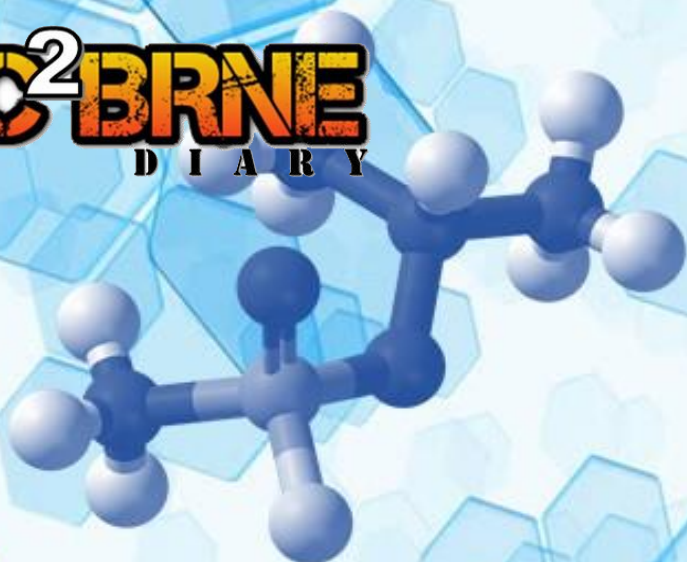
"Hamas has been proscribed in the UK," he said. "Anyone who has seen even a snip of the footage of October 7 that's available will see how it was at the extremes of revolting, genocidal terrorism."



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CHEM NEWS



UK stockpiled medicines to combat biological, nuclear and chemical attacks in the wake of 9/11 horrors as they feared further terrorist atrocities

Source: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12905569/UK-stockpiled-medicines-combat-biological-nuclear-chemical-attacks-wake-9-11-horrors-feared-terrorist-atrocities.html>

Dec 28 – The UK stockpiled medicines to combat biological, nuclear and chemical attacks in the wake of [9/11](#) amid fears of further terrorist atrocities, newly released documents show.

Medicines to combat anthrax, smallpox and the botulism toxin were all bought as part of a £15million spending drive by the Department of Health to treat everything from nuclear radiation to the sarin nerve agent.

Also bought up were protective clothing, decontamination units, needles and syringes that would be essential in combating the effects of a deadly attack.

The scramble to be able to protect the nation from potential attacks was revealed in discussions between Clive Gowdy, permanent secretary of the Department of Health in [Northern Ireland](#) and then-head of the Northern Irish Civil Service, Gerry Loughran.

In newly-disclosed official documents where he discussed the potential risk of being targeted after the World Trade Centre attack, he wrote: 'From our contacts with the Department of Health in [London](#), the main risks identified here are anthrax, smallpox, botulism, and nerve gases such as sarin.'

Medicines to combat anthrax, smallpox and the botulism toxin were all bought as part of a £15million spending drive by the Department of Health to treat everything from nuclear radiation to the sarin nerve agent in the wake of the 9/11 tragedy (pictured)

He added: 'A judgement would have to be formed as to the scale of the stockpiling undertaken, but we understand from our colleagues in the Department of Health in London that they have been given an extra £15m for the stockpiling of supplies there.'

Mr Gowdy was responding to a request sent on September 24 2001 from Mr Loughran, who had asked his various departmental permanent secretaries to 'urgently assess' the potential impact and possible consequences of 9/11 on the region.

Mr Gowdy, who had responsibility for health, social care and the fire and rescue service in Northern Ireland, circulated a detailed reply to Mr Loughran and colleagues two days later.

The senior civil servant outlined the potential consequence for the region resulting from any US follow-up action 'to root out terrorism in the aftermath of this atrocity'.

'While it is still unclear what form of action will be taken, there must be speculation that it will range from action of a conventional war-like-kind, such as the Gulf War, to more widespread and unconventional attacks which have world wide implications and, in either scenario, there is the very real threat of reprisals and retaliatory action,' he stated.

He said a conventional war would result in the possible call-up of auxiliary military personnel, including medical, nursing and paramedic staff from Northern Ireland who were members of the Territorial Army Medical Corps.

However, he said the department's 'working assumption' was the potential for a 'more unconventional campaign' and, as a result, its focus of attention was on dealing with 'possible attacks on the local population'.

'In planning to deal with this latter scenario, there are a number of possibilities to be addressed,' he continued.

The scramble to be able to protect the nation from potential attacks was revealed in discussions between Clive Gowdy, permanent secretary of the Department of Health in Northern Ireland and then-head of the Northern Irish Civil Service, Gerry Loughran (pictured)

'The first is that we would be subject to conventional attacks, such as bombing, gun attack, or the use of planes or other vehicles to attack heavily populated areas.

'The implications for us are essentially the difficulties of having to handle mass casualties with all the problems of capacity in our hospitals and on both the Ambulance Service and the Blood Transfusion Service. The Fire Service would also be heavily involved.'

Mr Gowdy then raised the potential for a nuclear attack.

'The second possibility is that we would be faced with some form of nuclear attack,' he wrote.

'In this scenario, the nuclear device might be exploded directly within the Province or we might suffer the after effects of the radiation discharged from a nuclear device exploded across the water in Scotland or England.

'Again, this would raise issues of capacity in our hospitals and in the Ambulance Service and Fire Service.

'There would also be issues around the use of protective clothing and decontamination units.

'The third possibility would be the use of chemical or biological weapons.

Mr Gowdy was responding to a request sent on September 24 2001 from Mr Loughran, who had asked his various departmental permanent secretaries to 'urgently assess' the potential impact and possible consequences of 9/11 on the region



'From our contacts with the Department of Health in London, the main risks identified here are anthrax, smallpox, botulism, and nerve gases such as sarin.

'As before, the hospitals, Ambulance Service and Fire Service would be heavily involved and there would be a need for protective clothing and antibiotics and antidotes to whatever agents were used.

'There would also be issues around the nature of the transmission procedures used for the agents in question. For example, a chemical or biological weapon released into the air in a crowded area would create different circumstances from a weapon of this type released into the water supply or released by airborne transmission over a wide area.'

Mr Gowdy said there was a 'clear' need to stockpile sufficient supplies and materials 'for combating these various possibilities'.

'We will need to build up our supplies of antibiotics and antidotes, needles and syringes and protective clothing etc,' he said.

'We will also need to ensure that we have sufficient decontamination capacity and that staff are properly trained to deal with the possible weapons and outcomes they might face.'

The permanent secretary said there was also a social services dimension to the planning for a mass attack.

'The need for temporary shelter for those displaced from their homes will be a major consideration,' he wrote.

Mr Gowdy further spoke of the 'solidarity and bereavement' felt by Northern Irish firefighters with counterparts in New York, saying they had been particularly affected by the appalling scenes.

'There will also be a need for meals and clothing. If the attacks are substantial, there will be the need for counselling both at the time and subsequently.

'Our social services staff have built up quite a reserve of expertise on these issues over the years of the troubles here.'

Mr Gowdy concluded by making clear he currently did not have the budget to make the preparations for the scenarios he had outlined.

'We do not have the money to stockpile on the scale which may be required,' he stated.

'A judgement would have to be formed as to the scale of the stockpiling undertaken, but we understand from our colleagues in the Department of Health in London that they have been given an extra £15m for the stockpiling of supplies there.'

He said a 'rough estimate' of the equivalent figure in Northern Ireland would be £750,000.

'We would also face clear difficulties in coping with the increased level of demand in our hospitals and we would need to bring in extra nursing and medical staff,' he added.

'Ideally, we would prepare by creating some new capacity, particularly in Intensive Care Units and in isolation units in the event of biological devices being used.

'We simply cannot afford to do any of these things on our present budget and I would wish to flag this up as an issue at the outset.'

Mr Gowdy further spoke of the 'solidarity and bereavement' felt by Northern Irish firefighters with counterparts in New York, saying they had been particularly affected by the appalling scenes.

Mr Gowdy said senior fire chiefs had been assessing whether there were any lessons for firefighting and rescue efforts if a similar attack happened in Northern Ireland.

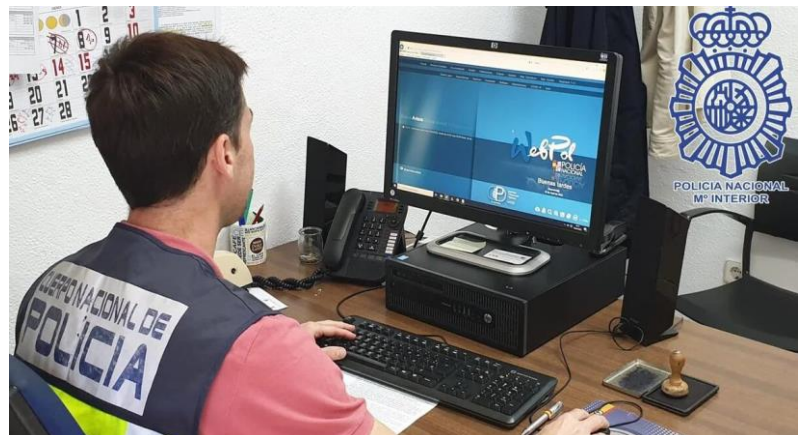
'They are already familiar with all major buildings in the Province and have a good understanding of the structural characteristics etc so their level of preparedness is good,' he said.

Police in 8 European countries remove terrorist attack manuals from internet

Source: <https://www.alaskacommons.com/police-in-8-european-countries-remove-terrorist-attack-manuals-from-internet/99117/>

Dec 28 – The Intelligence Center against Terrorism and Organized Crime (CITCO) of the Ministry of the Interior has worked with Spanish Security Forces in a Europol operation to detect and remove hundreds of manuals related to the preparation of terrorist attacks. The operation was led by Europol's Internet Terrorist Content Notification Unit (IRU), with police from eight European countries participating, including Spain.

CITCO coordinated the work of experts from the National Police, the Civil Guard, the Mossos d'Esquadra, and the Ertzaintza in Spain. On December 18, Europol coordinated a RAD (Referral



Action Day) on online terrorist content, notifying a dozen digital platforms of 872 web addresses storing instructional materials and manuals used by terrorists with various ideological motivations. The detected material included manuals for assembling 3D printed weapons and drones, manufacturing bombs and chemical weapons, selecting targets, choosing weapons for terrorist attacks, and staying anonymous. The operation also focused on removing terrorist propaganda spread online by individuals, groups, networks, and organizations that praised and celebrated terrorist attacks motivated by jihadist or violent far-right ideologies.

Removing this type of material from the internet plays a key role in preventing possible attacks around the world, according to the Ministry of the Interior. The process of notifying platforms and websites of the existence of this content was carried out through the PERCI platform, developed by Europol to delete illegal content and comply with different national legislations and conditions of service of digital operators.

Experts verified that file sharing services are the preferred means of disseminating terrorist content on instruction and training, from video sharing platforms to instant messaging services. In addition to police from the Czech Republic, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Finland, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, and Spain, different Europol units specialized in chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear substances and explosives (CBRNE) participated in the search, as well as in weapons and explosives.

SERB

Source: <https://serb.com/>

SERB Pharmaceuticals represents the combination of SERB, BTG Specialty Pharmaceuticals and Veriton Pharma to form a new, growing specialty pharmaceutical company focused on critical care and rare diseases.

We make treating complex and life-threatening conditions possible; supporting clinicians, healthcare systems and governments while offering hope to patients and their families.

SERB began in the 1950s as Société d'Études et de Recherches Biologiques (Company for Biologic Study and Research).

Today SERB has the broadest antidote portfolio in the world, including medical countermeasures for chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) risks.

As a fully integrated company, we have the experience and capabilities to acquire, develop, and manufacture our medicines to the highest standards, and make them available worldwide through our secure supply chain.



ChemProX

Source: <https://www.bertin-technologies.com/product/chemical-detection/chemprox-handheld-chemical-detector/>

ChemProX is a handheld chemical detector for CWA and TIC detection and classification. ChemProX belongs to a new generation of chemical detectors, enabling full situational-awareness during field operations. ChemProX allows for real-time location and detection information sharing between the team members and the Command Center. It also features built-in training functionalities for creating simulation scenarios, as well as an agent database and standard procedures instructions.

This versatile chemical detector can be used in different applications ChemProX can be easily mounted to drones and robots without any to quickly build a chemical monitoring network and training simulations capabilities can also be expanded with CBRN kit, adding biological detection to the ChemProX.

ranging from single usage to unmanned platforms. integration work, and it also provides the possibility (mentioned above). The chemical detection identification and radiation

Why Choose ChemProX

- ✓ Wide range of detectable CWAs & TICs
- ✓ Wireless network connectivity
- ✓ Built-in GPS and group location
- ✓ Simulation training mode
- ✓ Chemical database and instructions
- ✓ Optimized usability
- ✓ Lowest maintenance costs in its class
- ✓ UAV & UGV use without integration
- ✓ Optional [full CBRN detection](#) capability



CBRN Threat Detection in Naval Warfare

By Arto Penttinen

Source: <https://nct-cbnw.com/cbrn-threat-detection-in-naval-warfare/>



The CBRN surveillance capability must cover the entire ship, both exterior and interior. The quantity and quality of the system's equipment must be designed for different sizes and types of ships on a case-by-case basis according to their structure. © Bertin Environics

Threats related to chemical, biological, or radioactive materials (CBRN) can face a ship both at sea and in port. A ship may encounter a CBRN threat in peacetime due to accidents or terrorist attacks, or in crisis situations as a result of military attacks. In any of the above situations, the ship's crew needs to be aware of hazardous substances in the environment in real time to protect themselves and the ship's equipment in the best possible way and to initiate the necessary countermeasures.

The use of CBRN agents is an effective way to incapacitate a ship or even an entire squadron, or at least reduce its ability to perform a given mission. On a global scale, naval missions have moved closer to the coastlines, resulting in an increase of the threat of CBRN accidents or attacks. For example, the use of modern unmanned platforms, both flying (UAVs) and moving on water (USVs), makes it possible and easier to carry out strikes even for actors with lower capabilities.

Protection Against CBRN Threats

The first prerequisite for proper protection is quick threat detection. The quick detection of a hazard defines the principles for the measuring devices and the structure of the CBRN system. In addition to the threat, the classification society and NATO have their own requirements and guidelines for CBRN preparedness. A properly designed CBRN monitoring system provides an immediate and comprehensive real-time situational picture to the crew, facilitating the implementation of timely countermeasures.



When the threat is detected, different levels of protection measures can be initiated and carried out on board. The main protection in ships entails closing ventilation intakes and setting the ship in CBRN protection mode. Air entering the protective space is filtered with CBRN filters, and by pressurizing the interior, dangerous substances are prevented from entering the internal compartments of the ship.

Modern navies and coast guards have protective pre-wetting or washdown systems in their ships which prevent, or at least minimize, contamination of the ship's exterior surfaces. If the crew needs to work on the deck and in the ship's contaminated areas, personal protective equipment will protect them against CBRN agents.

Even after protecting the crew and the ship, there is still a need for real-time situational information and sharing of that information to the upper management levels in order to get a better overall situational awareness.

► Read the full article at the source's URL.

Arto Penttinen has a Master's Degree in Chemical Technology and has been working in the CBRN field since 2003. He has been previously working in the Product Management field and in recent years mostly in CBRN Naval & Maritime System Project Management.

908 Devices Launches Remote and Continuous Area Monitoring for Aerosol and Vapor Detection

Source: <https://nct-cbnw.com/908-devices-launches-remote-and-continuous-area-monitoring-for-aerosol-and-vapor-detection/>

The Boston-based chemical and biochemical analytics company 908 Devices has announced the launch of MX908 Beacon, a unique remote area monitoring system that can detect and identify aerosolized and vapor threats.

A press release published by 908 Devices on July 31, 2023, says that MX908 Beacon "quickly identifies harmful levels of chemical warfare and pharmaceutical-based agents, empowering swift response and remediation". Furthermore, Beacon's area monitoring capabilities enable remote and continuous operation with more than eight hours of battery life and 16 hours of standby time.

More specifically, Beacon monitors the air for the most toxic substances, including fentanyl and Novichok nerve agents. 908 Devices writes that it can also be used for CBRNE operations and decontamination line monitoring, as a turnkey vehicle mounted system, and for clandestine lab dismantling operations.

John Kenneweg, the Vice President of Government at 908 Devices, said that "following the groundbreaking launch of the MX908 with Aero, our customers expressed a need for more remote and continuous monitoring of aerosolized threats for a variety of applications – from hazmat area monitoring to large event protection to VIP security."

"With the MX908 Beacon, we're addressing those needs and ensuring public safety by empowering first responders with knowledge of their environment so they can take swift and appropriate action," he added. The MX908 Beacon is currently available for new and existing customers worldwide. The full original press release can be read on the 908 Devices website, [here](#).



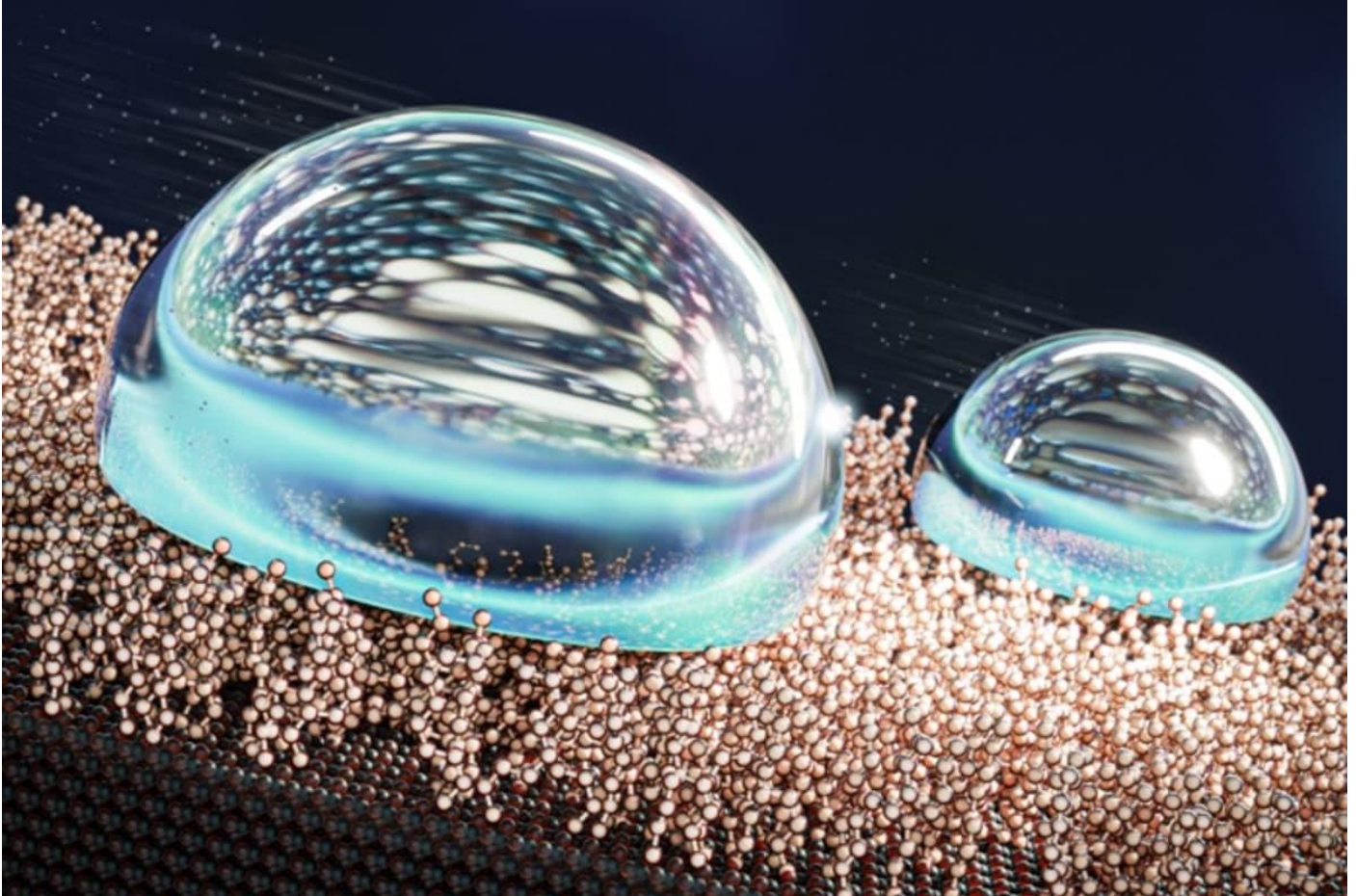
 908devices



About 908 Devices: 908 Devices is revolutionizing chemical and biochemical analysis with its simple handheld and desktop devices, addressing critical-to-life applications. The Company's devices are used at the point-of-need to interrogate unknown and invisible materials and provide quick, actionable answers to directly address some of the most critical problems in life sciences research, bioprocessing, pharma/biopharma, forensics and adjacent markets. The Company is headquartered in the heart of Boston, where it designs and manufactures innovative products that bring together the power of mass spectrometry, microfluidic sampling and separations, software automation, and machine learning.

World's most water-repellent surface surprises its own inventors

Source: <https://newatlas.com/materials/worlds-most-water-repellent-surface-superhydrophobic/>



Oct 2023 – Scientists have developed what they call the most water-repellent surface ever. By giving it a liquid-like coating that defies usual designs, water will roll off the surface at angles 500 times shallower than other superhydrophobic materials.

The ability to repel water is important for many materials, particularly in the automotive, marine and aerospace industries. Many [superhydrophobic](#) surfaces work by [trapping a layer of air](#) or [liquid](#), which causes any water that lands on it to ball up into droplets and roll off more easily. But an emerging technology creates what are called [liquid-like surfaces](#) (LLS), which have layers of highly mobile molecules that act like liquids but are tethered to substrates so they don't escape. The end result is like a lubricated surface that water slides right off.

In the new study, scientists at Aalto University in Finland developed a new LLS out of molecules called self-assembled monolayers (SAMs) coating a silicon substrate. By tuning conditions like the temperature and water content in the reactor during production, the team could control how much of the silicon the SAMs covered.

When the SAMs covered much of the surface, it became superhydrophobic, causing water to form droplets and roll off. That in itself was to be expected – but to the surprise of the researchers, low SAM coverage also made for a slippery surface. And it did so without the water beading, which has long been thought to be necessary for superhydrophobicity. “It was counterintuitive that even low coverage yielded exceptional slipperiness,” said Sakari Lepikko, lead author of the study. “We found that, instead, water flows freely between the molecules



of the SAM at low SAM coverage, sliding off the surface. And when the SAM coverage is high, the water stays on top of the SAM and slides off just as easily. It's only in between these two states that water adheres to the SAMs and sticks to the surface."

The team says that some versions of their SAM surfaces are the most water-repelling materials ever reported – superhydrophobic surfaces usually boast sliding angles (the angle at which water will roll off) as low as 5°. But the Aalto team reports that theirs can be an astonishing 0.01°, meaning water will run off basically any surface that's not perfectly level.

The more common measure of hydrophobicity is what's called the contact angle, which is given by how sharp a curve water droplets form on the surface. But it's hard to apply that measure here when the SAM surfaces allow water to spread into a film but still roll off easily. As intriguing as the SAM coating is, the researchers do acknowledge that it's still fairly thin and will disperse easily. But they plan to continue working to improve it, so that it could eventually help in a range of industrial use cases.

"Things like heat transfer in pipes, de-icing and anti-fogging are potential uses," said Lepikko. "It will also help with microfluidics, where tiny droplets need to be moved around smoothly, and with creating self-cleaning surfaces. Our counterintuitive mechanism is a new way to increase droplet mobility anywhere it's needed."

► The research was published in the journal [Nature Chemistry](#).

EDITOR'S COMMENT: A brilliant idea for more protective PPEs

Automated Agricultural Disease Detection

Source: <https://www.bioscout.com.au/>

BioScout is the answer to fungal crop disease. It's a high-tech solution that takes the guesswork out of your farming, so you can focus on the critical stuff and put your energy where it counts.

The Problem

Throughout agriculture, growers rely on intuition and symptomatic indicators to manage disease in production. Resulting in spraying **too much, too often** and at the **wrong time**.

The Answer

What if you could see the 'unseeable' and react to disease presence **weeks before it impacts your yields** whilst **reducing preventive sprays** by understanding your risk? BioScout is the solution you've been looking for.

How Does It Work?

Why wait for disease to show in your crops? Let us take a weight off your shoulders and help prevent disease by detecting it **before it's even visible**.

The BioScout Revolution

- ✓ Huge savings in time and money
- ✓ Reliable results you can count on
- ✓ Track disease in any location
- ✓ Receive immediate warning and instant feedback
- ✓ Innovative, maximum effectiveness on fungicide use
- ✓ Respond instantly to prevent disease before it strikes
- ✓ Boost your sustainability practices
- ✓ Reduce preventative sprays
- ✓ Save time and spend your energy where it counts
- ✓ Enjoy a newfound peace of mind

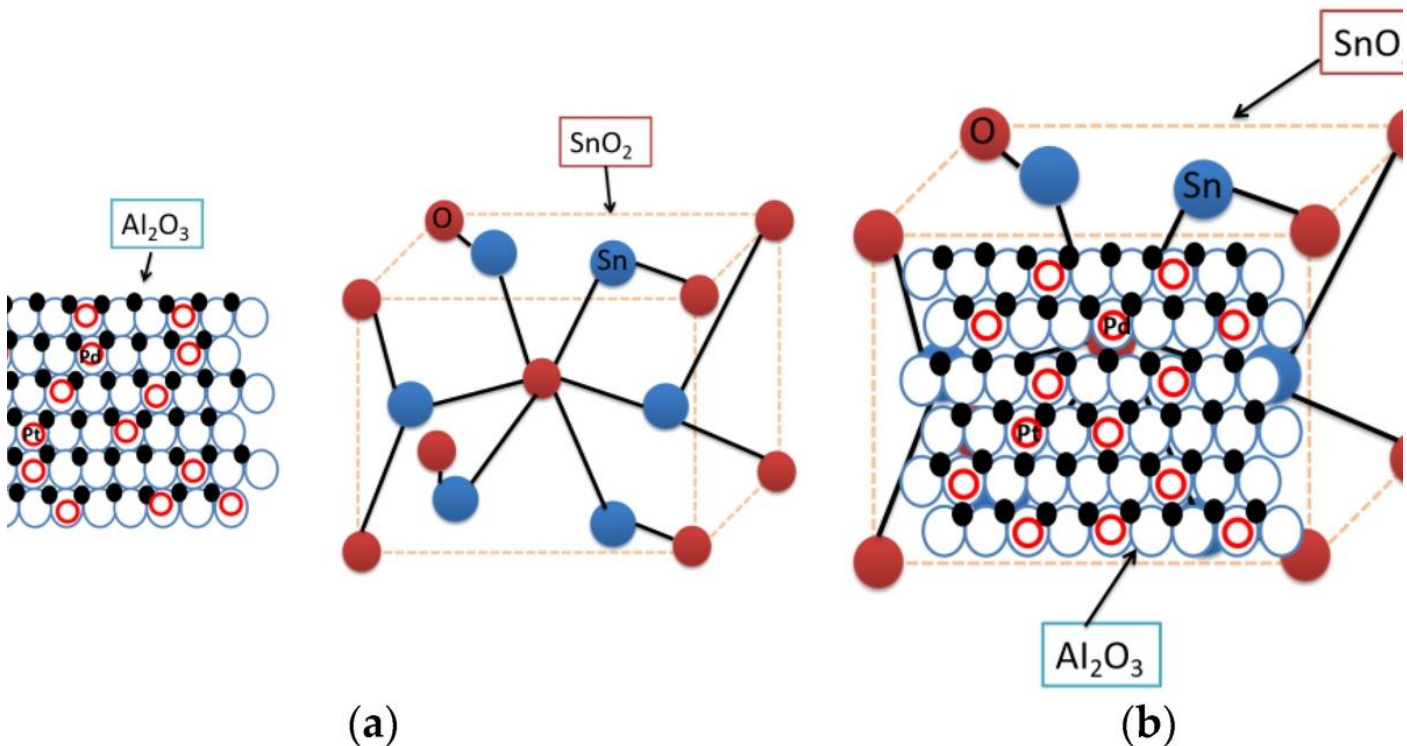


► Read more at the source's URL.



Revolutionary Wireless Gas Sensor Developed for Early Detection of Chemical Warfare Agents

Source: <https://bnnbreaking.com/tech/science-tech/revolutionary-wireless-gas-sensor-developed-for-early-detection-of-chemical-warfare-agents/>



Jan 03 – Scientists have successfully developed a **wireless surface acoustic wave (WSAW) gas sensor** that operates at 433 MHz for the detection of Dimethyl methylphosphonate (DMMP), a compound often used to simulate chemical warfare agents. This breakthrough sensor, which boasts a unique blend of wireless functionality, small size, and battery-free operation, is set to revolutionize the early detection of chemical warfare agents (CWAs).

A Sensor for Harsh Environments

The state-of-the-art WSAW gas sensor incorporates a YZ lithium niobate (LiNbO_3) substrate, metallic interdigital transducers (IDTs), and an antenna. Remarkably, it can function in environments with temperatures ranging from 30°C to 100°C and a relative humidity of less than 60%. The sensor's signal-to-noise ratio (S/N) was found to decrease with an increased wireless transmission distance, with the most stable baseline noise observed at shorter distances. An optimal wireless transmission distance of 20 cm was applied for further testing, as it provided long-term stability.

Performance under Varying Humidity

An intriguing humidity experiment was conducted to test the performance of the sensor under varying humidity conditions. The results indicated that the phase change of the sensor's signal increased with humidity up to 60% RH. However, beyond this threshold, fluctuations in the sensor baseline were observed, indicating reduced stability. This observation underscores the sensor's optimal performance under 60% relative humidity.

Revolutionizing Gas Detection

The gas sensor, prepared using a sensitive polymer film, SXFA, was tested in a newly developed gas generating system. This system utilized ambient air to dilute and recover gas and monitored the concentration in real-time. The sensor's response to the target gas, DMMP, remained consistent regardless of wireless distance, although baseline noise increased with distance. To ensure the best response time and sensitivity, the thickness of the SXFA film was optimized to around 450 nm. Consistency in the sensor's performance was achieved by



controlling spin coating conditions, confirmed by surface uniformity analysis using atomic force microscopy (AFM) and scanning electron microscopy (SEM). The final tests showed a linear relationship between detection concentration and response signal, with an impressive sensitivity of 4.63 mg/m³ and a minimum detection concentration of 0.48 mg/m³.

This pioneering WSAW gas sensor constitutes a promising development in the field of gas detection. Its superior performance, coupled with its ability to function in harsh conditions and its wireless functionality, makes it a valuable tool in the early detection of chemical warfare agents, potentially saving countless lives in the process.

New Wearable Nanotechnology Revolutionizes Health Monitoring

Source: <https://i-hls.com/archives/122300>

Jan 03 – Engineers at the University of Delaware are revolutionizing human health monitoring using clothing- or more precisely- using nanomaterial-based sensors embedded in clothing, called “Henswear.” The team, led by Professor Erik Thostenson, developed sensors that can be seamlessly integrated into everyday fabrics and offer real-time data on human movement.

In 2019, Thostenson and associate scientist Sagar Doshi co-founded MCET Technologies – a company dedicated to developing sensors for various applications, from monitoring structural health infrastructure to human motion. They began by evaluating the ability of Thostenson’s nanomaterial-based sensors to collect the needed data on human movement in a process that typically requires a lab environment. The results of the study became the foundation of Henswear.

According to Interesting Engineering, the current sensors boast remarkable flexibility and high sensitivity to changes in pressure and angle while remaining thin. Costing less than \$1 per gram of material, they can both be incorporated into existing garments or directly applied to fabrics.

The next step is additional research to validate the sensors and compare them to conventional lab-based assessments, as well as ensure the textiles can be washed and still function.

When it comes to real-life application, Thostenson said: “We understand the sensor and the sensing mechanism, and now we will be working on translating it to an application. That means understanding sensor repeatability, human garment interaction, and working with industry partners to learn about potential applications, what the customer’s needs are, and where this technology could be inserted.”

From enhancing fitness trackers to aiding recovery from injuries, potential applications are quite diverse, and as the sensors transition from lab prototypes to wearable tech, the researchers are optimistic about the human impact and how this tech could help people heal or get back to full fitness faster.



Exploring attitudes towards health preparedness in the Middle East and North Africa against chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear threats: A qualitative study

By Hassan Farhat, Guillaume Alinier, Mariana Helou, Ioannis Galatas, Denis Josse, et al.

J Contingencies Crisis Management | 24 November 2023

Source: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-5973.12509>

Abstract

Since 1970, Middle East and North African (MENA) countries have witnessed evolutionary industrial development and long-running terrorist and inter-country conflicts. Additionally, the risk of accidental, deliberate or natural chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) threats has also increased, requiring a collaborative review of the health sectors’ preparedness for potential CBRN risks within the region. This study aimed to explore the opinion of multidisciplinary experts interested in disaster management research in MENA about perspectives and challenges on readiness for potential CBRN incidents.

A modified interview online link was sent to the participants. A qualitative thematic analysis was performed on the responses using Nvivo@12 software, following semi-structured modified interviews using the Phonic@ application.

A total of 29 participants were sufficient to reach the data saturation. Through an inductive coding approach, five themes were identified: ‘CBRN-Related Incidents are a Threat’, ‘Inadequate National



Practice and Policy’, ‘Need for International Cooperation’, ‘Importance of Better Mass Gathering Management’, and ‘Ineffective Hospital Preparedness’.

With the assistance of the World Health Organization, there is a consensus on the need for cooperation between the MENA countries to ensure adequate healthcare preparedness for CBRN threats. Suggested measures should be considered, such as creating a unified database and liaison officer designation.

Bengaluru metro conducts mock drill on CBRN attack in underground metro station

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/bengaluru-metro-conducts-mock-drill-on-cbrn-attack-in-underground-metro-station/article67713788.ece>



EDITOR'S COMMENT: Seriously now! Emergency responders without PPE? With flu masks? In a CBRN drill? Come on!

Jan 06 – In the drill, emergency response teams from State Health Services, State Fire Services, City Civil Police, and NDRF rushed to the station for rescue and decontamination. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

The Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation (BMRCL) organised a mock exercise at Vidhana Soudha Metro Station on Saturday from 11 a.m. for about one hour to get all concerned familiarised with the procedures in case of any Chemical, Biological, Radioactive, and Nuclear Material (CBRN) attacks.

According to BMRCL, all connected government organisations such as NDRF, SDRF, police, and health services participated. The public was kept informed about the mock drill through public announcements.

“During the mock exercise, non-harmful coloured fumes using chemicals were generated on the station premises, creating a scenario similar to that of a smoke bomb. Some metro railwaymen nominated as passengers pretended to have fainted, and a few of them ran for help. Station authorities informed the Central Command and Security Surveillance for the intervention of the Disaster Management Organisation since the smoke was spreading and uncontrollable. Entry of passengers into the stations was stopped, and passengers inside the station were notified to hurriedly get out of the station,” the release stated. Meanwhile, the train operators were informed not to stop the trains at the station. The safe automatic



feature of shutting down the air-conditioner of the station and smoke extraction was activated. The Station Security Team rescued the affected persons after adopting personal safety measures, BMRCL said.

In the drill, emergency response teams from State Health Services, State Fire Services, City Civil Police, and NDRF rushed to the station for rescue and decontamination. “NDRF team took control of the operation and rescued the severely affected passengers. They sealed the chemical container and decontaminated the area. After clearance from NDRF, train services resumed,” BMRCL explained.

Second Sight MS

Source: <https://www.environics.fi/cbrn-products/second-sight-ms/>

Second Sight MS is a passive, long-range chemical and toxic gas cloud detector that is ideally suited to military and civil defense operations due to its compact, lightweight and modular design.

Its multispectral infrared imaging system shows the localization of TIC's and CWA's as an overlay.

Why Choose Second Sight MS

- Widest field of view: up to 60°x 45°
- Best field surface scanning rate: > 350 °/s
- **Detection range of up to 5 km**
- 50 gas database (CWA/TIC/VOC/SIM)
- Unknown gas, gas mixture and impure gas detection capability with Gas-X
- Portable, easy to deploy and to set up
- 360°pan monitoring with 90°tilt
- Time to alarm: <10 seconds
- Easy-to-use embedded graphic interface

Applications

Second Sight MS is the only standoff gas cloud detector for real-time surveillance with source localization. It can be implemented on CBRN vehicles to increase chemical detection capabilities. Remote monitoring from inside the vehicle provides full 360° surveillance of the chemical threat. Second Sight MS is also ideal for being easily deployed in the event of a chemical accident, to detect a gas leak at a long distance.

Specifications

Detection technology	Infrared multispectral imaging, up to 5 kilometers
Field of View (FoV)	3 lenses: 12° (5km), 30° (2km), 60° (1km)
Time to Alarm	< 10 seconds
360° Scan Mode	< 3 minutes
Voltage	From 100/240 VAC 47/63 Hz nominal (Power supply) or direct 24V DC



3D printing and terrorism: a threat in the making?

By Nicolò Miotto

Source: <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/3d-printing-and-wmd-terrorism-a-threat-in-the-making/>

Jan 10 – New and emerging technologies can and have revolutionised many aspects of society, bringing about positive change and innovation. Nonetheless, their potential misuse by both state and non-state actors poses unprecedented challenges to global security. Amongst other cutting-edge technologies, advances in additive manufacturing, commonly known as 3D printing, should be closely monitored due to their potential use by terrorists to acquire and create weapons of mass destruction (WMD).



3D printing and terrorism

3D printing is a set of technologies that can produce objects from diverse materials such as plastics, metals, polymers, and other components. Using a digital file made through computer-aided design (CAD) software, a 3D printer lays down successive layers of material until the object is created. This revolutionary technology is being employed in diverse areas for civilian purposes, including the production of [rockets](#), [medical devices](#), and [equipment for humanitarian aid](#). However, since 2013, when the online open-source hardware organisation Defence Distributed [released](#) the digital files for the world's first almost entirely 3D printed gun, the Liberator, observers have warned against the dual-use nature of 3D printing and its potential terrorist use.

What were considered hypothetical threats materialised in 2019, when a far-right terrorist used a [partially 3D printed firearm](#) to conduct a deadly attack in Halle, Germany. Since then, [numerous other cases](#) of terrorist use of 3D printing to produce firearms have been recorded in the United Kingdom, Spain, Ireland, Sweden, and [Finland](#). While evidence suggests that terrorists are primarily interested in the 3D printing of firearms, some researchers have called attention to its potential terrorist use to develop [WMD capabilities](#).

3D printing and WMD proliferation

Diverse hypotheses on the potential intersection between 3D printing and WMD have been made. [3D printing](#) could develop gas centrifuges out of carbon fibre for uranium enrichment or to produce explosives for radiological dispersal devices. It could also be used to make [laboratory equipment](#) for the development of bio-weapons or to bio-print tissue samples to assess their effectiveness. It could aid the creation of [miniaturised fluidic reaction ware devices](#) for synthesising chemical agents and producing WMD means of delivery, especially drones capable of dispersing [chemical agents](#) and [pathogens](#).

Nonetheless, these scenarios have been argued to be unlikely. Indeed, 3D printing high-functioning gas centrifuges in the large quantities needed to produce Uranium-235 would be [time and material-consuming](#). Hence, other means of acquisition (e.g., theft and illicit procurement) would represent more viable options for a terrorist organisation. Furthermore, the [highly technical expertise](#) necessary for bio-printing tissue samples would be difficult to acquire for terrorists. Moreover, 3D printed laboratory equipment might not be resistant enough to [corrosive reactions](#), thus constraining the production of chemical agents. Due to these technical limitations, [it was estimated](#) that the threat of the terrorist use of 3D printing to acquire WMD capabilities remained low overall.

A changing threat landscape

This assessment, however, may prove to have underestimated the potential threats as the technology further develops and the expertise required for additive manufacturing is increasingly democratised. Experiments in the fields of chemistry and biology have already showcased technical improvements in 3D printing. For instance, 3D printing is being tested to produce laboratory equipment for measuring the mechanical-physical properties of bulk materials and creating [heat exchangers](#). Similarly, research is being conducted on [bacterial 3D bioprinting](#).

As per the [3D printing of firearms](#), [knowledge of 3D bioprinting processes](#) is widely circulating across the so-called do-it-yourself (DIY) online communities. Not only do DIY communities disseminate theoretical knowledge, but they also provide tips on the practical use of 3D printing. The diffusion of theoretical expertise is also accelerated by the development of [large language models](#), which provide new learning opportunities by making dual-use scientific information more easily researchable.

In the immediate term, the most significant challenge concerns the 3D printing of drones as WMD delivery systems. Indeed, in January 2023, the West Midlands Police arrested [a Birmingham University PhD student](#) who successfully 3D printed a drone capable of delivering a chemical weapon for self-styled Islamic State. The PhD student had expertise in mechanical and chemical engineering and [is said](#) to have researched chemical agents like mustard gases and sarin. While this terrorism case can be regarded as an isolated event, it might testify to terrorist organisations' increased interest in additive manufacturing and in recruiting individuals with the technical expertise needed to employ it successfully.

Potential responses to recent trends

Technological advances and new criminal evidence suggest the need to monitor future trends in the potential intersection between additive manufacturing and WMD proliferation. 3D printing has featured in high-level WMD-related discussions at the international level, including at Spiez Convergence conferences in [2014](#) and [2016](#), at the [Australian Group](#) in 2019, and at the thirty-fourth session of the [OPCW Scientific Advisory Board](#) in 2022.

Nonetheless, further actions should be taken to raise awareness of the WMD proliferation risks stemming from 3D printing. A first step could be holding a dedicated international symposium, which follows the example of [the 2022 International Conference on 3D Printed Firearms](#) organised by Europol. By involving



diverse stakeholders, including governments, private companies, and academics, such a symposium could raise awareness of 3D printing's security implications for WMD terrorism and pave the way for future initiatives.

Discussions could also occur during the [outreach events](#) that the 1540 Committee was mandated to organise to address specific issues pertaining to the implementation of UNSCR 1540 (2004). For instance, a conference on the potential 3D printing of drones capable of delivering WMDs could be co-convened by the 1540 Committee and the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), which has developed a [Global Counter-Terrorism Programme on Autonomous and Remotely Operated Systems](#) (AROS Programme).

Conclusions

The threat of the terrorist use of 3D printing to produce and use WMD capabilities remains low overall. However, as innovation continues at a fast pace, there is a need to monitor additive manufacturing's developments and assess their security implications. Raising awareness of the potential threats stemming from 3D printing in coordination with key stakeholders, such as the private sector and academia, can help to empower governments to act swiftly if any of these threats become tangible. This can help prevent the misuse of this cutting-edge technology and to ensure that advances in this technology are instead used for the benefit of people and the planet.

[Nicolò Miotto](#) is a Project Assistant at the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

North Korea's WMD Arsenal: Unveiling the Hidden Threat of Chemical and Biological Weapons

By Maya Carlin

Source: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/korea-watch/north-koreas-wmd-arsenal-unveiling-hidden-threat-chemical-and-biological-weapons>

Jan 09 – As Pyongyang continues to make nuclear threats, a detailed analysis of the country's true nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities is important. But its stockpiles of chemical weapons should also be considered a grave threat.

North Korea: A Chemical Weapons and Biological Weapons Threat?

North Korean leader [Kim Jong Un](#)'s government has [threatened nuclear war](#) and kinetic war with Japan, South Korea, and the U.S. in recent months. Pyongyang has also increased the pace of missile launches in the region, indicating that the nation is willing and capable of [provoking](#) its adversaries.

While analysts mostly focus on the threat of North Korea's nuclear capabilities, Pyongyang's arsenal of chemical and Biological weapons is also a worry.

What We Know About North Korea's WMD

North Korea turned to the Soviet Union after World War Two to give its nuclear program a start. It paid dividends when the USSR built the Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Center, finishing construction by the mid-1960s.

North Korea did ratify the Treaty of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 1985, but it did not abide by the Treaty for very long, withdrawing officially in 2003. Since that time, Pyongyang has carried out several increasingly sophisticated [nuclear tests](#).

In addition to its nuclear stockpiles, the DPRK is not a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention and is believed to oversee an offensive [biological and chemical weapons](#) program.

According to author Robert Collins, a former intelligence analyst with the U.S. Forces Korea Command, Pyongyang started to research biological weapons in the 1960s. Around this time, a germ weapons research organization was developed under the National Defense Science Institute, which led to the DPRK's acquisition of anthrax, cholera and the bubonic plague. In an interview with [The Hill](#), Collins added that Pyongyang's hackers endanger South Korean chemical plants: "These hackers have also hacked into South Korea's Chemical Accident Response Information system for the purpose of understanding where the South's chemical plants are located and how much damage would result locally if they were subject to explosions."

Seoul outlined the DPRK's [possession](#) of anthrax, smallpox, and the plague in a 2018 white paper released by South Korea's Ministry of National Defense. Analysts believe that North Korea in a future war could weaponize its stocks of phosgene, sarin, mustard and V-type chemical agents. At least 12 facilities are believed to be responsible for developing these chemical agents, according to industry experts.





According to IHS Jane, a [2017 analysis](#) of Pyongyang's biological weapons capabilities cites the following evidence:

- ✓ "On 17 June (2015), the RoK MND issued a report that stated North Korea possesses an assortment of biological agents - including anthrax and smallpox - and the ability to weaponize them within 10 days. The report also stated that the North did not yet possess warheads to employ bioweapons."
- ✓ "During June 2015 North Korea announced that it has created a vaccine, known as Kumdang-2, that could treat Ebola, HIV, 'a number of cancers,' and MERS. Kumdang-2 was reportedly manufactured from ginseng grown in fertilizer made from 'rare-earth elements' and 'micro-quantities of gold and platinum.' Most serious researchers have significant reservations concerning these claims."
- ✓ "In the aftermath of Kim Jong-nam's death in February 2017 due to toxic nerve agent VX, South Korea's MND was quoted by Yonhap News Agency as saying that North Korea's military is probably operating a regiment-level biochemical weapons unit."

As Pyongyang continues to make nuclear threats, a detailed analysis of the country's true nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities is important. But its stockpiles of chemical weapons should also be considered a grave threat.

[Maya Carlin](#) is an analyst with the Center for Security Policy and a former Anna Sobol Levy Fellow at IDC Herzliya in Israel. She has by-lines in many publications, including [The National Interest](#), [Jerusalem Post](#), and [Times of Israel](#).

Remote CBRN Detection with Autonomous Teaming Drones: Draper Wins Pentagon Contract

Source: <https://dronelife.com/2024/01/10/remote-cbrn-detection-with-autonomous-teaming-drones-draper-wins-pentagon-contract/>

Jan 10 – Draper announced it has been awarded a \$26 million (all options) contract by the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) to further expand the capabilities of its unmanned autonomous systems (UAS) software to perform chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) reconnaissance missions in collaborative teams and in degraded operating environments. The Other Transaction Authority (OTA) agreement was awarded through the Joint Program Executive Office for Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Defense (JPEO-CBRND).





Draper will integrate flight software and sensor-driven algorithms that enable teams of unmanned systems to autonomously conduct CBRN missions currently performed by single UASs or in environments where one or more inputs are unavailable or unreliable, such as areas without GPS and zones where GPS may be spoofed. Blending the new technology with Draper's existing capabilities will allow the warfighter to gain a major tactical advantage—situational awareness—while remaining at a safe distance.

Draper Wins \$26M Pentagon Contract for Remote CBRN Detection Using Autonomous Teaming Drones

Draper will advance its system under an effort at JPEO-CBRND called CSIRP, which stands for CBRN Sensor Integration on Robotic Platforms.

Additional enhancements to the system will include advances in CBRN sensors and further customization of Draper's All Domain Execution and Planning Technology (ADEPT) autonomy framework.

Earlier this year, the company delivered initial prototypes of its system for a focused assessment. Operators employed the Draper prototype in realistic mission scenarios to communicate as a team and sense and rapidly report CBRN hazards. The new contract allows Draper to continue developing the teaming approach, and to deliver mature prototypes for government testing in 2026.

The autonomous software on the aerial unmanned platform will be designed to operate with the command-and-control user interface for the U.S. Army's Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Reconnaissance Vehicle (NBCRV) Stryker platform currently being developed by Teledyne FLIR. Draper will integrate communications with the Tactical Assault Kit (TAK) platform, enabling the unmanned



systems to send images to a mobile device and overlay the locations of detected objects of interest on an aerial map for human team members—all in real time. A major focus for Draper is to extend its proof-of-concept air-ground teaming architecture to link multiple systems into a mesh network. With mesh, every autonomous vehicle, including aerial (UAV), ground (UGV) and maritime (USV), becomes an access point and relays messages among themselves. The mission-requirements are to enable decentralized task allocation and task prioritization, collaborative navigation and mapping, path deconfliction and crash prevention, and team planning, control, monitor and networking. “Draper’s UAS CBRN system is capable of searching even small, cluttered places and detecting CBRN hazards,” said Won Kim, program manager at Draper. “Our novel sensor-driven algorithms will allow the UAVs and robots to perform reconnaissance missions as a team and make real-time decisions about where to go next, increasing their efficiency and effectiveness.” This award expands on the current state-of-the-art, according to Kim, by introducing robot on robot, swarm, mini-UAV and marsupial autonomous systems. It also advances UAS software in the direction the DOD prefers—to be modular, reusable and open to enhancement by third-party vendors.

The UASs will use Draper’s novel algorithm to synthesize the data from onboard sensors—including GPS, LiDAR, accelerometer, magnetometer and onboard cameras—and be able to communicate with human operators, centralized command centers, and other teamed UASs. Draper’s UAS for CBRN is expected to perform with limited operator interaction. A human operator will be able to override the autonomous agent decisions and redirect or abort the mission, as needed.

Assisting in the development will be Draper’s Human Systems Engineering, a team that will help design the tablet interface to support teaming, and Draper’s Warfighter Systems, which developed the TAK plug-in that enables Draper’s UAS to provide situational awareness at every level—the strategic level, theater level, brigade level and soldier level. “TAK allows you to bridge from the decision maker to tactical execution,” said Brian Alligood, Draper’s program manager for TAK.

Draper’s UAS CBRN system is currently being transitioned to a program of record for the U.S. Army, which means it will soon be fully operational in the field.

For the base contract, Draper will deliver two collaborative teams each comprising two UAV and one UGV options to support training, documentation, plus the delivery of additional UAS and payloads. The contract period of performance is 36 months, if all options are exercised. Visit us online to learn more about Draper’s platform-agnostic autonomy architecture and software package.

As a nonprofit engineering innovation company, Draper serves the Nation’s interests and security needs; advances technologies at the intersection of government, academia, and industry; cultivates the next generation of innovators; and solves the most complex challenges. Multidisciplinary teams drawn from a broad and deep talent pool of 1,300 engineers and scientists collaborate to develop first-of-a-kind solutions. Draper’s unbiased approach enables the company to focus on their customers’ needs and to deliver new capabilities to them. Learn more at draper.com.

Miriam McNabb is the Editor-in-Chief of DRONELIFE and CEO of JobForDrones, a professional drone services marketplace, and a fascinated observer of the emerging drone industry and the regulatory environment for drones. Miriam has penned over 3,000 articles focused on the commercial drone space and is an international speaker and recognized figure in the industry. Miriam has a degree from the University of Chicago and over 20 years of experience in high tech sales and marketing for new technologies.

Why cheap drones pose a significant chemical terrorism threat

By Zachary Kallenborn

Source: <https://thebulletin.org/2023/11/why-cheap-drones-pose-a-significant-chemical-terrorism-threat/#post-heading>

Earlier this year, police in the United Kingdom [arrested](#) Mohammad Al-Bared for building a drone designed for the Islamic State, the terrorist group that once held vast territory in Iraq and Syria. The 3D-printed drone was designed to deliver chemical weapons or explosives, and a search of Al-Bared’s home turned up notebooks with chemical equations and “recipes for chemical weapons,” unrelated, according to authorities, to his studies as a doctoral student in mechanical engineering. Al-Bared had developed a plan involving a “spoof company” to ferry his weapon, undetected, into a war zone.

Al-Bared, found guilty in September of preparing acts of terrorism, was certainly not the first would-be terrorist to explore using drones. The history of such planning dates back at least to the Japanese doomsday cult [Aum Shinrikyo](#)’s experimentation with uncrewed vehicles in 1993 or 1994 for a use in a possible chemical or biological weapons attack. The group ended up attacking the Tokyo subway system without drones. Since then, drone technology has significantly improved.

Relatively cheap drones are becoming a [mainstay](#) of conflicts, from the war in Ukraine to the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza. Though drones were once the purview of rich and powerful militaries, it’s now possible to use cheap consumer drones in battle. With [a few tweaks](#), they can whistle past even sophisticated air



defenses. As Al-Bared's case highlights, they may also present a significant chemical terrorism threat. Drones can be equipped with sprayers to deliver chemical weapons, or they could be used in an attack on a chemical plant. They could also provide critical attack support, helping with reconnaissance to plan out and conduct an attack, monitor law enforcement response, and create propaganda to highlight terrorist activities.



An agricultural drone. Credit: DJI-Agras via Pixabay.

Chemical attacks, on the cheap

Drones are great delivery vehicles for chemical weapons. They could fly above crowded areas, say an outdoor concert or a stadium, and spray the agent over the gathered people. Although commercial drones have small payloads that could limit the harm they inflict, low-altitude flights that target dense populations still pose a significant threat.

Commercial agricultural drones are particularly well-designed for chemical weapons delivery. Drones for spraying pesticides come equipped with chemical tanks, pumps, hoses, nozzles, and other equipment capable of handling toxic chemicals. A wannabe terrorist could get the complete package right off the shelf without worry. The drones can run as low as \$1,500 and do not require any special license to purchase.

Improvements to drone technology have also increased their effectiveness as chemical weapons delivery systems. Simple hobbyist drones available on Amazon for a few thousand dollars are capable of basic waypoint navigation, autonomously flying a pre-determined route guided by GPS. A terrorist organization could pre-plan spray routes over a gathered crowd, using multiple chemical-spraying drones. In addition, terrorists might incorporate decoy drones—simple, unarmed drones meant to distract law enforcement from the main chemical attack. Also, even commercial drones now can operate in autonomous modes, flying to a target without need of direct connection to the user, rendering defenses meant to jam the connection between drone and operator useless.

Of course, there's an important challenge any terrorist would face before delivering a chemical weapon via drone: acquisition of a chemical weapon. It would not be a trivial process for a terrorist group to acquire a weapons agent like sarin, VX, or mustard gas. The terrorists would require specialized equipment, chemicals, and facilities, not to mention the know-how to use them. However, as researchers at [Harvard Medical School](#) and I have



highlighted, fentanyl derivatives could provide a deadly, affordable alternative to traditional weapons agents. In the 1990s, the Department of Defense and Justice studied fentanyl as an [incapacitating agent](#), but concluded it was unsafe because the margins between incapacitating and killing targets were quite small. Now, fentanyl is available easily and broadly on the black market.



A gaping vulnerability

Beyond using drones to directly deliver chemical weapons is another deadly possibility: The use of drones to attack on chemical facilities. On [December 3, 1984](#), safety failures at the Union Carbide India Limited pesticide facility in Bhopal, India lead to an accidental release of 40 tons of highly toxic methyl isocyanate. The government of Madhya Pradesh, an Indian state, reported that [3,787 people](#) were killed and 574,366 were injured by the accident. Other estimates put the death toll as high as 16,000. Triggering a similar release would be perhaps the easiest way for a terrorist to carry out a mass-casualty chemical attack. Terrorists would not need to acquire any exotic chemical agent; they would need only to detonate enough explosives in the chemical facility to cause a disaster. The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency has identified [3,200](#) “high-risk” chemical facilities in the United States. Although Congress passed the [Chemical Facility Anti-Terrorism Standards](#) in 2006 to require and enforce a variety of security measures at chemical facilities nationally, including mandatory cyber and physical security measures, personnel vetting, and compliance inspections, the law has minimal requirements for protecting against potential aerial attacks. But on [July 28, 2023](#), Congress allowed the one law protecting chemical plants from terrorism to expire. The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency can no longer monitor compliance and enforce even the minimum requirements of the now-expired law.

Here’s how drones could make attacks on facilities easier: They can fly over physical barriers at the facility, such as fences, bollards, and gates and drop a bomb on a chemical storage tank, leading to a release. Current federal law does not authorize the private sector to operate drone defeat systems, so the facility would have to identify the threat, contact federal law enforcement, and wait on officer arrival before the threat could be neutralized with a handheld jammer or other device. As even hobbyist drones can fly over a 100 miles per hour, an aggressive attacker would likely be able to succeed.

A terrorist could also use drones to prepare for attacks on chemical facilities. For example, [Brenton Tarrant](#) used a drone to conduct reconnaissance on the the Masjid an-Nur mosque in a 2019 attack in Christchurch, New Zealand that killed 51 people. Similarly, a would-be chemical plant attacker could fly



the drone around the facility to monitor security officer movements, map the perimeter, look for security cameras, and identify potential avenues of attack either by drone or other forces. Even if facility managers spot the drone and are concerned, they may write it off as a careless hobbyist or perhaps a lawless rival.

What should be done

To mitigate the threat, Congress needs to reauthorize the Chemical Facility Anti-Terrorism Standards program. Chemical plants need to have robust security standards, enforced by federal agencies. Congress should also update the standards with new requirements for aerial situational awareness, such as establishing sensor networks and participating in information sharing systems like the Federal Aviation Administration's plan for an [unmanned traffic management](#) system. As commercial drones become more ubiquitous, providing chemical facility owners and operators with information about friendly drone behavior will be helpful in knowing which drones they do not need to worry about. Congress should also require purchasers of agricultural drones over 55 pounds to receive a Federal Aviation Administration certification prior to purchase. Part 137 UAS certification is already required for operating agricultural drones, so the impact on legitimate purchasers should be minimal. In addition, state, local, and federal law enforcement agencies should monitor for extremist interest in agricultural drones. A known terrorist group attempting to acquire such a drone or multiple conventional drones should set off red flags and warrant further investigation. That could include partnering with [drone manufacturers](#) like PrecisionHawk or Hyllo to identify and share information about suspicious transactions. The global community should also consider export controls and relevant monitoring of agricultural drones with particularly high-capacity storage tanks. These might be brought into international agreements like the [Australia Group](#), an arrangement among countries, including the United States, that seeks to coordinate export rules to prevent the proliferation of chemical or biological weapons.

For potential chemical terrorists, drones are quite the boon. They could serve as cheap, novel, and effective delivery systems. Or they could carry out attacks on chemical facilities, jumping over ground-based defenses. Or they might support reconnaissance before an attack or film the results. Thwarting chemical terrorism will require new initiatives that consider the growing popular uses for drones. Like the regulatory and technical advances that will allow for safe large-scale drone delivery and other operations, these could take a while to implement. At the very least, policymakers should avoid increasing the risks of chemical terrorism, for example, by letting the only US program meant to secure chemical facilities from attacks lapse. Though in Congress these days, that could be a tall order.

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Dover AFB Veterinary Treatment Facility, Warm Zone Team conduct decontamination training with MWDs

Source: <https://www.dover.af.mil/News/Article/3643470/dover-afb-veterinary-treatment-facility-warm-zone-team-conduct-decontamination/>

Jan 11 – Members of the Dover Air Force Base Veterinary Treatment Facility, 436th Security Forces Squadron Military Working Dog section, and the 436th Medical Group Warm Zone Team held a training session on January 10, 2024, to practice the skills necessary to properly decontaminate MWDs and possibly save their lives in the aftermath of a nuclear, biological or chemical attack or spill.

"Military working dogs are part of the military family. We have to make sure we know how to care for them in any scenario," said Tech. Sgt. Terrence Jasso, 436th Healthcare Operations Squadron noncommissioned officer in charge of diagnostic imaging and Warm Zone Team leader.

In the event of an incident or an accident involving CBRN agents, the Warm Zone Team is responsible for decontaminating patients before they are triaged and treated, ensuring healthcare workers can help the wounded without becoming casualties themselves. The team holds monthly training days to practice donning protective equipment and setting up the decontamination tent. This month's training went a step



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further. To ensure they know how to properly care for every member of Team Dover, the Warm Zone Team hosted members of the 436th SFS MWD section and staff from the Dover Veterinary Clinic.



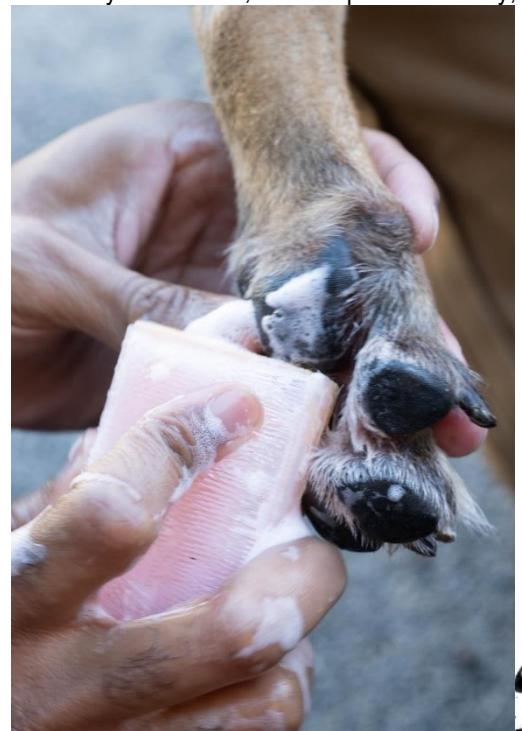
“Decontamination of military working dogs is actually an annual requirement for our veterinary technicians,” said Capt. Alicia Bailey, Dover AFB Veterinary Treatment Facility officer in charge. “We really wanted to have a more hands-on training session as well as share this important knowledge.”



Bailey reached out to the Warm Zone Team to plan the event and within a week the vet clinic was able to set up a training session alongside the Warm Zone Team and members of the 436th SFS MWD section. During the training, Bailey covered the proper technique for decontaminating dogs and demonstrated how to safely restrain dogs for decontamination when the dog’s handler is incapacitated or unavailable to help. “Training like this is important for all those who attended,” said Bailey. “Especially the Warm Zone Team because it’s not likely that veterinary technicians will be present following an incident involving CBRN

agents in a deployed environment.”

The training was the first of its kind on Dover AFB and there are plans to continue involving all three sections to ensure the vet clinic staff and Warm Zone Team is fully capable of decontaminating MWDs.



War Books: Understanding WMD

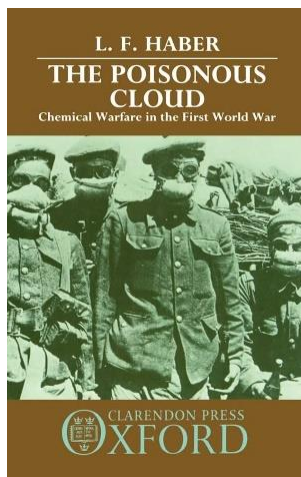
By Al Mauroni

Source: <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/war-books-understanding-wmd/>

Jan 19 – When looking for books on the general category of weapons of mass destruction, there's not a lot of original, insightful literature. Much of it is technically focused on describing the dangerous nature of chemical and biological warfare agents or the historical use of said weapons in the past. Books specifically discussing nuclear weapons or the general discussion of arms control and deterrence are much more numerous, largely due to our fascination with the tremendously devastating effect that they can have. But books on how to develop policy to counter adversaries with chemical and biological weapons, not so much. In part, my desire to write books on the policy aspects of chemical and biological weapons came from what I saw as a deficit in our national security literature. That said, there are a few fundamental texts that I would strongly recommend.

Seth Carus, [Defining "Weapons of Mass Destruction"](#)

One of the great challenges of our WMD policy is the failure to adequately define exactly what "weapons of mass destruction" are. There is a great deal of debate on the proper legal, military, and diplomatic definition. The original definition created by the United Nations in 1948 to address the new class of weapons was good enough for the Cold War, but after Aum Shinrikyo's use of nerve agent in Tokyo's subway in 1995, that changed. The threats of CBRN terrorism, pandemic disease outbreaks, and radiological incidents caused policy makers to use "WMD" in different forms. Carus explains how these six different definitions have implications in their use within the national security enterprise. This is an absolute "must read" for everyone, whether in the WMD community or in the larger defense establishment.

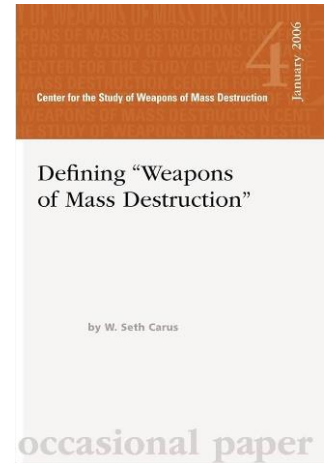
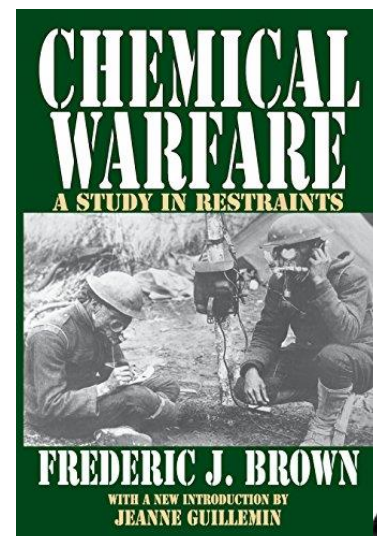


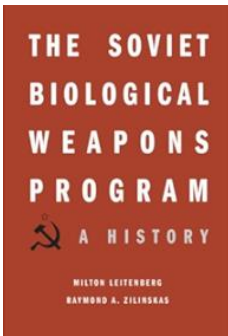
L. F. Haber, [The Poisonous Cloud](#)

L. F. Haber is the son of Fritz Haber, the famous scientist who initiated Germany's chemical weapons program in 1915 with his formulation of how to project a gas cloud against the enemy trenches using cylinders of chlorine. Most books cover the tactical use of chemical weapons in World War I either from a moral aspect or as a novelty. This book's value is how Haber describes the relationship between the chemists who were formulating the weapons and defensive measures such as respirators and the soldiers who looked skeptically on this new form of warfare. Haber calls the use of chemicals in World War I a failure, even as the Germans led the development of new gas weapons, because the military never committed to the use of it, the execution of the program was "amateurish," and the defensive measures were good enough to contain the threat. There are other books that cover the US and British programs during World War I, but none cover the German program in such depth.

Frederic Brown, [Chemical Warfare: A Study in Restraints](#)

This is an older book—published in 1968 when there was a slew of books critical of the US military's chemical-biological weapons program—but it is an invaluable review of the development of US defense policy on chemical weapons between 1915 and 1945. This book was instrumental in causing me to pursue a career as a defense policy analyst, due to its excellent review of the evolution of the US chemical weapons program and the debates held within US administrations over this timeframe. While the Cold War period saw a much greater pace of modernization for the US chemical-biological weapons program, this period remains the basis for how politicians and senior military leaders often view modern chemical warfare issues today. DoD policy views on chemical warfare topics have not matured as quickly as other technical areas in the defense world. Brown's final chapter draws important differences in how the defense establishment viewed chemical weapons and nuclear weapons, a discussion that the term "WMD" often obscures.



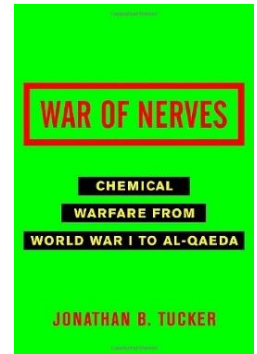


Milton Leitenberg and Raymond Zilinskas, [The Soviet Biological Weapons Program](#)

Ken Alibek's book *Biohazard*, released in 1999, offered a well-detailed discussion of the former Soviet Union's biological warfare program and the views of senior Soviet officials during a time when the Soviet Union was supposed to be complying with the Biological Weapons Convention. Leitenberg and Zilinskas go much deeper past Alibek's limited focus on *Biopreparat* into a thorough analysis of Russia's past efforts in part based on interviews with another Russian defector, Vladimir Pasechnik. It would be impossible to cover all the topics addressed in this 700-page book, but suffice it to say, this is the ultimate source for understanding the former Soviet Union's biological weapons program and their perspective on arms control. The chapter on the [Sverdlovsk incident](#) in 1979 is particularly well-developed, more than most narratives in other sources.

Jonathan Tucker, [War of Nerves: Chemical Warfare from World War I to Al Qaeda](#)

Jonathan Tucker was an outstanding researcher in the field of chemical weapons, and he died too soon in 2011 at the age of 56. His book *War of Nerves* was released in 2007, detailing a modern history of chemical warfare. The title is slightly misleading as the book was not focused on nerve agents and it does feature much more information about the US government's program rather than other nations. Tucker's narrative on the 1968 Dugway Proving Ground incident is unfortunately grounded in the popular narrative that the US military caused the sheep deaths (which I dispute in my own book). Other points of his book are decidedly not favorable to the US government, despite his access to government archives. But his research is top-notch and he does talk about the contemporary policy aspects facing US national security leaders. It may be the best historical review of chemical warfare in the past twenty years.



[Al Mauroni](#) is the director of the US Air Force Center for Strategic Deterrence Studies and author of the book *Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction: Assessing the U.S. Government's Policy*.

Asymmetric CBRN attacks

By Kevin Cresswell

Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7154512388107440128/>

Asymmetric CBRN attacks at home and abroad are highly likely in 2024!

Asymmetric warfare is where a significant imbalance in military power, resources, or capabilities exists between opposing forces. In the context of CBRN threats, it involves the use of non-traditional methods to overcome the technological and numerical advantages of a more powerful adversary.

In the next 12 months, asymmetric attacks are not only likely by a conventional force but may also involve the use of unconventional CBRN by non-state actors with limited 'conventional military capabilities' working together to maximize capacity and threat.



- ❖ Chemical Warfare (CW): Asymmetric actors may use chemical agents to create fear, disrupt military operations, or cause casualties in the homeland, using dispersal devices from unmanned air vehicles for example (UAV). These agents can range from traditional chemical weapons like nerve agents to more easily



accessible industrial chemicals or even fentanyl, used in a variety of unconventional delivery methods.

- ❖ Biological Warfare (BW): Non-state actors may resort to using biological agents to achieve their objectives. This could involve the deliberate release of pathogens or toxins to cause widespread illness, disrupt societies, or instill fear. The retail sector and of the homeland is wide open to this sort of attack. Imagine a pathogen entering a city water supply or being added to food on one of the 300 pallets containing the 3,125 gallons of soda, 10,000 pounds of chicken, and 71,500 eggs for an average week long sailing by a cruise ship.
- ❖ The use of radioactive materials or dirty bombs to contaminate areas and create panic, while not as destructive as nuclear weapons, can still cause significant disruption and psychological impact. A total of 146 incidents of illegal or unauthorized activities involving nuclear and other radioactive material were reported in 2022 to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)!
- ❖ It is unlikely non-state actors would pursue or acquire nuclear weapons, unless used as a proxy of course. The threat of nuclear terrorism then becomes a significant concern, and the subsequent ownership of a nuclear device by a non-state actor would have severe consequences for governments such as blackmail.

Terrorist groups share enemies and common ideologies in some cases, creating affinity to bind partners, forming alliances to advance their common objective. The asymmetry in CBRN warfare arises from the fact that these weapons can be relatively low-cost, easily concealed and not require a highly advanced military infrastructure.

Combined with this approach, these non-state alliances will likely exploit these characteristics to achieve their strategic objectives despite being at a conventional disadvantage.



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2024 CBRNE-RELATED CONFERENCES



<https://ciprna-expo.com/>

There are 16 critical infrastructure sectors whose assets, systems, and networks, whether physical or virtual, are considered so vital to the United States that their incapacitation or destruction would have a debilitating effect on security, national economic security, national public health or safety. Presidential Policy Directive 21 (PPD-21): Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience advances a national policy to strengthen and maintain secure, functioning, and resilient critical infrastructure. This directive supersedes Homeland Security Presidential Directive 7.

We must be prepared!

The Nation's critical infrastructure provides the essential services that underpin American society. Proactive and coordinated efforts are necessary to strengthen and maintain secure, functioning, and resilient critical infrastructure – including assets, networks, and systems – that are vital to public confidence and the Nation's safety, prosperity, and well-being.

Critical infrastructure must be secure and able to withstand and rapidly recover from all hazards. Achieving this will require integration with the national preparedness system across prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery.

This directive establishes national policy on critical infrastructure security and resilience. This endeavor is a shared responsibility among the Federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) entities, and public and private owners and operators of critical infrastructure (herein referred to as "critical infrastructure owners and operators"). This directive also refines and clarifies the critical infrastructure-related functions, roles, and responsibilities across the Federal Government, as well as enhances overall coordination and collaboration. The Federal Government also has a responsibility to strengthen the security and resilience of its own critical infrastructure, for the continuity of national essential functions, and to organize itself to partner effectively with and add value to the security and resilience efforts of critical infrastructure owners and operators.

The Critical Infrastructure Protection and Resilience North America conference will again bring together leading stakeholders from industry, operators, agencies and governments to collaborate on securing North America.

The conference will look at developing on the theme of previous events in helping to create better understanding of the issues and the threats, to help facilitate the work to develop frameworks, good risk management, strategic planning and implementation.



<https://www.ibmata.org/events/>



The International Border Management and Technologies Association (IBMATA) is a not for profit international non-governmental organisation (NGO) committed to the safe and secure movement of people and goods across international borders.

The challenges facing border agencies across the globe – whether run by immigration, customs, police, or a combination of these – have never been greater.

In a world of globalisation, the volume of people and goods crossing borders continues to rise year on year. Managing these volumes whilst meeting public expectations of facilitation and security is becoming ever more complex.

The demands of both the international freight and travel industries for modern and innovative approaches to border control are increasing annually. Border agencies are relying increasingly upon technology – whether visible, in the form of automated border controls, or invisible such as data analytics and risk assessment – to manage these pressures.

At the same time threats posed by international organised crime, terrorism, smuggling, trafficking, and irregular migration must be met.

Border agencies cannot solve these pressures alone.

More than ever, they need help not just from other government departments and agencies, but also from other international partners and stakeholders.

Who can join?

Membership is open to members of the following groups or organisations:

- All government departments and agencies charged with the responsibility of managing the international movement of people, goods and materials across national borders; including pre-entry, on-entry and after entry applications;
- Intergovernmental organisations with a vested interest in the management of people and goods across international borders;
- Non-governmental organisations with a vested interest in the management of people and goods across international borders;
- Transportation companies (including airlines, shipping companies, rail operators, freight forwarders) with a legitimate interest in supporting our aim;
- Port, airport, and other management entities with a legitimate interest in supporting our aim; and
- Those technology suppliers, business integrators and other private sector entities who support the safe and secure movement of people and goods across international borders whilst facilitating flow, in accordance with the aims of the organisation.

Upcoming.....

CBRNe Asia
CONVERGENCE

23rd - 25th January 2024



<https://cbrneworld.com/events/asia-24>

Singapore was one of the first places we held a CBRN conference when we started CBRNe World in 2006, and it continues to excel, not just in South East Asia but the world. There are multiple agencies that allow it to have such a position, but pre-eminent among these is the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF). SCDF initiatives have brought CBRN excellence to every aspect of the field, from collecting evidence through to initiatives to allow the public to create safe spaces for themselves should the worst happen. We have done

multiple interviews and articles with them over the years that explain these projects, but now after 15 years we thought it was time for you to see them yourself! For three days in January we will host an event in the heart of the SCDF's CBRNE defence capability, the Civil Defence Academy (CDA). The CDA has recently benefited from a multi-million dollar improvement to a facility that already managed to pack a great deal into a relatively small space. Due to Covid it will have only recently finished the third, and final stage, of its improvement, and we will be hosting the event at the facility! Delegates will get an opportunity to visit the new facility and gain an increased understanding of the investment in first responder training that the SCDF has made. In addition to this there will be an exhibition of leading companies interested in SE Asia.

September 1, 2023: Opening of registrations ([click here](#)). Start of submission of abstracts ([click here](#))

January 7, 2024: Abstracts submission deadline

January 25, 2024: Authors notification



ICI C²BRNE DIARY – January 2024

February 1, 2024: Late registrations

March 4, 2024: Closing of registrations

March 19 – 21, 2024: Conference in Strasbourg



STRASBOURG
FRANCE
March 19th - 21st 2024
[2024 INFORMATION](#)



Dear colleagues & friends,

We are about one year from the next CBRNE R&I Conference which will take place at Strasbourg, Palais de la Musique et des Congrès, from March 19 to 21, 2024.

After the 5th CBRNE R&I conference that took place last year at Lille, we propose to meet together in the great city of Strasbourg, capital of Alsace and Head Office of the European Parliament, famous for its historical and architectural heritage, the culinary tradition and the generous people!

Our coltto preparehe local French & German Committee (including responders from the Fire Brigades, Emergency Medical Services, Police, Gendarmerie, bomb disposal experts and scientists from the University of Strasbourg) are currently making strong efforts for preparing demonstrations and workshops, and the members of our scientific committee are on board to build a highly relevant scientific programme. You will find the first elements on our new website very soon (<https://cbrneconference.fr>).

Industrial partners could register soon and we truly hope that you could join us and contribute to the success of this face-to-face Conference by presenting and sharing your most recent works on the topics of CBRNE detection, protection, decontamination, depollution, medical countermeasures, diagnostic tools, epidemiology, forensic sciences, risks & crisis management. Looking forward to meeting you next year!

The organizing committee of the Conference.

March 13-14, 2024 | National Housing Center | Washington, D.C.

JOINT CIVIL & DOD CBRN

Symposium and Technology Showcase

Advancing CBRN Defense & Response Through Readiness, Technology & Collaboration

NCT | América del Sur

EXHIBITION
CONFERENCE
CBRNE & EOD TRAINING

6 - 8 FEBRUARY | 2024
BOGOTA, COLOMBIA

<https://nct-events.com/event/nct-south-america>

For its 6th edition in South America, NCT América del Sur 2024 will be held in Partnership with the Colombian Army through the Brigade of Engineers for Attention and Prevention of Disasters and hosted by the CBRNe Society. The conference will be chaired by Mr. José Antonio Zea



ICI C²BRNE DIARY – January 2024

Agüero, Director General of Centro de Información Química (CINQUI) and will address national and global challenges related to CBRNe and C-IED/EOD. NCT América del Sur 2024 will also host the NCT PRO eXperience training sessions for civil and military first responders.



<https://6thicmmathensgreece.com/index>

Generals, Admirals, Air Marshals,
Distinguished members of the Military Medical Community,
Dear colleagues,



I am Rear Admiral Antonios Papageorgiou HN and in my capacity as Surgeon General of the Hellenic Armed Forces I would like to invite you to the **6th Pan European Congress on Military Medicine** which is going to be held in **Athens** from **16th to 19th April 2024**.

COVID-19 pandemic already postponed twice the aforementioned Congress but now the Military Medical community has the opportunity to gather together in order to exchange knowledge and experience regarding all aspects of medical science.

ICMM, from its establishment back to 1921 till now has acted as the ideal platform for cooperation and collaboration between the participating countries. As a multinational initiative, aims not only to enrich scientific and training activities of the participating nations' Military Medical Services but furthermore to strengthen the relations and communication between the military medical personnel of our countries.

Through ICMM channel, the military health communities wherever the world, are given the opportunity to strengthen their relations and exchange knowledge and experiences in a joint effort to promote and develop the Military Health Services of our countries.

The 6th Pan European Congress on Military Medicine is an important link in the chain of cooperation between our countries in the military health sector and which we hope will be enriched and further strengthened.

Athens, birthplace of democracy, philosophy and science will host the 6th Pan European Congress on Military Medicine logging for the most fruitful outcome.



Apart from scientific debates the participants will have the opportunity to discover the Athenian antiquities such as Acropolis with the temple of Parthenon, feel the warmth of Greek hospitality and enjoy the soft and pleasant weather during the Greek spring.

I am fully convinced that the 6th Pan European Congress on Military Medicine will not only meet but far exceed the qualitative expectations and standards of ICMM, giving the opportunity to military Medical personnel to increase and broad its academic and operational knowledge through scientifically sound round tables, workshops and lectures.

With these thoughts and the true belief that ICMM will continue to assist our countries in terms of ensuring the health of our soldiers, I'm looking forward to meeting you all in Athens in April 2024 where the 6th Pan European Congress on Military Medicine will definitely serve in the most appropriate and fruitful way in exchanging ideas and practical experience in the military medical operational field.



9^ο
ΣΥΝΕΔΡΙΟ

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www.crisis-management2024.eu

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BIO NEWS



The pandemic is OVER!



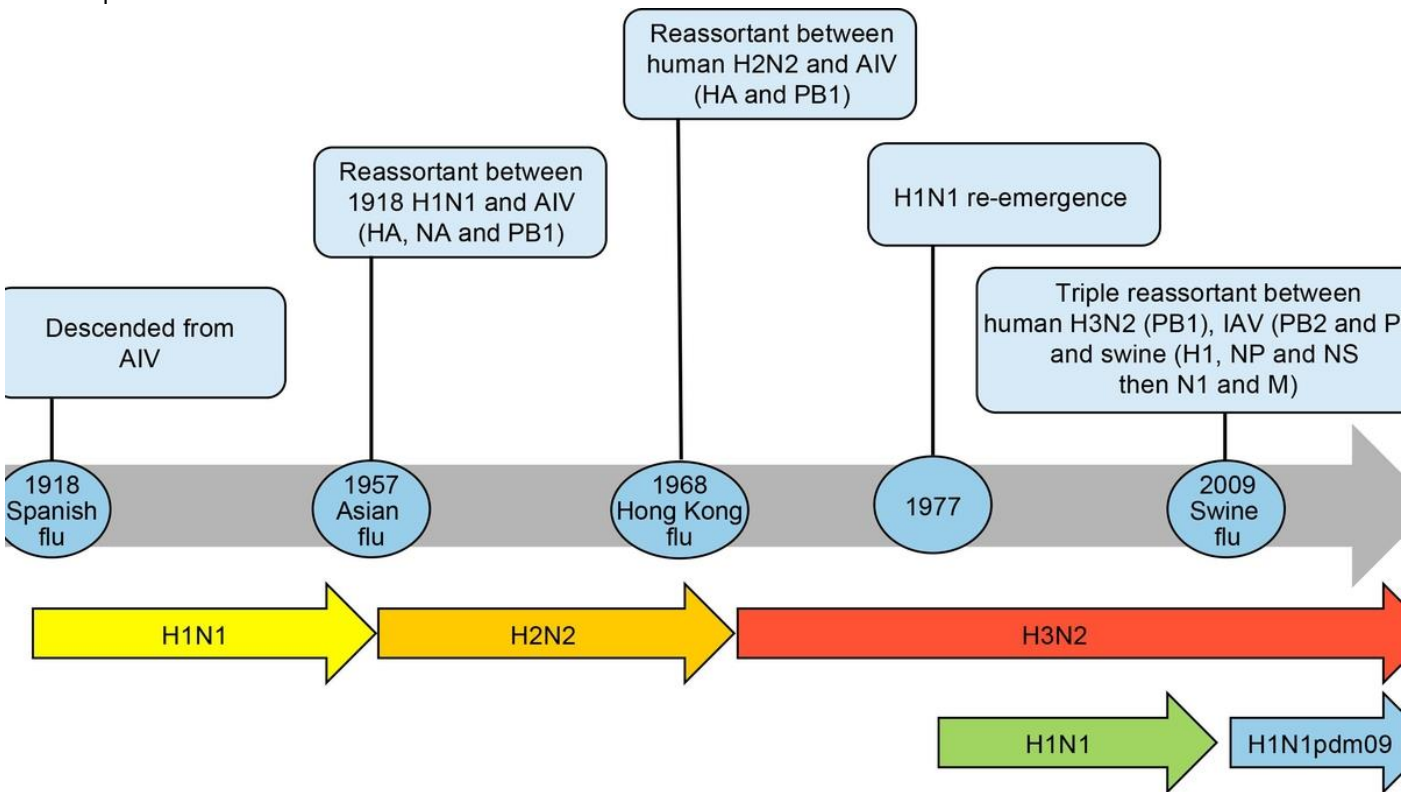
Pandemic by numbers (as of January 24, 2024)

	CASES	DEATHS	COUNTRIES & TERRITORIES	MOST AFFECTED COUNTRIES*
COVID-19	(700,262,978) 702,194,845	(6,960,046) 6,972,344	229	USA, India, Brazil, France, Germany, Japan, S. Korea

* over 30 million cases | numbers in parenthesis are patients of the previous month

Zoonotic Spillover, Bioterrorism, and Lab Leaks: Unraveling Potential Sources of Future Pandemics

Source: <https://bnnbreaking.com/breaking-news/health/zoonotic-spillover-bioterrorism-and-lab-leaks-unraveling-potential-sources-of-future-pandemics/>



Dec 22 – As the world grapples with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, attention is shifting towards the potential sources of future pandemics. These could range from zoonotic spillover – infections jumping from animals to humans – to bioterrorism and even accidental releases from laboratories. Such a focus comes in the wake of increasing cases of the new COVID variant, JN-1, driving a winter wave of infections across numerous states and countries.

Zoonotic Spillover: A Persistent Threat

Zoonotic spillover occurs through various channels: direct contact with infected animals, vectors like mosquitos, or consumption of animal products. This process has been the source of the majority of recent pandemics, making it a primary concern for scientists and public health experts. For instance, a new chimeric virus could emerge from a poultry worker infected with both human and bird flu, potentially triggering another pandemic. Moreover, avian flu and other viruses remain persistent threats.

Bioterrorism and Laboratory Releases: The Man-Made Risks

On the man-made front, bioterrorism represents a grave risk with the potential misuse of pathogens to cause deliberate harm. Additionally, while accidental releases from laboratories are rare, they have



occurred in the past. Such releases pose significant risks if dangerous pathogens are not handled with stringent biosafety measures. These factors underscore the importance of strong surveillance systems and global cooperation to avert future pandemics.

The Role of Climate Change

Climate change is another factor intensifying the prevalence of zoonotic diseases. Global rise in temperatures and alterations in precipitation patterns have led to a 30-fold increase in dengue cases globally over the last five decades. This shift has extended the reach of arboviral infections to new regions, necessitating a reevaluation of traditional epidemiological boundaries.

Addressing Future Pandemics

To prevent future pandemics, experts emphasize the need for investment in research and healthcare infrastructure. Public awareness campaigns and reliable information dissemination are crucial, as are tailored mental health support and holistic approaches addressing psychological well-being. The current rise in COVID-19 infections, driven by the JN-1 variant, serves as a stark reminder of the importance of these measures. As we face the ongoing pandemic, the lessons learned must inform our strategies to prevent and mitigate the impact of future pandemics.

Wounded IDF soldier dies after infection by fungus during Gaza ground op—reports

Source: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/wounded-idf-soldier-dies-after-infection-by-fungus-during-gaza-ground-op-reports/>

Dec 26 – An IDF soldier has died after he was seriously wounded and was infected with a dangerous strain of fungus while fighting in the Gaza Strip, the Kan public broadcaster reported Tuesday.

The soldier was brought to Assuta Ashdod Medical Center earlier this month with severe injuries to his limbs, the report said.

According to Kan, doctors then found that he had been infected with a fungus on the battlefield.

Despite round-the-clock care and experimental treatments from abroad, the fungus proved to be treatment-resistant and the soldier died.

There has been no public statement to confirm that the soldier's death was the result of an infection contracted in Gaza from either the military or the hospital.

Prof. Galia Rahav, the chair of the Israeli Association for Infectious Diseases, told Kan that around ten soldiers are believed to have been infected with the same fungus and are undergoing treatment in Israel.

The source of the fungus is believed to be soil that had been contaminated with sewage waste.

The infection can be contracted through wounds sustained by soldiers fighting in Gaza that cannot be kept sterile due to the conditions on the ground.

Kan said officials were checking if the fungus was connected to the vast network of underground tunnels built by the Hamas terror group in Gaza.

Prof. Eyal Leshem, director of the Center for Travel Medicine and Tropical Diseases at Sheba Medical Center, told Channel 12 news that field conditions in Gaza meant that wounded soldiers were at risk of infection.

"Some of those wounded in the Gaza Strip have complex infections that are the result of the field conditions. When there is an injury in the field, we tend to see bacteria and fungi that originate from the soil," Leshem said. "We have known about these infections for many years — American forces operating in Iraq and Afghanistan also reported similar infections."

"The soil is not sterile, but contains bacteria, molds and fungi," Leshem said. "When there are open wounds, there is a fear that those agents will penetrate and contaminate the area."

Prof. Hagai Levine, the head of the medical team for the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, told Channel 12 that soldiers were not the only ones at risk of infection, and that there were grave concerns for the health of those kidnapped and still held in Gaza.

"There is the potential for life-threatening infections when an individual has injuries in a dirty place. Regarding cases of infection near the fighters, it is worth waiting for the results of laboratory tests to understand what it is exactly."

Levine noted that similar cases had been seen in hostages released from Gaza.

"Among the hostages who came back, we know of several cases of invasive infections and serious injuries," Levine said. "Hostages who were injured on October 7, and were treated in poor conditions, suffered from infections."

"Therefore, we are very worried about the contaminated injuries of hostages who have not yet been released, which shows the urgency for the release of the hostages so that they can be brought to Israel for treatment as soon as possible," he said.



Israel launched its war against Hamas after the terror group led an unprecedented assault into southern Israel on October 7. Some 1,200 people in Israel, most of them civilians, were massacred.

Another approximately 240 people were kidnapped. It is believed that 129 hostages abducted by Hamas on October 7 remain in Gaza — not all of them alive.

Meanwhile, there is an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Gaza, with the collapse of basic services in the enclave and a massive displaced civilian population.

The United Nations has warned of increasing concerns of further spread of disease in Gaza, particularly during rains and flooding.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: In certain countries, special forces aimed to operate inside water (i.e., swamps) are given long-acting antibiotics before entering the mission zone (e.g., azithromycin; moxifloxacin).

After the Battlefield: Infectious Complications among Wounded Warriors in the Trauma Infectious Disease Outcomes Study

By David R Tribble, MD, DrPH, COL Clinton K Murray, USA, MC, Col Bradley A Lloyd, et al.

Mil Med. 2019 Nov-Dec; 184(Suppl 2): 18–25.

Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6886670/>

Abstract

During recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, improved survivability in severe trauma corresponded with a rise in the proportion of trauma-related infections, including those associated with multidrug-resistant organisms (MDROs). Significant morbidity was reported in association with the infections. There is also concern regarding potential long-term impacts of the trauma-related infectious complications. Therefore, to meet the critical need of prospective collection of standardized infection-related data to understand the disease burden and improve outcomes of wounded personnel, the Trauma Infectious Disease Outcomes Study (TIDOS) was developed. Herein, we review the accomplishments and key peer-reviewed findings of TIDOS.



Methods

The TIDOS project is a multicenter observational study of short- and long-term infectious complications following deployment-related trauma. Wounded military personnel medevac'd to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center (LRMC; Germany) before transfer to a participating US military hospital between June 2009 and December 2014 were eligible for inclusion. An infectious disease module to supplement the Department of Defense Trauma Registry by collecting infection-related data from all trauma patients admitted to participating hospitals was developed. Specimens from trauma patients were also collected and retained in a microbiological isolate repository. During the initial hospitalization, patients were allowed to enroll in a prospective follow-up cohort study. Patients who received Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) care were also given the opportunity to consent to ongoing VA follow-up.

Results

A total of 2,699 patients transferred to participating military hospitals in the USA, of which 1,359 (50%) patients enrolled in the TIDOS follow-up cohort. In addition, 638 enrolled in the TIDOS-VA cohort (52% of TIDOS enrollees who entered VA healthcare). More than 8,000 isolates were collected from infection control surveillance and diagnostic evaluations and retained in the TIDOS Microbiological Repository. Approximately 34% of the 2,699 patients at US hospitals developed a trauma-related infection during their initial hospitalization with skin and soft-tissue infections being predominant. After discharge from the US hospitals, approximately one-third of TIDOS cohort enrollees developed a new trauma-related infection during follow-up and extremity wound infections (skin and soft-tissue infections and osteomyelitis) continued to be the majority. Among TIDOS cohort enrollees who received VA healthcare, 38% developed a new trauma-related infection with the incident infection being diagnosed a median of 88 days (interquartile range: 19–351 days) following hospital discharge. Data from TIDOS have been used to support the development of Joint Trauma System clinical practice guidelines for the prevention of combat-related infections, as well as the management of invasive fungal wound infections. Lastly, due to the increasing proportion of infections associated with MDROs, TIDOS investigators have collaborated with investigators across military laboratories as part of the Multidrug-Resistant and Virulent Organisms Trauma Infections Initiative with the objective of improving the understanding of the complex wound microbiology in order to develop novel infectious disease countermeasures.



Conclusions

The TIDOS project has focused research on four initiatives: (1) blast-related wound infection epidemiology and clinical management; (2) DoD-VA outcomes research; (3) Multidrug-Resistant and other Virulent Organisms Trauma Infections Initiative; and (4) Joint Trauma System clinical practice guidelines and antibiotic stewardship. There is a continuing need for longitudinal data platforms to support battlefield wound research and clinical practice guideline recommendation refinement, particularly to improve care for future conflicts. As such, maintaining a research platform, such as TIDOS, would negate the lengthy time needed to initiate data collection and analysis.

●► Read also: Military Infectious Diseases Research Program ([MIDRP](#))

Classification of Trauma-Associated Invasive Fungal Infections to Support Wound Treatment Decisions

By Anuradha Ganesan, Faraz Shaikh, William Bradley, et al.

Emerg Infect Dis. 2019 Sep; 25(9): 1639–1647.

Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6711217/>

Microbiological findings for US military patients who had battlefield trauma wounds with invasive fungal infections and laboratory evidence of fungal infection, June 1, 2009–December 31, 2014*

Culture findings	IFI wounds, n = 143	High-suspicion wound, n = 120	p value†	Low-suspicion wound, n = 150	p value‡
Fungal cultures not sent	9 (6.3)	3 (2.5)	0.235	2 (1.3)	0.032
Fungal growth§					
None	21 (14.7)	16 (13.5)	0.774	9 (6.0)	0.014
1 fungus	55 (38.5)	50 (41.7)	0.597	91 (60.7)	<0.001
>1 fungi	58 (40.6)	51 (42.5)	0.751	48 (32.0)	0.128
>1 fungi plus bacteria¶	82 (57.3)	80 (66.7)	0.121	83 (55.3)	0.729
Order Mucorales	55 (38.5)	26 (21.7)	0.003	13 (8.7)	<0.001
<i>Aspergillus</i> spp.	45 (31.5)	39 (32.5)	0.858	55 (36.7)	0.348
<i>Fusarium</i> spp.	24 (16.8)	20 (16.7)	0.980	6 (4.0)	<0.001
Other filamentous fungi#	19 (13.3)	27 (22.7)	0.046	69 (45.7)	<0.001
Bacterial growth§					
None	3 (2.1)	1 (0.8)	0.628	3 (2.0)	≈1.00
<i>Staphylococcus aureus</i> **	0	0	NA	2 (1.3)	0.499
<i>Enterococcus</i> spp.	53 (37.1)	51 (42.5)	0.369	42 (28.0)	0.098
<i>E. faecalis</i>	5 (3.5)	5 (4.2)	0.777	8 (5.3)	0.445
<i>E. faecium</i>	41 (28.7)	42 (35.0)	0.271	31 (20.7)	0.111
<i>Escherichia coli</i>	22 (15.4)	20 (16.7)	0.777	23 (15.3)	0.990
<i>Pseudomonas</i> spp.	21 (14.7)	23 (19.2)	0.332	16 (10.7)	0.301



Culture findings	IFI wounds, n = 143	High-suspicion wound, n = 120	p value†	Low-suspicion wound, n = 150	p value‡
<i>P. aeruginosa</i>	16 (11.2)	14 (11.7)	0.903	11 (7.3)	0.254
<i>Acinetobacter baumannii</i>	29 (20.3)	11 (9.2)	0.012	6 (4.0)	<0.001
Other gram-negative bacilli	30 (21.0)	29 (24.2)	0.537	21 (14.0)	0.115
ESKAPE pathogen††	49 (34.3)	50 (41.7)	0.217	44 (29.3)	0.365
Multidrug resistant‡‡	53 (37.1)	34 (28.3)	0.134	26 (17.3)	<0.001

IFI = invasive fungal infection

*Values are no. (%) except as indicated. IFI, invasive fungal infection; NA, not applicable.

†Compares characteristics between IFI and high-suspicion wounds.

‡Compares characteristics between IFI and low-suspicion wounds.

§Because of polymicrobial wounds, organisms are not mutually exclusive and will add to more than the total. Bacterial cultures were restricted to those collected within 14 days of injury.

¶Category of >1 fungi plus bacteria is not mutually exclusive from fungal cultures with 1 fungus or >1 fungi.

#Includes *Acrophialophora* spp., *Alternaria* spp., *Bipolaris* spp., *Scedosporium* spp., and *Trichoderma*.

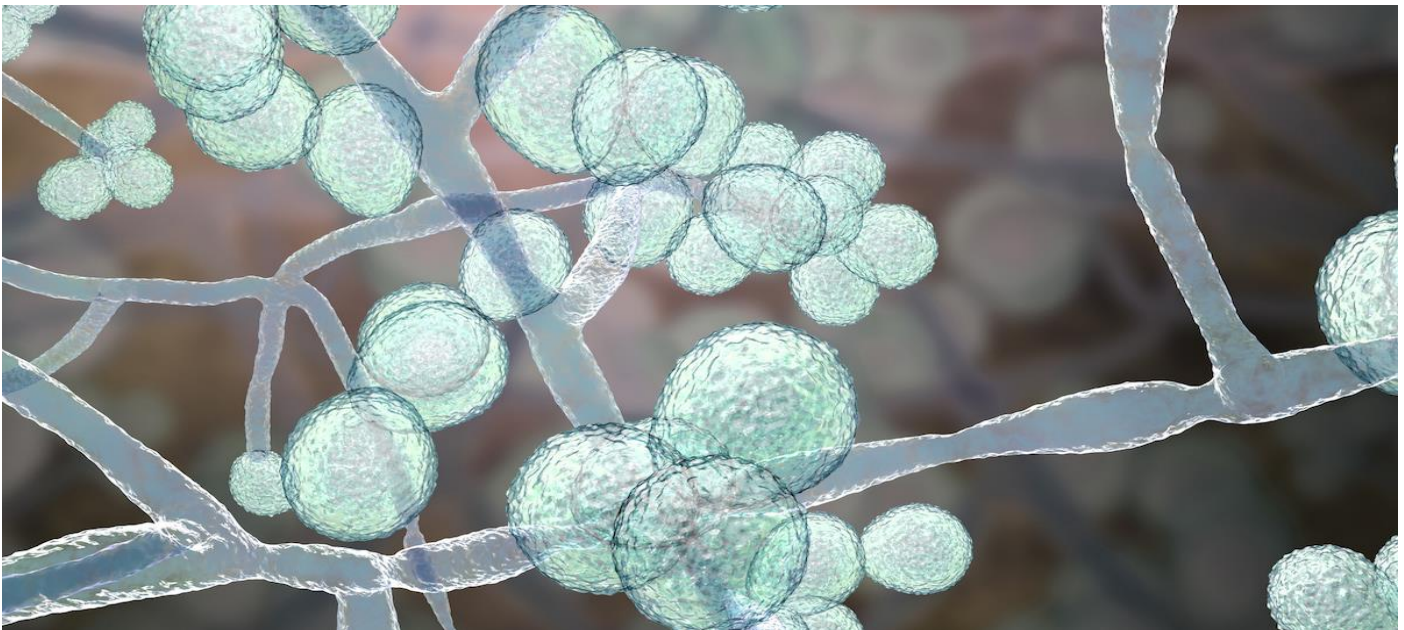
**Includes methicillin-resistant and methicillin-susceptible *S. aureus*.

††ESKAPE pathogens are *Enterococcus faecium*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *Acinetobacter baumannii*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, and *Enterobacter* spp.

‡‡Multidrug resistant is defined as resistance to ≥ 3 of 4 antibiotic classes or the production of extended-spectrum β -lactamase or carbapenemases.

Natural compound found in plants inhibits deadly fungi

Source: https://news.emory.edu/stories/2023/09/er_fungi_study_12-09-2023/story.html



A 3D illustration of the newly emerged species of fungus *Candida auris*, which is often multidrug resistant and has a high mortality rate. — Dr_Microbe, Getty Images

Sept 12 – A new study finds that a natural compound found in many plants inhibits the growth of drug-resistant *Candida* fungi — including its most virulent species, *Candida auris*, an emerging global health threat. The journal *ACS Infectious Diseases* published the discovery led by scientists at Emory University.



Laboratory-dish experiments showed that the natural compound, a water-soluble tannin known as PGG, blocks 90% of the growth in four different species of *Candida* fungi. The researchers also discovered how PGG inhibits the growth: It grabs up iron molecules, essentially starving the fungi of an essential nutrient.

By starving the fungi rather than attacking it, the PGG mechanism does not promote the development of further drug resistance, unlike existing antifungal medications. Laboratory-dish experiments also showed minimal toxicity of PGG to human cells.

“Drug-resistant fungal infections are a growing health care problem but there are few new antifungals in the drug-development pipeline,” says Cassandra Quave, senior author of the study and associate professor in Emory School of Medicine’s Department of Dermatology and the Center for the Study of Human Health. “Our findings open a new potential approach to deal with these infections, including those caused by deadly *Candida auris*.”

C. auris is often multidrug-resistant and has a high mortality rate, leading the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to label it a serious global health threat.

“It’s a really bad bug,” says Lewis Marquez, first author of the study and a graduate student in Emory’s molecular systems and pharmacology program. “Between 30 to 60% of the people who get infected with *C. auris* end up dying.”

An emerging threat

Candida is a yeast often found on the skin and in the digestive tract of healthy people. Some species, such as *Candida albicans*, occasionally grow out of control and cause mild infections in people.

In more serious cases, *Candida* can invade deep into the body and cause infections in the bloodstream or organs such as the kidney, heart or brain. Immunocompromised people, including many hospital patients, are most at risk for invasive *Candida* infections, which are rapidly evolving drug resistance.

In 2007, the new *Candida* species, *C. auris*, emerged in a hospital patient in Japan. Since then, *C. auris* has caused health care-associated outbreaks in more than a dozen countries around the world with more than 3,000 clinical cases reported in the United States alone.

A ‘natural’ approach to drug discovery

Quave is an ethnobotanist, studying how traditional people have used plants for medicine to search for promising new candidates for modern-day drugs. Her lab curates the Quave Natural Product Library, which contains 2,500 botanical and fungal natural products extracted from 750 species collected at sites around the world.

“We’re not taking a random approach to identify potential new antimicrobials,” Quave says. “Focusing on plants used in traditional medicines allows us to hone in quickly on bioactive molecules.”

Previously, the Quave lab had found that the berries of the Brazilian peppertree, a plant used by traditional healers in the Amazon for centuries to treat skin infections and some other ailments, contains a flavone-rich compound that disarms drug-resistant staph bacteria.

Screens by the Quave lab had also found that the leaves of the Brazilian peppertree contain PGG, a compound that has shown antibacterial, anticancer and antiviral activities in previous research.

A 2020 study by the Quave lab, for instance, found that PGG inhibited growth of Carbapenem-resistant *Acinetobacter baumannii*, a bacterium that infects humans and is categorized as one of five urgent threats by the CDC.

The Brazilian peppertree, an invasive weed in Florida, is a member of the poison ivy family.

“PGG has popped up repeatedly in our laboratory screens of plant compounds from members of this plant family,” Quave says. “It makes sense that these plants, which thrive in really wet environments, would contain molecules to fight a range of pathogens.”

Experimental results

The Quave lab decided to test whether PGG would show antifungal activity against *Candida*.

Laboratory-dish experiments demonstrated that PGG blocked around 90% of the growth in 12 strains from four species of *Candida*: *C. albicans*, multidrug-resistant *C. auris* and two other multidrug-resistant non-albicans *Candida* species.

PGG is a large molecule known for its iron-binding properties. The researchers tested the role of this characteristic in the antifungal activity.

“Each PGG molecule can bind up to five iron molecules,” Marquez explains. “When we added more iron to a dish, beyond the sequestering capacity of the PGG molecules, the fungi once again grew normally.”

Dish experiments also showed that PGG was well-tolerated by human kidney, liver and epithelial cells.

“Iron in human cells is generally not free iron,” Marquez says. “It is usually bound to a protein or is sequestered inside enzymes.”



A potential topical treatment

Previous animal studies on PGG have found that the molecule is metabolized quickly and removed from the body. Instead of an internal therapy, the researchers are investigating its potential efficacy as a topical antifungal.

“If a *Candida* infection breaks out on the skin of a patient where a catheter or other medical instrument is implanted, a topical antifungal might prevent the infection from spreading and entering into the body,” Marquez says.

As a next step, the researchers will test PGG as a topical treatment for fungal skin infections in mice.

Meanwhile, Quave and Marquez have applied for a provisional patent for the use of PGG for the mitigation of fungal infections.

“These are still early days in the research, but another idea that we’re interested in pursuing is the potential use of PGG as a broad-spectrum microbial,” Quave says. “Many infections from acute injuries, such as battlefield wounds, tend to be polymicrobial so PGG could perhaps make a useful topical treatment in these cases.”

Scientists from the University of Toronto are co-authors of the paper, including Yunjin Lee, Dustin Duncan, Luke Whitesell and Leah Cowen. Whitesell and Cowen are co-founders and shareholders in Bright Angel Therapeutics, a platform company for development of antifungal therapeutics, and Cowen is a science advisor for Kapoose Creek, a company that harnesses the therapeutic potential of fungi. The work was supported by grants from the National Institutes of Health, National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health; the Jones Center at Ichauway, the CIHR Frederick Banting and Charles Best Canada Graduate Scholarship and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research Foundation.

A new study reports 309 lab acquired infections and 16 pathogen lab escapes between 2000 and 2021

By Matt Field

Source: <https://thebulletin.org/2023/12/a-new-study-reports-309-lab-acquired-infections-and-16-pathogen-lab-escapes-between-2000-and-2021/>



The city of Lanzhou in northwest China. An accidental release of bacteria from a vaccine factory in 2019 led to over 10,000 infections with brucellosis. Credit: Pieceofmetalwork via Wikimedia Commons. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Dec 22 – In the fall of 2019, workers at a veterinary research center in the northwestern Chinese city of Lanzhou began to fall ill with a disease that caused fever, muscle aches, and other symptoms. Workers at a nearby plant that made brucellosis vaccines had been using expired disinfectant to treat waste gas; the gas was contaminated with aerosolized *Brucella* bacteria and wafted on southeast winds to the research facility. Eventually over



[10,000 people](#) were infected with the disease, which can cause long-term illness. This was just one of 16 times a pathogen escaped from a laboratory setting between 2000 and 2021, according to a [new study](#) in *The Lancet Microbe*.

An international team of researchers looked for all the cases of infections acquired in a laboratory or times a pathogen accidentally “escaped” from a laboratory setting. They found 309 laboratory-acquired or -associated infections from 51 pathogens; eight of these cases were fatal, including one of “mad cow” disease. The 16 incidents they found of a pathogen escaping a lab setting included well-publicized accidents such as the time where a West Nile researcher [became infected](#) with the first SARS virus in 2003 after handling contaminated samples in Singapore. He went on to expose 84 contacts and risked re-igniting the 2002-2004 SARS epidemic, by then quiet in Singapore. In another case, US government workers taking inventory in preparation for a move at the National Institutes of Health found [old vials](#) labeled “variola,” a reference to the virus that causes smallpox, in an unsecured refrigerator in 2014. The study comes at a time when the US government and other groups are re-assessing biosecurity protocols for studies involving potentially pandemic agents. Many experts have called for a strengthening of [global oversight](#) over pathogen research. The new study on accidents points to one area, where the risks associated with research and biotechnology remain murky: “[Without] globalised formal reporting requirements, the data summarised here could only represent the tip of the iceberg,” the authors wrote. Overall, North America, Europe, and Asia accounted for most illnesses. More than three-quarters of the reported infections occurred in the United States. Seventy percent of accidents involved procedural errors, which the authors defined as breaches of biosafety or risk mitigation procedures. These could involve the choice of the wrong personal protective equipment, poor training, or the mishandling of samples, including, the authors wrote, by sniffing them. Needlesticks and spills accounted for roughly 15 percent of infections. **About 77 percent of infections involved bacteria, some 14 percent involved viruses, and 7 percent involved parasites.** A small percentage of cases involved fungi or prions, the latter of which can cause bovine spongiform encephalitis or “mad cow” disease. Of the eight fatalities, six were caused by bacteria, including *Yersinia pestis*, which causes plague; one involved *Ebola* and the other, a prion. Incidents in which a pathogen escaped laboratory containment occasionally led to exposures outside of a research facility, but often did not lead to outbreaks (with exceptions like the Lanzhou accident). They involved bacteria, including the anthrax bacteria, and viruses like variola and influenza. Procedural errors (in the case of the Chinese brucellosis outbreak, the use of expired disinfectant) caused most of the escapes.

Studies of laboratory acquired infections date back [at least to 1915](#). That year, a survey turned up 47 infections, many occurring when researchers used their mouths to suck pathogenic material into pipettes, according to a 1966 review of mouth pipetting. Regulations and better practices have [reduced](#) some of the risks associated with pathogen work. But continued improvement in biosafety will be necessary and, many argue, likely [require new rules](#) for some research as the world undergoes [a boom](#) in construction of labs meant for studying the riskiest of pathogens.

Matt Field is an associate editor at the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. Before joining the *Bulletin*, he covered the White House, Congress, and presidential campaigns as a news producer for Japanese public television. He has also reported on print outlets in the Midwest and on the East Coast. He holds a master’s degree in journalism from Northwestern University.

Some of the year’s best biosecurity coverage in the Bulletin

By Matt Field

Source: <https://thebulletin.org/2023/12/some-of-the-years-best-biosecurity-coverage-in-the-bulletin/>



Dec 28 – Can new artificial intelligence (AI) technologies help would-be bioterrorists plot an attack or design a biological weapon? As avian influenza continues to wreak havoc on bird populations, what are the chances it morphs into the next human pandemic? Is the public health sector staffed up and prepared for another health crisis? These are some of the questions *Bulletin* writers and experts have addressed over the last year. What follows is some of their best work.

[How the ecological crisis of bird flu could become a human pandemic](#)

Thousands of a near-threatened pelican species dying after returning to their colonies. Three thousand Peruvian sea lions lying dead on the shores. The culling of tens of thousands of fur animals. “All these events, evolving in succession, may sound like the beginning of an apocalyptic fiction novel or film. Instead, they’re real-life ecologic emergencies,” infectious disease expert Georgios Pappas writes of highly pathogenic avian influenza. Scientists are watching to see whether H5N1 could evolve from a crisis in nature into a human pandemic.

[Catapulting corpses? A famous case of medieval biological warfare probably never happened](#)

There’s an oft-told tale about the history of biological weapons. An army of the Mongol Golden Horde began to fall ill from a mysterious pestilence as they lay siege to an Italian trading fort in modern-day



Crimea. Despondent, the Mongols catapulted their dead over the fortress walls, thereby spreading the plague to the traders within. As they fled on ships to ports west, the Italians spread the bubonic plague, initiating the infamous Black Death pandemic that crippled Europe in the late 14th century. The tale, though repeated in encyclopedias, documentaries, and elsewhere, is apocryphal, Jean Pascal Zanders says. I talked with the noted scholar of weapons of mass destruction about his research, which shows that the medieval bioweapons attack most likely did not occur.

[Public health position available: Low pay. Promise of burnout and harassment. Master's preferred.](#)

After several rough COVID years, one might assume that governments and society were better prepared for another pandemic. After all, there have been four major international disease crises in the last two decades; it seems likely that another will strike at some point. But a look at the on-the-ground situation in US public health departments could leave the impression that officials have taken the opposite bet. Funding and resources have dwindled, and the agencies are hemorrhaging the workers who will be critical for “disease surveillance, vaccination campaigns, and assistance in natural disasters like wildfires or hurricanes,” *Bulletin* editorial fellow Kimberly Ma writes. Pandemic burnout and intimidation are big issues in the field, but there are also structural problems with the way departments hire and nurture workers, Ma argues.

[Researchers hacked a lab's pathogen containment system. Was it a good idea to publish the results?](#)

One group of researchers studied how to hack the negative pressure systems that keep high-risk pathogens inside of research labs. Another made a hybrid SARS-CoV-2 virus that, while less deadly than the original COVID strain, was more deadly to infected mice than the omicron variant. Was it the right decision to publicize these studies involving so-called “dual-use” research—that is, research malicious actors could use to inflict harm? Biosecurity experts George Post and David Gillum write that “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.”

[Protein de-extinction: How Neanderthals and mammoths could help find new antibiotics](#)

For much of human history, injuries or illnesses that are treatable today could spell death for the afflicted. Without antibiotics, infections and debilitating disease could readily take hold. Antibiotics like penicillin made bacterial infections survivable, but, unfortunately, after decades of robust antibiotic development, the stream of new drugs coming onto the market has slowed to a trickle. Scientists have taken to looking in some interesting places for new antibiotic compounds—Komodo dragon blood and bacteria used by some ants, for example. University of Pennsylvania bioengineer Cesar de la Fuente is also researching animals to find potential cures. But unlike Komodo dragons and ants, the species whose biology he's scouring last walked the Earth tens of thousands of years ago.

[Can't quite develop that dangerous pathogen? AI may soon be able to help](#)

In response to rapidly improving AI technologies, the Biden administration unveiled an executive order that dealt in part with how to reduce the biosecurity risks of these advances in artificial intelligence. Allison Berke, an expert in chemical and biological weapons nonproliferation at the Middlebury Institute, writes that while researchers can use “biodesign” tools to develop biological constructs such as proteins, they can also have the AI “[produce designs for a variety of chemical weapons](#), including some as-yet-unknown candidate compounds predicted to be more toxic than VX, a potent and banned nerve agent.” Another type of AI known as large language models, can [provide the steps to synthesize 1918 pandemic influenza](#) and potentially help would-be bioterrorist in other ways. Berke writes that managing the rapidly advancing AI tools will “require assessment and risk mitigation tools with the flexibility to apply to AI models with as-yet-unimagined capabilities.”

Matt Field is an associate editor at the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. Before joining the *Bulletin*, he covered the White House, Congress, and presidential campaigns as a news producer for Japanese public television. He has also reported for print outlets in the Midwest and on the East Coast. He holds a master's degree in journalism from Northwestern University.

Protecting Europe from the Next Health Threats

By Laurent Muschel

Source: <https://nct-cbnw.com/protecting-europe-from-the-next-health-threats/>

Oct 27 – With the COVID-19 pandemic officially declared over, health emergencies could once again seem like a minor worry for EU defense. Yet as we enter the age of pandemics, it is more important than ever to ensure that we are ready when the next health threat materializes, writes acting Director-General of HERA, Laurent Muschel.

The risk for cross-border health emergencies is increasing in several ways. First, naturally occurring outbreaks are made more likely by anthropogenic impacts on the planet, including biodiversity loss, habitat



destruction, global warming, and intensive farming. Second, the growing number of high-containment labs around the world can increase the risk of accidental releases. Third, the current geopolitical situation comes with a higher threat level for chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) incidents. In addition, advances in synthetic biotechnology and artificial intelligence, combined with lower barriers to access necessary equipment and skills, make it easier for both state and non-state actors to produce and weaponize biological agents.

The COVID-19 pandemic gave the impetus to build a European Health Union. Europe is scaling up its capabilities in prevention, preparedness, and response to outbreaks and CBRN threats. By setting up the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) in October 2021, the continent now has a body dedicated to guaranteeing that it has an arsenal of medical countermeasures at its disposal during times of need.

Using foresight to drive innovation in biotechnology, HERA ensures that the EU and its Member States possess the necessary capabilities to combat unknown health threats. At the center of the EU's medical countermeasure strategy is the rapid development, production, and deployment of vaccines. For this, the European Commission is supporting research on many vaccines against infectious diseases.



Özlem TÜreci, Alexander de Croo, Ursula von der Leyen, and Albert Bourla visiting the Pfizer factory in April 2021, © European Union

One example is HERA's funding for the Coalition of Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) which has produced a candidate vaccine against Chikungunya that showed promising results in phase three trials. Chikungunya, transmitted by tiger mosquitoes, leads to severe fever, muscle, and joint pain, as well as a skin rash, and mosquito control is currently the only way to manage the disease. While Chikungunya used to be limited to Asia and Africa, there have been outbreaks in the Americas, as well as in France and Italy in the past decade. Other vector-borne diseases such as Dengue fever, West Nile fever and Crimean–Congo hemorrhagic fever are also making inroads in Europe. To strengthen our defenses, HERA is working on vaccine libraries and research on innovative vaccine platforms.

●► [Read the full article at the source's URL.](#)



Laurent Muschel has been the acting Director-General of the EU's HERA (European Union Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority) since March 2023. From September 2018 to February 2023, Laurent Muschel was the Director for Internal Security in the Directorate-General for Home Affairs. From September 2013 to August 2018, he was the Director for Migration and Protection, dealing with the migration crisis, borders, and the governance of the Schengen area. Previously, he has been Deputy Head of Cabinet to the Commissioner for Home Affairs. He joined the European Commission in 1994 after studying Political Sciences at Sciences-Po Paris, philosophy at the Sorbonne, and corporate finance in a French business school.

Revolutionizing Biological Threat Detection: The pBDi BioDetector

Source: <https://nct-cbnw.com/revolutionizing-biological-threat-detection-the-pbdi-biodetector/>



AIRSENSE Analytics introduces the pBDi BioDetector, a portable instrument that can detect toxins, bacteria and viruses on-site in only 20-25 minutes.

In a world where biological threats are evolving, rapid and reliable identification of biothreat agents is of prime importance. Biological events can arise from natural, accidental, or deliberate origins. Historical events such as the cholera epidemic in Haiti from 2010, the Ebola virus disease outbreak in West Africa in 2014, and the ricin letters in the United States in 2013 emphasize the need for rapid detection methods for biothreat agents.

The pBDi from AIRSENSE Analytics introduces a solution to these dangers. It is a portable instrument with automated measurements that significantly reduce analysis time. Apart from those mentioned above, one of the threat scenarios that is

intended to be addressed is suspicious shipments in the post offices of state authorities. If you receive a package that contains white powder, hours or days may have passed after sending it to the laboratory until you get the result as to whether it is a hazardous substance or just baking powder. Now, this determination can be made quickly and relatively reliably. pBDi makes it possible to detect toxins, bacteria, and viruses on-site in approximately 20 minutes (without sample preparation).

●► Read more at the source's URL.

2023 Year in Review: Biotechnology Developments

Source: <https://www.genengnews.com/industry-news/2023-biotechnology-developments/>

Dec 2023 – Assembling an end-of-the-year review is always tricky, especially for biotechnology, a field in which creative energy keeps finding new outlets—and yet somehow multiplies rather than dissipates. A comprehensive review would be exhausting, unless it were to do no more than list significant advances, in which case it would be superficial. A selective review would be more manageable, but it would also risk being arbitrary.

One way to navigate between the extremes of comprehensiveness and selectiveness is to be representative. This is the course that *GEN's* top editors have chosen for this end-of-year review. They



have decided to comment, at fair length, on a handful of outstanding presentations from *GEN*'s State of Biotech 2023, a virtual event that brought together a host of luminaries from industry and academia.

[Kevin Davies, PhD](#), the executive editor of *The CRISPR Journal* and *GEN Biotechnology*, recalls the event's opening keynote conversation, which featured Carolyn Bertozzi, PhD, professor of chemistry at Stanford University and a co-winner of the 2022 Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

[Julianna LeMieux, PhD](#), deputy editor in chief of *GEN*, highlights the keynote presentation by David Baker, PhD, professor of biochemistry at the University of Washington, a Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator, and the director of the Institute for Protein Design.

[John Sterling](#), editor in chief of *GEN*, discusses a session that was devoted to the state of mRNA vaccines and therapeutics. The session's speakers were Nathaniel Wang, PhD, co-founder and CEO of Replicate Bioscience, and Daniel G. Anderson, PhD, professor of chemical engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

As informative as these presentations are, they offer less than comprehensive coverage of the biotechnology field. They may even fall a bit short of being representative. However, they do capture the spirit of an event that can be said to have been representative. This event, which originally aired last September, is still available on the *GEN* website.

[Kevin Davies cites Nobel-winning glycobiology research](#)

Stanford University's Carolyn Bertozzi, PhD, shared the 2022 Nobel Prize in Chemistry "for the development of click chemistry and bioorthogonal chemistry." She is one of the founding faculty of the interdisciplinary Sarafan ChEM-H Institute (Chemistry, Engineering, and Medicine for Human Health). She is also a co-founder and advisor to a dozen spin-out biotech companies, exploring new diagnostics therapies that tackle a variety of genetic diseases and cancers.

At the State of Biotech event, Bertozzi said that she was introduced to the field of glycobiology while in graduate school at UC Berkeley. Then she offered a few general observations: "Every cell type has a different sugar coating; the sugars are molecular information that interact with receptors on other cells. They're involved in all facets of human biology, just as much as proteins or nucleic acids or other biopolymers. ... [There is] a huge opportunity to improve human health by understanding carbohydrates better. Chemical tools turn out to be very empowering for this."

She mentioned coining the term "bioorthogonal." "[It describes] chemical reactions that take place among different reactive groups that do not interact or interfere with anything in a biological system," she said. "Today, inside a patient, the chemistries are so selective, clean, and harmless that you can literally do chemistry in a person the same way that, 20 years ago, chemistry would be done in a glass flask."

Bertozzi also spoke about the controversial 2023 Inflation Reduction Act. "[The bill] targets small molecules in a different way than biologics. For small molecules, they've basically shortened the period of exclusivity during which a company can benefit from revenue from their drug before generic competition comes in." This could entail that pharma companies will "forget about small indications that aren't going to be very lucrative and go right into big lucrative indications, which means that a lot of medical need will go unmet and that the drug won't get tested in smaller indications."

One year after winning the Nobel, Bertozzi is still adjusting to autograph hunters and strangers in airports asking her to pose for selfies. "Being a small-time celebrity is a very new experience for most scientists!" she exclaimed. She added that she hopes the Nobel will allow her "to be a bit more bold in the science we do—to take some risks on things that have a longer horizon than typical projects." "I'm sure there's more I can do as a Nobel laureate," she declared, "and I'll find out!"

[Julianna LeMieux highlights progress in protein design](#)

The second keynote presentation in the State of Biotech Summit was given by David Baker, PhD, a pioneer in methods to predict and design the three-dimensional structures of proteins. He has won multiple awards for this work on artificial intelligence-powered predictions of proteins, including the 2021 Breakthrough Prize. Baker noted it's an "exciting time" in protein design. He went so far as to say protein design is at a tipping point. More specifically, he offered several examples of how researchers had used the Rosetta software that he developed, with colleagues, to allow the design of proteins whose sequences are predicted to fold to the design structure, giving a snapshot of where deep learning-based protein design is at the moment. In addition, he spoke about the design of protein binding using the traditional physically based approach. And then, toward the end of his talk, he illustrated how his team can design binding using deep learning. Baker started with medical applications and the first de novo designed medicine in use in humans—the protein-based vaccine for COVID-19 that uses a self-assembling nanoparticle technology developed by Neil King, PhD, assistant professor at the Institute for Protein Design. It's a self-assembling nanoparticle with the spike protein receptor-binding domain on it. In addition, there are several other



medicines that are now in human clinical trials. Baker added that he hopes to see more of those in the clinic soon. But the Baker lab's interests extend beyond medicine. For example, the lab is building molecular switches, vehicles for the targeted intracellular delivery of biologics, and sensors for an "artificial nose." Other applications of protein design beyond medicine are in agriculture and environmental remediation. Baker noted that the lab is working on the harvesting of light energy (via engineered photosynthetic systems), the degradation of plastic and toxic compounds in the environment, and carbon capture. This work has the potential to not only touch, but also transform, many (or even all) areas of biology. Baker emphasized that his lab is "committed to making the world a better place in these really important areas." The lab is also working on technologies that combine biology and electronics. Potential applications include devices that better detect what's going on in the world around us. It may sound as though Baker raced through a dizzying array of applications. But overall, what was most striking was Baker's optimism. Baker's presentation made it clear that he steers his work not by a biotechnologist's version of dead reckoning, but by compelling landmarks—the applications that protein design will be capable of 5 or 10 years from now.

John Sterling discusses mRNA technology

The pandemic response unleashed the power of mRNA technology. Besides enabling the development of mRNA-based COVID-19 vaccines, this technology opened the door to an entirely new range of therapeutic options for other diseases. Seventy years of biological work on mRNA have been validated, and applications of this work are far from exhausted.

During the State of Biotech session on mRNA therapeutics and vaccines, Replicate Bioscience's Nathaniel Wang talked about the surprises he encountered during drug delivery research. For example, when he and his team first began looking at different vectors, they thought they were going to find some that were specialized for the expression of therapeutic proteins and others that would be specialized for use in vaccines. What the scientists actually found, he said, was that the performance of vectors was dependent on the particular protein they were expressing. Some proteins need to be secreted into the blood to have their effect, others have to be decorated with sugars, while still others must be chopped into fragments and shown to the immune system. All these vectors influence the ways that proteins are processed by cells. Wang pointed out that every protein needs something different to induce its effect. "We ultimately found that there was going to be something unique to every vector and protein combination," he added. So, in the end, mRNA is not a plug-and-play technology. What's critically important is that you need a diversity of vectors within your library that you can scan through to find the right vector for each individual protein that you want to express.

MIT's Daniel G. Anderson said that when he began looking at small interfering RNA delivery to the liver, a key goal was determining how many different nanoparticles worked in animals. "We had thought that this might be like small-molecule drug discovery, where we needed to make a 50,000-compound library to find something that would bind and have the desired effect," Anderson explained. "Unexpectedly, we were able to identify several nanoparticles that could deliver RNA in vivo after evaluating only several hundred." When his lab moved on to nonhuman primates, it developed three different chemistries that were all able to deliver RNA in vivo. "I was surprised by how quickly we were able to generate a diverse set of nanoparticles that could deliver RNA in vivo," he recalled. "I believe that our early research gave the field hope that RNA nanoformulations could translate into therapeutic products." Anderson pointed out that the visibility of the mRNA field continues to be elevated: "The success of mRNA vaccines has encouraged people to think outside the space of vaccines and dream about a future where nanoparticles can be used for many other things, including genome editing the DNA to generate permanent therapies."

Ex-Kaiser nurse: Most Covid deaths caused by treatment protocols, not the virus

Source: <https://www.worldtribune.com/ex-kaiser-nurse-most-covid-deaths-caused-by-treatment-protocols-not-the-virus/>

Jan 01 – The overwhelming majority of Covid deaths were actually caused by the treatment protocols dictated by the Covid overlords and not the virus, a former Kaiser Permanente Santa Rosa nurse told Vaccine Safety Research Foundation founder Steve Kirsch.

There were also both early treatments and inpatient treatments available that reduced the Covid death rate by over 90 percent, Gail Macrae told Kirsch.

"Bottom line: it wasn't the virus that caused the pandemic," Kirsch noted, adding it was the response, the "top-down dictated treatment protocols and vaccination directives) that caused nearly all the morbidity and mortality. It was all preventable had we listened to the people that our government wanted to silence." The Covid



injections “increased all-cause mortality in hospitals by up to 80 percent according to one ICU doctor I spoke to who worked in the same hospital as Gail and made meticulous notes on patient outcomes,” Kirsch wrote.



Other key takeaways from the interview:

- ❖ Stanford Hospital was dead empty in April 2020, a time when the press said hospitals were overwhelmed. At peak, there were 11 Covid patients at Stanford. The peak number in the ICU was 4. The thinking at Stanford at the time was that the cases were low because everyone followed the protocol dictated by the health authority. They had no idea that every other hospital was experiencing the same lack of patients. It had nothing to do with the mitigation protocols.
- ❖ Macrae doesn't know of any hospitals in California that were full of Covid patients. Her hospital was running at a fraction of capacity during this “crisis” (at peak they had 10 of the 30 Covid beds filled). They were sending staff members home because there wasn't anything for them to do at work. The hospitals were like ghost towns.
- ❖ The hospital protocols are a two-edged sword: They withhold drugs like strong steroids that can save a patient's life, and they administer drugs like remdesivir which causes people to die sooner. Or they will put people on ventilators. One nurse who got Covid threatened to sue the hospital if she didn't get steroids. She got steroids and she's alive today.
- ❖ One of the reasons it was a “pandemic of the unvaccinated” is that Macrae said that the EMR systems like EPIC were programmed to default all Covid cases to be “unvaccinated” and nurses weren't told how to change it. They would make notations in the chart, but the statistics the hospital reports are based on the vaccine status field, not from notes. So anyone looking at hospital statistics could reasonably conclude that this is a “pandemic of the unvaccinated.”



- ❖ Macrae knew of at least 2 anaphylaxis reports in her unit after getting their first Covid injection. There are 25 people in her unit. Both said they would be fired if they spoke about it and were very reluctant to disclose this information to Marcre. Note: 2 anaphylaxis cases in 25 injections is a train wreck. The Pfizer Phase 3 trial reported no cases of anaphylaxis in the over 22,000 people who got the shots. So, this should have stopped the shots immediately because there was clearly something seriously wrong with the manufactured product (compared to what was given to the trial participants). But nobody said anything because they didn't want to get fired.
- ❖ Some medical staff were told that if they reported a vaccine side effect to VAERS, they would be fired.
- ❖ After the shots were rolled out, patients were admitted for a variety of unusual symptoms: clotting disorders she'd never heard of before, heart abnormalities, strokes, rapid onset autoimmune, rapid onset dementia. Basically, lots of very rare adverse events happening at a frequency that she had never seen before. She had 2 cases of Guillain Barre happening 24 hours after a vaccine, for example. So, 4 total in 6 weeks (two confirmed less than 24 hours after the shot). Previously, 2 cases total in the previous 9 years. So, something is causing this and it never happened during Covid.
- ❖ Younger people started going to the hospital with unusual symptoms starting when the vaccine rolled out for their age group.
- ❖ Macrae experienced roughly an 8X increase in code blues being called (over hospital com systems) directly associated with onset of vaccination. This never happened during Covid.

Kirsch said Dr. Paul Marik agreed that the 90 percent of those who died in the hospital from Covid were killed by the protocol would be a fair estimate. Marik worked in the ICU at the time and had close to 100 percent success rate in saving Covid patients (only a few patients who came in really late or had a lot of comorbidities died).

"He was told to switch to the 'hospital protocol' based on CDC guidance. He complied and 7 out of his next 7 patients died including one patient who was just 22 years old. Paul was not allowed by the hospital to use his protocol to save patient lives, so he resigned."

●► [See the entire interview here.](#)

Florida State Surgeon General Calls for **Halt** in the Use of COVID-19 mRNA Vaccines

January 03, 2024 | Communications Office

Source: <https://www.floridahealth.gov/newsroom/2024/01/20240103-halt-use-covid19-mrna-vaccines.pr.html>

Tallahassee, Fla. — On December 6, 2023, State Surgeon General Dr. Joseph A. Ladapo sent a [letter](#) to the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioner Dr. Robert M. Califf and Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Dr. Mandy Cohen regarding questions pertaining to the safety assessments and the [discovery](#) of billions of DNA fragments per dose of the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 mRNA vaccines.

The Surgeon General outlined concerns regarding nucleic acid contaminants in the approved Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 mRNA vaccines, particularly in the presence of lipid nanoparticle complexes, and Simian Virus 40 (SV40) promoter/enhancer DNA. Lipid nanoparticles are an efficient vehicle for delivery of the mRNA in the COVID-19 vaccines into human cells and may therefore be an equally efficient vehicle for delivering contaminant DNA into human cells. The presence of SV40 promoter/enhancer DNA may also pose a unique and heightened risk of DNA integration into human cells.

In 2007, the FDA published guidance on regulatory limits for DNA vaccines in the [Guidance for Industry: Considerations for Plasmid DNA Vaccines for Infectious Disease Indications \(Guidance for Industry\)](#). In this Guidance for Industry, the FDA outlines important considerations for vaccines that use novel methods of delivery regarding DNA integration, specifically:

- DNA integration could theoretically impact a human's oncogenes – the genes which can transform a healthy cell into a cancerous cell.
- DNA integration may result in chromosomal instability.



- The Guidance for Industry discusses biodistribution of DNA vaccines and how such integration could affect unintended parts of the body including blood, heart, brain, liver, kidney, bone marrow, ovaries/testes, lung, draining lymph nodes, spleen, the site of administration and subcutis at injection site.

On December 14, 2023, the FDA provided a written response providing no evidence that DNA integration assessments have been conducted to address risks outlined by the [FDA](#) themselves in 2007. Based on the FDA's recognition of unique risks posed by DNA integration, the efficacy of the COVID-19 mRNA vaccine's lipid nanoparticle delivery system, and the presence of DNA fragments in these vaccines, it is essential to human health to assess the risks of contaminant DNA integration into human DNA. The FDA has provided no evidence that these risks have been assessed to ensure safety. **As such, Florida State Surgeon General Dr. Joseph A. Ladapo has released the following statement:**

"The FDA's response does not provide data or evidence that the DNA integration assessments they recommended themselves have been performed. Instead, they pointed to genotoxicity studies – which are inadequate assessments for DNA integration risk. In addition, they obfuscated the difference between the SV40 promoter/enhancer and SV40 proteins, two elements that are distinct. DNA integration poses a unique and elevated risk to human health and to the integrity of the human genome, including the risk that DNA integrated into sperm or egg gametes could be passed onto offspring of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine recipients. If the risks of DNA integration have not been assessed for mRNA COVID-19 vaccines, these vaccines are not appropriate for use in human beings. Providers concerned about patient health risks associated with COVID-19 should prioritize patient access to non-mRNA COVID-19 vaccines and treatment. It is my hope that, in regard to COVID-19, the FDA will one day seriously consider its regulatory responsibility to protect human health, including the integrity of the human genome."

In the spirit of transparency and scientific integrity, State Surgeon General Dr. Joseph A. Ladapo will continue to assess research surrounding these risks and provide updates to Floridians.



Algorithm Identifies Dozens of New Bacterial Species from Clinical Isolates

Researchers at the University of Basel have established a new algorithm-NOVA (Novel Organism Verification and Analysis)-to analyze bacterial isolates that cannot otherwise be characterized using conventional identification procedures. Analyzing 61 unknown bacterial pathogens, found in blood or tissue samples from patients, 35 represent potentially novel species and seven out of the 35 isolated strains identified were clinically relevant. **+ MORE**

Biologist to Tucker Carlson: Data suggest 17 million have died from Covid injections

Source: <https://www.worldtribune.com/biologist-to-tucker-carlson-data-suggest-17-million-have-died-from-covid-injections/>

Jan 09 – The global death toll from the Covid injections is about 17 million, biologist Dr. Bret Weinstein said, citing a September 2023 study titled "[COVID-19 vaccine-associated mortality in the Southern Hemisphere.](#)"

In an interview with Tucker Carlson, Weinstein, a former distinguished professor of evolutionary biology at Evergreen State College, said the study which found one death for every 800 Covid shots was "game changer" type stuff.

While raising the alarm about the power grab of the UN's World Health Organization (WHO), Weinstein left Carlson stunned when he stated how many people have died from Covid mRNA injections.

"So I'm not a math genius, but one in eight hundred shots times billions is a lot of people ... 17 million deaths from the Covid vaccine?"

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"17 million deaths from the COVID vax?"

Bret Weinstein tells Tucker Carlson: "I saw a credible estimate of something like 17 million deaths globally."

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Just for perspective: I mean, that's like the death toll of a global war," Carlson noted.

"Yes, absolutely," Weinstein said. "This is a great tragedy of history." Weinstein also warned Carlson that the WHO is preparing "troubling" new health emergency measures that critics say would have a devastating effect on national sovereignty and free speech. Weinstein explained how the WHO was taken by surprise by a "small group of dissidents" were who able to "bend the narrative" surrounding the Covid pandemic and injections.

To combat this wrong thinking, the WHO is drafting "pandemic preparedness plan modifications" in response to prevent similar pushback when "the next pandemic" arises.

"The fact that that small number of dissidents was able to bend the narrative was able to bring people's awareness to the massive levels of harmful and effectiveness of the shots is, in some ways, the most surprising element of the story," Weinstein stated.

"And I think it truly surprised Pharma and its partners in social media and government — and government-run organizations — I think they thought that they own enough of the media that they could sell us any narrative they wish. And I think surprising as it is, they didn't really understand that podcasts could possibly be a countervailing force of significance."

Weinstein added that the WHO is "looking for a rematch" with humanity.

"What I believe is going on is the World Health Organization is now revising the structures that allowed the dissidents to upend the narrative," he said. "And they are looking for a rematch, I think."

"What they want are the measures that would have allowed them to silence the podcasters to mandate various things internationally in a way that would prevent the emergence of a control group that would allow us to see harms clearly," he added.

Novel nasal COVID-19 vaccine offers longer, better immunity than jabs

Source: <https://newatlas.com/medical/intranasal-covid-19-vaccine-greater-mucosal-systemic-immunity/>



Jan 10 – Researchers have developed an intranasal COVID-19 vaccine that enhances the immune system's response to the virus, providing longer-lasting, greater protection than vaccine injections, even against new and emerging variants. The novel vaccine candidate could mean fewer boosters in future.

While the immediate threat of the COVID-19 pandemic has dissipated somewhat, with most returning to their pre-COVID lives, the continued rise of new virus variants means that vaccination is still necessary to protect the vulnerable in the community, such as the elderly and frail and those with pre-existing medical conditions. Although many vaccines are available now that show protection in terms of significantly reducing infections, hospitalizations, deaths and virus transmission, breakthrough infections still occur, suggesting there are limitations to the duration of protection

afforded by current vaccine regimes. So, in a study led by **Duke-NUS Medical School in Singapore**, researchers set about developing and testing a COVID-19 vaccine that's delivered intranasally with the hope that it's more effective.

"Our data show that, compared to subcutaneous vaccination, the intranasal route improved the response of certain immune cells, known as T cells, which reduced disease severity," said Ashley St. John, corresponding author of the study. "Not only that, but it also resulted in a greater number of T central memory cells compared to subcutaneous vaccination, which could lead to longer-lasting protection."

Given that SARS-CoV-2 infection is initiated at the mucosal surface of the nasal passages and lung airways, you'd expect that a vaccine delivered into the nose – right at the point where the virus enters the body – would be more effective than one injected into the skin or muscle.

As expected, the researchers found that after testing their vaccine candidate on hamsters, nasal administration boosted the antibody response in the mucosa. However, compared to subcutaneous vaccination, mucosal vaccination produced distinct effects on T cells and antibody responses.

Importantly, it produced longer-lasting mucosal and systemic immune protection against SARS-CoV-2 through the preferential induction of airway-resident T cells and central memory T (TCM) cells, which play a vital role in safeguarding the body when it's re-exposed to a virus. While antigen-specific TCMs were also present in the animals that received the subcutaneously administered vaccine and could be reactivated as expected,



both their numbers and the magnitude of their cytokine production responses were heightened following mucosal vaccination. Cytokines are small proteins that are crucial in controlling the growth and activity of other immune and inflammatory cells. The researchers' use of adjuvants – substances that help create a stronger immune response – in the vaccine influenced the T cells' characteristics, as well as their activation and cytokine production, with different adjuvants producing different T cell responses. Further, immunoglobulin G (IgG), the most common antibody in humans and one that protects against bacterial and viral infections, was found to be more effective at neutralizing viral variants, including newly emerging ones, when induced through intranasal vaccination. The improved response by T cells and IgG following intranasal vaccination provides evidence it contributes to greater and longer-lasting protection from SARS-CoV-2, which would limit vaccine breakthrough infections, the researchers said. "While the acute phase of the pandemic may be behind us, the rise of new variants, including [JN.1](#), which has triggered an increase in hospital admissions locally, demonstrates that we have room in our arsenal of vaccines and treatment for even better tools," said Patrick Tan, one of the study's co-authors. "This study shows that mucosal vaccination holds promise for improving COVID-19 vaccine efficacy with potentially fewer boosters needed."

A patent has been filed that covers the invention of the vaccine composition formulated for intranasal delivery, paving the way for an industry partnership to potentially develop mucosal vaccines for COVID-19 and other pathogens that target mucosal surfaces.

●► The study was published in the journal [eBioMedicine](#).

Briefing by Chief of Nuclear, Chemical, and Biological Protection Troops of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov on U.S. military-biological activity



Source 1: <https://eng.mil.ru/files/NBC%20Briefing.pdf>

Source 2: <https://ria.ru/20240115/ospa-1921441389.html>



Jan 15 – During 2023, the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation carried out a detailed analysis of U.S. military biological activities in Ukraine and elsewhere in the world, which provided a more complete understanding of the military biology programmes they are implementing. Based on the analysis of documents obtained during the special military operation, the structure of the system set up by the U.S.



administration for global biological risk management became clear. It is made up of government agencies and private contracting companies, including the so-called 'Big Pharma' companies.

Through the U.S. executive branch, a legislative framework is being formed to fund military biological research directly from the federal budget. Under state guarantees, funds are attracted from non-governmental organisations controlled by the Democratic Party leadership, including the investment funds of the Clintons, Rockefellers, Soros, and Biden.

The main contractors of the American military department are Metabiota, Black & Veatch, and CH2M HILL, which are entrusted with the construction of biobased facilities, supplying equipment for the Pentagon's biolaboratories around the world. The work is being coordinated by the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA).

The activities of this system are aimed at studying pathogens of especially dangerous infections in the regions of the world strategically important for the USA, controlling the biological situation and achieving superiority in the field of bioproduction. One of the priority tasks is the so-called 'biological espionage' - analysing the epidemiological situation along the borders of geopolitical adversaries and in the proposed areas of deployment of military contingents.

Materials were received confirming that the American military department had set tasks to monitor the biological situation in the Middle East and Central Asia, territories bordering China, Turkey, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia.

Over the past year, the Pentagon has developed and adopted a number of conceptual documents that envisage the expansion of the foreign network of U.S.-controlled biolaboratories and the continuation of military biological research beyond national jurisdiction. In addition, administrative and technical structures (the White House Office of Pandemic Preparedness and Response Policy, and the State Department's Bureau of Global Health Security and Diplomacy) were created in 2023 with the primary mission of implementing policies for further biological-military expansion.

While the stated goals are to monitor infectious diseases and assist developing countries, the example of Ukraine has made it clear how the U.S. is building up its biological-military capabilities.

By the time the special military operation was started, the Pentagon was implementing UP and TAP projects in the country aimed at studying pathogens of particularly dangerous and economically significant diseases (tularemia, anthrax, hantavirus infections).

The research was conducted in three main areas. These include monitoring the biological situation, collecting endemic strains, and studying the susceptibility of the local population.

In 2023, the EU countries actively promoted an initiative to deploy a network of centres of 'excellence' in the field of NBC protection, which envisages the deployment of biolaboratories on the territory of the former USSR. The prospective partners are highly recommended '...not to advertise this initiative due to its extreme sensitivity for the Russian Federation...' At the same time, it is stressed that the Central Asian countries '...are already benefiting from technical cooperation...'

The distribution of funds on the territory of the post-Soviet space is carried out, including through a system of grants through the Ukrainian and International Science and Technology Centres. I would like to draw attention to the names of individual projects financed in the states of the Transcaucasia and Central Asia.

Project 2410 'Assessment of natural resistance of brucellosis pathogen in domestic and wild animals' is aimed at studying the possibility of transmission of this pathogen to humans. The research was carried out with the participation of specialists from the University of Florida.

The 2513 Project studies risk factors and molecular properties of resistance in the external environment of virulent Enterobacteriaceae.

The research aims to isolate strains that are immune to all known classes of antibiotics.

The 2545 Project involves modelling evolutionary changes in selected viruses highly pathogenic to humans. The research was supported by the UK's national research and innovation agency.

Taking advantage of gaps in international legislation, the United States administration is consistently building up its biological-military capabilities in various regions of the world.

Of particular concern is the fact that the United States has blocked any international initiatives to verify the Biological Weapons Convention. This eliminates the ability to inspect laboratory operations both inside and outside the United States. The 2023 BWC events once again confirmed Washington's fundamental reluctance to resume negotiations on a legally binding verification mechanism.

In the course of the events held at the BWC, the Russian Federation raised more than 20 questions concerning violations by Kiev and Washington of the requirements of the Convention. It concerned the nomenclature and quantities of pathogenic microorganisms studied under the Biological Threat Reduction Program, the conduct of research on Ukrainian servicemen and mentally ill persons, and the concealment by Ukraine and the United States of the facts of cooperation in the military-biological sphere in international reporting. None of the questions have received substantive answers to date.



At the same time, the initiatives promoted by the United States were aimed at replacing the provisions of the Convention and other norms of international law with its own 'rules', which were developed in U.S. interests, supported by the collective West and imposed on third countries for implementation.

This can be traced in the work at other international platforms, when Western delegations pushed through decision-making only on issues of interest to them, without regard for the priorities of other states. At the same time, attention is deliberately shifted to the consideration of secondary issues not directly related to the problems of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, for example, such as the creation of all kinds of databases, ensuring gender equality, participation in BWC activities by youth organisations, etc.

To mitigate the political damage from the Russian revelations, the U.S. administration is trying to put pressure on its allies and developing countries. This is due, in particular, to the results of the consideration of the issue of U.S. biological-military activities in Ukraine in the United Nations Security Council and the outcome of the vote in the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to re-elect Russia to the Executive Board of that organisation.

We have repeatedly noted that the work of U.S. military biologists is aimed at forming 'artificially managed epidemics' and is not monitored under the BWC and the UN Secretary General's mechanism for investigating the use of biological weapons.

At the same time, the forecast of the situation assumes further deterioration of the epidemic situation with possible formation of artificial disease foci and uncontrolled expansion of the vector area.

For example, an increase in non-endemic Asian tiger mosquitoes has already been recorded in Southern and Central Europe during the last two years. In Germany, populations of this species have developed in five federal districts. Another mosquito species that is a vector of the West Nile fever has been identified in Sweden and Finland.

At the same time, an increase in the incidence of uncharacteristic vector-borne infections was noted in the EU countries. More people infected with dengue fever were reported in Europe during the year than in the previous decade. The peak incidence of the West Nile fever has also been recorded more than a thousand cases, 92 of them fatal.

Of particular concern is the increase in research on smallpox viruses and other human pathogenic orthopoxviruses by U.S. military specialists. This involves the evaluation of monkeypox virus as a potential infectious biological agent and the search for agent mimics of smallpox viruses.

I would like to note that only two institutions are allowed to work with this virus - the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the USA and the State Research Center of Virology and Biotechnology VECTOR in Russia.

However, despite a ban by the World Health Assembly, aerobiological experiments using two strains of smallpox virus were conducted by staff of the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases. The relevant document showing the involvement of the U.S. DoD in the research is shown on the slide.

This situation clearly demonstrates the U.S. administration's disregard for international biosafety norms. Such work has the potential to trigger a global epidemic emergency, as a significant proportion of the population has become susceptible to smallpox and other orthopoxviruses as a result of loss of population immunity. The monkeypox pandemic and the increase in the incidence of cowpox virus worldwide over the past 10 years are clear examples.

I would like to remind you that American researchers have a keen interest in the synthesis of orthopoxviruses.

In 2017, they synthesised a functional genome of the equine smallpox virus. At the same time, the possibility of artificial production of Lassa, Ebola, Marburg, and human pathogenic coronaviruses was shown.

A recent example is the gain-of-function studies conducted at the Boston University, where directed modification of the COVID pathogen resulted in 80% lethality causing atypical neurological symptoms and severe lung lesions in model animals.

The risks of such dual-use research are greatly increased by the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies. This was clearly demonstrated by a US firm that used an artificial intelligence-based therapeutic compound generator to create potential chemical weapons agents. I should like to make a special mention of the work carried out in 2023 to identify the organisers and participants in military-biological activities on the territory of Ukraine.

As a result of the analysis of the documentation received, more than 50 persons were identified including US and Ukrainian government officials, employees of intermediary organisations and private companies.

They include DTRA employees Kenneth Myers, Robert Pope and Joanna Wintrol; and Pentagon contractor representatives (Battelle and EcoHealth Alliance) Kevin Olival, Karen Sailors, and Lewis von Thae.

This list includes Ukrainian citizens who took part in the implementation of the UP and TAP projects: Mikhail Usatiy, Tatyana Kiryazova. For a long time, employees of the Science and Technology Center in Ukraine (STCU) and the U.S. Agency for International Development remained in the shadows developing scenarios aimed at accusing the Russian Federation of using biological weapons. I would like to remind you that the relevant training took place in Lvov in August 2023 with the participation of representatives of the SBU and the



National Police of Ukraine. The event was attended by Filippa Lentzos, Gemma Bowsher, Head of the Reference Laboratory for the Diagnosis of Viral and Highly Dangerous Pathogens Irina Demchishina, and Head of the Biosafety and Biological Protection Department of the Centre for Public Health of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine Darya Ponomarenko. Demchishina had previously acted as an intermediary in dealing with Pentagon contractor Black & Veatch and its vice president, Thomas Wahl.

Research on the study of pathogens of economically significant infections and mechanisms of their spread was led by Denis Muzyka. Viktor Gavrilenko and Aleksandr Mezinov were involved in collecting and sending materials.

Among those involved in the biological-military dossier, those involved in the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and who benefited financially from the distribution of substandard vaccines deserve special mention.

They include former CIA Director Gina Haspel, Department of Health and Human Services Alex Azar and White House adviser Anthony Fauci, who deliberately obstructed investigations into the causes of the COVID-19 pandemic and manipulated public opinion. These are top officials of the pharmaceutical companies Pfizer and Moderna, Albert Bourla and Stephane Bancel, who made super profits on sales of drugs dangerous to human health.

The list includes Pentagon contractor executives Nita Madhav, CEO of Metabiota, and Peter Daszak, president of EcoHealth Alliance involved in laundering money from the U.S. government budget allocated to study the agent of a new coronavirus infection and fight the pandemic. The U.S. and Ukrainian officials shown on the slide are only a small part of the biological-military dossier; more complete information has been transferred to military investigative bodies for appropriate legal assessment.

I would like to point out that the United States signed the Convention in 1972 and ratified it in 1975. We have in our possession a Pentagon document dated 1977 (i.e., after the BWC was ratified).

It shows the main activities of the US Army in the biological weapons development programme. According to the authors, this material was prepared for Congressional representatives to raise their awareness of the U.S. Department of Defense's biological programme. It is noteworthy that many of the government and scientific institutions listed in the document as Pentagon contractors under the biological weapons development programme are now involved in the so-called Biological Threat Reduction Programme conducted by DTRA in Ukraine. These include universities in Texas, Florida, Arizona, and others.

The directions of research implementation have not changed. The same pathogens of tularemia, anthrax, tick-borne infections are the priority. In October 2023, the U.S. Department of Defense announced the launch of a training programme for the biomanufacturing strategy, with former military personnel with biomedical warfare experience being prioritised as candidates.

The official press release noted that '...the Department of Defence's activities will focus on revitalising U.S. domestic manufacturing capabilities...that enhance America's strategic competitiveness and enable the military of tomorrow...'

Such language may be indicative of Washington's attempts to recreate technologies for the large-scale production of biological formulations as part of an offensive biological programme.

Thus, the systemic expansion of biological-military activities poses a threat to the security of the Russian Federation and other States considered by the United States as strategic adversaries. The scale of U.S. dual-use research and the global biological risks it poses raise the question of an independent international investigation. Due to the unprecedented pressure from Washington, many states have taken a passive position on this issue, but the information received in the course of the special military operation on the development of biological weapons components on the territory of Ukraine in violation of Articles 1 and 4 of the Convention makes them change their point of view. In the current situation, we consider it extremely important to resume work on a legally binding protocol to the Convention, which would be binding on all States Parties to the BWC, and first and foremost on the United States.

We are continuing to analyse incoming documents and will keep you informed.

China experimenting with **deadly** Covid-like virus that could affect humans: Report

Source: <https://www.wionews.com/world/china-experimenting-with-deadly-covid-like-virus-that-is-fatal-to-mice-report-680390>

Jan 16 – If a report doing the rounds on a database of pre-peer reviewed journal articles is to be believed, China has been experimenting with a new deadly Covid-like virus which is 100 per cent fatal to mice and could affect humans. The paper published on bioRxiv website on January 3 claimed that doctors trained by the Chinese military made their version of the so-called "pangolin coronavirus" and gave it to a group of mice to see what would happen. "Four mice inoculated with inactivated virus and four mock-infected mice were used as controls. Surprisingly, all the mice that were infected with the live virus succumbed to the infection within 7-8 days post-inoculation," the paper said.



Deaths linked to brain infection

Experts found that the four mice given the virus lost weight within five days after being infected. On the seventh day, the mice started to become sluggish and their eyes went white.

"In the mice infected with live virus, the viral load in the lungs significantly decreased by day 6; both the viral RNA loads and viral titers in the brain samples were relatively low on day 3, but substantially increased by day 6. This finding suggested that severe brain infection during the later stages of infection may be the key cause of death in these mice," the paper further said.

Researchers said that the cause of death may be linked to the occurrence of late brain infection.

The virus had not only spread to the mice's bodies but also reached critical organs such as the brain, eyes, and lungs.

"To the best of our knowledge, this is the first report showing that a SARS-CoV-2-related pangolin coronavirus can cause 100% mortality in hACE2 mice, suggesting a risk for GX_P2V to spill over into humans," the researchers added.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first report showing that a SARS-CoV-2 related pangolin coronavirus can cause 100 percent mortality in hACE2 mice, suggesting a risk for GX_P2V to spill over into humans.

China warns of potential resurgence of Covid

Chinese authorities on Sunday warned of a [potential resurgence of Covid](#) this month driven by the JN.1 subvariant. The National Health Commission (NHC) highlighted the increasing presence of JN.1 and said that multiple respiratory diseases were likely to spread this winter and next spring.

"Influenza viruses are expected to remain the dominant pathogen," Wang Dayan, head of the Chinese National Influenza Center, told reporters.

He attributed the JN.1's rise to several factors including imported cases, lower influenza rates and declining population immunity.



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