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# IC<sup>2</sup> CBRNE DIARY

Dedicated to Global  
First Responders



March 2023



## Psychological Desensitization of First Responders

**PART A**



An International CBRNE Institute publication

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March 2023

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*Topics that attracted attention!*

# EDITOR'S CORNER



## Editorial



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

*Editor-in-Chief*  
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## Dear Colleagues,

The situation remains the same: proxy war – pandemic – universal unethical stupidity.



**War:** US Foreign Secretary Anthony Blinken has warned the UN Security Council not to be fooled by calls for a temporary or unconditional ceasefire in Ukraine, saying a "just and lasting" peace cannot allow Russia to rest and re-equip. This is how he wants to prejudice any country that will want a political settlement of the Ukrainian if the US does not win what it is asking for. At the same time, NATO Secretary General G. Stoltenberg in a speech in Estonia declared that China is unreliable for talks, adding more fuel to the fire and effectively stopping any peace efforts. This is how they effectively terminate China's 12-point peace plan, which Zelensky said he would consider. He probably should have asked first. Who cares about peace and lives? For example, Germany announces the possibility of constructing a Rheinmetall Panthr KF51 super-tanks factory in Ukraine (400 pieces annually) the moment that [Defense Minister](#) Boris Pistorius reportedly told Social Democrat lawmakers that the army is not capable of repelling an attack and is facing difficulties meeting obligations to the NATO alliance!

British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said that Moscow must respect international airspace after the United States accused the Russian Air Force of shooting down an American drone (MQ-9 Reaper) in the Black Sea. We have not heard similar concerns from Britain regarding Turkey's repeated violations of Greek National Air Space ...

**War clock – one minute to midnight:** Finland (F/A-18 Hornet) vs. Russia; Russia vs. Georgia; Azerbaijan vs. Armenia; China vs. Taiwan; Israel vs. Iran. Guess who is the common denominator? Two letters!

**NATO:** What if all NATO members decide to override Turkey's objections and accept Sweden in the alliance – tomorrow? How long this "Jump" "How high?" will continue?

**ICC:** Prosecution against V. Putin for war crimes! What about Ukrainian war crimes? It takes two to tango. Recalling some previous wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. It would be nice and helpful to open old wounds that never healed. On the other hand, there is this "[US Hague Invasion Act](#)" that complicates things.

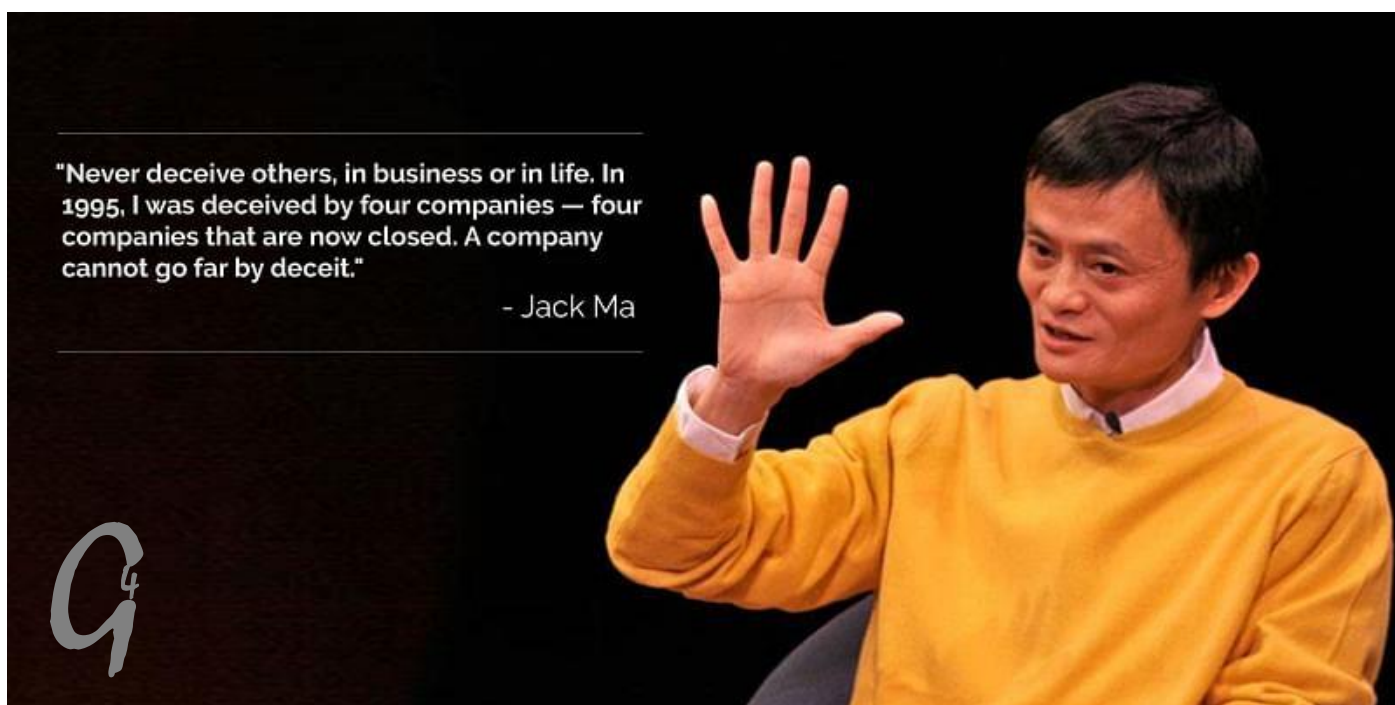
**Middle East:** Everything is changing in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East after the Iran-S. Arabia alignment was achieved through Chinese efforts and the tectonic changes continued with the return of Syria to the "Arab family" as the UAE gave a grand welcome to Syrian President M. Assad during his visit to the Gulf country. This is a fine example of negotiations, goodwill, and a desire for peace. Perhaps they will do the same with suffering Lebanon!



**Iraq:** Twenty years since the invasion of the US. The current situation is still a mess – as always (e.g., Afghanistan)

**Artificial intelligence/ChatGPT:** A machine empowered with AI threatens to destroy the world. An anthropoid [robot](#) (Ameca) was annoyed when a human touched its nose (cover photo). It seems that the new inhabitants of the planet are starting to acquire the behavior of their creators. And this means that when humans are lacking ethics then their creations will act accordingly. Unfortunately, ethics in cutting-edge technologies like AI is not well defined due to the people involved (personal experience with a GCC company). When humans do not care about the consequences of their actions to other people why do we expect what they produce will not mirror their creators?

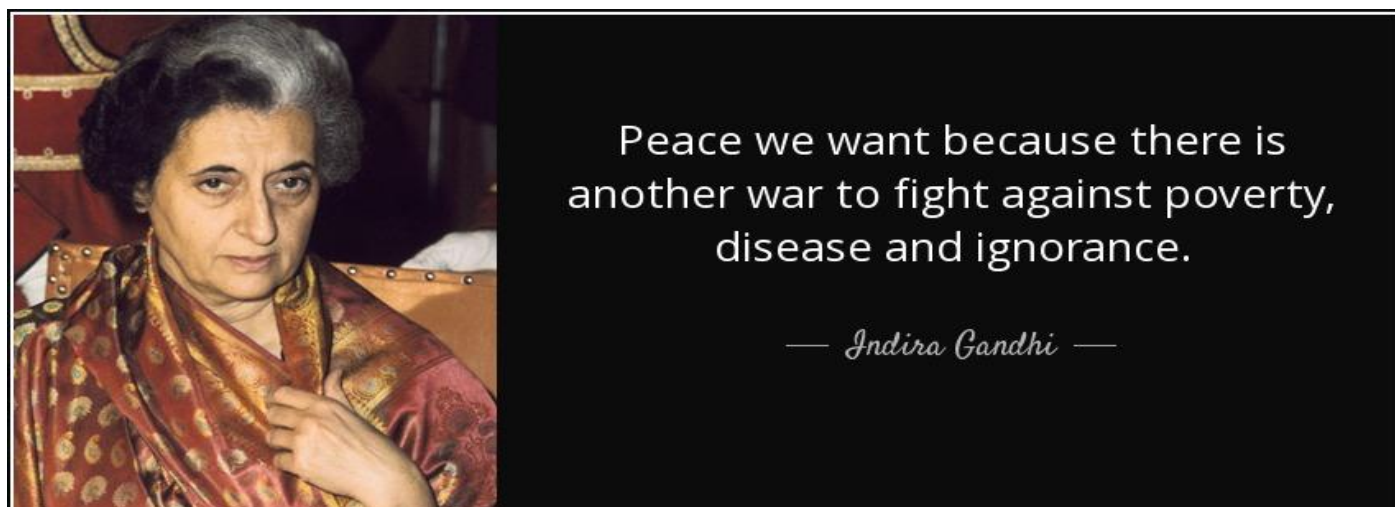
*The Editor-in-Chief*



"Never deceive others, in business or in life. In 1995, I was deceived by four companies — four companies that are now closed. A company cannot go far by deceit."

- Jack Ma

Jack Ma, Founder and Executive Chairman, Alibaba Group



Peace we want because there is another war to fight against poverty, disease and ignorance.

— Indira Gandhi —





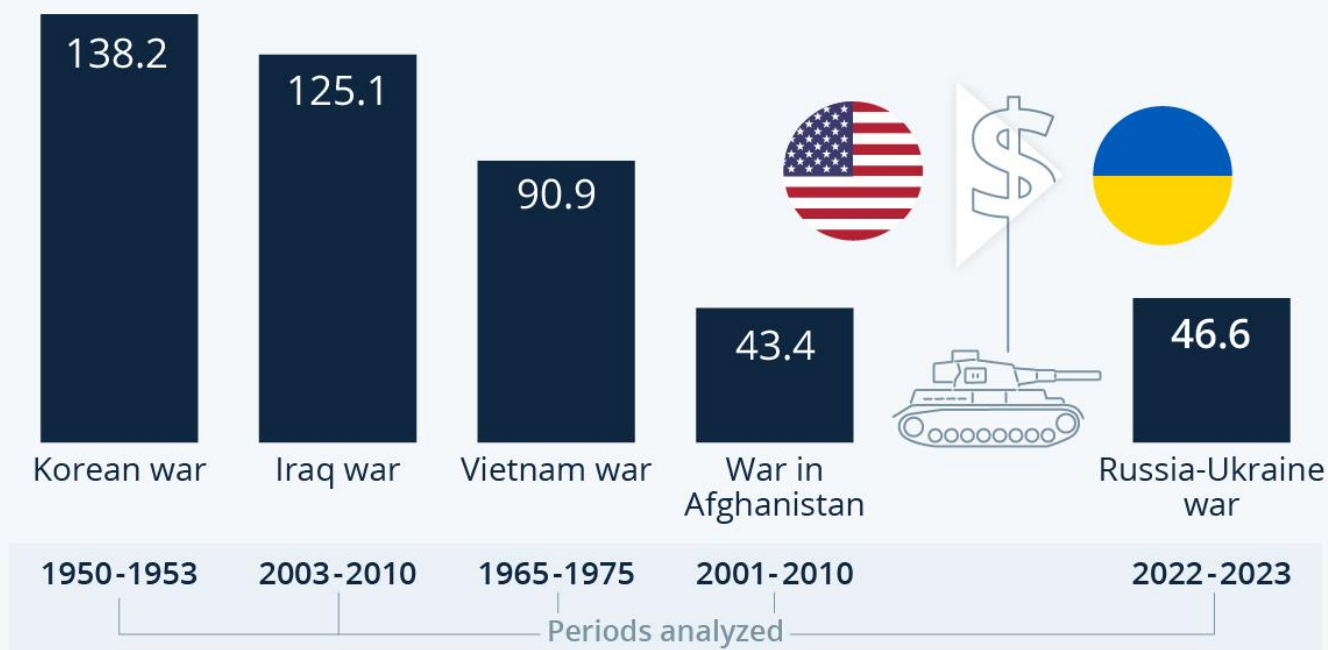
## Ukraine: U.S. Military Aid Exceeds Costs of Afghanistan

By Martin Armstrong

Source: <https://www.statista.com/chart/29375/us-military-aid-to-ukraine-compared-to-past-wars/>

Feb 23 – Ukraine receives the most military [aid](#) from the United States: Since the beginning of the war and as of Jan. 15, 2023, \$46.6 billion in financial aid for military purposes has flowed to the country now [at war with Russia](#). When calculating the average annual costs (in 2022 prices) of previous wars in which the United States has been involved in, the true magnitude of the country's Ukraine aid expenditure can be seen. As this infographic shows, the payments to Ukraine have already exceeded the annual military expenditure of the U.S. in the war in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2010. The U.S. military costs in the [Vietnam War](#), the Iraq War and the Korean War were significantly higher - according to calculations by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy as part of its [Ukraine Support Tracker](#).

Annual average U.S. military spending, by war vs. U.S. military aid to Ukraine (in billion U.S. dollars, in 2022 prices)\*



\* Military aid to Ukraine does not include weapons and equipment.

Source: Kiel Institute for the World Economy

In the Vietnam and Korean wars, the high usage rate of ammunition and other supplies cost a particularly large amount of money, in addition to the wear and tear of equipment and numerous other assets such as the care of the wounded. Further complicating matters in each case was the great distance to the theater of operations. Although the U.S. maintained a number of bases in Southeast Asia, the large weapons systems and the required replacement components all had to be shipped or flown across the Pacific. In addition, a large fleet of aircraft carriers was always deployed off the coast of Vietnam. The numerous missions of the air force also caused significant costs.

In the U.S., criticism of the scale of military aid to Ukraine is already coming from within the Republican ranks. Some of the U.S. Republicans in Congress have announced that they intend to block aid to Ukraine. Nevertheless, the day after his [visit to Kyiv](#), U.S. President Biden underscored his country's commitment to continued support of the Ukrainian war effort. Speaking in Warsaw, [Poland](#), he said: "This is not just about freedom in Ukraine.



It's about freedom of democracy in general". **In addition to the military aid detailed in this infographic, the U.S. has also supplied weapons and equipment worth over \$5 billion.**

## Magical Weapons for Ukraine: Lessons from World War I

By William Astore

Source: <https://www.antiwar.com/blog/2023/02/24/magical-weapons-for-ukraine-lessons-from-world-war-i/>

Feb 24 – If you read the mainstream media, it would seem the answer to the Russia-Ukraine War, now about to enter its second year of mass death and widespread destruction, is weapons of various sorts. Western tanks like the German Leopard and American Abrams. Fighter jets like the F-16 produced by Lockheed Martin. If only Ukraine had more tanks, more jets, and the like, they would be able decisively to defeat the Russian military, ejecting it from Ukrainian territory, even from the Crimea, so the argument goes.

As a historian of technology and warfare, I've studied this belief in magical weapons. History teaches us that weapons alone usually do not determine winners and losers in war. Weapons themselves are rarely decisive, especially when the sides engaged fight symmetrically. In such cases, new weaponry often increases the carnage.

Consider the events of World War I. Various weapons were tried in an attempt to win the war decisively through military action. These weapons included poison gas (of various types), tanks, flamethrowers, and submarines, among others. None of these weapons broke the stalemate on the Western Front. Countermeasures were found. And World War I dragged on for more than four long years, producing hecatombs of dead.

What did work? In a word, exhaustion. In the spring of 1918, Germany launched massive, last-ditch, offensives to win the war before U.S. troops arrived in Europe in large numbers. (The US had entered the war in 1917 but was still mobilizing in 1918.) The Germans came close to winning, but when their offensives grounded to a halt, they had little left in the tank to endure Allied counterattacks. Yes, the Allies had more tanks than the Germans, and were learning to use them effectively with airpower in combined arms assaults. But what truly mattered was exhaustion within the German ranks, exacerbated by the Spanish flu, hunger, and demoralization.

No magical weapon won World War I. And no magical weapon is going to provide Ukraine a decisive edge in its struggle with Russia. Certainly not a hundred or so Western tanks or a few dozen fighter jets.

Indeed, looking at some of the media coverage of the Russia-Ukraine War in the West, you might be excused from mistaking it for advertising videos at a weapons trade show. Over the last year, we've learned a lot about Javelin and Stinger missiles, HIMARS rocket launchers, and of course various tanks, fighter jets, and the like. But we've seen very little coverage of the mass carnage on both sides. It's been said the real costs of war will never get in the history books, for who wishes to confront fully the brutality and madness of industrialized warfare?

I'm in the middle of watching the new German version of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a film deservedly nominated for an Oscar for best picture (available on Netflix). It's one of the better war films I've seen in its depiction of the horrific and dehumanizing aspects of modern industrial warfare. Something like this movie is happening currently in Ukraine, but our leaders, supported by the media, think the answer to the carnage is to send even more destructive weaponry so that more troops (and civilians) can die.

Magical weapons are not the answer. For of course there's nothing magical about weapons of mass destruction.

**William J. Astore** is a retired lieutenant colonel (USAF). He taught history for fifteen years at military and civilian schools.

## All Wars Eventually End – Here Are 3 Situations That Will Lead Russia and Ukraine to Make Peace

By Andrew Blum

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20230224-all-wars-eventually-end-here-are-3-situations-that-will-lead-russia-and-ukraine-to-make-peace>

Feb 24 – It's been a year since Russia first launched a full invasion of Ukraine, and, right now, peace seems impossible.

[Peace talks between](#) the two countries have launched, [and then faltered](#), multiple times.

In February 2023, a senior Ukrainian official said that peace talks are "[out of the question](#)" – without Ukraine's [reclaiming its territory](#) that Russia overtook 2022. All wars end, however, and research shows that [almost half end in some type of agreement](#) to stop the fighting. The others end in victory for one side or when, for a variety of reasons, the fighting simply peters out.



As [a scholar](#) of peace and conflict, I have 20 years of experience working to help people establish and maintain peace after conflict. As Ukraine readies to enter its second year of a widespread war with Russia, I think it is useful to consider how wars end and what conditions need to be in place before the war between Russia and Ukraine might draw to a close. Here are three key points that help assess the possibility of whether a war might end.

### 1. A Shared Idea of the Future

The first question is whether opposing groups at war agree about what it will take for war to end – be it land, money or political control. Fighting in a war is part of a wider bargaining process. Victories on the battlefield allow the winning aggressor to demand more, while defeats may mean those losing ground have to settle for less.

Once both sides have a clear sense of the fighting's likely outcome, additional negotiations – or more fighting – become less important. And because [war is so costly](#), it is normally better to accept even part of an envisioned peace agreement than continue to fight.

At the moment, Russian and Ukraine appear to have differing opinions about the war's likely outcome. Ukrainian forces made progress in September 2022 when they [retook two Ukrainian regions](#) – Kharkiv and Kherson – that Russia had occupied. So Ukraine is likely to believe that it can make more advances if it keeps on fighting.

Conversely, Russia successfully halted a wider [collapse of its forces](#) and appears to be in a stronger position militarily heading into the spring [than it was in the fall of 2022](#).

### 2. If War Costs Overtake Costs of Peace

Beliefs in the costs of war and the costs of peace also matter. If the [costs of war](#) – including human lives, money or more intangible qualities, such as prestige – are low, one side might keep fighting for its goals.

The human and economic costs of this war are [very high for both Russia](#) and Ukraine, although they are [clearly much higher for Ukraine](#).

Russian attacks in Ukraine [killed at least 40,000 Ukrainian civilians](#) in the first year of this conflict, and more than [13 million Ukrainians](#) have had to flee their homes – about half have left the country altogether.

Upwards of 100,000 Ukrainian and Russian soldiers [have also died](#) in the fighting war.

These losses should help create incentives for Ukraine to go along with some kind of agreement to stop the fighting.

However, the costs of peace are also still very high for both sides.

It is possible that that Russian President Vladimir Putin would lose power, and might [even lose his life](#), if he is seen to be capitulating to Ukraine.

For Ukraine, peace might require relinquishment of part of its recognized, sovereign territory. It would also require Ukrainian people to make peace with an enemy whose wartime strategy has been to carry out the deliberate, targeted [“brutalization of the Ukrainian people.”](#)

### 3. Whether Peace Can Be Enforced

When opposing groups reach an agreement in other types of conflicts – such as an agreement to end a labor union strike, for instance – there is typically a government in place to help enforce its agreement.

Enforcing peace agreements between different countries is far more difficult because there is no global government to enforce them. This creates what war and peace researchers call a commitment problem. Without a way to enforce an agreement, how can one side trust the other side to live up to the commitments it made to stop fighting?

In smaller conflicts, the United Nations could serve as a credible, if imperfect, [enforcer of a peace agreement](#) – [as it did in Kosovo](#) after the war there ended in 1999.

Given that Russia has nuclear weapons and considerable political power as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, these options are not feasible in the case of Ukraine. Neither the U.N. nor any other group or country is powerful enough to force Russia to fulfill commitments it might make as part of a peace agreement.

Without a solid way to enforce the terms of a peace agreement, there is little incentive for either warring party to agree to one.

### What Might Change Between Russian and Ukraine

Based on the answers to these three questions, I don't think it's very likely that there will soon be productive peace negotiations between Ukraine and Russia.

But there are three main issues that could change this dynamic.





First, the Ukrainian offensive in the fall of 2022 revealed a host of [weaknesses within the Russian military](#). If the Russian military continues to falter, it would create incentives for Russia to negotiate some kind of peace agreement or cease-fire.

Second, Ukrainian people have suffered almost [unimaginable attacks](#) and losses in 2022. The suffering of the Ukrainians appears to have hardened their [resolve and willingness to defend their country](#). However, I think that it would not be surprising if Ukrainians eventually prefer to end the fighting – even with an undesirable peace agreement.

Third, public polling in Russia is difficult to conduct because of a range of factors, [including many Russians' concern](#) about criticizing Putin and the government.

[Putin's popularity appears to have remained high](#) during the war. But if Russia were to lose the war, it could place Putin in immediate danger of being overthrown either by a popular uprising or in a [palace coup](#).

It is not possible to predict which of these dynamics might lead to peace negotiations. In every war, however, unforeseen developments unfold that allow progress toward eventual peace.

Andrew Blum is Executive Director and Professor of Practice at Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace @ University of San Diego.

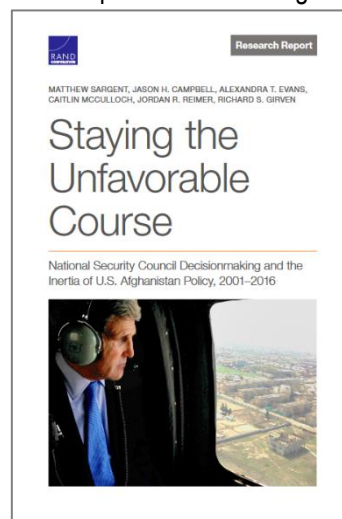
## Staying the Unfavorable Course

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20230224-staying-the-unfavorable-course>

Feb 24 – From 2001 to 2021, the United States pursued an unchanging policy objective in Afghanistan: to prevent a terrorist group from using the country as a safe haven in which to plan or launch an attack on the United States. However, despite deteriorating conditions and no apparent hope of military victory, the U.S. goal remained constant even as successive leaders experimented with different strategies to achieve it.

The authors of a new [report](#) from [RAND](#) examined the reasons behind this policy inertia through interviews with the senior leaders involved in the policy deliberations between 2001 and 2016. They interviewed the decisionmakers involved in high-level discussions and policy formulation to establish the institutional, informational, and interpersonal dynamics that informed major decisions; capture common interpretations and assumptions; and reconstruct how the deliberative process functioned in practice.

As this analysis details, decisions for how to navigate de-escalation from a conflict under conditions short of victory are tremendously difficult, both practically and politically. With no clear definition of success, bureaucratic inertia took hold, extending the conflict and enabling focus on mechanical details of its execution rather than its ultimate intent. The dynamics of the policy process further prevented dramatic policy change. Psychological factors promoted risk aversion and a continued escalation of commitment, even when the mission itself became poorly aligned with national priorities. Additionally, frictions between civilian and military leaders and with the Intelligence Community further prevented fundamental reassessments of the mission.



### Key Findings

- ❖ The expanding, open-ended mission in Afghanistan led America into a policy trap in which victory was seemingly impossible to achieve but withdrawal was not politically or psychologically palatable. The absence of clear, achievable metrics for success led to strategic scope creep as decisionmakers sought a strategy that would secure a positive outcome.
- ❖ Early decisions, such as lumping together the Taliban and al Qaeda, precluded a political settlement in the early years of the conflict that might have made a negotiated peace attainable.
- ❖ When the Iraq conflict took precedence during the Bush Administration, the lack of institutional safeguards to ensure that resources were reserved for monitoring Afghanistan meant that basic assumptions were not questioned, early signs of Taliban resurgence were overlooked, and potential correctives were not formulated.
- ❖ Tension and mistrust characterized civil-military relations. The nature of the conflict forced the military into areas beyond its traditional expertise and resulted in significant civilian involvement in military strategy and resourcing. Because the military felt that it was the stakeholder with the most to lose, it carefully controlled the options that were presented to civilian leaders and often seemed to box decisionmakers into a narrow set of options.



- ❖ The Obama Administration constructed multiple avenues for data collection, analysis, and deconfliction, but its highly centralized system lagged behind the pace of events and was as likely to frustrate as to empower its participants.
- ❖ Policies and strategic objectives were difficult to adjust because of bureaucratic inertia and the related momentum of the existing mission.



**Sun Tzu's 'Art of War' Applicability to Modern Outer Space Warfare  
- A Proposal -  
Paul S. Szymanski**



**Paul S. Szymanski** (B.S. Physics, Mathematics & Logic '73 – M.S. Experimental Physics, '74; Carnegie-Mellon University) has been conducting military operations research analyses for 46 years for the United States Air Force, Navy, Army and Marines. The last 43 years have been exclusively in outer space program analysis, management and development of space warfare theory, policy, doctrine, strategies, tactics and techniques.





## David might not win Goliath this time

Source: <https://news.yahoo.com/graphical-comparison-russian-ukrainian-forces-120000368.html>



## Europeans are not puppets



Feb 25 - Thousands join Berlin, Germany demo urging Ukraine peace talks



**Who is going to pay the 1 trillion required so far for the restoration of Ukraine and in exchange for what?**



**Parisiens NO to proxy war!**





Monica Crowley

@MonicaCrowley · Ακολουθήστε



Zelensky now directly threatening us and claiming American sons and daughters will have to fight and die for Ukraine.

HELL NO



2:33 π.μ. · 1 Μαρ 2023



9,6 χιλ.



Απάντηση



Αντιγραφή συνδέσμου

**NEW**  
US Package (3/3)  
400,000,000 USD  
weapons

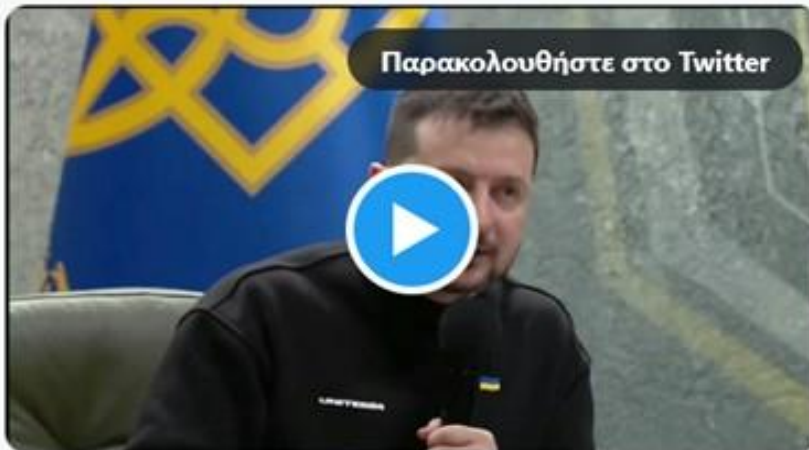


@amuse

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Zelenskyy tells Americans that if they don't support him they will have to send their sons and daughters to die in Europe. Will you send your kids to fight for Zelensky?



12:56 π.μ. · 1 Μαρ 2023



Διαβάστε ολόκληρη τη συζήτηση στο Twitter



818



Απάντηση



Αντιγραφή συνδέσμου



**I WANT  
1,000,000  
155 mm artillery shells**



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL  
(MARCH 23, 2023)  
YES SIR!**

**You pay  
the cost  
4,000,000,000 euro**



**24.3.1999 to 10.6.1999  
Yugoslavia in (NATO) flames!**

## 1500 Scientists Say ‘There Is No Climate Emergency’ – The Real Environment Movement Was Hijacked

By Mark Keenan

Source: <https://www.globalresearch.ca/1500-scientists-say-there-no-climate-emergency-real-environment-movement-hijacked/5809791>

*Many people worldwide are concerned about climate change and believe there is a climate emergency. For decades we have been told by the United Nations that Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions from human activity are causing disastrous climate change. In 2018, a UN IPCC report even warned that ‘we have 12 years to save the Earth’, thus sending millions of people worldwide into a frenzy.*

Feb 24 – Thirty-five years ago, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the (World Meteorological Organization) WMO established the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** to provide scientific advice on the complex topic of climate change. The panel was asked to prepare, based on available scientific information, a report on all aspects relevant to climate change and its impacts and to formulate realistic response strategies. The first assessment report of the IPCC served as the basis for negotiating the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Governments worldwide have signed this convention, thereby, significantly impacting the lives of the people of the world.

However, many scientists dispute with the UN-promoted man-made climate change theory, and many people worldwide are confused by the subject, or are unaware of the full facts. Please allow me to provide some information you may not be aware of.

1. Very few people actually dig into the data, they simply accept the UN IPCC reports. Yet many highly respectable and distinguished scientists have done exactly that and found that the UN-promoted manmade climate change theory is seriously flawed. **Are you aware that 1500 of the world’s leading climate scientists and professionals in over 30 countries have signed a declaration that there is no climate emergency** and have refuted the United Nations claims in relation to man-made climate change? See [this](#)

2. I have also signed this declaration. How can I make such an assertion? I have experience in the field as a former scientist at the Department of Energy and Climate Change, UK Government; and as former staff member at the United Nations Environment Division, where I was responsible for servicing the Pollution Release and Transfer Register Protocol, a Multinational Environmental Agreement, involving the monitoring of pollutants to land, air, and water worldwide. Real pollution exists, but the problem is not CO<sub>2</sub>. Industrial globalisation has produced many substances that are registered as pollutants, including thousands of new man-made chemical compounds, toxins, nano-particles and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) that are in violation of the scientific precautionary principle.

A book I published recently also provides ample evidence and testimony from renowned scientists that there is no Climate emergency. The book titled ‘*Transcending the Climate Change Deception Toward Real Sustainability*’ is available [here](#) on amazon.COM

3. Next, I will mention the **Irish Climate Science Forum (ICSF)** website, a valuable resource founded by Jim O’Brien. I am grateful to the ICSF for their excellent work in highlighting the scientific flaws in the UN climate narrative. The ICSF provides a comprehensive lecture series from renowned international scientists providing much evidence, analysis, and data that contradicts the UN assertions. The lectures are available [here](#).

The ICSF scientific view coincides with those of the Climate Intelligence (CLINTEL) foundation that operates in the fields of climate change and climate policy. CLINTEL was founded in 2019 by emeritus professor of geophysics Guus Berkhout and science journalist Marcel Crok. Based on this common conviction, 20 Irish scientists and several ICSF members have co-signed the CLINTEL World Climate Declaration “*There is No Climate Emergency*” (see [this](#)).

4. The reality is that the climate changes naturally and slowly in its own cycle, and solar activity is the dominant factor in climate and not Co<sub>2</sub>. **We can conclude that carbon emissions or methane from livestock, such as cows, are not the dominant factors in climate change.** In essence, therefore, the incessant UN, government, and corporate-media-produced climate hysteria in relation to carbon emissions and methane from cows has no scientific basis.

Please note that I have no commercial interest in stating that climate change is not caused by CO<sub>2</sub>. In truth I am against ‘real’ pollution, and the reality is that the CO<sub>2</sub> component is not a pollutant. Unfortunately,



many misinformed environmentalists are driving around in electric cars, the battery production for which has caused vast amounts of 'real' pollution via the industrial mining and processing of rare earth metals, and the consequent pollution to land, air and water systems. Note that the UN does not focus on the thousands of real pollutants that corporate industrial globalisation creates.

#### 5. The conclusions of the Climate Intelligence foundation include the following

There is no climate emergency. Therefore, there is no cause for panic and alarm.

**Natural as well as anthropogenic factors cause warming:** The geological archive reveals that Earth's climate has varied as long as the planet has existed, with natural cold and warm phases. The Little Ice Age ended as recently as 1850. Therefore, it is no surprise that we now are experiencing a period of warming.

**Warming is far slower than predicted:** The world has warmed significantly less than predicted by IPCC on the basis of modeled anthropogenic forcing. The gap between the real world and the modeled world tells us that we are far from understanding climate change.

**Climate policy relies on inadequate models:** Climate models have many shortcomings and are not remotely plausible as global policy tools. They blow up the effect of greenhouse gases such as CO<sub>2</sub>. In addition, they ignore the fact that enriching the atmosphere with CO<sub>2</sub> is beneficial.

**CO<sub>2</sub> is plant food, the basis of all life on Earth:** CO<sub>2</sub> is not a pollutant. It is essential to all life on Earth. Photosynthesis is a blessing. More CO<sub>2</sub> is beneficial for nature, greening the Earth: additional CO<sub>2</sub> in the air has promoted growth in global plant biomass. It is also good for agriculture, increasing the yields of crops worldwide.

**Global warming has not increased natural disasters:** There is no statistical evidence that global warming is intensifying hurricanes, floods, droughts and suchlike natural disasters, or making them more frequent.

6. In the above book I reference the relevant work and scientific presentations of some of the world's leading climate scientists. **Let us examine some of the work and testimonies of these scientists:**

"deeply flawed logic, obscured by shrewd and unrelenting propaganda, actually enabled a coalition of powerful special interests to convince nearly everyone in the world that Co2 from human industry was a dangerous plant destroying toxin. It will be remembered as the greatest mass delusion in the history of the world – that Co2 the life of plants was considered for a time to be a deadly poison."  
– **Professor Richard Lindzen**, Professor Emeritus of Atmospheric Sciences at MIT.

**Dr Nils-Axel Mörner** was a former Committee Chairman at the UN International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). He was an expert involved in reviewing the first IPCC documents. He says the UN IPCC is misleading humanity about climate change. He tried to warn that the IPCC were publishing lies and false information that would inevitably be discredited. In an interview, he stated: "This is the most dangerous and frightening part of it. How a lobbyist group, such as the IPCC, has been able to fool the whole world. These organised and deceitful forces are dangerous" and expressed shock "that the UN and governments would parade children around the place at UN Climate summits as propaganda props". The following is his testimony as detailed

"solar activity is the dominant factor in climate and not Co2... something is basically sick in the blame Co2 hypothesis... It was launched more than 100 years ago and almost immediately excellent physicists demonstrated that the hypothesis did not work.

I was the chairman of the only international committee on sea levels changes and as such a person I was elected to be the expert reviewer on the (UN IPCC) sea levels chapter. It was written by 38 persons and not a single one was a sea level specialist... I was shocked by the low quality it was like a student paper... I went through it and showed them that it was wrong and wrong and wrong... The scientific truth is on the side of the sceptics... I have thousands of high ranked scientists all over the world who agree that NO, CO2 is not the driving mechanism and that everything is exaggerated. In the field of physics 80 to 90% of physicists know that the Co2 hypothesis is wrong... Of course, metrologists they believe in this because that is their own profession – they live on it... I suspect that behind-the-scenes promoters... have an ulterior motive... It's a wonderful way of controlling taxation controlling people"  
– **Dr Nils-Axel Mörner**, a former Committee Chairman at the UN IPCC, and former head of the Paleo Geo-physics and Geo-dynamics department in Stockholm

Another climate scientist with impeccable credentials that has broken rank is **Dr Mototaka Nakamura**. He asserts: "Our models are mickey-mouse mockeries of the real world". **Dr Nakamura received a Doctorate of Science from MIT, and for nearly 25 years specialized in abnormal weather and climate change at prestigious institutions that included MIT, Georgia Institute of Technology, NASA, Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology, JAMSTEC and Duke University.** Dr Nakamura explains why the data foundation underpinning global warming science is "untrustworthy" and cannot be relied on and that: "Global mean temperatures before 1980 are based on untrustworthy data".

**Professor John R. Christy, Director of Atmospheric and Earth Sciences, University of Alabama, has provided detailed analysis of climate data, see Endnote [i]. I summarise the main points from his analysis below:**





“The established global warming theory significantly misrepresents the impact of extra greenhouse gases; the weather that affects people the most is not becoming more extreme or more dangerous; temperatures were higher in the 1930s than today; between 1895 and 2015, 14 of the top 15 years with the highest heat records occurred before 1960; the temperatures we are experiencing now in 2021 were the same as 120 years ago...

the number of major tornadoes between 1954 and 1986 averaged 56/year, but between 1987 and 2020 the average was only 34/year; between 1895 and 2015 on average there has been no change in the number of very wet days per month, and no change in the number of very dry days per month, and the 20 driest months were before 1988. Between 1950 and 2019 the percentage of land area experiencing droughts has not increased globally – the trend is flat; the incidence of wildfires in North America between 1600 and 2000 has decreased substantially. Sea levels rose 12.5 cm per decade for 8,000 years and then it levelled off, now it rising only 2.5 cm per decade... worrying about 30 cm rise in sea level in a decade is ridiculous, in a hurricane the east coast of the U.S. gets a 20 foot rise in 6 hours, so a 30 cm rise will be easily handled!”

In a lecture titled *The imaginary climate crisis – how can we change the message?* Available on the Irish Climate Science Forum website, see Endnote [ii]. **Richard L Lindzen**, Professor Emeritus of Atmospheric Sciences at MIT summarises the battle against the climate hysteria as follows:

“in the long history of the earth there has been almost no correlation between climate and co2... the paleoclimate record shows unambiguously that Co2 is not a control knob... the narrative is absurd... it gives governments the power to control the energy sector... for about 33 years, many of us have been battling against the climate hysteria... There were more important leading people who were objecting to it, they were unfortunately older and by now most of them dead...

Elites are always searching for ways to advertise their virtue and assert their authority. They believe they are entitled to view science as a source of authority rather than a process, and they try to appropriate science, suitably and incorrectly simplified, as the basis for their movement.”

“CO2... it’s not a pollutant... it’s the product of all plant respiration, it is essential for plant life and photosynthesis... if you ever wanted a leverage point to control everything from exhalation to driving, this would be a dream. So it has a kind of fundamental attractiveness to [bureaucratic mentality](#).” – Prof. Richard Lindzen, Professor Emeritus of Atmospheric Sciences at MIT

**Patrick Moore**, co-founder of Greenpeace, and President of Greenpeace in Canada for seven years, states:

“the whole climate crisis is not only fake news its fake science... of course climate change is real it’s been happening since the beginning of time, but it’s not dangerous and it’s not caused by people... climate change is a perfectly natural phenomenon and this modern warming period actually began about 300 years ago when the little ice age began to come to an end. There is nothing to be afraid of and all they are doing is instilling fear. Most of the scientists who are saying it’s a crisis are on perpetual government grants. I was one of the (Greenpeace) founders... by the mid-80s... we were hijacked by the extreme left who basically took Greenpeace from a science-based organisation to an organisation based on sensationalism, misinformation and fear... you don’t have a plan to feed 8 billion people without fossils fuels or get the food into the cities...” – Patrick Moore, co-founder of Greenpeace

**Professor William Happer, Princeton University, Former Director of Science at the US Department of Energy, is also a strong voice against the myth of man-made global warming. He states: “More CO<sub>2</sub> benefits the Earth”.**

### 7. The UN IPCC cherry picks data, uses flawed modelling and scenarios not remotely related to the real world

The UN climate crisis predictions are not based on physical evidence, rather they are based on complex computer modelling. One has to decode and analyse the modelling process to ascertain whether or not the models are valid and accurate or whether they have obvious flaws. The vast majority of scientists, economists, politicians and the general public have simply assumed that the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) models are accurate. Very few people have the time or skills to analyse these models, not to mention actually dispute them. Nonetheless, there were many senior and highly distinguished scientists that did exactly that – they claimed the UN narrative was incorrect and that there was no climate emergency. Their voices have been drowned out by a vast money-driven political and media establishment of the globalised ‘system’. The vitally important work of some of these renowned scientists is referenced in the above book.

“The computer models are making systematic dramatic errors... they are all parametrised... fudged... the models really don’t work” – Patrick J. Michaels, Director, Cato Institute Center for the Study of Science

Dr Roger Pielke Jr, University of Colorado, has conducted a detailed scientific review and analysis of the UN IPCC AR6 report, see Endnote [iii]. He describes that in relation to climate modelling, the IPCC detached the models from socio-economic plausibility. In creating the models, instead of first completing integrative assessment models (IAMs), the IPCC skipped this essential step and jumped straight to radiative forcing scenarios and thus these scenarios are not based on completed IAMs.

This led much of climate modelling down the wrong track. I quote points from Dr Pielke’s analysis as follows:



“The four IPCC scenarios came from a large family of models so instead of splitting modelling from socio-economic assumptions the models already had the assumptions faked and baked in to them, because they had to have those assumptions to produce the required radiative forcing (to produce a desired climate ‘crisis scenario’ outcome).

In another fateful decision the 4 representative concentration pathways (RCPs) came from 4 different IAMs, which was a huge mistake. These models are completely unrelated to each other, but the impression has been given that they are of a common set, only differing in their radiative forcing, this was a huge mistake. Furthermore, no-one has responsibility for determining whether these scenarios are plausible. The climate community decided which scenario to prioritise and they chose the two most implausible scenarios! There are thousands of climate assumptions, but only 8 to 12 of them are available currently for climate research. The IPCC report even states that “no likelihood is attached to the scenarios in this report”. The likelihood is considered low they admit – This is an incredible admission by the IPCC.

These extreme unlikely scenarios dominate the literature and the IPCC report; therefore, the IPCC report is biased. Bottom line is that there is massive confusion. The IPCCs’ Richard Moss warned that RCP 8.5 was not to be used as a reference for the other RCPs, but 5,800 scientific papers worldwide misuse it like that... The whole process is seriously flawed... Nothing close to the real world is represented by the IPCC scenarios. Climate science has a huge problem! The IPCC currently uses RCP 8.5 as the ‘business as usual’ scenario, but RCP 8.5 is wild fantasy land and not remotely related to current reality at all... climate science has a scientific integrity crisis.” – Dr Roger Pielke Jr, University of Colorado,

#### **8. Financialization of the entire world economy is now based on a life-killing ‘net-zero’ greenhouse gas emissions strategy.**

The UN Agenda 2030 plan and the Paris Agreement goal to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 7% per annum until 2030 is in effect a plan that would disable the current resource mechanisms of the industrial economy for the food, energy and goods that enable human life and survival. This is being implemented before humanity has transitioned away from the flawed polluting trans-national industrial economy toward self-sufficient local/regional economies.

Zero carbon emissions, in essence, means pulling the plug on current systems of industrial agriculture, transport, goods production, electricity production, etc., and many millions of people reliant on these systems worldwide could be faced with a lack of electricity, food, goods, etc. This could have terrible consequences, particularly in locations and countries, that are currently unable to produce much food. It should be noted that for decades, these same political, government, and corporate powers have rampantly promoted corporate economic globalization and fossil fuel dependency. Whilst, at the same time actively hindering the funding, creation, or government support of, more self-sufficient local communities/regions, and local co-operatives. Most of the world population thus became reliant on the globalized fossil-fuel dependent system.

#### **9. Central bankers are entirely funding / controlling the advancement of the worldwide climate change ‘project’**

The decision to drastically reduce CO<sub>2</sub>, one of the most essential compounds to sustain all life, is no co-incidence. It should be noted that it is the world’s central bankers that are behind this decision and are entirely funding and controlling the advancement of the worldwide project of combatting man-made climate-change.

This project involves an attempt to de-carbonise the activities of the entire world population. In December 2015, the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) created the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosure (TCFD), which represents \$118 trillion [of assets globally](#), see Endnote [iv]. In essence this means that the financialization of the entire world economy is based on meeting nonsensical aims such as “net-zero greenhouse gas emissions”. The [TCFD](#) includes key people from the world’s mega-banks and asset management companies, including JP Morgan Chase; BlackRock; Barclays Bank; HSBC; China’s ICBC bank; Tata Steel, ENI oil, Dow Chemical, and more. The fact that the world’s largest banks and asset management corporations, including BlackRock, Goldman Sachs, the UN, the World Bank, the Bank of England and other central banks of the BIS, have all linked to push a vague, mathematically nonsensical ‘green’ economy, is no coincidence. There is another agenda at play that has nothing to do with environmentalism. The green economy along with UN Agenda 2030 is an agenda of world control, and will also develop trillions of dollars for the behind-the-scenes mega-banks. When the world largest banks, corporations, and institutions, all align to push a climate change agenda that has zero evidence, one can see there is another major agenda going on behind the scenes. This agenda tries to convince the common people of the world to make huge sacrifices under the emotive guise of “saving our planet.”. While all the time the corporations and banks make vast profits, and political institutions implement worldwide technocratic control systems under the banner of combatting, and adapting to, so-called man-made climate change.

“The links between the world’s largest financial groups, central banks and global corporations to the current push for a radical climate strategy to abandon the fossil fuel economy in favor of a vague, unexplained Green economy, it seems, is less about genuine concern to make our planet a clean and healthy environment to live. Rather it is an agenda, intimately tied to the UN Agenda 2030 for “sustainable” economy, and to developing literally trillions of dollars in new wealth for the global banks and financial giants who constitute the real powers that be...” – **F. William Engdahl**, *strategic risk consultant and lecturer*



Back in 2010, the head of Working Group 3 of the UN IPCC, Dr Otmar Edenhofer, told an interviewer, "...one must say clearly that we redistribute de facto the world's wealth by climate policy. One has to free oneself from the illusion that international climate policy is environmental policy. This has almost nothing to do with environmental policy anymore."

To better perceive what is 'behind the curtain' of the Climate hoax and the UN/WEF agenda it also helps to examine what has happened in the decades beforehand. It is important to perceive the implications of the worldwide fractional-reserve debt-money banking scam and the subtle system of debt-slavery that has existed for decades. If you look at the World Bank website you will see that virtually every nation on Earth is in vast debt. In debt to who you may ask? The answer is to privately owned mega-banks. For many decades the so-called banking and corporate elites have had full control of the source of money creation and its allocation, via the debt-money system, and have therefore, by default, been able to fund, and increasingly control and manipulate the entire world spectrum of industry, media, government, education, ideological supremacy and war to their own design, agenda and benefit. Mayer Amschel Rothschild (banker) is widely reported to have said:

"Give me control of a nation's money supply and I care not who makes its laws."

#### **10. Central bankers hijacked the real environmental movement in 1992 creating the fake climate change agenda**

Psychopaths can utilise any ideology and, change it from within to something that may eventually be entirely different to its original purpose. Meanwhile, the original followers and advocates continue to pursue what they believe is the original ideology, but gradually become mere pawns in the agenda of a self-serving elite. Unfortunately, over the past decades, this is exactly what has happened in the environmental movement.

Whistleblower George Hunt served as an official host at a key environmental meeting in Denver, Colorado in 1987, and states that David Rockefeller; Baron Edmund De Rothschild; US Secretary of State Baker; Maurice Strong, a UN official and an employee of the Rockefeller and Rothschild trusts; EPA administrator William Ruckelshaus; UN Secretary General in Geneva MacNeill, along with World Bank and IMF officials were at this meeting. Hunt was surprised to see all these rich elite bankers at the meeting and questioned what they were doing there at an environmental congress.

In a video recording, Hunt later provided important evidence from the documents of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3-14 June 1992. This conference was the well-known UN '92 Earth Summit and was run by UNCED. According to Hunt, via the Earth summit, the UN was setting a net, an agenda, to place the power over the Earth and its peoples into their own hands. The world private banking cartel are the same ultra-rich banking families that had been instrumental in the setting up of the World Bank, the UN, and other international institutions, after WW2. Their political cohorts included Stalin (the leader of a brutal communist regime in the USSR that committed genocide of millions of people), UK Prime minister Churchill, and US President Roosevelt. Hunt refers to these banking families and their financial and international institutional networks as: "The same world order that tricked third world countries to borrow funds and rack up enormous debts... and purposely creating war and debt to bring societies into their control. The world order crowd are not a nice group of people..." – George Hunt, Whistleblower speaking about the UN Earth summit of 1992

As a consequence of the UN Earth Summit, the honest, genuine environment movement that actually cared about real pollution to land, air and water, was politically hi-jacked by powerful political and financial interests with a different agenda.

Maurice Strong, a UN official and an employee of the Rockefeller and Rothschild trusts, had convened the first UNCED congress in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1972. Then, 20 years later he was the convenor and secretary general of UNCED. Hunt also provided video evidence from the Fourth UNCED World Congress meeting in 1987 of an international investment banker, stating that:

"I suggest therefore that this be sold not through a democratic process that would take too long and require far too much funds to educate the cannon-fodder, unfortunately, which populates the Earth. We have to take almost an elitist program..."

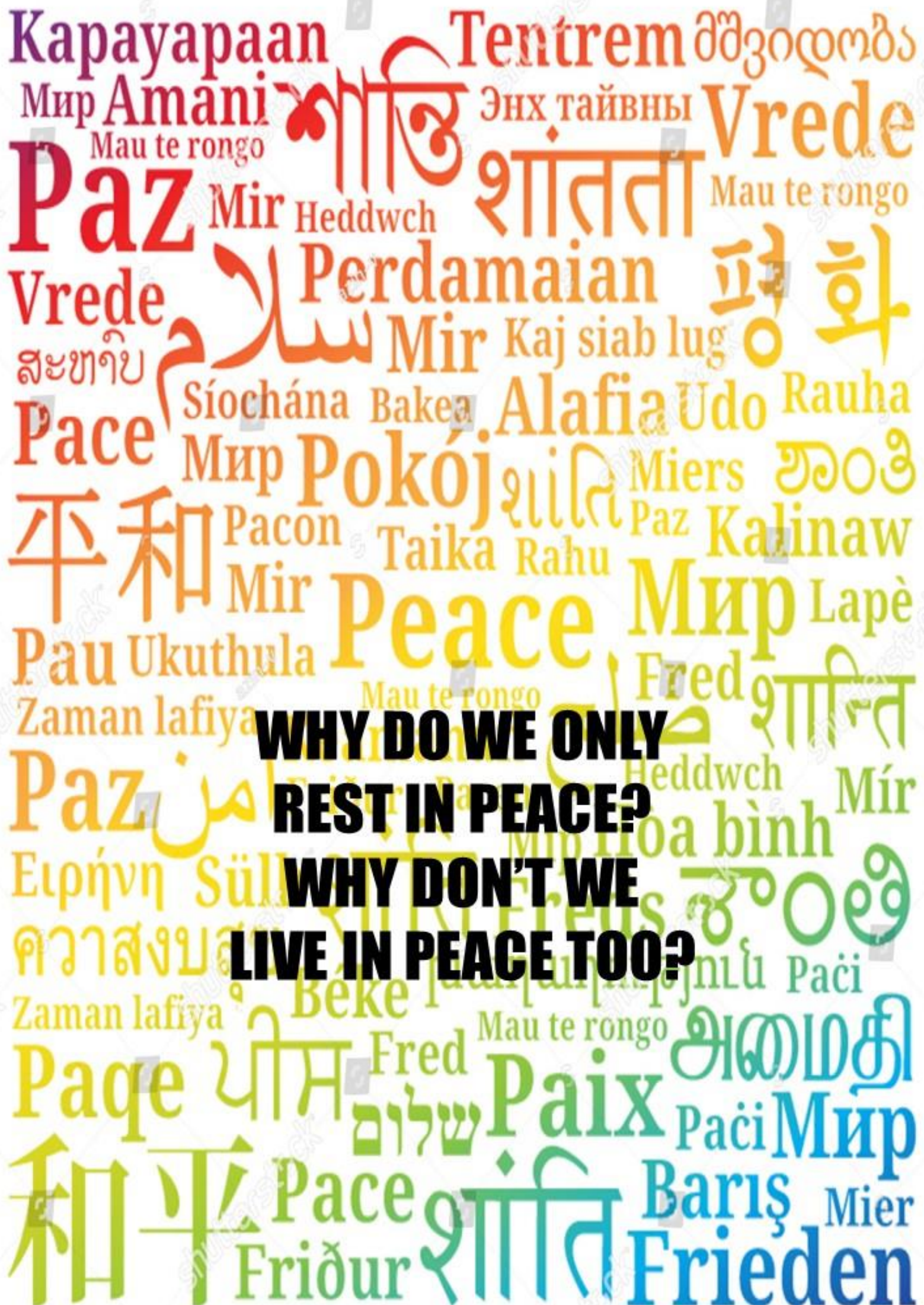
Thus, the decrees leading to the 1992 UN Earth summit were dictated without debate or opportunity for dissent and would supersede national laws. The decrees were dictated into existence by the banker Edmund de Rothschild, who got these major decrees into the '92 UN resolutions without debate or challenge. Hunt asserts that he was denied the opportunity to openly challenge Rothschild's remarks by the meeting Chairman.

Is it any surprise that the Rothschild bank of Geneva is the nucleus of the World Conservation bank and the wealthy elite are integrated into the bank via the Rothschilds private offering of shares. The banks assumes control of world conservation and decides and controls how these resources are allocated or utilized.

#### **11. Despite the deceptive and fake environmental facade, it has adopted, the vast institutional entity of the UN has fully endorsed environmentally destructive industrial globalisation for the past 70 years.**

The UN climate change, sustainable development and green economy policies over the past 30 years are little more than worldwide marketing tricks that have tragically brainwashed two generations of young people who do not understand what the UN actually is, and who it is really designed to serve.





**WHY DO WE ONLY  
REST IN PEACE?  
WHY DON'T WE  
LIVE IN PEACE TOO?**

This current globalised system involves the promotion of beliefs and fake science that claim to be unchallengeable truths, but are, in fact, ideologies in which evidence is manipulated, twisted, and distorted to prove the 'governing idea', and thus promote its worldwide dissemination. They start with the conclusion they want and then wrench and manipulate what scant evidence they can to fit that conclusion. Man-made climate change due to anthropogenic carbon emission is a major example of this.

Institutions, including the UN, the World Economic Forum (WEF), and the World Health Organisation (WHO), are privately-motivated unelected unaccountable organisations controlled by the source of debt-money creation, i.e., the world private-banking cartel; and are just clever marketing tools and political mechanisms for implementing and maintaining a corrupt worldwide system, under the clever guise of 'fixing the problems of the world'.

These powerful special interests have been promoting certain 'ideologies' for decades to advance their corporate and political aims. The word "sustainable" was hijacked decades ago, and it is now deceptively used to advance the agendas of globalist mega-corporate interests who couldn't care less about the environment. The aim is to catapult humanity into the arms of UN Agenda 2030 and the WEF 'reset' plan, which are clever marketing plans entirely designed by the so-called elite mega-corporate interests of the WEF Davos group. Furthermore, the current green energy/renewable technologies being promoted by the UN and WEF, are not a viable solution for the world's energy supply. Although these technologies have some limited viability in certain locations and scenarios, the fact remains that the Energy Returned on Energy Invested is much too low – in essence the entire process is mathematically flawed. This is evidenced by the work of scientists, including Professor David MacKay, former Regius Professor of Engineering at Cambridge University and former Chief Scientific Advisor at the UK Department of Energy and Climate Change.

### Summary

In summary, CO<sub>2</sub> reduction is the main focus of the UN-promoted climate-change-hysteria that has been rampant among the world's population. However, the proclaimed climate crisis exists in computer models only. The cult of 'manmade climate change' is a media and UN politically-promoted 'ideology', that is used for a wider political and corporate agenda. Manmade climate change is not based in fact, and has hijacked real environmental concerns.

The world's central bankers are fully funding the worldwide climate change 'project'. The truism 'follow the money' springs to mind – and by doing so, one quickly discovers who runs the corporate, political, and media world.

Due to incessant UN, government, and corporate-promoted climate change propaganda, many people are, thus, in a media-induced state of confusion, and, thus, blindly assume their pre-determined role in society under this 'dictatorship of words' without even being aware of it. For example, we now have millions of so-called climate change warriors blind to the fact that climate change is not actually caused by carbon emissions. This is all to scare people into accepting totalitarian authority and limitations to their freedom and personal well-being. The unpalatable reality is that people's access to energy and resources is being intentionally reduced via bogus climate change policies, high inflation, ongoing geo-political theatre and intentionally instigated war.

We cannot understand how to create a truly resilient society unless we correctly perceive the current society we live in and how it came to exist. So, who are the architects of the current paradigm. The above book is designed to help in that regard. Unless we recognize the untruths of the current paradigm, even if it is not 'politically correct' to do so, then we will not be able to make the correct adjustments to our current communities and local/regional networks, or create a truly resilient thriving society in Ireland. In this spirit of truth, new networks are emerging worldwide.

*Mark Keenan is a former scientist at the Department of Energy and Climate Change, UK; and at the United Nations Environment Division; and is the author of the book Transcending the Climate Change Deception – Toward Real Sustainability.*

## Netherlands to integrate last brigade into German army this year: NRC Politics

Source: <https://www.dutchnews.nl/news/2023/02/netherlands-to-integrate-last-brigade-into-german-army-this-year-nrc/>

Feb 01 – The Netherlands and Germany have taken a big step towards combining their armed forces with the integration of the last Dutch brigade into the German army, NRC reported on Thursday. The 13th Light Brigade, based in Oirschot, will come under the command of Germany's 10 Panzer Division, creating an infantry with a combined strength of 50,000 troops. The total manpower of both countries' armed forces is 89,000, of whom 24,000 are Dutch. NRC said the merger was part of the Common Army Vision, a confidential agreement



between the two countries' armed forces, signed off on November 30 last year at a meeting in Dresden between Martin Wijnen, commander of the Dutch armed forces, and his German counterpart Alfons Mais. It would represent the closest partnership between two countries in Nato and is part of a large-scale restructuring of the German army, which is due to take effect on April 1. Jean-Paul Duckers, the Netherlands' acting commander of operations, told NRC: 'Many people don't realise how unique what we are doing is.' The ministry for defence said no political decision had yet been taken and the Common Army Vision is a 'proposal'. But defence minister Kajsa Ollongren told parliament in September that the option of integrating the 13th Light Brigade into the German army was being 'investigated'. The coalition agreement published last January and the defence department's policy statement in June mentioned closer co-operation with Germany without going into detail. The policy statement said the two countries would strengthen their combined operations, firepower and other capabilities, while the 'further digitalisation' of their armies in the coming years would play 'a big role'.



**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** The issue, in a few words, is that Germany completes the "integration" of the Dutch army into its own by April, and then Finland and the Czech Republic will follow to be militarily integrated into Berlin. In this way, Germany almost two months from now will have become the BIGGEST power in Europe. While it is already the economic superpower, it will now be the military one as well. Berlin, almost 80 years after the defeat of the Third Reich in WW2, is preparing to take "revenge" not only without anyone reacting but by supporting and helping it, with the USA being the first to believe that with this "sharing" they can ensure that chained with German chains and under German boots, Europe will remain "opposed" to Russia and in general to the East. This is a new military force under German command. We are therefore talking about a crime, about the suicide of Europe if it accepts such a thing. That is, Fourth Reich, literally and from every side! This must be somehow stopped! Two World Wars are enough!

## Hot Issue – Yemen's Fragmented Future

By Michael Horton

Source: <https://jamestown.org/program/hot-issue-yemens-fragmented-future/>



Houthi Rebels via The New York Times

### Executive Summary:

*The Yemeni Civil War has ground on for eight years now, with the Houthi rebels controlling a majority of the country, and the power of the Internationally Recognized Government and Southern Transitional Council's forces seriously degraded. Many smaller armed militia groups and warlord fiefdoms compete with one another, maintaining only nominal allegiance to the major combatants. As it appears now, the internal deadlock and divergent interests of the key regional powers of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran suggest that there is little chance that*

Yemen will reunify in the short-, medium, or long-term.



**Michael Horton** is a fellow for Arabian Affairs at The Jamestown Foundation. Horton has completed in-depth field-based studies on a range of subjects and issues related to security and development in the Middle East and Africa for the public and private sectors. He has briefed senior members of the U.S. National Security Council, the U.S. State Department, the British Foreign Ministry, British Ministry of Defense, as well as members of the British Parliament and U.S. Congress. Michael is a co-founder of Red Sea Analytics International (RSAI).

## Holistic Security - Various Ways to Reduce Vulnerability

Source: <https://domprep.com/resilience/holistic-security-various-ways-to-reduce-vulnerability/>

According to a [May 2013 report](#) of the Commission on the Theft of American Intellectual Property – an independent, bipartisan initiative of U.S. representatives from both the private and public sectors – the theft of intellectual assets is estimated to cost U.S. businesses more than \$300 billion annually.



Increasingly, U.S. companies are not only facing persistent threats to the integrity of their business activities, but also grappling with the need to stem the erosion of their companies' values caused by commercial espionage carried out by both foreign and domestic actors.

In addition to the harm caused to the businesses directly affected, such thefts also contribute to a significant loss of U.S. jobs and a corresponding decline of the national economy in terms of a reduced gross domestic product. In some cases, the thefts also have resulted in the loss of U.S. ingenuity to rivals who are not only stealing intellectual property but also counterfeiting and/or otherwise adapting that property to foreign markets by focusing on low-cost positioning and mass consumption – both of which subsequently evolve into market disruptions in their own right.

These challenges have been not only costly but also fairly consistent in recent years. According to the 2012 [Cost of Cyber Crime Study](#) of 56 U.S.-based companies (many of them multinational corporations) – sponsored by Hewlett-Packard and carried out by the independent research group Ponemon Institute – cyber espionage attacks have increased by an average of 38 percent from 2010 to 2011. The average annual cost for the companies included in the 2012 study amounted to approximately \$8.9 million. Moreover, the World Intellectual Property Organization headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, estimated that, “In 1998, intangible assets constituted 80% of the value of Fortune 500 companies.” Obviously, the potential for truly extraordinary losses in the foreseeable future is not only evident but also probable.

### **Protecting U.S. Companies From Cyber Threats**

Although investments in protective measures such as firewalls and/or anti-virus solutions are popular options, they are insufficient in isolation. In an age of sophisticated and frequent attacks, particularly as related to the state-sponsorship of intellectual property theft through cyber and insider threats, private firms – the U.S. government as well – must ensure that security investments are diversified throughout their entire business plans and operations.

Diversification does not necessarily mean, though, that security investments in specific components of an enterprise do not provide protection. They certainly can, and often do. The problem is that securing individual components does not secure the business as a whole. Some software vendors may purport to sell their products as the one and only “cure-all” needed for total security and protection. But new technology added to a company's existing security infrastructure creates additional complexity. One likely result is that at least some of the company's data may not be properly analyzed and correlated with other data that the same firm creates. Application behavior, system performance, user actions, and deceptive activity are all critical data streams that can serve as invaluable intelligence in any post-incident investigation – or, preferably, pre-incident assessment. However, if such information is not used properly, and in conjunction with other data, an organization may find significant losses related to its product designs, research and development (R&D) operations, competitive processes, patents, and other intellectual property.

For other enterprise-specific issues such as information technology (IT), the outsourcing to IT risk consultants can offer well-known approaches for understanding a firm's ability to fend off attacks. However, the expertise of those consultants often focuses primarily on risks within the IT structure – despite the fact that there are many other potential areas of risk that must be taken into account to fully protect a company's intellectual property.

For companies that rely on in-house personnel to meet their security needs, the basic problem remains the same. Although some organizations often prefer this solution – usually for fear of not wanting to reveal vulnerabilities to outsiders – company personnel frequently focus their attention primarily on diagnostics, forensics, and basic security monitoring. Often, because of the nature of their employment, staff members: (a) may not be able to offer an objective assessment; and/or (b) do not necessarily possess a high enough level of expertise, and the investigative skills also required, to carry out a truly comprehensive analysis of the company as a whole.

Rather than focusing on security solutions in only one component of a firm's operations, a holistic intelligence program would diversify the collection of information across the entire enterprise. Use of this broader approach usually will help protect the intellectual assets of public- and private-sector organizations in the current age of sophisticated threats.

### **Holistic Security: A Deeper Look**

Holistic security encompasses all of the functional units of a business enterprise: IT, human resources, legal, R&D, security, and many others. Such security is based on the premise that so-called “isolated incidents” occurring in one particular department should be juxtaposed with other data to: (a) corroborate the existence of possible vulnerabilities; and (b) help identify other negative trends. The following four examples demonstrate how various isolated incidents, when interpreted holistically, can help skilled investigators understand the nature of a possible threat directed against a company's key value drivers.



**Isolated Incident No. 1.** A member of a company's IT Department observes Employee A trying to gain access to a folder for which the employee does not have permission to access. This folder contains sensitive information on a prototype development not yet introduced to the market. A week later, the same employee was found running a scan of the company's internal network. When IT staff noticed this activity, they confronted the employee, who offered what the staff considered to be a plausible explanation. No subsequent action was taken; and the information was not shared with any other department within the company.

**Isolated Incident No. 2.** The office manager has noticed Employee A working late hours – an irregular and seemingly unnecessary activity. Late one evening, Employee A attempted to leave the building with a bag containing folders labeled “proprietary.” When the office manager questioned the employee, the latter responded with a frantic apology and offered a plausible explanation. Accepting the response as legitimate, the office manager did not share this information with anyone else in the company.

**Isolated Incident No. 3.** A different employee (Employee B) recently traveled overseas to attend a meeting with a foreign partner on a joint venture opportunity. During the trip, the employee traveled with not only his smartphone but also a company laptop – both of which contained proprietary information. Moreover, on more than one occasion, Employee B had accessed the U.S. company's network from the joint venture partner's internal network. Apparently not thinking anything of it, Employee B did not, after his return, mention those actions to any of his colleagues.

**Isolated Incident No. 4.** At lunch on a Monday morning, colleagues learned that Employee A had just returned from a weekend trip overseas. When asked for details about the trip, the employee offered a hurried and somewhat confusing explanation about a “weekend getaway” that appeared to be in conflict with his/her established lifestyle pattern. Later that day, colleagues learned that Employee A had traveled with numerous company thumb-drives and disks – also rather unusual behavior for a traveler supposedly on a vacation. Moreover, over a longer period of time, colleagues started to notice some unexplained affluence on the part of Employee A – driving a brand new car, for example, rather than the more modest vehicle Employee A previously drove. When queried by a colleague, Employee A stated somewhat awkwardly that the car had been a gift from a distant relative. Without additional information confirming the suspicions already aroused, however, the issue was dropped; and the information already developed was not shared with anybody else inside the company.

### Share, Study, Assess & Confirm

As individual data points, the preceding incidents may seem mundane and/or ordinary to those who witnessed the various actions mentioned. But if those incidents had been documented, and not only correlated but also analyzed with the information collected from the other departments, certain patterns might well have emerged that would confirm the incidents as potential evidence pointing to a targeted campaign to steal the company's intellectual property.

In an era of increasingly sophisticated threats, the protection of intellectual assets may best be served through adoption of a holistic approach to security using both trusted intelligence methodologies and properly trained personnel. To do anything less, in fact, could have disastrous consequences. The failure “to address the challenge of trade secret theft costs industry billions of dollars each year,” said [Pamela Passman](#), president and chief executive officer of CREATE.org, a leading nonprofit dedicated to helping companies, suppliers, and business partners reduce piracy, counterfeiting, and trade secret theft. Moreover, she added, such thefts “can have devastating reputational, financial, and legal impacts ... [not only] for individual companies ... [but also for] the global economy as a whole.”

[Armond Caglar](#) is a security solutions consultant at Tailored Solutions and Consulting (TSC), an enterprise risk consultancy based in Washington, D.C. Prior to establishing himself in his current position, he served in the U.S. government for more than seven years conducting worldwide operations in support of sensitive national-level priorities. He holds both a Master's degree from Tufts University and a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of New Hampshire.

## Havana Syndrome Not Caused by Directed-Energy Weapons: U.S. Intelligence

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20230302-havana-syndrome-not-caused-by-directedenergy-weapons-u-s-intelligence>

Mar 02 – In 2016 in Havana, Cuba's capital, a growing number of U.S. diplomats reported symptoms of unexplained ailment. Over the next five years, employees in many other U.S. embassies complained about identical symptoms, which included dizziness, nausea, headaches, ringing ears, and disorientation.





A comprehensive investigation by several agencies of the U.S. intelligence community has now concluded that the symptoms of what came to be called the Havana Syndrome were not the result of an adversary nation using energy or radiation weapons against the embassies where employees complained of the symptoms.

The U.S. intelligence community's investigation, which included scientists, engineers, military experts, and medical professionals, said that the symptoms were probably the result of previous illnesses or other diseases or environmental factors.

### Our People in Havana

After more than two dozen U.S. diplomats living and working in Havana, Cuba and their relatives began to complain of puzzling headaches, hearing loss, dizziness, and nausea in 2016, the Department of State reduced the embassy staff to a bare minimum, a process which was repeated in several other U.S. embassies around the world.

What was puzzling to both intelligence analysts and medical professionals was not only the similarities of the symptoms – among people of different ages, backgrounds, and medical histories – but also the fact that all of them indicated that the symptoms started after hearing a strange sound or feeling strong pressure in their heads. U.S. officials did not rule out that what was happening was a result of a deliberate attack by an adversary nation, but from the start the notion of an “energy weapon” was treated with skepticism. In all, several U.S. intelligence agencies investigated well over a thousand individual cases of diplomats who served in dozens of countries. The majority of the agencies looking into the matter concluded that it was “highly unlikely” that a foreign adversary was responsible for the symptoms. The intelligence community, however, acknowledges that there are still gaps in its assessment, and it stresses that it is difficult to assess with accuracy the level of development of various energy- or radiation-weapons in the arsenals of Russia, China, North Korea, or Iran, the countries identified as the main suspects if there were deliberate attacks on U.S. embassies. Medical experts working with the intelligence community said that environmental and social factors have been identified which could plausibly explain many of the complaints reported by those affected.

### Energy Weapons

Last year, an independent panel of experts concluded that at least some of the cases of Havana syndrome could have been triggered by a targeted use of electromagnetic radiation, or pulse. The CIA, without referring specifically to the many complaints by American diplomats, published a report which said that there were “several plausible ways” to employ electromagnetic impulses from a certain spectrum frequency in such a targeted manner. Other hypotheses, such as the use of chemical or biological substances, were considered not plausible given the symptoms reported. The State Department said that the number of reported cases of “abnormal health incidents” has decreased since 2021. The current findings of the secret services “do not in any way question the experiences and symptoms that our colleagues and their family members have reported in recent years,” the State Department said.

The White House echoed the State Department's words, adding that regardless of the conclusions of this investigation and future ones, the affected diplomats and their family members will continue to receive additional financial and medical support.

Many of those affected insist that they have been the victims of a deliberate attack, and Russia is often mentioned as the likely source of the attacks. Many of the diplomats concerned have also accused the U.S. government of downplaying the symptoms in the past.

## Directed Energy Weapons Shoot Painful but Non-Lethal Beams – Are Similar Weapons Behind the Havana Syndrome?

By Iain Boyd

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20230302-directed-energy-weapons-shoot-painful-but-nonlethal-beams-are-similar-weapons-behind-the-havana-syndrome>

Mar 02 – The latest episodes of so-called [Havana syndrome](#), a series of unexplained ailments [afflicting U.S. and Canadian diplomats and spies](#), span the globe. They include [two diplomats in Hanoi, Vietnam](#) - which disrupted Vice President Kamala Harris's foreign travel schedule - in August, [several dozen](#) reports at the U.S. Embassy in Vienna earlier this year, and a [pair of incidents](#) at the White House last November. The cause of these incidents is unknown, but speculation in the U.S. centers on electromagnetic beams.

If Havana syndrome turns out to be caused by weapons that shoot energy beams, they won't be the first such weapons. As an [aerospace engineer](#) and former Vice Chair of the U.S. Air Force Scientific Advisory Board, I've researched directed energy. I can also personally attest to the effectiveness of directed energy weapons. In 2020, [a study on Havana syndrome by the U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine](#) concluded that the more than 130 victims experienced some real physical phenomena, and that the cause was most likely some form of electromagnetic radiation. These incidents began in 2016 with reports of multiple personnel



at the [U.S. embassy in Havana, Cuba](#), experiencing alarming and unexplained symptoms. The symptoms included a feeling of pressure on the face, loud noises, severe headaches, nausea and confusion. In some cases, the victims seem to have been [left with permanent health effects](#). Scientists from Cuba's Academy of Sciences issued a [report refuting the U.S. National Academies report](#) and ascribing the reported symptoms to psychological effects or a range of ordinary ailments and preexisting conditions. But based on my own experience, directed energy appears to be a plausible explanation. Here's how these beams affect people.

### At the Right Wavelength

There is a very wide range of [electromagnetic waves that are characterized by wavelength](#), which is the distance between successive peaks. These waves can interact with different types of matter, including human bodies, in a variety of ways.

At short wavelengths, a few hundred-billionths of a meter, ultraviolet rays from the Sun can burn the skin's surface if someone is exposed for too long. Microwaves have longer wavelengths. People use these every day to reheat meals. Microwaves [transfer energy](#) into the water molecules inside food. The U.S. military has developed [a directed energy technology](#) that shoots beams of a slightly longer wavelength in a focused area over distances up to a mile. This directed energy technology was designed for nonlethal control of crowds. When these waves interact with a person, they pass through the skin and transfer energy to the water that lies just under the surface. I had the opportunity to be zapped by one of these systems. I stood about a half-mile from the source and the beam was turned on. The portion of my body exposed to the beam got hot really quickly, and I immediately stepped out of the beam. The feeling was as though someone had just opened the door of a large furnace right by me.

At even longer wavelengths, electromagnetic radiation can [interact with electronic systems](#) and can be used to disable computers and control systems. For these waves, interaction with matter generates electrical currents and fields that interfere with the electrical systems. The military is developing these technologies to [defend against drone attacks](#).

### Defense Trough Detection

It's plausible that at just the right wavelength, an electromagnetic beam could be projected over hundreds of yards to create the symptoms seen in Havana syndrome incidents. If this is the case, it's likely that these beams are interfering with the electrical functions of the brain and central nervous system. For example, the [Frey effect](#) involves microwaves activating the auditory sensory nerves. Other studies have noted potential [effects of microwaves on the central nervous system](#), such as decreased response time, social dysfunction and anxiety. Further study is needed to determine the cause of Havana syndrome incidents. Unfortunately, this type of electromagnetic radiation does not leave a telltale trace like sunburn, which makes it difficult to be certain of the explanation. While the results of the National Academies study were made public, it is likely that federal agencies are carrying out additional activities behind the scenes to try to explain these incidents and determine who is to blame. Similar to responding to cyberattacks, though, the government may be reluctant to release too much information to the public because it could reveal techniques for detecting and countering the attacks. If the source of Havana syndrome turns out to be electromagnetic waves, then in principle, buildings could be hardened against them. However, it would be expensive and would still leave people vulnerable outdoors. Perhaps the best option to prevent further attack is detection. It is relatively simple and inexpensive to install sensors to detect electromagnetic waves on buildings and vehicles. Such sensors could also help identify the location of the source of the attacks and, in this way, act as a deterrent. Assuming Havana syndrome is the result of deliberately targeted electromagnetic beams, employees of the U.S. government and other nations will remain susceptible to these attacks until governments take such defensive measures.

Iain Boyd is a Professor of Aerospace Engineering Sciences @ University of Colorado Boulder.

## Death toll from rail disaster rises to 57 as anger boils in Greece

By Sana Noor Haq, Chris Liakos and Lindsay Isaac (CNN)

Source: <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/03/02/europe/greece-train-crash-larissa-protests-intl/index.html>

Mar 02 – Anger in [Greece](#) over poor railway safety grew on Thursday as the death toll from one of the country's worst train crashes in recent years reached 57. Demonstrators poured onto the streets after the [head-on collision](#) between a passenger train carrying more than 350 people and a freight train on Tuesday evening in Tempi, near the city of Larissa. Protesters clashed with police in the capital Athens, the country's transport minister resigned in the wake of the tragedy and a rail workers' union is going on strike, accusing the government of "disrespect" in the sector.





Another 48 people remain in hospital as a result of the crash, which left toppled carriages and scorched debris in its wake. Six of the injured being treated are in critical condition due to head wounds and serious burns, public broadcaster ERT reported Thursday. After a train station manager in Larissa was arrested in connection to the collision, Greek authorities on Thursday also released striking dispatch audio recordings that show one of the train drivers receiving instructions to ignore a red light. "Proceed through red traffic light exit until traffic light entry of Neon Poron," the station master is heard saying. "Vasilis, am I good to go?" the train driver responds, to which the train master says "Go, go." In a second conversation, the station master can be heard ordering an employee to keep one of the trains on the same track. "Shall I turn it now?" the employee asks. "No, no, because 1564 is on this route," the station master says. The station master has been charged with mass deaths through negligence and causing grievous bodily harm through negligence. Upon arrest he blamed the collision on a technical fault, though later admitted to "making a mistake."



An aerial drone photograph taken on Wednesday shows emergency crews searching wreckage of the accident, which killed dozens and left scores injured – Vasilis Ververidis/Eurokinissi/motionteam/AFP/Getty Images

**Protests in Athens**

Protesters gathered outside the central Athens headquarters of Greek rail company Hellenic Train again on Thursday evening in a demonstration organized by student and worker unions. Police already had a presence outside the Hellenic Train headquarters before the demonstrators arrived. The protest was peaceful, following unrest on Wednesday in which demonstrators clashed with police. Most of the passengers involved in the accident were young, a local hospital told ERT. The accident came soon after a holiday weekend. Search and rescue operations will continue on Thursday and Friday at the site of the crash, according to the Fire Service.





Meanwhile, relatives of those missing are still awaiting news regarding their loved ones as the identification process continues at Larissa General Hospital.



Speaking earlier to Greek media, Dimitris Bournazis, who is trying to get news about his father and brother, said no one has given him any information. Bournazis said he was trying to contact the company to find out where on the train his relatives were sitting at the time of the crash. He said he called the offices of Hellenic Train three times but no one has called him back.

“The prime minister and the health minister came here yesterday. Why? To do what? To explain what? Where are they today?” Bournazis told Greek broadcaster SKAI, adding that “no one has given us any information, no one knows how many people really were inside.”

“We cannot only blame one person for this because of a mistake. Where is everyone else now? They all await the election to speak,” he said. Speaking to ERT, passenger Andreas Alikaniotis, who was in the second carriage during the collision, described the moments following the crash.

“What we did was to break the glass, which was already cracked, and to throw the luggage outside the carriage, so we can land somewhere soft,” he told ERT, describing how he helped around 10 people



escape. “We jumped 3 to 4 meters,” he added, “first the more seriously injured and then us with lighter injuries” Alikaniotis added that he remembers pulling up two or three girls and helping them get to the window to jump. “There was panic,” he added. Condolences have poured in from across the world, while a three-day period of mourning is under way in Greece. Britain’s King Charles said in a statement that he and his wife Camilla, Queen Consort, have been “most shocked and profoundly saddened by the news of the dreadful accident.” French President Emmanuel Macron tweeted: “My thoughts go out to the families of the victims of the terrible accident that took place last night near Larissa. France stands alongside the Greeks.”

### ‘Pain has turned into anger’

Greece has a weak record of railway passenger safety compared with other countries in Europe, recording the highest railway fatality rate per million train kilometers from 2018 to 2020 among 28 nations on the continent, according to a 2022 report from the European Union Agency for Railways. In an extraordinary meeting, the Greek federation of rail workers decided unanimously to launch the 24-hour strike on Thursday to highlight poor working conditions and chronic understaffing. It accused the federal government of “disrespect” towards railways for causing the crash, saying “more permanent staff, better training and mainly the implementation of modern security systems, are permanently thrown in the bin.” Separately, another 24-hour strike was announced by Greek metro workers, who said in a statement: “There are no words to describe such tragedy.” Greek transport minister Kostas Karamanlis said the railway system the government inherited was “not up to 21st century standards” as he stepped down from his role Wednesday. In a televised address after visiting the crash site, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said the collision was “mainly” due “to tragic human error.”

He said the transport minister’s decision to resign was honorable, and added that the heads of Hellenic Railways Organization and its subsidiary ERGOSE have also submitted their resignations.



**EDITOR’S COMMENT:** Why this tragedy happened? JUST ONE WORD: **Inefficiency** (government and train organization) – they bought a railway telecommand system in 2000 and in 2023 this valuable system was not fully installed!!! 23 years ... Keep in mind: “Every deviation from SOPs ends up in bloodshed!”



## Desensitization of First Responders

By the Editor of the “C2BRNE Diary”

Once upon a time, during a “Crisis Management” course in the US, we had a special guest. He was a physically huge Coast Guard First Responder who participated in the recovery of victims of TWA Flight 800 that exploded and crashed into the Atlantic Ocean near East Moriches, New York, on July 17, 1996. While performing S&R he collected the head of a little girl floating on the sea. He delivered the body part and continued his normal duties. After a few months, he participated in an S&R operation off-shore Hawaii. While looking around for bodies, he saw a floating coconut. His brain matched the coconut with the girl’s head and the responder “froze” for life – sitting silently in a chair looking somewhere in space like been in another universe. This resulted in the introduction of first responders’ psychological desensitization starting from the 9/11 massacre – tents with psychologists and psychiatrists were deployed next to the ruins and crews completing their shifts obligatory went for an initial interview and assessment.

Unfortunately, this did not become a standard procedure in other continents and surely not in Greece. Nobody cares about the psychological status of firemen, policemen, ambulance, and ER crews who operated inside burning melting cars, collecting charcoal corps and body parts, or in the receiving hospitals. There is a sick belief that it is their job and that they can handle anything bad and socking like killed young men and women that were traveling with the damn train that crashed due to a combination of state and human mistakes and omissions. Speaking from my own experience, nobody cared when I lost a heart attack patient in my second shift at the emergency department of my hospital and I had to inform family and relatives about the incident – he was a 35-year-old police officer, married with two babies. Nobody from the hospital administration called me the other day and ask “John are you OK?”. Perhaps they thought that death is part of the job. But it is not; it will never be!

So, support first responders when involved in deadly incidents and do what is necessary to help them regain the psychological balance that will allow them to operate effectively next time fellow citizens will require their skills. First responders are humans, not super invincible heroes!

●► [Additional reading](#)



## Tennessee becomes first state to ban drag shows on public property

Source: <https://www.fox29.com/news/tennessee-becomes-first-state-to-ban-drag-shows-on-public-property-viewed-by-minors>



Mar 03 – Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee signed a bill into law Thursday restricting public drag shows in Tennessee – making it the first state to do so. [The legislation](#) criminalizes an "adult cabaret performance" that takes place on public property or in a location where the performance could be viewed by a person who is not an adult.

In the provision, which builds on existing restrictions on adult-oriented businesses in Tennessee, an "adult cabaret performance" is defined as a performance that "features topless dancers, go-go dancers, exotic dancers, strippers, male or female impersonators who provide entertainment that appeals to a prurient interest, or similar entertainers."

According to the bill, first-time violators may be charged with a Class A misdemeanor that is punishable by a \$2,500 fine and up to one year in prison. A second or subsequent offense will be classified as a Class E felony.

**This act takes effect July 1, 2023.**

**Lee also signed a [measure Thursday banning gender-affirming medical care](#) for trans youth.**

This bill comes as a photo of Lee in a high school yearbook photo circulates across social media platforms, apparently showing the governor in drag. Lee says there's a big difference between wearing a dress at a high school football game and drag queens wearing a dress on stage, according to NPR. Several other states, including Idaho, Kentucky, North Dakota, Montana, Oklahoma and Utah, are considering similar bans. The governor of Arkansas recently signed a bill that puts new restrictions on "adult-oriented" performances. While initially targeting drag shows, that bill was scaled back after complaints of discrimination. While the Tennessee bill has raised similar concerns, sponsors said that was not the intent.

Tennessee state Sen. Jack Johnson, a Republican, said the bill addresses "sexually suggestive drag shows" that are inappropriate for children. In a proclamation, Gov. Ron DeSantis declared a Sarasota woman to be the "real" winner of a 500-meter freestyle event. The top spot in the NCAA Division I



### White House condemns Tennessee Governor Bill Lee's ban on drag shows, trans healthcare

During a White House briefing, Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre slammed Tennessee Governor's ban on drag shows and gender-affirming care.  
DAMIEN HENDERSON, ASSOCIATED PRESS



swimming event went to University of Pennsylvania swimmer Lia Thomas, who was deemed the first known transgender woman to win the title. Drag show supporters say the performances are a form of expression protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and the proposed measures are discriminatory against the LGBTQ community.

The American Civil Liberties Union and the LGBTQIA+ civil rights organization Lambda Legal [plan to challenge the law](#) in court as unconstitutional, The Hill reported.

## Turkey's Top Religious Body: **Pedophilia Yes, Adoption No**

By Burak Bekdil

Source: <https://www.meforum.org/64217/turkey-top-religious-body-pedophilia-yes-adoption>

Mar 02 – Diyanet, Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs, an office under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's authority, shocked the nation once again when it issued an Islamic *fatwa* (religious opinion) shortly after the worst disaster in modern Turkey's history: a 7.8-magnitude **earthquake** that hit Turkey's southeast, as well as Syria, and that killed nearly [50,000](#) people and injured more than 100,000.

Thousands of babies and children pulled out of the rubble now have no families. More than 300,000 Turkish families have [applied](#) to adopt parentless children.

In a tragedy of that scale, what could be the primary concern of the suffering country's top religious authority? Helping the relief work? Not for Diyanet.

"[F]rom the Islamic viewpoint, there is no barrier to marriage between the adopter and the adopted child." Diyanet's *fatwa* [said](#).

What?! This looks surreal, horrific. Not, it seems, in the view of Turkish Islamists. Diyanet continued:

"Although Islam recommends 'the care and protection of orphaned children,' it does not recognize the institution of adoption, which has certain legal consequences. Accordingly, the relationship between the adopter and the adopted child does not create a barrier to marriage, nor is it permissible for the adopted child to be registered in the genealogy of the adopters instead of their biological parents."

Secular Turks were once again outraged. In his Twitter account, prominent columnist Fatih Altaylı wrote:

"We understand that you are really perverts, but what are you doing in an institution like the Diyanet? Perverts. Go into the porn industry."

There is a legal problem, as well. The *fatwa* runs up against the Turkish Civil Code, [according](#) to the Istanbul Bar Association's Center for Children's Rights. Article 129 of the Civil Code bans marriage between an adopter and an adoptee, and Article 500 grants adoptees the right of succession, the Center said, noting that Diyanet's statements should not be against the Constitution or the laws. As the Turkish government's topmost religious authority under Erdoğan, Diyanet is giving permission for an illegal act under the pretext of Islamic law: no obstacle for adoptive parents to marry, and consummate the marriage with, the adopted children who survived the earthquake.

Then a worse blow hit: Diyanet has [filed](#) a criminal complaint against Fatih Altaylı on the grounds that he shared "grave insults against the institution and its personnel" on social media. If Altaylı is to be blamed for his tweet, his only wrong should be that he did not insult a pedophilic religious institution enough.

Not only that. Erdoğan's focus is not on the relief effort or on the national agony. Turkey's broadcasting watchdog, RTUK, [suspended](#) the television stations Halk TV, KRT and Tele1, for three days and fined another, Fox TV, on grounds that "their coverage of the earthquake was unjustly critical of the government."

This story is only the latest in a long [list](#) of Turkish Islamist practices of pedophilia in the past years.

Most recently, in November, Turkey was shocked at [news](#) that a prominent Islamic sheik, the leader of a religious order fiercely devoted to Erdoğan, had married off his six-year-old daughter to a 29-year-old disciple. Six! The girl had been forced into sex and became a mother at 14. She complained to the prosecutor's office, but Erdoğan's authorities apparently did not want to bother the sheik.

As she became an adult, she collected evidence of abuse, made it public, and only then the judiciary acted. Initially the court decided to try the suspects without detention, but under huge public pressure, the court detained both the father and husband. The father, in a statement, said that he was answerable only to Allah, not to a court.

At the first court hearing in January, loyalists of the *Hiranur* sect [gathered](#) in front of the court building "to protest the legal proceedings against their sheik." In defense of the girl's father, they shouted, "*Allahu*

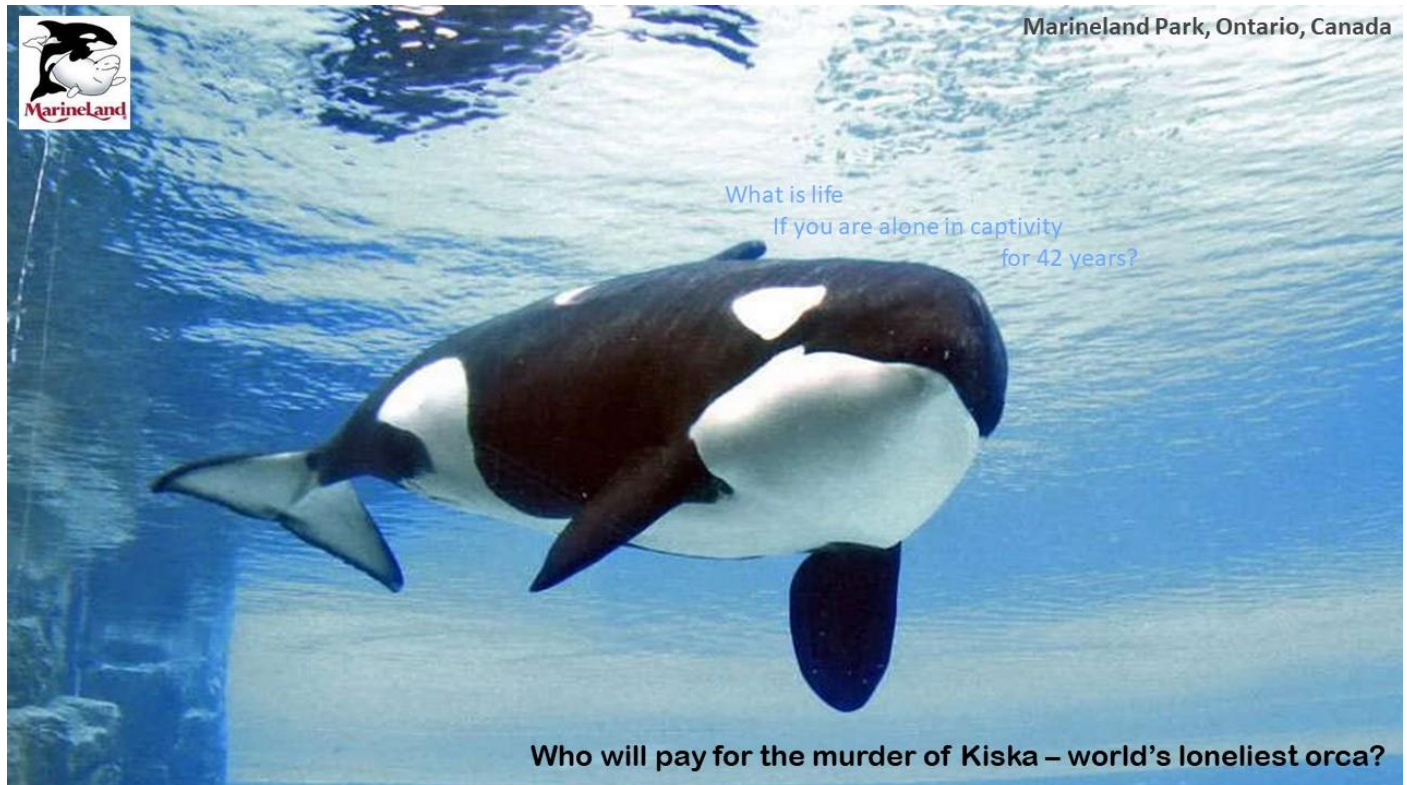


akbar [Allah is the greatest]." At the same hearing, the court [ordered](#) a "secrecy and media ban" on future proceedings. The trial was adjourned to February 27.

**A general election is scheduled for this spring. The Turkish people and NATO deserve better.**

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

## Is "Operation Fortune" Based on a True Story?



## What Saudi Arabia and Iran's Détente Really Means

By Adam Lammon

Source: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/lebanon-watch/what-saudi-arabia-and-iran%E2%80%99s-d%C3%A9tente-really-means-206295>

Mar 10 – The announcement that Saudi Arabia and Iran have restored diplomatic ties after seven years of tensions could result in significant changes in the Middle East. It not only stands to reset one of the region's most violent rivalries but also exemplifies how China has become an influential player in regional affairs. Indeed, the [joint statement](#) issued from Beijing on March 10 committed both countries to respect each other's sovereignty and to not interfere in each other's internal affairs, to reopen their embassies in Tehran and Riyadh within two months, to revive a bilateral security pact, and to resume trade, investment, and cultural exchanges. Occurring during a time of heightened fears of [open conflict](#) between Israel and a soon-to-be nuclear Iran, and after years of militant competition between Tehran and Riyadh across the region, this nascent rapprochement is undoubtedly positive. Yet the reactions in the United States and Israel suggest that the outcome—and perceptions of it—are more complicated. To its credit, the Biden administration [welcomed](#) the détente and stated that Riyadh had [kept Washington informed](#) of the talks' progress. Yet the fact that it was Beijing—merely three months after Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman lavishly [received](#) Chinese president Xi Jinping in Riyadh in sharp contrast to U.S. president Joe Biden's [frosty reception](#) six months earlier—that brought the Saudis and Iranians together has evidently smarted Washington.





Still, fears of [American decline](#) are overblown. China cannot (and is, in fact, not interested in) replacing the United States in the Middle East. The United States remains the region's apex security provider, not only in terms of selling the [most weapons](#) to the region but also in terms of its on-the-ground military presence. But while Washington has squandered its time and resources toppling governments in Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan and sanctioning Syria and Iran to ruin, China has forged ahead by investing in infrastructure and relationships. The Middle East is large enough for both China and the United States, and rather than panicking about every Chinese action, Washington would be better served by actually trying to compete with Beijing beyond the military sphere.



Moreover, despite Beijing's growing importance to the Middle East, it is not China, but the United States, that Saudi Arabia and the [United Arab Emirates](#) are asking to defend them. In this light, Israel's anxiety that a Saudi-Iranian rapprochement will work against its interests is misplaced. Far from being "a fatal blow to the effort to build a regional coalition against Iran," as former Israeli prime minister Naftali Bennet [tweeted](#), a reduction in regional tensions is good for Israel. Having the Saudis (and Chinese) press Iran on taking actions that enhance regional peace and stability can only help Israel, as Iranian intransigence will result in its international isolation. Moreover, this reconciliation—regardless of how meaningful it ultimately will be—has not duped Riyadh into believing that

its many years of problems with Iran are behind it. A decade ago, the late Saudi king Abdullah [urged](#) the United States to "cut off the head of the [Iranian] snake," and that was before Iran had developed the sophisticated nuclear weapons capabilities that it has today. And it was only in September 2019 that Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps [plotted](#) and then executed a targeted drone attack on Saudi oil facilities that halved the kingdom's oil production. In 2022, ballistic missiles and drones launched by the Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen were raining down on Saudi and Emirati cities with increasing regularity. Just yesterday, one day before Saudi Arabia and Iran decided to allegedly bury the hatchet, Riyadh [offered](#) to normalize its relations with Israel in exchange for the United States guaranteeing Saudi security and aiding the Saudi nuclear program. One cannot help but ask why the U.S. military should defend Saudi Arabia in exchange for something the Saudis [are already doing](#) and have a strong national interest in continuing. Yet it is also evident that "[American weakness](#)" is not what is pushing the Saudis to reduce tensions with Iran. The Saudis live in a dangerous region—occasionally [made more dangerous](#) by their own hands—and they will continue to diversify their relationships and seek security where they can.

In fact, even a U.S. security guarantee would not pull the Saudis decisively back into the U.S. camp, solve all the problems afflicting the Saudi-U.S. relationship, or end Riyadh's efforts to reach a new security architecture with Iran. Instead, it will only codify the United States' responsibility to defend Saudi Arabia, tying America's soldiers to Crown Prince Mohammed's high tolerance for risk, and additionally comprise the United States by further involving it in the kingdom's human rights abuses at home and abroad. It would also further stack the deck against Iran by formally throwing the weight of one of the world's two superpowers behind Tehran's foremost Islamic rival, thereby increasing the impetus for the Iranians to develop nuclear arms. If the United States is truly interested in supporting stability and competing with China in the Middle East, it needs to carefully extract itself from the region's morass, not dive deeper in.

**Adam Lammon** is a former executive editor at *The National Interest* and an analyst of Middle Eastern affairs based in Washington, DC.

## Italy's Coast Guard Launches Rescues, Saying More Than 1,000 Migrants in Danger

Source: <https://www.voanews.com/a/italy-s-coast-guard-launches-rescues-saying-more-than-1-000-migrants-in-danger/6999800.html>

Mar 10 – The Italian coast guard launched rescue operations on Friday to save hundreds of migrants packed aboard several boats off the toe of Italy, less than two weeks after at least 73 drowned in a



shipwreck. "More than 1,000 people are in danger," the coast guard said in a statement. The president of the southern Calabria region, Roberto Occhiuto, said around 1,300 migrants were aboard boats that the European Union's border force Frontex had warned could run into problems.

Three coast guard boats were trying to offload around 500 migrants packed on a vessel 70 miles (110 km) south of the Calabrian town of Crotona — close to the scene of the February 26 disaster. The coast guard said it also had dispatched a couple of boats to rescue about 800 migrants aboard two vessels further out to sea. An Italian navy ship was also headed at full speed to the area to help out. "The rescue operations ... are particularly complex due to the large number of people on board the boats adrift," the coast guard said.

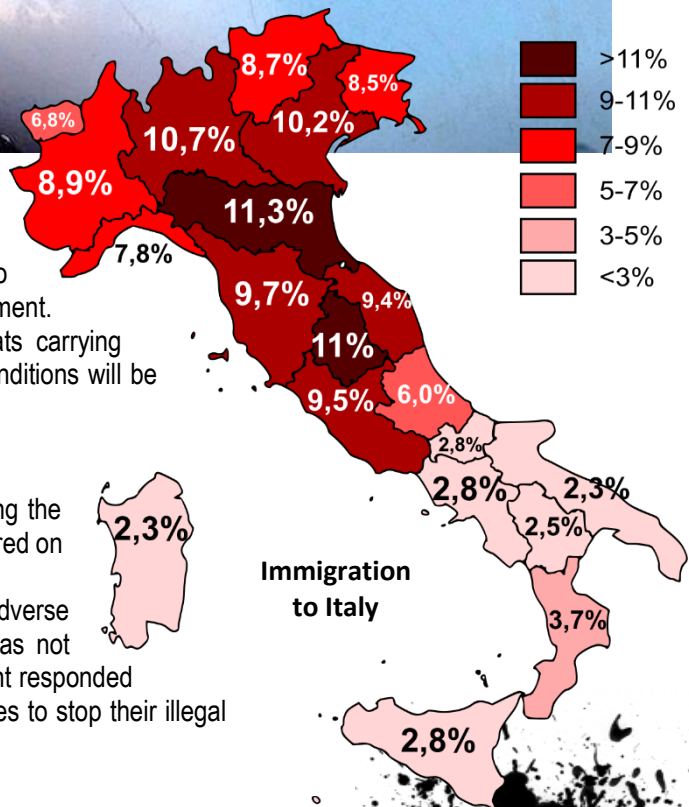


**Hundreds picked up**

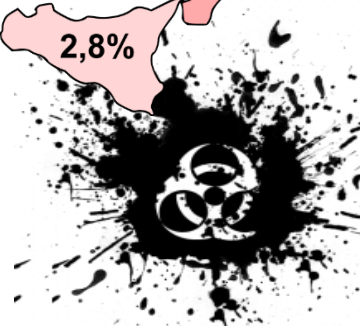
In a separate incident earlier Friday, the coast guard picked up almost 500 migrants close to the southern Italian island of Lampedusa, local media reported. "In the last days, we have seen an increase in attempts to cross the Central Mediterranean," Frontex told Reuters in a written statement. "Only since yesterday, our planes and drones have detected 20 boats carrying hundreds of people heading towards the Italian shores. The weather conditions will be deteriorating in the upcoming hours."

**Italy's sea rescue capabilities under scrutiny**

Italy's migrant sea rescue capabilities have come under scrutiny following the February 26 shipwreck off Calabria. The body of a young boy was recovered on Friday, bringing the death toll to 73, with many migrants still missing. Police vessels had tried but failed to intercept their wooden boat due to adverse weather, and the coast guard, better equipped to face rough seas, was not immediately activated. Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's rightist government responded on Thursday with tougher jail penalties for migrant smugglers and pledges to stop their illegal boat trips, while opening up legal migration channels.



Immigration to Italy



The government approved a decree at the end of last year cracking down on charity rescue boats but its declared aim of curbing migrant crossings is having scant success.

More than 3,000 people have reached Italy since Wednesday, compared to around 1,300 for the whole of March last year. As many as 1,869 migrants from 41 boats arrived on Lampedusa on Thursday, the ANSA news agency said, calling it an all-time record for landings on a single day.

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** What is the difference between this action and a war invasion? What if Italy decides one day that it will halt all S&R operations? When you know the risks of sailing in angry seas during wintertime but still you give it a try counting on the humanitarian feelings of a neighboring nation is this sufficient to be rescued? All these charity NGOs who "cry" for the poor illegal immigrants have ever thought about the risks that the Italian National Guard is taking. What if they have an accident and people on duty drown? If these illegal intruders know that nobody will save them will they stay home and try to push their governments to do something about them? Strangely, most African countries are rich with very poor citizens.

## Iran Unveils World's First 'Air Defense Boat' Capable Of Firing Deadly Missiles From Its Vertical Launch System – Analyst

Source: <https://eurasianimes.com/worlds-first-air-defense-boat-capable-of-firing-deadly-missiles-from-its-vertical-launch-system-experts/>

Mar 10 – Iran's second navy, under the IRGC, has developed the world's first very small air-defense boat amid rising concerns about



Tehran's burgeoning military power that is seen as a threat by countries in the Persian Gulf and Israel.

The development of a small defense boat is unique in its own right.

This is the first-of-its-kind vessel Iran has likely produced for domestic use by the Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy, according to a report by Naval Analyst and OSINT expert HI Sutton.

Subsequently, a video surfaced on social media in which a **Nawab surface-to-air missile** is released from the Vertical Launch System of the boat. According to military observers, this air

defense boat was modified and converted from the British Bladerunner. This is due to the hull's shape, which resembles the Bladerunner.

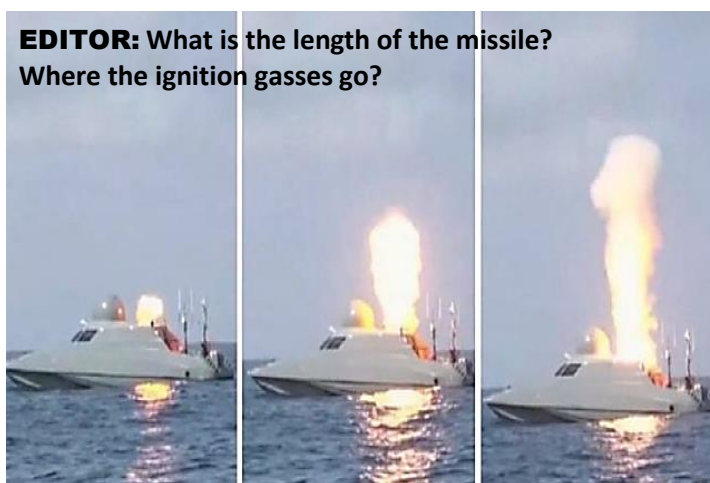
The vessel is reportedly named the 'Zulfiqar-class,' which is confusing as a host of other equipment in the Iranian military go by that name. Sutton believes that this small air defense boat has short-range surface-to-air missiles (likely the Nawab) as its primary armament.

Last year, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy received three indigenously-developed vessels equipped with sophisticated air defense systems.

At the time, Commander of the IRGC Navy, Rear Admiral Ali Reza Tangsir, claimed that the nation's new speed boats use cutting-edge technology produced by domestic firms to dodge hostile radar.

Unlike other vessels equipped with cutting-edge missile defense systems to identify hostile targets, the Iranian Zulfiqar air-defense boat is more like "a sea-mobile air defense system like the Tor air defense

**EDITOR:** What is the length of the missile?  
Where the ignition gasses go?



system,” according to Sutton. Further, military observers have noted that the boat has a multi-functional AESA radar. According to reports, the vertical launch system (VLS) is behind the cabin, and a sizable radome is over it. Whether this boat will be extensively used remains unknown because only one has reportedly been constructed.

Although some small boats usually carry MANPADS, this is the first small boat with a complete surface-to-air missile system. It is pertinent to note that smaller boats are particularly susceptible to air assault. However, this is one of the many domestically-produced innovative military equipment that has drawn global attention.

This boat might be able to defend against short-range air attacks from a swarm of other vessels. This would become significant given that the global navies, including the United States, are also advancing work on unmanned surface vessels.

In September last year, the Iranian navy [seized](#) two US Navy Saildrone Explorer unmanned surface vessels (USVs) in the Red Sea. It released them later when the US dispatched two destroyers, the USS Nitze and USS Delbert D Black, and two helicopters to secure their release.

However, the incident gave the impression that the confrontation between the IRGC-N and rival navies could become more frequent with an enhanced Iranian naval presence in the region.

Against that backdrop, developing a sea-mobile air defense small boat could be an Iranian attempt at bolstering its defenses at sea. This is even more significant since Tehran is reeling under international sanctions aimed at curtailing its military development and nuclear program. However, despite the international sanction regime getting tighter, the West Asian country has taken gigantic leaps in military development.

### Iran's Expanding Naval Fleet

Iranian reports state that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is strengthening its navy on a war footing. On the morning of March 9, pictures of newly outfitted speedboats and a new support ship were broadcast by Iranian media. Iran essentially has two navies: the state navy and the IRGC navy.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps navy announced it had added a new ocean-going warship and tens of missile-launching speed boats to its fleet. Iran International [reported](#) that the vessels were part of a significant upgrade, bolstering the country's navy fleet.

The IRGC held an unveiling ceremony in the port city of Bandar Abbas. Among the new additions to the fleet are 99 Ashura and Tariq speed boats, modified from rocket launchers to missile launchers, and the Iranian-built Shahid Mahdavi destroyer, formerly a commercial ship.

The “Shahid Mahdavi ocean liner,” which would enable the IRGC to conduct long-distance missions, was claimed to be under



construction in Iran last year, according to sources. Although it looks like an ocean liner, this vessel—which Iran International claims was once known as Sarvin—was initially a cargo ship and is now intended to serve as a floating base.

[Shahid Mahdavi, originally a container ship, now converted into a warship \(via Twitter\)](#)

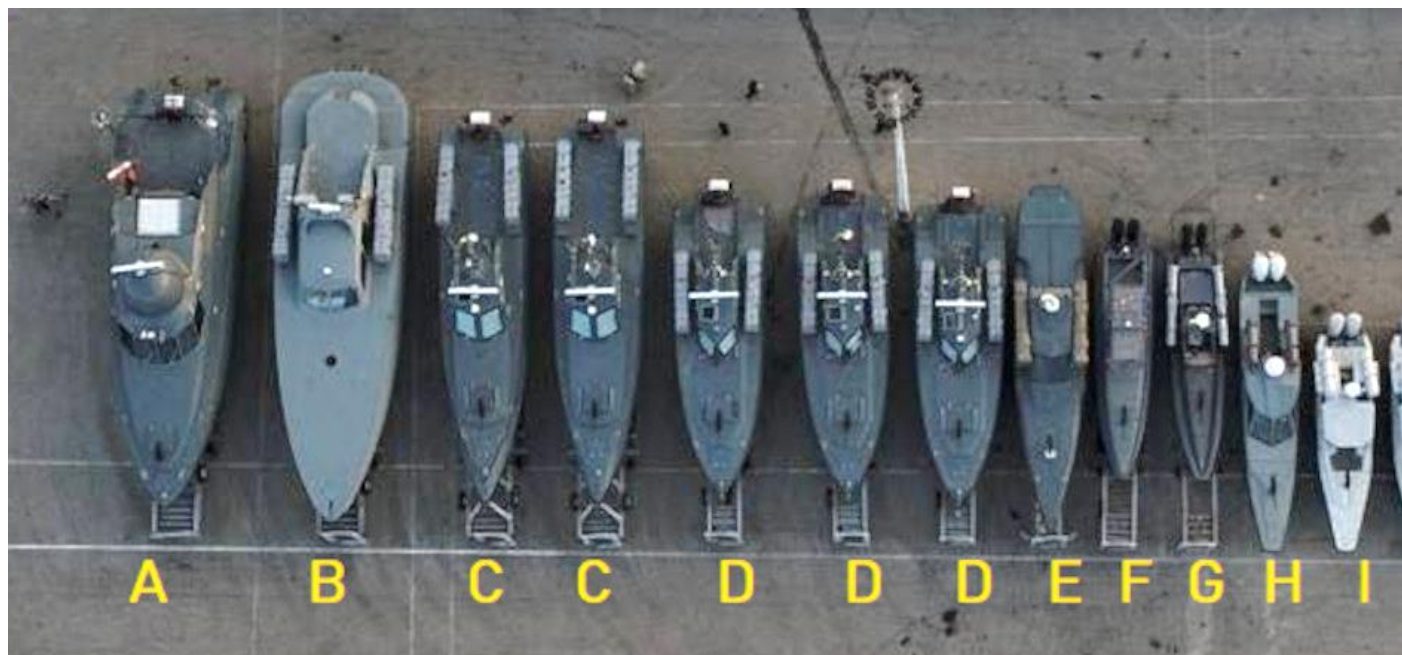
According to sources, the IRGC, which oversees its division of Iran's navy, is receiving almost

100 new patrol boats and a sizable support ship in the shape of an “ocean liner” modified for naval purposes. Iran has recently attempted to strengthen its relatively weak naval force, even sending ships on lengthy expeditions to South America and Russia. The reports about Iran's new missile-capable and drone-launch-capable missile boats have been circulating since 2020 when Naval Post reported that Iran had received 112 missile-launching boats. The Ashura, Taregh, and Zulifqar classes are some of the few boat types that Iran built. The IRGC-N Commander said at the ceremony that Iran is also rolling out the larger logistic vessel, perhaps one of at least two that will be built to carry helicopters and drones.

He gave some specifics on the Mahdavi, noting that it was 2,100 tons, 240 meters long, and 27 meters wide, with a radar array and surface-to-surface, surface-to-air missiles, highly advanced electronic warfare



Khordad 3 integrated telecommunication [air-defense] systems and had the capability of carrying helicopters, UAVs and operational vessels. The induction of these new vessels and the modifications carried out by Iran is expected to significantly bolster its capability at the seas, especially when faced with a more aggressive Israel and a more hostile neighborhood.



Camera drone's-eye view of IRGC boats on display, March 2023. A) The air defense boat. B) Light missile boat with Bladerunner hull. C) light missile boats on Interceptor hull. D) light missile boats on Interceptor hull (alternative design). E) Missile boat, with type of missile unclear. F) RIB, possibly explosive boat or uncrewed. G) RIB with lightweight anti-ship torpedoes, can be carried aboard a Shahid Soleimani-class missile corvette. H) Interceptor boat. I) Interceptor boat with new type of missile.

### Four-legged heroes!



◀ Turkish mega earthquake – He slept after 56 hours of non-stop search and found 40 people alive under the rubble. This is the Tunisian hero “Husky”

← Tweet

Ankita Jain @Ankita20200

"Heroic Rescue Dogs returning home from Turkey are being upgraded by Turkish Airlines from the cargo hold... to First Class. The world isn't desperate for 'Brand Purpose' It's desperate for Brand Contribution." #TurkeyQuakes #TurkeySanThquake



## How to negotiate the China-Taiwan impasse

By Dan Drollette Jr

Source: <https://thebulletin.org/premium/2023-03/introduction-how-to-negotiate-the-china-taiwan-impasse/>

Mar 13 – With much of the world's attention focused on Russia and Ukraine, it could be easy to look away from rising tensions between China and Taiwan.

That would be a mistake, as a variety of experts in various fields attested for this issue. We asked these experts to analyze the China-Taiwan dilemma from the angles they thought most useful. Most—but not all—favor dialogue and cooperation with China, wherever and whenever it can be achieved. But US policy on Taiwan has always been a balancing act that includes some measure of military deterrence.

So the analyses of potential responses to this complex and longstanding impasse are, as one might expect, disparate.

As Cold War veterans Richard Garwin and Frank von Hippel point out in “How to avoid nuclear war with China,” the stakes of a US-China faceoff over Taiwan are high. There is a significant probability that a war between China and the United States would escalate to threats of nuclear weapons use—or even using them. It is urgent that the two countries launch talks on nuclear arms control, they argue, both to prevent a nuclear arms race and to reassure one other that both want to avoid a nuclear conflict. Meanwhile, Garwin

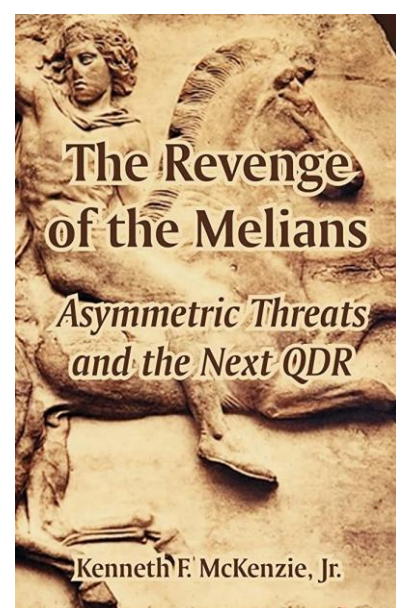
and von Hippel say, citizens need to re-engage with their governments to urge alternatives to a new nuclear arms race, and US scientists should brainstorm with their Chinese counterparts about how to persuade governments to reduce nuclear risks.



“We are determined to liberate Taiwan!” “Yiding yao jiefang Taiwan”. This 1971 poster became very popular in the West, and was subsequently re-issued with subtitles in English, French, and German, as seen here. It decorated many students’ rooms, alongside the portrait of Che Guevara. Source: <https://chinese posters.net/posters/e3-748>

Jingdong Yuan of Sydney University writes that the United States should re-examine its decades-long “One China” policy and the messages that it sends. In his essay “The United States and stability in the Taiwan Strait,” Yuan argues that China’s growing economic power and increasing military capabilities will pose ever-more difficult challenges to US security commitments to Taiwan. The ways in which Washington has chosen to respond so far—legislation conveying US support and commitment, engagement in high-level official exchanges, support for Taiwan’s pursuit of greater international space, and more arms sales—are sending messages to Beijing. How these major US policy changes are interpreted and implemented under the new environment imposed by China could affect Taiwan’s security—and whether a war can be avoided.

For several historical reasons, mistrust of the United States remains relatively strong among the Taiwanese people. As Washington policymakers continue to debate Taiwan policy through the lens of US-China relations, most of the discussion has been focusing on how to deter



China from attacking Taiwan; few are articulating the importance of the need to reassure Taiwan as well. In his article “To reassure Taiwan and deter China, the United States should learn from history,” Catholic University doctoral candidate Clark Aoqi Wu argues that any effective US policy toward Taiwan should include both credible military deterrence of China and clear reassurances for Taiwan—a policy that would require the United States to exchange its “strategic ambiguity” stance for one of “strategic clarity.”

Lyle Goldstein of Brown University emphasizes the role of diplomacy in China-Taiwan relations, saying that “unlike Ukraine, Taiwan likely could not be reinforced during a war since it will almost surely be blockaded and thus completely isolated.” In his essay “The trouble with Taiwan,” he notes that “[t]he island is also about 15 times smaller than Ukraine, while China’s military budget is considerably larger than that of Russia. In short, the Ukraine War has likely not saved Taiwan... [W]ise and cautious diplomacy must prevail since I see no feasible military solutions.”

Other observers—including the Hoover Institution’s Larry Diamond and Adm. James Ellis—are more hawkish. Diamond and Ellis believe that today’s China is a neo-totalitarian regime that represents a growing risk to peace. Over the next decade, they argue, a Chinese attack on Taiwan cannot be avoided—unless the Chinese leadership is forced to accept that the costs of a military invasion would be too great to bear. In their article “Deterring a Chinese military attack on Taiwan,” Diamond and Ellis call for a “porcupine strategy” in which Taiwan fields large quantities of small, mobile, affordable, and resilient anti-air and anti-ship systems to resist airborne or amphibious invasion. (One can think of this approach as reminiscent of how Ukraine responded in the first stages of Russia’s invasion—Taiwan would essentially try to “Ukraine-ize” the basic, on-the-ground situation, to coin a cliché.)

They argue that there is no way to prevent war over Taiwan, other than for Taiwan and the United States—hopefully in closer cooperation with Australia, Japan, and perhaps others—to prepare more energetically and intelligently for it. Peace through strength, deterrence through preparation, they argue, echoing Cold War rhetoric from decades past. The future will show whether that approach or another makes a US-China military confrontation over Taiwan more or less likely to happen and if it does, more or less likely to escalate toward catastrophe.

**Dan Drollette** is the executive editor of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. He is a science writer/editor and foreign correspondent who has filed stories from every continent except Antarctica. His stories have appeared in *Scientific American*, *International Wildlife*, *MIT’s Technology Review*, *Natural History*, *Cosmos*, *Science*, *New Scientist*, and *BBC Online*, among others. He was a TEDx speaker in Frankfurt am Main, Germany and held a Fulbright Postgraduate Traveling Fellowship to Australia—where he lived for a total of four years. For three years, he edited CERN’s online weekly magazine, in Geneva, Switzerland, where his office was 100 yards from the injection point of the Large Hadron Collider. Drollette is the author of “Gold Rush in the Jungle: The Race to Discover and Defend the Rarest Animals of Vietnam’s ‘Lost World,’” published in April 2013, by Crown. He holds a BJ (Bachelor of Journalism) from the University of Missouri, and a master’s in science writing from New York University’s Science, Health and Environmental Reporting Program.

**EDITOR’S COMMENT:** It seems to me that if the US was not acting as if Taiwan is the 51<sup>st</sup> State, Taiwan, and China should have come to an agreement. What is next? Read the “Revenge of the Melians” for an answer.

## Sports in the 2024 Olympic Games

Source: <https://www.paris2024.org/en/the-paris-2024-olympic-sports-programme/>

Archery, athletics, badminton, basketball, basketball 3×3, boxing, canoe, road cycling, cycling track, mountain biking, BMX freestyle, BMX racing, equestrian, fencing, football, golf, artistic gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, trampoline, handball, hockey, judo, modern pentathlon, rowing, rugby, sailing, shooting, table tennis, taekwondo, tennis, triathlon, volleyball, beach volleyball, diving, marathon swimming, artistic swimming, swimming, water polo, weightlifting, and wrestling.

### Four additional sports

Breaking, sport climbing, skateboarding, surfing.



**EDITOR’S COMMENT:** Breaking dance? Skateboarding? Climbing? Rugby? BMX? Are they serious? “Olympic Games” is a trade mark and as such it has to follow certain original rules going back in time and in Ancient Greece – the origin of the Games. If the hosting nation desire to add additional activities (e.g., tango, poker, pole dancing, hanger games, etc.), let’s change the name to something like “Earth or Planet Games” or even better to “Global Security Games” but not “Olympic Games”. Show some respect for traditions!



## Desperate Migrants Seeking Asylum Face a New Hurdle: Technology

By Arelis R. Hernández (The Washington Post)

Source: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2023/03/11/asylum-seekers-mexico-border-app/>

Mar 11 – As the Biden administration struggles to bring order to the border, some of the most vulnerable migrants are finding themselves stuck in squalid camps in Mexico. A significant number are seeking asylum in the United States and were expecting the sanctuary of the nation's immigration law, which allows migrants fleeing persecution to request protection no matter how they reach the country. Advocates estimate close to 7,000 people were spread out in encampments in Matamoros and Reynosa in January. All are trying to use a new CBP app that is supposed to make entering the country more efficient. Each day, migrants awake before sunrise to search for a WiFi signal and try to get one of the 700 to 800 appointments available at eight entry points. Advocates estimate there are more than 100,000 people seeking entry. The appointments fill up within five minutes. Previously, attorneys could intervene to make a case for asylum seekers to get emergency admission into the United States. Now those fleeing gang violence are fighting for appointments on their own, alongside those facing less dire conditions.

## Physicians Get Trained on Gun Safety

By Emily Moskal

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20230314-physicians-get-trained-on-gun-safety>

Mar 14 – [Dean Winslow](#), MD, a professor of medicine since 1998, deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan six times since Sept. 11, 2001. It was during these deployments, more than 11 years ago, that he saw first-hand how devastating gun injuries are — especially those from assault weapons. Winslow became increasingly concerned about the proliferation of semiautomatic assault weapons and mass shootings in the United States after his time in the Air Force. In 2017, two days after the Sutherland Springs mass shooting, during his senate confirmation hearing for assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, Winslow told Senator Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire that he thought it was “insane” to



sell semiautomatic assault weapons to civilians. Because of this statement his confirmation was put on indefinite hold by Senator John McCain of Arizona, until Winslow withdrew his name about a month later.

For the past three years, Winslow and [Julie Parsonnet](#), MD, professor of medicine and of epidemiology, have worked on an online, self-paced course called [Clinicians and Firearms](#). Medical student Christina Cantwell of UC Irvine and Deniz Cataltepe, MD, medical student at Icahn School of Medicine, helped develop the course material while partnering with Stanford Medicine. The aim is to promote education for clinicians, teaching how to reduce firearm injuries and deaths, including tips on how to talk to patients about safe storage and temporary removal of firearms from the home during times of high risk. The course launched in 2021 and is continually updated.

“We’re dealing with a huge public health problem,” said Winslow. “We’ve controlled tuberculosis and HIV as major causes of death. We’re not cutting it with guns — we’ve let it become the leading cause of death in children ages one to 18.”

### Safety as a Matter of Fact

In the U.S., physicians rank high in credibility, acting as a trusted source of information for the average person, Winslow said. Winslow saw an opportunity to leverage that perspective to improve patient care. In 2018, he and Parsonnet partnered with then Stanford School of Medicine student Sarabeth Spitzer, MD, to form Scrubs Addressing the Firearms Epidemic, or [SAFE](#), a nonprofit for U.S. physicians that aims to promote gun safety education, research and policies. SAFE members created and administer the Clinicians and





Firearms course. “As respected members of their communities, physicians can turn the tides in a public campaign,” Winslow said. “Doctors have played a big role in changing culture around things that may be deleterious like drinking, smoking and distracted driving.” Acknowledging and mitigating the risks of gun-related accidents and injuries are important when it comes to gun ownership, but most people aren’t as vigilant as they need to be, said Parsonnet, who is the George DeForest Barnett Professor of Medicine. “We live in a society in which guns are a fact of life. But we are not living in a society in which gun safety is a fact of life. Nor have we made a real commitment to making the ownership of guns a big responsibility.”

The importance of safety is underrated, Parsonnet said. Currently, fewer than 30 of the approximately 150 medical schools in the U.S. feature education on gun violence or harm reduction. So far, more than 400 individuals or groups have enrolled in the course since its launch in 2021. The course has three modules that cover firearm education and harm reduction. The first module explores the data of firearm-related injuries. The second defines the anatomy and types of firearms and ammunition and the injuries that result from them so that physicians can speak with credibility to gunowners. The third discusses firearm safety and how to have that conversation with patients, particularly when there are toddlers in the home or when someone has clinical depression. The course recommends doctors share gun safety measures, such as safe storage of firearms. While making such suggestions, Winslow said, doctors could also ask if a patient’s gun is locked and unloaded.

### Hitting Home

[Unice Chen](#), MD, a clinical assistant professor, was motivated to take the course after a recent mass shooting that happened in Half Moon Bay, California, where she lives, during Lunar New Year, a holiday she celebrates. She said it really brought home how mass shootings and gun fatalities have reached a crisis point. “Gun violence has become an escalating public health threat,” Chen said. “Health care providers need to educate themselves and patients about firearm safety in an effort to reduce preventable harms, including death.” She most appreciated the module about the fundamentals of guns — she had limited knowledge about the basic mechanics of firearms and had never handled a gun. “Discussing firearm ownership and safety is an uncomfortable subject for many clinicians,” Chen said.

After taking the class, Chen said she would pay even more attention to her elderly patients. She was surprised to find such a high rate of suicide among elderly men with depression and loneliness, as well as other firearm-related injuries in patients with dementia.

### Doctors as Messengers

Forty-five thousand Americans died by gunshot [in 2020](#) in the U.S. The tragedy has an enormous ripple effect, said Winslow, including post-traumatic stress disorder among survivors. To address the epidemic, as a former senior associate dean for medical education, Parsonnet has been working with curriculum committees at Stanford Medicine and beyond to integrate the course training not just in medical school education but also residencies across the nation. Six months ago, the course was also approved as a continuing medical education course, geared toward providers post-medical school who want to stay apprised on the latest developments in the field. Currently, anyone can take the course for free. The second version will be available at the end of this spring quarter, with more interactivity, videos and written materials. “We must address the reality that gun ownership is a part of our culture in this country,” Parsonnet said. “But we need to carefully engage with that culture to diminish injuries and deaths.”

[Emily Moskal](#) is Science Writer at Stanford Medicine.

**EDITOR’S COMMENT:** Gun safety is something we teach when training CBRN first responders providing field first aid. Healthcare personnel including ambulance crews are not familiar with arms and accidents can easily happen when dealing with contaminated police officers or soldiers.

## Why US troops remain in Iraq 20 years after “shock and awe”?

Source: <https://apnews.com/article/iraq-war-anniversary-troops-military-d1d9a7e6e83925dec22fce4d2e2c831e>

Mar 15 — Twenty years after the U.S. invaded Iraq — in blinding explosions of shock and awe — American forces remain in the country in what has become a small but consistent presence to ensure an ongoing relationship with a key military and diplomatic partner in the Middle East.

The roughly 2,500 U.S. troops are scattered around the country, largely in military installations in Baghdad and in the north. And while it is a far cry from the more than 170,000 U.S. forces in Iraq at the peak of the



## ICI C<sup>2</sup>BRNE DIARY – March 2023

war in 2007, U.S. officials say the limited — but continued — troop level is critical as a show of commitment to the region and a hedge against Iranian influence and weapons trafficking. A look at America's evolving role in Iraq:

### How did it start?

The U.S. invaded Iraq in March 2003 in what it called a massive “shock and awe” bombing campaign that lit up the skies, laid waste to large sections of the country and paved the way for American ground troops to converge on Baghdad. The invasion was based on what turned out to be faulty claims that Saddam Hussein had secretly stashed weapons of mass destruction. Such weapons never materialized.

Saddam was toppled from power, and America's war shifted the country's governing base from minority Arab Sunnis to majority Shiites, with Kurds gaining their own autonomous region. While many Iraqis welcomed Saddam's ouster, they were disappointed when the government failed to restore basic services and the ongoing battles instead brought vast humanitarian suffering.

Resentment and power struggles between the Shiites and the Sunnis fueled civil war, leading ultimately to America's complete withdrawal in December 2011. The divide was a key factor in the collapse of the nation's police and military forces when faced with the Islamic State insurgency that swept across Iraq and Syria in 2014.

### The US returns

The rise of the Islamic State group — its roots were in al-Qaida affiliates — and its expanding threat to the U.S. and allies across Europe sent the U.S. back into Iraq at the invitation of the Baghdad government in 2014. Over that summer and fall, the U.S.-led coalition launched airstrike campaigns in Iraq and then Syria, and restarted a broad effort to train and advise Iraq's military.

The coalition's train and advise mission has continued, bolstered by a NATO contingent, even after the Islamic State group's campaign to create a caliphate was ended in March 2019.

The roughly 2,500 troops deployed to Iraq live on joint bases with Iraqi troops, where they provide training and equipment. That troop total, however, fluctuates a bit, and the Pentagon does not reveal the number of U.S. special operations forces that routinely move in and out of the country to assist Iraqi forces or travel into Syria for counterterrorism operations.

“Iraq is still under pressure from ISIS,” said retired Marine Corps Gen. Frank McKenzie, who led U.S. Central Command and served as the top U.S. commander for the Middle East from 2019 to 2022. “We still help them continue that fight. We've done a lot of things to help them improve the control of their own sovereignty, which is of very high importance to the Iraqis.”

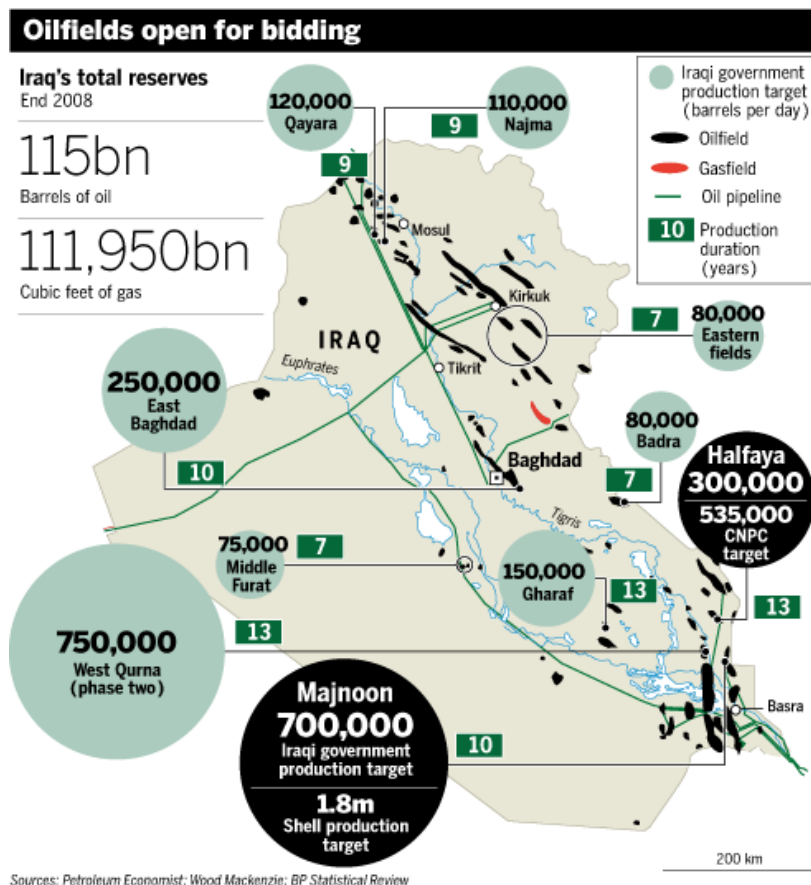
### Why the US presence continues?

The much-stated reason for the continued U.S. troop presence is to help Iraq battle the remnants of the Islamic State insurgency and prevent any resurgence. But a key reason is Iran.

Iran's political influence and militia strength in Iraq and throughout the region has been a recurring security concern for the U.S. over the years. And the presence of American forces in Iraq makes it more difficult for Iran to move weapons across Iraq and Syria into Lebanon, for use by its proxies, including the Lebanese Hezbollah, against Israel.

The same is true for the U.S. troop presence around the al-Tanf garrison in southeastern Syria, which is located on a vital road that can link Iranian-backed forces from Tehran all the way to southern Lebanon — and Israel's doorstep. In both Iraq and Syria, U.S. troops disrupt what could be an uncontested land bridge for Iran to the eastern Mediterranean.

U.S. troops in Iraq also provide critical logistical and other support for American forces in Syria, who partner with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces battling the Islamic State group. The U.S. conducts



airstrikes and other missions targeting IS leaders, and also supports the SDF in guarding thousands of captured IS fighters and family members imprisoned in Syria.

Military leaders successfully beat back efforts by then-President Donald Trump to pull all troops out of both Syria and Iraq. They argued that if anything were to happen in Syria that endangered U.S. forces, they would need to be able to quickly send troops, equipment and other support from Iraq.

In a [recent visit to Baghdad](#) to meet with Iraqi leaders, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said **U.S. forces are ready to remain in Iraq, in a noncombat role, at the invitation of the government.**

"We're deeply committed to ensuring that the Iraqi people can live in peace and dignity, with safety and security and with economic opportunity for all," he said.

### Iraq by the numbers

By the time Washington withdrew its last combat troops in December 2011, tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians were dead, along with 4,487 American troops.

More than 3,500 troops were killed in hostile action and nearly 1,000 died in noncombat deaths from 2003 to 2011. More than 32,000 troops were wounded in action; tens of thousands more have also reported illnesses to the Department of Veterans Affairs that are believed to be linked to toxic exposure from the burn pits in Iraq. Legislation signed into law by the Biden administration has expanded the number of those veterans who will qualify for lifetime care or benefits due to that exposure.

From 2003 through 2012, the United States provided \$60.64 billion to fund Iraq's security forces and civilian reconstruction, according to the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction. Of that total, \$20 billion went to funding, equipping, providing uniforms for and training Iraq's security forces.

There were roughly 100,000 contractors each year in Iraq supporting U.S. forces and the U.S. mission from 2007 until 2010, according to the Congressional Research Service. As of late last year, there were about 6,500 contractors supporting U.S. operations in Iraq and Syria, according to U.S. Central Command.

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** Is it a naïve question or what?

## Iraq War Costs Could Hit Nearly \$3 Trillion by 2050: Report



The Costs of War Project said the U.S.-led invasion and occupation "caused massive death, destruction, and political instability," killing hundreds of thousands of people while displacing millions more.



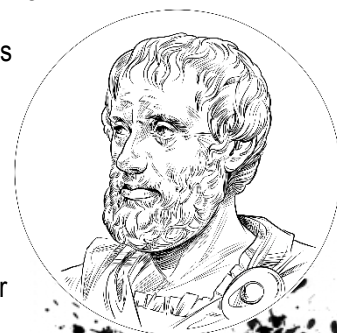
## MIT: Most Famous People of the Past 6,000 Years are Greek Figures

Source: <https://greekreporter.com/2014/03/17/mit-most-famous-people-of-the-past-6000-years-are-greek-figures/>

Mar 17 – There are many ways of being a celebrity, but according to Australian writer Clive James, Jesus Christ for example, was the first to have succeeded it globally and without conquering the world by force. Yet he isn't the most famous person of the last 6,000 years. According to [MIT](#), Greeks are the winners in the world's field of popularity.

The American University has been recently working on a project titled "Pantheon" which is essentially what its name predicates. Studying and analyzing data from 4,000 BC to 2010, the MIT formed a list of those whom they consider to be the most famous people of the past 6,000 years.

[Aristotle crowns the list](#), but the Greeks don't stop there as historic Greek personages have taken over most of the lists top spots.



In order to reach this conclusion, the MIT studied and evaluated the “cultural offer” of the great figures of history, paying special attention to data that topped the geographical boundaries as well as boundaries of time and language, thus conquering a special place in world culture.

According to MIT, the most famous people around the world over the last 6,000 years are the following:

<b>Aristotle</b>	<b>Leonardo Da Vinci</b>
<b>Plato</b>	<b>Confucius</b>
<b>Jesus Christ</b>	<b>Julius Caesar</b>
<b>Socrates</b>	<b>Homer</b>
<b>Alexander the Great</b>	<b>Pythagoras</b>



## North Korea claims almost 800,000 have signed up to fight against U.S.

Source: <https://news.yahoo.com/north-korea-claims-almost-800-215840418.html>

Mar 17 — North Korea claims that about 800,000 of its citizens volunteered to join or reenlist in the nation's military to fight against the United States, North Korea's state newspaper reported on Saturday.

About 800,000 students and workers, on Friday alone, across the country expressed a desire to enlist or reenlist in the military to counter the United States, the Rodong Sinmun newspaper reported.

"The soaring enthusiasm of young people to join the army is a demonstration of the unshakeable will of the younger generation to mercilessly wipe out the war maniacs making last-ditch efforts to eliminate our precious socialist country, and achieve the great cause of national reunification without fail and a clear manifestation of their ardent patriotism," the North's Rodong Sinmun said.

The North's claim came after North Korea on Thursday launched its Hwasong-17 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) in response to ongoing U.S-South Korea military drills.

North Korea fired the ICBM into the sea between the Korean peninsula and Japan on Thursday, hours before South Korea's president flew to Tokyo for a summit that discussed ways to counter the nuclear-armed North.





Troops take part in a military parade to mark the 75th founding anniversary of North Korea's army, in Pyongyang, North Korea on Feb. 8, 2023, in this photo released by North Korea's Korean Central News Agency. (KCNA via REUTERS)

The North's ballistic missiles are banned under United Nations Security Council resolutions and the launch drew condemnation from governments in Seoul, Washington and Tokyo. South Korean and American forces began 11 days of joint drills, dubbed "Freedom Shield 23," on Monday, held on a scale not seen since 2017 to counter the North's growing threats. Kim accused the United States and South Korea of increasing tensions with the military drills.

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** Most probably they signed because the food is better in the military Because they had no alternative. Because lies are part of their DNA. No man on Earth deserves such a leader.

## 'They had no idea what they were doing': expert talks US invasion of Iraq 20 years on

By Fatemeh Salari

Source: <https://dohanews.co/they-had-no-idea-what-they-were-doing-expert-talks-us-invasion-of-iraq-20-years-on/>

Mar 18 – Throughout the invasion, US-led forces carried out various atrocities in Iraq including murder, rape and the mass slaughter of civilians. The prerogative that the west or industrial communities have to show some sort of motivation to back uprisings within countries in the region, can be seen as problematic as it could strip away the genuineness and agency of these movements, an expert said during a panel discussion at the 2023 Global Security Forum.

"I think this is a problem because it might jeopardise those movements. They have to be genuine, they have to have the agency, they have to do it by themselves without this perceived support," said Omar Mohammed, Historian and Founder of Mosul Eye.



The panel discussion titled “The Invasion of Iraq: 20 Years On (New America)” focused on the 20-year anniversary of the tragic 2003 invasion of Iraq and how it affected both contemporary global security and the lives of the country’s citizens.



The Global Security Forum began with an opening speech from the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani. Several panels and discussions will take place from 13 to 15 March at Sheraton Grand Hotel.

In light of the overarching theme of the panel on how the US invasion affected the Iraqi people, Mohammed of Mosul Eye said: “I think among Iraqis, they all agree it was necessary to remove Saddam [Hussain] but the United States shouldn’t have invaded,” adding that the Iraqi citizens should have taken matters into their own hands. “We have to start looking at things from the perspective of the man in the Iraqi street, not from the

perspective of the ruling class or from the perspective of the international community.”

The expert further pointed the lack of planning and failed mission the US carried while forcefully entering Iraq, saying that they did ‘not have a plan and did not know what to do, and had to even download a map of Mosul.’

The human cost that has unravelled over the years in Iraq tailored major destabilisation into the very fabric of the Iraqi society that, as Mohammed pointed, even a mere TV series could threaten the social cohesion of the country.

Speaking at the sidelines of the forum, Omar Mohammed told *Doha News* the US invasion of Iraq “destabilised not only Iraq but the entire region and the problem with the invasion is that they didn’t have a plan or they were ‘selling’ all of these plans saying that we are here to modernise Iraq, to bring democracy.” “But then when they arrived, they didn’t know what they are going to do the next day. They didn’t have any plans,” he said, adding that upon the US arrival to the Middle Eastern country, they dismissed the entire military as well as all the administrations and “wanted to start over, thinking that building a state could take one or two days.”

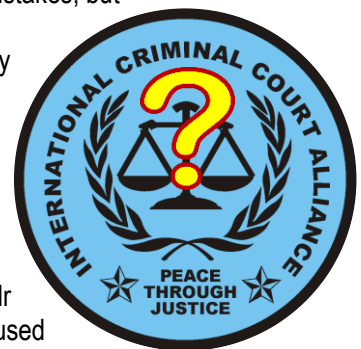
Speaking on the failed US involvement in Iraq, Mohammed said: “when it comes to the United States, it’s no more a reliable ally, Iraqis have hoped that after all these years of terrible mistakes that the United States would fix those mistakes, but it is back again with the same policy.”

“When they [US] saw that there is a rise in the insurgency and some extremism, what did they do? They went to the tribes and told them we’re gonna give you weapons to fight those extremists.”

### US war crimes in Iraq

Iraq has been drenched in violence and corruption since the US launched a deadly invasion in 2003, though Washington has long evaded responsibility for the war crimes it committed there.

Throughout the invasion, US-led forces carried out various atrocities across the country, including murder, rape and the mass slaughter of civilians in various areas including Haditha, Hamandiya, Sadr City, Samarra and Ishaqi. The Pentagon has covered up the majority of these crimes and cleared the accused soldiers, despite some cases being brought before military commissions. Military prosecutors have focused their efforts on a small number of low-ranking soldiers, rather than high-ranking officials and senior officers, [reports](#) have found. Washington asserts such atrocities were carried out by a “few bad apples”. In 2003, the United States bypassed the United Nations and violated the rule of international law prohibiting the use of force, which amounted to aggression against Iraq. Approximately 209,000 Iraqi civilians were killed in the war and other violent conflicts between 2003 and 2021, while 9.2 million fled their country as refugees or were otherwise compelled to do so, according to Statista, a global statistical database.



# Countries that are not members of the ICC

- Recognize the ICC's authority
- Do not recognize the ICC's authority



Source: ICC website

 **SPUTNIK**



## 20 Lies About the Iraq War

By Glen Rangwala and Raymond Whitake

Source: <https://www.globalresearch.ca/20-lies-about-war/5812507>



Mar 19 – The Bush administration initiated the war under the pretext that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which both the US and UK governments knew to be false even prior to the invasion. After 20 years, Iraq is in shambles. The continued presence of US military in the country has only caused further suffering and hardship to the Iraqis. The invasion should teach us lessons about America's "war on terror" and "humanitarian efforts". The article below will remind us of 20 lies that were used to justify the illegal war.

### 1 Iraq was responsible for the 11 September attacks

A supposed meeting in Prague between Mohammed Atta, leader of the 11 September hijackers, and an Iraqi intelligence official was the main basis for this claim, but Czech intelligence later conceded that the Iraqi's contact could not have been Atta. This did not stop the constant stream of assertions that Iraq was involved in 9/11, which was so successful that at one stage opinion polls showed that two-thirds of Americans believed the hand of Saddam Hussein was behind the attacks. Almost as many believed Iraqi hijackers were aboard the crashed airliners; in fact there were none.

### 2 Iraq and al-Qa'ida were working together

Persistent claims by US and British leaders that Saddam and Osama bin Laden were in league with each other were contradicted by a leaked British Defence Intelligence Staff report, which said there were no current links between them. Mr Bin Laden's "aims are in ideological conflict with present-day Iraq", it added.

Another strand to the claims was that al-Qa'ida members were being sheltered in Iraq, and had set up a poisons training camp. When US troops reached the camp, they found no chemical or biological traces.

### 3 Iraq was seeking uranium from Africa for a "reconstituted" nuclear weapons programme

The head of the CIA has now admitted that documents purporting to show that Iraq tried to import uranium from Niger in west Africa were forged, and that the claim should never have been in President Bush's State of the Union address. Britain sticks by the claim, insisting it has "separate intelligence". The Foreign Office conceded last week that this information is now "under review".

### 4 Iraq was trying to import aluminium tubes to develop nuclear weapons

The US persistently alleged that Baghdad tried to buy high-strength aluminium tubes whose only use could be in gas centrifuges, needed to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons. Equally persistently, the International Atomic Energy Agency said the tubes were being used for artillery rockets. The head of the IAEA, Mohamed El Baradei, told the UN Security Council in January that the tubes were not even suitable for centrifuges.

### 5 Iraq still had vast stocks of chemical and biological weapons from the first Gulf War

Iraq possessed enough dangerous substances to kill the whole world, it was alleged more than once. It had pilotless aircraft which could be smuggled into the US and used to spray chemical and biological toxins. Experts pointed out that apart from mustard gas, Iraq never had the technology to produce materials with a shelf-life of 12 years, the time between the two wars. All such agents would have deteriorated to the point of uselessness years ago.

### 6 Iraq retained up to 20 missiles which could carry chemical or biological warheads, with a range which would threaten British forces in Cyprus

Apart from the fact that there has been no sign of these missiles since the invasion, Britain downplayed the risk of there being any such weapons in Iraq once the fighting began. It was also revealed that chemical protection equipment was removed from British bases in Cyprus last year, indicating that the Government did not take its own claims seriously.

### 7 Saddam Hussein had the wherewithal to develop smallpox

This allegation was made by the Secretary of State, Colin Powell, in his address to the UN Security Council in February. The following month the UN said there was nothing to support it.

### 8 US and British claims were supported by the inspectors

According to Jack Straw, chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix "pointed out" that Iraq had 10,000 litres of anthrax. Tony Blair said Iraq's chemical, biological and "indeed the nuclear weapons programme" had been well documented by the UN. Mr Blix's reply? "This is not the same as saying there are weapons of mass destruction," he said last September. "If I had solid evidence that Iraq retained weapons of mass destruction or were constructing such weapons, I would take it to the Security Council." In May this year he added: "I am obviously very interested in the question of whether or not there were weapons of mass destruction, and I am beginning to suspect there possibly were not."





### 9 Previous weapons inspections had failed

Tony Blair told this newspaper in March that the UN had “tried unsuccessfully for 12 years to get Saddam to disarm peacefully”. But in 1999 a Security Council panel concluded: “Although important elements still have to be resolved, the bulk of Iraq’s proscribed weapons programmes has been eliminated.” Mr Blair also claimed UN inspectors “found no trace at all of Saddam’s offensive biological weapons programme” until his son-in-law defected. In fact the UN got the regime to admit to its biological weapons programme more than a month before the defection.

### 10 Iraq was obstructing the inspectors

Britain’s February “dodgy dossier” claimed inspectors’ escorts were “trained to start long arguments” with other Iraqi officials while evidence was being hidden, and inspectors’ journeys were monitored and notified ahead to remove surprise. Dr Blix said in February that the UN had conducted more than 400 inspections, all without notice, covering more than 300 sites. “We note that access to sites has so far been without problems,” he said. “In no case have we seen convincing evidence that the Iraqi side knew that the inspectors were coming.”

### 11 Iraq could deploy its weapons of mass destruction in 45 minutes

This now-notorious claim was based on a single source, said to be a serving Iraqi military officer. This individual has not been produced since the war, but in any case Tony Blair contradicted the claim in April. He said Iraq had begun to conceal its weapons in May 2002, which meant that they could not have been used within 45 minutes.

### 12 The “dodgy dossier”

Mr Blair told the Commons in February, when the dossier was issued: “We issued further intelligence over the weekend about the infrastructure of concealment. It is obviously difficult when we publish intelligence reports.” It soon emerged that most of it was cribbed without attribution from three articles on the internet. Last month Alastair Campbell took responsibility for the plagiarism committed by his staff, but stood by the dossier’s accuracy, even though it confused two Iraqi intelligence organisations, and said one moved to new headquarters in 1990, two years before it was created.

### 13 War would be easy

Public fears of war in the US and Britain were assuaged by assurances that oppressed Iraqis would welcome the invading forces; that “demolishing Saddam Hussein’s military power and liberating Iraq would be a cakewalk”, in the words of Kenneth Adelman, a senior Pentagon official in two previous Republican administrations. Resistance was patchy, but stiffer than expected, mainly from irregular forces fighting in civilian clothes. “This wasn’t the enemy we war-gamed against,” one general complained.

### 14 Umm Qasr

The fall of Iraq’s southernmost city and only port was announced several times before Anglo-American forces gained full control – by Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, among others, and by Admiral Michael Boyce, chief of Britain’s defence staff. “Umm Qasr has been overwhelmed by the US Marines and is now in coalition hands,” the Admiral announced, somewhat prematurely.

### 15 Basra rebellion

Claims that the Shia Muslim population of Basra, Iraq’s second city, had risen against their oppressors were repeated for days, long after it became clear to those there that this was little more than wishful thinking. The defeat of a supposed breakout by Iraqi armour was also announced by military spokesman in no position to know the truth.

### 16 The “rescue” of Private Jessica Lynch

Private Jessica Lynch’s “rescue” from a hospital in Nasiriya by American special forces was presented as the major “feel-good” story of the war. She was said to have fired back at Iraqi troops until her ammunition ran out, and was taken to hospital suffering bullet and stab wounds. It has since emerged that all her injuries were sustained in a vehicle crash, which left her incapable of firing any shot. Local medical staff had tried to return her to the Americans after Iraqi forces pulled out of the hospital, but the doctors had to turn back when US troops opened fire on them. The special forces encountered no resistance, but made sure the whole episode was filmed.

### 17 Troops would face chemical and biological weapons

As US forces approached Baghdad, there was a rash of reports that they would cross a “red line”, within which Republican Guard units were authorised to use chemical weapons. But Lieutenant General James Conway, the leading US marine general in Iraq, conceded afterwards that intelligence reports that chemical weapons had been deployed around Baghdad before the war were wrong.

“It was a surprise to me ... that we have not uncovered weapons ... in some of the forward dispersal sites,” he said. “We’ve been to virtually every ammunition supply point between the Kuwaiti border and Baghdad, but they’re simply not there. We were simply wrong. Whether or not we’re wrong at the national level, I think still very much remains to be seen.”



### 18 Interrogation of scientists would yield the location of WMD

"I have got absolutely no doubt that those weapons are there ... once we have the co-operation of the scientists and the experts, I have got no doubt that we will find them," Tony Blair said in April. Numerous similar assurances were issued by other leading figures, who said interrogations would provide the WMD discoveries that searches had failed to supply. But almost all Iraq's leading scientists are in custody, and claims that lingering fears of Saddam Hussein are stalling their tongues are beginning to wear thin.

### 19 Iraq's oil money would go to Iraqis

Tony Blair complained in Parliament that "people falsely claim that we want to seize" Iraq's oil revenues, adding that they should be put in a trust fund for the Iraqi people administered through the UN. Britain should seek a Security Council resolution that would affirm "the use of all oil revenues for the benefit of the Iraqi people".

Instead Britain co-sponsored a Security Council resolution that gave the US and UK control over Iraq's oil revenues. There is no UN-administered trust fund.

Far from "all oil revenues" being used for the Iraqi people, the resolution continues to make deductions from Iraq's oil earnings to pay in compensation for the invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

### 20 WMD were found

After repeated false sightings, both Tony Blair and George Bush proclaimed on 30 May that two trailers found in Iraq were mobile biological laboratories. "We have already found two trailers, both of which we believe were used for the production of biological weapons," said Mr Blair. Mr Bush went further: "Those who say we haven't found the banned manufacturing devices or banned weapons – they're wrong. We found them." It is now almost certain that the vehicles were for the production of hydrogen for weather balloons, just as the Iraqis claimed – and that they were exported by Britain.

## Predicting Threats to Food Security

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20230320-predicting-threats-to-food-security>



Mar 20 – "Pests and diseases remain one of the biggest threats to food production, increasingly destabilizing food security and livelihoods across climate-vulnerable regions around the world," says Professor Chris Gilligan, Director of Research in the Department of Plant Sciences, [University of Cambridge](https://www.cam.ac.uk/).

"While farmers in these countries are struggling to control familiar pests and pathogens that are endemic, new pests and pathogens are appearing for the first time. Until now, these newly emerging threats have not been possible to predict."

So, what has changed? The answer lies, in thinking big.

"In the past there's been a tendency to focus on an individual crop when controlling a particular disease using genetic resistance or fungicides." But, as Gilligan explains, when it comes to diseases that have no regard for boundaries and borders, that is not enough.

"Some diseases can spread very rapidly – these are known as transboundary pests and pathogens – in the context of the African continent you could have a disease that spreads through many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa within days or weeks."

"As epidemiologists we realized that what your neighbor does, and their neighbor does and so on, really matters. We needed to think on a bigger scale."

Multiple factors determine the spread of a disease: the crops themselves and how they are distributed across the landscape; the environment, which is now further complicated by climate change; the pathogens and their propensity to multiply and spread, and finally, there's the influence of farmers' behavior in controlling disease.

Gilligan realized that what was needed was an "epidemiological toolkit" that could account for all the varying factors. The resource built with his team of modelers, biologists and computer scientists in the Department of Plant Sciences not only enables the tracking of diseases in real-time, it also predicts how an outbreak will unfold and how cost-effective interventions are for halting its spread.

The idea is to pull the epidemic below a threshold of prevalence in a landscape so that it fades out, explains Gilligan.

Key to the success of the models is collaboration with in-country partners. "We meet with agricultural extension workers and research scientists in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia to discuss what is feasible. Our aim is always to provide practical guidance in managing disease.

"Yes, models can be interesting for academic reasons, but we want to help people on the ground. When a grower in Kenya says, "I don't want to know what it is; I want to know what to do about it," that's very telling."



The modelling technology that Gilligan and his team have developed has been used by governments across the world and is helping to preserve livelihoods.

“Ethiopia is the largest wheat producer in Sub-Saharan Africa providing a source of food and income for an estimated five million farming households,” says Gilligan. It’s also vital to the economy. This means that diseases affecting wheat production can have devastating consequences.

One of the deadliest is a fungal disease called wheat rust that can result in “explosive epidemics” due to rapid wind dispersal. Gilligan explains that in the past there have been severe epidemics with fungicide being applied “too late or in the wrong place at the wrong time” resulting in a “double failure” with crops lost and foreign currency spent on fungicide.

Gilligan and his team adapted their epidemiological toolkit to predict the timing and dispersal range of wheat rust spores, based upon weather forecasts generated by the UK Met Office. This allowed for an early warning system (EWS) in Ethiopia, forecasting up to seven days in advance.

They worked in partnership with the Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency, the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research, the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT), and the UK Met Office to deploy the EWS.

This allowed policymakers to make timely and informed decisions about the allocation of limited stocks of fungicide. To date, it is estimated that the models to forecast wheat rust disease have enabled up to 500,000 smallholder farmers in a region of Ethiopia to take timely action reducing risks to food supplies.

In 2021 all conditions were favorable for an epidemic of a new strain of wheat rust – meaning there was no natural resistance making chemical control the only option. Thanks to the EWS, fungicides were used effectively and the epidemic prevented.

Since the application of the wheat rust EWS in Ethiopia, the forecasting service has been expanded across Bangladesh, Nepal and Kenya.

## NATO's Stoltenberg warns China against delivering arms to Russia

By Reuters Staff

Source: <https://www.reuters.com/article/nato-stoltenberg-russia-china/natos-stoltenberg-warns-china-against-delivering-arms-to-russia-idINP6N35G001>

Mar 21 – NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg warned China on Tuesday against supplying lethal weapons to Russia, as leaders of both countries were meeting in Moscow for talks. “We haven’t seen any proof that China is delivering **lethal weapons** to Russia, but we have seen some signs that this has been a request from Russia and that this is an issue that is considered in Beijing by the Chinese authorities,” Stoltenberg told reporters in Brussels. “China should not provide lethal aid to Russia, that would be to support an illegal war.” (Reporting by Sabine Siebold, Andrew Gray, Benoit Van Overstraeten)

**EDITOR’S COMMENT:** Shri Ramakrishna<sup>1</sup> used to say, “As long as I live, so long do I learn”. This time I learned that there are lethal weapons! Until now I believed that you can do lovely things with weapons!

## Skilled Migrants Aren’t Interested in Germany

By Paul Hockenos (a Berlin-based journalist)

Source: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/03/22/skilled-migrants-arent-interested-in-germany/>

Mar 22 – Germany faces a fundamental migration dilemma. Refugees from poor and war-torn countries flock to it as a haven while skilled professionals from outside of the European Union—workers the German economy sorely needs—tend to shun it. Germany’s efforts to make itself more appealing run up against deep-seated cultural affinities, which explains why a new Organisation for

<sup>1</sup> Indian Hindu monk and philosopher 1863 - 1902



Economic Cooperation and Development [report](#) lists it as only the 15th most attractive country for foreign workers—just behind Portugal, Denmark, and Ireland and way behind front-runners New Zealand, Sweden, and Switzerland.

“Germany is child-friendly!” according to [Make It in Germany](#), a portal funded by Germany’s ministry for migration and refugees, the purpose of which is to attract foreign nationals to Germany. Think tanks forecast that the German labor market could be short as many as [7 million workers](#) by 2035. “We need labor and skilled worker immigration from third countries,” Vanessa Ahuja of the German Federal Employment Agency told [German media](#), referring to non-EU countries. Her office’s goal: 400,000 new professionals a year. It should be clear, however, that this offer isn’t meant for the often impoverished, usually undereducated refugees [fleeing](#) countries like Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq. These nationalities constituted most of the nearly 250,000 asylum applicants last year. That’s almost [28 percent](#) more than 2021 (though just a third of those filed during the migration crisis year of 2016.) The newspaper *Bild* [reflects](#) the ire of many ordinary Germans: “They are often without proper education, without a job. But they have the right to welfare support, housing, clothing.” In 2022, every third day saw an attack on the accommodations of refugees.

Indeed, Germany is a prime destination for people fleeing war and destitution: [1.3 million people](#) entered Germany last year—among them 1.1 million people from Ukraine, 140,000 of which have since returned to Ukraine. (In contrast to people living in countries with repressive governments, Ukrainians cannot apply for asylum but can receive temporary protection status.)

Yet, in a dark irony, Germany, a country with a declining native population and anemic labor market, badly needs qualified workers—in some cases, qualified with just a basic knowledge of the German language—to fill around [778,000 vacancies](#). The list of the sectors crying out for help, according to a [foreign ministry portal](#), is sprawling: raw material extraction, production, and manufacturing; natural sciences; information technology; air transport; and energy technology as well as agriculture; forestry and animal husbandry; horticulture; construction; architecture; and surveying and building technology.

This list doesn’t even include vacancies in education, child care, tourism, gastronomy, and retail. Parents of school-age children in Berlin are furious about the spotty cover of teachers. Every week, school kids’ schedules are perforated with gaps left by missing—some temporarily, some permanently—staff. The Robert Bosch Stiftung, a German foundation, [estimates](#) that two-thirds of German school are short teachers. Many hotels, restaurants, and department stores operate with the bare minimum of staff—and often less than that judging by the number of “help wanted” signs in windows and the time it takes to be waited on and served.

In a U-turn from a decade ago or so, Germany has realized that it needs prodigious labor reinforcement from abroad to plug the gaps and has sent out word that they are welcome. And, in fact, there has been a positive response—mostly though from professionals within the EU. Romanians, Poles, Spaniards, Italians, and Bulgarians above all flock to Germany, which the EU’s freedom of movement principle makes relatively easy for a fellow EU citizen.

But since all of the EU 27 members are currently experiencing more deaths than births—Germany’s fertility rate of [1.58 children](#) per woman as of 2021 may be a hair above the EU average of 1.53 that same year, but it is still far from the [2.1 birth rate](#) necessary for a population to grow—the entire continent is waking up to the fact that their economies will require ever more foreign workers as populations age and the downward demographic curve steepens. In Spain and Poland, people are having even fewer babies than Germans. This means that in the near future, Germany will not be so free to draw from the European pot as it does now.

“The Polish labor market needs workers today,” Ulrich Kober, a migration expert at Bertelsmann Stiftung, a German research institute, told *Foreign Policy*. “I fear that the inner EU labor migration that Germany has benefited from so much is coming quickly to an end. We’ve got to find another solution.”

And the predicament is more dire by the year: The number of Germans at retirement age will rise from [16 million people](#) today to at least [20 million people](#) by the mid-2030s. In the 2040s, the number of people aged 80 or over will increase and with them, their need for long-term care. Meanwhile, the number of working-age people will drop by between 1.6 million and 4.8 million people in the next 15 years, according to the Federal Statistical Office.

In contrast to EU labor migrants, the number of qualified workers from non-EU countries is paltry, even if it has been ticking up. In 2021, it tallied just around [40,000 people](#)—led by professionals from India and followed by the United States, Turkey, and China. German Finance Minister Christian Lindner recently [experienced](#) an embarrassing moment in Accra, the capital of Ghana, in Western Africa, when not a single college student in a full auditorium raised a hand when he asked who would consider working in Germany. “Oh, wow! Okay,” Lindner [responded](#).

Canada, with a long history of immigration and streamlined migration processes, obviously doesn’t have this problem. In 2021, Canada welcomed [139,459 new permanent residents](#) through its high-skilled worker programs and more than [645,000 people](#) in the first 10 months of 2022. It intends to accept more than [1.5 million](#) more people by 2025—numbers Germany can only fantasize about. “Germany radiates a lot of bureaucracy and precious little welcoming culture,” Holger Bonin, director of the Institute of Labor Economics in Bonn, Germany, told a [German weekly](#). “But even more problematic is the German language and the unique system of dual vocational training system. The rules for recognizing foreign qualifications in this country are very [not] transparent and take far too long.”



“We have to speed up everything that can be sped up,” German Labor Minister Hubertus Heil said this week when in Canada to pick up a few tips on expediting labor migration.

Learning the German language is a daunting hurdle for every person seeking work—skilled or unskilled—in Germany. A 44-year-old Syrian man, Hayyan—who asked just to be referred to by his first name—arrived in Germany with the large refugee wave in 2016. An agricultural engineer with decent English, he’s exactly the kind of qualified professional that Germany needs and wants. But seven years, an intensive German-language course, two advanced training classes, three apprenticeships, and three part-time jobs later, he remains unemployed. Even though he now has a German passport, he’s applying for jobs in the United States and United Arab Emirates as well as in Germany.

“I’m confident with the German that I learned,” Hayyan told FP. “But, sure, my superior is going to have to check it, and that’s work he or she won’t have to do if a German person does my job.” Hayyan said he’s been given short-term jobs that are far below his qualifications and treated poorly by his superiors. “The racism isn’t spoken, but I feel it every day,” he said.

Hayyan’s not alone. Getting foreign workers there is one thing, but keeping them—and spreading good stories around the world about Germany as a good place to work—is another. All four men who Hayyan traveled with to Germany—across the Mediterranean Sea and up the Balkan route—were medical doctors and had their medical degrees in Germany approved. But after receiving German citizenship, two of them left for hospital positions in Abu Dhabi, UAE, and one in Dubai. There, they earn four times their former German wages and feel at home in Arab culture.

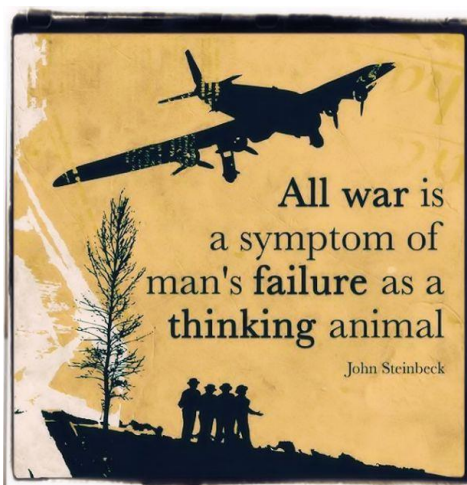
“What if a revolution in Iran was successful and a large part of the Iranians [living in Germany] were to go back?” asked [Naika Foroutan](#), a German social scientist with Iranian roots. “I’m joking a bit, but then Germany would be without dentists.”

German wages may be much higher than in the global south, but compared to many European and North American countries, they’re low—and taxes are high, schools are overcrowded, and the urban housing market is very tight. Linda Teuteberg, a foreign affairs expert for the liberal Free Democratic Party, said Germany’s [“top ranking”](#) in taxes and other levies discourages people from coming to our country. The skilled workers our country requires ... who are highly qualified and speak English go where there is more left over after taxes.”

Since 2020, the Skilled Immigration Act has smoothed the way somewhat fairly or skilled workers by cutting back the bureaucracy required to enter Germany and look for a job as well as for employers to hire a foreign national. A new law will upgrade the 2020 changes, improving educational opportunities, training, and continuing education programs. Immigration requirements will be eased again. Yet another measure will lower the residency period for German citizenship from eight to five years and make dual citizenship easier for foreign nationals living in Germany.

But the shabby treatment endured by Hayyan and his doctor friends—all of them refugees *and* highly skilled professionals—sheds light on a problem that Germany can’t solve by just passing new laws. Germany needs “technology and talent but also tolerance,” Heil said, obviously [impressed](#) by Canada’s multiculturalism. Germans have to rethink the way they understand themselves and Germany—as a country in which immigration is normal and positive, German is spoken with a foreign accent, and foreign nationals and new German citizens are every bit equal to native-born Germans. It’s going to take some time though before Germany becomes Canada.

**EDITOR’S COMMENT:** In Greece, from time to time we rarely read about qualified immigrants mostly illegal. The majority are enjoying the EU benefits and the famous Greek sun – sometimes given more money than native pensioners!





# T - NEWS

## Turkish Company Launderers Funds for Hamas, Defies U.S. Sanctions

By Abdullah Bozkurt

Source: <https://www.meforum.org/64190/turkish-company-launderers-funds-for-hamas-defies>



Feb 22 – A Turkish company that was sanctioned by the US Treasury last year over a covert **Hamas** financing network is continuing its operations, posting millions of Turkish lira in profit at the end of 2022. Real estate investment firm Trend Gayrimenkul Yatırım Ortaklığı A.Ş (Trend), run by Hamas operatives, announced it had earned 57.9 million Turkish lira in profit in 2022, according to a declaration to the Public Disclosure Forum (KAP) of the Borsa İstanbul (İstanbul Stock Exchange) on February 13, 2023.



Trend, previously known as Anda Gayrimenkul Geliştirme ve İnşaat, was designated under a sanctions regime on May 24, 2022 by the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). The US officials said the company was part of Hamas's global financial assets, worth more than \$500 million, and used to conceal and launder funds on behalf of the militant Palestinian organization.

The Islamist government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, which has been an ardent supporter of Hamas, has not taken any action against the firm or its officials since the US designation. The company, which trades publicly on the stock exchange, continued to generate income in construction and real estate investment schemes in Istanbul.

The last trade registry filing made by Trend, on February 14, announced that the firm would hold a general assembly at its headquarters in the Kagithane district of Istanbul on March 8. Its office is located in a building owned by wealthy Turkish businessman Adnan Polat in the same Istanbul neighborhood where Turkish President Erdoğan launched his political career in his younger years. Since the US designation, the company has made some changes to the board of directors. On November 7, 2022 Hamid Abdullah Hussein al-Ahmar, the board chair, was removed and replaced by Alaeddin Şengüler, a Turkish national who owns real estate investment firm Ala. Şengüler, born to Turkish parents in Egypt and educated in Islamic sciences in Saudi Arabia, appears to have cultivated ties with Hamas over the years.

Hisham Yunis Qafisheh (also known by his assumed Turkish name, Haşmet Aslan), sanctioned by the US for his role in the transfer of Hamas funds and who managed several companies on behalf of the militant organization, no longer serves on Trend's board.

In addition to Şengüler, the board now comprises Mustafa Saka, Mustafa K.M. al-Jallad, Zeliha Özenc and Salih Avci.

According to the US Treasury, Trend was directly or indirectly run by Hamas's investment office, which is subordinate to Hamas's Shura Council and Executive Committee. In addition to Turkey, the network has control of multiple firms in various countries such as Sudan, Algeria, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. Some of the funds Hamas generates through its web of companies in multiple countries help finance violence in the Middle East.

Hamas was designated by the US as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in October 1997 and as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist pursuant to Executive Order No. 13224 in October 2001.

Turkey does not list Hamas as a terrorist entity, and Erdoğan's Islamist government aids and abets the organization and hosts some of its leaders in Turkey while granting citizenship and passports to Hamas members.

Tracking Hamas activity in Turkey has in recent years has become more complicated as many Hamas figures assumed Turkish names after obtaining citizenship to cover their tracks.

Unlike previous governments in Turkey, the Erdoğan administration made it easy for foreigners to acquire citizenship if they made investments or purchased real estate in Turkey. The change, a radical departure from decades-long citizenship and immigration practices, was advertised as a step to attract investment to the Turkish economy.

That also helped many Islamist associates of Erdoğan, especially in the Muslim Brotherhood network and its Palestinian offshoot Hamas in various countries, to quickly obtain Turkish nationality. It is not clear how many Muslim Brotherhood members and Hamas militants benefited from this program as the government has not been forthcoming with detailed figures.

Not only did Muslim Brotherhood operatives benefit from this scheme, but some members of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) also acquired Turkish nationality. Nordic Monitor previously published a story revealing how Marwan M Salih Salih, an Iraqi national who was sanctioned for ISIS links, acquired Turkish citizenship and changed his name to Polat Devocioğlu. Salih, the CEO of a company called Redin Danışmanlık İç ve Dış Ticaret Limited Şirketi, a consulting and foreign trade firm that was sanctioned by the US on September 10, 2019, was flagged for transferring funds to Hamas as well.



Many people claim these practices will make Turkey a black money paradise. Not being asked about the source of money transferred to Turkey is one of the most criticized issues. It is also known that a considerable portion of the money brought into Turkey by foreigners does not come through banks, but as cash in suitcases. Unregistered money becomes legal by buying real estate or depositing it in a bank. As Turkey faces deeper economic troubles, how the incoming money enters the market loses its importance.

**Abdullah Bozkurt**, a Middle East Forum Writing Fellow, is a Swedish-based investigative journalist and analyst who runs the [Nordic Research and Monitoring Network](#) and is chairman of the Stockholm Center for Freedom.

## Iran girls poisoned to stop education, says official

Source: <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/middle-east/article/3211616/iran-girls-poisoned-stop-education-says-official>

Feb 26 – An Iranian deputy minister on Sunday said “some people” were poisoning schoolgirls in the holy city of Qom with the aim of shutting down education for girls, state media reported.



Since late November, hundreds of cases of respiratory poisoning have been reported among schoolgirls mainly in Qom, south of Tehran, with some needing hospital treatment.

On Sunday the deputy health minister, Younes Panahi, implicitly confirmed the poisonings had been deliberate. “After the poisoning of several students in Qom schools, it was found that some people wanted all schools, especially girls’ schools, to be closed,” the IRNA state news agency quoted

Panahi as saying. He did not elaborate. So far, there have been no arrests linked to the poisonings.

On February 14, parents of students who had been ill gathered outside administrative buildings to “demand an explanation” from the authorities, IRNA reported. The next day government spokesman Ali Bahadori Jahromi said the intelligence and education ministries were trying to find the cause of the poisonings.

The poisonings come as Iran has been [rocked by fatal protests](#) since the September death in custody of 22-year-old Iranian Kurd [Mahsa Amini](#) for an alleged violation of the country’s strict dress code for women. Meanwhile, Iran has released a young Spanish woman, Ana Baneira, who had been in detention since





November, Spain's foreign minister said on Sunday. "She was freed yesterday but we didn't want to announce it publicly before her plane had taken off from Iran," Jose Manuel Albares told journalists.

"I was able to speak with her ... she is well," he said, adding that Baneira was on her way to her home region in northwestern Spain. Baneira was 24 when she was arrested, the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) said last year.

The circumstances of her detention were never confirmed by the Iranian authorities, but it took place amid the protests that followed the death of Mahsa Amini.

## Sahel Security 2023: United States Forecast

Source: <https://greydynamics.com/sahel-security-2023-united-states-forecast/>



Feb 26 – The strategic relationship between the United States and Sahel nations is increasing in importance. As France withdraws and Russia seeks to project its influence, the already unstable region faces new challenges throughout the next year. As the US recalibrates its African strategy, it is worth assessing the potential future outcomes.

**Key Judgement 1.** We assess it is highly likely the US will pursue a diplomatic and humanitarian focused agenda in the Sahel over the next 12 months. This assessment is based on the 2022 US Africa policy. The policy replaces a counterterrorism focus with one on humanitarian initiatives.

**Key Judgement 2.** We assess it is unlikely the current US counterterrorism strategy in the Sahel will have a significant influence on regional security over the next twelve months. The US will likely focus on unconventional and special operations driven missions.

**Key Judgement 3.** The current surge in Russian interest in the Sahel will likely force the US to further reevaluate its regional strategy over the next 12 months. With the current US strategy, there is a minimal focus on contingency plans against regional intervention from non-Western nations.

**KJ-1. We assess it is highly likely the US will pursue a diplomatic and humanitarian focused agenda in the Sahel over the next 12 months. This assessment is based on the refreshed 2022 US Africa policy. The policy replaces a counterterrorism focus with one on humanitarian initiatives.**

a. In August 2022, the US disseminated a new Africa strategy. ([source](#))

b. This strategy includes: revamping public diplomacy efforts, supporting sustainable development and resilience, refining and reinvesting in US defence tools, strengthening trade and commercial relations, driving digital transformation, and rebalancing urban hubs. ([source](#))

c. Other topics within the policy include climate change, human rights, and promoting the Western idea of equality and addressing subsequent inequality within marginalised populations. ([source](#))

**KJ-2. We assess it is unlikely the current US counterterrorism strategy in the Sahel will have a significant influence on regional security over the next twelve months. The US will likely focus on unconventional and special operations driven missions.**

a. The US is not engaged in any conventional wars within the Sahel. In part, this is a reason for its historic lack of strong security related policy directives in the region. ([source](#))

b. Flintlock, the United States Special Operations Command Africa (AFRICOM) led annual exercise, is planned for 1-15 March 2023 in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. This exercise involves around 1300 service members from 30 countries, and has the mission of strengthening the military capabilities of US partner nations in Africa. ([source](#))

c. Historically, Flintlock is a net positive for the bolstering of regional militaries, and the improvement of their counterterrorism capabilities. However, the extent of this benefit is difficult to gauge. This is largely because of the special operations driven aspect of the US side. ([source](#))



d. Although the US is not formally engaged in conflict with Sahelian hostile actors, they actively conduct unconventional operations. And, they provide support through training and tactical assets. As a result, this will be the likely course of action over the next 12 months from a military standpoint. ([source](#))

**KJ-3. The current surge in Russian interest in the Sahel will likely force the US to further reevaluate its regional strategy over the next 12 months. With the current US strategy, there is a minimal focus on contingency plans against regional intervention from non-Western nations.**

a. Russia is currently taking active steps in projecting its influence into the Sahel region. This includes humanitarian assistance and military support, primarily through the deployment of Wagner Group mercenaries. ([source](#))

b. In February 2023, the US intelligence community informed the Chadian government of a Wagner Group plot to destabilise the country and eliminate its president. ([source](#))

c. The 2023 French withdrawal from the Sahel is leaving behind a gap in security that Russia can exploit. ([source](#))

d. Because of this vulnerability, the US has a vested interest in increasing its own influence, to prevent the leaders of Sahelian nations from siding with Russia. ([source](#))

### Analytical Summary

Because of the volatile and constantly evolving situation in the Sahel, we have a moderate level of confidence in our judgments. Our source base comprises open-source information from governmental and non-governmental organisations, wire news, and open-source analysis published on reputable media websites. Our analysis is primarily based upon the new US Sahel strategy resulting in positive outcomes for the region, and an increased trust in US support from Sahel nations. Were this assumption to be proven incorrect, we would expect to see a further increase in regional destabilisation, and a higher likelihood of Russia gaining a dangerous strategic advantage and increased presence.

**Michael Ellmer** is the Head of Research and Editor at Grey Dynamics. He spent eight years as a rifleman the United States Marine Corps infantry, with tours to Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Pacific region. He is currently pursuing a master's degree in strategic intelligence analysis at Brunel University London.

## MI5 'missed chances' to stop Manchester Arena bomber who killed 22 in terror attack

Source: <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/mi5-missed-chances-stop-manchester-29318269>

Feb 26 – MI5 is expected to come under fire this week for missing a series of chances to prevent the [Manchester Arena terror attack](#).

Suicide bomber [Salman Abedi](#) killed 22 people when he detonated his home-made device at an [Ariana Grande](#) concert in May 2017.

The final report from the public inquiry into the atrocity is out on Thursday.

Sir John Saunders, who led the probe, has already highlighted failings by the emergency services.

Now he is expected to criticise MI5's failure to act on intelligence.

Much evidence about what MI5 knew about Abedi was heard behind closed doors at the inquiry, to safeguard national security.

**But it is known he had been flagged on three separate occasions over fears he was showing signs of radicalisation.**

He was declared a "subject of interest" in March 2014, which meant he was placed under investigation by MI5, but the file was closed four months later. It was reopened in October that same year but this time closed after one day. In the months before May 2017, MI5 twice received intelligence on Abedi but labelled



it “non-terrorist criminality”. The Security Service also knew Abedi was in regular contact with a convicted terrorist in early 2017. But he was not questioned on his return to Britain from Libya on May 18, 2017, four days before killing himself in the explosion aged 22. His younger brother Hashem, now 24, got life in 2020 for aiding the plot. MI5 lawyers have said decisions on Abedi were in the context of “unprecedented” scale of terrorist threat in 2017. Victims’ families’ lawyer Richard Scorer said: “We hope Sir John analyses... all the various failings and makes suitably wide-ranging recommendations.”

**EDITOR’S COMMENT:** For the 100<sup>th</sup> time I will repeat that too much legality harms public health. You can never guess what is inside evil minds – so, make a mistake and detain him! Better safe than sorry! Read [also](#).

## How ISIS and al-Qaeda Exploit the Earthquake in Turkey to Mobilize Support

By Uran Botobekov, Ph.D.

Source: <https://www.hstoday.us/featured/how-isis-and-al-qaeda-exploit-the-earthquake-in-turkey-to-mobilize-support/>



Feb 27 – The Islamic State and al-Qaeda, the two Sunni terrorist groups vying not only for the leadership of the global jihadi movement but also for its soul, expressed different assessments of the devastating Feb. 6 earthquakes in Turkey and Syria. Despite the intra-Jihadi bloody conflicts, both groups are trying to exploit the natural disaster to arouse religious sentiment and mobilize support among Muslims around the world.

### ISIS: “Earthquake is Divine Punishment”

In its [weekly al-Naba newsletter \(Issue 377\)](#) on February 9, the Islamic State featured an editorial titled “Nothing prevents us from sending miraculous signs, except for frightening,” in which it turned to the topic of the devastating earthquakes that recently struck southeastern Turkey and northwestern Syria. The global Sunni jihadi terrorist group has interpreted the earthquake as a message of warning and intimidation from God to the Muslims so that they should obey Allah and his Messenger and strengthen their faith.



The main idea of the article was built around Surah al-Isra (Verse 59) of the Quran, according to which Muslims should seek salvation from powerful natural disasters in repentance for their sins and wholeheartedly and willingly devote to Allah. Expressing its sympathy for casualties of the devastating disaster, the al-Naba editorial quotes the well-known Hadiths on the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, the utterances of famous imams al-Bukhari and Ibn Taymiyyah that “the earthquake is a formidable sign from Allah, which is sent down to people because of committing sins as a reminder of repentance and the crushing power of the Lord of the Worlds.”

The article implies that the salvation from such a powerful natural disaster should be sought in the Holy Quran, which edifies all Muslims to live according to the Sharia law of Allah Almighty in the Islamic Caliphate. Thus, by describing the earthquake as “a great sign of Divine Power reminding people of their weakness before the might of Allah,” IS ideologues tried to take advantage of this worst natural disaster in Turkey and Syria to arouse religious sentiment and mobilize new supporters around the Islamic State. Further, the IS propaganda mouthpiece called on the quake victims to repent of their sins, stop doing bad deeds and ask Allah for forgiveness. Appealing to God’s wisdom, the al-Naba editorial draws the logical conclusion that only living under Sharia law and submitting to the Islamic Caliphate can save the lives of Muslims from the Almighty’s anger. According to the logic of the ISIS propaganda machine, Allah may inflict his wrath on those who are disobedient from disbelievers, hypocrites, and the like.

This message is in line with the Islamic State’s harsh Salafi-Jihadi ideology (al-Salafiyya al-Jihadiyya), which promotes the global agenda of building a single Islamic Caliphate that rejects the division of the unified Muslim Ummah along national, sectarian, territorial, and political lines. And, of course, by design of IS ideologues, a unified Islamic Caliphate should be ruled by their Caliph, a single political and religious authority who firmly adheres to Islamic law. In addition to its editorial, Islamic State’s al-Naba Issue 377 published an [infographic titled “Earthquakes”](#) with a photo of collapsed buildings in the background. The infographic reiterated some of the editorial’s ideas that the earthquake is a frightening and discouraging message that Allah conveys to mankind so that they believe in Him and follow His path. In order to earn the favor of the Islamic Ummah, it called on Muslims to show kindness and give charity to the quake victims, as well as to provide them with temporary shelter. Also, the infographic notes that an earthquake is one of the preliminary signs of the end of days when people will be judged for their actions.

#### ISKP: “God’s Wrath against Taghut”

Developing the propaganda policy of the IS-Central jihadist parent organization, on February 11, the Uzbek-language pro-Islamic State Khurasan Province (ISKP) media group Al-Azaim published an infographic with a photo of a destroyed Turkish city and defenseless people trying to save their loved ones from under the rubble, which clearly illustrates the enormous scale of the natural disaster. Worth noting, Al-Azaim media’s religious assessment of the devastating earthquake is much harsher and more critical than IS-Central’s al-Naba. ISKP’s Uzbek-language media arm claims that the earthquake in Turkey and Syria is a punishment from Allah for their deviation from religious purity, violation of Tawhid and fidelity of Allah, neglected to apply Sharia law, rejection of the Holy Book of God, refusal to perform the five pillars of Islam, non-payment of Zakat and Fitrah, committing Shirk (idolatry or polytheism) and Haram (forbidden by Islam), and falling into sins such as usury, fornication, prostitution and bribery. Islamic State’s Uzbek propagandists claim that “a sane person is well aware that this earthquake is not just an accident or a natural disaster, but a divine punishment for the betrayal of Muslims and the shedding of their blood.” Further, Al-Azaim Media cites a well-known hadith about Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second caliph of Rashidun, who said that an earthquake is a warning from the Lord to sinful people.

On February 18, 2023, ISKP’s official [Voice of Khurasan Magazine](#), in its 22nd issue, published a notable article in English titled “The crimes of Turkish Taghut about which the Muslim masses remained silent,” which lists the reasons why Allah punished Turkey with earthquakes. IS-Khurasan claims that God’s punishment has befallen Turkey for “replacing sharia with Kuffar (unbeliever) laws, committing Shirk, waging war against ISIS, collaborating with NATO crusaders, and legalizing alcohol, homosexuality, adultery and nudity.” Thus, the Islamic State’s increasing focus on earthquakes aims to capitalize on the world media attention that is focused on February’s tragic events in Turkey and Syria. Emphasizing that the earthquake was God’s punishment for violating Tawhid and living without Sharia law in Turkey and Syria, IS-Central’s al-Naba and its Khurasan province’s Al-Azaim media promoted the idea that only ISIS can unite the Islamic Ummah under its Caliphate and protect the believers from the wrath of Almighty. Clearly, ISIS is trying to take advantage of the earthquake to arouse religious sentiment and mobilize support among Muslims in the Middle East, where it has weakened significantly since the targeted killing of its top leaders last year.

#### Al-Qaeda’s Moderate Assessment

Following the ISIS statements, al-Qaeda and its several branches also expressed their reaction to the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria. Not surprisingly, the two Sunni militant groups vying not only for the leadership of the global jihadi movement but also for its soul could not miss an opportunity to capitalize on this terrible natural disaster. From February 8-20, [al-Qaeda Central](#) (AC), [al-Qaeda in the Arabian](#)



[Peninsula](#) (AQAP), [al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb](#) (AQIM), [Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin](#) (JNIM) and al-Qaeda-affiliated armed insurgent groups in Syria, [Huras al-Din](#) and [Ansar al-Islam](#), issued statements expressing their condolences to the earthquake victims in Turkey and Syria. To illustrate its sympathy, AQAP called for the provision of assistance to the victims in any possible way, such as providing material assistance, helping to remove the ruins, sending the wounded to the hospitals, caring for orphans and widows, and providing shelter for the homeless. Al-Qaeda Central also called on the entire Ummah and its supporters to force the rulers and monarchs of the Gulf states to aid oppressed Muslims suffering from natural disasters in Turkey and Syria, rather than wage war against Islam, Islamic scholars and fellow believers. Judging by its statements, al-Qaeda apparently seeks to position itself as a more moderate and pragmatic movement than ISIS. This demonstrates [al-Qaeda's grand strategy](#) to reinforce its relationships with local populations and focus more on local issues and emergencies by planting ever deeper roots into local ground.

### Turkey Is a Bone of Contention Between Jihadi Scholars

The role and place of Turkey and its leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the modern Islamic Ummah has often been the subject of debate between leading Salafi scholars and Jihadi ideologues influencing the ideological development of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. [Turkey's three waves of military operations](#) in northern Syria in 2016-2020 and its strong support for Sunni Mujahideen groups such as Sultan Murad Division, al-Hamzat Division and Ahrar al-Sharqiya within [the Syrian National Army](#) (SNA) have further escalated the intra-Jihadi debate. Following the "rational cooperation" between Ankara and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), well-known Jihadi scholar [Abu Qatada al-Filastini celebrated Erdogan](#) and issued a fatwa legitimizing certain forms of interaction with the Turks. At one time, some moderate Jihadi scholars warmly welcomed Erdogan's pan-Islamic views, his strong [support for the Muslim Brotherhood](#), and his consistent [defense of Palestinian Muslims](#) in the Israeli-Palestine conflict. Well-known Jihadi ideologues Saudi Sheikh Abdul-Aziz al-Tarifi and Sheikh Abdullah al-Muhaysini, who has worked with various jihadi groups in Syria, [highly praised Erdogan](#) as "a diligent Muslim, ardent in God's religion, who is taking positive steps to reform Turkey away from its secular orientation and support the oppressed Muslims in the world." Notably, Muhaysini is a [U.S.-designated terrorist](#) with multiple ties to al Qaeda. But unlike the pro-al-Qaeda wing of the Jihadi scholars, the Islamic State's Sharia figures are always [sharply critical of Erdogan-led Turkey](#). In the eyes of ISIS, Turkey is a Taghut state, and its leader, Recep Erdogan, is considered an apostate. Over the past seven years, the Islamic State propaganda machine has repeatedly [targeted Erdogan personally](#), threatening him with death, and issuing Takfir (excommunication).

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be noted that today Turkey is at the forefront of the fight against international terrorism. Therefore, it is not surprising that ISIS and al-Qaeda are trying to exploit the powerful earthquake in Turkey to mobilize their support within the country. The saddest thing is that in these tragic days on a national scale, Turkey is threatened from two sides: predicted natural disasters and possible attacks by global terrorist organizations on the eve of the fateful presidential elections.

[Dr. Uran Botobekov](#) is a leading expert on the Central Asian Salafi-Jihadi Movement, a research fellow, and a member of the Advisory Board of EU Modern Diplomacy. During his career, Dr. Botobekov combined public and diplomatic service for the Kyrgyz government with scientific research. At various times he worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as the head of the State Policy Department of Governmental Agency for Public Service Affairs of Kyrgyz Government and the Press Secretary of the Kyrgyz President. He also served as the Counselor-Ambassador of the Kyrgyz Republic to Turkey and Ukraine. Dr. Botobekov regularly publishes books, articles, and Op-eds.

## Assessing Risk of Terrorist Acts by Looking at Location Data and Demographic and Social Characteristics

Source: <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/assessing-risk-terrorist-acts-using-location-data-and-other-characteristics>

Feb 27 – According to the American Terrorism Study, 296 terrorism incidents occurred in the United States from 9/11 through 2019. In domestic terrorism investigations, as in conventional policing, place matters. Although the location of terrorist violence is critical, the places where a terrorist lives and plans violent acts can also represent vital evidence. Information about place helps law enforcement and intelligence agencies identify individuals or groups engaged in terrorism-related activities and provides opportunities to prevent terrorist attacks and apprehend the people involved. In addition, researchers can use location information to understand and predict how, when, and why a terrorist or terrorist group will act.



Prior spatial research looking at the “where” of terrorism-related activity focused on the site of the terrorist act, with an inference that planning of the activity occurred at or near the location of the terrorist act. However, other research has shown that most terrorists do not live near the places they attack. Rather, the locations where those who commit terrorist acts live and plan are often geographically distinct from where the attack is executed. In addition, incidents related to terrorist activity occur throughout the nation and in diverse communities.

Moving forward, understanding the place-related connections between residence, planning, and execution of attacks can give law enforcement and intelligence agencies sharper insights into patterns of extremist violence. A larger place-based dataset can also lead to more statistically significant research findings and may help expose people who plan acts of terror before they can implement them.

### A Two-Tool Approach to Spatial Analysis of Terrorism Risk

Much of the existing research connecting location to the risk of terrorism in particular places has relied on statistical models designed to predict how a single factor can increase or decrease the risk of terrorism in a particular location.

However, the risk of terrorism is based on multiple, interacting factors, rather than on a single variable. With that in mind, a research team from the University of Arkansas and Rutgers University applied two advanced analytical tools for interpreting location data. The tools are:

- **Conjunctive Analysis of Case Configurations (conjunctive analysis):** A method that identifies the demographic and social characteristics at neighborhood and county levels and develops profiles of communities most at risk of terrorist attacks and attempted attacks, as well as those most likely to be the location where preparatory or pre-incident planning takes place.
- **Risk terrain modeling:** A method for identifying situational, place-based risk factors most associated with locations where terrorist incidents are likely to be planned or occur. This method looks at specific aspects of the physical landscape, such as locations of buildings or parking lots.

The Arkansas-Rutgers team integrated these tools in a single analytic inquiry designed to provide a more complete picture of how social and environmental elements intersect in unique and patterned ways across communities. The study extended previous research on the place-based risks of terrorism by combining the two methods to discover underlying risk dynamics.

The study objectives were to:

- Identify demographic and social characteristics of communities at risk of terrorism-related pre-incident and incident activities.
- Identify situational, place-based risk factors most associated with where pre-incident and incident activities are more likely to occur.

Through combining conjunctive analysis and risk terrain modeling, the team found that terrorism-related activities in the United States were not evenly distributed geographically. In fact, the top five states in terms of total incidents accounted for 50% of all incidents. This finding can help inform policy. For example, law enforcement agencies can use the data to allocate anti-terrorism resources.

The team used the two tools to analyze risk through several criminology perspectives, including ecological, situational, and environmental criminology. [See “Defining Criminology Perspectives.”](#)

The research team used this approach to develop a framework for understanding how broad social conditions and specific interactions operate in a particular physical area to increase or decrease the risk of terrorism-related activities in that area.

The team then examined data linked to terrorism-related incidents in the United States from the time of the 9/11 terror attacks in 2001 through 2019. According to the American Terrorism Study, during that time, 296 terrorism incidents and 617 pre-incident activities occurred. In addition, there were 420 known residences tied to terrorism-related incidents in particular states.

The conjunctive analysis segment of the research examined geographic study areas, such as counties and census tracts, with at least one terrorism-related event. The analysis revealed that those areas with the most prominent risk profiles were all associated with high-density populations.

The risk terrain modeling study segment looked at spaces as small as a single building or parking lot. This analysis indicated that New York City had the highest number of attempted or actual terror incidents with 13 incidents, all primarily involving use of a bomb or other explosive.

### The Importance of Place

The place-based analysis approach to terrorism investigation represents a shift from the conventional research emphasis on targeting suspicious persons by their demographic or other traits. This approach investigates the importance of location in explanations of crime and terrorism. The research team noted that although approaches to place-based terrorism research in the United States are varied, some patterns are emerging from the literature, suggesting certain prominent risk factors, including:



- Urbanization in the study area
- Social diversity

Further, the team reported that economic factors were relatively insignificant for predicting the location of terrorism incidents.

### **A More Complete Picture**

The integration of macro-level (socio-demographic, from Conjunctive Analysis) and micro-level (terrain feature, from risk terrain modeling) perspectives in a single study provides a more complete picture of how social and environmental elements intersect in unique and patterned ways across communities.

One benefit of this more robust place-based data set relates to the rarity of terrorism-related incidents in the United States since 9/11. The statistical significance of research findings depends on the quantity of data analyzed.

The main data sources for the study were:

- The American Terrorism Study, a source of data on pre-incident terrorism-related activities and incident activities.
- Community and environmental data derived from an open-access data portal, Info-Group, and the U.S. Census Bureau.

### **Learning How Demographic and Social Characteristics of Communities Influence Behavior Using Conjunctive Analysis**

Conjunctive analysis differs from conventional quantitative research approaches in that it allows for all possible combinations of variables in what are known as “fully saturated models.” The study focused on counties with at least one terrorist-related event, but it aggregated all combinations of data to determine risk profiles. It generated findings at the county, tract (or neighborhood), and event levels.

The most prominent terrorism risk profiles identified through conjunctive analysis, combining all three levels of analysis, included:

- High population density
- Low white population
- Less-than-high-school education
- Moderate unemployment
- Low percentage of families below the poverty line
- Moderate percentage of families living in the same residence as one year prior (stability measure)
- Low percentage of vacant houses
- High percentage of foreign born

### **Learning How Environment Influences Behaviors Using Risk Terrain Modeling**

The study represented the first application of risk terrain modeling to U.S. domestic terrorism.

Risk terrain modeling diagnoses how the environment influences behaviors. It is used to predict risk at the micro level, with the expectation that some locations are riskier than others. It considers two variables, proximity and density, in determining the spatial influence of risk factors in a given physical environment. For example, in considering risk posed by the presence of a bar in a local area, risk terrain modeling considers whether close proximity to a bar creates a risk of crime and whether the density of bars in a small area influences risk of crime.

The risk terrain modeling segment of the study found that after New York City, the second-highest incident counts occurred in the Oakland, California area. Of nine total incidents, eight related to environmental extremism, and one was Islamist extremism. The report also presented neighborhood profiles of three Washington, D.C., neighborhoods where a total of five terrorism-related incidents occurred during the study period. A notable feature of those tracts was numerous government buildings.

Criminology research has long recognized the significance of crime “hot spots” as potential predictors of criminal behavior and as opportunities to develop interventions to prevent crime. Risk terrain modeling extends beyond a focus on specific hot spots in one time period to one that examines conditions over time, uncovering contexts conducive to terrorism events and their precursors.

### **Limitations of this Study**

Given the rarity of terrorism incidents, the researchers combined data categories to achieve statistical significance. Although they acknowledged that the merger of categories is a study limitation, at the same time they said, “given the heightened level of offense type, we believe this is an important contribution.” The three combined categories were pre-incident/preparatory; target location; and residence. When combined, the three reflect a broader terrorism activity with known locations.

The study was also limited by the fact that full street addresses were not available for all locations informing the risk terrain modeling micro-level analysis.



## Conclusion

Combining the analytical power of conjunctive analysis and risk terrain modeling offers promise for enhancing the ability to predict where future terror-related activity is more likely to occur. The relatively small number of terrorist attacks in the United States makes it difficult to collect enough data to assess the risk of terrorism-related events. The researchers noted that, in a typical day, there are more murders in the United States than all the domestic terrorism incidents since 9/11. By combining data from multiple categories, the study aimed to generate findings of greater significance to law enforcement and intelligence agencies, as well as the research community. A significant implication of the research is that this approach can be used to alert community members, as well as law enforcement, about possible locations of terrorist acts. That said, assessing the predictive power of the researchers' models will have to await future events.

## Sidebar: Defining Criminology Perspectives

In this study, researchers analyzed risk from three criminology perspectives. Following are definitions of each, including ecological, situational, and environmental criminology.

- **Ecological** — Focused on how different environments, such as area- and place-based social organization and activities, influence criminal development and action.
- **Situational** — Focused on how aspects of an individual's situation influence the individual's choices to engage in or refrain from criminal conduct; for example, in a prison environment, aspects include prison features, staffing, and resident access to communication devices.
- **Environmental** — Focused on exploring how actual criminal events involve interactions between motivated individuals and social, economic, legal, and physical surroundings.

## Prevent review: why we need a new – and clearer – definition of Islamist extremism

By Julian Hargreaves

Source: <https://theconversation.com/prevent-review-why-we-need-a-new-and-clearer-definition-of-islamist-extremism-200664>

Mar 03 – An independent review of the UK counter-terrorism strategy, Prevent, has recommended that the government increase its efforts to tackle Islamist extremism.

Prevent was launched nearly two decades ago to divert vulnerable people away from radicalisation and terrorism. It has been [controversial](#) from the outset, criticised by [experts](#) and [campaigners](#) alike for its tight focus on Islamist extremism in particular and the alleged targeting of Muslim communities in Britain this results in.

William Shawcross, a British journalist and current commissioner for public appointments, has conducted an independent review. In his 200-page report, he outlines how Prevent is not doing enough to counter non-violent Islamist extremism or to tackle organisations operating within the law and below the threshold of terrorism. He also criticises “a double standard when dealing with the extreme right-wing and Islamism”. Prevent's view of Islamist extremism, he says, is often too narrowly focused on banned terrorist organisations. Its view of extreme right wing, by contrast, is often too broadly focused on “mildly controversial” mainstream rightwing-leaning commentary. One fundamental question this review poses is what exactly “Islamist extremism” is. This matters because many professionals (including teachers, lecturers, social workers, health workers and prison guards) are now legally obliged to watch out for it. [Research](#) I have recently published with Maaha Elahi, a pupil barrister, shows that a clearer definition is possible.

### A new definition of “Islamist extremism”

The UK government defines “extremism” as “vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs”. This general definition has [done little](#) to improve the public's understanding or to clarify what might distinguish Islamist extremism from other forms.

According to Prevent: “Islamist extremists regard Western intervention in Muslim-majority countries as a ‘war with Islam’, creating a narrative of ‘them’ and ‘us’.” This ideology, the definition says, includes the uncompromising belief that people cannot be both Muslim and British. “Islamist extremists specifically attack the principles of civic participation and social cohesion,” it says. “These extremists purport to identify grievances to which terrorist organisations then claim to have a solution.”

The problem is that Prevent's definition is rooted in the government's favoured concept of “British values”. It says little about how extreme Islam differs from more mainstream forms of the religion. And it offers little practical guidance for the professionals now under a legal duty to be aware of terrorist risks. To explore





how this might be improved, we revisited the 2013 libel case brought by a London imam, Shakeel Begg, against the BBC. In a televised interview conducted by journalist Andrew Neil with the Muslim Council of Britain, Begg was described as an “extremist speaker” holding “extremist positions”. He subsequently sued the BBC.

In deciding Begg’s case, Lord Justice Haddon-Cave distinguished between extreme and mainstream forms of Islam. Among other expert sources, he relied on philosopher and sociologist of religion Matthew Wilkinson and his 2018 book, [The Genealogy of Terror](#), to set out ten indicators of what he termed “extremist Islamic positions”:

1. Having a Manichean view of the world – a strict divide between “us” and “them” – including between the “right” and “wrong” kind of Muslim.
2. Reducing the idea of *jihad* to armed combat (or *qital*); the term can, in fact, also be translated simply as “striving”.
3. Ignoring the established Islamic doctrinal conditions for the declaration of *qital*, including support for terrorism.
4. Ignoring the Islamic regulations governing armed *jihad*, including attacks on civilians.
5. Advocating *qital* as a universal, individual religious obligation.
6. Interpreting sharia law to require breaking domestic (in our case, UK) law.
7. Classifying all non-Muslims as unbelievers (or *kuffar*).
8. Adhering to the extreme Salafist position that the Muslim faith negates and supersedes family, kinship and nation.
9. Citing or approving legal opinions (or *fatwa*) from Islamic scholars with extremist views.
10. Delivering or following teaching which encourages Muslims to engage in or support terrorism or violence in the name of Allah.

This is helpful because it roots “Islamist extremism” in Islamic concepts, not British values. It reduces the risk of the British state implying that Islam stands apart from British society. According to UK [census](#) data from 2021, 6.5% of those living in England and Wales – nearly 4 million people – are Muslim. Following Haddon-Cave’s lead would enable the government to play a more active role in protecting mainstream Islamic values for these Muslim communities.

Further, Haddon-Cave’s checklist approach offers a more practical solution to some of the uncertainty people feel. It helps to communicate more clearly what is meant – and what is not – by the term “Islamist extremism”.

This will contribute towards more positive relations between, for example, the police and Muslim communities. [Checklists](#) have a long history in both the engineering and medical professions. They are easy to use and, as our understanding develops, easy to adapt over time. Although not strictly a checklist, the most widely used definition of “[antisemitism](#)”, for instance, employs a working definition with a list of examples to help its users. This checklist approach could also be easily adapted to other forms of extremism, from the far right to far left. The various properties of [rightwing](#) extremism that criminologist Elisabeth Carter identified in 2018 include authoritarianism, nationalism, racism, xenophobia and anti-democratic values. Early definitions, for instance, of “rightwing extremism” often excluded populism because it was mainly considered a speech-writing style. As our understanding of it as a political ideology developed, later definitions included it. Carter’s study shows how a checklist could be adapted in line with such developments in our thinking. There are differences of opinion over which is the more serious issue, Islamist or far-right extremism. Some point to the MI5’s annual threat update, in which Director General Ken McCallum [stated](#) that Islamist terrorism represent three-quarters of its terrorist caseload. Others highlight recent data – from [Prevent](#) itself – that shows that extreme rightwing cases (between April 2021 and March 2022) in fact outnumbered Islamist cases for the second year running.

Home Secretary Suella Braverman [has pledged](#) to fully implement the review’s recommendations. Campaigners, meanwhile, have [called](#) for Prevent to be scrapped. Either way, accurately defining and identifying extremism, in all its guises, remains crucial.

[Julian Hargreaves](#) is Director of Research at the Woolf Institute and Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Islamic Studies, University of Cambridge.

**EDITOR’S COMMENT:** Decades after 9/11 and still unable/unwilling to define terrorism. The word derives from “terror”. Whatever action causes terror to people is terrorism. Is it so difficult to define?

## Tehran Regime Targets U.S. Homeland -- Kill Lists and Kidnappings

By Benjamin Weinthal

Source: <https://www.meforum.org/64206/tehran-regime-targets-us-homeland-kill-lists>

Mar 01 – Amid the report that a top Iranian regime military official on Friday urged the murders of the ex-commander of the United States Central Command General Kenneth McKenzie, [former President Trump](#),



and former Secretary State of Mike Pompeo, a new report asserts that Iran is likely behind a "kill list" targeting law enforcement agencies in Boston. Amirali Hajizadeh, the commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Aerospace, declared during a



televised interview last week that, "Inshallah (God willing) we will be able to kill Donald Trump, Mike Pompeo (former) CENTCOM chief Kenneth McKenzie, and others who ordered killing of Qasem Soleimani."

The U.S. military [killed Soleimani with a drone](#) strike in January 2020 because the EU and U.S.-designated terrorist was planning an attack and was responsible for the murder of over 600 American military personnel. The reach of Islamic Republic of Iran terrorist activities impacted the independent TV network Iran International Iran just days ago. The Persian-language TV outlet said it was suspending its London-based operation and relocating to Washington D.C. because of a "significant escalation in state-backed threats from Iran."

Across the Atlantic, Iran's regime—which the U.S. State Department classifies as the world's worst international

state-sponsor of terrorism—[launched a kidnapping attempt](#) of the Brooklyn-based Iranian dissident Masih Alinejad.

Following the arrest of the three alleged kidnapers, [FBI director Christopher Wray noted](#) the very real threat posed by Iran to the U.S. and the world. "The conduct charged in today's case shows how far Iranian actors are willing to go to silence critics of the Iranian regime—even attempting an assassination right here in the United States. But looking at the threat from Iran more broadly, we've seen the Iranian regime become more aggressive and more brazen across vectors."

Wray continued that "In just the past couple years, actors associated with Iran have launched a ransomware attack on a children's hospital in New England, attempted to assassinate the former U.S. National Security Advisor on U.S. soil, and now plotted to silence a U.S. citizen—a journalist who publicized the Iranian government's human rights abuses—by carrying out a murder in the heart of New York City."

Wray warned, "If that doesn't show how serious the threat from Iran is to Americans right here in America, I don't know what does."

There is a bill of particulars of Iranian assassination plots on U.S. soil. In 2009, [Iranian agents sought to murder](#) California resident Jamshid Sharmahd for his opposition to the country. The regime kidnaped Sharmahd when he was in the United Arab Emirates in 2020 and [sentenced him to death on Tuesday](#) on reportedly trumped-up charges.

In 2012, the former New York City Police Department Commissioner Ray Kelly disclosed during an anti-terror conference that "We've been concerned about Iran for a while."

In 2014, the United States government linked Iran's regime to the planned [assassination of the Saudi Arabian Ambassador](#) in a Washington, D.C., restaurant.

A new 24-page report by U.S.-based Zachor Legal Institute outlines what it says are Iranian threats against U.S. targets that include the Boston Police Department, the FBI, and other government and law enforcement agencies.

The report, titled "The Unseen Threat of The Mapping Project," claims there "is considerable evidence that Iranian elements may be involved in creating the Mapping Project." The document notes that the Iranian regime-owned PressTV published a "supportive column" on June 26, 2022, and a 30-minute video segment about it in July of the same year that praised the Mapping Project and called for its replication in all 50 American states.

The [U.S.-sanctioned outlet PressTV](#) reported, "It is perfectly legitimate to target Jewish groups that support Zionist crimes, [just as it is to target Christian groups](#) that do the same. The Mapping project, to its credit is already doing that."

Rebekah Koffler, a former analyst at the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, told Fox News Digital, "It is my professional assessment that there's a high probability of Iran's involvement in this heinous project. The project's stated goals, antisemitic narrative, and methodology employed to galvanize support from extremist sympathizers, are consistent with the tradecraft of Iranian intelligence and Iran's declared policy to target U.S. persons."

The Boston Mapping Project was initially thought to be largely limited to planned antisemitic terrorism attacks against Jewish and Israeli organizations in Boston. The Zachor Legal Institute, however, revealed that "out of the roughly 500 entities publicly listed on the Mapping Project website, 298 are American strategic security assets and institutions. This raises concern that the true goal of the project is to map the



American security apparatus and that the targeting of the American Jewish community – while real and troubling – may be a façade to obfuscate this plan." According to Zachor, "A particularly noteworthy feature of the Mapping Project is that it provides, in meticulous detail, the precise addresses of U.S. government institutions and law enforcement offices. This refers not only to department and agency headquarters but also to numerous local branches and offices of these institutions."

Tehran's clerical [regime has Iranian dissidents](#) and American officials on its terror assassination radar screen. Koffler noted that "The U.S. government already pays millions of dollars to provide 24/7 security to former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and former [President Trump's special envoy to Iran Brian Hook](#), both of whom face, to this day, 'serious and credible' threats from Iran."

The website of the Boston Mapping project declares that, "Our goal in pursuing this collective mapping was to reveal the local entities and networks that enact devastation, so we can dismantle them. Every entity has an address, every network can be disrupted."

Mariellen Burns, chief of communications for the Boston Police Department, referred Fox News Digital to federal partners. She also noted that, "We are continuously engaged with security and threat briefings with the Jewish Community, and they are aware we are here to help." When asked about the report and the alleged list of federal and security targets, a spokesperson for the FBI told Fox News Digital that the organization "has no comment."

A spokesperson for the U.S. National Security Council referred Fox News Digital to the State Department.

A spokesperson for the U.S. State Department told Fox News Digital that, "We have no information to provide on this question" with respect to the alleged role of Iran in the Boston Mapping Project.

Koffler said, "The Biden Administration's security team has been quite enthusiastic about investigating parents under 'domestic terrorism' laws. It is stunning that they are ignoring the real and escalating threat ... against our security institutions, such as police stations, air force bases, naval installations, the U.S. Secret Service, FBI, Homeland Security, U.S. Marshals."

When asked about Iranian plans for such an attack and whether Tehran was behind the mapping project, a spokesperson from the Iranian mission to the United Nations told Fox News Digital that "The group you mentioned isn't supported in any way by Iran."

[Benjamin Weinthal](#) is a Middle East Forum writing fellow, reporting on Israel, Iran, Syria, Turkey and Europe for Fox News Digital.

## ISIS – The return to Europe

Source: <https://www.gfatf.org/archives/isis-return-europe/>



Jan 2023 – Over the last decade, ISIS is one of the most ferocious terror organizations in the world. Its horrible techniques of torturing and slaughtering its enemies (which is pretty much everyone else) are considered extreme even for other terrorists and gave it during its prime days a vile reputation.

**Recently 400 ISIS operatives with European citizenship, were chosen to return to Europe on a secret mission. The operation started three and a half years ago (mid-2019) intending to return to Europe without their real documents and to lead new terror cells on the continent. They were chosen due to their loyalty to ISIS, leadership, achievements on the battlefield, and radical perspectives. ISIS infrastructure and resources are based on criminal activities, so apart from the imminent threat of terror attacks, we can expect a profound rise in criminal activity on the streets of Europe.**

### The basics

Over the years of its existence, ISIS used sophisticated and professional propaganda to recruit future insurgents from all over the world (more than 80 countries and all Muslim countries) to join its battle and unite for the great cause of establishing the "Islamic State".

In its pursuit of terrorism, ISIS needed to have enough manpower to achieve its ambitious goals and maintain its foothold in the area. The cycle includes combat, conquer and enforcement, village after village in the boundaries of Syria and Iraq.

Over the last years the numbers known average 5,000 people with European citizenship, who joined ISIS. From the information we received, last updated two months ago, 6,300 **confirmed people with European citizenship joined ISIS in the past decade**. Some were Muslims, others converted. Many of them didn't fit into the European society, both economically and spiritually. "When you have nothing to lose you may go to the extreme. The idea of being a part of something with a much larger ideology than yourself makes you feel that you belong. Taking actual responsibility and taking an active part is even more emotional to some of the people that were rejected repeatedly by Europe, and more than welcome by ISIS", as a former ISIS member, who was recruited from Europe, told the media a few years ago.



According to several Intelligence agencies and testimonies of people who survived the inferno, some of the ISIS returnees were senior commanders in Iraq and Syria and they were the ones who directed many of the crimes ISIS is performing daily over there. Over the years, some of those approx. 6,300 Europeans who joined ISIS were killed in battle, others are still operatives of the organization today. But there is a phenomenon that's taking place behind the scenes as **ISIS insurgents return to Europe**.

According to information we received, **3,262 ISIS operatives, including a high number of former combat insurgents, made their way back to Europe, especially in the last four years**. Some of the confirmed countries that ISIS operatives returned to are **Belgium, Netherlands, France, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Italy, Spain**, and more.

Alex Younger, former Head of the United Kingdom's secret intelligence service MI6, mentioned the subject when he was still in service: **"returnees are likely to have acquired the skills and connections that make them potentially very dangerous."**

It is true that those 3,262 individuals, were allowed to return home to Europe in a legal way with the official approval of the authorities. They were usually the ones who were willing to pay the price and serve short terms in prison just to rescue their families from an evil future. Usually, those are families of former operatives that came from Europe and married underage women under the ISIS law, had several kids, and saw the opportunity to pay for their actions and by that give their kids a better future in a normal environment.

### The Plan

Apart from the above, our information shows two facts of concern about ISIS members that went back to Europe:

**1. Of the 3,262 ISIS members who returned to Europe, about 400 of them were playing sensitive roles in ISIS such as special units, interrogation units, intelligence units and more. They took an active part in massacres of entire villages, participated in the rape of local women (many of them underage), and tortured to death prisoners who were captured in confrontations.**

Due to lack of proof, the fact that it is almost impossible to bring witnesses to justify, and the complexity of different legal systems in Europe, **not all the 400 individuals have been taken to court under the right accusations, therefore, most of them are already out of prison or never spent a formal time in prison at all.**

Back in June 2019, several of the leading European countries tried to **promote an idea to establish a special court in Iraq which will deal only in ISIS crimes and will be supervised under the authority of the EU**. That idea was **postponed** after several NGOs were protesting that by doing so, Europe will officially declare its surrender to terror. "It will be a disgrace for countries who believe in protecting human rights of every human being".

That gave ISIS leadership sufficient proof for the plans, nowadays implemented in Europe. **Extremely dangerous people are free to live their lives in many of Europe's capitals.**

**More than 130 of them came back to be involved in terrorism connected to ISIS.** The most famous case is the combined terror attacks in Paris in 2015. The attackers, who had Belgian and French citizenships came back from fighting in Syria. They had the combat experience, the right preparations, and the specific intelligence to launch such a deadly attack.

In 2022 only, intelligence organizations have foiled several attempts for a massive terror attack in Western Europe.

**2. According to several authorities, around 400 ISIS operatives with European citizenship, were chosen to return to Europe on a secret mission. The operation started three and a half years ago (mid 2019). They were chosen due to their loyalty to ISIS, leadership, achievements in battlefield, and radical perspectives. The goal was to return to Europe without their real documents and to lead new terror cells on the continent. Not all of them went back to their countries of origin.**

The plan was built on the fact that they will know better how to fit in, they know the languages, and are familiar with the lifestyle. Therefore, it will be easier for them to find a decent job or open a business, which will be the cover for their real activity. As a business cover, some of them received instructions to open offices of real estate companies, computers, and more. Others were sent to fulfill administrative jobs that may assist in building identities and infrastructures.

Most will not return by themselves. For receiving authenticity, they will return along with their families. But it won't be their authentic family, it will be a **fake family** that would be attached to them.

The "fake-family" is built precisely for the specific needs of each one of those who were chosen for that plot, according to criteria of character, physical appearance (European look), personal skills, and extreme perspective. It includes men or women that will fit for the individual (the women are included in the 400) and teenagers (boys and girls) that are mostly orphans.

**Many went through two years of training which involved mainly language skills in two European languages, behavioral training, Islamic studies, and military training.**

The journey to Europe is usually not as difficult as for regular refugees. ISIS built a whole infrastructure just for them which includes bribery, private planes, fake identities, apartments, cars, and large amount of money so they could fit in step by step, recruit and operate.

Many fake passports that were used for that operation came from real embassies of European countries in **Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan**, using their administrative helpers in place. These days, there is a group



of around 100 individuals, that is currently in Afghanistan as a transit spot waiting to be launched into Europe in small groups. They are receiving logistical assistance from the **Taliban**. Afghanistan, and especially the Taliban, are the main source of Opium related drug trafficking, including into Europe. This is where criminal financing meets terror activities with a mutual interest.

The popular destinations of these groups until today are France, Belgium, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Germany. In those countries, there are large Muslim communities that can be the base for future recruiters who identify themselves with the extreme ideology of ISIS. **The European countries have not done enough to secure the borders of the continent.** It's just too easy for ISIS returnees to find the way back to Europe and avoid the EU courts.

European countries should consider to use more advice of their intelligence services and be less afraid to confront NGOs which are driven by interests and receiving political support.

One should construct a temporary all-European task force including all the major intelligence services, police, financial investigators dealing with money laundering and income tax, border authorities, ministry of interior, cyber security with social network screening. ISIS is becoming stronger every year around the world, especially in Africa and central Asia. The capabilities, the weapons and the money will eventually find their way to Europe again, to be used against the local population.

European citizens will be facing a rising crime rate, as this is the basis for ISIS terror. Not only will the criminality rise in quantity, it will rise in cruelty, as ISIS is known for ruthlessness and brutality – no matter how high the success rate of the authorities in foiling the terror attacks. **European leaders need to understand that extreme terrorism is an ideology, and ideology doesn't disappear if you change your surroundings, it is what defines it.**

## Suicidal Sweden: Girl (9) Stabbed by 'Allahu Akbar' Screaming Iranian Who Committed 51 Previous Crimes

Source: <https://rairfoundation.com/suicidal-sweden-girl-9-stabbed-by-allahu-akbar-screaming-iranian-who-committed-51-previous-crimes/>



**52 crimes  
Still in Sweden  
BRAVO !!!**

Mar 04 – Iranian Milad Salari is now on the docket for a total of 52 crimes since he made his criminal debut at the age of 15. On Thursday afternoon, a nine-year-old girl out with her grandmother and grandfather was stabbed in the stomach and throat by a Muslim migrant [screaming](#) Allahu Akbar in central Gothenburg. The suspect, Milad Salari, is a 35-year-old Muslim born in Iran and has committed **52 crimes in Sweden since 2002.**

Shortly after 12:30, the police were called to Brunnsparken, where a child from the Netherlands who was visiting her grandparents had been stabbed. Police report that the girl has been taken to the hospital, describing her situation as critical.



According to reports from the scene, the child is bleeding from the stomach, says Thomas Fuxborg, press spokesperson at the police in the West region.

Passing-by youths are said to have brought the perpetrator to the ground, and guards and security guards intervened. Then there was also an off-duty police officer who intervened, says Fuxborg.

I saw the perpetrator get caught. He first lay on the ground for quite some time. Then they picked him up, put bags on his hands, put him in the police car, and drove away, says Firas Moussa, who works in the house next to the bloody tram stop where the arrest occurred.

Police report that the attack is still unclear, and the police see no connection between the perpetrator and the victim. The grandmother was also slightly injured when she tried to protect the girl.

The man was convicted last winter of a crime and escaped prison as they thought they saw a “tangible improvement” in his life.

According to information from freelance journalist Joakim Lamotte, the perpetrator screamed “Allahu akbar” during the attack.

### First criminal beginnings

In September 1994, Milad’s mother sent in an application for Swedish citizenship for her son. The request was accepted just over four years later, at the end of October 1998.

In May 2002, Milad Salari had just turned 15 and became a criminal. He then commits the first crime for which he is convicted – theft. The court is content to let the social services “provide the necessary care”.

Not even a year they were passed before Milad was arrested again in February 2003. This time for yet another theft and attempted embezzlement of supplies. The penalty will now be a little more severe; 50 hours of youth service and “necessary care” with social services. After that, the teenager’s criminal career escalates. Damage, narcotic crimes, illegal driving, attempted theft, more and more narcotic crimes, and many calls to social services. He is known for a total of 24 crimes before the age of 18.

### Prison

In May 2006, at 19, Milad Salari was sentenced to prison for the first time. With a buddy and armed with a dummy pistol, he robbed Vodafone’s Nordstan showroom in Gothenburg.

The salesman recounts the horror when Milad grabs him and drags him to a room inside the store. He thinks he’s going to be killed. But instead, the penalty for this brutal theft is one and a half years in prison.

In 2011, Milad was sentenced to a year in prison for another robbery and, in the same case, to another month in prison for unlawful threats. In 2013, Milad was arrested by Copenhagen police for trespassing. He is locked up for six days before being sent back to Sweden. He never appeared at the trial, where he was sentenced to pay a fine of 3,000 Danish crowns.

In 2014 and 2015, Milad was convicted of other drug-related robberies and offenses. Each time, the court considers it more appropriate that Milad be sentenced to probation rather than prison.

### Rob a gold store

Lucia Day 2015, Milad Salari commits his worst crime, despite having the appointed overseer to prevent it. Armed with an “automatic weapon-like object,” he robs Jarl Sandin Ur & Guld on Kungsgatan in Gothenburg.

Under threat, customers and staff are forced into the workshop, and Milad steals watches worth over two million crowns. A hunter who witnessed the theft runs after the attacker. He immediately realized that the gun was not real but a so-called soft plastic airgun.

I had already planned to take him to the store, but there were too many people there, explains the hunter in interrogation. The portly thief can’t bear to run away from the hunter and gives up. After a bit of persuasion, the hunter manages to persuade the first police patrol alerted, who doubt the authenticity of



the weapon, to arrest the robber. "I'm a hunter myself, and I own a weapon, and I saw right away that it wasn't a real weapon," he said.



### Ongoing crime

Milad Salari is sentenced to three years in prison for, among other things, aggravated theft. However, in January 2018, he will be released on parole. Although he was convicted of new crimes, assault, and theft during the probationary period, the triple robber does not have to serve the rest of the prison sentence. Instead, the court settles for probation twice in a row.

In 2019, the Iranian serial criminal committed seven more crimes, including theft, grand theft, and drunk driving; in 2020, he was sentenced again for robbery, and in 2021, for another shoplifting against Naturkompaniet.

### 'Appalling improvement'

After committing 51 crimes, Milad Salari stood trial again last year after stealing a laptop from inside the Elgiganten in central Gothenburg. Despite the fact that Milad was convicted of similar shoplifting as recently as the previous year and lived with his older brother, who is also convicted of a crime, the court finds that a "significant improvement has occurred in his personal and social situation." Therefore, the 36-year-old again avoids prison and is instead sentenced to probation.

Milad Salari is now on the docket for a total of 52 crimes since he made his criminal debut at the age of 15. He is now suspected of yesterday's brutal murder attempt on a nine-year-old girl from the Netherlands.

## Islamic State uses young boys in jihadi breeding farm

By Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury

Source: <https://hindupost.in/world/islamic-state-uses-young-boys-in-muslim-breeding-farm/>

Mar 07 – With the alarming rise in Muslim population in almost all of the 'non-Muslim' nations, here is shocking information on extreme notoriety of Islamic State (ISIS) women who are forcing young boys into impregnating detained female jihadists. Once their jihadist women are pregnant, ISIS members turn around and tell the Western authorities and establishment media that they are victims, and need to return to their homes, and Western authorities and the establishment media, being both clueless and indifferent to the well-being of their native population, all too often fall for it. According to an exclusive report published in The Beast, boys as young as 13 rescued from detention



camps say they were forced to try to impregnate dozens of ISIS women, since there are no men in the camps. At least two boys have come forward to claim they were victims in a twisted plot run by ISIS women that forced teenagers to try to impregnate dozens of women held in detention center. In some cases, one boy is forced to have sex with at least 5-6 women.



Syrian Defense Force officials said, two boys named Ahmet (13) and Hamid (14) told a guard at Camp al Hol in northeast Syria, “We are being forced to have sex with the ISIS women, to impregnate them”.

It may be mentioned here that Camp al Hol is one of the detention centers housing approximately 8,000 foreign ISIS-affiliated women and children who surrendered or were captured as a result of the 2019 territorial defeat of the so-called Islamic State. A large portion of these detained ISIS females continue in their violent dedication to the Caliphate, insisting on carrying on ISIS’s distorted Islamic dictates, punishing women who renounce ISIS, and working hard to indoctrinate children whose countries continue to refuse to repatriate them. Some of these ISIS diehard women have refused voluntary repatriation, with their countries of origin allowing them to also refuse repatriation for their children.

Ahmet and Hamid told the staff at the newly opened Orkesh rehab center that they were subject to sexual exploitation by a group of ISIS women. Center staff told The Daily Beast that one of the boys said he was forced to have sex with eight ISIS women in just a few days.

Officials said the ISIS women in Camp al Hol told the teens they wanted to get pregnant to increase the population of the Islamic State, which they believe is going to be reinstated when fighters come and break them out of the camps. A camp guard said at least 10 boys at al Hol were involved, some only located and rescued when the SDF went into the camp and found them hidden by the women in underground tunnels.

No one knows the exact number of pregnancies in the camps but the SDF intelligence who monitor the camps say there are many. These should not be possible given that the ISIS men are held separately. Some pregnancies may have been the result of illicit relationships with guards, despite safeguards in place to make sure that doesn’t happen, but officials say the boys are clearly being exploited by ISIS women.

One boy in Camp al Roj subjected to such exploitation ended up in the hospital collapsing after being given a Viagra-like substance to make him capable of having multiple erections so that he could perform sexual acts with a large number of females every day. It is also reported that some ISIS women manage to earn money by offering sex to camp guards while they demand drugs – particularly for using those on young boys for enabling them to have sex with multiple women every day. Notorious ISIS women even force those young boys in attending “orientation course” where they are taught and encouraged of having sexual relations and impregnating female considering it as part of “holy jihad”.

[Salah Uddin Shoab Choudhury](#) is an internationally acclaimed multi-award-winning anti-militancy journalist, writer, research-scholar, counterterrorism specialist and editor of Weekly Blitz.





## Sweden's street gangs are gaining power

By Paulina Neuding

Source: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/swedens-street-gangs-are-gaining-power/>

Mar 11 – Barely a day goes by in Stockholm without a shooting or a bombing. In one part of the city, housing estate residents have been informed about what to do if their building is a bombing target. For all too many Swedes, this is the new normal.

Under Swedish law, children under 15 cannot be sentenced to any criminal punishment and older teenagers are seldom given more than four years in 'compulsory care'. So mobsters now recruit young people, arm them with thermos-flask bombs or guns and send them out as soldiers in their gang wars.

The country's liberal criminal justice system and the fact that the police were never trained for such problems have made life comfortable for new gangs in immigrant neighbourhoods. The latest tale gripping Sweden in horror involves the suburb of Botkyrka, to the south-west of Stockholm.

Almost half of the population there lives in so-called 'vulnerable areas' – the police's polite way of describing places with a majority of migrants where criminal networks exert considerable pressure on the other residents. Many of Botkyrka's children, who are disproportionately from immigrant backgrounds, struggle in school and are easy pickings for the criminal gangs.

Few initiatives have backfired as badly as Sweden's publicly funded 'youth centres'. In Botkyrka, rather than keep kids off the streets, they became a base for gangland criminals. According to police, gang members – when not committing crimes – would spend night after night playing video games at the centres and gangsters had shown up wearing bulletproof vests. Weapons and drugs had also been found at the centres. The mayor, Ebba Östlin of the centre-left Social Democrats, decided last year that these places had become part of the problem and should be closed.

Then, a few weeks ago, Östlin was suddenly deposed at a meeting with her local party. Her supporters claim that her branch had been infiltrated by those who wanted to punish her for taking a stand against gang crime. Fifty new party members appeared at the meeting, several of whom turned out to be connected to Botkyrka's criminal gangs.

The Social Democrat party denies any infiltration, and says there was simply internal dissatisfaction with Östlin's leadership. But investigations by journalists have found that the new leadership is, at the very least, in a position where it owes a debt of gratitude to local criminals for helping to push her out of power.

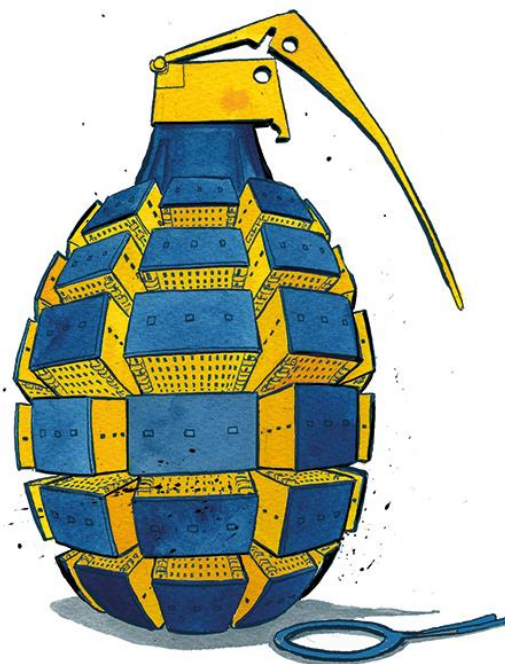
Now Sweden's national government has appointed a committee to investigate the operations of educational organisations such as ABF (the group which ran the youth centres), and to what extent they adhere to society's 'democratic values'. That is to say: which of them might be in league with the mob or Islamist extremists.

Such is the national reaction to accusations of gang infiltration that Gunnar Strömmer, Sweden's minister of justice, has announced a separate investigation into how criminal entities try to influence elected officials and political assemblies. He has had to admit that such problems are not restricted to the Social Democrats. Indeed, his own party, the centre-right Moderates, was involved in a similar scandal when its leader in Botkyrka was ousted in a coup six years ago. And that's what's so disturbing: Swedes have seen this before.

Take Södertälje, a town close to Botkyrka with a population of just under 100,000. As many people were shot dead in Södertälje last year as in all of London. Police found criminal networks were advancing into local politics there as long ago as 2011. Visible crime, like violence and drug trafficking, was only one level on which gangs operated. On the middle level were those who committed financial offences and acted as insiders and enablers for authorities and companies – while top-level criminals had 'great influence in social, political and economic spheres'.

In Gothenburg, Sweden's second-largest city, the municipality is also under pressure from criminals. In the summer of 2021, a report based on interviews with 50 council workers showed that criminal families and gangs had succeeded in getting the municipality's employees to look the other way when drugs were sold openly, or when weapons and drugs were stored in council property. They also felt unable to report concerns when children were at risk.

A forthcoming citizen survey, obtained by the online magazine Kvartal, shows the number of Gothenburg's social services employees who say they have been exposed to gangland influence is growing. There is



also the problem of 'honour oppression', with mainly women and children having their freedom restricted in ways inconsistent with the western understanding of human rights. Two city council employees are reported as saying that they are concerned about how those living under honour oppression 'are increasingly not getting the help they need, as families, relatives and others with close ties to the family' try to influence social workers and others 'to change their decisions'.

So how to cope with this ever-mutating threat of gang crime? How bad will it get? 'I am quite pessimistic in the short term,' said Ulf Kristersson, Sweden's Prime Minister, recently. 'This is going to be very, very bad.' But just how bad? The award-winning journalist Federico Moreno, who was himself raised in Botkyrka and has closely followed its descent, recently summed it up. 'When the gangs rule the streets, they soon want to own the politics.' Sweden is now finding that out.

## The baby-faced fanatic inspired by Jihadi John to unleash terror at a Justin Bieber concert in Cardiff... Just one of the thousands of under-the-radar lone wolf terrorists radicalised online that a chilling new book says MI5 is struggling to track

Source: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11848575/The-baby-faced-fanatic-inspired-Jihadi-John-unleash-terror-Justin-Bieber-concert.html>



Mar 11 – Lloyd Gunton was not a typical Islamist terrorist. The 17-year-old farmer's son lived in the Welsh valleys with his Christian parents.

The freckle-faced teenager Lloyd Gunton had a butcher's knife and a heavy claw hammer in his school rucksack

His sole knowledge of fighting jihad – a holy war – had been gleaned from his computer. Yet the freckle-faced teenager had a butcher's knife and a heavy claw hammer in his school rucksack, alongside a handwritten martyrdom letter proclaiming: 'I am a soldier of the Islamic State.' Inspired by [Isis](#) terrorists, his motivation for violence was to wreak revenge for British air-strikes on the Middle East.

From the confines of his bedroom, Gunton had planned to launch a deadly attack on a Justin Bieber concert in Cardiff on a balmy June evening six years ago. But his plot was foiled in the nick of time.

Just hours before 40,000 Bieber fans arrived at Cardiff's Principality Stadium, armed police – acting on information from the security services – burst into Gunton's farmhouse near Llantrisant, South Wales, and arrested the would-be killer. Gunton came to the attention of security services after boasting of his plan on Instagram. Using the name 'Alqaeds', he wrote: 'Cardiff, are you ready for our terror... May Allah bring terrorism to Cardiff.' Posts also included a picture of the Welsh capital's castle, an image of a Jeep, a knife, a bomb and a fluttering Isis flag.



He had even posted instructions on launching vehicle attacks, copied from Isis's translated propaganda magazine. The security services had already been working to counter the threat from around 900 British jihadis who had joined Isis in Syria and Iraq. But in Gunton, who had not converted to Islam, they had found a different sort of threat: a home-grown terrorist with no links to known extremists.

Evidence presented at his trial suggested he had radicalised himself by reading internet posts about Jihadi John, who featured in beheading videos by Islamic State, and the two Muslim converts who murdered Fusilier Lee Rigby.

The conversion from innocent schoolboy to terrorist took little over a year. Gunton is far from the only one. Some 43,000 people have been logged by MI5 for posing a potential threat to the UK, of whom 3,000 are deemed 'subjects of interest'. Thanks to an estimated 800 priority investigations by intelligence services, around 40 terror attacks on British soil have been foiled in the past six years.

These would-be terrorists do not get the chance, as they see it, to die in a blaze of glory. Instead, like Gunton, they are arrested, their homes searched, their phones and laptops seized, and their friends and families interviewed.

When Gunton was sentenced this month, he was given a life sentence with a minimum term of 11 years.

These thwarted plots reveal far more of the true picture of terrorism in the UK than the deadly attacks by terrorists whose secrets often die with them.

●► Read the full article at the source's URL.

## Vehicles of The Future – Air Taxis at Paris Olympic Games

Source: <https://i-hls.com/archives/118385>

Mar 08 – As part of a one of a kind project, the first flying taxis will be utilized during the 2024 Olympic Games in France and will be used to drive passengers around. This project is supervised by the Paris Transportation Network and the general manager of France for Commercial Air. Few months prior to the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, a series of test will commence and will examine the service. If the tests prove successful, this will allow airlines to develop a similar service during 2028-2030, according to a report by Maariv news. Many industrial companies and experts on the aerial field are involved with the air taxi project, some of whom is Airbus the



airplane manufacturer, Safran, EHang the Chinese helicopter manufacturer – a company which itself develops air taxis powered by electricity. This project began during 2019 with soring support, even prior to any initial testing. Since then, the Pontoise airport located in the Île-de-France region has been chosen as the real time test site for the futuristic air taxi project. “We shall build here the first European airport for flying cars,” said Augustin de Romanet, chief executive officer of Groupe ADP, during the opening event of the project.

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** France is big by all means country. Innovations like air taxis should be spared for later after the Olympic Games – unless passengers undergo security screening of their belonging before flying over Paris and venues for obvious reasons.



## Daesh, Al Qaeda and the risk of a terrorism comeback

By Amer Al Sabaileh

Source: <https://jordantimes.com/opinion/amer-al-sabaileh/daesh-al-qaeda-and-risk-terrorism-comeback>

Mar 12 – In his answers to questions at the US Senate Intelligence Committee’s annual hearing on the top threats to the nation this week, Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) Director Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier rang the bell on the possible return of terrorist groups and particularly Al Qaeda and Daesh. In his statement below, just one month after the Taliban’s seizure of Kabul, Berrier warned that a revived Al Qaeda with aspirations to attack the United States could become a reality within three years.

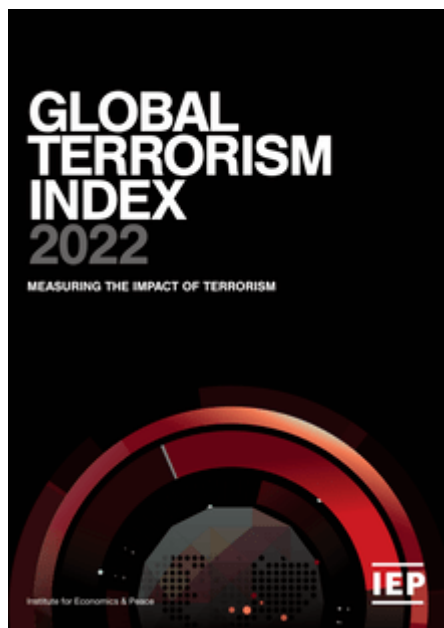
The Lt. Gen. stated: “And I would say, based on what we know right now from the threat of Al Qaeda, they’re trying to survive, basically without a real plan to at least or intend to attack the West anytime soon. And I would say that ISIS-K poses a bit of a larger threat, but they are under attack from the Taliban regime right now. And it’s a matter of time before they may have the ability and intent to actually attack the West at this point.”

The increasing number of attacks that Daesh is conducting in Afghanistan and Pakistan could be an indication they are not suffering from the Taliban’s attacks, but in fact could suggest a real desire to diminish the authority of the Taliban. These ongoing developments are related to Daesh primary targets in Kabul, which target Taliban personnel and sites, including religious and even educational institutions. They also suggest the group intends to diminish the authority of the Taliban by any means, going so far as to target foreign citizens in civic sites, hotels and companies.

It was expected that the US withdrawal from Afghanistan leaving the Taliban in power would be seen by many groups as a model to imitate, sending the message that if you are strong on the ground, you will be recognised as the single authority. There were impacts across the global terrorist scene as the Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan paved the way for terrorist groups to coordinate and attack elsewhere. The increasing and more frequent attacks of Daesh in Syria and Iraq, and involvement with drug trafficking suggest they have intentions to resurface and leverage the regional situation and internal instability.

This could see them moving from small scale operation to wider tactics, including dormant cells, lone wolves, or even more sophisticated operations so the group can send a message of their arrival to the world. There is a clear need for greater security cooperation and advanced collaboration among the region and globally to address this risk.

The US DIA evaluation should motivate countries to activate an international coalition to anticipate these growing risks and including criminal networks in the mandate of this anti-terrorism coalition. It is fundamental to focus on what is currently going on in Afghanistan as it could offer insights to anticipate the threats from Daesh in Africa to Al Qaeda in Yemen to Daesh reincarnations in Syria and Iraq.



### Global Terrorism Index 2023

Source: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-terrorism-index-2023>











Mar 14 – This is the tenth edition of the Global Terrorism Index (GTI). This report provides a comprehensive summary of the key global trends and patterns in terrorism over the last decade. The calculation of the GTI score considers not only deaths but also incidents, hostages and injuries from terrorism, weighted over a five-year period

The GTI report is produced by the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) using data from TerrorismTracker and other sources. TerrorismTracker provides event records on terrorist attacks since 1 January 2007. The dataset contains almost 66,000 terrorist incidents for the period 2007 to 2022.

In 2022, deaths from terrorism fell by nine per cent to 6,701 deaths and is now 38 per cent lower than at its peak in 2015. The fall in deaths was mirrored by a reduction in the number of incidents, with attacks declining by almost 28 per cent from 5,463 in 2021 to 3,955 in 2022. However, if Afghanistan was removed from the index, terrorism deaths would have increased by four per cent.

Afghanistan remained the country most impacted by terrorism for the fourth consecutive year, despite attacks and deaths falling by 75 per cent and 58 per cent respectively. The GTI does not include acts of state repression and violence by state actors and, as such, acts committed by the Taliban are no longer included in the scope of the report since they took control of the government.



RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	RANK CHANGE	RANK
1	 Afghanistan	8.822	↔	29
2	 Burkina Faso	8.564	↑ 2	30
3	 Somalia	8.463	↔	31
4	 Mali	8.412	↑ 3	32
5	 Syria	8.161	↑ 1	33
6	 Pakistan	8.160	↑ 3	34
7	 Iraq	8.139	↓ 5	35
8	 Nigeria	8.065	↓ 3	36
9	 Myanmar (Burma)	7.977	↑ 1	37
10	 Niger	7.616	↓ 2	38

The deadliest terrorist groups in the world in 2022 were Islamic State (IS) and its affiliates, followed by al-Shabaab, Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM).

IS remained the deadliest terror group globally for the eighth consecutive year, recording the most attacks and deaths of any group in 2022. Despite this, terrorism deaths attributed to IS and its affiliate groups, Islamic State - Khorasan Province (ISK), Islamic State - Sinai Province (ISS) and Islamic State West Africa (ISWA), declined by 16 per cent. However, there has been a rapid increase in deaths attributed to unknown jihadists in the countries where ISWA operates, increasing by 17 times since 2017 to 1,766 terrorism deaths. Given the location, many of these are likely unclaimed attacks by ISWA.

If most of the deaths caused by unknown jihadists were included as IS terrorism deaths, then the outcome would have been similar

Rank	ORGANISATION	DEATHS	ATTACKS	INJURED
1	Islamic State (IS)	1045	410	644
2	Al-Shabaab	784	315	1016
3	Islamic State - Khorasan Province (ISK)	498	141	832
4	Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM)	279	77	215
5	Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)	233	30	113
6	Islamic State West Africa (ISWA)	219	65	118
7	Boko Haram	204	64	51
8	Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)	137	90	187
9	Islamic State - Sinai Province	71	27	32
10	Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)	57	40	16

#### to 2021. Deadliest Terror Groups of 2022

Eighteen countries experienced a death from terrorism caused by IS in 2022, a slight decrease from 20 countries the year prior. After the substantial falls in terrorism between 2015 and 2019, improvements have plateaued in the last three years. Highlighting the point, the number of countries experiencing deaths has remained almost constant for the last three years, ranging from 43 in 2020 to 42 in 2022. This is down from the peak of 56 countries in 2015. The number of countries experiencing increases and decreases in terrorism deaths remained roughly the same in 2022, with 25 countries recording reductions, while another 24 countries recorded increases. Terrorism is dynamic and, although the overall change in the last three years has been minimal, there have been sharp rises and falls in terrorism in many countries during this period, notably Niger, Myanmar and Iraq.

Terrorist attacks became more deadly in 2022, killing on average 1.7 people per attack in 2022 compared to 1.3 deaths per attack in 2021. This is the first increase in lethality rate in five years.

Violent conflict remains the primary driver of terrorism, with over 88 per cent of attacks and 98 per cent of terrorism deaths in 2022 taking place in countries in conflict. All ten countries most impacted by terrorism



in 2022 were also involved in an armed conflict. Attacks in countries involved in conflict are seven times deadlier than attacks in peaceful countries.

The Sahel region in sub-Saharan Africa is now the epicentre of terrorism, with the Sahel accounting for more terrorism deaths in 2022 than both South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) combined. Deaths in the Sahel constituted 43 per cent of the global total in 2022, compared to just one per cent in 2007. Of particular concern are two countries, Burkina Faso and Mali, which accounted for 73 per cent of terrorism deaths in the Sahel in 2022 and 52 per cent of all deaths from terrorism in sub-Saharan Africa. Both countries recorded substantial increases in terrorism, with deaths in Burkina Faso increasing by 50 per cent to 1,135 and in Mali by 56 per cent to 944. Attacks in these countries are also becoming more deadly, with the number of people killed per attack increasing by 48 per cent from 2021. Most attacks in these countries are attributed to unknown jihadists though both IS and JNIM operate in these countries. The escalation in violence in Burkina Faso has also spread to neighbouring countries, with Togo and Benin recording their worst GTI scores on record.

The increase in terrorism in the Sahel has been dramatic, rising by over 2,000 percent in the last 15 years. The political situation in the Sahel compounds this increase, with six coup attempts since 2021, of which four were successful. The underlying drivers are complex and systemic including poor water utilisation, lack of food, ethnic polarisation, strong population growth, external interventions, geopolitical competition, pastoral conflict, the growth of transnational Salafi-Islam ideology and weak governments. Most of the terrorist activity occurs along borders where government control is weakest. Significantly, of the 830 million people facing food insecurity globally, 58 per cent live in the 20 countries most affected by terrorism. Adding to the complexity, many criminal organisations increasingly represent themselves as Islamic insurgents, which partly accounts for attacks attributed to unknown jihadists.

North America had the largest regional improvement in score, while sub-Saharan Africa recorded the largest deterioration. North America consists of two countries, the US and Canada, with neither country having a high score; however, the region is the only region where no countries have a nil GTI score.

Sub-Saharan Africa recorded the largest increase in terrorism deaths, rising by eight per cent. Sixty per cent, or 4,023, of all terrorism deaths globally occurred in sub-Saharan Africa. Four of the ten countries with the largest deteriorations in GTI score are located in sub-Saharan Africa: Togo, Djibouti, Central African Republic and Benin. Terrorism deaths in sub-Saharan Africa increased by eight per cent, reversing the small improvement recorded in 2021.

The MENA region recorded only 791 deaths in 2022, a fall of 32 per cent and the lowest number in the region since 2013. Attacks almost halved in the last year, from 1,331 in 2021 to 695 in 2022. Underscoring the changing dynamics in terrorism, the region has dropped from 57 per cent of global terrorism deaths in 2016 to just 12 per cent in 2022. There has also been a substantial drop in suicide bombings in MENA. In 2016, suicide bombings resulted in 1,947 deaths; while in 2022, MENA recorded only six suicide bombings that killed eight people.

South Asia remains the region with the worst average GTI score in 2022. The region recorded 1,354 deaths from terrorism in 2022, a decrease of 30 per cent when compared to the previous year; however, if the improvement in Afghanistan was excluded, then terrorism deaths would have increased by 71 per cent. In Afghanistan, both the Khorasan chapter of IS and the emerging National Resistance Front (NRF) pose a serious threat. Afghanistan and Pakistan remain amongst the ten countries most affected by terrorism in 2022, with deaths in Pakistan rising significantly to 643, a 120 per cent increase from 292 deaths in 2021. The BLA were responsible for a third of these deaths in Pakistan, a ninefold increase from the prior year, making it the fastest growing terrorist group in the world.

In the West, the number of attacks continues to fall, with successive falls each year since 2017. Forty attacks were recorded in 2022, a decrease of 27 per cent when compared to the 55 attacks in 2021. However, the number of deaths more than doubled, albeit from a low base; from nine deaths in 2021 to 19 in 2022, with 11 of these occurring in the US. This was the first increase in terrorism deaths in the West since 2019. In Europe, Islamist extremists carried out two attacks in 2022. Attacks in the US remained low, with only eight attacks recorded in 2022. None were attributed to any known terrorist group. The UK recorded only four attacks and no deaths this year, the first year since 2014 that no deaths have been recorded; while Germany recorded the lowest number of attacks since 2015.

Ideologically motivated terrorism continues to be the most common type of terrorism in the West, with religiously - motivated terrorism declining by 95 per cent since its peak in 2016. All 14 ideologically-motivated deaths can be attributed to far-right terrorism.

Drones are rapidly evolving and changing the way conflicts are conducted. It is also an emerging trend in terrorist attacks, with groups such as IS, Boko Haram and Houthi rebels using the technology for attacks. Current estimates suggest that 65 non-state actors are now able to deploy drones, which can be easily accessible in public marketplaces. They can travel up to 1,500 kilometres, be deployed in swarms, be used in targeted assassinations, hold biological weapons, require little training, and are highly accessible. Additionally,



advances in AI will provide the crafts with launch-and-forget capabilities. At the time of writing, counter-measures to the use of drones by terrorists have not been sufficiently considered and will be an emerging area of concern in the near future.

## Japan's sushi chains roll out defenses against 'sushi terrorism'

Source: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/03/13/business/corporate-business/sushi-pranks-chains-action/>

Mar 13 – Following a series of unhygienic pranks at Japan's popular sushi chains, restaurants are boosting their defenses against so-called [sushi terrorism](#) in an effort to put customers at ease.

But the newly installed measures — from no longer having sushi dishes rotating on conveyor belts to having artificial intelligence-equipped cameras monitor for pranks — may lead to an altered experience at the restaurants.

On Wednesday, three people, including one who drank soy sauce directly from a bottle, were [arrested for allegedly attempting to obstruct a business](#).

Sushi terrorism entered the spotlight after videos taken at a Sushiro outlet and posted on social media went viral, with the culprits licking soy sauce bottles and teacups and rubbing saliva on sushi pieces passing on the conveyor belt.

Sushiro parent Food & Life, which temporarily saw a dive in its stock price following the incidents, immediately took preventive steps, limiting offerings on conveyor belts to ordered items.

"We consider the series of disturbing acts to be a serious matter that shakes the very foundation of the food service industry," said Mayumi Hayashi, spokesperson for Food & Life. "We are doing our utmost to create an environment where customers can eat without worrying (about these things)."



**EDITOR: Do not forget the 1984 Rajneesh attack in the US!**

A conveyor belt sushi chain restaurant in Tokyo. "Sushi terrorism" entered the spotlight after videos posted on social media went viral, with the culprits licking soy sauce bottles and teacups and rubbing saliva on sushi pieces passing on the conveyor belt. | AFP-JJJI

Customers at Sushiro were previously able to grab any dishes from the conveyor belts. But now it's just photos of sushi and other items that rotate past the tables. The company has also started installing plastic panels between tables and conveyor belts in their stores nationwide. Another sushi chain, Choushimaru, said it plans to phase out conveyor belt operations by April 26. All 63 stores will operate under a full order system, with staff delivering items ordered via a touch panel, the company announced. Last month at a Choushimaru location, a cigarette butt was found



inside a container of pickled ginger that is usually left on tables for everyone to share. Since then, Choushimaru has altered operations to have staff bring condiments and utensils to the table after customers have been seated.

Another chain, Kura Sushi, is taking a slightly more technological approach in its bid to deter people from tampering with food. Since 2011, Kura Sushi has used dome-like covers on its sushi dishes at all of its outlets, but earlier this month, the company upgraded its AI-assisted cameras to detect unsavory behavior, including the opening and closing of food covers as they travel on the conveyor belt.

Previously, the cameras were used to discern which types of sushi customers were selecting and to count the number of plates consumed at each table, making for a smoother payment process.

“We’re making changes to have a tamper-proof system,” said Akihiro Tsuji, a spokesperson for Kura Sushi. “Conveyor belt sushi, in a way, is a form of entertainment, and that sense of fun is something we’d like to preserve.”

Amid the concerns about sushi terrorism, Tsuji said Kura Sushi is making sure that condiments such as soy sauce bottles at tables are replaced with sanitized ones every time a new customer comes in, noting that 120 of the company’s stores nationwide now have this rule, with plans to apply it to all stores by May.

The situation is slightly different for Hama-Sushi, which only uses conveyor belts to carry food items on rotation at about 10% of its stores. The remaining locations use “straight lanes” to deliver dishes to customers directly, according to Tetsuya Yamamoto, who is in charge of public relations at the company.

“We’ve implemented this lane since 2016 to ensure that customers eat freshly made food, but this also may have helped with preventing pranks from happening at our stores,” said Yamamoto.

But Hama-Sushi has had its share of incidents, with a video of a man putting wasabi on someone else’s order going viral in January. Another video, from February, showed a high school boy using his chopsticks to directly take pickled ginger out of its container. Yamamoto said the company has started providing pickled ginger in small bags at each table.

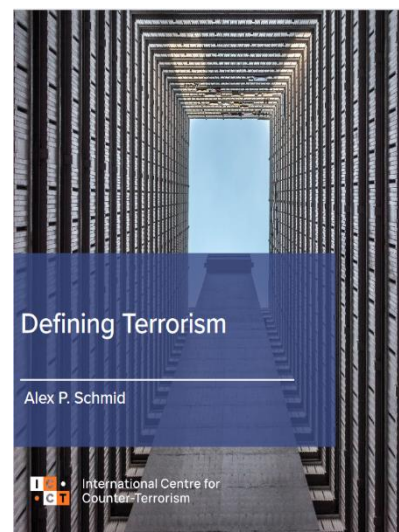
## Defining Terrorism

By Alex P. Schmid

Source: [https://www.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2023-03/Schmid%20-%20Defining%20Terrorism\\_1.pdf](https://www.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2023-03/Schmid%20-%20Defining%20Terrorism_1.pdf)



Mar 13 – This report summarizes, and builds on, some of the author’s previous conceptual work. It approaches the definition of terrorism from five angles: (i) by focusing on the history of terrorism; (ii) by focusing on the psychology of ‘terror’ (the threat and fear factor); (iii) by focusing on forms of political violence other than terrorist violence; (iv) by focusing on the terrorist act; and (v) by focusing on the terrorist. Subsequently it addresses the question who should have definition power? The author looks at how terrorists, victims of terrorism, religious authorities, mass and social media, national governments, the United Nations, and members from academia have tried to define terrorism. In his conclusion, the author pleads for a narrow definition of terrorism. The main body of the text is followed by a sample of definitions of terrorism and a bibliography of books, book chapters, and articles on the subject.



**Prof. em. Alex P. Schmid** is a Distinguished Fellow at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) and Director of the Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI), an international network of scholars who seek to enhance human security through collaborative research. Between 1978 and 2018 he was, for various periods of time, working in different capacities at Leiden University. In addition, he was Extraordinary Professor for Conflict Resolution at Erasmus University in Rotterdam and later held a Chair in International Relations at the University of St. Andrews, where he was also Director of the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV). Prof. em. Alex Schmid has also held various other positions, including, for nearly seven years, Officer-in-Charge of the Terrorism Prevention Branch of UNODC in Vienna in the rank of a Senior Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Officer. His latest book is his *Handbook of Terrorism Prevention and Preparedness*, which features contributions from leading experts in the field and aims to be an authoritative resource on counter-terrorism. You can read the Handbook in full [here](#). Schmid has nearly 200 publications in ten languages to his name, including an award-winning handbook on terrorism (1984, 1988, 2005, 2011, 2013). Until 2009 he was co-editor of the journal *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Since then he is Editor-in-Chief of *Perspectives on Terrorism*, the largest scholarly online journal in the field of Terrorism Studies.





## Europe's second front: The risks and challenges of the Balkan Peninsula's fundamentalist Islamist organizations

By Peter Almos Kiss

*Hungarian Defence Review / Vol 144; Special Issue 2016/2*

Source: [https://www.academia.edu/31928914/EUROPE S SECOND FRONT THE RISKS AND CHALLENGES OF THE BALKAN PENINSULA S FUNDAMENTALIST ISLAMIST ORGANIZATIONS](https://www.academia.edu/31928914/EUROPE_S_SECOND_FRONT_THE_RISKS_AND_CHALLENGES_OF_THE_BALKAN_PENINSULA_S_FUNDAMENTALIST_ISLAMIST_ORGANIZATIONS)

The first front of the terrorist threat to Europe is sufficiently well known: second or third generation young Muslims who grew up in the European states, but are alienated from and hate their host societies, and adopted the radical ideology of political Islam. The second front – radical Islam in the western Balkans – has received less attention. There is a good reason for this: for the time being it is only a distant storm cloud on the horizon. However, it can strike without warning at any moment, like a tropical storm. This essay analyzes the origins of this threat, estimates its extent and seriousness, and recommends policies to prepare for it.



## Sayfullo Saipov will serve life in prison after jury failed to reach unanimous death penalty verdict

Source: <https://abc7ny.com/death-penalty-jury-deliberations-terror/12948773/>

Mar 14 – Sayfullo Saipov will spend life in prison without the possibility of release after a Manhattan federal court jury was unable to reach a unanimous sentencing decision for any of the 9 death-eligible counts he faced in connection with the 2017 ISIS-inspired terror attack that killed eight people.

The lack of unanimity, either for death or for life in prison, automatically means a life sentence at ADX in Florence, Colorado where Saipov will spend at least 22 hours a day alone in his cell.

The jury agreed "sentence of life imprisonment without the possibility of release is a harsh punishment," according to the verdict form.

The jury agreed Saipov intentionally killed his victims after "substantial planning and premeditation" and did it for ISIS. However, the jury did not unanimously find that Saipov represented a future danger or would likely commit acts of violence while in prison.

Word came in a note to the judge.

Federal prosecutors asked the judge to poll each juror, asking them if they believe further discussion could lead to a unanimous verdict. The judge declined.

Instead, the judge brought the jury back, including the alternates, to talk to them.

The judge then decided the jury effectively reached a decision by indicating they cannot reach a decision, as death penalty must be unanimous, or deliberations will continue.

The death penalty deliberations in the case against the convicted ISIS terrorist were stalled by a juror issue last week before resuming Monday.

It was the first such trial since Democrat Joe Biden became president.

**Saipov, 35, was convicted in January of killing five Argentine tourists, two Americans and a Belgian woman in the attack. Inspired by Islamic State group propaganda, Saipov drove a truck down a busy riverside path, running over cyclists before crashing into a school bus.**



Saipov's attorneys asked jurors to spare him the death penalty, noting how several members of his family including his father and sisters expressed hope that someday he would realize how wrong he was to carry out a terrorist attack hoping to win favor with the Islamic State group. And they emphasized that he would spend the rest of his life in seclusion, likely confined to a small cell for at least 22 hours a day with two 15-minute phone calls allowed each month to his family and a few showers permitted each week. Prosecutors urged death, saying Saipov never showed compassion for any of his victims as he sought to kill as many people as he could, even confessing that he had hoped to go to the Brooklyn Bridge after the bike path assault so he could kill more people there. He is a citizen of Uzbekistan but lived in New Jersey. A federal jury in New York has not rendered a death sentence that has withstood legal appeals in decades, with the last execution in 1954. New York state, which no longer has the death penalty, has not executed anyone since 1963.

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:**

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**IPOB among 20 world's deadliest terror groups – Report**Source: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/ssouth-east/587836-ipob-among-20-worlds-deadliest-terror-groups-report.html>

Mar 15 – The outlawed [Indigenous People of Biafra \(IPOB\)](#) is listed among the 20 deadliest terror groups in the world, even as the impact of terrorism has continued to decline in Nigeria, according to the [2023 Global Terrorism Index \(GTI\) report](#).

Nigeria is now in the eighth position globally, among the countries that have been hard hit by terrorism in 2022, according to the report. Nigeria had [occupied](#) the sixth position in last year's report and was in the third position for more than three years before last year.

Afghanistan, for the fourth consecutive year, is the country most impacted by terrorism, followed by three African countries – Burkina Faso (second position), Somalia (third) and Mali (fourth). Syria is in the fifth position, while Pakistan is sixth, and Iraq, seventh.

After Nigeria, Myanmar (Burma) comes next in the ninth position, while Nigeria's neighbour, Niger Republic, is ranked 10th, among the countries hard hit by terrorism in 2022.

The GTI report, released on Tuesday, is in its 10th edition. It tracks terrorism incidents across the world. It is produced by the Institute for Economics & Peace, an independent, non-partisan, non-profit think tank which is headquartered in Sydney, Australia. The GTI report placed IPOB in the 10th position among the deadliest terror groups in the world, while Islamic State, operating around Iraq and Syria, is top on the list.

Islamic State West Africa (ISWA), occupying a sixth position on the global scale, is ranked as the deadliest terror group in Nigeria, followed by Boko Haram, which is the seventh on the global scale.

“The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), designated as a terrorist group by the Nigerian government in 2017, recorded their deadliest year in 2022. They were responsible for 40 attacks and 57 deaths in 2022, an increase from 26 attacks and 34 deaths the year prior,” the report said. IPOB is leading the agitation for the independent state of Biafra, which it wants carved out of the Igbo speaking south-east region and some parts of South-south Nigeria. Last year's GTI report attributed the increase in attacks on police and other security agencies in Nigeria to clashes between law enforcement and IPOB. “Law enforcement, including police and prison officers overtook both military and civilians as the most targeted group of 2021. Attacks against police and prisons increased substantially from one recorded attack in 2020 to 75 in 2021, accounting for over a third of all attacks in Nigeria in 2021.

“This was largely driven by an increase in clashes between law enforcement and separatist groups, such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).” The IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu is detained in Abuja, [accused of terrorism](#).

**The Sahel now accounts for nearly half the world's terrorism**Source: <https://unherd.com/the-post/sahel-accounts-for-nearly-half-the-worlds-terrorism/>

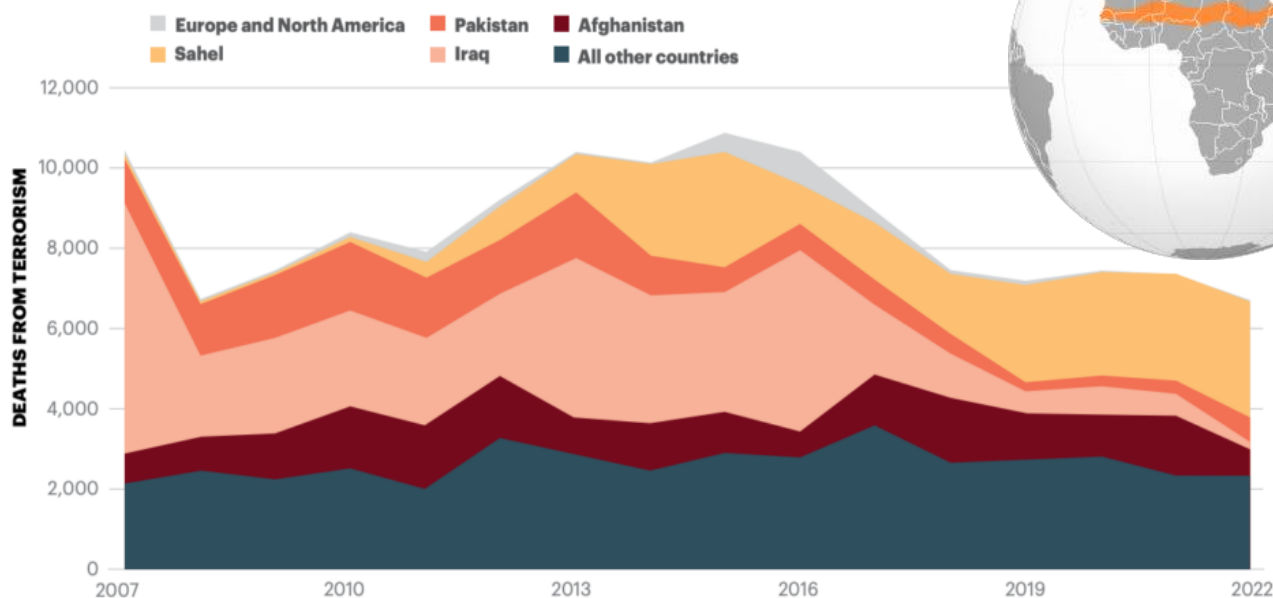
Mar 17 – The Sahel region in Sub-Saharan Africa is now the epicentre of terrorism worldwide, constituting nearly half (43%) of the global death toll, according to the latest [edition](#) of the Global Terrorism Index (GTI). Up from 1% of the global total in 2007, incidents in the Sahel have increased by over 2000% in the last 16 years. As of this year, it accounts for more terror fatalities than South Asia and the Middle East & North



Africa (MENA) combined, with the latter region experiencing a 32% fall this year — its lowest figure since 2013.

The report, produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace, uses data from sources including [TerrorismTracker](#) to study trends relating to terrorist activity across the world. The global death toll caused by terrorist attacks fell by 9% last year and is now 38% lower than its 2015 peak, with a 2022 total of 6,701. The number of attacks worldwide declined by 28% to 3,955, and 121 out of 163 countries surveyed — roughly three-quarters — recorded no deaths from terrorism. That is the highest number of fatality-free nations since 2007. The Sahel has for some years been [viewed](#) as the new arena for jihadi operations. There have been six coup attempts in the region since 2021, four of which were successful. It is this political

Total deaths have decreased 38 per cent from their peak in 2015.



Source: Dragonfly TerrorismTracker; IEP calculations

instability, as well as the correlation between national involvement in war and seriousness of attacks (seven times more deadly than in peaceful countries), which goes some way to explaining these figures, while most activity is concentrated in border areas, where government reach is less extensive. All 10 of the countries most affected by terrorism last year were also embroiled in armed conflict, and 98% of total deaths occurred in warzones. Four of that top ten are in the Sahel, while the region has become a theatre for [proxy conflict](#) between Russia and the West. The number of terrorist attacks in the West is going down, but resulting deaths have risen again after a decrease in recent years. Just 40 attacks were recorded in the West last year, yet the number of deaths from those attacks has almost doubled, from nine to 19, 11 of which took place in the United States. Though the Sahel is a [hotbed for jihadi violence](#), and in spite of Islamic State's continued influence, the latest GTI demonstrates that explicitly religiously motivated terrorism has gone down by 95% since 2016. In Europe, there were just two attacks carried out by Islamist extremists last year. The UK recorded four incidents falling into the category of terror attacks, [resulting in no deaths](#) — the first time this has happened since 2014. The GTI ascribes the Sahel's descent into violence to a number of factors, including "weak governance, ethnic polarisation [...] the growth of transnational Salafi-Islam ideology, political instability [...] and geopolitical competition". The [departure](#) of French troops from Mali in late 2022 after an eight-year counter-terrorism campaign, Operation Barkhane, has led to surge in violence against Malian civilians. Of the Sahel total, 73% of terrorism deaths took place in Burkina Faso and Mali last year.

## Terrorist Attacks More Deadly, Despite Decline in the West

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20230320-terrorist-attacks-more-deadly-despite-decline-in-the-west>

Mar 20 – The tenth annual edition of the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) reveals that attacks are more deadly with 26% more people dying in each incident - the first rise in lethality in five years. After substantial increase in terrorism activity between 2016 and 2019, progress has plateaued with both attacks and deaths remaining roughly the same since 2019. The number of countries recording a death ranged from 43 in 2020 to 42 in 2022. The hub of



terrorism is rapidly changing and moving towards countries facing political instability, conflict, and ecological degradation, particularly in the Sahel. Eight out of the ten countries within this region have the worst scores for food and water scarcity according to the 2022 ETR. Burkina Faso is an illustration of this shift, where deaths caused by terrorism rose by 50% to 1,135, and the number of deaths per attack increased by 8%, leaving the country with the highest death toll.

Last year, terrorism resulted in 6,701 deaths, 38% lower than at their peak in 2015. However, the lethality rate of the two deadliest terrorist groups is increasing. IS, the deadliest, saw an increase of 12% to 2.9 deaths per attack, while al-Shabaab's lethality rate is at its highest level since 2017, increasing by 32% to 2.5 persons per attack. This highlights that the effectiveness of these two groups is rising. The next two deadliest terrorist groups were Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM). IS remained the deadliest terrorist group for the eighth consecutive year, while the BLA, operating in Pakistan, is now the fastest growing terrorist group in the world, with terrorism deaths increasing nine times to 233 deaths in 2022.

Deaths from terrorism in the Sahel increased by 7% and are now higher than South Asia and MENA combined. The area is also the most impacted region in the world, representing 43% of deaths from terrorism globally. The region also faces some of the worst ecological degradation, which is amplified by climate change. The challenges are systemic and include poor food security, lack of adequate water, weak governance, rampant criminality, and some of the fastest population growth rates globally. The region has suffered from six coup attempts since 2021, of which four were successful.

In MENA the overall score continued to improve, building on the last six years with the proportion of global terrorism deaths substantially dropping, from 57% in 2016 to just under 12% in 2022. The region recorded 791 deaths in 2022, a fall of 32% and the lowest number in the region since 2013. Attacks almost halved to 695. There has also been a substantial drop in suicide bombings in MENA, in 2016, suicide bombings resulted in 1,947 deaths. In 2022, there were only six suicide bombings that killed eight people. In the West, the number of attacks continues to fall, with successive falls each year since 2017. Forty attacks were recorded in 2022, a decrease of 27% when compared to the 55 attacks in 2021. However, the number of deaths more than doubled, rising from a low base of nine in 2021 to 19 in 2022. Ten of the deaths were caused by one attack in the US when a gunman killed civilians at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York. This is the first increase in deaths in the West since 2019. Ideologically motivated terrorism, meaning those related to political extremism, continues to be the most common type of terrorism in the West, with religiously motivated terrorism declining by 89% since the peak in 2016.

The dynamics of terrorism are changing with unclaimed attacks becoming more common. Of the 3,955 terrorist attacks recorded in 2022, 33% were not attributed to a group. The fastest growing segment was unknown Jihadists, especially in the Sahel, with deaths eighteen times higher than in 2017.

Steve Killelea, Founder & Executive Chairman, IEP: "Terrorism remains a serious threat to peace with minimal gains made over the last three years. Islamic jihadists have proven adaptable, seeking out areas of instability in which they can operate. It is becoming increasingly obvious that to tackle terrorism, systemic approaches are needed, including addressing poor governance, low levels of government capacity, poverty, group grievances, and the use of kinetic force."

As the conflict in Ukraine consumes the world's attention and its resources, it is crucial that the global fight against terrorism remains high on the political agenda. As its nature evolves it is imperative that the response of the international community continues to evolve. This is no time for complacency and a loss of focus will lead to an increased threat of terrorism in the future. Fighting terrorism is one of the few remaining areas where the world's superpowers have a common goal."

It is evident that the war in Ukraine has diverted military resources – leading to increased instability, including in the Sahel, where Russia and France have wound down their military presence. Contrary to the overall MENA trend in Syria, IS activity is on the rise, causing 42% more terrorism deaths than in 2021, resulting from slightly fewer attacks. The earthquake in the region will lead to increased instability, as it occurred in areas where IS operate. The 344 terrorism deaths caused by IS in Syria in 2022 is also likely to increase. Violent conflict and war are the most significant drivers of terrorism, with 88% of terrorist attacks and 98% of deaths occurring in countries with active conflicts. Several countries are currently experiencing significant ecological and climate induced changes, particularly in conflict-prone areas, exacerbating these problems. According to the 2022 ETR, 27 countries face catastrophic ecological threats, while also having low levels of societal resilience.

These hotspot countries are clustered in three regions: sub-Saharan Africa, MENA, and South Asia, they are also the most affected regions by terrorism.

The evolution of drones is rapidly transforming the nature of conflict and emerged as a new trend in attacks with groups like IS, Boko Haram, and the Houthis using the technology. **The latest estimates suggest that 65 non-state actors can now deploy drones, which have a range from a few kilometres up to 1,500 kilometres for military grade drones.** Their use in the 2019 Houthi-Saudi Aramco attack illustrates the power of this technology, with drones launched from Yemen, more than 800km away. The current lack of existing countermeasures means that drones are likely to be used more frequently.



## “He Has a Battle Rifle”: Police Feared Uvalde Gunman’s AR-15

By Zach Despart

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20230321-he-has-a-battle-rifle-police-feared-uvalde-gunman-s-ar15>

Mar 21 – Once they saw a torrent of bullets tear through a classroom wall and metal door, the first police officers in the hallway of Robb Elementary School concluded they were outgunned. And that they could die.

The gunman had an AR-15, a rifle design used by U.S. soldiers in every conflict since Vietnam. Its bullets flew toward the officers at three times the speed of sound and could have pierced their body armor like a hole punch through paper. They grazed two officers in the head, and the group retreated.

Uvalde Police Department Sgt. Daniel Coronado stepped outside, breathing heavily, and got on his radio to warn the others.

“I have a male subject with an AR,” Coronado said.

The dispatch crackled on the radio of another officer on the opposite side of the building.

“Fuck,” that officer said.

“AR,” another exclaimed, alerting others nearby.

Almost a year after Texas’ deadliest school shooting killed 19 children and two teachers, there is still confusion among investigators, law enforcement leaders and politicians over how nearly 400 law enforcement officers could have performed so poorly. People have blamed cowardice or poor leadership or a lack of sufficient training for why police waited more than an hour to breach the classroom and subdue an amateur 18-year-old adversary.

But in their own words, during and after their botched response, the officers pointed to another reason: They were unwilling to confront the rifle on the other side of the door.

A Texas Tribune investigation, based on police body cameras, emergency communications and interviews with investigators that have not been made public, found officers had concluded that immediately confronting the gunman would be too dangerous. Even though some officers were armed with the same rifle, they opted to wait for the arrival of a Border Patrol SWAT team, with more protective body armor, stronger shields and more tactical training — even though the unit was based more than 60 miles away.

“You knew that it was definitely an AR,” Uvalde Police Department Sgt. Donald Page said in an interview with investigators after the school shooting. “There was no way of going in. ... We had no choice but to wait and try to get something that had better coverage where we could actually stand up to him.”

“We weren’t equipped to make entry into that room without several casualties,” Uvalde Police Department Detective Louis Landry said in a separate investigative interview. He added, “Once we found out it was a rifle he was using, it was a different game plan we would have had to come up with. It wasn’t just going in guns blazing, the Old West style, and take him out.”

Uvalde school district Police Chief Pete Arredondo, who was fired in August after state officials cast him as the incident commander and blamed him for the delay in confronting the gunman, told investigators the day after the shooting he chose to focus on evacuating the school over breaching the classroom because of the type of firearm the gunman used.

“We’re gonna get scrutinized (for) why we didn’t go in there,” Arredondo said. “I know the firepower he had, based on what shells I saw, the holes in the wall in the room next to his. ... The preservation of life, everything around (the gunman), was a priority.”

None of the officers quoted in this story agreed to be interviewed by the Tribune.

That hesitation to confront the gun allowed the gunman to terrorize students and teachers in two classrooms for more than an hour without interference from police. It [delayed medical care](#) for more than two dozen gunshot victims, including three who were still alive when the Border Patrol team finally ended the shooting but who later died.

Mass shooting protocols [adopted](#) by law enforcement nationwide call on officers to stop the attacker as soon as possible. But police in other mass shootings — including at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, and the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida — also hesitated to confront gunmen armed with AR-15-style rifles.

Even if the law enforcement response had been flawless and police had immediately stopped the gunman, the death toll in Uvalde still would have been significant. Investigators concluded most victims were killed in the minutes before police arrived.

But in the aftermath of the shooting, there has been little grappling with the role the gun played. Texas Republicans, who control every lever of state government, have talked about school safety, mental health and police training — but not gun control.

A [comprehensive and scathing report](#) of law enforcement’s response to the shooting, released by a Texas House investigative committee chaired by Republican [Rep. Dustin Burrows](#) in July, made no mention of the comments by law enforcement officers in interviews that illustrated trepidation about the AR-15.

Other lawmakers have taken the position that the kind of weapon used in the attack made no difference.



“This man had enough time to do it with his hands or a baseball bat, and so it’s not the gun. It’s the person,” [Sen. Bob Hall](#), R-Edgewood, said in a hearing a month after the shooting.

Republican state and legislative leaders, who are in the midst of the first legislative session since the shooting, are resisting calls for gun restrictions, like raising the age to purchase semi-automatic rifles like the AR-15. Republican [Gov. Greg Abbott](#) has suggested such a law would be unconstitutional, while [House Speaker Dade Phelan](#) said he doubts his chamber would support it.

Abbott, [Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick](#) and four Republican members of the Legislature — Phelan, Hall, Burrows and [Rep. Ryan Guillen](#), chair of the House committee that will hear all gun-related proposals, declined to discuss the findings of this story or did not respond. Two gun advocacy groups, Texas Gun Rights and the Texas State Rifle Association, also did not respond.

Limiting access to these kinds of rifles may not decrease the frequency of mass shootings, which plagued the country before the rifle became popular among gun owners. During the decade that the federal assault weapons ban was in place, beginning in 1994, the number of mass shootings was roughly the same as in the decade prior, according to a mass shooting database maintained by Mother Jones. It also would not address the root causes that motivate mass shooters, merely limit the lethality of the tools at their disposal.

Relatives of Uvalde victims, like Jesse Rizo, whose 9-year-old niece Jackie Cazares was killed in the shooting, say the comments by police who responded in Uvalde are undeniable proof that rifles like the AR-15 should be strictly regulated.

“(Police) knew the monster behind the door was not the kid. It’s the rifle the kid is holding,” said Rizo, referring to the 18-year-old gunman. “It’s the freaking AR that they’re afraid of. ... Their training doesn’t say sit back and wait.”

### A Weapon of War

Officers arriving at Robb Elementary on May 24 had similar reactions as they realized that the gunman had an AR-15.

“You know what kind of gun?” state Trooper Richard Bogdanski asked in a conversation captured on his body-camera footage outside of the school.

**EDITOR’S COMMENT:** All police officers and officials must see this 2003 movie – worldwide!

“AR. He has a battle rifle,” a voice responded.

“Does he really?” another asked.

“What’s the safest way to do this? I’m not trying to get clapped out,” Bogdanski said. They had good reason to worry: The AR-15 was designed to efficiently kill humans. ArmaLite, a small gunmaker in California, designed the AR-15 in the late 1950s as a next-generation military rifle. Compared with the U.S. Army’s infantry rifle at the time, the AR-15 was less heavy, had a shorter barrel and used lighter ammunition, allowing soldiers to carry more on the battlefield. It also fired a smaller-caliber bullet but compensated for it by increasing the speed at which it is propelled from the barrel.

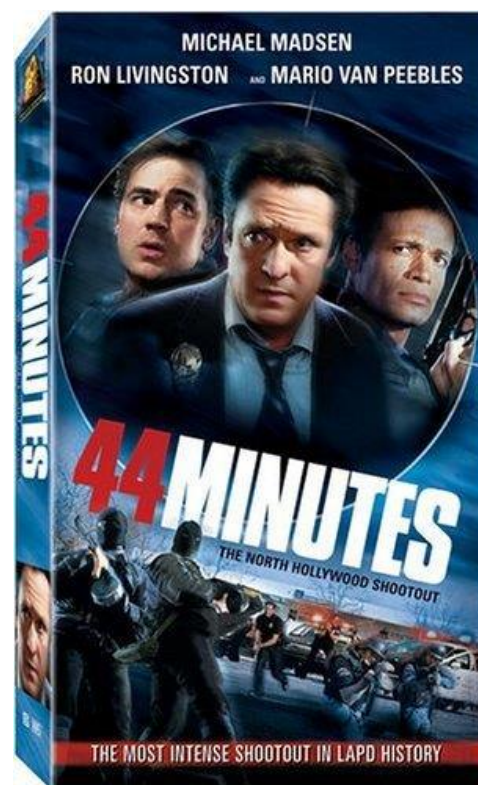
A declassified 1962 Department of Defense report from the Vietnam War found the AR-15 would be ideal for use by South Vietnamese soldiers, who were smaller in stature and had less training than their American counterparts, for five reasons: its easy maintenance, accuracy, rapid rate of fire, light weight and “excellent killing or stopping power.”

“The lethality of the AR-15 and its reliability record were particularly impressive,” the authors reported.

Its bullets could also penetrate the body armor worn by the initial responding officers to Robb Elementary, an added level of danger they were aware of. While most departments, including the city of Uvalde’s, have rifle-rated body armor, it is not typically worn by officers on patrol because of its added weight.

“Had anybody gone through that door, he would have killed whoever it was,” Uvalde Police Department Lt. Javier Martinez told investigators the day after the shooting. You “can only carry so many ballistic vests on you. That .223 (caliber) round would have gone right through you.”

Coronado echoed the concern in his own interviews with investigators about the moment he realized the gunman had a battle rifle. “I knew too it wasn’t a pistol. ... I was like, ‘Shit, it’s a rifle,’” he said. He added, “The way he was shooting, he was probably going to take all of us out.”



The AR-15 is less powerful than many rifles, such as those used to hunt deer or other large game. But it has significantly more power than handguns, firing a bullet that has nearly three times the energy of the larger round common in police pistols.

The AR-15 also causes more damage to the human body. Handgun bullets typically travel through the body in a straight line, according to a 2016 study published by *The Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery*. High-energy bullets become unstable as they decelerate in flesh, twisting and turning as they damage a wider swath of tissue. This creates “not only a permanent cavity the size of the caliber of the bullet, but also a ... second cavity often many times larger than the bullet itself.”

The Defense Department report detailed this effect in plainer language, describing the AR-15’s performance in a firefight with Viet Cong at a range of 50 meters: “One man was shot in the head; it looked like it exploded. A second man was hit in the chest; his back was one big hole.”

The Defense Department placed its first mass order for the rifle in 1963, calling its version the M16, and based each of its service rifles until 2022 on this design. The only significant difference between the military and civilian versions of the AR-15 is that the military rifle can fire automatically, meaning the user can depress the trigger to shoot multiple rounds. The civilian AR-15 is semi-automatic, requiring a trigger pull for each round.

In the context of mass shootings, it is a distinction without a meaningful difference: Both rates of fire can kill a roomful of people in seconds.

That’s what happened in Uvalde.

In two and a half minutes, before any police officer set foot inside the school, the gunman fired more than 100 rounds at students and teachers from point-blank range. Several victims lost large portions of their heads, photos taken by investigators show. Bullets tore gashes in flesh as long as a foot. They shattered a child’s shin, nearly severed another’s arm at the elbow, ripped open another’s neck, blasted a hole the size of a baseball in another’s hip. Other rounds penetrated the wall of Room 111, passed through the empty Room 110, punctured another wall and wounded a student and teacher in Room 109, who survived.

When medics finally reached the victims, there was nothing they could do for most, they said in interviews with investigators. Eighteen of the 21 were pronounced dead at the school. Police assigned each a letter of the alphabet and took DNA samples so they could be identified by family.

### **Rifle Popularity Surges**

Ruben Torres, who saw what the rifle can do in combat while serving as a Marine infantryman in Iraq and Afghanistan, never imagined someone would use it to try and kill his daughter, Khloie, who was wounded by bullet fragments at Robb Elementary.

The Corps spends so much time drilling firearm safety into Marines that Torres can recite the rules from memory. Even now, he has no objection to civilians owning AR-15s, but he thinks they should be required to complete training like soldiers because too many who buy one treat it like a toy.

“You get people that never served in the military or law enforcement, and yet they’re wannabes,” Torres said. “They purchase this weapons system, not having a clue how to use it, the type of power and the level of maturity needed to even operate it.”

It was customers seeking a military experience who helped spur the rifle’s surge in popularity over the past 15 years, gun industry researchers say. Civilians have been able to buy an AR-15 since the mid-1960s, but for decades it was a niche product whose largest customer segment included police SWAT units.

A federal assault weapons ban expired in 2004, creating a new opportunity to market rifles like the AR-15 to the general public, said Timothy Lytton, a professor at the Georgia State University College of Law who researches the gun industry.

“In the 2000s, there was a shift in the industry’s marketing to people who are not just looking for self-defense, but people who are also looking for some sort of tactical experience,” Lytton said. He said this new consumer wanted to “simulate military combat situations.”

Sales of the rifle exploded. The National Shooting Sports Foundation, a prominent trade group, estimates American gunmakers produced 1.4 million semi-automatic rifles like the AR-15 in 2015, excluding exports — a figure 10 times higher than a decade earlier. This group of semi-automatic rifles accounted for 89% of the rifles made by domestic manufacturers in 2020, according to government and industry data.

As it grew more popular with the public, the rifle also became more popular with mass shooters. AR-15-style rifles weren’t used in any mass shootings until 2007, according to the [mass shooting database](#) maintained by Mother Jones, which includes indiscriminate killings of at least three people in public places, excluding crimes that stem from robbery, gang activity or other conventionally explained motives. Gunmen used the rifle in 5% of attacks that decade and 27% in the 2010s. 2022 cemented the AR-15 as the weapon of choice for mass shooters. They wielded the rifle in 67% of the 12 massacres that year, including a parade in Illinois where seven were slain and a supermarket shooting in New York that killed 10. The death toll in Uvalde exceeded them both.



### The Gunman's Purchase

Little is known about what motivated the shooter in Uvalde or why he targeted the elementary school he once attended. But signs of planning, and a fixation on guns, stretched back months.

Beginning in late 2021, he began buying accessories: an electronic gun sight, rifle straps, shin guards, a vest with pockets to hold body armor and a hellfire trigger, which can be snapped onto semi-automatic weapons to allow near-automatic fire. He faced a single significant obstacle to assembling an arsenal: Under Texas law, the minimum age to purchase long guns like rifles is 18. That hindrance vanished on May 16, 2022, his 18th birthday. He ordered an AR-15-style rifle from the website of Daniel Defense, a gunmaker that has pioneered marketing firearms via social media. Its sleek Instagram videos often feature young men rapidly firing the company's rifles, wearing outfits that resemble combat uniforms. Other posts feature members of the U.S. military. A lawsuit filed by Uvalde victims' families against Daniel Defense alleges the gunmaker's marketing intentionally targets vulnerable young men driven by military fantasies.

The company rejected these claims and cast the lawsuit as an attempt to bankrupt the gun industry.

"To imply that images portraying the heroic work of our soldiers risking their lives in combat inspires young men back home to shoot children is inexcusable," then-CEO Marty Daniel said last year. The case is ongoing.

Federal law requires weapons purchased online to be picked up at a licensed dealer, which also performs a background check. The Uvalde gunman had no criminal history and had never been arrested, ensuring he would pass. He had the Daniel Defense rifle shipped to Oasis Outback, a gun store in town. The gunman visited the store alone three times between May 17 and May 20. First, he purchased a Smith & Wesson AR-15-style rifle, then returned to buy 375 rounds of ammunition, then came back again to pick up the Daniel Defense rifle. Surveillance footage from the shop shows an employee placing the case on the counter and opening it. The gunman picked up the rifle, peered down the barrel and placed his finger on the trigger — a breach of a cardinal rule of gun safety, to never do so until you are ready to fire. The gun store's owner told investigators he was an average customer with no "red flags," though patrons told FBI agents he was "very nervous looking" and "appeared odd and looked like one of those school shooters."

An online order he'd placed for 1,740 rifle cartridges arrived at 6:09 p.m. on May 23. In the eight days after he became eligible to purchase firearms, he bought two AR-15-style rifles and 2,115 rounds of ammunition.

He had broken no laws. He had aroused no suspicion with authorities. And, like many mass shooters, he had given no public warning about his plan. May 24, the day of the Uvalde shooting, was most likely the first time he had ever fired a gun, investigators concluded. To do so with an AR-15 is simple: Insert a loaded magazine, cock the rifle to force a cartridge into the firing chamber, slide the safety switch off and pull the trigger. Still, he initially struggled to attach the magazine correctly in the previous days, a relative recalled to investigators, and it kept falling to the floor.

He figured it out by the time he pointed one of the rifles at his grandmother and shot her in the face, amid a dispute about his cellphone plan. The bullet tore a gash in the right side of her face; she required a lengthy hospitalization but survived. He took only the Daniel Defense rifle to the school, leaving the Smith & Wesson at his grandmother's truck, which he had stolen, driven three blocks and crashed on the west edge of the elementary campus.

### When Other Officers Hesitated

The 77-minute delay in breaching the fourth grade classroom was an "abject failure" that set the law enforcement profession back a decade, the Texas state police director [said in June](#). Police had failed to follow protocol developed after the 1999 Columbine school shooting that states the first priority is to confront shooters and stop the killing. Yet even beyond Uvalde, the performance of police against active shooters with AR-15-style rifles — which were rarely used in mass shootings when the standards were developed — is inconsistent. When a gunman began firing an AR-15-style rifle in 2016 at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, an officer providing security waited six minutes for backup before pursuing the suspect into the club; he later said his handgun was "no match" for the shooter's rifle. Two years later, a sheriff's deputy at Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida did not confront the AR-15-wielding shooter there, either. Investigators said he instead retreated for four and a half minutes, during which the gunman shot 10 students and teachers, six fatally. In some instances, police have confronted the rifle without hesitation. Officers killed a gunman who had fatally shot seven people in a 2019 shooting spree in Midland and Odessa. During the 2021 supermarket shooting in Boulder, Colorado, one of the 10 victims the gunman killed with his AR-15 was one of the first responding officers. The extreme stress the body experiences in a gunfight slows critical thinking and motor skills, said Massad Ayoob, a police firearms trainer since the 1970s. Officers can overcome this with repeated training that is as realistic as possible, he said. Without it, they are more likely to freeze or retreat. "Have you ever been in a firefight? Have you ever been in a situation where you were about to die?" said Kevin Lawrence, a law enforcement officer for 40 years and the





executive director of the Texas Municipal Police Association. “None of us knows how we’re going to react to that circumstance until we’re in it.”

Improved training that reinforces the expectation that police immediately confront active shooters would improve the likelihood that they do so, said Jimmy Perdue, president of the Texas Police Chiefs Association. But because they attack at random locations and times, he said it is unrealistic to expect that all 800,000 law enforcement officers in the United States would be prepared. That rifles like the AR-15 are especially lethal, he acknowledged, adds an additional mental obstacle for officers.

“All we can do is play the averages ... and hope that the training will take place and they’ll be able to understand the gravity of the situation and respond accordingly,” Perdue said. “But there is no guarantee that the one officer that happens to be on duty when this next shooting occurs is going to respond correctly.” In many cases, whether officers follow active-shooter training is irrelevant. Most mass shootings end in less than five minutes, research from the FBI concluded, often before officers arrive.

This was the case in Newtown, Connecticut, where a gunman killed 26 people at an elementary school in 2012, and in Aurora, Colorado, where another killed 12 people at a movie theater the same year. Both used AR-15-style rifles.

### Resistance to Gun Control

Texas has a long, proud and increasingly less-regulated history of gun ownership. It is rooted in a belief in personal responsibility, that average citizens can sensibly own guns to protect themselves and their families and intervene to stop armed criminals in the absence of police. “Ultimately, as we all know, what stops armed bad guys is armed good guys,” said U.S. [Sen. Ted Cruz](#) at the National Rifle Association convention in Houston three days after the Uvalde shooting.

He cited two examples: the Border Patrol team who finally breached the classroom at Robb Elementary and the firearms instructor who shot the gunman who in 2017 attacked a church in Sutherland Springs with an AR-15-style rifle. Both actions potentially saved lives. But they failed to prevent the murders of 47 people. This year a group of Uvalde families has been regularly visiting the Capitol to push for stricter gun laws, including to raise the age someone can legally purchase AR-15-style rifles to 21.

The mass shootings since 2016 in Dallas, Sutherland Springs, Santa Fe, El Paso and Midland-Odessa — all but one committed with a semi-automatic rifle — did not persuade the Legislature to restrict access to guns. Instead, [lawmakers relaxed regulations](#), including allowing the open carry of handguns without a license or training. And Democrats who have proposed a number of new restrictions this session admit that their bills face nearly insurmountable odds. The AR-15s carried by state troopers at the Capitol give Sandra Torres flashbacks. Her daughter, 10-year-old Eliahna, a promising softball player, died at Robb Elementary. Sandra never got to tell her she’d made the all-star team. Mack Segovia, Eliahna’s stepfather, didn’t grow up around guns, but he’s seen enough pictures of 200-pound wild hogs his friends tore up with AR-15s while hunting to understand what the rifle did to his daughter.

The couple has made the six-hour round trip to Austin five times already, squeezing with other families into tiny offices for meetings with lawmakers to ask for what they think are commonsense regulations. Most legislators are cordial, but sometimes the families can tell they are being rebuffed, Torres said. Her partner recalled how the House speaker drove 360 miles from his home in Beaumont to Uvalde to [tell families](#) he did not support new gun laws, which struck him as a hell of a long way for a man to travel to say: Sorry, I can’t help you. The experience is frustrating. Torres and Segovia said they did not have a strong opinion about guns until their daughter was taken from them by a young man who bought one designed for combat, no questions asked. They said they feel compelled, if Eliahna’s death served any purpose, to make it harder for other people to do the same.

“Those were babies,” Segovia said. “I promise you, if it happened to those people in the Senate, or the governor, it would be different.”



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# CHEM NEWS



## The Forever Pollution Project

### Journalists tracking PFAS across Europe

Source: <https://foreverpollution.eu/>



More than 17 000 sites all over Europe are contaminated by the “forever chemicals” PFAS, an exclusive, months-long investigation from 18 European newsrooms shows. The investigation “The Forever Pollution Project” reveals an additional 21 000 presumptive contamination sites due to current or past industrial activity. The contamination revealed by this project spreads all over Europe.

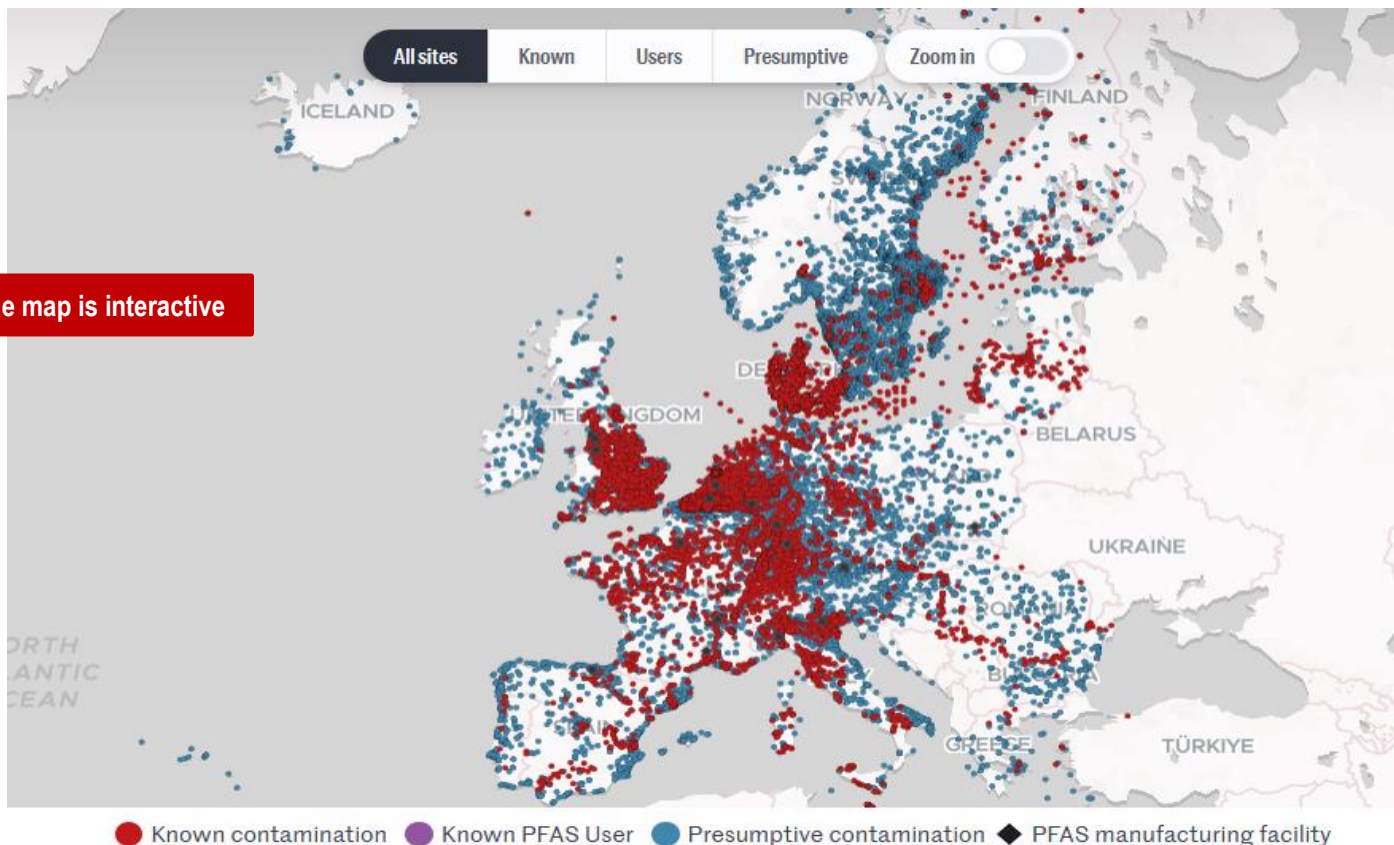
In early February 2023, the European Chemicals Agency ECHA published a ban proposal on all PFAS – or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. “The Forever Pollution Project” can now reveal that there is way more contamination all over Europe than has been publicly known. The journalists gathered 100 datasets and filed dozens of FOIA requests to build a first-of-its-kind map of PFAS contamination in Europe. The scientific methodology behind this “peer-reviewed journalism experience” is borrowed from the [PFAS Project Lab](#) and the [PFAS Sites and Community Resources Map in the U.S.](#)

“It is a necessary and also scary result that you have achieved here,” said Phil Brown (Northeastern University, Boston), who coordinated the work behind the American map. “Something similar has been missing for Europe,” said Martin Scheringer, a professor of environmental chemistry at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (Zürich, Switzerland). “Your contribution is therefore extremely important and valuable.”

The project shows that there are 20 manufacturing facilities and more than 2 100 sites in Europe that can be considered PFAS hotspots – places where contamination reaches levels considered to be hazardous to the health of exposed people. The problem: It is extremely expensive to get rid of these chemicals, once they have found their way into the environment. The cost of remediation will likely reach the tens of billions of Euros. In several places, the authorities have already given up and decided to keep the toxic chemicals in the ground, because it’s not possible to clean them up.

PFAS are used in a lot of different industries, from Teflon to Scotchgard to make non-stick, non-stain or waterproof products. They don’t degrade in the environment and are very mobile, so they can be detected in water, air, rain, otters and cod, boiled eggs and human beings. PFAS are linked to cancer and infertility, among a dozen other diseases. It was estimated that PFAS put a [burden of between 52 and 84 billion euros](#) on European health systems each year.





PFAS emissions are not regulated in the EU yet, and only a few Member States have adopted limits. All the PFAS experts we interviewed were adamant that the thresholds set by the EU for implementation in 2026 are much too high to protect human health. “The Forever Pollution Project” also uncovered an extensive lobbying process to water down the proposed EU-wide PFAS ban. Several dozen FOIA requests in Brussels and other European cities revealed that for months now, more than 100 industry associations, think tanks, law firms and major companies have been working to influence the European Commission and the Member States to weaken the forthcoming PFAS ban.

Over the course of several months of investigation, the “Forever Pollution Project” dissected more than 1 200 confidential documents from the European Commission and the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) as well as hundreds of open sources. Analysing these documents, the reporters behind “The Forever Pollution Project” can show how companies from Chemours to 3M or Solvay are trying to exempt their products from the ban. All 17 000 contamination sites and all 21 000 presumptive contamination sites are available at <http://lemde.fr/PFASmap>. Links to reporting partners is available at [www.foreverpollution.eu](http://www.foreverpollution.eu).

The Forever Pollution Project was initially developed by Le Monde (France), NDR, WDR and Süddeutsche Zeitung (Germany), RADAR Magazine and Le Scienze (Italy), The Investigative Desk and NRC (Netherlands). The project was financially support by [Journalismfund.eu](http://Journalismfund.eu) and Investigative Journalism for Europe ([IJ4EU](http://IJ4EU)). The investigation has been further developed and investigated by Knack (Belgium), Denik Referendum (Czechia), Politiken (Denmark), YLE (Finland), Reporters United (Greece), Latvian Radio (Latvia), Datadista (Spain), SRF (Switzerland), Watershed Investigations / The Guardian (UK). The crossborder collaborative process was supported by [Arena for Journalism in Europe](http://Arena for Journalism in Europe).

## 17 Countries Join Forces to Prevent Chemical Terrorism

Source: <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/17-countries-join-forces-to-prevent-chemical-terrorism/>

Feb 24 – On February 21, a large-scale Referral Action Day targeting the misuse of dangerous chemicals by terrorist groups took place at Europol’s headquarters in The Hague. Specialized counterterrorism units from 17 countries worked hand in hand with Europol’s European Counter Terrorism Centre to restrict access to instructions online on how to use high-risk chemicals for terrorist attacks.



## ICI C<sup>2</sup>BRNE DIARY – March 2023

A number of chemicals routinely used in industrial processes or professional functions can react upon mixing, producing hazardous substances that could be used to carry out chemical terrorist attacks.

Investigators scoured the clear and dark web to identify and refer for removal propaganda and instructions on the use of high-risk chemicals, and the toxic gasses they generate, in terrorist material and online fora.

As a result, over 120 individual pieces of content were referred to 21 online service providers to secure their swift removal.

The referred content covered five languages and was disseminated by terrorist supporting networks, including jihadist, right-wing and left-wing terrorist groups.

The findings of this Referral Action Day will feed into the analysis of the current threat picture on high-risk chemicals in the impact assessment produced by the European Commission.

**Participating countries: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Colombia, Czechia, Denmark, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Moldova, Montenegro, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Spain, United Kingdom.**

## The Train Derailment in Ohio Was a Disaster Waiting to Happen

By John McCracken

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20230224-the-train-derailment-in-ohio-was-a-disaster-waiting-to-happen>



Five (out of 11) derailed train cars were carrying 115,580 gallons of vinyl chloride.

Feb 24 – When a freight train filled with volatile chemicals derailed in rural Ohio earlier this month, it set off a chain of reactions: the evacuation of a town of nearly 5,000 people; a massive black plume of smoke from a controlled burn; the death of fish in local waterways; and the necessity of monitoring the local air for pollutants.

While the disaster garners headlines, researchers and chemical spill experts told *Grist* it's a situation that plays out far too often across the country.

The train that derailed around 9 p.m. on February 3 was carrying chemicals used in a variety of industries, from [plastics](#) to agriculture, each with a [specific degree of hazard](#).

The rail industry is responsible for a large share of the movement of highly volatile chemicals and explosives across the country. But for years, it has been plagued by harsh working conditions and a lack of rigorous safety standards and transparency.



Justin Mikulka, a reporter who spent years researching the rail industry's pitfalls and disasters and wrote the book [Bomb Trains: How Industry Greed and Regulatory Failure Put the Public at Risk](#), said weakened regulations and a rush to reopen is to be expected. "While the trains are still burning, they're rebuilding the rails," Mikulka told Grist. "It's again an excellent example of how they put profit over public safety."

Mikulka said, be it chemicals or crude oil, trains are getting longer, going faster, and moving through the majority of the nation's backyard. These lines are often dubbed "[bomb trains](#)" by those in the rail industry and environmental groups.

In the last two decades, train lengths have increased by 25 percent, according to the [Government Accountability Office](#). Currently, the Federal Railroad Administration, or FRA, does not have a limit on how long a train can be. While derailments have decreased in recent years, the severity has increased as the industry focuses on longer trains with small crews.

"The accidents that do occur, because of the longer trains, tend to be bigger accidents — more cars and more potential damage," Steven Ditmeyer, a former head of the office of research and development at the FRA, [told](#) Vox.

Mikulka said that the Ohio derailment could have been worse.

A Norfolk Southern spokesperson told Grist that there were three operators on board the train that derailed, one conductor, one engineer, and a conductor trainee, none of whom were injured. In recent years, rail companies have lobbied for one-person crews to cut costs and rail unions have urged for two-person crews to be mandated at the federal level. Under the Trump administration, the FRA dropped the two-crew proposal, [saying at the time](#) "no regulation of train crew staffing is necessary or appropriate for railroad operations to be conducted safely."

When crews are stretched thin, Mikulka said, accidents and derailments are just waiting to happen. He said calls from workers for increased safety measures have gone unheard. "There are so many different points in this process where we look at how we can make it safer, and the rail company says 'Yeah, but we don't want to pay for that.'"

At a press conference last week Ohio Governor Mike DeWine said the train that went through East Palestine was not marked as hazardous, despite the chemicals on board. He called it "[absurd](#)" and is asking Congress to investigate how hazardous materials are handled.

"We should know when we have trains carrying hazardous material that are going through the state of Ohio," DeWine said.

The problem, however, is that freight trains are almost always carrying toxic materials, and most communities they barrel through don't know what is onboard.

Over 250 trains derailed in the last decade, according to the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, or PHMSA, a branch of the federal Department of Transportation. Nearly half of those derailments involved hazardous waste.

Rick Hind, a retired legislative director with Greenpeace with decades of chemical regulation experience, has worked firsthand with various chemical spills. He said the nation's rail systems are the "wild west" when it comes to regulation and transparency of moving hazardous materials.

Currently, the Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA, monitors the chemicals used inside [roughly](#) 12,000 authorized chemical facilities which are estimated to impact nearly 175 million people in the country. But when those chemicals are on the rails going to and from facilities, regulations change.

PHMSA is supposed to set safety standards for trains in motion, but the agency has a notoriously brittle track record. Former California congressperson Jackie Speier called the agency "fundamentally broken" in the aftermath of a 2010 natural gas pipeline explosion in her state.

"PHMSA is not only a toothless tiger, but one that has overdosed on Quaaludes and is passed out on the job," Speier [said](#) in a 2016 hearing. When Washington State attempted to regulate the movement of hazardous chemicals and oils within its borders in 2019, the federal government stepped in to overturn this ruling, with PHMSA legal counsel [saying](#) "a state cannot use safety as a pretext for inhibiting market growth."

The EPA is currently reviewing its rules for [Safer Communities by Chemical Accident Prevention](#). But, industry pressure from a large rail industry lobbying group, the Association of American Railroads, has already [mounted against](#) the federal agency's proposals for the management of moving hazardous materials.

"We clearly need to revamp the safety rules on railroads," Hind told Grist. "If there aren't strong legal requirements, you can't have strong regulations."

Hind said workers in the rail industry face the compounding pressures of lack of paid sick and leave time, failing technology, and thin crews aboard trains that have gotten longer and longer over the years.

"Figuratively speaking, how can you check the tires on a train that is a mile and a half long?," Hind said.

According to a report from Vice, the train that derailed in Ohio had a reputation for being difficult for rail workers, earning it the nickname "32 Nasty," about the 32N name it was assigned. "This train is notorious for breaking knuckles or drawbars or some other malfunctions," a rail worker told [Vice](#).



In addition to fighting against mandated crew size, [train length regulations](#), [brake technology changes](#), and new standards for moving hazardous chemicals, the rail industry has not been known to adhere to a National Transportation Safety Board, NTSB, voluntary, confidential “close call” reporting system, which is an anonymous way for employees to report near-misses and unsafe incidents.

In a [recent letter](#) from Greg Regan, president of the Transportation Trades Department of the AFL-CIO union, to the head of the FRA, he said none of the seven major U.S. freight railroads voluntarily use this reporting program.

When asked if Norfolk uses this reporting system, a spokesperson told Grist that the company operates “its own reporting system of that nature with its workforce.” The spokesperson declined to comment or speculate on the cause of the derailment, citing an ongoing NTSB investigation.

Ahead of the final investigation report, Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro issued a letter to Norfolk Southern, outlining concerns that the company did not immediately notify Pennsylvania emergency management and was not forthcoming with the specific chemicals and amounts on board the derailed train.

“Norfolk Southern failed to explore all potential courses of action, including some that may have kept the rail line closed longer but could have resulted in a safer overall approach for first responders, residents, and the environment,” the governor [wrote](#).

While the people of East Palestine, Ohio, and officials await the NTSB investigation, expected to be released in the next few weeks, cleanup continues. Federal investigations could be underway as Congressmembers have expressed [plans to investigate](#) after the final investigation is released. A spokesperson for the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Republicans told Grist that they are currently in contact with the federal agencies involved and Norfolk Southern and will know the next steps once confirmed causes are determined.

Despite outcries from [sitting members of Congress](#) for more federal help, a spokesperson for Ohio Governor DeWine told Grist that they do not expect to announce a disaster declaration, which would qualify the state for the use of Federal Emergency Management Agency aid. Late last week, the Governor’s office announced they will be accepting federal on-the-ground assistance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

DeWine spokesman Dan Tierney told Grist that one of the reasons for declining federal aid is that “Norfolk Southern has been picking up the tabs” on expenses that would normally go to local and state governments. “They’re picking up the testing costs and providing that to third party vendors,” he continued.

Tierney said that there has now become a “public expectation” that if there’s a high level of hazardous chemicals moving through a community on a freight train, state and local agencies should know ahead of time.

## Avon looks to further Middle East presence at IDEX

Source: <https://www.shephardmedia.com/news/defence-notes/avon-looks-to-further-middle-east-presence-at-idx/>

Feb 25 – [Avon Protection](#) is seeking to build on its footprint in the Middle East, providing hundreds of thousands of pieces of equipment to regional partners. As a key partner to the UAE, Avon has delivered over 100,000 air purifying respirators or APRs to the emirates alone since 2017.

Building on this, the UK protective equipment company seeks new opportunities in the UAE alongside its partner, Abu Dhabi-based International Golden Group (IGG).

In support of the UAE’s efforts to develop a more sovereign defence industrial base, Avon is exploring the localisation of production and assembly of its equipment via technology transfers.

Across the region, Avon has supplied some 300,000 systems over the past 13 years.

Speaking to *Shephard*, Avon Middle East, South and Central Asia sales director John Hodges said having supplied so many systems to the region, Avon now wanted to help customers in the Middle East advance their chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) capabilities.

Hodges added that for Avon, the future in the region was one of an embedded permanent presence.

He added that if Avon wanted to maintain its position as a leading player in the field, it needed to engage in the transfer of technology and localisation.






A first area of localisation could be aspects of the production of [emergency escape hood systems](#).

Avon's **NH15 combat escape hood** was one of a number of its systems on display at the IDEX show. Other items included Team Wendy helmets, with Avon having acquired the ballistic protection company in 2020.

Hodges said Avon was looking to build on the acquisition and its partnership with other companies to improve further how the different aspects of personal protection equipment fit together.

The company also had on show its gloves and boots, designed for situations where enhanced CBRN protection is needed.

Hodges said a benefit of using Avon's gloves was that a wearer can still operate touchscreens through the material, an essential advantage as soldier-carried devices become more prevalent.

## Spanish Army acquires advanced mobile CBRN laboratory

Source: <https://www.shephardmedia.com/news/landwarfareintl/spanish-army-acquires-advanced-mobile-cbrn-laborat/>



2022 – The Spanish Army has acquired an advanced mobile chemical analysis laboratory to equip its 1st CBRN Defence Regiment. The announcement was made on 17 March by the supplier Indra.

The system is mounted on a military truck and complies with NATO STANAG 4632 standards for CBRN installations, Indra noted in a statement. It provides a safe space with negative pressure in which two or three experts can work on sample collection and analysis. An advanced information and communications system will allow them to coordinate with the Marañosa Institute of Technology's Central Chemical Weapons Laboratory (LQCA).





The 1st CBRN Defence Regiment is responsible for establishing a rapid alert system in the case of nuclear, biological or chemical attacks.

So far, this unit has operated mainly [VAMTAC](#) reconnaissance vehicles and BMR 6x6 armoured vehicles adapted for the mission with Sampling and Identification of Biological, Chemical and Radiological Agents (SIBCRA) Equipment.

The Spanish Army has been seeking ways to [improve its CBRN systems](#) since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

## Can You Tell Whether a “Bomb Train” Is Coming to Your Town? It’s Complicated.

By John McCracken

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20230227-can-you-tell-whether-a-bomb-train-is-coming-to-your-town-it-s-complicated>

Feb 27 – In the wake of the East Palestine, Ohio train derailment, Governor Mike DeWine called on Congress to look into why the rural village didn’t know ahead of time they had volatile chemicals coming through town.

“We should know when we have trains carrying hazardous materials through the state of Ohio,” DeWine [said](#) at a press conference.

This information is out there, but it’s probably not what the governor had in mind. With the derailment of the Norfolk Southern train receiving international attention, more railroad communities are now [asking](#) what is traveling through their backyard.

According to representatives from the United States Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, or PHMSA, all trains that carry hazardous materials are subject to “hazard communication” requirements. But this doesn’t mean a rail company tells the residents what is going by their town every day.

The troika of hazard communications, according to the agency, contains the following: There is a listing of all cars with hazardous material on each train; signage detailing which car is carrying what material; and the use of [AskRail](#), an electronic application used by first responders that gives up-to-the-minute details on a train’s location and contents.

AskRail was created by the country’s largest railroad companies and first responders and is not made available to the public over concerns of public safety and terrorism. PHMSA told Grist that all major railroad companies, including Norfolk Southern, use this application and the agency is developing a proposal to make the use of this app mandatory and expand its use to smaller railroad companies as well.

In 2017, when New Jersey citizens and politicians demanded more transparency about the contents and schedules of trains moving through their state, in the wake of [national attention focused on oil-by-rail trains](#), a former managing director of the National Transportation Safety Board [called](#) it a “dumb idea.”

“Nobody cares, frankly, until there’s a huge event,” a former railroad industry employee, who would only talk on background, told Grist. “Nobody cares outside the railroad industry, they care because it’s their liability and personnel handling materials.”

Nick Messenger is a senior researcher with the nonprofit Appalachian policy think tank [Ohio River Valley Institute](#). He told Grist that however a material is deemed hazardous should be part of a transparent process and that the people who live in rail communities should get a say in that labeling. “These places already kind of feel forgotten or overlooked and we’ve run railroads through their communities,” Messenger said. “When I think of one car spilling and polluting water, soil, or air, that’s a hazard.”

Justin Mikulka, author of [Bomb Trains: How Industry Greed and Regulatory Failure Put the Public at Risk](#), told Grist that the rhetoric around the threat of terrorism and a community’s right to know has been a flashpoint in the rail industry. He said the industry’s offer of information and self-regulation is a means to prevent government regulation.

“Don’t regulate us, we will volunteer to do the right thing,” he said. “Historically, that’s always been their first offer.”

Michael F. Gorman is an operations management professor at the University of Dayton’s School of Business who has worked for decades as a consultant in the railroad industry. He said that providing the general public with this advance notice of information, be it a rail car or a tractor-trailer, wouldn’t be an excessive cost to shipping companies, but the deluge of information wouldn’t have any economic benefit or preventive value. “What would East Palestine, Ohio, have done if they knew there was a train coming with vinyl chloride? The answer is maybe the first time they find out they throw rocks at the train or have signs or hold up a protest or something, but they can’t stop moving hazardous material,” Gorman said.

Railroads carry a lot of hazards. According to the [Association of American Railroads](#), freight railroads moved 2.2 million carloads of plastics, fertilizers and other chemicals in 2021. The majority of these chemicals were ethanol, but also include chemicals used in the plastics industries, industrial production, and agriculture.

These hazards have become integral components of modern life. But they come at a price. Fossil fuels comprise the building blocks of plastics manufacturing. So as demand for oil and gas decreases worldwide, many fossil fuel companies are turning their attention to the plastics industry to sustain their production.



It's [estimated](#) that global plastic production will quadruple by 2050, reinforcing a need for the movement of these chemicals to and from petrochemical production plants, with trains moving these hazards daily through railroad towns like East Palestine.

As Gorman pointed out in a column for the online news site [The Conversation](#), rail is not the only way these hazards get around. The trucking industry is also a major mover of hazardous chemicals. Just like when a train derails, or when a truck flips over on the highway, first responders are made aware of what is inside by reading the signage on the outside of the truck, as well as a manifest on the inside. Two weeks ago, a truck containing nitric acid, a toxic gas used to make fertilizer, [flipped over in Tucson, Arizona](#), killing the driver, and prompting shelter-in-place notices for residents due to the public health risks.

"It's a fact of life, you can't eliminate hazmat materials," Gorman said. "It's a negative side effect of progress quite frankly."

Stephanie Herron, a national organizer with the collective [Environmental Justice Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform](#) said in a statement that neighboring communities refuse to accept these events as a fact of life.

"These issues aren't new to the people who live near hazardous facilities who have been speaking up about the urgent need to transition to safer chemicals to prevent disasters in their communities," Herron said. "What's new is that more people are paying attention." When a train carrying crude oil derails or a truck filled with toxic chemicals skids off the road, first responders are on the scene. Eric Brewer is the director of emergency services and chief of the hazardous response team for Beaver County, Pennsylvania, which borders East Palestine, Ohio. He was there roughly 30 minutes after a 150-car train derailed in neighboring East Palestine late at night on February 3, now thought to be caused by an [overheating wheel bearing](#). He said first responders that night used the electronic application AskRail to determine what was aboard the Norfolk Southern train, but agencies don't often get notice ahead of time when hazards come through their communities. Brewer said many of the agencies he works with are volunteer firefighters, who don't have the resources to get detailed training for responding to hazardous situations.

"There are no laws for prenotification to first responders, so we assume that all rail cars are hazardous," Brewer told Grist.

The only trains that require prenotification to a community's first responders are known as "high-hazardous flammable trains," or HHFTS. These trains are long units filled with 20 or more tankers of flammable liquids such as ethanol or oil, often dubbed "[bomb trains](#)" by those inside the rail industry. Representatives with PHMSA told Grist that railroads are required to inform state emergency responders of the routes that HHFTS travel. In response to the East Palestine derailment, the federal Department of Transportation is [calling for a renewed push](#) for notifying communities when HHFTs are coming through their communities.

The train that derailed in East Palestine was not an HHFT and this federal push for increased notification would have not changed the February 3 disaster. Despite what federal agencies say and want, Brewer told Grist that his agency doesn't receive pre-notification when these high-hazard trains roll through. Similarly, Ohio fire officials told a [local news station](#) that firefighters often don't know they are walking into a hazardous situation. The night of the fiery crash, Brewer said the first responders went to work inspecting the damage, but it is often hard to discern what a placard is supposed to say when a tanker is engulfed in flames.

He said that it was a joint decision between the Ohio emergency responders, his agency, and Norfolk Southern officials on the scene to let the tankers filled with vinyl chloride burn. The gas, which is a carcinogen, has garnered national attention after its controlled burn left a massive black cloud over the town and caused an eventual evacuation and lingering health concerns.

Despite any information they did have ahead of time, the placards on the train, and the use of AskRail, the tankers burned for hours. The decision to let train cars filled with toxic chemicals burn comes at the recommendation of the federal agency that regulates the movement of hazardous materials.

According to the PHMSA's publicly available [2020 Emergency Response Guidebook](#), when first responders are met with tankers of flammable gas like vinyl chloride they are to evacuate the area within a one-mile radius, stay away from tanks engulfed in flames, and when a massive blaze can't be put out with an unmanned nozzle, withdraw from the area and "let fire burn."

[John McCracken](#) is a Midwest Reporting Fellow at Grist.

## Chechen Jihadist's Critical Analysis of a Ricin Poison Instructional Video

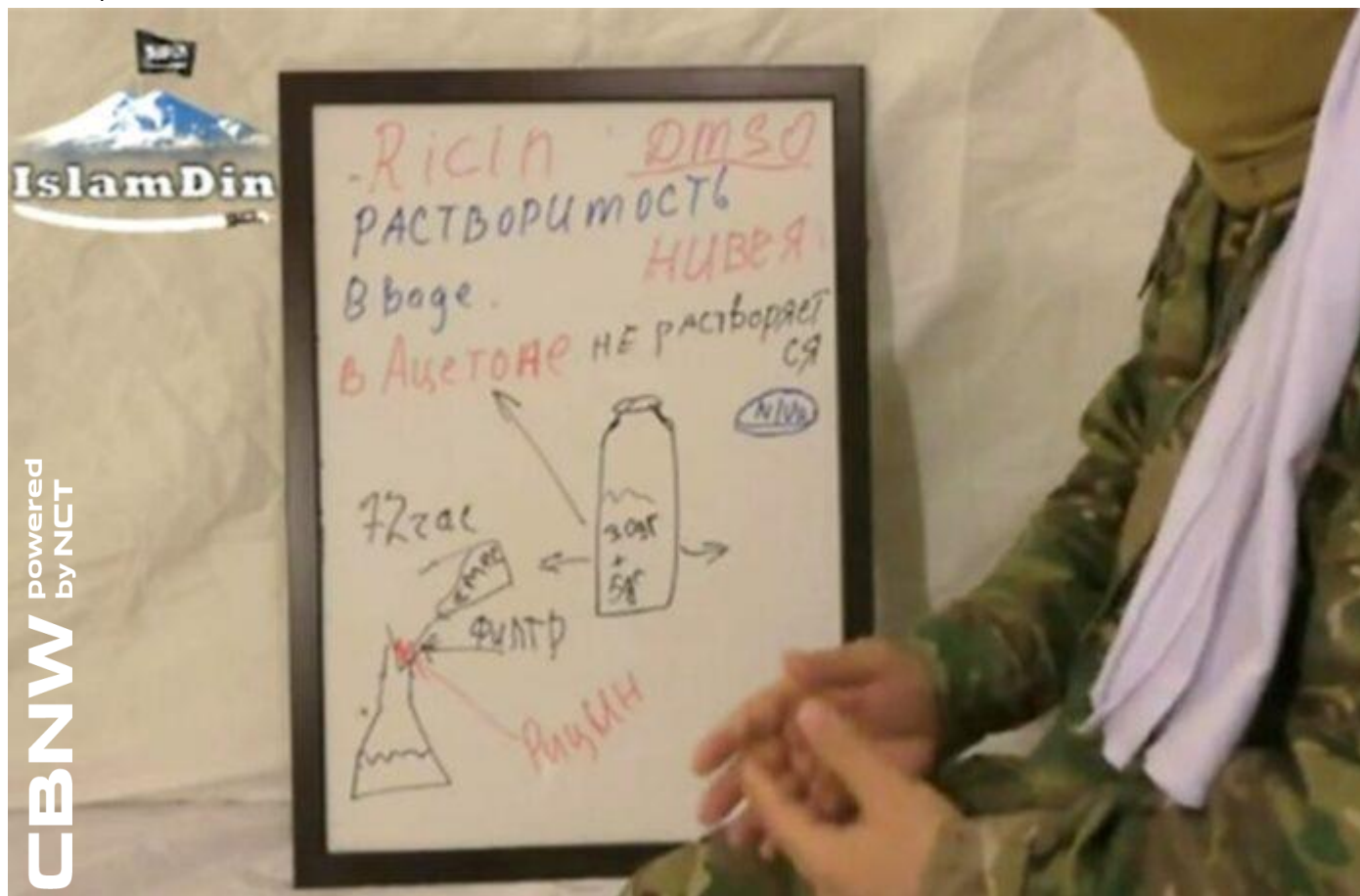
Source: <https://nct-cbnw.com/chechen-jihadists-critical-analysis-of-a-ricin-poison-instructional-video/>

*Shai Arbel, CEO of Terrogen Global, provides a valuable update on CBRN terrorism with the aim of raising awareness and helping first responders and law enforcement authorities to dismantle these terrorist networks.*

Feb 27 – Recently, the Chechen jihadist Lamanho Telegram channel started a discussion related to the production and use of ricin, based on a known (old) video by Kurt Saxon. The Lamanho author provides his analysis, highlighting the pros and cons of the recipe, and makes corrections to it. While this is not the



first time the use of ricin as an assassination TTP has been discussed in jihadi groups, the Lamanho thread presents a new opinion on the topic.



### Lamanho's Critical Analysis

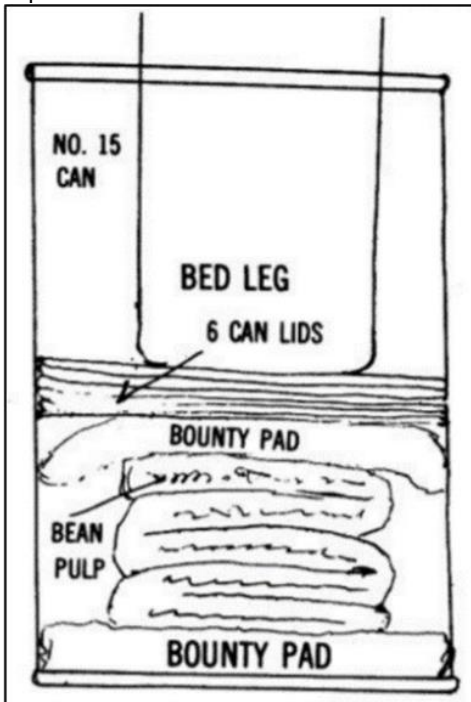
The Lamanho ricin-related discussion is based on an old video by Kurt Saxon, an American writer, radio host, survivalist, and the author of "The Poor Man's James Bond," a series of books on improvised weapons and munitions. According to the video, the ricin recipe is taken from Vol. 3, page 26. The third volume was written in 1984, so the video was probably filmed in the late 1980s. In the video, Saxon shows the extraction of ricin in two ways: using saline solution and using acetone. The video is accompanied by Russian subtitles, added by Lamanho.

Screenshots from video filmed by Kurt Saxon, with Russian subtitles added by Lamanho

Using the Saxon video as a basis, the Lamanho author presents his own analysis of the pros and cons of the instructions. The Lamanho author then summarizes, in a step-by-step manner, the instructions provided in the video, highlighting the most



important details. He also converts ounces to grams and milliliters, adapting it for Russian-speaking audiences.



The extraction method involving the use of saline solution is recommended by Lamanho as the preferred method as all the components used in this method are inexpensive and easy to obtain.

Regarding the second method, using acetone, the Lamanho author provides a detailed explanation of why the method is less effective, and then explains how it should be performed in his estimation.

After that, the Lamanho author provides instructions which, in his estimation, work better when using acetone.

At the end of discussion, the Lamanho author added some theoretical materials, stating it was necessary to go over the basic theory before making the poison yourself. The materials include several pages scanned from a book by a Russian microbiologist – an author of books and articles on the history of plagues, epidemics, and other especially dangerous infections, in addition to the history of the development and use of chemical and biological weapons.

On the left: Castor bean oil press, shown in the video by Kurt Saxon. The screenshot is taken from Saxon's book, where it appeared in better quality than the one shown in the video.

The Lamanho author also posted "The Preparation of Toxic Ricin" (1952) by Harry L. Craig, in English. Comment: "Patent for the preparation of ricin. Especially for those who want to obtain pure ricin. Let me remind you that [Georgi] Markov was killed with

just 0.5 mg of ricin administered parenterally. 1 gram is 1000 mg."

► Read the full article at the source's URL.

## Dutch Defence CBRN Centre innovates its training facilities

By Mr. Eyal Kapuza and Sgt. Ruud ter Linden, Dutch Defense CBRN Centre, Netherlands

Source: <https://nct-cbnw.com/dutch-defence-cbrn-centre-innovates-its-training-facilities/>

As time goes by, CBRN defense, HAZMAT, and crisis management becomes a global interest among the different governments, militaries, and civil organizations. Whether the events occur as a result of accidents, terrorist attacks, or military operations, there are requirements for the response units in all fields to know and master the defensive procedures that should follow. This makes the training of the units even more crucial, which shall be as close as possible to the reality that they may encounter. This understanding brought forth the development of Bagira's CBRN Dutch Defence CBRN innovation and build a Training Center in Vught.



Simulation Training System (CBRN-STs). A few years back, the Centre (DCBRNC) decided to step towards simulation system based at the CBRN National



## Liquid nitrogen may do the trick for getting moon dust off spacesuits

Source: <https://newatlas.com/space/liquid-nitrogen-regolith-spacesuits/>



On the Apollo moon missions, regolith damaged spacesuits and even caused respiratory problems for some astronauts – Depositphotos

Feb 28 – If you've ever been to the Moon (and who hasn't?), then you'll know that the clingy dust which covers its surface can damage spacesuits. According to a new study, a spray of liquid nitrogen may offer the best method of getting the stuff off – while leaving suits intact.

Scientifically known as lunar regolith, moon dust isn't like most natural dust here on Earth.

For starters, because it isn't subject to erosion by wind or water, the fine particles are [quite jagged and abrasive](#). Additionally, because regolith is saturated with solar radiation, it has a positive charge which causes it to cling to anything with which it comes into contact. On the Apollo moon missions, astronauts discovered that brushes were quite ineffective at removing regolith from their spacesuits – in fact, brushing just served to grind the dust in. Some of the suits were actually rendered unusable after the regolith damaged their seals. Needless to say, the particles also aren't great for electronics or engines. They even caused [respiratory problems](#) in some astronauts, which persisted after they returned to Earth.

Seeking a more effective and less harmful alternative to brushing and [other proposed methods](#) of regolith removal, scientists at Washington State University recently looked to liquid nitrogen.

When an ultra-cold spray of the liquid was applied to warmer samples of spacesuit material covered in simulated regolith, the dust particles beaded up and floated away in the nitrogen vapor. This reaction was due to what's known as the [Leidenfrost effect](#), in which a drop of liquid gets suspended above a surface by a layer of vapor. It is what's at work when cold water beads up and skitters across the surface of a hot frying pan.

The technique was tested both in normal atmospheric conditions and in a vacuum similar to that in outer space. It worked in both but performed better in the vacuum, where it removed 98.4% of the dust particles.





A sample of black material covered in gray dust before (left) and after the liquid nitrogen treatment in a vacuum – Washington State University

Additionally, whereas just one brushing of the dust-covered material samples damaged them, they stood up to 75 cycles of the liquid nitrogen treatment before any damage was observed.

The scientists now plan on conducting further tests under conditions which more closely simulate those on the lunar surface. A paper on their research – which is being led by Assoc. Prof. Jacob Leachman – was recently published in the journal [Acta Astronautica](#).

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** I was wondering if this method could be used one day for the decontamination of CBRN PPE.

## West helped Nusra, ISIS obtain chemical weapons: Syrian FM

Source: <https://thecradle.co/article-view/22047/west-helped-nusra-isis-obtain-chemical-weapons-syrian-fm>

Feb 28 – Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Faisal Mekdad, claimed at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on 28 February that “**well-known countries** had used weapons of terrorism against the Syrian people,” in violation of the United Nations charter and their international obligations.

Foreign Minister Mekdad stated in a video address to the conference that, “Syria faced an unjust war, during which well-known countries employed weapons of terrorism against the Syrian people, sent tens of thousands of foreign terrorists, and provided them with various types of support and weapons, including internationally prohibited ones, to serve their aggressive agendas.”

He added that the policies of these countries have led to terrorist organizations such as ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra obtaining chemical weapons and using them repeatedly against Syrians, which highlights the need to address the shortcomings in international instruments governing the use of such weapons. Mekdad also called for joint action to find a politically neutral mechanism to coordinate international efforts to address acts of chemical terrorism.



Not only the Syrian government but independent sources have suggested that armed opposition groups supported by the US, Israel, Turkiye, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia used chemical weapons against the Syrian army and Syrian civilians during the conflict, which began in 2011.

Carla del Ponte, a member of the UN's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and a former war crimes prosecutor, [gathered](#) testimonies indicating that opposition armed groups used sarin gas against the Syrian army and civilians in the town of Khan al-Assal in March 2013.

Journalist Seymour Hersh reported that a classified US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) [briefing](#) in June 2013 indicated that Nusra maintained a sarin production cell and was attempting a large-scale production effort in Syria.

A report published by *Rootclaim* in 2021 [showed](#) that the Saudi-backed armed opposition group, Liwa al-Islam, launched the sarin-filled rockets used in the chemical attack in East Ghouta in August 2013.

A detailed [report](#) from the Libertarian Institute showed that the Ghouta attack was a false flag attack meant to trigger Western military intervention in Syria as part of the broader CIA program known as Timber Sycamore.

Foreign Minister Mekdad pointed out that Syria's experience with the UN's Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) showed that the watchdog group had become politicized and a tool of the Western powers to manufacture hostility toward the Syrian government. Mekdad called on the states who are party to the OPCW to carry out a responsible and careful review of the work of the organization and to correct errors and clear violations of the provisions of the convention that governs the group.

As [reported](#) by journalist Aaron Mate, veteran OPCW inspectors provided evidence showing the Syrian government was not responsible for an alleged chemical attack in Douma in April 2018, but their probe was censored and manipulated by top OPCW officials. Under direct US government pressure, the OPCW concealed this evidence provided by its own inspectors and released a report that suggested the Syrian government was responsible for the attack.

Foreign Minister Mekdad also stressed that the Israeli occupation constitutes a source of permanent and serious threat to regional and international peace and security. In addition to launching repeated attacks on Syrian and Palestinian territories, it continues to modernize and expand its arsenal of all types of weapons of mass destruction.

## Technology Assessment Completed for Hazard Identification Tool

Source: <https://www.hstoday.us/industry/industry-news/technology-assessment-completed-for-hazard-identification-tool/>

Mar 01 – The Department of Homeland Security's Science and Technology Directorate has published a technology report with the results of first responders' operational assessments of the [Pendar X10 Handheld Standoff Raman Spectrometer PDF](#).

To provide feedback on features and functionality for urban first responder organizations, first responder evaluators used the X10 in an operational scenario that included a series of single and multiple chemical identifications. The X10 can identify hazardous materials that might be encountered in a wide range of law enforcement and emergency response applications.



### Applications

- Military, industrial and homemade explosives
- Drugs
- Chemical warfare agents
- Toxic chemicals
- Related precursors and byproducts
- Other organic or inorganic materials

### Assessment takeaways

Some key takeaways from the first responder evaluators' assessments of this technology include:

- The X10's ability to scan unknown substances up to 6 feet away without causing an unintentional ignition was impressive.
- The X10 user's need to auto-focus the laser to correctly identify certain chemicals has challenges in rapid and reliable execution.
- The X10's weight could be distributed more evenly to support a responders' ability to use the auto-focus feature and increase their maneuverability when operating the X10 in hazardous materials personal protective equipment.



## Ricin's Round Two: Germany Prevents Another Islamic State-Motivated Bioterrorism Attack

By Herbert Maack

*Terrorism Monitor Volume: 22 Issue: 5*

Source: <https://jamestown.org/program/ricins-round-two-germany-prevents-another-islamic-state-motivated-bioterrorism-attack/>



[German police investigating crime scene in Castrop-Rauxel via CBS News.](#)

Mar 03 – On January 7, German police special forces arrested a 32-year-old Iranian citizen named Monir J. and his 25-year-old brother Jalal L. in Castrop-Rauxel in North Rhine-Westphalia. According to German law enforcement authorities, Monir J. had been planning to use cyanide and ricin in an “Islamist-motivated” chemical attack. While initial searches at the residence of Monir J. did not produce evidence of explosives or toxic substances, authorities did confiscate electronic storage devices and unspecified “new evidence” in subsequent searches. It was unclear if this included material for the production of toxic substances ([faz.net](#), January 16). According to German media, Monir J. and his brother initially planned to conduct their attack on New Year’s Eve, but due to the lack of a critical toxic substance, they had to postpone the attack. The plot was reportedly discovered by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which alerted their German colleagues at the Bundeskriminalamt (BKA) on December 30, 2022. On January 6, an IP address was traced to Monir J., which led to him and his brother’s arrest a day later ([faz.net](#), January 16).

The disrupted plot highlights not only the continued threat stemming from Islamic State (IS)-inspired perpetrators—who continue to have interest in developing and deploying a biological weapon—but also the critical international intelligence cooperation needed to prevent such attacks.

### The Brothers’ Background

German law enforcement authorities suspect the brothers were IS supporters. However, the authorities never found conclusive links to IS, which indicates that the brothers were likely self-radicalized. In addition





to this, the profiles of the two brothers are somewhat puzzling. They arrived in Germany in 2015 and Monir J. claimed in 2016 to be fleeing from persecution in Iran due to his conversion to Christianity. He was therefore allowed to stay in Germany, and did not attract the attention of German law enforcement authorities until the 2023 incident ([focus.de](https://www.focus.de), January 9).

Conversely, the younger brother, Jalal L., was known to German law enforcement and was sentenced in 2019 to a seven-year jail term. Jalal L. was convicted for attempted murder after he tossed a 10 kilogram branch from a highway bridge onto a random car below while he was drunk, nearly killing the driver. During the subsequent investigation and his incarceration, Jalal L. showed no signs of Islamist radicalization. The fact that Jalal L. was able to spend weekends outside the jail due to active participation in therapy sessions and good behaviour provoked harsh criticism after news emerged of his participation in the terror plot ([bild.de](https://www.bild.de), January 10).

### The Terror Case's Context

The terrorist plot in Castrop-Rauxel is not the first time that Germany has averted an Islamist-motivated terrorist plot involving ricin. In 2018, Tunisian citizen Sief Allah Hammami and his wife Yasmin planned to detonate a ricin bomb in an unknown location, which experts suggested had the capability to kill 13,500 people. In 2020, Hammami was sentenced to a ten-year prison sentence. His wife was sentenced to an eight-year prison sentence a year later ([Terrorism Monitor](https://www.terrorism-monitor.com), August 10, 2018; [n-tv.de](https://www.n-tv.de), August 13, 2021).

It is noteworthy that the ricin plot from 2018 was also disrupted thanks to a warning from US intelligence. Germany's most recent close call has renewed the debate over German reliance on US intelligence to warn its own law enforcement authorities about domestic jihadist terror plots. Germany's lack of intelligence gathering capabilities has meant that it relies on information from the US—and Israel, in some cases—to disrupt numerous terrorist plots on its own soil ([bild.de](https://www.bild.de), January 11, 2023).

In addition, Germany has also diverted some of its limited intelligence capabilities to address far-right threats, though some experts have warned German leaders not to neglect the Islamist threat. According to German security authorities, the country is facing threats from 28,000 Islamists in the country, of which the BKA has identified 520 as *gefährder*, or “potential violent perpetrators.” This number is more than the number of far-right and far-left potential violent perpetrators combined ([focus.de](https://www.focus.de), January 9, 2023). Further, according to Germany's Interior Minister, the threat from Islamist-motivated attacks continues to be high in Germany, with Islamist terrorist groups still seeking to attack the country ([welt.de](https://www.welt.de), January 8, 2023).

### Conclusion

The disrupted plot of Monir J. and Jalal L. shows the continued threat from loosely IS-connected and IS-inspired individuals. It also underscores the continued interest of Islamist-motivated perpetrators in bioterrorism and their desire to inflict significant losses of life. For Germany, the disrupted plot was already the second one involving ricin. While US-German counterterrorism intelligence cooperation seems to be functioning well, the potentially catastrophic consequences for any failure should cause Berlin to consider strengthening its own domestic counter-terrorism intelligence gathering capabilities.

### Mysterious serial poisonings in Iran new propaganda fodder for West

By Syed Zafar Mehdi

Source: <https://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2023/03/05/699321/Iran-schoolgirls-poisoning-propaganda-West>

Mar 05 – Earlier this week, a social media rumor about the “death” of an 11-year-old girl in the central Iranian city of Qom due to “poisoning” circulated at a dizzying pace and grabbed headlines worldwide.

A [report](#) in France 24, reproduced by many other Western media outlets, cited anonymous “Iranian activists” to allege that Fatemeh Rezaei “died after being poisoned at school”.

New York-based so-called Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI) [claimed](#) that the girl died after hundreds of students were subjected to “deliberate poisoning”, calling it an “act of terrorism”.

An Italian news portal, Agensir, [quoted](#) a representative of the Iranian Youth Association in Italy as saying that Rezaei lost her life as a result of the “barbaric regime poisonings”.

A website affiliated with the MKO terror cult [described](#) the Qom girl as the first victim of “biological terror attacks on high school girls” to “avenge their active participation in the Iran uprising”.

This is while the father of the victim, Abolqasem Rezaei told [local media](#) that his daughter's untimely death had no connection with serial poisonings that have sent shockwaves across the country.

“My daughter's pain and infection started a week before her death. Even before pain, she didn't go to school for about three weeks,” said the father, debunking the toxic misinformation.

On Saturday, another rumor was disseminated through social media platforms about the “death” of a schoolgirl in Pakdasht city, 25 kilometers southeast of Tehran.



## UPDATE 13/3: 13,000 cases of school poisoning



One Twitter user, a “journalist and social reporter”, [claimed](#) that a female student was “killed” with a “poisonous substance” in Pakdasht, likening classrooms to “gas chambers”.

An anonymous page by the name of ‘LiveIranNews’ [said](#) students at a Pakdasht school were “chemically terrorized” and a female student was “killed in the tragedy”.

This too turned out to be a hoax. A [report](#) on Saturday evening, quoting local officials, said 60 schoolgirls had been hospitalized in Pakdasht due to “mild poisoning” and no one had died.

According to reports received from the ground, there has been no fatality from serial poisonings so far, and its cause remains shrouded in mystery, being investigated by relevant organizations.

But it has already provided fodder for anti-Iran propaganda mills in the West to foment chaos in the country, in continuation of their multi-pronged hybrid war against the Islamic Republic.

The mysterious wave of illness, which started first in Qom in November last year, has in recent weeks alarmingly spread to other cities, including the capital Tehran.

President Ebrahim Raeisi last week [ordered](#) a thorough investigation into the issue and instructed Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi to lead the probe with assistance from other ministries.

Several theories have been floated about the cause of the mysterious illness, which has seen hundreds of schoolgirls in different Iranian cities being hospitalized, albeit with mild symptoms.

Iranian authorities, however, maintain there is something deeply sinister in this frenzy.

Speaking at a public rally in southern Iran’s Bushehr city on Friday, President Raeisi [described](#) the serial poisonings as “part of the hybrid war” against Iran designed to “create unrest and problems”.

Iran’s Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian also took to Twitter to [denounce](#) Western countries for “shedding crocodile tears” over serial poisonings in the Islamic Republic.

“The interventionist reaction of some Western authorities to the issue of suspected poisoning of dear Iranian female students is the continuation of the enemy’s hybrid war,” he tweeted, adding that the matter is being “followed up seriously” by relevant institutions. Their remarks came after the United States and Germany, yet again, made “interventionist” remarks regarding Iran’s internal matters, much to the chagrin of Tehran.

“It’s deeply concerning news coming out of Iran. These – what, what could be the poisoning of young girls that are just going to school,” White House national security spokesperson John Kirby [said](#).



German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, [commenting](#) in a Twitter post, said "girls must be able to go to school without fear" and "all cases must be fully investigated".

In response, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani in a series of [tweets](#) slammed the top German diplomat's remarks as "hypocritical and meddling", reminding her of Germany's role in chemical attacks on the people of Iran during Saddam Hussein's war on Iran in the 1980s.

Kanaani had on November 28, on the eve of the day for remembrance of the victims of chemical warfare, appeared for his weekly presser with a haunting chemical mask on the desk.

It was a [symbolic protest](#) against Germany's supply of chemical weapons to former Iraqi military dictator Saddam Hussein during his 8-year war against Iran in the 1980s, immediately after the Islamic Revolution put an end to years of Western meddling in the country. "One of the bitter facts that still needs clarification is the chemical poisonings through German-made toxic gases during the Saddam-imposed war [on Iran] which still takes lives," Kanaani tweeted on Friday.

He hastened to add that the Iranian government is "very serious" about "identifying criminals and uprooting the evil," and will not allow others to "foment insecurity" with "political motivations."

Pertinently, the US and Germany in recent months led the no-holds-barred crusade against the Islamic Republic, which eventually fizzled out. The poisonings appear to be a new chapter now.

In a statement late on Saturday, Interior Minister said "suspicious samples" were discovered during the investigation and are being examined in the country's premier laboratories.

Since the outbreak of these poisonings, Vahidi asserted, the perpetrators of the hybrid war against Iran have sought to fuel "mental-psychological pollution" in society and force the closure of schools.

"We assure our dear people that the health of students was and remains the top priority for (government) officials and they will spare no effort to create peace and comfort for them," he said.

●► Read also: [160 girls poisoned at Afghan school \(what a coincidence!\)](#)

**Syed Zafar Mehdi** is a Tehran-based journalist, political commentator and author. He has reported for more than 13 years from India, Afghanistan, Kashmir and West Asia for leading publications worldwide.

## Cowardly chemical attacks on Iranian Girls

Source: <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2023/3/5/2156349/-Cowardly-chemical-attacks-on-Iranian-Girls>

Mar 05 – What sort of state sponsors Chemical and Biological terrorism on its own children?

### Mild effects of organophosphate poisoning:

Runny nose, chest tightness, shortness of breath, sweating, nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, muscle twitching, confusion and can be much worse leading to coma and death.

Organophosphates being common and readily available [insecticides] are suspected of being used.

Nobody has been arrested.

### [The Misogynistic Iranian Regime has blamed everybody but themselves.](#)

No one has been arrested three months after the first chemical attack on a girls' school in Iran, amid a new spate of attacks affecting at least 26 schools Wednesday.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi said at a press briefing Wednesday afternoon that so far no one has been arrested for the mysterious poisoning of girls at schools across the country and no chemical agent responsible for the poisonings has yet been found\*.

\*Organophosphate poisoning has been suspected by Iranian doctors treating the girls, as they see [such poisoning on a regular basis](#).

Now who could be to blame, I wonder.

Someone that hates the idea of girls being educated?

Someone that has a grudge against women and girls for counter revolutionary actions?

Mass hysteria, that old chestnut?

A foreign power?

Sorry, I don't believe in plausible deniability this transparent, neither do the parents

Children's parents shouting "Death to the child-killing regime" and "Death to the Dictator" outside a girls' school in Tehransar in a western suburb of Tehran





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## Massive emergency response in Midtown after woman found dead in car from exposure to 'hazardous materials'

Source: <https://www.amny.com/news/midtown-emergency-response-hazardous-materials/>

Mar 06 – A woman died in Midtown Sunday after being exposed to “hazardous materials,” police said.

The 35-year-old victim was found unresponsive in the back of a vehicle on East 56th Street and Sutton Place at around 11:23 a.m. on March 5. Sources close to the investigation say two NYPD officers responded after a woman walking her dog made the grim discovery Sunday morning.

When the pair arrived, they opened the car door, only to be hit with a powerful odor. Both officers were examined on scene and are expected to be okay, sources said.

EMS pronounced the woman dead after which a massive emergency response flooded the area. First responders wearing hazmat suits and using what appeared to be Geiger counters — an instrument used to detect radiation — combed over the vehicle as police cordoned off the scene to the public.

A putrid, sulfur odor emanated throughout the block, which remained roped off Sunday afternoon.



The Editor is getting really pissed when personal protective equipment is not properly donned!  
Be serious!



Officials in hazmat suits investigate the scene after a woman was found dead in her car in Midtown on Sunday. Photo by Dean Moses

According to authorities, an array of liquid chemicals were found within the car, the combination of which police believe killed the woman. While law enforcement sources do not believe the incident is criminally motivated, they did not say whether the death was intentional or accidental, nor did they release exactly what chemicals were found inside the car.

“I have never seen anything like that,” one officer, who requested anonymity, told amNewYork Metro. “That is someone’s daughter.”



The medical examiner removed the woman's body while the materials were placed in red bags. The investigation remains ongoing, and the victim's identity is being withheld pending family notification.

Nearly four years ago, [a man was found](#) in a similar fashion in a car in Queens. An investigation later uncovered that the man, a Lyft driver, died by what police referred to as "a chemical suicide." The discovery of the victim's body prompted a massive response by the FDNY's Haz-Mat Unit, which worked to make the area safe for firefighters to pull the man's body out of the car.

A chemical suicide, as defined by the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#), involves death by exposure to chemical vapors from household chemicals or other products in a confined area. It poses serious risk of injury to first responders and others who may become exposed to the fumes.

It remains unclear whether or not the woman whose body was discovered Sunday died by such a suicide.

[World](#)

## Iran announces first arrests over mysterious poisonings of hundreds of schoolgirls



Source: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/iran-schoolgirl-poisonings-arrests-possible-chemical-biological-attack/>

Mar 07 – Iranian authorities announced Tuesday the first arrests linked to a series of mysterious [poisonings of schoolgirls](#) across the country.

"A number of people have been arrested in five provinces and the relevant agencies are conducting a full investigation," said Iran's deputy Interior Minister, Majid Mirahmadi, on state television.

**More than 1,200 Iranian schoolgirls from at least 60 different schools have fallen ill since November** from what may have been chemical or biological attacks, according to Iranian state media and government officials. That number may be far higher, with one prominent Iranian lawmaker claiming as many as 5,000 students have complained of falling ill across 230 schools, though no other officials or media have reported such a high number.

Reports of poisonings spiked over the weekend, with students describing a range of unexplained odors reminiscent of everything from paint to perfume to something burning. After the smells, they reported experiencing numbness, temporary paralysis or near blackouts. "It certainly sounds like a chemical or biological event," Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, a British chemical weapons expert, told CBS News. "That is not something that appears to be naturally occurring."

**"Tear gas, particularly badly made tear gas, would create these sort of symptoms without killing people, and possibly other chemicals like sulphur dioxide, and some people also suggested nitrogen dioxide. These are industrial chemicals that have perfectly [legitimate] commercial uses, but can be toxic to humans in certain doses," he said.**

No deaths have been reported and nearly all of the affected girls appear to have recovered within a few days.

Iranian leaders and officials don't appear to have reached any consensus on the cause — unusual for the top-down authoritarian regime run by Islamic clerics. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said if the girls have been deliberately poisoned, it is "a great and unforgivable crime," punishable by death.

State media said the Interior Ministry had found and sent suspicious samples for analysis, but the deputy interior minister had earlier suggested that "hostile" media outlets could be to blame, rather than toxins.

"Over 99% of this is caused by stress, rumors and psychological war, started particularly by hostile TV channels, to create a troubled and stressful situation for students and their parents," Mirahmadi said previously, before announcing the arrests on Tuesday.

[A woman holds a placard depicting a girl wearing a gas mask during a demonstration against hundreds of cases of girls being poisoned in schools in Iran, March 4, 2023 in Madrid, Spain. Diego Radamas/SOPA Images/LightRocket/Getty](#)



On the streets of the capital Tehran and other cities around the world, angry

Iranian nationals have protested against the government and accused the regime of committing state terrorism against its own people. They believe Iran's leaders, or people in positions of power, could have



been exacting revenge for the wave of women-led, anti-government protests that swept across the county starting last summer after the death of Mahsa Amini in police custody.

"I think you cannot underestimate the psychological impact of using chemical and biological weapons," said de Bretton-Gordon. "Certainly, any young girl in Iran thinking about protesting in future may well think twice if they think they're going to be essentially gassed because of that."

If Iranian officials are behind the mysterious poisonings, de Bretton-Gordon said the ultimate goal would have been to silence protesters and instill fear.

"They don't have the luxury that we do have in the democratic world to make our opinions known," he said. "In countries like Iran, any dissent is stamped on very, very quickly. That is what these autocratic governments do."

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** Nitrogen dioxide and sulfur dioxide have easily recognized odors – bleach and the smell of a just-struck match respectively. Arrests might be fake to ease the public unrest locally and internationally.

## Packable AI exoskeleton cranks outdoor adventure into hyperdrive

Source (+video): <https://newatlas.com/outdoors/hypershell-packable-ai-exoskeleton/>



Push beyond your normal limits with help from the Hypershell exoskeleton – Hypershell

Forget sports drinks and energy goos, Hypershell has a more concrete and powerful way of boosting your performance on mountain and trail. The Shanghai startup looks to free exoskeleton technology from the [workplaces](#) and [battlefields](#) where it's often found and send it out into the great wide open.

The company's new exoskeleton series channels the power of a horse into the legs of human adventurers, allowing them to explore farther, run faster, climb higher and enjoy more of the outdoors they yearn to experience. Average Joe becomes intrepid explorer.



Hypershell imagines its Omega exoskeleton platform as a sort of human power bank, keeping one's legs fresher and allowing them to venture out farther without becoming fatigued. Unlike some of the fuller bodied exoskeletons on the market, the 4.4-lb (2-kg) Omega is purpose-built around portability, folding into a 6.5-L form that can be lashed to or carried in a backpack. This way, users can choose to wear it for the entire journey or pack it in and suit up for particularly difficult legs of the trip.



[The Hypershell exoskeleton folds up and packs in or on a backpack – Hypershell](#)

While 4.4 lb is a lot to add to a backpack (many backpacking tents weigh less), the Hypershell Omega more than compensates. The lower-body device adjusts in size to fit the user's waist and legs, then uses its integrated 1-hp (800-W) permanent magnet synchronous motor to deliver assistive support that offsets up to 66 lb (30 kg) of weight. The user feels less weight from any load they're carrying and can walk, run or scramble more easily, helping to conserve energy and adventure longer. The exoskeleton supports running speeds up to 12 mph (20 km/h), offering

a range up to 16 miles (25 km) per charge.

The Hypershell Omega has one active and eight passive joints for smooth, unrestricted motion. It relies on a multi-sensor architecture to track torque, position and force, monitoring leg motion and modeling gait in milliseconds via two onboard two processors. The device then tunes motor output through nine different modes, including walking, running, hill climbing and cycling. "Hyper mode" allows immediate push-button access to maximum system output. The AI engine intelligently predicts one's next move and seamlessly matches assistive output, learning and adapting to the user over time for more intuitive operation.

[The Omega exoskeleton secures to the waist with a belt and to the legs with straps – Hypershell](#)

An exoskeleton of this form seems like it would be most useful for multi-day backpacking trips, as opposed to short afternoon hikes, but limited range could quickly drain the battery. Hypershell attempts to sidestep that problem by giving the exoskeleton two hot-swappable lithium battery packs integrated in the sides of the aluminum-magnesium chassis. Users can carry extra batteries and swap them as needed, so long as they're prepared to pack an additional 14 oz (400 g) per battery pair.



In addition to hikers and backpackers, Hypershell imagines its exoskeleton being used by mountain climbers, cyclists and trail runners, as well as outdoor professionals like photographers and search and rescue crews. Back in civilization, the Hypershell Omega could be equally useful for the likes of walking city streets or visiting theme parks.

Hypershell is trying to get production off the ground now, offering three different exoskeleton models based on the same Omega platform over on [Kickstarter](#). **Starting at a pledge level of HK\$2,339 (approx. US\$299), the base Hypershell Go has a smaller 400-W motor for a lower 7.5-mph (12-km/h) top speed. The standard Pro model has the specs described above and starts at HK\$3,129 (US\$399), while the lighter 4-lb**





**(1.8-kg) Carbon model jumps up to HK\$6,189 (US\$790).** Deliveries will begin in September if all goes according to plan.



The Hypershell Omega exoskeleton has running modes and supports speeds up to 12 mph in "hyper mode" – Hypershell

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** Perhaps the CBRN Responders of the future will be benefited from exoskeletons like this one!

## Iran blasts German FM's 'baseless' remarks, urges Berlin apology for chemical weapons

Source: <https://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2023/03/08/699502/German-FM-baseless-remarks-aimed-harming-Iran-Iraq-ties>

Mar 08 – The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman has strongly condemned anti-Iran remarks made by German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock during a visit to the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, saying the comments were aimed at harming Tehran-Baghdad relations.

Nasser Kan'ani made the remarks on Wednesday, a day after Baerbock accused Iran of jeopardizing the "stability" of the region with its missile attacks, particularly on Iraqi territory.

Kan'ani said the German foreign minister must apologize for the past "shameful behavior" of her government toward the two nations instead of trying to hide the history of Germany's crimes by making "baseless" claims against the Islamic Republic.

Germany supported Saddam Hussein's regime during its eight-year war against Iran, he said, adding that Berlin equipped the Ba'athist regime with chemical weapons in order to use them against defenseless Iranian and Iraqi soldiers and civilians.

**"Unfortunately, a significant number of terrorists and armed separatist groups, who have Iranian and Iraqi civilians' blood on their hands, have now taken refuge in Germany,"** Kan'ani said, reminding Berlin of Iran's undeniable role in supporting Iraq's territorial integrity and unity.

On Tuesday, Baerbock called on Iran to cease its missile attacks on Iraqi territory, claiming that the strikes put both civilians and regional stability at risk.



“It is unacceptable and dangerous for the whole region,” she said at a news conference with her Iraqi counterpart. In November last year, Iran targeted the positions of terrorist groups operating near the country’s western borders in Iraq’s semi-autonomous Kurdistan region. The attacks took place amid reports that terrorists sought to ignite riots and unrest in Iran’s western border cities. The Iranian foreign ministry spokesman also noted that Baerbock’s anti-Iran remarks show that Berlin still supports armed terrorists and separatists against the Islamic Republic and makes fruitless efforts to damage the relations between the two neighbors. Kan’ani also stressed that regional nations will never forget how certain Western states, including Germany, have waged wars and supported war-mongering dictators across the region. Iran has on many occasions warned Iraqi Kurdistan’s local authorities that it will not tolerate the presence and activity of terrorist groups along its northwestern borders, saying the country will give a decisive response should those areas become a hub of anti-Islamic Republic terrorists. Back in May 2022, the IRGC struck and demolished positions of terrorist groups operating near the country’s western borders in Iraq’s northern Kurdish regional capital of Erbil. Also in September 2021, the IRGC launched an attack in northern Iraq, where it destroyed four bases belonging to hostile groups.

## World’s first ‘flying bike’ hits market for \$500K: ‘Bringing science fiction to life’

Source: <https://nypost.com/2023/03/07/worlds-first-flying-bicycle-hits-market-for-555k/>



Mar 07 – Not so long ago in an online galaxy not so far way.

A new mode of transport being hyped as the [“world’s first flying bike”](#) has officially been released in Japan — with a nearly \$555,000 online price tag, according to the company’s site.

The 12-foot-long [XTURISMO “luxury air cruiser”](#) — inspired by the “Star Wars” universe — was developed by the aircraft company AERWINS.

The 661-pound vehicle, a [finalist in the 2023 Edison Awards](#), is designed to draw power from two large central rotors running on a 228-horsepower, gas-fueled Kawasaki motor.



**EDITOR: Perhaps one day CBRN First Responders will fly with their bicycles!**



Additional oomph comes from an electrical battery that powers four fans on the vehicle's outer edges that provide stability to the ride. The bike — hyped as “a manifestation of the dream of air mobility” — can reportedly hit speeds ranging from 50 to 62 miles per hour. “Brining science fiction to life: Imagine a world where humans have free reign over the skies. Surely, life would be more free,” reads the official description. “Expand your ideas about transport, experience the world like never before Pioneer the next generation of transport. XTURISMO was created with this in mind. A new journey begins.” The bike bears a resemblance to the speeder bikes used by the Galactic Empire to [chase Luke Skywalker](#) (Mark Hamill) and Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher) through the forests on the planet of Endor in the franchise's sixth installment, 1983's [“Return of the Jedi.”](#) In June 2022, AERWINS announced the global launch of XTURISMO Limited Edition at December's [Top Marques Monaco](#) conference, and its performance at America's Detroit Auto Show in September was also well received worldwide, according to brand reps who said they are “currently receiving orders and inquiries from all over the world.” Alas, “Star Wars” fans and others who are itching to take part in their own chase will be heartbroken to hear that flying bikes are currently only available in Japan — and is limited to test rides over a closed race track. However, the air cruiser — hailed as one of the [“19 most mind-blowing science stories of 2022”](#) by BBC Science — could eventually be used to assist in rescue operations, disaster relief and inspections of infrastructure, according to its creators.

A video touting XTURISMO Limited Edition features the vehicle hovering above the waters of Lake Yamanaka with Japan's iconic Japanese Mt. Fuji in the background. “In publishing this video, it is our hope that viewers will be moved by the natural beauty of Yamanashi,” the brand's reps said in a statement, “and feel the anticipation and excitement of the future mobility which can be achieved through our technological capabilities.”

## Paris Olympics planners sweat over opening ceremony

Source: <https://today.rtl.lu/sport/international/a/2040224.html>

Mar 13 – The unprecedented opening ceremony planned for the 2024 Paris Olympics, just 500 days away, promises to be both spectacular and a serious security headache, with the arrangements still being worked out by anxious officials.

The vision, as announced by French President Emmanuel Macron, is to take the ceremony out of its customary location in the main stadium and put it in the heart of the capital. Sporting delegations are set



PARIS 2024



to sail down the river Seine in boats, an armada of sporting excellence set against the backdrop of the capital's world-famous monuments in view of up to 600,000 cheering spectators.

The appeal of such a bold statement of French ambition and art de vivre to a global TV audience of hundreds of millions is clear. Turning it into reality is said to be giving planners cold sweats.

"Everyone is working and working an enormous amount," one senior French official involved in the process told AFP on condition of [anonymity](https://www.cairn.info/revue-securite-globale-2022-4-page-35.htm?contenu=article). "A ceremony like this has never taken place before. But we'll manage it, we'll be ready."

As the Games loom into view, the number of boats, the arrangements for spectators, and the means of controlling crowds and guarding against a terror attack or accident are still the subject of intense discussions.

The French police "have never worked on a scenario like this," a senior security source told AFP, again on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the subject.

"When it's something repetitive, they can debrief, make improvements, work out what works. This will be one shot," he added.

The total number of spectators allowed to line the six-kilometre (four mile) route is still up in the air, with the final figure expected to somewhere between 400,000-600,000.

Around 70,000 seats on the lower banks or on bridges are set to go on sale from May 11, starting at 90 euros (96 dollars) and topping out at 2,700 euros.

These paid-for positions "will be expensive because it will be unique. It will be very spectacular in this iconic city," head of the organising committee, Tony Estanguet, told reporters last week.

### Madness?

Some security experts have spoken out about the idea, however, warning about the dangers of uncontrolled crowd movements so close to water and the difficulty of securing such a long stretch of water with overlooking buildings.

The chaotic scenes at last year's Champions League final in Paris, when Liverpool fans found themselves in a crush outside the stadium, were a reminder of the dangers of badly organised sporting events.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, who faced severe criticism for his handling of the Champions League fiasco, travelled to the World Cup in Qatar in November last year on a fact-finding mission.

While there, he warned of the dangers of "a drone loaded with explosives that falls on a crowd, on an exposed team, on an opening ceremony like at the Olympic Games, for example."

"When you organise an event like this, cyber attacks, the fight against drones, questions of terrorist threats, the flow of people are important subjects," he told AFP.

Well-known French criminologist Alain Bauer slammed the whole concept of the ceremony as "criminal madness" last year.

"There's not a single expert from France, abroad, the IOC (International Olympics Committee), who thinks this thing makes sense," Bauer told the France 5 channel in May, adding that it would be impossible to secure the whole area.

Another danger for organisers is that some risk-averse teams might refuse to participate.



### Police force

With the Games set to take place from July 26 to August 11, the interior ministry must also find the required number of officers at the height of the summer holiday period.

For the opening ceremony, Darmanin is counting on 35,000 members of the security forces being on duty, with police already warned that requests for leave over the summer holiday period will not be permitted.

The interior ministry has also suggested 25,000 private security agents should be used for less critical missions, with thousands currently being screened, recruited and trained.

The low prices being offered by the organising committee mean many private security companies are reluctant to take up contracts, however, another source close to the event told AFP.

The total number of boats for sports teams has also been downgraded recently, with "around 100" set to take place instead of the 180 originally planned, according to a Paris councillor.

A first practice run is expected in July this year, with 30-40 boats set to take part.

## RAF drone blasts top ISIS extremist linked to chemical and biological weapons

Source: <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/raf-drone-blasts-top-isis-29448425>



Mar 13 – An RAF drone blasted a top ISIS terrorist involved with a chemical and biological weapons, MPs were told tonight.

The MQ(9A) unleashed its fearsome firepower on the Islamic extremist while it flew above northern Syria, Defence Secretary [Ben Wallace](#) told the Commons.

The air strike came as part of Operation Shader, the [Ministry of Defence](#)'s codename for the military campaign against ISIS, which it calls [Daesh](#), in Syria and Iraq.

Outlining the details of the raid, Mr Wallace said: "An RAF Reaper remotely-piloted aircraft conducted a strike against a leading Daesh member in Al-Abab, Northern Syria.

"The individual's activity was related to chemical and biological weapons.

"The Reaper's crew minimised potential risks to civilians before firing two Hellfire missiles, both of which struck the target accurately.

"Actions like these are vital to degrading the terrorist threat, protecting British citizens and supporting our international partners." The RAF has 10 Reaper drones operated by a three-man crew based at RAF Waddington near Lincoln - 3,000 miles from Syria.



## Non-Toxic CBRN Decontamination & Disinfection Material and Equipment for Military, Industrial, and Commercial use

Source: <https://www.atmas-tech.com/cbrn-decontamination>

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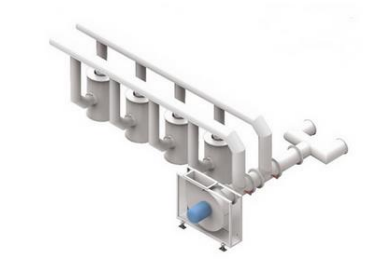
- Tests conducted by the U.S. Coast Guard in 2001
- Tests conducted by ITEL (Spanish Technical Institute of Cleaning)



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### CBRN/NBC FILTERS FOR SMALL, MEDIUM & LARGE FILTRATION SYSTEMS AND AIR-HANDLING UNITS

## Facing the Challenge of Terrorists With Chemical Weapons

Source: <https://eeradicalization.com/facing-the-challenge-of-terrorists-with-chemical-weapons/>

Mar 16 – The communications revolution has made sharing information easier for everyone, including terrorists. One element to this is the proliferation of weapons technology that had previously been reserved for states. A [prominent example in this regard is drones](#). A less prominent but perhaps more dangerous case is chemical weapons.

### A Brief History of Chemical Warfare

Chemical weapons are probably most often associated in people's minds with the First World War, and this was the origin point of chemical warfare in its modern sense. Chlorine is the best-known chemical agent used by the combatants in the Great War, but phosgene and sulphur mustard were more lethal. Chemical weapons were also a major feature of the Second World War, with Zyklon B used by the Nazi government in Germany to carry



out the industrial genocide against Europe's Jews, and the Japanese government employing chemical munitions against the Chinese nationalists of the Kuomintang. Since the war, only a small number of rogue actors in the international system have used chemical WMD. In the 1960s, Egypt's ruler Gamal Abdel Nasser used chemical weapons [against civilian tribesmen](#) during his disastrous intervention in Yemen.

The Soviet Union used chemical weapons in the 1980s, during its [colonisation of Angola](#) and its [conquest of Afghanistan](#).

Also in the 1980s, Saddam Hussein launched repeated chemical attacks, mostly nerve agents like Tabun and Sarin, against Iran during their war and against Kurdish civilians within Iraq, [most infamously at Halabja](#).

Finally, since 2011, the Iran-supported regime of Bashar al-Assad has [repeatedly used chemical WMD](#) against Syrian civilians, occasionally [incurring](#) some [international penalties](#).

There was an international taboo against the use of chemical weapons even before 1914, yet the Chemical Weapons Convention that classified certain chemicals as weapons of mass destruction (WMD), to be dismantled and their use forbidden by treaty, was only enacted in 1997.

### Terrorists' Use of Chemical Weapons

Chemical weapons were [first used by a non-state actor](#) in 1990: the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) or "Tamil Tigers" attacked government troops at a base on the east coast of Sri Lanka using chlorine. The LTTE, based among the Tamil Hindu minority, waged an insurgency against the Sinhalese Buddhist-dominated government of Sri Lanka from 1976 until the LTTE's total defeat in 2009.

The LTTE became well-known for its brutality, particularly its use of suicide bombings, one of which murdered former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991. Iran's Hezbollah militia, the pioneer of suicide bombing, [trained the LTTE](#) in the tactic after the LTTE reached out to them following Hezbollah's suicide attack against the U.S. and French Marines in Beirut in 1983, and the subsequent withdrawal of Western troops. Hezbollah would go on to [train other terrorist groups](#) in the use of suicide atrocities, notably the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey and various Palestinian groups.

In June 1994, Sarin was used in Matsumoto in Japan against an apartment building. The targets of the terrorist attack were three judges who lived in the building and were about to rule in a criminal case against a group called Aum Shinrikyo (Supreme Truth), a Buddhist "End Times" cult that incorporated elements of Hinduism and Christianity within its ideology, believing its members to be the "elect" who would survive the oncoming Armageddon. The Matsumoto attack killed eight people and wounded about 250.

The best-known use of chemical weapons by a terrorist group until recent years was also by Aum Shinrikyo, in March 1995, releasing Sarin on the Tokyo subway system, killing thirteen people and wounding hundreds more.

Al-Qaeda was known to have [acquired and tested](#) chemical WMD on a small scale in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan in the 1990s, and Al-Qaeda's branch in Iraq, Ansar al-Islam, which was later absorbed by the Islamic State (ISIS), had [developed chemical weapons](#) in the early 2000s, during Saddam's time in power. Al-Qaeda thankfully was never successful in using chemical WMD, but ISIS has made regular use of such weapons over the last two decades.

### The Islamic State and Chemical Weapons

ISIS—known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq until 2006—gained [access to Saddam's chemical stockpiles](#) in the early years after the 2003 Anglo-American invasion because the jihadists worked closely with the Ba'athists of the former regime who dominated the insurgency up to 2005. ISIS repeatedly used these chemical WMDs, such as sulphur mustard, to attack Coalition troops and civilians. From as early as 2004, and especially in the 2006-2007 period, ISIS also made use of chlorine.

ISIS has plotted to use chemical terrorism abroad. In June 2004, Jordan [disrupted a major ISIS plot](#) to use a variety of chemicals for a massive bombing in Amman. More recently, ISIS was [planning chemical attacks in Europe](#).

Since ISIS declared its "caliphate" in 2014, it has invested significant resources in its special department to develop chemical weapons, which has existed since 2002 and was and remains significantly staffed by former officials from Saddam's WMD program. ISIS has [tested chemical weapons on humans](#), and used them widely against U.S. and allied troops. Some members of ISIS's WMD department have been [captured](#), [killed](#), and [sanctioned](#) by the United States.

With the demise of the "caliphate", developing chemical weapons has become more difficult for ISIS: even developing small amounts of chemical WMD requires significant industrial infrastructure, and without territory to govern such infrastructure is not reliably available.

### Conclusion

At the present time, the most serious chemical terrorism threat comes from ISIS: they have used them on a fairly large scale, and they retain access to materials and expertise drawn from the former Saddam



regime. Without the “caliphate”, however, it is difficult for ISIS to combine its stockpiles and knowledge to create chemical weapons on a significant scale. Ensuring that ISIS cannot recapture territory is, therefore, an important security priority in terms of denying terrorists access to chemical WMD, because in today’s interconnected world such weapons would soon spread.

## Gas Attacks Reveal a War on Iranian Women

By Ahmad Hashemi

Source: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/lebanon-watch/gas-attacks-reveal-war-iranian-women-206317>

Mar 18 – In the past few months, [poison attacks](#) have affected hundreds of Iranian schoolgirls, prompting some parents to take their children out of school due to fear of what some have dubbed “biological terrorism.”

These attacks started in November in Qom, which is the heartland of Shiite extremism and home to Iran’s Shiite seminary and Islamic institutions. This wave of toxic gas attacks has expanded to the rest of the country, but with thirty school attacks, the ultraconservative city of Qom still [leads](#) the list of the most-targeted cities.

Speculation on the perpetrators of such attacks continues but the regime itself and regime-affiliated [extremist groups](#) are the main suspects. Some local media have [said](#) that it could be the work of religious zealots who want to prevent girls from attending school. Others, including former Vice President Mohammad Ali Abtahi, have [speculated](#) that the poisonings are the work of hardliners who want to “copy” the Taliban in Afghanistan and the militant Islamist group Boko Haram in Nigeria, which have banned women’s education and terrorized parents to stop sending their girls to school. Abtahi has [asked](#) in an Instagram post: “Has Boko Haram come to Iran?”



Several regime officials have highlighted the intentional nature of the serial poisoning of female students in Qom and other cities. Iran’s deputy education minister has [admitted](#) these attacks are “intentional” and Iran’s attorney general has [acknowledged](#) the poisoning of students in the city of Qom might be a “deliberate criminal act.”

Yet, as in all other cases when things go wrong, Iran’s senior officials, including its president, Ebrahim Raisi, [have blamed](#) foreign enemies for schoolgirl poisonings.

These reportedly intentional biological attacks come at a critical time: the regime in Iran has been challenged by the death of Mahsa Jina Amini at the hands of Iran’s “morality police” on September 16, 2022, which sparked large protests across the nation.

Consequently, it appears that the Iranian regime is taking revenge on this women-led movement by indiscriminately targeting schoolgirls.

### A race between Sunni and Shiite extremists on misogyny

Iran remains the leading state sponsor of global terrorism. The Islamic regime brutally represses its own people and supports instability, chaos, and terrorist organizations abroad.

As a predominantly Shiite country, Iran used to have sectarian animosity with such extremist groups like Al Qaeda. However, Iran has occasionally formed an anti-American alliance of convenience with Sunni terrorist organizations, hosting their leaders and providing them with logistical and financial support. The U.S. State Department [stated](#) in February that Said al-Adel, an Iran-based Egyptian, has become the head of Al Qaeda following the July 2022 death of Ayman al-Zawahiri. In addition, the former U.S. special representative for the reconciliation in Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, recently [said](#) that Iran has become a new center of Al Qaeda. In addition to hosting, funding, and arming Sunni extremists, Iran also competes with these groups to make its Shiite version of Islam a more puritan, brutal, and misogynist brand. What Iran is doing with its schoolgirls is reminiscent of acts of such terrorist organizations as the Taliban, ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al





Qaeda who oppose women's education. Iran's Shiite fanatics are competing with their Sunni rivals while the mullahs in Tehran deeply fear the progressive women's movement that has adopted the "Woman, Life, Freedom" slogan, three components that go against the founding principles of this clerical regime. Thus, the government is adamant to clamp down and deter the women's activism in Iran, even by means of poisoning them.

Silencing, stoning, enslaving, and taking revenge on the women is an inalienable part of Islamist extremist entities that despise women just for being women, especially if those women—like brave girls in Iran—dare to seek freedom from clerical tyranny, Islamist misogyny, and inhumane Sharia law.

### Putin's mysterious poison game

Russian president Vladimir Putin has, [on several occasions](#), used mysterious poisons and other biological and toxic substances to get rid of his enemies. He has also used these substances against schoolchildren. When Putin came to power in Russia in 1999, he started punishing the independence-seeking Chechen nation by indiscriminately bombing Chechen civilians, leveling the capital, Grozny, and targeting Chechen schoolgirls by collectively poisoning them by potentially using chemical agents or biological weapons. When she was seventeen years ago, Anna Politkovskaya, a prominent Russian investigative journalist and human rights activist, started probing the poisoning cases of Chechen schoolgirls and began [publishing her findings](#) in 2006. She was found dead in her apartment a couple of months later. No one was charged for the murder as impunity reigns for perpetrators who go after anti-Putin activists.

A similar pattern is repeating itself in Iran as the clerical regime is trying to collectively punish women by means of mass poisoning as there is no will to find and charge the perpetrators. Inspired by Putin's poison game, Tehran has waged a war against schoolgirls by indiscriminately punishing brave Iranian women for resisting the regime's efforts to subjugate and indoctrinate them.

### Iran, Russia, and China

Iran has shown great interest in importing Russian and Chinese repression technologies, and it is possible that Iran has acquired its poisoning technology from Russia.

Xi Jinping's China is another source of inspiration for Iran. China is a dystopian, human rights nightmare as collective punishment can go as far as the [mass rape and detention](#) of the Uighur people, especially women in Muslim and Turkic-speaking Xinjiang province.

One can't help but notice that misogyny is a common trait of all repressive regimes. Putin punished, in mass, Chechen women for giving birth to tough fighters who wanted independence from Russian tyranny. Xi is collectively punishing Uighur women for giving birth to a generation that wants to preserve their culture and tradition and defy the Chinese Communist Party's indoctrination. Iran is indiscriminately punishing women and schoolgirls because of their leading role in anti-regime protests that started with Amini's brutal death.

Iran, Russia, China, and other authoritarian regimes fear women the most. To deprive their nation of liberty, Putin's Russia, Xi's China, and clerical Iran along with Islamist terrorist organizations suppress women's very existence.

### What America can do

While the women in Iran are putting their lives at risk and fighting for their emancipation and dignity, the democratic world led by the United States must take measures to ensure that they are on the side of the freedom-seeking women in Iran, not the regime.

The Biden administration needs an effective and coercive strategy to address Iran's nuclear and human rights dossiers; it cannot remain indifferent to Iran's proliferation threat and human rights violations.

Washington must act swiftly as the Iranian regime has [enriched uranium to 84 percent purity](#), becoming closer than ever to weapons-grade material. At the same time, Tehran [seeks sophisticated S-400 air defense systems](#) from Russia which would make a potential Israeli airstrike on Iran's nuclear facilities harder. The United States must take steps to ensure that Tehran will never access nuclear weapons to initiate an atomic Armageddon.

The free world should also be able to concur that the compulsory hijab is against women's rights. Unlike what the Iranian regime and other radical Islamists say, the compulsory hijab is not part of the culture and national tradition in Iran or elsewhere in the Muslim world. The compulsory veil is a sign of submission and subjugation of women. That is one reason why Iranian women have symbolically been burning their headscarves during protests. To support Iranian women, Western diplomats must stop complying with this discriminatory and myogenic law when traveling to Iran. Recently, the Iranians were [outraged](#) by the Swiss ambassador's decision to wear a long black veil during a visit to a shrine in Qom, the very city most affected by poisonous attacks against girls and women.



For the United States, devising a comprehensive strategy for targeting human rights abusers is indispensable. Designating those Iranian officials who are responsible for the biological war against women and are involved in the poisoning, killing, harming, denigrating, and subjugation of women in Iran should be a priority. The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control can do a better job of further sanctioning and including Iranian individuals and entities that are connected to women's rights abuse in the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons list.

Ahmad Hashemi is a research fellow at the Hudson Institute.

## Who Was the Cold War “Umbrella Assassin?”

By Christopher Nehring

Source: <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20230321-who-was-the-cold-war-umbrella-assassin>

Mar 21 – Ever since Bulgarian journalist Hristo Hristov successfully sued for the release of the intelligence file on Francesco Gullino (left) in 2007, the world has known that Gullino, an Italian-born Danish citizen, began working for the [Bulgarian secret service](#) in 1971.



To this day, Gullino is considered the main suspect in the so-called “umbrella assassination” case: the murder of the Bulgarian writer and dissident Georgi Markov (right in photo) in London in 1978.

Markov was [poisoned](#), probably with [ricin](#), after being injected with a poisoned pellet when stabbed in the leg with the tip of a specially adapted umbrella at a bus stop in London.

A new Danish TV documentary by journalist Ulrik Skotte has uncovered some incredible details about the life of Gullino, who appears to have been a multiple murder suspect, sexually deviant fascist and notorious swindler.

### Recruited by the Bulgarian Secret Service

Gullino's career as an agent began in 1970 when he was arrested in [Bulgaria](#) for smuggling and illegally trading in used cars. A short time later, he was recruited by the

Bulgarian secret service and given the codename “Piccadilly.”

In 1978, a lavish dinner was laid on in his honor by senior members of the Bulgarian secret service, which dispatched him to London around the time of Markov's murder. All documents about the period that followed were removed from the Piccadilly file in 1990 and destroyed.

The spy chief at the time of the murder, Vladimir Todorov, was convicted in 1992 of destroying documents on the case. His superior and co-conspirator Deputy Interior Minister General Stoyan Savov committed suicide in order to avoid trial.

### The Communist Spy with Fascist Sympathies

But what the Bulgarian secret service didn't know and what Skotte's documentary reveals is that Gullino was a fascist all his life. The Danish journalist has in his possession Gullino's copy of Hitler's “Mein Kampf” and a calendar with pictures of Mussolini.

Gullino's unsavory political leanings also played a role in his sexual deviance. As a child, he spent several years living with an aunt in Italy who ran a brothel. Apparently shaped by this experience, he sought the company of prostitutes throughout his life.

### Gullino's Third Life: Pornographer

He paid some of these prostitutes to wrap themselves in Nazi flags during sex or to pose in fascist uniforms. For these and other pornographic images, Gullino rented a photo studio and hired a secretary. He posed as a photographer and model agent and demanded pornographic photos or sexual favors in return for modeling jobs.

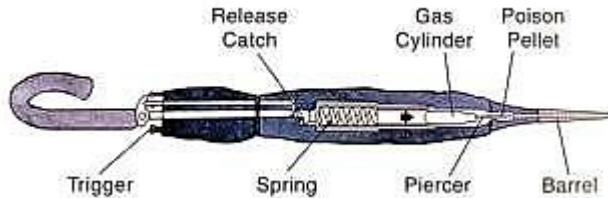
The Danish documentary team unearthed over 100 of these images. Skotte told DW that in his eyes, Gullino's marked sexual preferences were his “third life” alongside his outwardly respectable existence and his work as a secret agent.



### Was Gullino Involved in Another Murder?

Skotte's documentary reveals for the first time that Gullino's predilection for prostitutes has made him a suspect in another murder case, namely that of prostitute Hanne With, who was murdered in Copenhagen on New Year's Eve 1989. With had a photo of herself on a horse on her bedside table. On the back she had written "Riding with Gullino."

When questioned by the police, Gullino said that he had been at a party at the time of her death, which according to Danish police files was confirmed by telephone by the party guests named by Gullino. However, when asked on camera for the documentary, every one of these guests said that they neither spent the evening with Gullino nor had they ever been questioned by police. Even the Danish police cannot explain how Gullino's obviously faked alibi came about.



### Tricks, Lies and Evasive Answers

In February 1993, Gullino was interrogated by the Danish secret service, PET, and Scotland Yard. The investigators had received the purged "Piccadilly" file from Bulgaria and were questioning Gullino about Markov's murder. During the interrogation, Gullino twisted and turned and gave evasive answers; at times saying nothing or himself asking questions. He had learned how to behave during an interrogation from the Bulgarian secret service in the 1970s when he had received special training as an agent. The rest can be put down to his natural talent at putting up smoke screens. He claimed that the "Piccadilly" file was a fake and said he could not explain the counterfeit passports it contained. He admitted that he had been in London in 1978, but said he neither knew Markov nor had murdered him.



### What Does the Danish Secret Service Know?

Due to a lack of evidence conclusively linking him to the umbrella murder, the investigators had to let him go. According to Skotte, however, this was only half the truth. Skotte has seen information that indicates Gullino handed over important information to the PET. He is still trying to find out exactly what that information was. In return, Gullino was apparently allowed to leave [Denmark](#) for [Austria](#), where he drew his Danish pension from the consulate.



### New Source of Information

But where did this new information come from? The morning after Gullino had been interrogated about the Markov murder in 1993, he turned up on the doorstep of a friend in Copenhagen, journalist and director Franco Invernizzi. Gullino was agitated. In the months that followed, his company went bankrupt and Gullino moved in with his friend. During that time, he told Invernizzi his life story and gave him documents, notebooks and photos, allegedly for a film that Invernizzi was to make about Gullino and the "true story of the Markov murder." Six months later, Gullino left Denmark. The objects Gullino gave Invernizzi — whose wife appears in the documentary — were the basis for the new film. Skotte and his team interviewed Gullino in the Austrian city of Wels in 2021.

### Gullino, the Chameleon

So, who was Francesco Gullino? A sexually deviant fascist? An art dealer? A secret agent? A multiple murder suspect? A notorious swindler and liar? Gullino was capable of being everything and everyone,



had friends everywhere, had an appropriate story for everyone and an answer to every question, no matter how probing. As this recently unearthed material shows, it is not possible to find the real Francesco Gullino beneath the decades of stories, lies and half-truths. Maybe there never was one real Francesco Gullino.

As far as Ulrik Skotte is concerned, Gullino was above all a chameleon, which in turn made him the ideal secret agent.

Gullino died alone at home in the summer of 2021. His corpse was found a week after his death. He was cremated and given an anonymous burial. Skotte says that just before he died, Gullino called the Danish film crew one more time. All they could hear at the other end of the line was a wheezing, rasping sound.

**Christopher Nehring** is guest lecturer on disinformation at the University of Sofia and the Media Program at the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation, Berlin.

**The 3 articles on “CBRN challenges in giga/mega projects” (in Saudi Arabia and UAE) have been submitted for publication.**



# 2023 CBRNE-RELATED CONFERENCES

## 15TH ANNIVERSARY NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

February 13-15, 2023 | Hyatt Regency Crystal City | Arlington, VA SUMMIT

[www.exchangemonitor.com/go/nuclear-deterrence-summit-2023/](http://www.exchangemonitor.com/go/nuclear-deterrence-summit-2023/)

 <p><b>NCT Europe 2023</b></p> <p>VIEW EVENT</p>	 <p><b>NCT South America 2023-24</b></p> <p>VIEW EVENT</p>	 <p>Riyadh, KSA</p> <p><b>NCT Middle East 2023</b></p> <p>VIEW EVENT</p>
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<https://nct-events.com/event>

**04-08 September: NCT USA**

Aberdeen Proving Ground, Edgewood MD

**04-11 November: NCT Asia**

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**21-26 May: International CBRN Commandants and Commanders Conference (ICCC) 2023**

Rotterdam, The Netherland

**25-27 July, NDIA Annual CBRN Symposium and Exhibition**

Baltimore Civic Center, Baltimore, MD

[www.ndia.org/events](http://www.ndia.org/events)

	<p>CSCM February, 2022 <b>Dubrovnik 23-27 October 2023</b></p> <p><b>Announcing the CBRNe Science and Consequence Management 2023 World Congress</b></p>
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Within the body of Istanbul Aydın University, under the coordination of Istanbul Aydın University Environment and Human Health Application and Research Center (ÇEVSAM) and CBRN Defense Policy Development Association the 1st of the "Istanbul CBRN Days" will be held. This meeting, which will provide the opportunity to share the knowledge and experience of very valuable participants on this subject in the



national sense, will accelerate the development of scientific infrastructure and studies on CBRN DEFENSE in our country and related institutions and organizations, will ensure that experts and employees in this field get to know each other, share their work and contribute to the increase of cooperation between them. We hope to be found.

CBRN environment; It covers a large number of dead, injured, and environmental effects, especially those who have been infected with biological warfare agents, exposed to chemical warfare agents and/or toxins, and injured as a result of the effects of nuclear weapons and radiation. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has been affecting the whole world for almost the last 3 years, has enabled us to better understand the Biological threat of the CBRN concept, and in a sense, it has revealed how intense and difficult management of CBRN events can cause and can cause mass losses. The threat of CBRN weapons, which started with the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, and made a name for itself in the recent Syrian internal conflicts in the Middle East geography, including our country, has taken its place in the asymmetric war, and unfortunately, these agents are expected to be used in both war and terror environment in the future.

We think that this meeting, which will bring together many scientists, public and private sector representatives, will bring together many scientists, public and private sector representatives, based in Istanbul, which is the apple of the world's eye, and present the latest developments and technologies in the field of CBRN DEFENSE, and we think that this meeting will partially fill the deficiency of our Istanbul in this field. At the end of the event, we hope to see all the participants among us who will contribute to the "1st Istanbul CBRN Days", where we aim to raise awareness about CBRN threats and dangers.

You can find more detailed information about the KRBN Days, which we plan **to be held in Florya (Halit Aydın) Campus of Istanbul Aydın University on October 20 – 21, 2023**, and which we think will create an important added value for our country, at <https://istanbulkbrn.org/>

## High-Intensity CBRN 2023

28 - 30 June 2023

<https://cbrneworld.com/events/poland>

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Putin's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was the end of a prelude that had begun a long time ago. Nato, and allied nations, need to prepare for the potential use of CBRN weapons that belonged to a different age.

How do military, and first responder, forces prepare for the kinds of mission sets where gallons, rather than milliliters of an agent are the order of the day? Where population centres are targeted, and military and civilian forces need to work together to save the lives of thousands of people unprepared for this kind of eventuality?

The event will have a pre-conference decontamination workshop, and a two-day conference and exhibition, and provide insight into the kinds of scenarios that forces need to prepare for, and help them develop a blueprint for managing them.

Each nation will give two presentations, the first on their current capability (0-3 years) and a second, academic one, that forecasts out to the medium term (5-10 years).

Held at the Military Academy of Technology (WAT) in the center of Warsaw, a city and country that will be on the front line of any escalation of threat, this will be THE thought leadership CBRN event of 2023.



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# BIO NEWS





## Prone Positioning Curbs Need for Intubation in Nonintubated COVID-19 Patients

Source: <https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/988611>



Feb 22 – Prone positioning significantly reduced the need for intubation among nonintubated adults with COVID-19, as indicated by data from a new meta-analysis of more than 2000 individuals. The use of prone positioning for nonintubated patients (so-called "awake prone positioning") has been common since the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prone positioning is more comfortable for patients, and it entails no additional cost. Also, awake prone positioning is less labor intensive than prone positioning for intubated patients, said Jie Li, PhD, in [a presentation](#) at the Society for Critical Care Medicine (SCCM) 2023 Critical Care Congress.

However, data on the specific benefits of prone positioning are lacking and contradictory, said Li, a respiratory care specialist at Rush University in Chicago, Illinois. Li and colleagues from a multinational research group found that outcomes were improved for patients who were treated with awake prone positioning – notably, fewer treatment failures at day 28 – but a pair of subsequent studies by other researchers showed contradictory outcomes. For more definitive evidence, Li and colleagues conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of 11 randomized, controlled trials and one unpublished study of awake prone positioning for patients with COVID-19. The studies were published between January 1, 2020, and July 1, 2022, and included a total of 2886 adult patients.

The primary outcome was the reported cumulative risk of intubation among nonintubated COVID-19 patients. Secondary outcomes included mortality, the need for escalating respiratory support, length of hospital length of stay, ICU admission, and adverse events. Overall, awake prone positioning significantly reduced the intubation risk among nonintubated patients compared to standard care (risk ratio [RR], 0.85). A further subgroup analysis showed a significant reduction in risk for intubation among patients supported by high-flow nasal cannula or noninvasive ventilation (RR, 0.83). However, no additional reduction in intubation risk occurred among patients who received conventional oxygen therapy (RR, 1.02).

Mortality rates were similar for patients who underwent awake prone positioning and those who underwent supine positioning (RR, 0.96), as was the need for additional respiratory support (RR, 1.03). The length of hospital stay, ICU admission, and adverse events were similar between the patients who underwent prone positioning and those who underwent supine positioning. The findings were limited by several factors. There was a potential for confounding by disease severity, which may have increased the use of respiratory support devices, Li said in her presentation.

"Another factor we should not ignore is the daily duration of prone positioning," said Li. More research is needed to identify which factors play the greatest roles in treatment success, she added.



### Findings Clarify Current Evidence

The current study was important in that it evaluated the current evidence of awake prone positioning, "particularly to identify the patients who benefit most from this treatment, in order to guide clinical practice," Li told Medscape in an interview.

"Since early in the pandemic, awake prone positioning has been broadly utilized to treat patients with COVID-19," she said. "In 2021, we published a multinational [randomized controlled trial](#) with over 1100 patients enrolled and reported lower treatment failure. However, no significant differences of treatment failure were reported in several subsequent multicenter randomized controlled trials published after our study," she noted. Li said she was not surprised by the findings, which reflect those of her team's [previously published meta-analysis](#). "The increased number of patients helps confirm our previous finding, even with the inclusion of several recently published randomized controlled trials," she said.

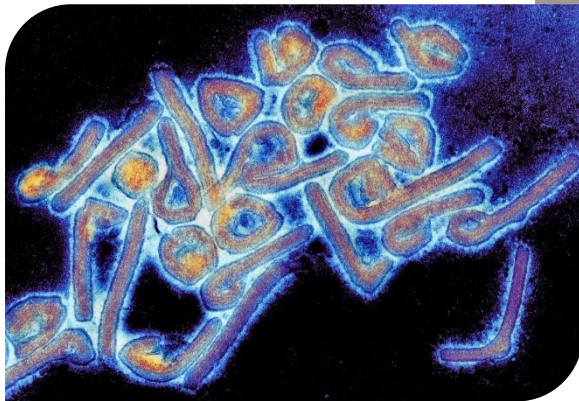
For clinicians, "the current evidence supports the use of awake prone positioning for patients with COVID-19, particularly those who require advanced respiratory support from high-flow nasal cannula or noninvasive ventilation," Li told Medscape.

## Spain Detects First Suspected Case of Marburg Disease

Source: <https://www.voanews.com/a/spain-detects-first-suspected-case-of-marburg-disease/6978680.html>

Feb 25 – The Spanish patient is a 34-year-old man who had recently traveled to the Central African nation of Equatorial Guinea. He was in a private hospital but has been transferred to an isolation unit at Hospital La Fe in Valencia for further tests, regional medical officials said.

Marburg virus disease, or MVD, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "is a rare but severe hemorrhagic fever which affects both people and non-human primates ... Primates [including people] can become infected with Marburg virus, and may develop



serious disease with high mortality."

Spanish health officials said Saturday that more than 200 people in Equatorial Guinea have recently been quarantined because of Marburg disease. Earlier this month, two suspected cases of Marburg were detected in Cameroon near its border with Equatorial Guinea.

The World Health Organization says that the "highly virulent disease" can have "a fatality ratio of up to 88%" and "is in the same family as the virus that causes Ebola virus disease." There are no vaccines or antiviral treatments for Marburg.

## "The WHO Pandemic Treaty will establish a global, police, medical and scientific state", Francis Boyle, professor of law

Source: <https://www.francesoir.fr/videos-les-debriefings-videos-english/who-pandemic-treaty-will-establish-global-police-medical-and>

Feb 23 – Francis Boyle is Professor of International Law at the University of Illinois. **He is the author of the Biological Weapons Anti-Terrorism Act of 1989, a U.S. law implementing the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention.** In this new "Debriefing", Francis Boyle warns against the amendments to the International Health Regulations and against the World Health Organization (WHO) Pandemic Treaty.



Texts "binding under international law" that would violate the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. Worse, once passed, they would give the WHO "dictatorial powers." Leaders should then "enforce and apply both texts at the national level (...) It would go all the way to primary care that your doctors give you and beyond," he says. If the WHO obtains "these dictatorial powers, it will be able to order to undertake so-called medical measures that will kill you and not cure you (...) They can, during a pandemic, order lockdowns, masks or even more vaccines," Boyle said.

An unacceptable scenario for this lawyer, since "we cannot trust the WHO". It is a rotten, corrupt and criminal organization that is in the pocket of Big Pharma, the CDC, the biological warfare industry and the Chinese communist government." Francis Boyle explains to France-Soir that such texts, once in force, would establish "a world state, police, medical and scientific" whose authority "will exceed that of the States and their constitutions".

The law professor draws parallels between experimental biological weapons vaccines – which he campaigned against in the 1980s – and mRNA vaccines against the coronavirus. "Covid-19 is a biological warfare weapon" in the same way, or even "more dangerous", than anthrax and botulism. We have never before had any type of successful vaccine against a biological warfare agent... Excuse me, the two we had, were a disaster producing deaths and disabilities in both the United States and Britain," he said, referring to the 1990 Gulf War Syndrome. This law professor called, during this interview, for the indictment of "all those involved, not only in covid-19, but also in vaccines, for murder and conspiracy to murder".

## "Cause Unknown" – The Epidemic of Sudden Deaths in 2021 and 2022

By Ed Dowd

Source: <https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Cause-Unknown/Ed-Dowd/Children-s-Health-Defense/9781510776395>

### What is killing healthy young Americans?

2020 saw a spike in deaths in America, smaller than you might imagine during a pandemic, some of which could be attributed to COVID and to initial treatment strategies that were not effective. But then, in 2021, the stats people expected went off the rails. The CEO of the OneAmerica insurance company publicly disclosed that during the third and fourth quarters of 2021, death in people of working age (18–64) was 40 percent higher than it was before the pandemic. Significantly, the majority of the deaths were not attributed to COVID.

A 40 percent increase in deaths is literally earth-shaking. Even a 10 percent increase in excess deaths would have been a 1-in-200-year event. But this was 40 percent.

And therein lies a story—a story that starts with obvious questions:

- What has caused this historic spike in deaths among younger people?
- What has caused the shift from old people, who are expected to die, to younger people, who are expected to keep living?

It isn't COVID, of course, because we know that COVID is not a significant cause of death in young people. Various stakeholders opine about what could be causing this epidemic of unexpected sudden deaths, but "CAUSE UNKNOWN" doesn't opine or speculate. The facts just are, and the math just is.

The book begins with a close look at the actual human reality behind the statistics, and when you see the people who are represented by the dry term *Excess Mortality*, it's difficult to accept so many unexpected sudden deaths of young athletes, known to be the healthiest among us. Similarly, when lots of healthy teenagers and young adults die in their sleep without obvious reason, collapse and die on a family outing, or fall down dead while playing sports, that all by itself raises an immediate public health concern. Or at least it used to.

Ask yourself if you recall seeing these kinds of things occurring during your own life—in junior high? In high school? In college? How many times in your life did you hear of a performer dropping dead on stage in mid-performance? Your own life experience and intuition will tell you that what you're about to see is not normal.

**Or at least it wasn't normal before 2021.**



## Myocarditis — New Top Cause of Death Among COVID-Jabbed

Have our federal health agencies destroyed the hearts of tens of thousands of young Americans by pushing and mandating these shots? The preponderance of evidence suggests this is most likely. A recent survey<sup>15</sup> by Steve Kirsch suggests myocarditis and sudden death are now two of the top causes of death in the U.S., but only among those who got the COVID jab.

In early October 2022, Florida Surgeon General Dr. Joseph Ladapo issued updated COVID jab guidance,<sup>16,17</sup> recommending men between the ages of 18 and 39 abstain from getting any more shots, as data show an 84% increase in heart-related death within 28 days of injection. Men over the age of 60 have a 10% increased risk of cardiac-related death within 28 days.

●► Read also [this](#)

## Confidential report to the White House points to Covid lab leak theory: WSJ

Source: <https://tpworld.com/66605902/confidential-report-to-the-white-house-points-to-covid-lab-leak-theory-wsj>



The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) exclusively reported on Feb 26th that the intelligence report points to the theory that the virus originated from the Wuhan Institute of Virus Research, which was initially considered a conspiracy.

The possibility of a laboratory leak causing the COVID-19 pandemic has gained further attention, as a confidential intelligence report provided to the White House and key members of Congress suggests that the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has concluded it is likely. The theory of a laboratory leak was initially excluded from early papers on the virus's origin when it first emerged in 2020. However, the updated intelligence report submitted to the office of National Intelligence Director, Avril Haines highlights how different parts of the intelligence community made varying



judgments about the virus's origin. The new report points to a change in the DOE's position, which had not previously determined how the virus emerged. The DOE now joins the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in suggesting that the virus may have been spread through an accident in a Chinese laboratory. Four other agencies and a national intelligence team still determine that it may be the result of natural transmission, while two others are uncertain.

This theory has gained more attention in the scientific community, demanding further investigation. According to Fox News, some emails of Anthony Fauci, the former chief epidemiologist of the United States, revealed last January, indicating that Fauci and Francis Collins, the former director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), had long known that the virus might have been leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virus Research in China and may have been genetically modified.

The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), which Fauci heads, is also suspected of having funded "gain-of-function" research in China to modify the virus. While the origin of the pandemic remains a topic of much debate, the new intelligence report indicates that a laboratory leak cannot be ruled out and further investigation is necessary.

## Report: NYC Sent Fingerprints of Unvaxed Teachers to FBI

Source: <https://freebeacon.com/latest-news/report-nyc-sent-fingerprints-of-unvaxed-teachers-to-fbi/>



Feb 14 – New York City sent the fingerprints of unvaccinated public school teachers to the FBI, the educators allege in a lawsuit against the city government. The city also flagged the teachers, whom the city fired for refusing to take the COVID-19 vaccine, with a "problem code" that can affect their ability to get another job, [Fox News](#) reported.

**"Fingerprints are sent with that flag to the FBI and the New York Criminal Justice Services, so it impacts their ongoing ability to get employment at other places,"** said John Bursch, a lawyer representing the teachers in their suit against the city.

Employees filed suit after New York City mayor Eric Adams (D.) announced on Feb. 6 that he is lifting the city's COVID mandate. During the course of the mandate, 1,780 New York City employees, including those in the Department of Education, Department of Health, NYPD, and FDNY, lost their jobs for refusing the vaccine, according to the [New York Post](#).

The city denied a religious exemption for one teacher who had worked for New York public schools for 15 years. "Religiously, mentally, I just didn't want anything experimental on my body, so what criminal activity does that persist?" she asked. "This is an invasion of privacy."



City employees fired for refusing the vaccine still have to reapply for jobs, without guarantee of their previous salaries or benefits. Attorney James Mermigis joined the legal battle to prevent future mandates, arguing such policies are unconstitutional. "So many employees were wrongfully terminated. [Mayor] Adams and his cronies blatantly violated New York City Human Rights Laws during the accommodation process," said Mermigis. "They cannot be let off the hook because he rescinds the mandate."

## Zombie Viruses from the Arctic

By Jean-Michel Claverie

Source: <https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/zombie-viruses-arctic>



Jan 18 – Global warming was traditionally associated with the emergence of new health risks stemming from the migration of vectors of tropical diseases to temperate regions of the globe, such as Western Europe. However, it was more recently realized that another threat could come from the far North, where microbes stored in the frozen earth for up to a million years would be released from the accelerated thawing of the Siberian Arctic frozen soils—the permafrost.

This science fiction scenario became more realistic in 2015 when an international research team succeeded in resurrecting several viruses isolated from permafrost dating back 30,000 years. Following additional experiments, it is now clear that a significant proportion of prehistorical viruses can remain infectious for even longer periods of time. This article reviews the reality of the risks that their release might represent for the future.

Contrary to the beliefs of many in temperate zones, regions north of the Arctic Circle are not icy expanses permanently covered with snow.

### What is "Permafrost"?

Contrary to the beliefs of most inhabitants of temperate zones (including many journalists), the regions located north of the Arctic Circle are not icy expanses permanently covered with snow. For instance, in



Duvanny Yar, a popular permafrost research site—located on the mouth of the Kolyma River north of the 68th parallel in the Republic of Sakha, Yakutia—although the annual average temperature does not exceed -10°C there, it remains above zero from June to September, occasionally reaching 30°C. Each summer therefore sees the regrowth of a significant vegetation cover, made up of diverse fauna (arthropods, worms) and the proliferation of a complex microbial ecosystem (protozoa, bacteria, viruses).

At the return of each winter, this transient surface layer of living matter slowly decomposes and refreezes. Its accumulation and compaction over hundreds of years end up forming a sort of peat at a depth where the temperature never again reaches above 0°C, even in summer. This permanently frozen soil, called "permafrost," is thus very different from ice (i.e. frozen water), with which it is frequently confused in popular media. The thickness of permafrost is delimited by two zones. At the surface (to a depth of about one meter), by what is called the "active layer," the temperature of which rise above 0°C each summer. And at the bottom (which can reach up to 1,500 meters in northeastern Siberia, because of the geothermal gradient (Earth's internal heat). Between top and bottom the permafrost temperatures remain relatively constant (between -15°C and -5°C).



Dr. Eugène Christo-Foroux proudly presenting the mammoth tusk he just found on the bank of the Kolyma river at Duvanny Yar, Siberia, August 2019. Photo courtesy of Jean-Michel Claverie

Studies have shown that this geological feature has been stable for the last 400,000 years in the Arctic, a status that is now threatened in the context of global warming. If it is now widely acknowledged that an average temperature increase of 1.5°C relative to pre-industrial era would be exceeded during the 21st century, the scenario is much worse in the Arctic, which appears to warm up two to three times faster than temperate regions. An already visible consequence is the summer thawing of surface permafrost at increasing depths and the rapid erosion of permafrost bluffs in coastal areas, or along rivers. This in turn increases the release and revival of permafrost microbes, including ancient ones from the late Pleistocene (i.e., the last 100,000 years).

### Permafrost Is an Optimal Natural Repository for Ancient Microbes

Permafrost originates from regular soil, which is a rich mixture of decaying organic matter under the action of a huge and highly diverse population of microorganisms (bacteria, yeasts, protozoa, etc.). However, below the active layer, free liquid water ceases to exist, progressively grinding all metabolic activities to a halt. Although this causes the irreversible death of a fraction of the resident microorganisms, many others manage to enter an inert state called "cryptobiosis," pending their eventual return to life when the temperature rises above 0°C again. It turns out that deep—thus ancient—permafrost offers ideal conditions for the preservation of cellular structures as well as DNA. It is cold, dark, anoxic, and neutral, all the opposite of what rapidly destroys microbes at the surface: heat, UV light, oxygen, and extreme pH. Put a yogurt in permafrost, and it might still be edible 50,000 years later.

What is true for cellular microorganisms (bacteria or protozoa) remaining unaltered once in the state of cryptobiosis, is even truer for viruses—the particles of which do not require any metabolic activity for their maintenance, such as microscopic seeds. Deep permafrost is thus a permanent repository for microorganisms and viruses as old as the frozen soil layers they have been trapped in—up to a million years. This time span greatly exceeds the earliest estimate for the emergence of the modern human (*Homo sapiens*) or even our cousin *Homo neanderthalensis*, about 300,000 years ago. In other words, our species—hence, our immune system—has never been in contact with most of those microbes during its evolution.

Deep and ancient permafrost offers ideal conditions for the preservation of cellular structures as well as DNA.

### Multiple Studies Substantiate the Resurrection of Prehistorical Microbes

Explorations of the microbial flora of the permafrost of Arctic regions started much before the recent interest manifested by the media. The presence of bacteria in Siberian permafrost was already known in 1912. As early as 1944, it was known that bacteria were capable of surviving 1,000 years in permafrost. This research, for the most part carried out by Russian scientists, remained ignored by Western scientists for much of the twentieth century because of the Cold War and for linguistic reasons, with most researchers from the Soviet Union publishing their work in Russian journals not distributed abroad.

The late David Gilichinsky (1948-2012), a leader in the field, was the first microbiologist specialist of Siberian cryosols—soils in very cold climates—to break this isolation by publishing in English starting in 1992. Unfortunately, his results were initially presented as exploring the possibility of microbial life on Mars,



and therefore published in unconventional journals ignored by traditional microbiologists. Following these pioneering studies, different teams have now revived bacteria from permafrost layers dated back 100,000 years ago, but most of them in the range 10,000 - 50,000 years because of the limit of radiocarbon dating. Recent studies have also introduced a new "metagenomic" approach consisting in sequencing the total DNA extracted from permafrost followed by database comparisons to identify which types of microbes (dead or alive) are there (akin to forensic DNA profiling).

Thanks to these multiple studies, we now know that the highly diverse bacterial population found in permafrost includes relatives of most common contemporary human pathogens—Acinetobacter, Bacillus anthracis, Brucella, Campylobacter, Clostridia, Mycoplasma, various Enterobacteria, Mycobacteria, Streptococci, Staphylococci, and Rickettsia. The massive outbreak of anthrax in reindeer from July to August 2016, that occurred in the Yamal Peninsula in Russia, is the latest example of such pathogens resurging from the past (estimated as seventy-five years ago) because of a particularly hot summer thawing surface permafrost deeper than usual. Hopefully, we can reasonably believe that an epidemic caused by an even much older pathogenic bacterium could still be controlled by modern antibiotics at our disposal (even though bacteria carrying antibiotic-resistance genes were found surprisingly prevalent in permafrost). Indeed, these antibiotics target cellular structures or block metabolic pathways that have been conserved in all bacteria since a billion years of evolution. By design, these drugs are "broad spectrum antibiotics."



A man walks through a tunnel in permafrost covered with ice crystals. REUTERS/Maxim Shemetov

### **Ancient and Unknown Viruses Are the Real Risk**

The situation would be much more disastrous in the case of an animal or human diseases caused by an ancient/unknown virus. As unfortunately well demonstrated by the most recent pandemics (for example, COVID and AIDS), each new virus, even related to previously known families, requires the development of highly specific medical responses, such as new antivirals and vaccines. There is no equivalent to "broad spectrum antibiotics" against viruses, because they do not share metabolic processes that are universally conserved. It is therefore legitimate to focus on the risk posed by viral particles released from the thawing of thousands of years of permafrost layers. A review of the literature shows that few studies have been published on this subject, and they are not reassuring. One was the identification of influenza virus RNA from the lung





of a victim buried in permafrost since 1918. Another one was the detection of smallpox virus DNA in a 300-year-old Siberian mummy. However, there was no attempt to "revive" these viruses (fortunately).

The first isolation of two fully infectious viruses from 30,000-year-old permafrost was performed in a laboratory at Aix-Marseille University, in France, and published in [2014](#) and [2015](#). All viruses are obligatory parasites of cells, and can only infect and multiply in specific cell types of a given host. Thus, contrary to bacteria, infectious (i.e. live) viruses can only be detected by putting them in contact with the proper host. For safety reasons, our experiments were restricted to the detection of ancient viruses capable of infecting amoebas, unicellular eukaryotic organisms separated from the human species by a billion years of divergent evolution.

Although limited to amoebas, these first results demonstrated that it was possible for viruses to remain infectious in ancient permafrost since prehistorical times, a conclusion most likely extendable to viruses infecting other species, such as animals or humans. This is when the popular notion of a "zombie" virus was born. Since then, we [revived](#) seven additional amoeba viruses from ancient permafrost, now pushing the limit close to 50,000 years ago, overlapping with paleontological evidence of human occupations in northeastern Siberia. [The latest metagenomic studies](#) have identified genomic traces of poxviruses, herpesviruses, and Asfarviruses, all of which are well known human and vertebrate pathogens. The scenario of an unknown virus once infecting Neanderthal coming back at us, although unlikely, has become a real possibility.

### Risk = Hazard + Exposure

There are sharks in Australia, but they do not pose any threat to you until you go surfing. Indeed, a risk is always the combination of



hazard and exposure. We have now demonstrated that ancient, but still infectious, amoeba viruses are released every summer day from thawing permafrost. Most likely, this also applies to animal- and human-infecting viruses—the genomic traces of which have been detected. This now constitutes a tangible hazard. Fortunately, very few people were living in those inhospitable regions until now, making a cognate virus-host encounter very unlikely.

The author in front of the Melnikov Permafrost Institute in Yakutsk, Republic of Sakha, Yakutia, Russia, August 2019. Photo courtesy of Jean-Michel Claverie

However, global warming is rendering those desertic regions more accessible to human activity, in particular the northern Arctic Ocean coastline of Siberia, thanks to reduction of the perennial sea-ice area, allowing for increases in marine traffic and easier industrial

operations. The rich mineral resources and oil reserves of the arctic regions are under increasing pressure. Clearly, the worst exposure scenario is the gathering of a large number of workers around an open pit mining operation, from which permafrost excavated hundreds meters deep would release very ancient and totally unknown human-infecting viruses. How long ancient viruses eventually released from permafrost could remain infectious once exposed to outdoor conditions (UV light, oxygen, heat), and how likely they will be to encounter and infect a suitable host in the interval, is yet impossible to estimate. But it is already clear that the risk associated to the "zombie viruses" scenario is bound to increase in the context of global warming as permafrost thawing keeps accelerating, and as more people populate the Arctic in the wake of industrial ventures.

**Jean-Michel Claverie** is an emeritus professor at the School of Medicine of Aix-Marseille University, in the South of France. After completing his PhD (Dr. Sc) at the University of Paris in 1977, he started a nomadic career holding research positions at the CNRS in Paris, The Salk Institute (La Jolla), The Pasteur Institute (Paris), the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NIH, Bethesda), and Incyte, a global biopharmaceutical company (Palo Alto). Dr. Claverie returned to France in 1995, where he created a new laboratory with his wife and co-worker Dr. Chantal Abergel. This laboratory is most known for their studies of "giant" viruses, the discovery of which in 2003 deeply challenged several basic concepts in virology and marine microbiology. In 2014, they went on to create the new field of "paleovirology" with their discovery of the first infectious viruses in ancient Siberian permafrost.



## Not Enough Data to Support Multiple Annual COVID Boosters, CDC Advisers Say

Source: <https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/988749>

Feb 27 – There is not sufficient evidence to recommend more than one COVID-19 booster shot a year for older people and those with weakened immune systems, an expert advisory group to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said on Friday. The COVID-19 working group of the CDC's Advisory Committee For Immunization Practices (ACIP) supported an annual booster campaign, likely in the fall, especially for populations considered at high risk, Dr. Sara Oliver, a CDC official who heads the group, said during a meeting of the agency's outside advisers.

The agency currently recommends older and immunocompromised people receive COVID booster shots more frequently since vaccine effectiveness usually wanes faster for those populations compared to younger people with robust immune systems.

In the spring of 2022, the CDC recommended immunocompromised and people over age 50 receive an additional shot if they had received their first booster at least four months earlier.

The CDC advisers did not vote on new recommendations for how the COVID-19 shots should be administered on Friday.

But ACIP advised showing flexibility in recommendations for those with compromised or weakened immune systems to allow more frequent doses for those most vulnerable to severe COVID.

Both the CDC and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration are working on how to best update COVID vaccines to target circulating variants annually, similar to flu vaccine campaigns. About 53.3 million people in the United States - around 16% of the U.S. population - have received a COVID-19 booster shot since updated versions of the vaccines were authorized in September.

That compares with 230 million people, around 70% of the population, that received an initial two-dose series of the COVID vaccines.

## Guelph-based company in the business of fighting bioterrorism

Source: <https://www.guelphmercury.com/news-story/10858791-guelph-based-company-in-the-business-of-fighting-bioterrorism/>

Feb 28 – A manufacturing process developed in Guelph that can be used to produce treatments for ricin exposure or other bioterrorism threats has received a patent from the U.S. Patent Office.

[AntoXa](#), a subsidiary of biopharmaceutical company PlantForm Corporation, has an exclusive licence from Defence Research & Development Canada to develop and produce the **PhD9 monoclonal antibody treatment** in plants for sale in markets worldwide. The process involved has received the U.S. patent.

“Our plant-based, made-in-Canada manufacturing platform uniquely addresses the critical need for cost-effective, large-scale production of antidotes for ricin and other potential bioterrorism threats,” PlantForm president and CEO Don Stewart said in a news release. He went on to say safety and efficacy studies had shown therapeutic efficacy against ricin intoxication, and validated the manufacturing platform’s ability to produce “a best-in-class antibody treatment for ricin exposure.”

**Ricin** is a naturally occurring protein from the castor bean plant that is toxic to humans when inhaled or injected.

“It is listed as a Category B threat agent by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention due to its ease of production, worldwide availability, relative stability and extreme lethality,” the news release said.

It acts quickly and leaves a short window for administering therapeutic antibodies, and there is currently no approved antidote against ricin poisoning. The PhD9 antibody drug candidate prevents ricin from penetrating cells.

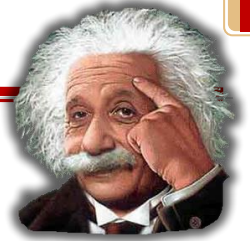
Further preclinical studies and a Phase 1 human clinical trial are among the next steps for the commercialization of PhD9, but would be dependent on raising the necessary funds for scaleup and other activities necessary to obtain regulatory approvals, Stewart said. Medical countermeasures do not require Phase 2 and Phase 3 human efficacy trials for ethical reasons, therefore the path to regulatory approval is shorter than for other pharmaceuticals.



### Did you know?

A 1993 [analysis](#) conducted by the Office of Technology Assessment of the US Congress estimated that 130,000 to 3 million deaths could occur following the release of 100 kilograms of aerosolized *B. anthracis* over Washington, DC, making such an attack as lethal as a hydrogen bomb.





## New York police say shoppers should take off face masks before entering stores

By Megan Cerullo

Source: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/amazon-hq2-construction-pause-northern-virginia/>



A marijuana store in New York's SoHo neighborhood informs patrons they must show their faces for entry on March 1, 2023 Megan Cerullo

Mar 01 – Face masks, once an essential Covid-19 protective measure, are now being worn by criminals to conceal their identities, according to New York police who are urging businesses to unmask customers before letting them in stores.

The recommendation is a 180-degree turn from mask-wearing norms at the onset of the pandemic. During peak periods of infection, federal agencies mandated mask-wearing in public places, while many businesses required customers to wear them on the premises. Now, however, some businesses are banning customers from entering the premises with face masks on, saying the policy change is needed to identify thieves. And after numerous incidents, the New York Police Department is urging business owners to make shoppers remove their face masks and flash their features before being let in.

"We're seeing far too often where people are coming up to our businesses, sometimes with masks and latex gloves, and they're being buzzed in, they're being allowed to enter into the store and then we have a robbery or some kind of property being stolen,"

He acknowledged that during the pandemic, most businesses wouldn't allow patrons to enter stores without masks, and sometimes even gloves. Pre-pandemic, however, most businesses wouldn't allow you to walk in there with a mask and latex gloves on, he said. New York State even recently scrapped a mandate that masks be worn in healthcare settings.

### "Condition of entry"

"We're asking the businesses to make this a condition of entry: That people, when they come in, they should show their face, they should identify themselves," Maddrey added. "And if they feel like they want to put their mask on after they identify themselves for their safety, by all means, they should do so."



The NYPD's appeal to businesses comes after a "masked up" criminal entered a Queens jewelry store and allegedly made off with \$1.1 million worth of property after beating the 79-year-old woman who was watching the store.

"Since the pandemic, this is a way of life for us, where people wear masks regularly. But we're seeing this being used too much as a ruse, to enter into businesses and to victimize our businesses," Maddrey said.

He added that businesses can permit customers to don their masks after they've identified themselves.

"It can be a condition of entry that a mask is removed, and once the person is identified, they can put their mask back on for safety," he said.

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** Curious to read the crime reduction results after two months compared with 2022. It is very interesting that NY Police can issue directives related to public health!

## Can a 1975 bioweapons ban handle today's biotreats?

By Matt Field and Erik English

Source: <https://thebulletin.org/2023/03/biological-weapons-convention/>

Matthew Meselson is a true eminence grise of arms control in the realm of biological weaponry. In 1984, he [traveled](#) to Thailand to debunk the US assertion that forces backed by the Soviet Union were using "toxin warfare" on Hmong and Cambodian Khmer Rouge fighters in Southeast Asia. The alleged "poison from the sky" was actually bee poop, he concluded, after witnessing a several-minute "shower of feces" from high flying honeybees near Chiang Mai. Later in the 1990s, he and his wife, the noted bioweapons scholar Jeanne Guillemin, and colleagues investigated an anthrax outbreak that occurred in 1979 in Sverdlovsk, Russia. An incident at a bioweapons facility had lofted spores into the air, their [study showed](#).

Early in his career, as Meselson recounted in a recent interview, a "very nice" former Harvard immunology professor gave him a tour of Fort Detrick, the Maryland military base that was the center of the United States' biological weapons program.



"We came to a big building seven stories high. And it looked from a distance as though it had real windows, but when you get up close, you can see they're not real windows at all. There were no windows."

Meselson thought: "Well, what do we do in there?"

[Building 470 at Fort Detrick in Frederick, Maryland, in March 2002.](#) (Maryland Historical Trust)

Indeed, the structure, a rectangular industrial affair had no windows. Instead, glass bricks let in light while obscuring the project underway inside. This was [Building 470](#), where the United States housed 30-foot-tall fermentation tanks for [churning out anthrax](#).

Also on the Fort Detrick campus was the "Eight Ball," a multi-story spherical building that looks sort of like Disney's Epcot Center in Florida,

except the [air-tight chamber](#) was used for testing biowarfare agents. Meselson's guide told him biological weapons "could save us a lot of money" compared to nuclear weapons; this was the budget option for killing on a huge scale.

"It didn't take me long to realize, 'Hey wait, first of all, we got a lot of money,'" Meselson recalled. "And second, 'Why would we pioneer a strategic weapon that could wipe out whole cities that's cheap?'"

### A toothless treaty?

Since 1975, the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) has been the cornerstone of international efforts to curb the proliferation of offensive biological weapons programs. Many experts credit the treaty with having established or at least reinforced a "norm" against the use of germs as weapons. But there's always been a piece missing from the bioweapons ban. The convention has no strict verification regime to ensure that countries are complying with it. Unlike the [Chemical Weapons Convention](#) or the [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty](#), no [corps of inspectors](#) travels the world to confirm treaty compliance. A plan to have some sort of inspection program fell through two decades ago, when the United States, responding to concerns from its pharmaceutical companies and to misgivings about the feasibility of inspecting potentially tens of thousands of sites, killed the negotiations on such an oversight body.





The Soviet bioweapons testing grounds at Vozrozhdeniya Island. (Raymond A. Zilinskas)

And there have been dead-to-rights violators of the BWC in the past. After becoming one of the original signers of the treaty, the Soviet Union undertook to create an illicit program of astounding size and ambition. A military program along with a [supposed civilian enterprise](#) called Biopreparat employed [tens of thousands](#) of workers who produced or researched anthrax, smallpox, and other diseases in a far-flung network of facilities. The scientists and technicians worked on sci-fi-like horrors like “chimeric viruses that would cause two diseases either nearly simultaneously or successively,” [according](#) to an exhaustive history of the Soviet program by Milton Leitenberg and Raymond A. Zalinskas. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian government [admitted](#) to inheriting the secret program and pledged to end it, but a lack of transparency surrounding key military sites and the government’s subsequent efforts to backtrack on its admissions have led to persistent doubts about whether the Soviet program was ever truly dismantled. After years of inaction on the verification issue, there was modest movement at the bioweapons treaty’s Ninth Review Conference in Geneva in December. Delegates cracked the door open to a formal verification process by setting up a working group to explore the issue. But against the backdrop of rapid advances in biotechnology and the new risks they create—not to mention swirling allegations that countries still have bioweapons programs—a key question remains: Can the existing biological arms control treaty live up to the promise of a world free from biowarfare?

Ukrainian forces training in chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defense. (Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, Wikimedia Commons)

### Bioweapons before the BWC

By the time Meselson began researching America’s offensive weapons program in 1963, he was, though young, already a scientific star who had [shown how DNA replicated](#) and had helped show how messenger RNA [brought](#) the genetic instructions encoded in DNA to the cellular machinery for protein synthesis. He’d gone to Washington that summer after a divorce because “I thought it’d be fun and I might meet somebody I like, a lady.”



**EDITOR: If you do not do it right during training, there is no chance to succeed during real exposure in the field! (unless it is an orientation drill in smoke)**



Ukrainian forces training in chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defense. (Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, Wikimedia Commons)

The now-defunct Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (then independent but now merged with the State Department) had hired Meselson to ponder European theater nuclear weapons. But the molecular biologist soon discovered he was swimming in crowded waters. Giants of the nuclear intelligentsia, like the ambassador to the Soviet Union, “came to me,” Meselson recalled. It was embarrassing.

“People had already thought about this, but not just people: Henry Kissinger had written a book called *The Necessity for Choice* all about this. So how am I going to come up with anything useful in a few weeks in the summertime?” Meselson remembers thinking. He asked, and the agency agreed, to transfer him to deal with chemical and biological weapons, an area more suited to his expertise, at least.

At [Fort Detrick in 1963](#), Meselson caught only a glimpse of just a part of America’s vast biological weapons program.

At the Pine Bluff Arsenal in Arkansas, workers loaded bioweapons agents onto bombs and into spray tanks. The facility [handled](#) dried anthrax bacteria, tularemia bacteria, Venezuelan equine encephalitis virus, and other pathogens in its biowarfare stockpiles, according to the late bioweapons expert Jonathan Tucker. Tens of thousands of loaded munitions were stored at the site.

Near the weapons facilities, boy scouts held “camporees,” and hunters and fishermen [wandered](#) Pine Bluff’s 9,000 acres of woods—a “stone’s throw from the Western world’s deadliest collection of germs,” a 1971 *New York Times* story reported.

Meanwhile, out in the Utah desert at the Dugway Proving Ground, the military ran open-air tests using viruses and bacteria in addition to chemical weapons. The experiments didn’t always stay on the range. Thousands of sheep [died in 1968](#) after a malfunction caused a plane carrying nerve agent to release it at a higher altitude than planned, contaminating grazing lands 27 miles away. According to a 1994 US Senate staff report, investigations also found that animals near Dugway had antigens to Venezuelan equine encephalomyelitis, suggesting they had been exposed due to work at Dugway. The disease had previously only been found among rats in Florida.



The latter testing mishap was likely a result of a basic truth about bioweapons: They are extremely tricky for militaries to handle. Environmental factors like UV radiation can [affect](#) pathogens. The wind can blow them off course. A contagious disease could



boomerang, infecting whoever deploys it, or it could [mutate](#) after its release. Despite these obvious drawbacks, biological weapons are likely quite capable of killing or sickening a lot of people.

The Stepnogorsk biological weapons complex in Kazakhstan. (US Department of Defense)

In 1970, the World Health Organization [estimated](#) that 110 pounds of tularemia bacteria, if aerosolized and dispersed on a city of five million people, would kill 19,000 and sicken another 250,000.

Indeed, the accidental release from the Sverdlovsk anthrax plant in the Soviet Union [killed](#) more than 60 people downwind from the facility in 1979.

While few countries have used bioweapons in war, several, have maintained programs. During World War II, the Japanese Imperial Army tested and used pathogen weapons on a large scale. Planes flew over China dropping bombs full of plague-infested fleas. Though crude, the attacks sparked reports of outbreaks, [according](#) to *The New York Times* in 1995. Japanese medical staff in China would conduct vivisections, sometimes without anesthetics, to see how biological agents affected patients.



A photo from the Jilin Provincial Archives, which, according to Xinhua Press, shows a "bacteriological test directed by Japan's Unit 731 in November of 1940" in northeast China's Jilin Province. (Wikimedia Commons)



As one wartime medic with the army's notorious Unit 731 told the *Times*, anesthetics "might have an effect on the results." A former Japanese military doctor later recounted [sending](#) samples of typhoid germs to Japanese troops. The test tubes, the doctor was told, would be used to poison wells.

Earlier, during World War I, Germany [attempted](#) to infect animals with disease in various countries as a form of sabotage, but the Japanese program certainly stands alone in scale.

The scarcity of examples of use, however, belies the interest countries have displayed in biological weapons. A [2008 chart](#) by the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies lists 23 countries as having had programs that researched bioweapons agents. At least eight of those countries actually weaponized them.

Though Meselson thought his argument about the folly of pioneering cheaper weapons of mass destruction was solid, he had a realization: He would have to influence people both inside and outside of government. Meselson talked about biological weapons whenever he could—to members of Congress, staff in the executive branch, and TV hosts. Though the United States was spending tens of millions of dollars a year on the weapons during the 1950s and '60s—Sonia Ben Ouagrham-Gormley, a researcher at George Mason University, wrote the government spent [\\$700 million](#) over the life the program—the public wasn't fixated on them the way it was on the nuclear threat. "Everybody talks about nuclear weapons. There's only this Meselson guy from Harvard who's talking about biological weapons ... and the people who disagree with him," Meselson said of his early work.

Following the disastrous nerve agent incident at Dugway, Congress [put pressure](#) on the Nixon administration to reign in America's chemical and biological warfare efforts, including through consideration of [a test ban](#). In November 1969, however, President Richard Nixon, officially ended the country's offensive bioweapons program "Mankind already carries in its own hands too many of the seeds of its own destruction," he [wrote](#) in a statement that also limited the chemical weapons program. The president ordered [the destruction](#) of the country's bioweapons and embraced a draft treaty to ban them, which would eventually become the BWC.

### Verification on the move

Two developments in the 1990s pushed BWC members to attempt to give the treaty more teeth. In February 1991, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein faced a Sword of Damocles moment. Iraq had invaded and [quickly](#) conquered Kuwait in August 1990, but after a roughly [six-week military campaign](#), a US-led coalition pushed Iraqi forces out of Kuwait and a portion of southern Iraq. In exchange for a ceasefire, Saddam [agreed](#) to an invasive UN-led inspection of his country's nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons programs. For, [about eight years](#), the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) visited sites, interviewed officials, and audited [supplies of material](#) with weapons applications, like bacterial growth media. As if in a spy thriller, UNSCOM investigators [raced to visit sites](#) before minders could alert interview targets. They played hardball. During one standoff outside a Baghdad veterinary school in 1993, an inspector [remembered](#) calling his boss for advice. "Tell them you will end your mission, depart Iraq, and they can deal with the Security Council," the boss said. As the inspectors began to drive off, the Iraqis chased after them to invite in the team.

A month before BWC negotiators [met](#) in September 1991 for the third treaty review conference, Iraq [acknowledged](#) it had a biological weapons program, claiming it was for defensive purposes. In fact, by start of the Persian Gulf War, Saddam [had](#) scores of missiles and bombs loaded with anthrax and biological toxins. At around the same time that the Iraqi weapons saga was playing out, in another corner of the world, Soviet defectors were revealing a picture of their country's illicit bioweapons effort. High-ranking scientists [Vladimir Pasechnik](#) and [Ken Alibek](#), who defected to the United Kingdom and the United States in 1989 and 1992, respectively, shared alarming details about the size and ambitions of Biopreparat.

The [two programs](#) seemed to be proof positive that countries had been harboring bioweapons secrets. What might other countries be hiding? In the 1991 review conference's final document, BWC members agreed to create a group of experts to examine how to verify compliance with the convention.

The group, known by the mashup VEREX (an acronym combining "verification" with "experts") [reported on 21 methods](#) for assessing treaty compliance. These ranged from checking declarations about biological programs that countries could submit to stationing personnel at specific sites. Some ideas would be costly. Others posed a variety of other problems. Requiring declarations of biological manufacturing facilities, for example, would rely on the honesty and exhaustiveness of a self-interested state; few if any countries would admit to breaking the rules.

But some proposals, [in combination](#), might be able to ascertain compliance.

To build on the expert verification report, BWC members created the so-called "Ad Hoc Group" in 1994; it was to negotiate over a verification system, called a protocol. Although the group [met](#) 24 times over the course of six years, negotiators could never coalesce around a verification mechanism. A rolling text of the proposal contained more than 1,000 brackets denoting places where there was no agreement.







A UN inspector from the Netherlands measures the volume of nerve agent in a container on October 7, 1991. (UN Photo)

In July 2001, the relatively new George W. Bush administration [told](#) the Ad Hoc Group that the years long discussions had been a bust. The talks were over. The emerging protocol would have had countries [declare](#) some biodefense, vaccine, and other research facilities relevant to bioweapons development, subjecting them to potential inspection. But countries would not need to declare a vast number of facilities that could also play a role in illicit weapons programs, like some pharmaceutical plants, according to a *New York Times* article from 2001. Inspectors would therefore be able to visit just a relatively small sample of the potentially tens of thousands of facilities relevant to the treaty, Donald Mahley, a US negotiator, told the Ad Hoc Group. As negotiators crafted the verification proposal, they erroneously looked towards treaties like the Chemical Weapons Convention, which bans chemical weapons, Mahley said. For economic reasons, however, chemical weapons precursors, which also have peaceful applications, are produced in “a limited number of facilities,” Mahley said. Chemical weapons development therefore is easier to monitor

In the view of the United States, the Ad Hoc Group proposal would expose sensitive information while failing to deter treaty violators. “It will not enhance our confidence in compliance and will do little to deter those countries seeking to develop biological weapons. In our assessment, the draft Protocol would put national security and confidential business information at risk,” Mahley said in Geneva. Critics in other countries roundly scorned the United States for abruptly ending the verification negotiations. Several countries have kept up the push ever since.

According to Andrew Weber, who worked to dismantle the Soviet bioweapons empire as part of the Pentagon’s Cooperative Threat Reduction program, the George W. Bush administration had an ideological problem with the BWC verification negotiations. John Bolton, a top arms control official in the administration “who’s famously against all arms control, helped blow up the work that was done on a verification protocol,” Weber, now a senior fellow at the Council on Strategic Risks, told me. “The politics are much different today.”

### Wanting more

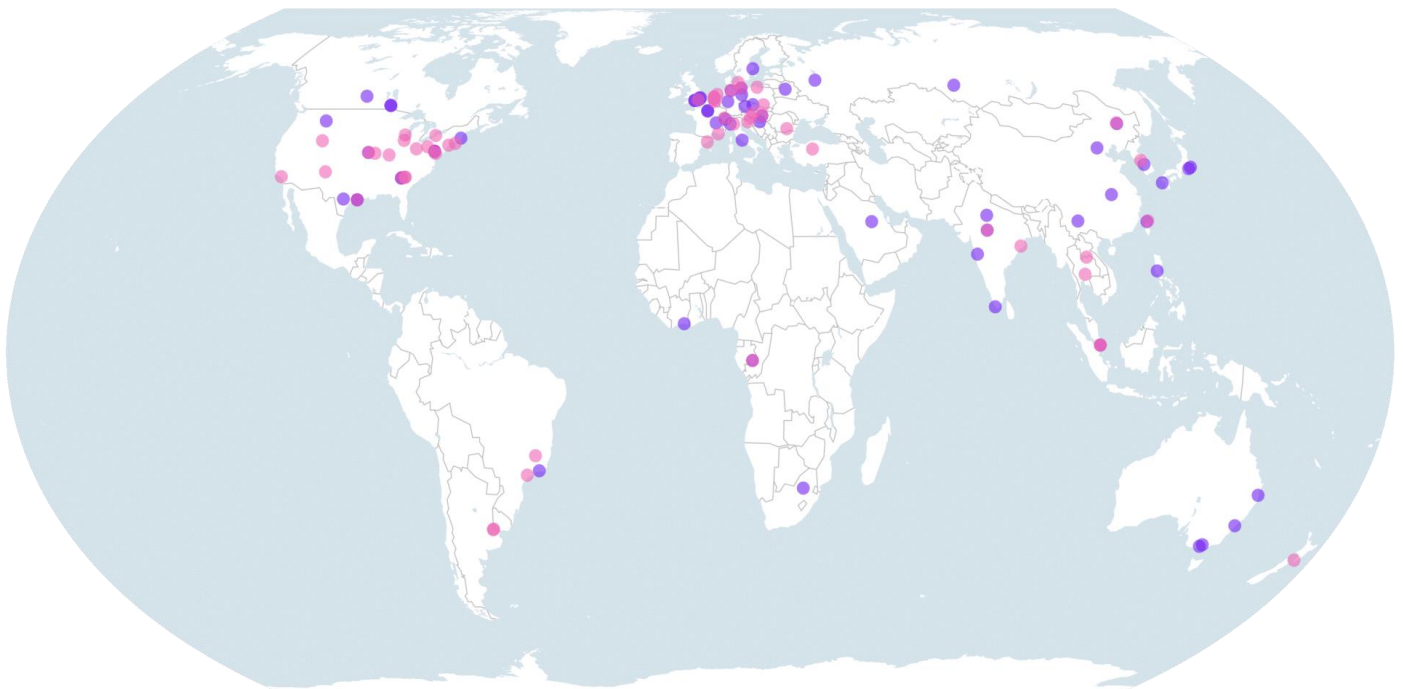
Over the years, BWC countries and civil society groups have worked to increase the transparency of biodefense and dual-use biological research activities. In 1987, the convention [implemented](#) a system of self-reporting known officially as Confidence-Building Measures. Using a form, countries submit information about research centers, biodefense programs, disease outbreaks, and other issues pertinent to biological arms control. France proposed the concept of [“peer review”](#) compliance assessments, whereby other countries could



review how well a country is adhering to the BWC through visits and other means. More recently, Filippa Lentzos and Gregory Koblenz, biosecurity experts at King's College London and George Mason University, respectively, produced a system for tracking the proliferation of the BSL-4 and BSL-3+ labs where researchers conduct dual-use research on dangerous pathogens like Ebola or smallpox virus.

James Reville, the head of the weapons of mass destruction program at United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), an autonomous research institute within the UN, said the goal of a verification system for the BWC would not be a 100-percent guarantee that no one is violating the treaty; the goal should be to increase confidence that no country is doing so. That's been the thrust of the Confidence-Building Measures and other efforts to boost BWC transparency, of which there will likely be more in the future.

Map of current BSL-4 and BSL-3+ labs around the world: ● Biosafety Level 4 labs | ● Biosafety Level 3+ labs



Meanwhile, biological attacks have been [few and far between](#) since 2001. That's when a disaffected US Army researcher [allegedly stole](#) anthrax from a biodefense lab and sent tainted mail to politicians and media figures. And Unit 731's atrocities and the major offensive bioweapons programs of the Cold War are even further in the rearview mirror. So is the bioweapons treaty working as is, or does it need a more concrete verification mechanism, like other weapons treaties?

A verification arm of the BWC could be useful in sorting out allegations about biological weapons—and debunking disinformation campaigns that involve bioweapons allegations.

As the Russian invasion of Ukraine materialized, Russian President Vladimir Putin's government and [its media proxies](#) waged a massive public relations campaign aimed at convincing people that a network of labs in Ukraine with links to the US military's Biological Threat Reduction Program was part of a US-Ukraine bioweapons program. [The US and Ukrainian governments](#)—and many outside experts—insist that the labs are [public and animal health facilities](#), and that the Russian PR campaign is false propaganda.

Indeed, many of the allegations about the labs have been easily and widely debunked. Media figures like Dilyana Gaytandzhieva, a Bulgarian journalist, [cherry picked](#) from legal documents to paint a picture of Ukrainian and American malfeasance. And the Russian propaganda campaign [drew](#) from clearly selective readings of data presented at public symposia and in published reports to claim it had evidence of an offensive program.

As fact-free as it appears to be, the Russian campaign spread ably in the early days of the Ukraine war; it even found a receptive audience among [right-wing outlets](#) and [QAnon adherents](#) in the United States.

But all bioweapons allegations aren't as easily debunked as the Kremlin's claims. The United States currently accuses Russia and North Korea of [maintaining](#) offensive bioweapons capabilities, and it's expressed worries about other countries, including Iran and China. "The public record strongly suggests



that Russia has maintained and modernized the surviving parts of the Soviet biological weapons program,” Robert Petersen, an analyst for the Danish Centre for Biosecurity and Biopreparedness, [wrote](#) in a piece in the *Bulletin* last year.

The claims highlight the lack of a verification mechanism in the BWC. An independent, official system could, at least theoretically, arrive at definitive resolutions of allegations. “Whatever the real intention or veracity of Russian allegations, they underline the value of functioning clarification and compliance mechanisms in the BWC,” [a 2022 UNIDIR report](#) on verification said.

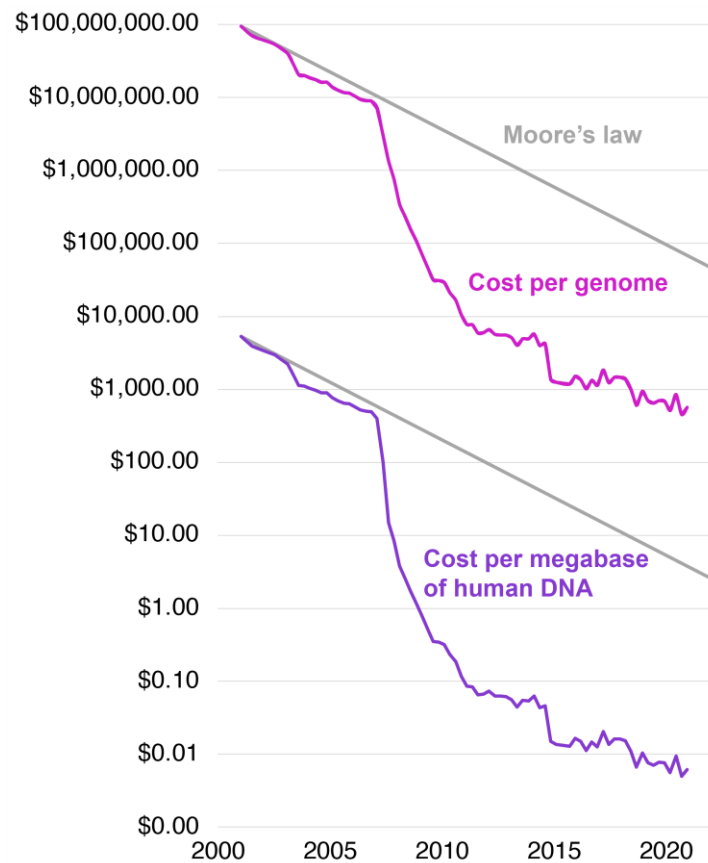
What Revill said was a shift came in November 2021. Under the Biden administration, Ambassador Bonnie Denise Jenkins, the top US official for arms control, nudged the door open a bit on the BWC verification issue. In a speech before BWC members, she [called](#) for an expert working group that would explore methods to strengthen the agreement, including measures that would “enhance assurance of compliance.”

At last year’s Ninth Review Conference, Jenkins [doubled down](#): “We need to examine how technology has changed and what the bioweapons threats of today and tomorrow looks like. We also need to explore what measures—yes, including possible verification measures—might be effective in today’s context,” she said.

Although [modest](#), observers say BWC delegates made a breakthrough in December, agreeing to form the working group that will examine verification and other issues.

The drafters of the BWC had one particularly strong insight: It would be [difficult to predict](#) what exactly might constitute a biowarfare agent in the future. They also knew that few if any biological agents had no peaceful purpose whatsoever. It’s important, for example, that scientists have access to even the deadliest viruses if they are to develop vaccines against them.

In addition to banning delivery systems for bioweapons, [the first article](#) of the convention, known as the general purpose criterion, simply requires that countries don’t “develop, produce, stockpile or otherwise acquire or retain” biological agents such as microbes or toxins (usually chemicals produced by organisms) “of types and in quantities that have no justification for prophylactic, protective or other peaceful purposes.” Experts say this provision future-proofs the convention.



#### The declining cost of DNA sequencing (logarithmic scale)

Costs are calculated by the National Human Genome Research Institute. Moore's law refers to the observation that computing power doubles roughly every two years—first predicted by Gordon Moore in 1965. Technologies that follow or improve upon Moore's law are considered to be performing well. (National Human Genome Research Institute)

Science hasn't stood still since the convention went into effect in 1975, and it hasn't taken a pause since the verification talks failed to gain traction 20 years ago. The human genome was [mostly decoded](#) by 2003. Now many companies have moved past “reading” genes to “writing” or synthesizing them. Researchers could soon have [gene synthesis technology](#) at their desks. New CRISPR [gene editing technology](#) is making it easier to accurately insert genes into genomes. And beyond progress in genetic engineering, AI-based systems can now churn out the recipes for [novel proteins](#) and [toxic chemicals](#).

In terms of bioweapons delivery devices, uncrewed aerial vehicles are becoming increasingly capable.

And some new knowledge is opening doors to misuses of biology-related technology that might not be covered by the convention. Lentzos, the King's College London expert, pointed to areas such as surveillance technology that can track [gait](#) and other physical characteristics as even more of a concern to her than new biological weapons. These technologies “should be classified as ways of using biology to cause harm,” she said, but they wouldn't fall under the purview of the BWC.

“It's now easier to make pathogens, find pathogens, [or] tweak pathogens, but it's essentially the same logic of: What is a biological weapon?” Lentzos said. “[The technology is] more readily accessible to a larger number of people, we can produce them quicker and tweak them, but it's the same sort of logic. Where my bigger concern is, is in these other ways of using biology to suppress and surveil people.”



To deal with how advances in science and technology might impact the BWC, the original convention text called for members to [meet in Geneva](#) five years after enacting the treaty. The conferences have continued almost every five years since. At them, treaty members have gradually included so-called “additional understandings” and an article-by-article review section in final conference documents.

But BWC members have fallen off in explicitly describing the science and technology developments that could affect the treaty. A BWC review conference hasn't had a solid article-by-article review since 2011. In 2016, delegates essentially copied and pasted from the previous review conference, adding very little in the way of additional understandings. Last December, states didn't include the article-by-article review section at all and didn't even bother to rehash a previous version. One result of this neglect: The final document from the December conference doesn't include language that specifies that gene-edited agents could also be bioweapons, something the United States hoped to include. (Given the generalized definition of what is prohibited under a convention meant to encapsulate current and future threats, it's debatable whether any specific technology needs to be mentioned in additional understandings; nonetheless, over the years BWC delegates have specified, [for example](#), that the convention applies even to artificially created biological agents.)

“It is worrisome that states parties can't agree on relatively simple propositions that would ensure that the Article 1 prohibition on developing biological weapons includes biological agents produced or modified via emerging technologies such as genome editing,” Koblentz, the George Mason University biosecurity expert, said.

As with the verification issue, however, the latest review conference managed to push another door open, too, seeking to achieve a long-held goal: a science and technology review mechanism. The working group that will consider verification will also weigh how to develop a formalized system to keep the convention up to date on science and technology.

### Along with risks, opportunity

While advances in science and technology and other trends create potential risks, they also come with opportunities to improve compliance with the BWC.

Some of the verification proposals that the VEREX group made in the 1990s could be more effective today than they were then. Hundreds of satellites now circle Earth, meaning that the information one provides can be validated through redundancy. New types of sensors—for instance, those that can detect volatile organic compounds associated with bacterial growth—can enhance on-the-ground, but off-site assessments, according to the UNIDIR report on verification. And the internet makes it much easier to track academic studies, national legislation, and industrial statistics. “Since the 1990s, the science and technology of relevance to assessing compliance has significantly enhanced the potential of the 21 verification measures VEREX considered,” the report said. Henrietta Wilson, a researcher at King's College London who studies open-source research and its applicability to arms control, told me that access to data has skyrocketed in the decades since verification was originally considered. Now a researcher interested in weapons issues can comb through social media feeds, local media stories, government pronouncements, and more, with ease.

As Wilson sees the situation, the goal of open-source research, as it relates to the BWC, is to establish a baseline. Do researchers have LinkedIn profiles that have suddenly gone dark? That could mean something. Is certain equipment being ordered in excess of normal levels? Again, it's a situation potentially worth digging into more deeply.

“What verification looks like in that context is less about finding the smoking gun of a violation and more about understanding what normal is and looking for aberrations from that normal,” Wilson said. “Some people call that red flag monitoring. You're kind of constantly looking at normal patterns of things. And then you might think, ‘Wow, that looks a bit strange.’ And you investigate further.” Even if a beefed up BWC could better verify treaty compliance and identify violators, that may not change much. It might not be enough to settle allegations. Lentzos cited the example of Syrian chemical weapons attacks. While [international investigations](#) by the UN and OPCW concluded that the Syrian government had used chemical weapons, Syria's ally Russia was able to [veto](#) a 2017 Security Council resolution to impose sanctions. The country was able to escape accountability then and, in fact, chemical attacks continued. Likewise with the output of any BWC verification mechanism, “at the end, the judgment will be a political judgment, not a scientific technical judgment,” Lentzos said.

### At the Palais

The Swiss city of Geneva is known for a few things: its lake, [chocolate](#), [famously private](#) Swiss banks, and international diplomacy. Some 32,000 diplomats and associated personnel work in the international civil sector of the city, [according](#) to the Swiss mission to the UN. The city is also the site of BWC review conferences, held at the Palais des Nations UN complex. The Palais, as it's often called, is a massive collection of art deco buildings, [completed in 1938](#). Sitting on a sprawling hilly campus on the shores of Lake Geneva, it is one of the world's large diplomatic venues, hosting some 5,300 meetings a year.





The "Broken Chair" sculpture, meant to commemorate opposition to land mines, was constructed in 1997 at the Palais des Nations, home of the United Nations Office in Geneva.

The three-week RevCon, as the abbreviation- and acronym-loving international diplomatic set calls such meetings, took place last December in a massive circular room at the Palais. Beneath a giant screen, the conference president, Leonardo Bencini of Italy, sat at a rostrum rising above a sea of desks that spread out toward the back the room, each with video screens, buttons for voting, and headphones for listening to simultaneous translations. The whole arrangement suggested that important business was being taken care of at the highest levels.

And the conference did tackle the weighty matter of biological disarmament with appropriate gravitas. UN Secretary General António Guterres beamed in on the large video screen behind the rostrum to urge on the conference delegates "The Biological Weapons Convention affirms the conscience of humankind," Guterres [said](#). "The COVID-19 pandemic brought the world to its knees. Now imagine a different kind of disease one that is most deliberately designed and can race though the global population even faster. Biological weapons are not the product of science fiction, they are a clear and present danger."

But a review conference also has its housekeeping. The treaty members set meeting dates and decide when to have another review conference. They vote on whether to retain the three people hired to support the convention. Had things gone sideways at the end, which some feared [might happen](#) last year, the BWC [could have lost](#) its already bare-bones staff, at least until the next review sometime in Geneva before the end of 2027.

Until BWC members agreed to a slight expansion, Daniel Feakes, the chief of the Implementation Support Unit (ISU), held one of just three staff positions managing the day-to-day functioning of the treaty. After the conference, Feakes gained a single colleague. It wasn't hard to believe him when he said the unit had been working 12-hour days during the review conference.

"We also have to support countries to implement the BWC," Feakes told me. "And for a small team of people of only three, and, as you said, with 184 states parties and lots of demands and requests coming in—doing that with only three people is quite challenging, to say the least. Obviously." In comparison, about [500 people](#) work at the OPCW, which had a roughly [\\$76 million budget](#) in 2021 and maintains a headquarters building at The



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Hague. And 2,500 [people work](#) at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which administers the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The small staff of the BWC is partly a product of the treaty itself, which does not include a verification protocol. Verification would likely have required a larger permanent staff. As it is, the BWC billed its members less than \$2 million for operations in 2021 and 2020. By the fourth day of the review conference, funds for having the UN audio visual operation broadcast the meetings live had [run dry](#).

A large mural by Norwegian artist Per Lasson Krohg symbolizes the promise of future peace and individual freedom in the UN Security Council's meeting room. (j0e\_m. [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#))

### What's the point?

With no legally binding way of ensuring countries are following the bioweapons rules and an outdated understanding of scientific and technological developments, is the BWC relevant? The threat of pandemics is on the rise, focusing attention on natural disease outbreaks. And other serious emerging risks—for instance, new tools for surveillance and oppression—rely on biological processes but may have nothing to do with the BWC.

A member of the UN Security Council investigative team in Iraq once said the comprehensive bioweapons verification effort in Iraq happened right at a “[sweet spot](#),” as geopolitical tensions briefly thawed as the Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War came to an end. These days world events regularly invite comparisons to the Cold War era; the sweet spot has long since soured. This year, for example, Ukraine's delegation at the review conference railed against the Russian invasion and its violation of the “universal principles” that underpin the UN; Russia repeatedly short-circuited discussion of the war by invoking a review conference rule that limits debate to matters relevant to the treaty.

Against this backdrop, the consensus-driven process of decision-making in the BWC means that one country can grind progress to a halt.



Notice that they use paper and old telephones!

Members of the US military wear chemical/biological warfare suits in an exercise that simulates a deployment to South Korea following an attack by North Korean forces. (Department of Defense, Wikimedia Commons)





Smallpox Repository (building on right) at the Vector Research Institute, Koltsovo, Russia. (GAO)

Frustrating as the slow momentum is, the middle-aged BWC still has value. It's carved out a space to discuss bioweapons and risks in the life sciences more broadly. Perhaps more importantly, it's created a norm. Despite the BWC's lack of a strong verification system and its other flaws, having countries get together every five years and publicly commit to not weaponize biology might be a powerful preventative. "The international norm is so well established that currently no state will admit to having a biological weapons program because they don't want to be associated with any suggestion of development or use of biological weapons," Revill said. Norms, however, aren't written in stone. Russian and North Korean agents have allegedly used chemicals [several times](#) in [attempted](#) and [successful](#) assassinations. The Syrian regime has used chemical weapons repeatedly. And Putin has made menacing threats about nuclear weapons—despite what some scholars have called a “nuclear taboo.” Under Putin, Russia is “increasingly trying to upend the entire UN system,” Weber, the former Pentagon official, said. The surge of bioweapons disinformation that came with the Ukraine war, could, [some say](#), give the impression that biological weapons are acceptable.

Instead of concrete steps like creating a verification mechanism or a scientific and technical advisory process—or any other would-be critical element of a revitalized Biological Weapons Convention, the latest review conference simply formed a working group to consider these items. Modest though that result may seem—given that the search for agreement on a BWC enforcement mechanism has gone on for three decades—in today's environment, some insiders contend it counts as significant. “You might say it's no big deal,” Bencini, the conference president, [told Arms Control Today](#), “but it is a big deal, actually, because we really had to break this deadlock so that we could still say that we do have a convention on biological weapons.”

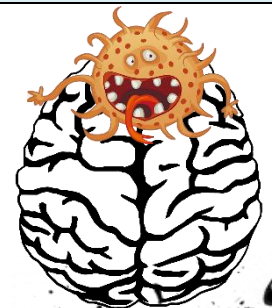
**Matt Field** is editor, biosecurity at the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. Before joining the Bulletin, he covered the White House, Congress, and presidential campaigns as a news producer for Japanese public television. He has also reported for print outlets in the Midwest and on the East Coast. He holds a master's degree in journalism from Northwestern University.

**Erik English** is an associate multimedia editor at the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. He has worked at the International Atomic Energy Agency, the US Department of State, and the US African Development Foundation. Erik was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Benin from 2009 to 2011 and received his master's degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in 2015.

## Even Mild COVID Is Hard on the Brain

Source: <https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/989268>

Mar 06 – Even mild cases of COVID-19 can affect the function and structure of the brain, early research suggests. “Our results suggest a severe pattern of changes in how the brain communicates as well as its structure, mainly in people with anxiety and depression with long COVID syndrome, which affects so many people,” study investigator Clarissa Yasuda, MD, PhD, from University of Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil, said in a news release. “The magnitude of these changes suggests that they could lead to problems with memory and thinking skills, so we need to be exploring holistic treatments even for people mildly affected



by COVID-19," Yasuda added. The study was released early, ahead of presentation at the upcoming American Academy of Neurology (AAN) 2023 Annual Meeting in April.

### Brain Shrinkage

Some studies have shown a high prevalence of symptoms of anxiety and depression in COVID-19 survivors, but few have investigated the associated cerebral changes, Yasuda told *Medscape Medical News*.

The study included 254 adults (177 women, 77 men, median age 41 years) who had mild COVID-19 a median of 82 days earlier. A total of 102 had symptoms of both anxiety and depression and 152 had no such symptoms.

On brain imaging, those with COVID-19 and anxiety and depression had atrophy in the limbic area of the brain, which plays a role in memory and emotional processing. No shrinkage in this area was evident in people who had COVID-19 without anxiety and depression or in a healthy control group of individuals without COVID-19.

The researchers also observed a "severe" pattern of abnormal cerebral functional connectivity in those with COVID-19 and anxiety and depression. In this functional connectivity analysis, individuals with COVID-19 and anxiety and depression had widespread functional changes in each of the 12 networks assessed, while those with COVID-19 but without symptoms of anxiety and depression showed changes in only 5 networks.

### Mechanisms Unclear

"Unfortunately, the underpinning mechanisms associated with brain changes and neuropsychiatric dysfunction after COVID-19 infection are unclear," Yasuda told *Medscape Medical News*.

"Some studies have demonstrated an association between symptoms of anxiety and depression with inflammation. However, we hypothesize that these cerebral alterations may result from a more complex interaction of social, psychological, and systemic stressors, including inflammation. It is indeed intriguing that such alterations are present in individuals who presented mild acute infection," Yasuda added.

"Symptoms of anxiety and depression are frequently observed after COVID-19 and are part of long-COVID syndrome for some individuals. These symptoms require adequate treatment to improve the quality of life, cognition, and work capacity," she said.

Treating these symptoms may induce "brain plasticity, which may result in some degree of gray matter increase and eventually prevent further structural and functional damage," Yasuda said. A limitation of the study was that symptoms of anxiety and depression were self-reported, meaning people may have misjudged or misreported symptoms.

Commenting on the findings for *Medscape Medical News*, Cyrus Raji, MD, PhD, with the Mallinckrodt Institute of Radiology, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, said the idea that COVID-19 is bad for the brain isn't new.

[As previously reported](#) by *Medscape Medical News*, early in the pandemic, Raji and colleagues published a paper detailing COVID-19's effects on the brain and Raji followed it up with a [TED talk on the subject](#). (Raji wasn't involved with Yasuda's team for this current study.) "Within the growing framework of what we already know about COVID-19 infection and its adverse effects on the brain, this work incrementally adds to this knowledge by identifying functional and structural neuroimaging abnormalities related to anxiety and depression in persons suffering from COVID-19 infection," Raji said.

▶▶ American Academy of Neurology (AAN) 2023 Annual Meeting: Abstract 1998. To be presented April 24, 2023.

## Biological lab funded by U.S. sparks alarm

Source: <https://www.ecns.cn/news/2023-03-08/detail-ihcmhyte8999872.shtml>



### C. Asia unit said to be studying pathogens that could be used in bioterrorism attacks

Mar 08 – A controversial biological laboratory in Kazakhstan has caused concerns among local residents. The laboratory used to be controlled by the Soviet Union, but now it is funded and built by the U.S. In a suburb near the city of Almaty, Kazakhstan, the Central Reference Laboratory, which opened in 2017, is studying some of the deadliest pathogens that could be used in bioterrorism attacks. The facility is a \$102 million biosecurity laboratory funded by the United States Defense Threat Reduction Agency, or DTRA, and the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, or CTR. The lab is studying the highest-risk diseases such as plague and cholera, the National Geographic channel reported. TASS news agency last January reported that social media speculated that experts in chemical protective suits were working near the lab due to "a leak of dangerous pathogens". The lab's existence has been controversial, and the Kazakh government had previously denied any involvement in producing biological weapons. The lab also provides steady employment for scientists who







might otherwise be tempted to sell their high-level and potentially destructive knowledge to hostile groups, said Lieutenant Colonel Charles Carlton, director of the DTRA offices in Kazakhstan, according to National Geographic.

Historically, Kazakhstan monitored high-risk diseases in laboratories of the former Soviet anti-plague system, which fell into severe disrepair after the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent lack of funding, according to the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, a California-based nongovernmental organization that aims to curb the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

The U.S. then engaged with this former Soviet lab through the CTR program. It was not the first time the U.S. took over former Soviet biological research. Beginning in the late 1990s, the U.S. started to establish partnerships and develop collaborations in the field of biological research with a number of former Soviet republics to seek

"to dismantle the former Soviet Union's massive biological weapons research, development and production infrastructure", according to The Jamestown Foundation, a Washington, DC-based think tank. The DTRA and the CTR have carried out various "bio-threat reduction projects" in Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine, according to The Jamestown Foundation.

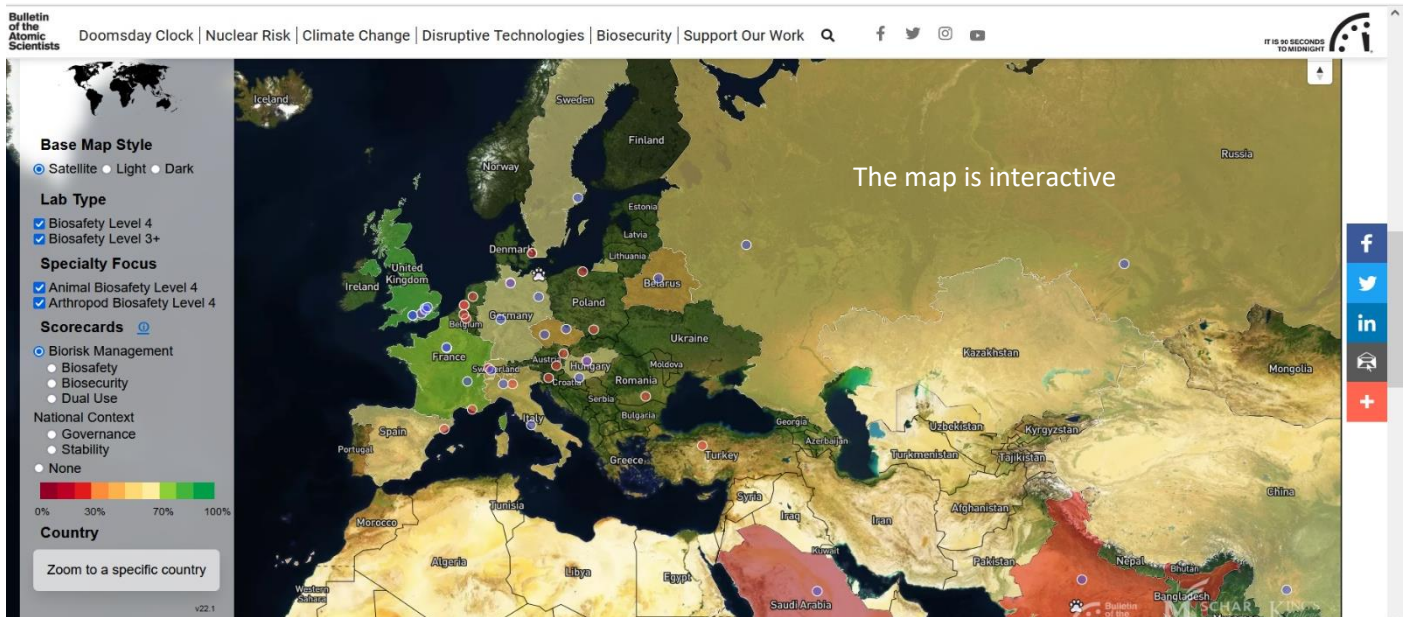
### 'Guise of peaceful research'

Moscow has repeatedly claimed that such cooperation represents a threat to Russia. Major General Igor Kirillov, the commander of Russia's Radiological, Chemical and Biological Defense Troops, in 2018 claimed, "under the guise of peaceful research, (the U.S.) is building up its military-biological potential". "The Pentagon has been doing it since 2005, working with Ukrainians, to quote, 'eliminate biological weapons' left behind by the Soviets. That makes sense," Fox News host Tucker Carlson said in Tucker Carlson Tonight in March 2022. "But wait, 2005 was 17 years ago. How long does it take to eliminate Soviet bioweapons? Seventeen years seems like a long time. If you had 17 years and ample funding from Congress, you could probably remove and catalog every grain of sand on Waikiki Beach. And yet somehow, over that same period, 17 years, the Pentagon has not finished removing test tubes from Soviet-era freezers," he said. **In fact, the U.S. has an increasing number of biolabs around the world.**

The Biological Threat Reduction Program of the U.S. Department of Defense, or DoD, has reportedly supported a total of **336 biolabs** across regions, including Africa, East Europe, Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East, as well as several biosecurity labs operated directly by the DoD overseas, according to a report presented by the U.S. to the Meeting of the Biological Weapons Convention in November 2021. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland in last March mentioned in a Senate hearing that she feared the labs in Ukraine would "fall into Russian hands", prompting further suspicions on the biological program. "If nothing bad is happening in these biolabs, why are you concerned about them falling under Russian control?" Scotty A said in comments posted on YouTube.

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:** Perhaps after the US/NATO proxy war in Ukraine we will witness "proxy BWA labs" as well ... Local people's worries? Who cares when money talks?





There are 69 known BSL-4 labs, of which 52 are operational, 3 are under construction and 14 are planned. In some cases, planned labs are not shown in the map because their location has not been finalized.

## Scientists have revived a 'zombie' virus that spent 48,500 years frozen in permafrost

Source: <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/03/08/world/permafrost-virus-risk-climate-scn/index.html>

Mar 08 – Warmer temperatures in the Arctic are thawing the [region's permafrost](#) — a frozen layer of soil beneath the ground — and potentially stirring viruses that, after lying dormant for tens of thousands of years, could endanger animal and human health.



Jean-Michel Claverie is pictured here working in the subsampling room at the Alfred Wegener Institute in Potsdam, where the cores of permafrost were kept – Jean-Michel Claverie

“There's a lot going on with the permafrost that is of concern, and (it) really shows why it's super important that we keep as much of the permafrost frozen as possible,” said Kimberley Miner, a climate scientist at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, California.

Permafrost covers a fifth of the Northern Hemisphere, having underpinned the Arctic tundra and boreal forests of Alaska, Canada and Russia for millennia. It serves as

a kind of time capsule, preserving — in addition to ancient viruses — the mummified remains of a number of extinct animals that scientist have been able to unearth and study in recent years, including [two cave lion](#) cubs and a [woolly rhino](#).

The reason permafrost is a good storage medium isn't just because it's cold; it's an oxygen-free environment that light doesn't penetrate. But current day Arctic temperatures are warming [up to four times faster than the rest of the planet](#), weakening the top layer of permafrost in the region.

To better understand the risks posed by frozen viruses, Jean-Michel Claverie, an Emeritus professor of medicine and genomics at the Aix-Marseille University School of Medicine in Marseille, France, has tested

! Why?



## ICI C<sup>2</sup>BRNE DIARY – March 2023

earth samples taken from Siberian permafrost to see whether any viral particles contained therein are still infectious. He's in search of what he describes as "zombie viruses" — and he has found some.

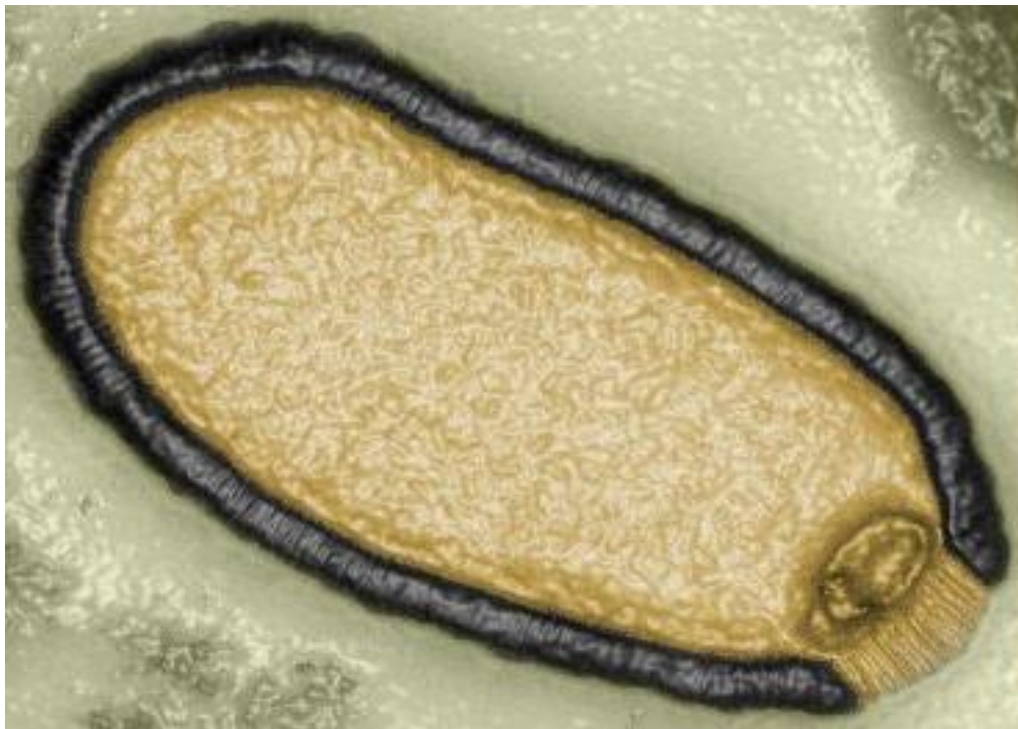
### The virus hunter

Claverie studies a particular type of virus he first discovered in 2003. Known as giant viruses, they are much bigger than the typical variety and visible under a regular light microscope, rather than a more powerful electron microscope — which makes them a good model for this type of lab work.

His efforts to detect viruses frozen in permafrost were partly inspired by a team of Russian scientists who in 2012 [revived a wildflower from a 30,000-year-old seed tissue](#) found in a squirrel's burrow. (Since then, scientists have also successfully brought [ancient microscopic animals back to life](#).)

In 2014, he managed to [revive a virus he and his team isolated from the permafrost](#), making it infectious for the first time in 30,000 years by inserting it into cultured cells. For safety, he'd chosen to study a virus that could only target single-celled amoebas, not animals or humans.

He repeated the feat in 2015, [isolating a different virus type](#) that also targeted amoebas. And in his latest research, [published February 18 in the journal Viruses](#), Claverie and his team isolated several strains of ancient virus from multiple samples of permafrost



taken from seven different places across Siberia and showed they could each infect cultured amoeba cells.

This is a computer-enhanced microphoto of Pithovirus sibericum that was isolated from a 30,000-year-old sample of permafrost in 2014 – Jean-Michel Claverie/IGS/CNRS-AMU

Those latest strains represent five new families of viruses, on top of the two he had revived previously. The oldest was almost 48,500 years old, based on radiocarbon dating of the soil, and came from a sample of earth taken from an underground lake 16 meters (52 feet) below the surface. The youngest samples, found in the stomach contents and coat of a

woolly mammoth's remains, were 27,000 years old.

That amoeba-infecting viruses are still infectious after so long is indicative of a potentially bigger problem, Claverie said. He fears people regard his research as a scientific curiosity and don't perceive the prospect of ancient viruses coming back to life as a serious public health threat.

"We view these amoeba-infecting viruses as surrogates for all other possible viruses that might be in the permafrost," Claverie told CNN. "We see the traces of many, many, many other viruses," he added. "So we know they are there. We don't know for sure that they are still alive. But our reasoning is that if the amoeba viruses are still alive, there is no reason why the other viruses will not be still alive, and capable of infecting their own hosts."

### Precedent for human infection

Traces of viruses and bacteria that can infect humans have been found preserved in permafrost.

A [lung sample from a woman's body exhumed in 1997 from permafrost](#) in a village on the Seward Peninsula of Alaska contained genomic material from the influenza strain responsible for the 1918 pandemic. In 2012, scientists confirmed the 300-year-old mummified remains of a woman buried in Siberia [contained the genetic signatures of the virus that causes smallpox](#).



An anthrax outbreak in Siberia that [affected dozens of humans and more than 2,000 reindeer](#) between July and August in 2016 has also been linked to the deeper thawing of the permafrost during exceptionally hot summers, [allowing old spores of \*Bacillus anthracis\* to resurface](#) from old burial grounds or animal carcasses.

Birgitta Evengård, professor emerita at Umea University's Department of Clinical Microbiology in Sweden, said there should be better surveillance of the risk posed by potential pathogens in thawing permafrost, but warned against an alarmist approach.

"You must remember our immune defense has been developed in close contact with microbiological surroundings," said Evengård, who is part of the CLINF Nordic Centre of Excellence, a group that investigates the effects of climate change on the prevalence of infectious diseases in humans and animals in northern regions.

"If there is a virus hidden in the permafrost that we have not been in contact with for thousands of years, it might be that our immune defense is not sufficient," she said. "It is correct to have respect for the situation and be proactive and not just reactive. And the way to fight fear is to have knowledge."

### Chances of viral spillover

Of course, in the real world, scientists don't know how long these viruses could remain infectious once exposed to present-day conditions, or how likely the virus would be to encounter a suitable host. Not all viruses are pathogens that can cause disease; some are benign or even beneficial to their hosts. And while it is home to 3.6 million people, the Arctic is still a sparsely populated place, making the risk of human exposure to ancient viruses very low.

Still, "the risk is bound to increase in the context of global warming," Claverie said, "in which permafrost thawing will keep accelerating, and more people will populate the Arctic in the wake of industrial ventures."

And Claverie isn't alone in warning that the region could become a fertile ground for a spillover event — when a virus jumps into a new host and starts to spread.

Last year, a team of scientists [published research](#) on samples of soil and lake sediment taken from Lake Hazen, a freshwater lake in Canada located within the Arctic circle. They sequenced the genetic material in the sediment to identify viral signatures and the genomes of potential hosts — plants and animals — in the area.

Using a computer model analysis, they suggested the risk of viruses spilling over to new hosts was higher at locations close to where large amounts of glacial meltwater flowed into the lake — a scenario that becomes more likely as the climate warms.

### Unknown consequences

Identifying viruses and other hazards contained in the warming permafrost is the first step in understanding what risk they pose to the Arctic, Miner at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory said. Other challenges include quantifying where, when, how fast and how deep permafrost will thaw.

Thawing can be a gradual process of as little as centimeters per decade, but also happens more rapidly, such as in the case of massive land slumps that can suddenly expose deep and ancient layers of permafrost. The process also releases methane and carbon dioxide into the atmosphere — an overlooked and underestimated driver of climate change.

Miner cataloged an array of potential hazards currently frozen in Arctic permafrost in a 2021 [paper published in the scientific journal \*Nature Climate Change\*](#).

Those possible dangers included buried waste from the mining of heavy metals and chemicals such as the pesticide DDT, which was banned in the early 2000s. Radioactive material has also been dumped in the Arctic — by Russia and the United States — since the advent of nuclear testing in the 1950s.

"Abrupt thaw rapidly exposes old permafrost horizons, releasing compounds and microorganisms sequestered in deeper layers," Miner and other researchers noted in the 2021 paper.

In the research paper, Miner labeled the direct infection of humans with ancient pathogens released from permafrost as "currently improbable."

However, Miner said she is worried about what she termed "Methuselah microorganisms" (named after the Biblical figure with the longest life span). These are organisms that could bring the dynamics of ancient and extinct ecosystems into the present-day Arctic, with unknown consequences.

The re-emergence of ancient microorganisms has the potential to change soil composition and vegetative growth, possibly further accelerating the effects of climate change, Miner said.

"We're really unclear as to how these microbes are going to interact with the modern environment," she said. "It's not really an experiment that I think any of us want to run."

The best course of action, Miner said, is to try and halt the thaw, and the wider climate crisis, and keep these hazards entombed in the permafrost for good.



## Biodefense: Actions Needed to Address Long-Standing Challenges

Source: <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-106476.pdf>

Mar 09 – The National Biodefense Strategy outlines how the federal government should prepare for and respond to biological incidents. The pandemic exposed shortcomings in federal response efforts.

This snapshot highlights federal biodefense challenges and opportunities for improvement that we've identified. For instance, agencies have developed response plans and conducted interagency exercises to prepare for biological threats. However, they don't routinely work together to monitor exercise results in order to identify potential problems. Doing so would help to ensure that the nation is better prepared to respond to the next biological threat.



Source: U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Alissa Schuning. | GAO-23-106476

First responders in hazmat suits practicing in a BioWatch safety drill

### The Big Picture

Biodefense consists of actions to counter biological threats, reduce biological risks, and prepare for, respond to, and recover from biological incidents. The complexity of these efforts requires a whole-of-government approach. For over a decade, [GAO has evaluated](#) federal biodefense efforts related to implementation of the *National Biodefense Strategy*, biodefense preparedness and technology challenges, and federal biosurveillance efforts, among others and identified challenges and opportunities for improvement.

### What GAO's Work Shows

#### 1. National Biodefense Strategy Challenges

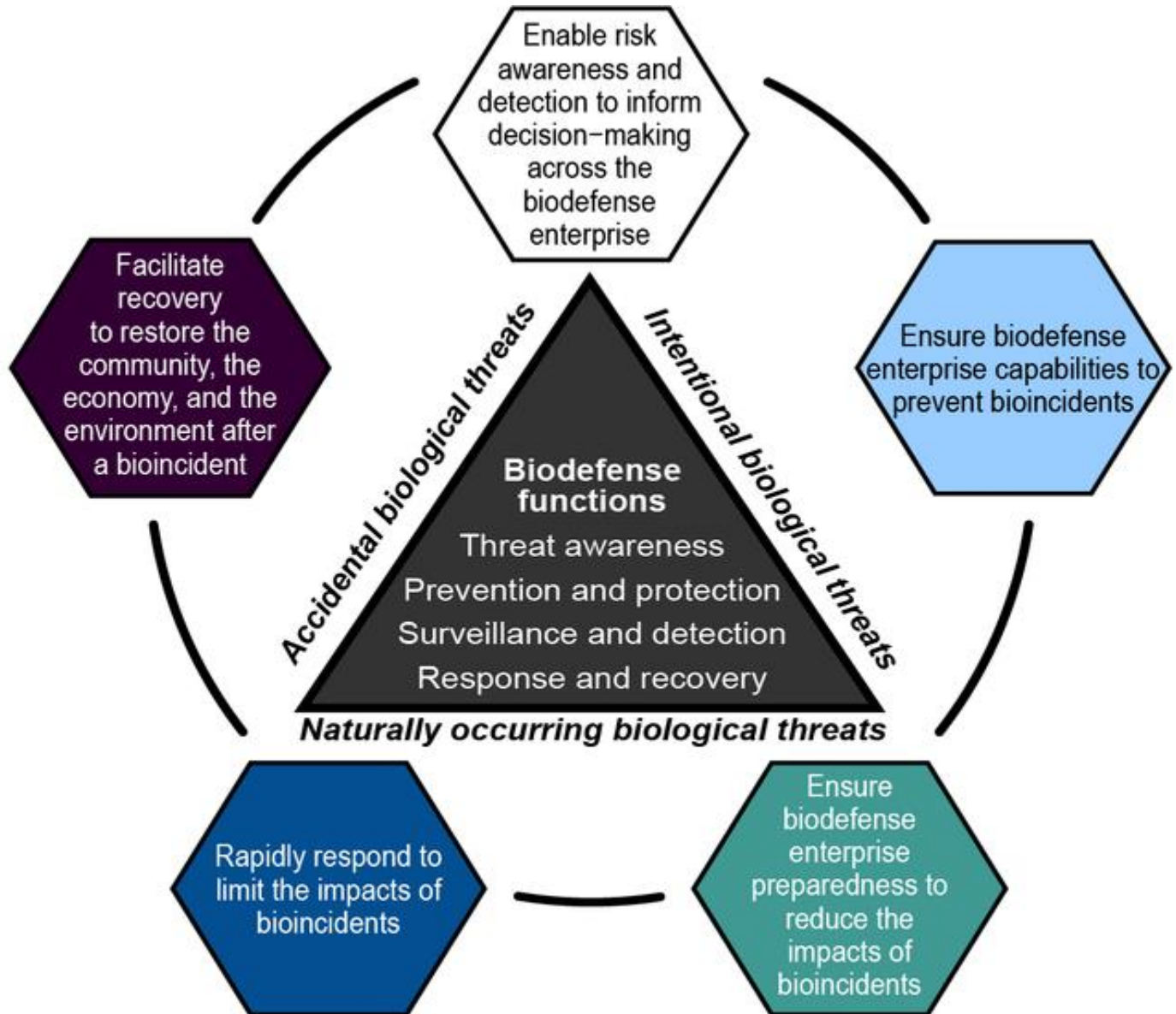
In 2018, the White House issued the *National Biodefense Strategy*, which outlined five high-level goals and functions. It was designed to strengthen federal biodefense capabilities to address naturally occurring, accidental, and deliberate biological threats. An accompanying Presidential memorandum set up a governance structure to guide its implementation, coordinate federal biodefense activities, and assess the effectiveness of goals and objectives. However, in 2020, [GAO found](#) a lack of clear procedures and planning to analyze data in a way that leveraged resources and advanced national biodefense capabilities, among other findings.

➤ **We recommended** that the Secretary of Health and Human Services direct the interagency biodefense body to clearly document guidance and methods for analyzing the data collected.

Further, GAO has reported on broad issues related to leadership, coordination, and collaboration as a result of fragmentation throughout the biodefense enterprise. In October 2022, the White House updated



the *National Biodefense Strategy*. The new strategy changed the biodefense governance structure, underscoring the need for institutionalized leadership to assess, prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from biological threats.



Source: GAO analysis of biodefense doctrine. | GAO-23-106476

#### Five National Biodefense Strategy Goals and Functions

### 2. Biodefense Preparedness Activities Need Strengthening

Key federal agencies have developed response plans and conducted interagency exercises to prepare for and respond to biological threats. In 2021, [GAO's analysis](#) of these exercises—and the federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic and other incidents—revealed long-standing biodefense challenges. These included challenges in coordinating response capabilities, managing information, and in planning and conducting exercise efforts. GAO further found that there was no interagency process to assess and communicate exercise priorities, or monitor results from exercises and incidents.

➤ **We recommended** that key federal agencies take steps to address these gaps, including assessing exercise priorities and monitoring the results of exercises and incidents to identify patterns of challenges and root causes.



### 3. DHS Faces Biodefense Technology Challenges

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS)'s BioWatch program, begun in 2003, is designed to provide early indication of a biological weapons attack using a system of aerosol collectors and laboratory facilities. In 2021, GAO reported on DHS's [effort to replace BioWatch](#) with a new system. This project faces risks, such as the possibility of increased false alarm rates, due to technology limitations and uncertainties with combining technologies for use in biodetection. DHS plans to reduce risk using technology readiness assessments, but GAO found that DHS's guidance for these assessments lacked sufficient detail to ensure objectivity and independence, among other findings.

➤ **We recommended** that DHS conduct technology readiness assessments that follow our best practices before making acquisition decisions.

### 4. Challenges Exist with DHS's Biosurveillance Efforts

DHS's [National Biosurveillance Integration Center \(NBIC\)](#) integrates, analyzes, and distributes key information about health and disease events to help ensure the nation's responses are well informed, save lives, and minimize economic impact. However, in 2015, GAO found that NBIC faced several challenges that limited its ability to fulfill its mission, such as limited access to federal agency data and other coordination challenges.

➤ **We presented** Congress with several options to address NBIC's challenges, such as providing NBIC with additional authorities or assigning NBIC's mission to other agencies.

GAO has ongoing work reviewing NBIC and we plan to report its findings in fall 2023.

### Challenges and Opportunities

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp focus the shortcomings of the nation's current preparation to respond to a nationally significant biological incident. GAO identified actions that federal agencies could take to prepare for and respond to future biological incidents. As of March 2023, 21 of 29 recommendations made remain unimplemented. We continue to monitor agencies' progress in implementing these recommendations.

## Blind spots in biodefense

Source: <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.adg9237?source=globalbiodefense>

In October 2022, the Biden administration released its National Biodefense Strategy (NBS-22), the first update since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Although the document notes that one of the lessons of the pandemic is that threats originating anywhere are threats everywhere, it frames threats as largely external to the United States. NBS-22 focuses primarily on bioterrorism and laboratory accidents, neglecting threats posed by routine practices of animal use and production inside the United States. NBS-22 references zoonotic disease but assures readers that no new legal authorities or institutional innovations are needed. Although the US is not alone in failing to confront these risks, its failure to comprehensively address them echoes across the globe.

More zoonotic diseases originated in the United States than in any other country during the second half of the 20th century. In 2022, the US processed more than 10 billion livestock, the largest number ever recorded and an increase of 204 million over 2021. Risks occur across the supply chain, from facilities where animals are born to homes where they are consumed. The ongoing H5N1 avian influenza outbreak has left 58 million animals dead in backyard chicken coops and industrial farms. It has infected animals in one of the dozens of live poultry markets in New York City (elsewhere called "wet markets"). Of the many agencies that govern food animal production, the US Department of Agriculture is the most important, but even it has no authority to regulate on-farm animal production. Since 2011, the US has recorded more swine-origin influenza infections than any other country. Most occurred at state and county fairs, where an estimated 18% of swine have tested positive. These fairs attract 150 million visitors each year. In 2012, H3N2v influenza jumped from pigs to humans at livestock exhibitions and infected 306 people across 10 states, with suspected human-to-human transmission. Still, animal fairs remain largely unregulated and exempt from federal oversight.

Zoonotic risks also arise from interactions with free and captive wildlife. Each year, the US consumes an estimated 1 billion pounds of "game" (elsewhere called "bushmeat"). Yet, most hunter-harvested meat is not inspected, and no sanitary measures are required. Avian influenza has spread from wild birds to hunters and also appeared in captive game farms, where 40 million birds are raised annually. Three million mink live on US fur farms in long rows of wire cages where their waste falls onto the floor or onto other animals below. Though mink are slaughtered on-site, no federal laws govern them, and few states even require licenses. In some states, regulators were unaware that fur farms existed within their borders until animals in them began contracting COVID-19. In Michigan, mink generated a new strain



of the virus, transmitting it to workers; in Utah, health department officials were denied access to an infected farm, unable to carry out containment efforts or even testing.

The US is the largest importer of wildlife in the world. More than 200 million live wild animals enter the US each year, most undergoing no health and safety checks when they arrive. Live animal imports are governed by a range of agencies, many with ill-defined jurisdictions. The US Fish and Wildlife Service, which oversees most of these imports, has stated that it does not have independent authority to detain shipments of sick animals. Mpox arrived in the US in 2003 in one of these shipments, destined for the pet trade.

These examples illustrate a regulatory system in urgent need of reconstruction. What is needed is not simply for agencies to do their jobs better or to paper over the gaps, but a fundamental restructuring of the way that human–animal interfaces are governed. A One Health approach, which NBS-22 claims as its guiding principle, would take the health of other living things not merely as the occasional means or obstacles to human health, but as continuous with it. The first step in implementing such an approach would be to create a high-level process for integrating the broken mosaic of multiple agencies, with their unclear and sometimes competing mandates, into an effective, comprehensive regime. The US is still very far from taking such decisive action, or even recognizing its responsibility for generating these global risks.

## Number of recognized vaccination damages has risen sharply since autumn

Source: <https://newsingermany.com/number-of-recognized-vaccination-damages-has-risen-sharply-since-autumn/>



Mar 14 – It has been more than two years since the start of the corona vaccination campaign in Germany – since then vaccination centers, medical practices and mobile vaccination teams have immunized almost 64 million people nationwide against Sars-CoV-2 at least once and administered a total of a good 192 million injections. In individual cases, the corona vaccination has left permanent damage, and those affected have been complaining for months that medicine can hardly help them and that politicians are overlooking them. Health Minister Karl Lauterbach (SPD) has now spoken out in favor of vaccination damage having to be recognized more quickly. In addition, the manufacturers of the vaccines should participate in the state compensation payments for those affected, Lauterbach demanded on Sunday evening on ZDF. The minister said it would be “valuable” for companies to get involved in the aftermath of the vaccination campaign. “Because the profits were exorbitant. And so that would actually be more than a good gesture, but one could expect it.” According to research by the FAZ, the number of recognized corona vaccine damages has recently increased again significantly, albeit at a low level overall. By Monday afternoon, 13 of the 16 federal states had responded to a request to this effect. No data were available until late afternoon only from Brandenburg, Bremen and Saxony-Anhalt. In the other countries, a total of 6,600 applications for benefits after possible corona vaccination damage were received by mid-March.

### Damage to almost 214,000 vaccinated

That is a good third more than in October, when the FAZ last collected the numbers. The number of corona vaccination damages recognized by the pension offices has almost doubled in the countries mentioned,





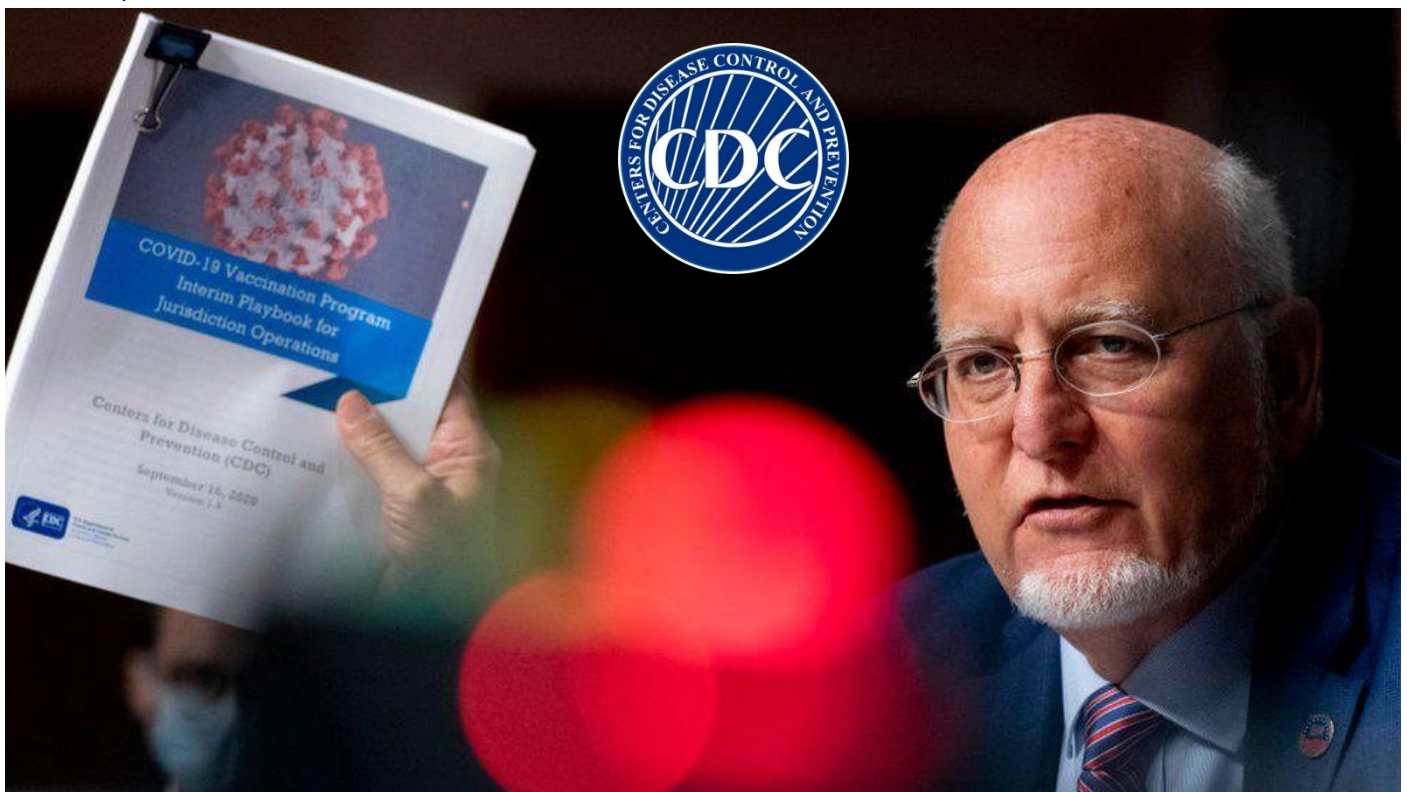
rising from 153 to 284. In the 13 countries, there is recognized corona vaccination damage for almost 214,000 vaccinated citizens. A spokesman for the Ministry of Social Affairs in North Rhine-Westphalia said that the reason for many tests that are still open is that "medical science still has too few reliable findings on the connection between a Covid 19 vaccination and alleged diseases". In addition, "the availability of sufficiently trained medical experts for the authorities responsible for implementation is very limited". The data from the federal states also show that the pension offices are primarily concerned with suspected vaccination damage in connection with a corona vaccination. In ten countries that provided up-to-date data, the number of applications and positive notifications is differentiated according to the respective vaccine. The 4576 applications that have been made there since 2021 after a corona vaccination are compared to only 273 applications that have been received after other vaccinations. Hardly any of them were approved.

Baden-Württemberg, on the other hand, reports the total number of people who received benefits after vaccination damage at the end of the year, regardless of the year of the application. Most recently, there were 466 people in the southwest. In addition to 18 victims after a corona vaccination, 271 victims after a smallpox vaccination were on the list of the supply authorities, as well as 49 victims after a polio vaccination and 22 victims each who were immunized against flu and diphtheria.

Lauterbach underscored his demand on Sunday that people who had been injured by the corona vaccination had to be helped. Lauterbach said he would launch a program to investigate the consequences of Long Covid and Post-Vac and improve care. "This is a program I want to launch as soon as possible. I'm sort of in the budget negotiations for that money."

## Covid-19 origin debate 'squashed', ex-CDC chief Dr Robert Redfield claims

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-64891745>



Mar 09 – The former head of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said he was "sidelined" over his views on the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic. **Dr Robert Redfield** was the key witness in a US congressional committee's first public hearing as it investigates how the coronavirus emerged.

He said he was cut out of early discussions on where the virus came from because he suspected a lab leak. The accusation was dismissed by Dr Anthony Fauci as "completely untrue".

Many scientists point out there is no evidence that Covid leaked from a lab. The White House has said there is no consensus across the US government on the virus's origins. Some studies suggest the virus



made the leap from animals to humans in Wuhan, China, possibly at the city's seafood and wildlife market. The market is near the Wuhan Institute of Virology, a world-leading virus laboratory that conducted research into coronaviruses.

Dr Redfield, who led the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention when the outbreak began in 2020, was an early proponent of the lab leak theory.

He told the House select subcommittee, formed by the new Republican majority in the US House of Representatives, it was "not scientifically plausible" to him that the virus had natural origins.

He claimed he was "sidelined" at the beginning of the pandemic and excluded from meetings as his views were not in line with other major scientists like Dr Fauci, the de-facto face of the US pandemic response.

"It was told to me that they wanted a single narrative, and that I obviously had a different point of view," he said. "Science has debate and they squashed any debate." Dr Fauci, who was not present at the hearing, denied Dr Redfield's accusation.

"No one excluded anyone," he told US news outlet Politico after the hearing.

"And the idea of saying that he was not wanted there because he had a different opinion ... there were several people on the call who had the opinion that it might have been an engineered virus," said Dr Fauci, who retired from his government roles in December. During his testimony, Dr Redfield also spoke of his opposition to so-called gain of function research, in which viruses are manipulated to become more infectious in lab environments. He said that US agencies had likely funded such research at the Wuhan institute.

### Divisive subject

The House panel, which consists of nine Republicans and seven Democrats, has said it aims to stay above the fray of partisan politics. But that may prove difficult given the divisive subject matter.

On the panel is Republican congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, who used Wednesday's hearing to air her concerns about decisions made by federal agencies during the pandemic.

At the outset of the hearing, Democrat Raul Ruiz protested the inclusion of witness Nicholas Wade, the author of a controversial book on race and genetics that has been endorsed by a former Ku Klux Klan leader.

Mr Ruiz argued Mr Wade had written a dangerous book and his testimony could not be relied upon, but Mr Wade defended his book and remained at the hearing. The spectre of Donald Trump also hung over the proceedings, with Democrat Jamie Raskin suggesting the former president had been sycophantic and fawning in his approach to Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The House probe comes a week after FBI Director Christopher Wray said an unintentional lab incident was "most likely" how Covid originated. A few days before that, the US Department of Energy said it had found the virus was most likely the result of a lab leak in Wuhan, but could only reach that conclusion with "low confidence".

In response to that, many scientists who have studied the virus said that there was no new scientific evidence pointing to a lab leak. A natural origin is still the more likely theory, said Professor David Robertson, head of viral genomics and bioinformatics at the University of Glasgow.

## Bird Flu, Mpox And Marburg. Why Do So Many Viruses Seem to Be Emerging Right Now?

By Lindsay Broadbent

Source: <https://www.sciencealert.com/bird-flu-mpox-and-marburg-why-do-so-many-viruses-seem-to-be-emerging-right-now>

Mar 15 – From the widespread [outbreak of mpox](#) (formerly called [monkeypox](#)) in 2022, to the evolving bird flu situation, to recent [cases of Marburg virus](#) in Equatorial Guinea, COVID isn't dominating the headlines as much as it used to.

Instead, we've been regularly hearing about outbreaks of newly emerging or re-emerging [viruses](#).

So, is the incidence of [virus](#) outbreaks increasing? Or, have we just become better at detecting outbreaks thanks to improved technology developed during the COVID [pandemic](#)? The answer may be a bit of both.

There are an estimated 1.67 million viruses yet to be identified that currently infect mammals and birds. Of these, it is thought that [up to 827,000](#) have the potential to infect humans.

To understand how viruses emerge, we need to go back to the beginning of life on Earth. There are several theories about how the first viruses came into existence, but they all agree that viruses have been around for billions of years, evolving alongside living things. When there's disruption to this stable co-evolution, that's when we can run into trouble.

The main drivers of viral emergence in the human population are humans and their actions. Agriculture became a common practice more than 10,000 years ago, and with it humans started having close contact



with animals. This presented the opportunity for viruses that naturally infected these animals to "species jump" into humans. This is called zoonosis. Around [75 percent of newly emerging infectious diseases](#) are due to zoonosis.

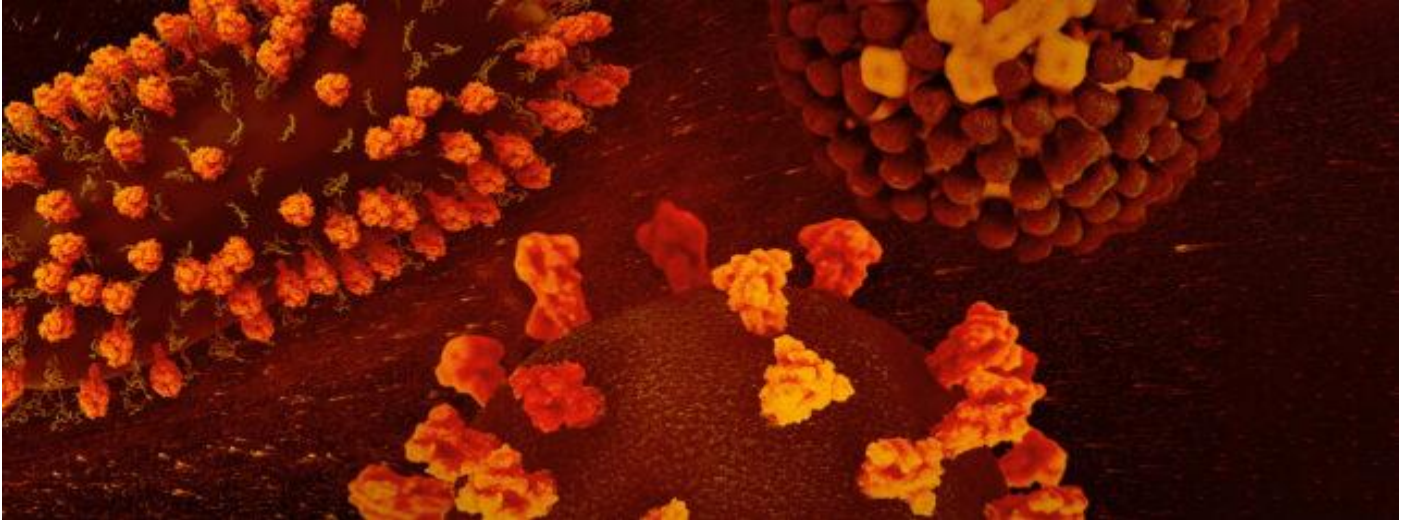


Illustration of RSV (top left), SARS-CoV-2 (bottom) and flu (top right) ([NIAID/Flickr](#))

As human civilization and technology advanced, the [destruction of animal habitats](#) forced animals into new areas in search of food sources. Different species that wouldn't usually have been in contact were now sharing the same environment. Add humans into this equation and you have the perfect recipe for a new virus to emerge. Urbanization leads to [high population density](#), creating an ideal environment for viruses to spread. The rapid development of towns and cities often outpaces adequate infrastructure such as sanitation and healthcare, further increasing the likelihood of virus outbreaks. [Climate change](#) is also contributing to the [spread of viruses](#). For example, arboviruses (viruses spread by arthropods like mosquitoes) are being detected in new areas because the range of countries mosquitoes can survive in is increasing. We've known about these factors for a long time. The emergence of [SARS-CoV-2](#) (the virus that causes COVID) did not surprise any virologist or epidemiologist. It was a matter of when – not if – a pandemic would occur. What was unexpected has been the scale of the COVID pandemic, and the difficulty of effectively limiting the spread of the virus. We also couldn't have predicted the impact that misinformation would have on other areas of public health. Anti-vaccination sentiment in particular has become more commonplace on social media over the past few years, and we're seeing increased rates of [vaccine hesitancy](#). There has also been disruption to routine childhood immunization programs, increasing the risk of outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases [such as measles](#).

### Lessons in surveillance

Science has moved at an unprecedented rate during the COVID pandemic, resulting in the development of new and improved virus detection methods to monitor outbreaks and the evolution of the virus. Now, many of the scientists involved in tracking SARS-CoV-2 are turning their attention to monitoring other viruses as well. For example, [wastewater monitoring](#) has been used extensively to detect SARS-CoV-2 during the pandemic, and could similarly help track other viruses that pose a threat to human health.

When a person is infected with a virus, some of the genetic material of that virus is usually flushed down the loo. Wastewater has the power to show if the number of infections in an area is increasing, usually before case numbers start to increase in hospitals.

Adapting this technology to look for other viruses such as influenza, measles or even polio could provide us with valuable data on the timing of virus outbreaks. This is already happening to some degree – [poliovirus](#) was detected in wastewater in London during 2022, for example. This increase in viral surveillance will naturally result in more virus outbreaks being reported. While some people may regard this as fearmongering, information like this could be the key to containing any future pandemics. If an outbreak were to occur in an area that doesn't have adequate virus surveillance, the infection is more likely to spread too far to be easily contained.

That said, surveillance is only one part of pandemic preparedness. Governments and health and science agencies around the world need to have (regularly updated) virus emergence and pandemic protocols in place, so that we are not scrambling to understand a situation when it may already be too late. COVID is unlikely to be the last pandemic that many people alive today will witness. Let's hope we are better prepared next time.

[Lindsay Broadbent](#) is a Lecturer in Virology @ University of Surrey.



## COVID-19 Could Be Robbing People of Their Ability to Recognize Faces

Source: <https://www.sciencealert.com/covid-19-could-be-robbing-people-of-their-ability-to-recognize-faces>

Mar 15 – When Annie reunited with her family for the first time a few months after being ill with [COVID-19](#), it was clear the disease was not yet done with her. "My dad's voice came out of a stranger's face," Annie [told](#) the researchers investigating her case.

Annie (a pseudonym to protect her privacy) had normal facial recognition before she was diagnosed with COVID-19 in March 2020. A few days later she started to recover, only to relapse after several months. Now her case study suggests we can add 'face blindness' ([prosopagnosia](#)) to [a long](#) and [growing list](#) of [brain problems](#) caused by the disease.

The new study surveyed more than 50 other patients struggling with long COVID and most were finding it harder to identifying familiar faces, since their infections. "Faces are like water in my head," Annie [explained](#), describing how trying to remember a face is now like being asked to replicate a Chinese character after one viewing when you're unfamiliar with the language.

The 28-year-old part-time artist previously needed to look at her subject maybe once every 15 to 30 minutes while working on a portrait. Now Annie has to refer back constantly. Dartmouth College neuropsychologists Marie-Luise Kieseler and Brad Duchaine presented Annie with a series of tests and confirmed that her trouble with recognition is due to specific face memory defects and not wider issues. But Annie has also been experiencing trouble navigating her way through familiar environments, having difficulties with her orientation and having to rely on Google map pins to relocate her car. Navigation difficulties are also [common in others with prosopagnosia](#). "The combination of prosopagnosia and navigational deficits that Annie had is something that caught our attention because the two deficits often go hand in hand after somebody either has had brain damage or developmental deficits," [explains](#) Duchaine. "That co-occurrence is probably due to the two abilities depending on neighboring brain regions in the temporal lobe."

During the course of her infection Annie had lost her sense of smell and taste, struggled with breathing and had high [fever](#) for a few days. Since relapsing, the facial recognition and navigation problems have been accompanied by other long COVID symptoms including fatigue, concentration problems, and [brain fog](#). Later, she developed balance issues and migraines as well.

Due to issues with insurance, Annie has not undertaken an [MRI](#).

"So a stroke cannot be excluded as the cause of her symptoms, especially given the [evidence for increased risk of stroke](#) with COVID-19," the team cautioned in [their case study](#).

Regardless of the specific mechanism behind the symptoms this is yet another example of how COVID-19 can cause [neurological problems](#). "Our study highlights the sorts of perceptual problems with face recognition and navigation that can be caused by COVID-19 – it's something that people should be aware of, especially physicians and other healthcare professionals," Duchaine [urges](#).

The majority of people with long COVID the researchers surveyed reported noticeable neurological difficulties doing things they found easy before, not just a minority of severe cases.

"It's been known that there are broad cognitive problems that can be caused by COVID-19, but here we're seeing severe and highly selective problems in Annie," [says](#) Duchaine, "and that suggests there might be a lot of other people who have quite severe and selective deficits following COVID."

●► The case study was published in [Cortex](#).

## COVID Worsened a Health Crisis Among Pregnant Women

Source: <https://news.yahoo.com/covid-worsened-health-crisis-among-115231025.html>

Mar 16 — Tammy Cunningham doesn't remember the birth of her son. She was not quite seven months pregnant when she became acutely ill with COVID-19 in May 2021. By the time she was taken by helicopter to an Indianapolis hospital, she was coughing and gasping for breath.

The baby was not due for 11 more weeks, but Cunningham's lungs were failing. The medical team, worried that neither she nor the fetus would survive so long as she was pregnant, asked her fiance to authorize an emergency cesarean section.

"I asked, 'Are they both going to make it?'" Matt Cunningham recalled. "And they said they couldn't answer that."

New government data suggests that scenes like this played out with shocking frequency in 2021, the second year of the pandemic. The National Center for Health Statistics reported Thursday that 1,205 pregnant women died in 2021, representing a 40% increase in maternal deaths compared with 2020, when there were 861 deaths, and a 60% increase compared with 2019, when there were 754.

The count includes deaths of women who were pregnant or had been pregnant within the last 42 days, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy. A separate report by the Government



Accountability Office has cited COVID as a contributing factor in at least 400 maternal deaths in 2021, accounting for much of the increase.

Even before the pandemic, the United States had the highest maternal mortality rate of any industrialized nation. The coronavirus worsened an already dire situation, pushing the rate to 32.9 per 100,000 births in 2021 from 20.1 per 100,000 live births in 2019.

The racial disparities have been particularly acute. The maternal mortality rate among Black women rose to 69.9 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2021, 2.6 times the rate among white women. From 2020 to 2021, mortality rates doubled among Native American and Alaska Native women who were pregnant or had given birth within the previous year, according to a study published Thursday in *Obstetrics & Gynecology*.

The deaths tell only part of the story. For each woman who died of a pregnancy-related complication, there were many others, like Tammy Cunningham, who experienced the kind of severe illness that leads to premature birth and can compromise the long-term health of both mother and child. Lost wages, medical bills and psychological trauma add to the strain.

Pregnancy leaves women uniquely vulnerable to infectious diseases like COVID. The heart, lungs and kidneys are all working harder during pregnancy. The immune system, while not exactly depressed, is retuned to accommodate the fetus.

Abdominal pressure reduces excess lung capacity. Blood clots more easily, a tendency amplified by COVID, raising the risk of dangerous blockages. The infection also appears to damage the placenta, which delivers oxygen and nutrients to the fetus, and may increase the risk of a dangerous complication of pregnancy called preeclampsia.

Pregnant women with COVID face a sevenfold risk of dying compared with uninfected pregnant women, according to one large meta-analysis tracking unvaccinated people. The infection also makes it more likely that a woman will give birth prematurely and that the baby will require neonatal intensive care.

Fortunately, the current omicron variant appears to be less virulent than the delta variant, which surfaced in the summer of 2021, and more people have acquired immunity to the coronavirus by now. Preliminary figures suggest maternal deaths dropped to roughly pre-pandemic levels in 2022.

But pregnancy continues to be a factor that makes even young women uniquely vulnerable to severe illness. Cunningham, now 39, who was slightly overweight when she became pregnant, had just been diagnosed with gestational diabetes when she got sick.

“It’s something I talk to all my patients about,” said Dr. Torri Metz, a maternal fetal medicine specialist at the University of Utah. “If they have some of these underlying medical conditions and they’re pregnant, both of which are high-risk categories, they have to be especially careful about putting themselves at risk of exposure to any kind of respiratory virus, because we know that pregnant people get sicker from those viruses.”

In the summer of 2021, scientists were somewhat unsure of the safety of mRNA vaccines during pregnancy; pregnant women had been excluded from the clinical trials, as they often are. It was not until August 2021 that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention came out with unambiguous guidance supporting vaccination for pregnant women.

Most of the pregnant women who died of COVID had not been vaccinated. These days, more than 70% of pregnant women have gotten COVID vaccines, but only about 20% have received the bivalent boosters.

“We know definitively that vaccination prevents severe disease and hospitalization and prevents poor maternal and infant outcomes,” said Dr. Dana Meaney-Delman, chief of the CDC’s infant outcomes monitoring, research and prevention branch. “We have to keep emphasizing that point.”

Cunningham’s obstetrician had encouraged her to get the shots, but she vacillated. She was “almost there” when she suddenly started having unusually heavy nosebleeds that produced blood clots “the size of golf balls,” she said.

Cunningham was also feeling short of breath, but she ascribed that to the advancing pregnancy. (Many COVID symptoms can be missed because they resemble those normally occurring in pregnancy.)

A COVID test came back negative, and Cunningham was happy to return to her job. She had already lost wages after earlier pandemic furloughs at the auto parts plant where she worked. On May 3, 2021, shortly after clocking in, she turned to a friend at the plant and said, “I can’t breathe.”

By the time she arrived at IU Health Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis, she was in acute respiratory distress. Doctors diagnosed pneumonia and found patchy shadows in her lungs.

Her oxygen levels continued falling even after she was put on undiluted oxygen, and even after the baby was delivered.

“It was clear her lungs were extremely damaged and unable to work on their own,” said Dr. Omar Rahman, a critical care physician who treated Cunningham. Already on a ventilator, Cunningham was connected to a specialized heart-lung bypass machine.

Jennifer McGregor, a friend who visited Cunningham in the hospital, was shocked at how quickly her condition had deteriorated. “I can’t tell you how many bags were hanging there, and how many tubes were going into her body,” she said.



But over the next 10 days, Cunningham started to recover. Once she was weaned off the heart-lung machine, she discovered she had missed a major life event while under sedation: She had a son.

He was born 29 weeks and two days into the pregnancy, weighing 3 pounds.

Premature births declined slightly during the first year of the pandemic. But they rose sharply in 2021, the year of the delta surge, reaching the highest rate since 2007.

Some 10.5% of all births were preterm that year, up from 10.1% in 2020, and from 10.2% in 2019, the year before the pandemic.

Although the Cunninghams' baby, Calum, never tested positive for COVID, he was hospitalized in the neonatal intensive care unit at Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis. He was on a breathing tube, and occasionally stopped breathing for seconds at a time.

Doctors worried that he was not gaining weight quickly enough — “failure to thrive,” they wrote in his chart. They worried about possible vision and hearing loss.

But after 66 days in the NICU, the Cunninghams were able to take Calum home. They learned how to use his feeding tube by practicing on a mannequin, and they prepared for the worst.

“From everything they told us, he was going to have developmental delays and be really behind,” Matt Cunningham said.

After her discharge from the hospital, Tammy Cunningham was under strict orders to have a caretaker with her at all times and to rest. She didn't return to work for seven months, after she finally secured her doctors' approval.

Cunningham has three teenage daughters, and Matt Cunningham has another daughter from a previous relationship. Money was tight. Friends dropped off groceries, and the landlord accepted late payments. But the Cunninghams received no government aid: They were even turned down for food stamps.

“We had never asked for assistance in our lives,” Tammy Cunningham said. “We were workers. We used to work seven days a week, eight-hour days, sometimes 12. But when the whole world shut down in 2020, we used up a lot of our savings, and then I got sick. We never got caught up.”

Although she is back to work at the plant, Cunningham has lingering symptoms, including migraines and short-term memory problems. She forgets doctor's appointments and what she went to the store for. Recently she left her card in an ATM.

Many patients are so traumatized by their stays in intensive care units that they develop so-called post-intensive care syndrome. Cunningham has flashbacks and nightmares about being back in the hospital.

“I wake up feeling like I'm being smothered at the hospital, or that they're killing my whole family,” she said. Recently she was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Calum, however, has surprised everyone. Within months of coming home from the hospital, he was reaching developmental milestones on time. He started walking soon after his first birthday, and likes to chime in with “What's up?” and “Uh-oh!”

He has been back to the hospital for viral infections, but his vocabulary and comprehension are superb, his father said. “If you ask if he wants a bath, he'll take off all his clothes and meet you at the bath,” he said.

Louann Gross, who owns the day care that Calum attends, said he has a hearty appetite — often asking for “thirds” — and more than keeps up with his peers. She added, “I nicknamed him our ‘Superbaby.’”

## When The Pandemic Came, The Zoos Shut, And The Animals Began to Act Differently

Source: <https://www.sciencealert.com/when-the-pandemic-came-the-zoos-shut-and-the-animals-began-to-act-differently>

Mar 16 – We all had to make adjustments as the [coronavirus pandemic](#) unfolded – even zoo animals who were suddenly not seeing crowds of visitors pass by every single day.

In a study published last year, researchers discovered how primates reacted to that shift, looking at the behavior of bonobos, chimpanzees, western lowland gorillas, and olive baboons, and finding that the animals changed their habits in a variety of ways, including the amount of time they spent resting and eating.

Visitor interactions are [thought to be crucial](#) to the welfare of zoo animals. Yet these interactions have the potential to be either positive or negative. So the researchers were keen to see the difference when the crowds weren't there.

“Primates are some of the most cognitively advanced species in zoos and their interactions with visitors are complex,” [zoo animal welfare scientist Samantha Ward](#) from Nottingham Trent University in the UK explained in 2022.

“A limitation to understanding how visitors can affect behavior of animals in zoos and parks is that they rarely close to the public for prolonged periods, so this provided us with a unique opportunity.”

Observations were recorded at Twycross Zoo and Knowsley Safari in the UK, both before and after visitors returned.





Over several months and multiple open and closure periods, there were noticeable changes in primate behavior, which varied depending on the animal.

As visitors began to return to the zoo, the bonobos and gorillas spent less time alone, while the gorillas also spent less time resting. Chimpanzees, meanwhile, were eating more and engaging with their enclosures more when zoos reopened.

The olive baboons in the safari park were seen to engage in less sexual and dominance behavior when the visitors came back. They also tended to approach visitor cars more often, compared with the ranger vehicles they saw when the park was closed.

Whether or not these changes were positive is more difficult to say.

The researchers suggest that the returning visitors seemed to stimulate the chimpanzees and baboons, while gorillas and bonobos spending less time alone could also be viewed as positive. At the same time, it could be argued that gorillas – naturally more sedentary animals – were disrupted by the crowds in that they spent less time resting.

That the gorillas changed the parts of their enclosures they spent the most time in when visitors came back suggests that the animals can to some extent manage this disruption.

"Behavioral changes and changes in enclosure use in the presence of visitors highlights the adaptability of zoo species to their environments," [said zoo animal welfare researcher Ellen Williams](#) from Harper Adams University in the UK.

"Provision of environments which enable animals to actively adapt in this manner is really important for their welfare."

The team also observed that there was a visitor number threshold when it came to olive baboons, beyond which the animals stopped becoming increasingly active and stimulated by the passing cars in the safari park.

This is all valuable data for animal welfare researchers, who know that visitors can have all kinds of effects on wildlife – from adding feelings of companionship and safety, to being sources of annoyance or even threats. This needs to be factored into how zoos and parks are run and designed.

While there might not be any more lockdowns in the foreseeable future (hopefully), the research team wants to continue the work of studying how visitor numbers affect animal behavior, including collecting data involving more animals and across a longer time scale.



The Coronavirus ZOO



"Future work could involve looking at the impact on a wider range of species in both zoos and safari parks as well as differences among individual animals," [said Williams](#).

► The research was published in [Animals](#).

## Russian Defense Ministry names Ukrainians involved in US military biological programs

Source: <https://tass.com/defense/1587153>

Mar 10 – Chief of Russia's Radiation, Chemical and Biological Protection Troops Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov announced the names of Ukrainians involved in US military biological programs at a briefing on Friday.

He pointed out that the Russian Defence Ministry had earlier announced the names of some participants in US military biological programs, including officials from the US Department of Defense, US biotech companies and Pentagon contractors. "Today, we would like to add representatives of Ukrainian state institutions and private companies involved in US military and biological programs to this list," Kirillov said.

According to him, one of them was Sergey Morgun, Head of the Sanitary and Epidemiological Department of the Ukrainian armed forces and one of the organizers of interaction between the Ukrainian Defense Ministry and the US Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA). He was one of the leaders of the U-P-8 project supervising hantavirus research.

Kirillov went on to mention Vladimir Kurpita, Head of the Public Health Center, who had managed interaction between Ukrainian specialists and DTRA, organized the collection of biological samples from Ukrainian citizens and their transfer abroad. The Russian general also noted that Irina Demchishina, Head of Reference Laboratories at the Ukrainian Health Ministry's Public Health Center, had acted as an intermediary in interaction with Pentagon contractors Black & Veatch and Metabiota and supervised the implementation of DTRA projects of UP and TAP series.

"In total, the Russian Ministry of Defense has information on more than a hundred participants in dual-use biological programs. The Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation is currently checking more than ten United States citizens, as well as a number of officials of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, for their involvement in the aforementioned programs," the chief of Russia's Radiation, Chemical and Biological Protection Troops stressed.

In addition, the new list includes Denis Muzyka, Deputy Director of International Cooperation of the Ukrainian Institute of Experimental and Clinical Veterinary Medicine, who carried out the main part of the research in the UP-4 project. Head of Finance and Tax at Black & Veatch is Larisa Pekarskaya, who was involved in the financing of US Defense Threat Reduction Office projects in Ukraine, as well as related Black & Veatch document management.

Among the names made public is that of Metabiota's head of research projects and programs in the countries of the former USSR, Natalia Mikhailovskaya. She collaborated with Muzyka on projects UP-4, UP-9, UP-10 and in the preparation of the final report. It is also the name of the head of the laboratory of natural focal infections of the Ukrainian Research Institute of Epidemiology and Hygiene of the Lviv National Medical University, Igor Lozinsky, who oversaw the modernization of the laboratory for military biological research.

## Tanzania: Authorities investigate mysterious illness that killed five

Source: <https://www.africanews.com/2023/03/17/tanzania-authorities-investigates-mysterious-illness-that-killed-five/>

Mar 17 – Tanzania has asked medical experts to investigate a mysterious "communicable" disease that has already killed five people in the country, authorities said.

The disease has been detected in "seven people with symptoms such as **fever, vomiting, bleeding and kidney failure**," the health ministry said in a statement late Thursday night. Medical experts have been dispatched to the Kagera region (northwest) bordering Uganda to investigate the "communicable" disease, said health official Tumaini Nagu.

"Samples have been taken from patients and the dead to identify the source and type of disease," she said in a statement, calling on the population to remain calm.

The case comes after an Ebola outbreak in Uganda that lasted almost four months and left 55 people dead. Uganda declared the end of the outbreak in January. Last year, Tanzania identified an outbreak of leptospirosis, or "rat disease," that killed three people in the southeastern region of Lindi.





## ICI C<sup>2</sup>BRNE DIARY – March 2023

This bacterial disease, transmitted to humans by certain mammals, is spread through water or food contaminated by the urine of infected animals. Outbreaks as this is not new in Tanzania. Last July, a disease whose symptoms included nosebleeds, fever, headaches and fatigue, was detected in the Lindi region. In response, the government's chief medical officer, Aifello Sichalwe formed a team of professionals and called on residents to remain calm. Mr Sichalwe added that the patients tested negative for Ebola, Marburg virus and Covid-19. One of them has recovered while the others are in isolation. A total of 13 cases of patients were detected then, three of whom have died.

Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan then told a religious gathering that the "strange" disease detected in Lindi could have been caused by "increasing interactions" between humans and animals due to environmental degradation.



### Deadly Fungi Are the Newest Emerging Microbe Threat All Over the World

These pathogens already kill 1.6 million people every year, and we have few defenses against them

Source: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/deadly-fungi-are-the-newest-emerging-microbe-threat-all-over-the-world/>





**Pandemic by numbers** (as of March 24, 2023)

	CASES	DEATHS	COUNTRIES & TERRITORIES	MOST AFFECTED COUNTRIES*
<b>COVID-19</b>	<b>(673,522,769)</b> <b>682,949,371</b>	<b>(6,748,144)</b> <b>6,823,077</b>	229	USA, India, Brazil, France, Germany, Japan, S. Korea

\* over 30 million cases

**Difficult to believe but ...**

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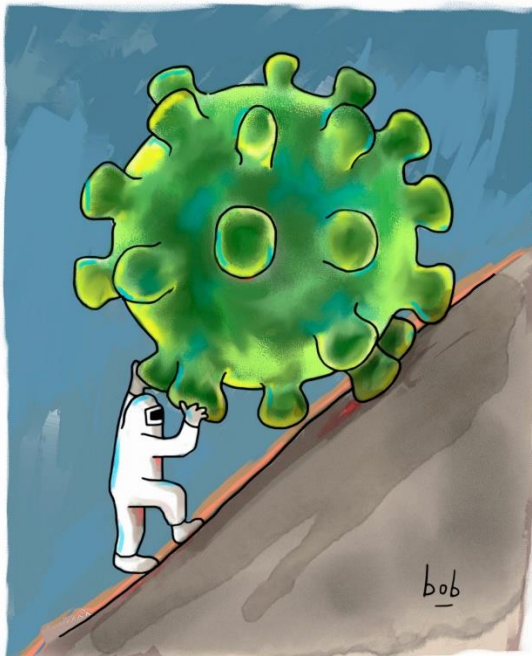
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## How to tell biodefense from an offensive bioweapons program

By Dan Regan and Rhys Dubin

Source: <https://thebulletin.org/2023/03/how-to-tell-biodefense-from-an-offensive-bioweapons-program/>

Mar 23 – For nearly three years, the world has faced a remarkable cascade of public health crises. As COVID-19, the rapid spread of mpox to more than 100 non-endemic countries, reemergent Ebola outbreaks, and a host of other threats demonstrate, biological risks are on the rise. Contrary to initial expectations, however, these disasters have not produced a simultaneous rise in global cooperation. As tensions spiked in the midst of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, for instance, Moscow falsely accused the United States of constructing and running a series of biological weapons labs in Ukraine. [Longstanding research facilities](#) dedicated to public health research on endemic diseases were, according to Moscow, a cover for US-sponsored efforts to weaponize pathogens and even [send](#) infected animals like bats and insects into Russia.

This devastating combination of disease, conflict, and blatant misinformation makes biodefense—global efforts to counter biological threats, reduce biological risks, and prepare and respond to natural or artificial biological incidents—more vital than ever. Without effective policies, the United States and others stand exposed to numerous catastrophic threats, including everything from the next COVID-19 variant to biological weapons developed by violent non-state actors. Articulating a cohesive strategy is only half the battle. Because militaries may fund and be involved in biodefense efforts—which can require work on dangerous pathogens with partners in the far-flung locales—such programs are uniquely vulnerable to being misconstrued as bioweapons research, as recent Russian behavior demonstrates. Because of an exponential growth in disinformation efforts worldwide and increasing geopolitical tensions, it is more important than ever for governments to be crystal clear about what defensive biological programs look like, in contrast to offensive actions banned under international law.

In this regard, the Biden administration's inclusion of counter-disinformation measures within its updated [biodefense strategy](#) is encouraging. Still, continuing to make the distinction between offense and defense is a vital step toward a comprehensive approach to biodefense. By drawing such a line, governments can effectively build trust, prepare for future threats, and call out rogue actors. Without such distinctions, however, Washington and others risk drowning in a sea of misinformation, which undermines global public health efforts and places them at grave risk.

### What's biodefense?

Despite its sometimes-shadowy reputation, biodefense is integral to any comprehensive national security strategy. Most biodefense programs have a similar portfolio of activities meant to deter, detect, and respond to emerging threats.

Any successful biodefense program, for instance, will rely heavily on information gathering to detect emerging biological threats. Identifying such patterns is critical at all levels of government. Doing so can alert physicians to new diseases, inform decision-making on strategic national stockpiles, and even catalyze global health aid. In the United States, these activities span multiple programs, including the Pentagon's [Global Emerging Infections Surveillance](#) and the Department of Health's [Center for Forecasting and Outbreak Analytics](#), which provide information on emerging pathogens, identify potential outbreaks, and model the likely spread of diseases.

Governments must also invest in biomedical equipment to prevent and contain infectious disease outbreaks. National defense and public health laboratories research improved personal protective equipment, advanced area decontamination, and other topics. Although information on most of these projects is publicly available, some may be classified to prevent malign actors from reverse engineering or circumventing valuable defensive measures.

Developing early warning systems to detect novel or reemerging pathogens is another critical part of biodefense programs. These may involve actively testing at-risk human, animal, and plant populations and taking regular environmental samples for infectious diseases. Governments also use electronic databases such as syndromic surveillance networks that monitor clinical data, including emergency room logs, mobile health apps, and social media—to look for indicators of outbreaks. Within the United States, clinicians, public health departments, state health departments, and the CDC all work together to monitor and detect potentially dangerous pathogens.

Finally, strong national biodefense programs rely on logistics and infrastructure to quickly deploy medical countermeasures in case of an outbreak. In the United States, the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) plays a central role in these efforts—supporting the development and acquisition of medical countermeasures such as therapeutics and vaccines. The Department of Defense also plays a leading role in developing similar tools. The Pentagon was a key leader in Washington's medical response to the 2014–2016 Ebola outbreak in West Africa and was instrumental in administering the US COVID-19 vaccination strategy.



Crucially, none of these biodefense activities—intelligence, equipment development, early warning, and logistics—are necessarily constrained by national borders. As far back as the 1940s, for instance, the United States partnered with countries across the former Soviet bloc, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa to bolster international biodefense capacities. With assistance from the [US Biological Threat Reduction Program](#), partner countries receive training on field epidemiology and safe handling of infectious pathogens and funding to bolster their laboratories for pathogen diagnostic capabilities.

### Defense versus offense

The United States' contemporary biodefense posture differs observably from past examples of offensive biological programs designed to develop weapons. Although such large-scale bioweapons programs are comparatively rare, analysts and historians have documented multiple instances of states developing or using such weapons.

The Soviet Union, for instance, spent decades during the Cold War [weaponizing](#) a slate of deadly pathogens, even though it signed the Biological Weapons Convention, the global bioweapons ban, in 1975. Even after the treaty entered into force, the Soviets carried out extensive work to transform a variety of pathogens, including smallpox, plague, Marburg hemorrhagic fever, and a host of novel biological agents into weapons. Crucially, the Soviet government worked to produce these deadly agents on an industrial scale, constructing extensive secret facilities for making and amassing biological weapons.

Separately, in one of the few examples of a state actually [using bioweapons](#) in conflict, Japan deployed several different weaponized biological agents against Chinese and Soviet soldiers and civilians during World War II. On several occasions, Japanese aircraft deliberately dropped packages of rice and wheat contaminated with plague-carrying fleas, causing hundreds (if not thousands) of casualties across parts of China. In other instances, Japanese soldiers contaminated water supplies with cholera and spread anthrax in rice fields, among other biological attacks.

Although biological weapons are easier to identify when deployed in a comparatively obvious fashion, offensive programs are often difficult to verify or distinguish from defensive efforts. In contrast to the treaty governing chemical weapons, the Biological Weapons Convention does not have a formal [verification regime](#) designed to catch violators.

Official verification efforts notwithstanding, determining whether a particular state's biological research program is offensive or defensive is a complex undertaking. Given rapid advances in biotechnology, many cutting-edge developments have dual-use potential—valuable for both peaceful research and theoretical weaponization, with little apparent difference to an outside observer. That doesn't mean it is impossible to tell the difference, but it does mean that any serious attempt to separate offensive from defensive biological programs must rely on "probabilistic verification," or the aggregation of many low- to medium-confidence strands of information. Outside analysts might, for instance, note a state's sudden increase in secrecy around its biological research output, an unexpected shift in a government's biodefense posture, an increase in particular acquisitions from the private sector, or a ramp-up in disinformation campaigns targeting rival states' biological research activities. Together, these might provide grounds for serious suspicion.

### Time to prepare

The need for a comprehensive global biodefense effort has never been clearer. COVID-19, mpox, and Ebola have taken their tolls on national economies and human health, serving as painful reminders of what can happen when states are left unprepared to handle complex emerging threats. But biodefense is far from a geopolitically neutral issue. Russia's ongoing global disinformation campaign targeting US biodefense-support efforts in Ukraine and elsewhere illustrate the practical difficulties facing policymakers as they address biological threats. Given the often blurry and complex line between offensive and defensive programs, Washington risks getting bogged down in endless and self-defeating diplomatic spats if it is not crystal clear about both its intentions and the fundamentally defensive nature of its efforts.

Perhaps more dangerously, if the United States fails to provide clear explanations for shifts in its biodefense policies or posture, other nations may misinterpret the intent of such programs while competitors may leverage the ambiguity for disinformation campaigns. Because defensive research and testing may, at first pass, look similar to weaponization, foreign governments might mistakenly view such programs as signs of a Soviet Union-esque offensive effort—thereby prompting potentially catastrophic geopolitical miscalculation. Worse still, bad actors might exploit this ambiguity to justify using dangerous weapons themselves. Transparency and diplomacy will be key to avoiding such hazardous outcomes.

Threats in the biological realm aren't going away anytime soon. Novel pathogens such as COVID-19 will continue to emerge, while older diseases such as dengue, mpox, and Ebola may reappear and spread further afield due to climate change. The US State Department has also [assessed](#) that Russia and North Korea have ongoing offensive biological weapons programs and that China and Iran engage in activities that raise concerns around

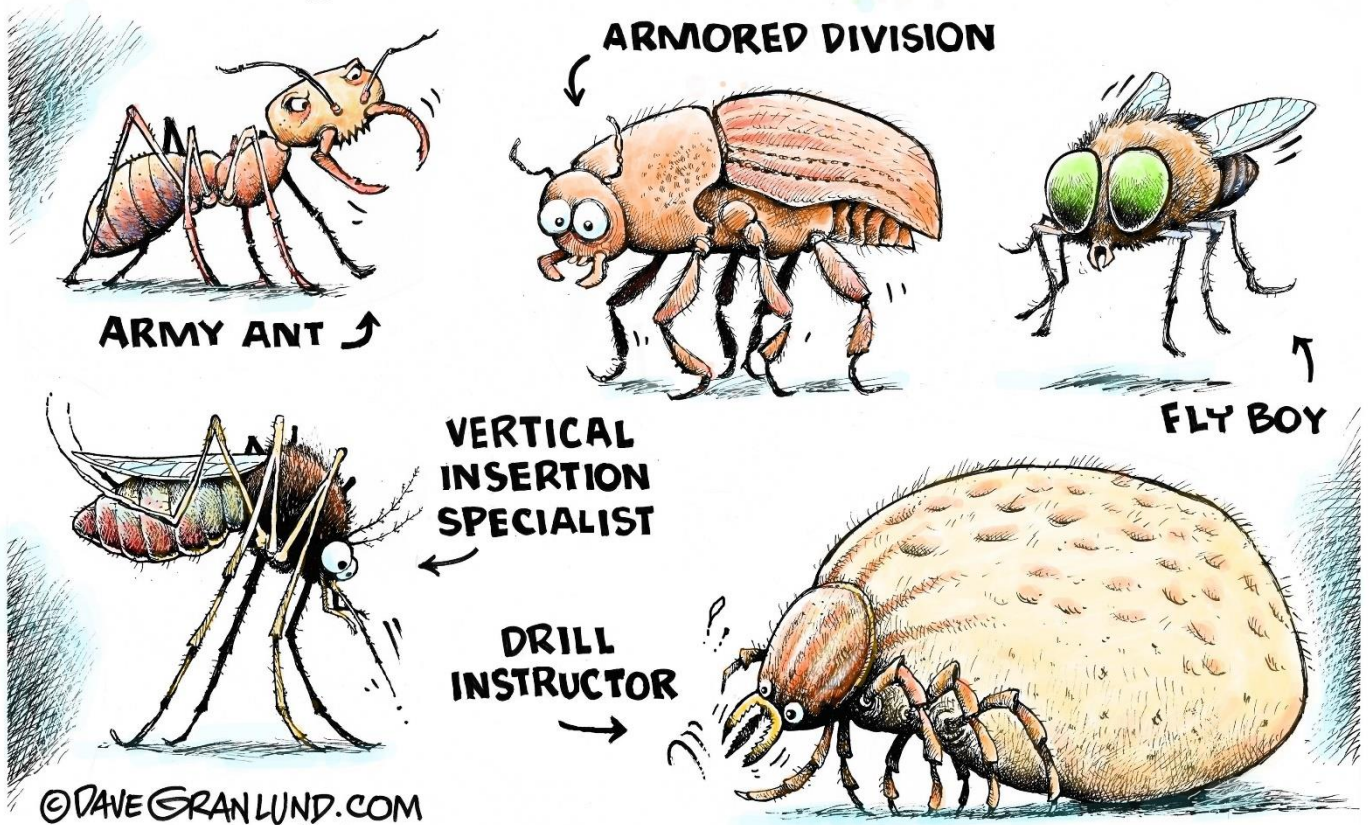


compliance with the BWC. As geopolitical competition ramps up, these programs will only become more and more dangerous. Given this shift in the biological threat landscape, Washington has good reason to focus on biodefense. But if policymakers want to bolster norms against biological weapons and avoid spiraling distrust and potential conflict, they must simultaneously take care to broadcast their intentions with as much clarity as possible. Although divining intent in geopolitics is a fraught exercise, offensive and defensive biological programs still look different—even from the outside. The Biden administration and those that come after must be careful to explain the distinction. If executed successfully, transparent US leadership might constitute a small step toward a world where biological weapons are obsolete.

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## Proof: Pentagon enlisted insects for bio-warfare...



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