

NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

WEEKLY TERRORISM BRIEF

Issue 45 | November 6, 2020

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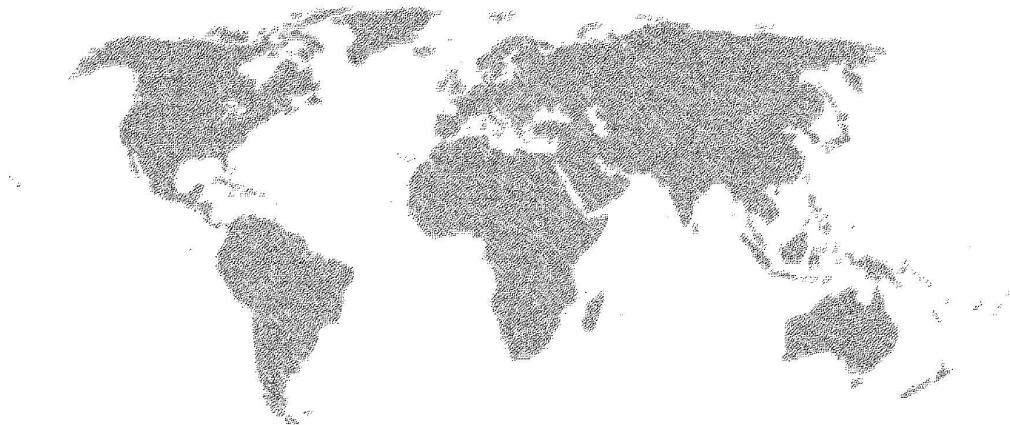
Issue #45 | November 6, 2020

Information Cutoff: November 6, at 1200

The NYPD Counterterrorism and Intelligence Bureaus compile this weekly open source brief to provide an overview and analysis of what we assess to be the most relevant headlines and trends currently impacting the global terrorism threat environment. This is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of all terrorism news and inclusion is not a confirmation of credibility or an endorsement by the NYPD.

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NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

WEEKLY TERRORISM BRIEF

Issue 45 | November 6, 2020

Attacks

Mass Casualty Attack Targets Popular District in Central Vienna, Austria



Authorities respond to scene of Vienna attack (CNN)

On November 2, a gunman identified as 20-year-old Kujtim Fejzulaj carried out a series of mass shooting assaults, indiscriminately firing at civilians across at least six locations in busy areas of central Vienna, Austria.

- At least four people were killed and 23 were injured, including a police officer.
- The gunman, who was from the town of St. Poelten, roughly 33 miles west of Vienna, was known to law enforcement and had previously been convicted in April 2019 of attempting to travel to the Iraq/Syria conflict zone to join ISIS as a teenager.
- He was ultimately set free on conditional release after eight months in prison.
- In a communique issued on November 3, ISIS officially claimed credit for the attack, referring to the suspect as Abu Dujana al-Albani and calling him a "soldier of the caliphate."
- ISIS's *Amaq News Agency* also released a video purportedly depicting the suspect pledging allegiance to ISIS.
- Despite initial conflicting accounts of multiple shooters, Austria's Interior Minister confirmed there is no evidence of additional perpetrators in the attack at this time.
- Initial local media reports indicated that the first attack targeted the Seitenstettengasse Temple; however, officials confirmed that the synagogue was closed at the time of shooting, and there was no specific attack at that location.
- The attack reportedly occurred several hours before Austria was set to move into a stricter lockdown amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
- Karl Nehammer, Austria's interior minister, acknowledged on November 4 that the country failed to act on a warning from Slovakia in the summer of 2019 concerning the gunman. Slovakian police reportedly told Austrian authorities that some "suspects from Austria" attempted to buy ammunition last July. The trip

was reportedly unsuccessful because the gunman did not have a license. (BBC, CNN)

Analyst Comment: This attack, which marks the deadliest act of Salafi-jihadist extremist terrorism in Western Europe in 2020, comes amid an elevated threat environment, with numerous foreign terrorist organizations from ISIS to al-Qa'ida calling for lone offender operations against the West in recent months. Although acts of terrorism are rare in Austria, the foreign terrorist fighter (FTF) and the homegrown violent extremist (HVE) threat remains an enduring concern for the country's national security. This latest assault demonstrates the challenge of assailants equipped with multiple weapons—semi-automatic rifles, handguns, edged objects, and hoax improvised explosive devices (IEDs)—targeting vulnerable, open, and publicly accessible areas.

Two Police Officers Shot in Ambush-Style Attack in New Orleans, Louisiana

On October 30, at approximately 1625 hours (local time) in the French Quarter of New Orleans, a male pedicab passenger—identified as 44-year-old Georgia resident Donnell Linwood Hassell—encountered a marked New Orleans Police Department vehicle and opened fire in what authorities described as an "ambush," shooting one officer in the face, while a second suffered minor injuries.

- The New Orleans Police Department emphasized that the arresting officers did not use physical force in arresting the suspect, and there was no interaction between the suspect and the officers prior to the shooting.
- The motive for the shooting is currently under investigation. (NOLA, CNN)

ISKP Claims Attack at Kabul University Campus

According to Afghanistan's Interior Ministry, on November 2 three fighters stormed the Kabul University campus, taking hostages and killing at least 22 people.

- Reports indicated that upon entering the campus, the suspects detonated improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and fired weapons over a six-hour period before being killed by Afghan security forces and American troops.
- On the same day, ISIS's Khorasan Province (ISKP) claimed responsibility for the attack, stating that two fighters, identified as Anas al-Panshiri and Tariq al-Khorasani, targeted a graduation celebration at the university for "judges and investigators belonging to the apostate Afghan government in Kabul city."
- The group further claimed that the fighters used automatic weapons to kill and wound 80 people.
- The Pro-ISIS Amaq News Agency published a similar article and included a photo of the alleged attackers. (THE NEW YORK TIMES, SITE, REUTERS)

NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

WEEKLY TERRORISM BRIEF

Issue 45 | November 6, 2020

Gunmen Kill Eight in Central Mali

On November 4, media sources reported that gunmen attacked a minibus that was traveling between the towns of Bandiagara and Bankass in central Mali's volatile Mopti region on November 3, killing eight people and seriously wounding eight others.

- A local government official blamed the attack on Salafi-jihadist extremists.
- Days before the attack, French military forces carried out airstrikes near the borders of Burkina Faso and Niger, killing more than 50 al-Qa'ida-linked militants and confiscating arms and material.
- French Defense Minister Florence Parly said the operation was launched after an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) detected a "very large" motorcycle caravan in the "three borders area."
- A military spokesperson noted that explosives and a suicide vest were found, claiming the group was planning an imminent attack on an army position in the region. (DEFENSE POST, FRANCE 24)

Analyst Comment: French troops first deployed to Mali in 2013 after a Salafi-jihadist insurgency broke out in the country the previous year. Despite their presence, violence has spread to

neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger. Task Force Takuba, a new counterterrorism unit of elite European troops, will be tasked with supporting Malian soldiers in targeted operations aimed at containing the threat from Salafi-jihadist extremist militants throughout Africa's Sahel region.

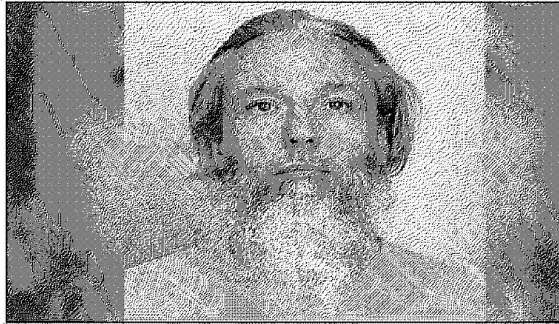
Teenager Who Stabbed Officer in Tatarstan Killed by Russian Police

On October 30, authorities in Kukmor, Russia shot and killed a 16-year-old boy after he stabbed a police officer.

- Prior to the incident, which has been labeled an attempted terrorist attack, the suspect reportedly threatened officers with a knife.
- While actively resisting arrest, he stabbed one of the officers.
- Despite the fact that another officer fired warning shots, the alleged assailant refused to cooperate and was subsequently shot and killed.
- The police officer who sustained injuries was transported to the hospital. Investigators have not revealed a specific motive for the attack. (AL JAZEERA)

Arrests, Trials, and Investigations

Trial Begins for Anti-Government Extremist Group Leader that Bombed Minnesota Mosque in 2017



Michael Hari (CBS)

On November 2, jury selection began in the trial of 49-year-old Michael Hari of Clarence, Minnesota, the leader of an Illinois anti-government extremist group who allegedly devised the plan for the 2017 bombing of Dar al-Farooq Islamic Center in Bloomington, Minnesota.

- In August 2017, an assailant threw a pipe bomb through the window of an imam's office at the mosque during early morning prayers.
- After a seven-month investigation, authorities determined that Hari was the leader of a group called the White Rabbits, which he led in a campaign of bombings, home invasions, and armed robberies using illegal automatic rifles.

- Prosecutors claimed that Hari rented a truck, loaded it with a pipe bomb, guns, and other gear, and drove more than 500 miles to carry out the mosque attack with two others.
- He pleaded not guilty to damaging property because of its religious character, forcibly obstructing the free exercise of religious beliefs, conspiracy to commit felonies with fire and explosives, using a destructive device in a crime of violence, and possessing an unregistered destructive device. (ABC NEWS)

Louisiana Man Sentenced for Burning Down Three Baptist Churches in 2019

On November 2, the Western District of Louisiana sentenced 23-year-old Holden Matthews of Opelousas, Louisiana to 300 months imprisonment followed by three years of supervised release for intentionally setting fire to three Baptist churches all with predominantly Black congregations.

- Matthews previously pleaded guilty to all three fires, which he set over a 10-day period in March and April of 2019.
- The fires completely destroyed each of the church buildings.
- Matthews admitted to setting the fires because of the religious character of the buildings in an effort to raise his profile as a "Black Metal" musician by copying similar crimes committed in Norway in the 1990s. (DOJ)

NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

WEEKLY TERRORISM BRIEF

Issue 45 | November 6, 2020

Alaskan White Supremacist Prison Gang Members Charged in Additional Indictment

On October 28, prosecutors in Alaska put forth additional charges in an indictment against members and associates of the 1488s, a white supremacist gang charged as a criminal organization with murder in aid of racketeering, kidnapping in aid of racketeering, assault in aid of racketeering, as well as kidnapping, and conspiracy to commit assault and kidnapping in aid of racketeering.

- The 1488s are a violent prison-based gang operating inside and outside of state prisons throughout Alaska and elsewhere.
- They employ Nazi-derived symbols to self-identify themselves and their affiliation with the gang, with the most coveted tattoo for members being the "patch" (an Iron Cross superimposed over a Swastika), which reportedly can be worn only by members who have achieved full membership status through committing an act of violence on behalf of the group.
- The new indictment adds two gang members, and details that the group allegedly forcibly removed a tattoo of a former gang member before murdering him. (JUSTICE)

Alleged Texan Boogaloo Member Charged with Unlawful Possession of a Firearm

On October 29, prosecutors charged 21-year-old Cameron Emerson Casey Rankin, of San Antonio, TX, a self-proclaimed Boogaloo movement member, with one count of being a prohibited person in possession of a firearm.

- According to the complaint, Rankin was in unlawful possession of a firearm, with the capability and means to affect violence in furtherance of his extremist beliefs.
- Having previously been committed to mental institution, Rankin was not legally permitted to possess a firearm and expressed a desire to overthrow the government, specifically, the "three letter agencies" such as ATF, FBI and IRS.
- Agents with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) warned Rankin that he was a prohibited person, but on May 30, Rankin and others, carrying long guns and pistols, appeared at the Alamo in downtown San Antonio to attend a protest in reaction to the police-involved killing of George Floyd.
- The next day, Rankin reportedly posted on his Facebook account photos of himself and others carrying a firearm at the protest as well as comments about his disdain for police including, "...hope they burn the precinct down" and "I'm BOOGALOO we hate police." If convicted, Rankin faces up to ten years in federal prison. (JUSTICE)

Alleged Conspirator in Michigan Kidnapping Plot Reportedly Issued Threats against Other Officials

According to an unsealed search warrant affidavit on October 28, 44-year-old Barry Croft, of Bear, DE, who allegedly participated in the plot to kidnap Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, reportedly also

threatened to hang President Donald Trump, and posted a hit list on Facebook targeting other elected leaders, including former President Barack Obama.

- FBI agents gathered evidence from Croft's Facebook account that was saturated with violent imagery, including a noose and a list of grievances in which he mused about killing Democrats and Republicans including South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster, Muslims and liberals. (DETROIT NEWS)

West Virginia Man Charged for Allegedly Selling Firearm Parts to Boogaloo Movement Members



Timothy Watson (Herald Mail Media)

On November 3, police arrested 30-year-old Timothy Watson, of Ranson, West Virginia and charged him with conspiracy, illegal possession and transfer of a machine gun, and unlawfully engaging in the business of manufacturing firearms.

- Watson allegedly sold wall hanger kits that were reportedly used to convert firearms into machine guns by members of the Boogaloo movement.
- His business sold 3D-printed "innocuous" hooks made with two pieces.
- Once disassembled, one piece effectively functions as an illegal drop-in auto sear, which federal authorities determined can be used to convert a semi-automatic AR-15 into a fully-automatic machine gun.
- The website for Watson's wall hanger business was also advertised on Facebook groups associated with the Boogaloo movement.
- One of Watson's customers, Steven Carrillo, is accused of shooting security officers in May at the Ronald V. Dellums Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse in Oakland, CA, and of killing a Santa Cruz County Sheriff's deputy in June. (HERALD MAIL MEDIA)

U.S. Officials Seize Additional Domain Names Controlled by Iran and its Affiliates

On November 4, government officials seized 27 additional domain names that Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) used unlawfully, and in furtherance of a global covert influence campaign.

NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

WEEKLY TERRORISM BRIEF

Issue 45 | November 6, 2020

- Four of the domains fronted as legitimate news outlets, but in reality were controlled by the IRGC in violation of U.S. sanctions targeting both the government of Iran and the IRGC.
- The domains were established to covertly influence U.S. policymaking and public opinion, in violation of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA).
- The remaining 23 domains targeted audiences in other parts of the world. FBI Special Agent in Charge Craig D. Fair noted the seizures were part of the FBI mission of "aggressively investigating any evidence of foreign influence and the unlawful spread of disinformation by hostile nations." (DOJ)

Analyst Comment: The IRGC was added to the U.S. Department of Treasury's list of Specially Designated Nationals, as officials determined it provided material support to a number of foreign terrorist organizations and militant groups, including Hizballah, Hamas, and the Taliban. According to the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), Specially Designated Nationals are required to obtain a license from OFAC prior to using a domain name and obtaining services from the U.S.

Police Execute Coordinated Raids Across Europe to Combat Online Hate Speech

Europol announced on November 3 that law enforcement authorities recently carried out coordinated raids in seven countries in an effort to combat online hate speech and incitement to violence.

- German law enforcement searched 83 apartments and other buildings to seize items such as smart phones and laptops. According to prosecutors, 96 suspects are being questioned about the hateful content they posted online.
- One suspect allegedly made anti-Semitic comments, and another insulted a female politician.
- While the raids were part of an annual drive started by Germany, Italy, France, Greece, Norway, Britain and the Czech Republic participated this year for the first time. Germany, which has the most stringent laws on defamation and incitement to commit crimes and threats of violence, sentences those convicted of denying the Holocaust to prison.
- A law enacted in 2018 requires social media networks to delete or block obviously criminal content within 24 hours of receiving a complaint or they are subjected to a large fine. (REUTERS)

Two Senior Officials in Swiss Islamic Group Convicted of Spreading Propaganda Supporting Al-Qa'ida

According to media reports on October 27, two senior officials from a Swiss Islamic group—identified as Nicholas Blanco, president of the Islamic Central Council of Switzerland (ICCS) and media spokesperson Abdel Azziz Qassim Illi—received 15 month and 18 month prison sentences respectively for terrorism-related crimes.

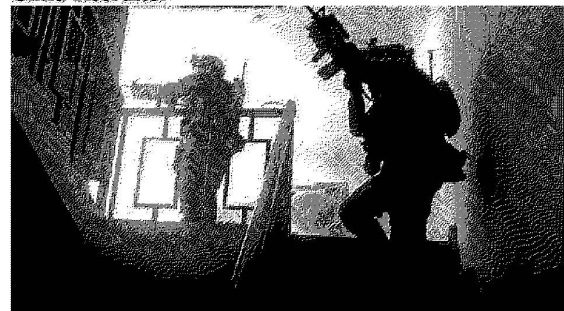
- In 2017, the two men and a third were charged in connection with videos posted online in 2015 including interviews with leaders of Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qa'ida's Syrian affiliate at the time.
- The ICCS alleged that the footage was not meant to glorify extremists, but to bring attention to a region in conflict. The videos were later used by al-Qa'ida as propaganda.
- The court initially found Blanco and Illi not guilty, concluding that prosecutors did not provide enough detail to result in a conviction. However, the third ICCS official was ultimately convicted.
- Blanco's and Illi's acquittals were overturned in March by the Federal Court, which ordered a new hearing. (REUTERS)

Three Extremists Sentenced to Death for 2015 Mali Attacks

On October 29, media sources reported that two Salafi-jihadist extremists were found guilty and sentenced to death by a Malian court for killing over two dozen people in attacks targeting Westerners in 2015.

- Fawaz Ould Ahmed and Sadou Chaka were given the death sentences after the guilty verdict was announced.
- A third defendant, Abdoulbaki Abdramane Maiga, was also sentenced to death in absentia.
- The three defendants were charged both for the 2015 attack on La Terrasse nightclub and for another assault in November 2015 at the Radisson Blu hotel, where militants held 170 guests and staff hostage during a nine-hour siege.
- Ahmed claimed to have attacked the nightclub in revenge for cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad that were published by the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo. (YAHOO NEWS)

Iraqi Counterterrorism Forces Capture Alleged ISIS Child Recruiter



Iraqi counterterrorism troops conduct raid on compound in Fallujah (Stars and Stripes)

On November 4, media sources reported that the U.S.-trained Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) conducted a raid in

NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

WEEKLY TERRORISM BRIEF

Issue 45 | November 6, 2020

Fallujah last week resulting in the capture of a suspected ISIS child recruitment ringleader.

- CTS officials said they hope the mission will provide intelligence needed to target other members of the child recruitment ring.
- According to coalition officials, the operation was carried out without a single shot being fired and was one of many successful recent Iraqi operations targeting the group. Lieutenant General Abdul Wahab al-Saadi, the commander of the CTS, said that the unit still frequently checks its intelligence with the coalition and conducts missions alongside foreign troops.
- However, the raid was one of many that Iraqi security forces pursued on their own in the past five months.
- In its quarterly report released to Congress on November 3, the Pentagon's lead Inspector General noted that Iraqi forces have grown more capable but still require international assistance to keep pressure on ISIS and prevent its resurgence in the region. (STARS AND STRIPES)

Analyst Comment: In recent months, U.S. military forces have shifted to a largely advisory role in Iraq, with local forces coordinating and leading ongoing operations to root out ISIS remnants. Operation Inherent Resolve, the international military coalition against ISIS, has withdrawn thousands of foreign troops and returned eight bases to the Iraqi government this year.

Bahrain Convicts 51 People for Allegedly Setting up Terrorist Organization

On November 3, Bahrain announced that it convicted 51 people, more than half of them located outside the country, on charges of belonging to a militant group.

- Bahraini officials said those convicted belong to a militant group that received orders from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), alleging that the Guard supplied weapons and funding to aid the group in plans to potentially target "economic and vital installations, security patrol sites, and the headquarters of the Ministry of Interior and the Bahrain Defense Force."

- Officials also said some of those arrested sought to target a bank ATM and a transportation company, adding that some possessed gasoline bombs.
- According to the government statement, the arrests took place last year, and the suspects received sentences ranging from five years to life in prison.
- One of the defendants was acquitted.
- Of those convicted, the kingdom described 27 as "fugitives abroad." (STARS AND STRIPES)

Analyst Comment: On September 20, Bahrain's Interior Ministry reported that the country foiled an attempted terrorist attack earlier in the year by agents backed by the IRGC. It is unclear whether those convicted or the unnamed militant group were involved in this previously reported plot. Over the last year, Bahrain conducted a series of mass trials, which have faced criticism for lacking the procedural safeguards necessary to ensure a fair trial for the defendants.

Taliban Attack on Kunduz Governor's Compound Likely Conducted Using Remotely Piloted Aircraft

Media sources reported on November 1 that an explosion killing four security officers in the Kunduz governor's compound was most likely carried out by the Taliban using a remotely piloted aircraft, a concerning development for forces in the region, including U.S. and NATO troops.

- The Taliban's previous use of small, over-the-counter drones has been largely limited to filming attacks for propaganda and surveillance, and U.S. troops reportedly have limited equipment available to counter the hard-to-detect weapons, which ISIS has employed against them in Iraq since 2014. (NEW YORK TIMES, DEFENSE POST)

Analyst Comment: American forces have remained largely unscathed by Taliban attacks since signing the February 2020 peace deal agreeing to withdraw completely from Afghanistan, but violence has continued to heavily impact the region despite ongoing peace talks between Taliban and Afghan government negotiators in Qatar. The situation is likely to worsen for local authorities after U.S. troops exit the country.

Global Security Developments

U.S. Special Forces Rescue American Hostage Held in Nigeria

On October 31, U.S. Special Forces rescued 27-year-old Philip Walton, an American citizen who was kidnapped by armed men, in a military operation in northern Nigeria.

- Walton was abducted from his home by six men with AK-47 assault rifles in the Massalata village of southern Niger on October 27, according to two unnamed U.S. officials.
- Media sources reported that the suspects appeared to be from the Fulani ethnic group and that they spoke Hausa and some English.

- They reportedly demanded money and searched the family's home before leaving with Walton.
- It is believed that several of Walton's captors were killed during the Special Forces operation, but no U.S. troops were hurt.
- A diplomat source in Niger said Walton is now at the U.S. ambassador's residence in Niamey.
- The U.S. Department of Defense confirmed the operation but did not immediately provide the identity of the hostage. (REUTERS)

NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

WEEKLY TERRORISM BRIEF

Issue 45 | November 6, 2020

American Identity Movement Announces Its Disbandment

On November 2, American Identity Movement (AIM) president, Patrick Casey, published a statement in which he claimed that the organization had "reached the limit of what a dissident membership organization can realistically achieve."

- He emphasized that former AIM members would remain engaged in far-right actions, describing the disbanding as "a strategic reorientation, one that will allow the dissident right to network, host events, create content, and engage in activism in more fruitful ways."
- Casey's statement suggests that the former members will decentralize into an informal network of activists, which would reportedly put them in step with the majority of other far-right extremist adherents. (SITE)

France Ramps Up Security in Response to Nice Attack

French officials announced on October 30 that they were increasing security across the country in response to the terrorist attack at a church in Nice that left three dead as protests broke out in parts of the Middle East, Asia, and Africa in response to controversial French cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad.

- Thousands of soldiers were deployed to houses of worship and schools while French President Emmanuel Macron raised the security alert to the highest level.
- After Macron also vowed to uphold France's laws on freedom of expression, protests broke out in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Palestinian territories.
- Police in Islamabad fired tear gas at protesters who attempted to break through security blockades at the French embassy. Demonstrators in Dhaka, Bangladesh called for the boycott of French products, labeled Macron "the world's biggest terrorist," and burned effigies of the French leader. (REUTERS)

Analyst Comment: As France continues to affirm its stance on freedom of expression, some countries may continue to call for official diplomatic action to be taken against the country. Further, some Salafi-jihadist extremists may view the ongoing increased tensions as a justification to escalate to violence in the near-term.

Somali Special Forces Reportedly Kill Senior Al-Shabaab Commander

According to limited local media reports on November 1, Somalia's military announced that its Special Forces recently conducted a counterterrorism operation in the Middle Juba region that resulted in the death of a senior commander of al-Qa'ida's East African affiliate, al-Shabaab.

- The deceased commander was identified as Abdullahi Osman a.k.a. Dhega-Adde. He was reportedly responsible for the foreign terrorist organization's media wing.
- Somalia's DANAB Special Forces operators, responsible for the raid, receive training and support from the United States military. (GAROWEY)

Top Kashmiri Rebel Commander Killed in Gun Battle with Indian Forces, Sparking Anti-India Protests

On November 1, Indian security forces shot and killed Saifullah Mir, leader of Indian-administered Kashmir's largest rebel group, Hizbul Mujahideen, in a counterinsurgency operation launched based on intelligence of Mir's movements near the region's capital of Srinagar.

- A suspected associate was also captured after the gun battle. Mir, who became the chief of operations for Hizbul Mujahideen after his predecessor Riyaz Ahmad Naikoo was killed in a government operation in May, is suspected to have been responsible for the deaths of three police officers and several grenade attacks carried out in opposition to Indian rule.
- Indian forces hailed the operation a success, calling it a setback for the rebel group, though anti-India protests and clashes with forces erupted in the region immediately after the firefight. (AL JAZEERA/NEW INDIAN EXPRESS)

Analyst Comment: Similar to the deaths of former leader Riyaz Ahmad Naikoo and his predecessor Burhan Wani by security forces in 2016, Mir's death will not likely only produce a series of violent demonstrations over the next few weeks, but also pose broader consequences for the region's stability, including the potential revival of the militant movement in Kashmir.

Counterterrorism Policy

U.K. Terrorism Threat Level Raised to Severe

According to media reporting on November 3, the U.K.'s terrorism threat level has officially been upgraded from substantial to severe.

- The decision indicates that security officials assess that an attack is highly likely but there is no specific intelligence of an imminent incident at this time.
- The elevated threat level comes in the immediate aftermath of the mass shooting in Vienna, Austria by an ISIS supporter that left at least four dead and 23 injured,

as well as several recent high-profile edged weapon assaults in France in recent weeks.

- The U.K. threat level is assessed by the nation's Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC), a part of MI5, which makes recommendations independent from the government. (BBC)

U.S. Cyber Command Reportedly Expands Operations Targeting Hackers from Russia, Iran, and China

On November 2, media sources reported that U.S. Cyber Command expanded its overseas operations aimed at finding

NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

WEEKLY TERRORISM BRIEF

Issue 45 | November 6, 2020

foreign hacking groups in an effort to secure the U.S. presidential election.

- Cyber Command reportedly undertook new operations in Europe to pursue Russian hackers and sent teams to the Middle East and Asia over the past two years to locate Iranian, Chinese, and North Korean hacking teams and identify the tools they were using to break into computer networks.
- In 2018, Cyber Command began to expand its efforts abroad, as it sent teams to North Macedonia, Montenegro, and other countries to gain insight into Russian operations.
- While operations in the lead up to the 2018 midterm elections largely centered on Russia, Cyber Command's focus prior to the 2020 U.S. presidential election

expanded to Iran and China, as intelligence officials warned of the countries' efforts to potentially influence the vote.

- According to U.S. officials, Cyber Command employs "hunt forward operations" to get close to foreign adversaries' networks and then identify and neutralize attacks targeting the United States.
- Cyber Command officials noted that those efforts uncovered malware being used by adversarial hacking teams, and government agencies used that information to help state and local officials shore up their election system defenses and notify the public regarding threats. (THE NEW YORK TIMES)

Cyber and Media

Far-Right Extremists Urge Supporters to Prepare for Widespread Political Violence after Election Day, Call for Weapons Acquisition

In the days leading up to the 2020 presidential election, far-right extremists continued to urge Americans to prepare for a revolution and violent action.

- On October 28, a post on a neo-Nazi Telegram channel stated, "Election Day is coming next week. Sure hope everyone kept their heads down and you know all your neighbors for when the fall out from this comes."
- The post also urged readers to avoid organizing on the internet for fear that government agencies could monitor their activity.
- Another neo-Nazi Telegram channel shared a poster of Kyle Rittenhouse, the 17-year-old facing charges for the murder of two protesters in Kenosha, Wisconsin, along with a statement instructing followers to "go into gamer mode and empty those magazines," instead of acting in defense, adding "there is no peaceful solution."
- Also on October 28, a 4chan user began a thread urging others to collect ammunition, firearms, and other weapons before the election.
- Many users commented on the post, with several calling for violence and one in particular stating "Kill People 2020."
- Another user stated that all government employees and law enforcement officers "deserve a bullet for tolerating the state of affairs since 911."
- Additionally, on October 26, a white nationalist Telegram channel suggested that most people are not fit enough to fight, recommending they train in guerilla warfare and subjects like mechanics and electrical engineering.
- In a subsequent post, the channel provided advice on the best way to carry out violence, suggesting the use of specific firearms. (SITE)

User in Neo-Nazi Chat Group Reportedly Encourages Assassination of U.S. Presidential Candidates

On October 31, a user of the neo-Nazi Telegram channel "NSA" made a comment encouraging the assassination of both presidential candidates in the 2020 U.S. election.

- In his comment, user "D" made reference to the anti-Semitic far-right conspiracy theory that an invisible "Jewish elite" rules the United States.
- In response to another user's message that denounced U.S. aid to Israel, "D" commented "America is ruled by jewish, I suggest you to kill Trump and Biden [sic]." (SITE)

Analyst Comment: "NSA" is a neo-Nazi Telegram channel that posts submissions from various far-right extremist groups, disseminates racially and ethnically motivated violent extremist (REME) propaganda, and comments on current affairs.

Members of Neo-Nazi Group Discuss Plans to Capitalize on Post-Election Unrest by Killing "Local Traitors" and Framing Government

On October 31, a member of the U.S.-based neo-Nazi Vorherrschaft Division posted in the organization's Telegram chat group imploring the group to start organizing a meetup. The

- Vorherrschaft Division is known for its connections to designated neo-Nazi terrorist entities and long history of violent incitements.
- The member emphasized the importance of meeting in person by insisting that "Americans will be unreachable when the internet and cellphones go down" supposedly following impending election unrest.
- Another member of the group responded stating, "This generation of warfare is about the moral [sic] level of the locals," suggesting they need to "get big brother to overstep its line" in order to make the "people become restless."

NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

WEEKLY TERRORISM BRIEF

Issue 45 | November 6, 2020

- The user confirmed that “when big brother can no longer supply them with their needs, they take matters into their own hands.”
- A group administrator cautioned that, should the neo-Nazi community exploit the tumultuous atmosphere surrounding the election to incite and orchestrate mass violence, they also need to “be able to fill in the shoes of the government at the local level to restore order and sanity.” (SITE)

Pro-ISIS Media Outlet Releases Poster Threatening Transit Targets in France

On October 29, the pro-ISIS *Quraysh Media* disseminated a propaganda poster threatening an IED attack in France.

- The poster depicted a masked man sitting on what appeared to be an airplane or a train holding a bomb-laden backpack, with associated French text that translated to “France. Your war against the Muslims is doomed. France is our target, you will pay the price, O worshippers of the cross.”
- The media group also published a graphic glorifying Abdoullakh Anzorov, the suspect in the recent beheading of French school teacher Samuel Paty.
- The image showed Anzorov with a gun over his shoulder and French text that reads “The hero Abdullah.” (SITE)

AQIM Demands Physical Violence and Death for France Over Economic Harm in Revenge for Insults against the Prophet Muhammad

On November 2, *al-Andalus Media Foundation* issued a propaganda statement declaring that the insistence by French President Emmanuel Macron to treat controversial depictions of the Prophet Muhammad as freedom of expression, will only incentivize Muslims to be more persistent in seeking retribution.

- Al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) acknowledged the recent boycott of French products as “useful” to deter the French government and its people from damaging the reputation of Islam. However, in its latest message AQIM demanded violence and death over economic harm to France as a form of retaliation. AQIM also argued that economic damage is “insufficient,” as revenge for the Prophet Muhammad and that the response must be “stronger and tougher.”
- The group maintained that those responsible for such insults must be killed and claimed that Muslims who are ardent in their faith must sacrifice themselves in defense of the Prophet, like the “Chechen hero”—a reference to Aboulakh Anzorov, who beheaded French teacher Samuel Paty in France last month. (SITE)

ISIS-Aligned Group Publishes Warning Poster Following Vienna Attack

On November 3, following the news that ISIS claimed responsibility for the mass casualty attack in Vienna, Austria, the

pro-ISIS *Tala’ita al-Ansar Foundation* published a poster threatening those who look to fight the group.

- The poster displayed an image of the suspected mass shooter, Kujtim Fejzulaj a.k.a. Abu Dujana al-Albani, from his video pledging allegiance to ISIS, along with a warning that “whoever thinks about entering into a war with us must consider it a thousand times.” (SITE)

California, Indiana Democratic Parties and Think Tanks Targeted by Russian Hackers

According to media reports on October 30, a group of Russian hackers previously accused of meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, sought to target email accounts belonging to Democratic state parties in California and Indiana, as well as think tanks in Washington, D.C. and New York.

- Many of the attempted intrusions—reportedly carried out by the group nicknamed “Fancy Bear”—were flagged internally by Microsoft over the summer.
- The hackers’ actions potentially provide insight into how Russia may be targeting Election Day in the U.S.
- Some of the organizations targeted have been identified as the Center for American Progress, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- None of the groups believe the hacking attempts were successful. Fancy Bear, which is run by Russia’s military intelligence agency, is responsible for previously hacking into email accounts of Hillary Clinton staffers leading up to the 2016 presidential election.
- The most recent news comes in the wake of Microsoft revealing Fancy Bear attempted to hack over 200 organizations, many of which have links to the 2020 election. The Russian Embassy in Washington D.C. denied the allegations of ties to Fancy Bear and called the reports “fake news.”
- In addition to targeting a lobbying firm allied with Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden, Democrats in Indiana and California were also in Fancy Bear’s crosshairs, indicating that Russia is casting a wide net, according to the cybersecurity company Secureworks. (REUTERS)

Analyst Comment: Russia and other malign foreign influence actors, including Iran, have continuously sought to undermine confidence in the results of the U.S. election and further sow discord. These state-actors have used a variety of cyber-enhanced methods including sending threatening emails under the guise of a racially and ethnically motivated violent extremist (REMVE) group and actively work to spread and amplify election-related disinformation online.

NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

WEEKLY TERRORISM BRIEF

Issue 45 | November 6, 2020

ON OUR RADAR

Despite the Horrors in Vienna and Paris, Jihadism Has Declined—The Economist (3 November 2020)

Teeming with spooks and intrigue, Vienna is no stranger to political violence. “Carlos the Jackal” held opec’s oil ministers hostage there in 1975. Since then, assassinations in Austria’s capital have claimed the lives of Kurds and Chechens, among others. But until November 2nd Vienna had largely been spared the attacks on civilians that have menaced cities like London, Madrid, or Paris. That night four people were killed and 23 injured several of them seriously, during a gun and knife rampage in Vienna’s centre. Many were attacked as they took their last chance of a drink or a meal before Austria’s second coronavirus lockdown. The Austrian authorities identified Kujtim Fejzulaj, a 20-year-old man with dual Austrian and North Macedonian citizenship, as the sole gunman. Further arrests were made on November 3rd. Mr. Fejzulaj, who was shot by police, was born and raised in Vienna to Macedonian parents of Albanian extraction. Radicalized as a teenager, in 2019 he was convicted of terrorist offences and given a 22-month prison sentence after authorities thwarted his plan to join Islamic State (ISIS) fighters in Syria. But he was released in December under Austria’s lenient rules for young offenders.

The Terrorist Threat from the Fractured Far Right—Lawfare Blog (1 November 2020)

In November 2019, Seamus Hughes and Deborah Margolin of the George Washington University’s Program on Extremism argued here on Lawfare that the jihadist threat to the West has splintered. “It is clear that the jihadist threat has become fractured, with new and old hazards facing the United States concurrently,” they reasoned, before presenting the multiple different groups—including homegrown jihadists, returnees from conflicts abroad, and those recently released from prison—that have diversified the threat beyond the traditional conceptualization of hierarchical, bureaucratic, foreign-based terrorist organizations that send foreign fighters abroad, à la al-Qa’ida in September 2001. They are right, but this atomization of terrorism is not confined to the jihadist threat.

Intelligence Isn’t Just for Government Anymore—Foreign Affairs (2 November 2020)

Foreign election interference must be bad if spy agencies are making public service announcements. Two weeks ago, Director of National Intelligence (DNI) John Ratcliffe and FBI Director Christopher Wray held a press conference warning that Russia and Iran have been acquiring voter registration data and waging influence operations to sow division and tilt the election. And earlier in October, counterintelligence chief William Evanina and General Paul Nakasone—who heads both the Pentagon’s cyberwarriors and the supersnoopers of the National Security Agency—participated in a video alert designed to reassure Americans that the threats are real but they are on the job. What these officials said is important. But the fact that they said it is pathbreaking.

An Analytic Framework for Assessing Risks of U.S. Post-Election Violence—Just Security (3 November 2020)

Today and the days ahead are the most consequential period for the U.S. in at least a generation. Many around the world are watching with us to see who we are and what our choice could mean for their own struggles for responsive and inclusive democracy. Many of us watching should be looking not only to see who wins, but to monitor the risk of post-election violence and take action to prevent it. When I served as a senior analyst for the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, I developed frameworks to evaluate the risk of election-related instability overseas. As a National Security Council staff member at the White House, I relied on similar tools to help prepare for and organize U.S. government support for nine elections in West Africa. Evaluating the likelihood of violent conflict requires considering a variety of factors including the context, indicators of risk, potential triggers, and sources of resilience. The U.S. election is happening in a context defined by irresponsible political leadership, entrenched polarization, systemic racism and inequality, and concurrent health and economic crises that have brought into focus underlying risk factors for political violence. Despite these risks, the U.S. still has comparatively substantial resources and a long but imperfect history of commitment to governing ideals that provide resilience.

The Truth Behind Al-Qa’ida’s Silence in Afghanistan—Asia Times (5 November 2020)

The key clause in the United States’ peace deal with Afghanistan’s Taliban is a commitment to disallow any militant group from using Afghan soil to plot against America and its allies. But is the Taliban merely pretending that its long-time ally al-Qa’ida no longer maintains bases and fighters in the areas it controls in Afghanistan just to appease the U.S. and withdraw its troops from the country? As part of a historic deal brokered in February, the Taliban agreed, among other things, not to shelter terrorist groups like al-Qa’ida and to cut all ties with the transnational terrorist group best known for orchestrating the 9-11 attacks on U.S. soil. With that commitment, the U.S. has promised a complete withdrawal of its forces from Afghanistan, a departure that some speculate could pave the way for the Taliban’s eventual return to power. There are now around 5,000 U.S. troops in the country, a number that will fall to 2,500 by early 2021. The U.S. is also helping to facilitate a political settlement between the Taliban and President Ashraf Ghani’s incumbent government. While peace talks underway in Doha, Qatar, have not yet achieved any substantial breakthroughs, a deal would restore the Taliban’s international legitimacy as a political actor. Yet key questions remain. Has the three-decade-long history of al-Qa’ida in Afghanistan truly come to an end? Is the world safe from an al-Qa’ida threat that has long emanated from Afghanistan’s remote and rocky reaches?