



Europe and the Fall of the Caliphate

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 23rd March 2019, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) lost its last piece of territorial Caliphate: Baghuz, a town in eastern Syria.

The expulsion of ISIS from territory it held in Iraq and Syria was a significant moment in the war against Islamist extremism. However, it did not mean an enduring defeat for ISIS, which continues to operate around the globe.

This report carries out an audit regarding ISIS' capacity to wreak havoc in Europe as well as examine the broader terrorist threat to the continent since the fall of the Caliphate.

Between 24th March 2019 and 24th June 2020, there have been – on average – two Islamist plots per month either successfully executed or thwarted in Europe. In total, 39 innocents have been injured and 12 killed in terrorist attacks during this time period. France, the UK, and Germany were the countries most targeted. Most perpetrators acted alone, with edged weapons being used more commonly than firearms or explosives.

Plotters in Europe's direct organisational links to ISIS have declined and ISIS is now more reliant on inspiring attacks in Europe than directing them. However, these links have not disappeared entirely: a cell of Tajik nationals alleged to be recently planning an attack in Germany were believed to be in contact with ISIS leaders in both Afghanistan and Syria.

Plots have also occurred with no demonstrable links to any foreign terrorist group and should be understood as being part of a broader, global jihad, rather than in tribute to one specific group.

This is not unique to the period studied or the fall of the Caliphate. While ISIS has been a dominant ideological force among terrorist groups in Europe, it would be a mistake to inflate ISIS' reach and influence beyond what they can actually demonstrate.

Multiple plots occurred during the period covering the Covid-19 pandemic, with the first successful attack in Europe since the declaration of the pandemic occurring in France in April 2020. However, there has not been a noticeable uptick in terrorist activity and there was nothing particularly unique about these plots in terms of the targets of the plot, which were familiar (the police, the military, or civilians).

In the period studied, other forms of extremism also threatened Europe. This includes attacks by the Far Right. The risk posed by the Far Right has simmered in recent years and – as shootings carried out in February 2020 in Hanau demonstrate – has become increasingly lethal. In the UK, charges were also brought against an alleged Far Left terrorist, as well as an involuntary celibate ('incel') who was jailed for possessing an explosive, having previously contemplating committing acts of violence.

Beyond terrorism, European policymakers face challenges from extremists who, while not involved in acts of violence, engage in proselytisation, subversion and will likely find new and creative ways to push old ideas. From an Islamist perspective, that could mean a focus on how to gain Muslim support for key objectives sullied by a recent association with ISIS (such as the need for a Caliphate).

Introduction

On 23rd March 2019, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) lost its last piece of territorial Caliphate: Baghuz, a town in eastern Syria.

The expulsion of ISIS from territory it held in Iraq and Syria was a significant moment in the war against Islamist extremism. It prevented ISIS from committing any further humanitarian catastrophes; it inhibited them from using their territory as a springboard from which to launch attacks abroad; it hurt the group financially, with ISIS no longer able to tax and extort those living under its rule; and it put a dent in its recruitment appeal.¹

However, this did not mean an enduring defeat for ISIS. Despite losing its land, it continues to operate in Iraq and Syria, claiming responsibility for thousands of attacks.² According to Aaron Zelin of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, its activities in the year after the fall of the Caliphate were best described as “surviving and waiting for the right moments to take advantage”.³

This report attempts to carry out a similar audit regarding ISIS’ capacity to wreak havoc in Europe. After all, in its pomp, ISIS used Syria as a base from which to direct major, co-ordinated attacks throughout Paris in November 2015 and in Brussels in March 2016. Hundreds were killed or injured as a result. Other major ISIS plots carried out by those who had previously fought and trained in Syria – such as a

planned assault in Verviers, Belgium, in February 2015 – were thwarted.⁴

As ISIS came under more pressure militarily, it came to rely increasingly on a ‘virtual entrepreneurs’⁵ model, whereby terrorists based in the Caliphate recruited Europeans over social media and used the same medium to remotely coach recruits through committing an attack – sometimes step-by-step.⁶ Virtual entrepreneurs included a British citizen, Junaid Hussain, who was killed in a drone strike in Raqqa in August 2015.⁷

More commonly, ISIS inspired others to carry out attacks in tribute to it. Some – such as in Nice in July 2016, or in Barcelona in August 2017 – were devastatingly effective. Others – such as the attack in August 2017 in Turku, Finland – led to a smaller amount of casualties, but still struck fear in parts of Europe hitherto unused to Islamist terrorism and focused the broader policy-maker community on the urgency of addressing the issue.

However, all that occurred when ISIS controlled territory. This paper uses open-source material to examine Islamist terrorism in Europe since the loss of this territory and assesses the threat that foreign terrorist organisations and Islamist ideology pose to the continent today.

It examines the frequency of alleged Islamist plots/attacks in Europe since March 2019. It also examines which countries were most frequently targeted; provides details about the precise nature of the alleged plots/attacks (for example, the kinds of

1. This assessment is shared by European intelligence agencies. For example, it was reported by the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service that, “[a]s a result of the caliphate’s downfall and ISIS’ diminishing military power, the group has become less attractive to jihadists”. See “AIVD Annual Report”, General Intelligence and Security Service, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (May 2019), <https://english.aivd.nl/publications/annual-report/2019/05/14/aivd-annual-report-2018> (accessed March 31, 2020). The Center for Terrorism Analysis within the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET) said the same: that “as a result of the territorial losses suffered by IS in Syria/Iraq, the capacity of the group to carry out complex, directed attacks in the West, including Denmark, has been reduced”. See “Assessment of the terror threat to Denmark”, The Center for Terrorism Analysis (March 2020), <https://www.pet.dk/-/media/VTD%202020/VTD2020ENGMARCHpdf.ashx> (accessed April 2, 2020).
2. Aaron Zelin, “A Year Since Baghuz, the Islamic State Is Neither Defeated nor Resurging (Yet)”, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy *Policy Watch*, No. 3287, March 25, 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-year-since-baghuz-the-islamic-state-is-neither-defeated-nor-resurging-yet> (accessed March 31, 2020).
3. Ibid.
4. “Verviers terror suspects jailed in Belgium”, BBC News, July 5, 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36717286> (accessed April 1, 2020).
5. Seamus Hughes and Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, “The Virtual Entrepreneurs of the Islamic State,” *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (March 2017), pp. 1–7, https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2017/03/CTC-Sentinel_Vol10Iss327.pdf (accessed March 31, 2020).
6. For a specific example of how this worked in Europe, see Robin Simcox, “The 2016 French Female Attack Cell: A Case Study”, *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 11, No. 6 (June/July 2018), pp. 21–25, <https://ctc.usma.edu/2016-french-female-attack-cell-case-study/> (accessed March 31, 2020).
7. One of Junaid Hussain’s plots was to try to plan a suicide bombing at an Armed Forces Day parade in southwest London, as that was the target closest to where Lee Rigby had been stabbed to death by two radicalised converts in May 2013. However, the ‘operative’ he was in contact with turned out to be an undercover journalist from the tabloid newspaper *The Sun*. The police were informed of Hussain’s activities. See “I.S. plot to bomb U.K. today”, *The Sun*, June 26, 2015, available at <https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/241550/i-s-plot-to-bomb-uk-today/> (accessed April 1, 2020).

weapons being used and the people being targeted); how many were thwarted by authorities and how many successfully took place; and how many were linked to foreign terrorist groups.

There is then an assessment of the impact Covid-19 has on Islamist terror activity in Europe; the extent to which Islamist terror activity in Europe today should be understood as being part of a broader, global jihad, rather than solely ISIS-linked; and an overview of which other ideologies, outside of Islamism, may need potential monitoring by European security forces and officials.

Criteria

These plots were extracted from a private database of over 300 Islamist alleged plots/attacks or acts of violence in Europe that took place since January 2014.⁸ Included in this database are attacks with a provably Islamist motive that are committed in prison and which target police or prison guards.

This database catalogues incidents across all of Europe (excluding Russia) gained from open source material. The high volume of countries studied, a lack of access to classified material, and resource and linguistic constraints leading to an inability to access all news sources from across Europe means this database is not exhaustive. Neither, therefore, is this study: there were potentially more plots that took place in this period.

The start date was the day after the fall of Baghuz: 24th March 2019. The cut-off point was 24th June 2020. All data was gained from open-source material.

Frequency

In the 15 months since Baghuz's fall, this study catalogued 33 terrorist plots in Europe. This was an average of 2.2 plots a month.⁹

In total, 22 of the 33 alleged plots were thwarted by authorities.

However, 11 of the 33 alleged plots were broadly 'successful', in that the perpetrator or perpetrators inflicted an attack which led to either deaths or injuries.

Six of these 11 plots led to injuries but no deaths (three times in France, twice in the UK, and once in Italy). Five of these 11 plots led to both injuries and deaths (three times in France, twice in the UK).

In total, twelve people were killed in these attacks. Four of these were stabbed to death in Paris by Mickaël Harpon, a convert to Islam with links to French Salafists, as part of an 'insider' attack in a Parisian police station.¹⁰ This was the plot that led to the highest number of fatalities.

The attacks led to 39 injuries; 13 were caused by Mohamed Hichem Medjoub, an Algerian who was alleged to have committed a parcel bombing outside a bakery in Lyon in May 2019. According to French prosecutors, Medjoub had pledged allegiance to ISIS.¹¹ This was the plot that led to the highest number of injuries.

Countries Targeted

During the Caliphate's existence, the UK, France, and Germany were the countries most frequently targeted by Islamist terrorists.¹² This has remained the case since the fall of the Caliphate. In total, 24 of the 33 alleged plots/attacks converged upon those three countries, constituting 73% of recorded plots. The other countries catalogued as being targeted in this period were Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Italy, and Spain.

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8. To qualify for inclusion in this analysis, the plot had to be focused on targets in Europe itself, as opposed to having solely to do with fundraising, terrorist training, or other terrorist-related activity that did not have a specific component involving an attack being planned in Europe. For example, a plot targeting European embassies in the Middle East would not be included. Also included are ISIS or Islamist-inspired attacks on different faiths, religious sects, and/or practices.
 9. This was an overall decline from previous years. A CEG database shows that there were 44 plots or attacks in 2015; 84 in 2016; 80 in 2017; and 41 in 2018.
 10. "Paris knife attacker's colleagues spotted 'signs of radicalisation' in 2015, internal report says", France 24, October 7, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20191007-france-paris-knife-attacker-harpon-police-prefecture-report-signs-radicalisation-2015> (accessed April 1, 2020).
 11. "Lyon blast suspect appears before anti-terror judge", France 24, May 30, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190530-lyon-bombing-suspect-police-terrorist-jihad> (accessed April 1, 2020).
 12. Robin Simcox, "European Islamist Plots and Attacks Since 2014—and How the U.S. Can Help Prevent Them", The Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder*, No. 3236, August 1, 2017, <https://www.heritage.org/europe/report/european-islamist-plots-and-attacks-2014-and-how-the-us-can-help-prevent-them> (accessed April 3, 2020); Robin Simcox, "The Post-Caliphate Terror Threat in Europe—and the Need for Continuing U.S. Assistance", The Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder*, No. 3424, August 19, 2019, <https://www.heritage.org/terrorism/report/the-post-caliphate-terror-threat-europe-and-the-need-continuing-us-assistance> (accessed April 3, 2020).

Plot Details

On the evidence that is currently available publicly, most perpetrators acted alone, with 23 of the 33 alleged plots/attacks involving just a single actor committing the attack (although that perpetrator may have been in contact with informants or terror groups overseas in the planning stage).

In total, 10 of the 11 attacks that led to casualties (and all plots executed outside of prison) involved just a solo attacker, highlighting their lamentable efficiency.

This included an attack that took place in Italy. In September 2019, Fathe Mahamad – a Yemeni asylum seeker living in Italy with a temporary residence permit – stabbed a member of the Carabinieri with scissors at Milan Central Station, yelling “Allahu Akbar”.¹³ A month previously – when Mahamad arrived in Italy – German intelligence warned Italian authorities that Mahamad was an ISIS sympathiser who had taken part in the ongoing fighting in Yemen. Mahamad told Italian prosecutors that, while he was hoping to be ‘martyred’, he was not aligned with ISIS.¹⁴

Also included was an attack in Paris in January 2020 when a 22-year-old French convert to Islam – Nathan Chiasson – began stabbing joggers in a park. One man died while trying to protect his wife, who was also seriously injured. Another civilian was also wounded before Chiasson fled. The attacker was eventually shot and killed by French police.¹⁵ France’s anti-terrorism prosecution office announced that there was “a definite radicalization of the suspect, as well as evidence of planning and preparation carried out before the act”.¹⁶

However, there were also alleged plots involving greater numbers and a seemingly greater degree of planning.

For example, in December 2019, Danish authorities arrested approximately 20 terror suspects related to an alleged plot that was believed to ultimately involve the use of explosives.¹⁷ Israel’s intelligence agency, Mossad, reportedly provided intelligence that helped foil the attack.¹⁸ Seven individuals were remanded in custody, suspected of planning and preparing terrorist attacks in Denmark or elsewhere in Europe.¹⁹ Their trial is yet to take place. There was also an alleged link to a suspect charged in Norway, who was supposedly in contact with the cell. As of December 2019, that individual was awaiting trial in a seemingly separate terrorism case.²⁰

Two of the largest alleged plots appeared in France. One such plot – targeting security forces – was disrupted in late April 2019.²¹ The ringleader was Alexandre Benon, who had posted extremist material online and professed a willingness to be martyred while killing French police. He had been allegedly carrying out reconnaissance on a Parisian police station and also filming officers carrying out identity checks on a public highway. Benon had additionally allegedly carried out surveillance of police guarding the Élysée Palace.

He did so alongside Karim Bendjeghal, a radical already on the French intelligence radar. The third member of the cell was Anis Mesroua, whose task was to finance the purchase of Kalashnikovs. The cell had acquired two at the time of arrest.²²

13. Giovanna Stella, “Military attacked in Central, it is terrorism: ‘I wanted Allah’s paradise’”, *Il Giornale*, September 17, 2019, <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/milano/centrale-stato-terrorismo-militare-ferito-nome-allah-1754609.html> (accessed April 2, 2020).
14. “Attacks on the military in Milan, Fathe Mahamad suspected of terrorism”, *Notizie.it*, September 19, 2019, <https://it.notizie.yahoo.com/aggregisce-militare-milano-fathe-mahamad-102230604.html> (accessed April 2, 2020).
15. Jean-Michel Décugis, Fanny Delporte, Vincent Gautronneau and Jérémie Pham-Lê, “Villejuif attack: killer suffered from mental problems”, *Le Parisien*, January 3, 2020, <http://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/attaque-a-villejuif-le-tueur-souffrait-de-problemes-mentaux-03-01-2020-8228679.php> (accessed April 3, 2020).
16. Simon Carraud, “French knife attacker was radicalised, anti-terrorism prosecutors say”, *Reuters*, January 4, 2020, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-france-security/french-knife-attacker-was-radicalised-anti-terrorism-prosecutors-say-idUKKBNIZ30JT> (accessed April 3, 2020).
17. Jan M. Olsen, “Police foil suspected Islamist terror attack plans”, *Associated Press*, December 11, 2019, <https://apnews.com/d1bc79e9e27f4a6fab8ed-38b4a96394> (accessed April 2, 2020).
18. “Report: Mossad helped Denmark thwart terror attacks this week”, *Times of Israel*, December 14, 2019, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/report-mossad-helped-denmark-thwart-terror-attacks-this-week/> (accessed April 2, 2020).
19. “Assessment of the terror threat to Denmark”, *The Center for Terrorism Analysis* (March 2020), <https://www.pet.dk/-/media/VTD%202020/VT-D2020ENGMARCHpdf.ashx> (accessed April 2, 2020).
20. “PST confirms Danish terror connection”, *News in English.no*, December 12, 2019, <https://www.newsinenglish.no/2019/12/12/pst-confirms-danish-terror-connection/> (accessed April 3, 2020).
21. “Locations and reference to the killer of Magnanville: how the suspects of the foiled attack were preparing”, *BFM TV*, July 5, 2019, <https://www.bfmtv.com/police-justice/attentat-dejoue-contre-la-police-qui-sont-les-cinq-suspects-interpelles-1686978.html> (accessed April 2, 2020).
22. *Ibid.*

The fourth member was Mohamed Chakrar, a 17-year-old who had been jailed for three years (two suspended) in 2017 following a failed attempt to travel to Syria in February of that year. A friend of Chakrar's, Khamid Sidiev, a Chechen born minor (16 years old upon arrest), was then tasked with posting the cell's filmed pledge of allegiance to ISIS on social media.

Another larger plot was disrupted in January 2020 when seven terror suspects were arrested in Brest, northwest France, having allegedly targeted a French military installation and Chinese New Year celebrations taking place in Brest.

The cell had allegedly recorded pledges of allegiance to ISIS, and the alleged ringleader was a Syrian refugee who arrived in France in 2015 with connections to ISIS.²³ Investigators additionally found the group's propaganda when carrying out the arrests.

Most of the cell were already on the intelligence radar, with one suspected of having the desire to travel to Syria in 2014. Some were converts, while the youngest member of the cell was 16 years old.²⁴

Among the countries most targeted, there were some unusual discrepancies. For example, four of the five plots facing Germany involved multiple individuals. Only once had an individual alleged to have planned to carry out his attack alone: Abdullah H., a Syrian national arrested in November 2019, and who was suspected of planning a bombing in an unspecified location. Even here, Abdullah H. was part of an electronic messaging group linked to ISIS, where bomb-making instructions were discussed.²⁵

On the flipside, eight of the nine plots facing the UK involved an individual planning to attack alone. This was also the case for seven of 10 plots in France.

These lone actor alleged plots/attacks tended to have a greater chance of success; six of these seven lone actor alleged plots/attacks in France led to casu-

alties, while three of the eight in the UK did so. All the alleged plots targeting Germany were disrupted.

Repeat Offenders

Nine Islamist plots targeting the UK were catalogued since April 2019. Strikingly, two attacks were carried out by recently released terrorists; one in prison by a previously convicted terrorist, and another by an Islamist radical who had just been acquitted in another terrorist trial.

In November 2019, Usman Khan stabbed two people to death and injured three others on London Bridge before being disrupted by nearby civilians and then being shot and killed by the police. He had previously been arrested in December 2010 as part of a police operation focused on al-Qaeda-inspired terrorists who were planning attacks on various targets in London, including the Stock Exchange. Khan was eventually jailed in connection with a plan to travel to Kashmir to establish a training camp that would produce terrorists to possibly carry out attacks in the UK.²⁶

In February 2020, Sudesh Amman stabbed two civilians in Streatham before being shot and killed by the police. Amman had previously pleaded guilty in November 2018 to both possession and dissemination of terrorism-related documents. He had shared material supportive of both ISIS and al-Qaeda.²⁷

In January 2020, two prisoners at HMP White-moor – Brusthom Ziamani and Baz Macaulay Hockton – injured four prison guards with 'shank' weapons they had constructed out of plastic and metal. Both men were wearing fake suicide vests at the time. Both have since been charged with attempted murder and assault.²⁸ London Metropolitan Police stated they were treating the incident as a terrorist attack.²⁹ Ziamani had previously been jailed for 19 years in February 2015 after being found guilty of a

23. "Anti-terrorist search in Finistère: suspects targeted at least two targets in Brest", Europe 1, January 24, 2020, <https://www.europel.fr/societe/coup-de-filet-antiterroriste-dans-le-finistere-les-suspects-visaient-au-moins-deux-cibles-a-brest-3945347> (accessed April 3, 2020).

24. "Suspects arrested in Brest indicted for terrorism", *La Croix*, January 25, 2020, <https://www.la-croix.com/amp/120107412> (accessed April 3, 2020).

25. "German police arrest Syrian terror suspect who 'bought bomb-making materials'", *Deutsche Welle*, November 19, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-police-arrest-syrian-terror-suspect-who-bought-bomb-making-materials/a-51314176> (accessed June 1, 2020).

26. David Anderson Q.C., "The Terrorism Acts in 2012" (July 2013), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/243472/9780108512629.pdf, p.25.

27. *R v Sudesh Amman*, The Counter-Terrorism Division of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) – Successful prosecutions since 2016, <https://www.cps.gov.uk/counter-terrorism-division-crown-prosecution-service-cps-successful-prosecutions-2016> (accessed April 1, 2020).

28. "HMP Whitemoor prison officer attack: Inmates in court", BBC News, March 4, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-51725499> (accessed April 6, 2020).

29. "HMP Whitemoor prison stabbings classed as 'terror attack,'" BBC News, January 10, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-51062381> (accessed September 24, 2020).

plot to behead a British soldier in support of ISIS.³⁰ (Hockton had not initially been jailed for a terrorism-related offence).³¹

Finally, there was the case of Mohiussunnath Chowdhury. In August 2017, Chowdhury had been arrested outside Buckingham Palace while in possession of a sword, injuring police officers who tried to restrain him. He had left a note with his family proclaiming that, “By the time you read this note, I will be in paradise with Allah... The Queen and her soldiers will all be in the hellfire...They are the enemies that Allah tells us to fight”.

Chowdhury was, however, acquitted of preparation for a terrorist attack. The jury believed the defence, that Chowdhury had wanted to provoke the police into killing him due to the depression he felt over Saudi Arabian foreign policy, specifically its approach towards Yemen.³²

Upon release, Chowdhury quickly told undercover police officers of his plans to carry out a new attack. Referring to the incident outside Buckingham Palace, Chowdhury told the officers that he had “intended to kill a soldier in the name of jihad” and that “I should be in prison for 30 plus years”.³³ Chowdhury eventually settled upon carrying out a knife attack at

London’s Gay Pride event in July 2019, the planning of which led to his arrest and ultimate conviction.

The phenomenon of plots being planned by those already convicted of terrorism-related activities was not unique to the UK.

One high-profile example in France involved a perpetrator behind the raid on the *Charlie Hebdo* offices in January 2015, which led to 12 deaths and 11 injuries.

Cherif Kouachi had previously been convicted of a terrorism-related offence in France. Kouachi had been arrested in January 2005 as he prepared to leave the country and head to Iraq to take part in the fighting there.³⁴ When convicted at a 2008 trial, he was sentenced to three years but immediately freed due to time served.³⁵

Three years later, Kouachi and his brother Said headed to Yemen in the summer of 2011 to receive training from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP),³⁶ the group which subsequently claimed responsibility for the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*.³⁷

There was also the phenomenon of those convicted of terrorism-related activities planning fresh attacks while still in jail.³⁸ There were three separate examples in France and one in the UK. These attacks followed a relatively standard template: the

30. It has been reported that Ziamani has defected from a prison gang loyal to ISIS to one aligned with al-Qaeda. See Matthew Bradley, “Isis and al-Qaeda fought to control jihadist inmates”, *The Times*, December 23, 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/isis-and-al-qaeda-fought-to-control-jihadist-inmates-s0c0rkd2h> (accessed April 6, 2020).

31. “Knife attack by inmates wearing fake suicide vests treated as terrorism”, Sky News, January 10, 2020. <https://news.sky.com/story/knife-attack-by-inmates-wearing-fake-suicide-vests-treated-as-terrorism-11905301> (accessed May 26, 2020); “The Counter-Terrorism Division of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) – Successful prosecutions since 2016”, Crown Prosecution Service. <https://www.cps.gov.uk/counter-terrorism-division-crown-prosecution-service-cps-successful-prosecutions-2016> (accessed May 26, 2020).

32. “Uber driver acquitted of terror offence after Buckingham Palace sword incident”, Sky News, December 19, 2018, <https://news.sky.com/story/uber-driver-acquitted-of-terror-offences-after-buckingham-palace-incident-11586010> (accessed April 2, 2020).

33. Mark White, “Mohiussunnath Chowdhury: Jihadist guilty of plotting terror attack on tourist sites and Pride”, Sky News, February 10, 2020, <https://news.sky.com/story/mohiussunnath-chowdhury-extremely-dangerous-jihadist-guilty-of-plotting-terror-attack-on-gay-pride-parade-11927763> (accessed April 2, 2020).

34. Andrew Higgins and Maïa de la Baume, “Two Brothers Suspected in Killings Were Known to French Intelligence Services”, *The New York Times*, January 8, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/08/world/two-brothers-suspected-in-killings-were-known-to-french-intelligence-services.html> (accessed May 21, 2020).

35. Rukmini Callimachi and Jim Yardley, “From Amateur to Ruthless Jihadist in France”, *The New York Times*, January 17, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/18/world/europe/paris-terrorism-brothers-said-cherif-kouachi-charlie-hebdo.html> (accessed May 21, 2020).

36. Yara Bayoumy and Mohammed Ghobari, “Both brothers behind Paris attack had weapons training in Yemen: sources”, Reuters, January 11, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-shooting-yemen/both-brothers-behind-paris-attack-had-weapons-training-in-yemen-sources-idUSKBN0KK0F620150111>; Margaret Coker and Hakim Almasmari, “Paris Attacker Said Kouachi Knew Convicted Nigerian Airline Bomber”, *The Wall Street Journal*, January 11, 2015, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/paris-attacker-said-kouachi-knew-convicted-nigerian-airline-bomber-1421005446> (accessed May 21, 2020). There is some ambiguity over this, as AQAP has only admitted to training Said Kouachi. See Thomas Joscelyn, “AQAP’s Inspire magazine contains ‘military analysis’ of Charlie Hebdo massacre”, *The Long War Journal*, September 11, 2015, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/09/aqaps-inspire-magazine-contains-military-analysis-of-charlie-hebdo-massacre.php> (accessed May 21, 2020).

37. Thomas Joscelyn, “Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula claims responsibility for Charlie Hebdo attack”, *The Long War Journal*, January 14, 2015, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/01/al_qaeda_in_the_arab_2.php

38. While not all attacks inside prison by incarcerated terrorist convicts should automatically be categorized as terrorist incidents, the examples in this study all had a demonstrable terrorism dimension. See Robin Simcox and Hannah Stuart, “The Threat from Europe’s Jihadi Prisoners and Prison Leavers”, *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 13, No. 7 (July 2020), pp. 22–36, <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-threat-from-europes-jihadi-prisoners-and-prison-leavers/>

construction and subsequent concealing of makeshift weapons used to stab prison employees (and, in the case of Brusthom Ziamani, also donning a fake suicide vest).

For example, in June 2019, Mohammed Taha el-Hannouni – serving a seven-year jail sentence for criminal association with terrorists, related to him traveling to Syria to fight in 2014 – used a table leg and broken piece of mirror to injure two prison officers. El-Hannouni shouted “Allahu Akbar” during the assault.³⁹ He has now been charged with attempted murder.⁴⁰

There was also an example where radicals who met while in jail allegedly discussed an attack. The suspected mastermind was Matthieu C., a convert jailed for making statements supportive of terrorism and who had been moved around multiple prisons due to his negative influence while incarcerated.

He had met Zoubeir C. (an alias) in prison. Zoubeir C. was due to be released in August 2019, having served his sentence for joining the al-Nusra Front, al-Qaeda’s then affiliate in Syria, for six months in 2014. Matthieu C. passed details to Zoubeir C. of a contact who could acquire firearms for him upon his release. The plot was in its early stages, with a range of targets discussed, including prison guards and civilian passers-by.

A third man – a former soldier known as Sylvain D. – was also arrested as part of the investigation.⁴¹

Weapons Used

Edged weapons were the weapon of preference in 11 of the 33 plots (the most common type of weapon known or planned to be used).

Of the 11 plots that led to casualties, nine involved the use of an edged weapon. The exceptions to these were Hichem Medjoub’s parcel bombing in Lyon, inspired by ISIS; and in April 2020, when Youssef T. injured two police officers in the Parisian suburb of Colombes with a vehicle.⁴² Prior to the Colombes attack Youssef T. pledged his allegiance to Abu Walid al-Sahraoui,⁴³ the emir of the Islamic State in Greater Sahara.

The sole use of explosives was planned in five plots, and firearms in a further two. The use of both firearms and explosives was restricted to two plots, both involving larger cells. The weapon of choice was unspecified or unclear in 12 of the plots.

Youssef T. aside, there was a surprising lack of vehicles used as weapons by terrorists in the period studied; an approach that had previously been extremely difficult for authorities to detect and which terrorists had hitherto used with devastating impact in Europe between 2016 – 2017 (for example, in Nice, Stockholm, Berlin, and Barcelona).⁴⁴

Covid-19

On 11th March 2020, the Covid-19 outbreak was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation.

A variety of voices – including EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, Gilles de Kerchove – subsequently warned of how extremists of all stripes could exploit the situation for their own ends: for example,

39. “Le Havre prison: detainee indicted for terrorist ‘attempted murder’”, *Le Figaro*, June 24, 2019, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/prison-du-havre-le-detenu-mis-en-examen-pour-tentative-d-assassinats-a-caractere-terroriste-20190624> (accessed April 2, 2020).

40. “Prison wardens attacked in Le Havre: the detainee indicted for a ‘terrorist assassination attempt’”, France TV Info, June 24, 2019, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/societe/prisons/surveillants-de-prison-agresses-au-havre-le-detenu-mis-en-examen-pour-tentative-d-assassinats-a-caractere-terroriste_3505205.html (accessed April 2, 2020).

41. Jérémie Pham-Lê, “In prison, detainees suspected of planning attacks in France”, *Le Parisien*, July 31, 2019, <http://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/un-projet-d-attentat-fomente-en-prison-dejoue-31-07-2019-8126709.php> (accessed April 2, 2020).

42. “Police injured in Colombes: what we know about the attacker”, *L’Obs*, April 28, 2020, <https://www.nouvelobs.com/faits-divers/20200428.OBS28079/policiers-blesses-a-colombes-ce-que-l-on-sait-de-l-assaillant.html> (accessed May 5, 2020).

43. Jean-Michel Décugis and Jérémie Pham-Lê (with Ronan Folgoas), “‘May God accept my martyr’: the attacker of Colombes justifies his acting out”, *Le Parisien*, April 28, 2020, <http://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/que-dieu-accepte-mon-martyr-l-assaillant-de-colombes-justifie-son-passage-a-l-acte-28-04-2020-8307684.php> (accessed May 5, 2020).

44. Robin Simcox, “Can We Stop Terrorist Vehicular Attacks?”, *Lawfare*, October 22, 2017, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/can-we-stop-terrorist-vehicular-attacks> (accessed April 20, 2020). One incident in Limburg, Germany, where a Syrian man injured eight people after stealing a truck and ploughing into parked cars, was initially categorised as a terrorist attack but later re-evaluated (the motivation is unclear, but the case is not currently being treated as terrorism). “Investigators not treating truck ramming as terror”, *Deutsche Welle*, October 16, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/investigators-not-treating-limburg-truck-ramming-as-terror/a-50849761> (accessed April 20, 2020).

via the Far Right blaming migrants or ethnic minorities for the spread of the virus.⁴⁵ Other analysts have suggested that developing anti-China sentiments and conspiracy theories surrounding 5G could help shape the post-Covid-19 terrorism scene.⁴⁶ For its part, ISIS was reported as having expressed its hope that with Western countries focused on the pandemic, they would now stop “meddling” in Muslim-related issues.⁴⁷

The extent to which these narratives will truly take hold in Europe remains to be seen. Yet one immediate consequence of the pandemic and the subsequent enforced lockdown in Europe was the resulting lack of mass public gatherings: the type of soft target that terrorists have aimed to strike in the past.

Still, Islamist activity continued, nevertheless. For example, on June 20th, 2020, Khairi Saadallah, a Libyan refugee, targeted civilians relaxing in a park in Reading, Berkshire. Three people died and three more were injured before Saadallah was restrained by a nearby police officer.

Overall, there were seven catalogued alleged plots or attacks disrupted or launched after 11th March and 24th June (two in France, two in the UK, one in Germany, one in Spain, and one in Denmark). However, there was nothing particularly unique about them in terms of the targets of attack, which were familiar: the police, the military, or civilians.

The only reported relevance which the virus had to any of these cases was when Abdallah Ahmed-Osman told investigators that his being confined to his studio flat was an aggravating factor in his April 2020 stabbing rampage in Romans-sur-Isère, southeast France. Osman’s attack led to two deaths and five

injuries.⁴⁸ He has since been charged with murder connected to a terrorist enterprise.⁴⁹

Foreign Links

ISIS used Syria as a base from which to direct attacks in Europe in the late 2015/early 2016 period, in part by exploiting the refugee flow to infiltrate Europe and by launching plots that led to hundreds of deaths or injuries. By 2020, however, this aspect of command-and-control from overseas had diminished significantly.

Most cases studied in this report did not demonstrate any evidence of external assistance or guidance from a foreign terrorist organisation. The general trend points to one that was also outlined by a recent United Nations Security Council report, which concluded that ISIS had “not been able to reconstitute its external operations capability and remains reliant on inspired attacks to demonstrate relevance outside conflict zones”, operations which are “usually unreliable or have limited impact”.⁵⁰

However, there were exceptions. For example, in March 2020, four Tajik nationals were arrested upon suspicion of planning an attack in Germany. Their targets were alleged to be US Air Force bases and an unnamed individual who had publicly criticised Islam. The cell had acquired firearms in preparation for the suspected attack. A fifth Tajik national connected to the cell – who had been arrested in March 2019 – had also previously passed on instructions regarding the construction of explosives. The cell was believed to be receiving instructions from ISIS leadership in Afghanistan and Syria.⁵¹

Another was a rare case in Bulgaria where, according to a *New York Times* report, ISIS had recruited a 16-year-old Bulgarian student via social me-

45. Luke Baker, “Militants, fringe groups exploiting COVID-19, warns EU anti-terrorism chief”, Reuters, April 30, 2020 (accessed May 5, 2020).

46. Raffaello Pantucci, “After the Coronavirus, Terrorism Won’t Be the Same”, Foreign Policy, April 22, 2020 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/22/after-coronavirus-terrorism-isis-hezbollah-5g-wont-be-the-same/> (accessed May 22, 2020).

47. Mina al-Lami tweet, June 5, 2020, <https://twitter.com/Minalami/status/126878966802114508?s=20> (accessed June 5, 2020).

48. Jérémie Pham-Lê, “Romans-sur-Isère: the author of the knife attack”, *Le Parisien*, April 8, 2020, <http://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/romans-sur-isere-1-auteur-de-l-attaque-au-couteau-mis-en-examen-08-04-2020-8296413.php> (accessed May 5, 2020).

49. “France Lays Terror Charges Against Knife-attacker Who Killed Two”, AFP, April 8, 2020 (accessed May 6, 2020).

50. The same report concluded that European member states viewed online radicalisation as the main threat. See United Nations Security Council, “Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat”, February 4, 2020, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2020/95 (accessed April 17, 2020).

51. “Arrest of Five Suspected Members of a Terrorist Cell of the Foreign Terrorist Association ‘Islamic State (IS)’”, The Federal Prosecutor’s Office, April 15, 2020, <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/aktuelle/Pressemitteilung-vom-15-04-2020.html?sessionid=B-CAF05EE9FB15B80D01F5097DBC87570.intranet662?nn=478184> (accessed April 17, 2020).

dia.⁵² The student was in possession of an ISIS flag and components required to construct a variety of bombs, including a pipe bomb.⁵³ Media reports in Bulgaria claimed that the target was Plovdiv town centre.⁵⁴

Such instances help explain why, in March 2020, Denmark's Centre for Terrorism Analysis (established by the Danish Security and Intelligence Service, PET) concluded that "networks of IS-affiliated individuals continue to offer assistance to and support attacks against targets in Europe. For instance, individuals with links to IS work as facilitators and mentors for sympathizers who wish to carry out attacks in the West."⁵⁵

Despite this, it is inspiration rather than direction that ISIS is largely able to offer its supporters in 2020. The Danish assessment also specified that, "IS still tries to inspire its sympathizers to carry out attacks in the West on their own";⁵⁶ and the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) has warned that, "[h]aving survived the end of the Caliphate, ISIL's ideology still exists in the form of jihadist propaganda consumed and disseminated by a large scene of sympathisers [...and] spread by ISIL sympathisers in a decentralised way".⁵⁷

There are clear examples of this ongoing inspiration during the time period studied for this report. For example, in April 2019, Germany deported three terror suspects back to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The

Ministry for Children, Family, Refugees and Integration announced that they were suspected of planning an attack in tribute to ISIS.⁵⁸

Similarly, three Chechens inspired by ISIS ideology were arrested in December 2019, suspected of planning a series of attacks – one component of which was the targeting of a Christmas market in Vienna, Austria.⁵⁹

Beyond ISIS

While these cases demonstrated a clear ideological link to ISIS, it is not always clear that plots in Europe are being carried out in tribute to that group specifically. For example, ISIS has claimed two attacks in the period studied: Usman Khan and Sudesh Amman's attacks in London. ISIS said both were "fighters" for the groups.⁶⁰

With Amman, this was no surprise. Amman had previously shared al-Qaeda material, but a previous terrorism trial concerning Amman revealed him to be an ISIS supporter.⁶¹ He had praised the group in a series of WhatsApp messages between 2017 and 2018 and had pledged allegiance to them in a message to his girlfriend sent years previously.⁶²

Khan is a more complex story. Certainly, his method of attack is familiar to that used by ISIS-inspired terrorists on many occasions in recent years. It fits the method championed by ISIS' then head of external operations, Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, who

52. It is unclear where the ISIS recruiter was based geographically.

53. Boryana Dzhabazova and Palko Karasz, "Bulgaria Charges Teenager With Plotting Terrorist Attack", *The New York Times*, June 8, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/08/world/europe/bulgaria-plovdiv-terrorism.html> (accessed April 17, 2020).

54. "Terrorist attack in Bulgaria's Plovdiv thwarted – reports", *The Sofia Globe*, June 8, 2019, <https://sofiaglobe.com/2019/06/08/terrorist-act-in-bulgarias-plovdiv-thwarted-reports/> (accessed April 17, 2020).

55. "Assessment of the terror threat to Denmark", The Center for Terrorism Analysis (March 2020).

56. Ibid.

57. "2018 Report on the Protection of the Constitution: Facts And Trends", Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (June 2019), <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/en/public-relations/publications/annual-reports/annual-report-2018-summary>.

58. "North Rhine-Westphalia deports three perpetrators", WDR, April 11, 2019, <https://www1.wdr.de/nachrichten/nrw-gefahrder-abschiebung-100.html> (accessed April 2, 2020).

59. "Austrian police foil 'Vienna Christmas market terror plot'", *The Local*, <https://www.thelocal.at/20191216/austrian-police-foil-vienna-christmas-market-terror-plot> (accessed April 20, 2020).

60. "ISIL claims responsibility for deadly London Bridge attack", Al-Jazeera, November 30, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/isil-claims-responsibility-deadly-london-bridge-attack-191130174025409.html>; Harriet Brewis, "ISIS claims responsibility for Streatham terror attack carried out by Sudesh Amman", *Evening Standard*, February 3, 2020, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/islamic-state-responsibility-streatham-terror-attack-a4352026.html> (accessed April 1, 2020).

61. Daniel De Simone, "Sudesh Amman: Who was the Streatham attacker?", BBC News, February 3, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51351885> (accessed April 1, 2020).

62. Amman pleaded guilty to multiple charges related to the possession and dissemination of terrorist material in November 2018. He was jailed for three years and four months shortly afterwards. See "R v Sudesh Amman", The Counter-Terrorism Division of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) – Successful prosecutions since 2016, <https://www.cps.gov.uk/counter-terrorism-division-crown-prosecution-service-cps-successful-prosecutions-2016> (accessed April 1, 2020).

urged followers to carry out attacks against “disbelievers” using any method possible.⁶³

Before his arrest in 2010, Khan was also part of the proscribed al-Muhajiroun (ALM) network, which had supplied fighters for ISIS and its Caliphate.⁶⁴ The head of ALM, Anjem Choudary, was found guilty in July 2016 of inviting support for the group.⁶⁵

Yet, that does not mean ISIS was necessarily the ideological inspiration in such cases.

Firstly, ISIS was not unique in its championing of a DIY approach to terrorism. Abu Musab al-Suri, a favoured al-Qaeda theologian, had done so almost two decades earlier.⁶⁶ AQAP highlighted the importance of the “lone mujahid” in its English language magazine *Inspire* and from summer 2010 was telling readers to “build a bomb in the kitchen of your mom”.⁶⁷

Some UK jihadis were of the same mind. One prominent example involved Roshonara Choudhry, who attempted to murder a Labour MP in May 2010 by stabbing him at his constituency surgery in Ne-wham, east London. Choudhry had immersed herself in lectures by AQAP’s influential American- Yemeni cleric Anwar al-Awlaki.⁶⁸

Secondly, ISIS has certainly claimed credit for acts of violence, despite seemingly having no links to the perpetrator. The Las Vegas shooter of October 2017, Stephen Paddock, is one high profile example. Paddock killed 58 people and injured almost 900 more in a mass shooting he carried out from his hotel win-

dow, targeting attendees at a country music festival. While ISIS claimed he was one of its “soldiers”, no evidence has emerged to support this.⁶⁹

Furthermore, there is no evidence that Khan was in contact with ISIS and, unlike others who committed attacks in Europe, he had not arranged for a video to be posthumously released declaring his loyalty to ISIS.⁷⁰

Thirdly, Usman Khan was a terror threat long before the declaration of the Caliphate, having previously been jailed for terrorism-related offences.⁷¹

Therefore, on the evidence currently available, Khan’s actions should be understood as being part of a broader, global jihad, rather than in tribute to one specific group.

This is not unique to the period studied or the fall of the Caliphate. While ISIS has been a dominant ideological force among terrorist groups in Europe, Khan is not the only case where pinpointing their exact areas of influence is challenging. It would be a mistake to inflate ISIS’ reach and influence beyond what they can actually demonstrate.

Beyond Islamism

Other forms of violence have begun to rise to the fore in Europe. These include attacks by the Far Right. A United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee report outlined that, when it came to Far Right terror, “there has been a recent increase in its frequency and lethality, with some individuals,

63. Al-Adnani advised that, “If you can kill a disbelieving American or European—especially the spiteful and filthy French—or an Australian, or a Canadian, or any other disbeliever from the disbelievers waging war...then rely upon Allah, and kill him in any manner or way however it may be. Do not ask for anyone’s advice and do not seek anyone’s verdict.... Smash his head with a rock, or slaughter him with a knife, or run him over with your car, or throw him down from a high place, or choke him, or poison him.” See Helen Davidson, “Isis Instructs Followers to Kill Australians and Other ‘Disbelievers,’” *The Guardian*, September 23, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/23/islamic-state-followers-urged-to-launch-attacks-against-australians> (accessed April 17, 2016).

64. For example, Siddhartha Dhar, who was listed as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist and member of the Islamic State by the State Department in January 2018. Dhar was a former al-Muhajiroun spokesperson. See “State Department Terrorist Designations of Siddhartha Dhar and Abdelatif Gaini”, U.S. Department of State, January 23, 2018, available at <https://www.state.gov/state-department-terrorist-designations-of-siddhartha-dhar-and-abdelatif-gaini/> (accessed May 22, 2020).

65. Jamie Grierson, Vikram Dodd and Jason Rodrigues, “Anjem Choudary convicted of supporting Islamic State”, *The Guardian*, August 16, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/aug/16/anjem-choudary-convicted-of-supporting-islamic-state>

66. Peter Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Knew: An Oral History of al Qaeda’s Leader* (Simon & Schuster, 2006), p. 245.

67. Richard Spencer, “Al-Qaeda newspaper: Make a bomb in the kitchen of your mom”, *The Telegraph*, July 1, 2010, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/7865978/Al-Qaeda-newspaper-Make-a-bomb-in-the-kitchen-of-your-mom.html> (accessed April 17, 2020).

68. Vikram Dodd, “Roshonara Choudhry: Police interview extracts”, *The Guardian*, November 3, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/nov/03/roshonara-choudhry-police-interview> (accessed April 1, 2020).

69. Jared Malsin, “ISIS Claimed the Las Vegas Shooter as a ‘Soldier.’ Experts Are Skeptical.” *Time*, October 2, 2017, <https://time.com/4965449/isis-las-vegas-shooter-stephen-paddock/> (accessed April 17, 2020).

70. Thomas Joscelyn, “Terror plots in Germany, France were ‘remote-controlled’ by Islamic State operatives”, FDD’s Long War Journal, September 24, 2016. <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/09/terror-plots-in-germany-france-were-remote-controlled-by-islamic-state-operatives.php> (accessed May 22, 2020).

71. David Anderson Q.C., “The Terrorism Acts in 2012” (July 2013), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/243472/9780108512629.pdf, p.25.

groups and movements pursuing transnational aims in a national context, drawing on international networks, ideas and personalities and seeking to mobilize others, often using the Internet”.⁷²

Far Right terrorism is hardly a new phenomenon, but it has had significant modern manifestations in Europe, such as when Anders Breivik’s rampage through Oslo and the surrounding island of Utoya in July 2011 led to 77 deaths and 319 injuries.

The threat simmered at a lower level in the years that followed, before the number of Far Right terror arrests in EU countries doubled between 2017 and 2018 (from 20 to 44).⁷³ The shootings carried out in February 2020 by Tobias Rathjen in Hanau – in which 10 were killed and five injured – also helped demonstrate the ongoing risk in Europe posed by the FarRight.

Following Rathjen’s attack, German Justice Minister Christine Lambrecht commented that, “Far-right terror is the biggest threat to our democracy right now”.⁷⁴

Germany was not alone in paying more attention to this phenomenon. For example, the Danish Centre for Terrorism Analysis raised the threat from Far Right extremism from ‘limited’ (there is limited capacity and/or intent) to ‘general’ (there is capacity and/or intent and possibly planning).⁷⁵

This is not a trend to which the UK is immune, where plots have lacked sophistication but not impact. In June 2016, Jo Cox MP was stabbed to death by a terrorist inspired by Far Right ideology; and in June 2017, a vehicular attack targeting Muslims occurred

near the Finsbury Park Mosque in north London. One person died and 12 were injured.

In June 2020, charges were brought against an alleged Far Left terrorist. A 32-year-old West Yorkshire male was charged with 13 counts of possession of documents likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism, and one charge of viewing or accessing a document likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism.⁷⁶ The extent to which Far Left terror – as opposed to their more commonly deployed use of street violence – becomes a viable and persistent threat is unclear.

Beyond terrorist movements, in March 2020, the UK also convicted its first involuntary celibate, or ‘incel’, plotter. Anwar Driouich was jailed for possession of an explosive, having acquired ammonium nitrate. He also possessed several other weapons and had discussed his desire for a “massacre” on a Facebook chat.⁷⁷ Driouich was jailed for one year, eight months.⁷⁸

Analysts have also warned of a potential rise in ‘militant environmentalism’ linked to climate change and environmental campaigners.⁷⁹ For example, in June 2019, certain activists within Extinction Rebellion had crafted plans to deploy drones at Heathrow Airport in an attempt to ground flights.⁸⁰ This (currently non-violent) activism of Extinction Rebellion provides an insight into the ways in which mainstream concerns over the environment can be weaponised by a small number of leaders as part of their

72. “Member States concerned by the growing and increasingly transnational threat of extreme right-wing terrorism”, CTED Trends Alert (April 2020), https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CTED_Trends_Alert_Extreme_Right-Wing_Terrorism.pdf (accessed May 5, 2020).

73. European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2019 (TE-SAT), Europol (2019), <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2019-te-sat>.

74. Melissa Eddy, “Far-Right Terrorism Is No. 1 Threat, Germany Is Told After Attack”, *The New York Times*, February 21, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/21/world/europe/germany-shooting-terrorism.html> (accessed April 23, 2020).

75. “Assessment of the terror threat to Denmark”, PET/Centre for Terrorism Analysis (March 2020), <https://www.pet.dk/-/media/VTD%202020/VT-D2020ENGMARCHpdf.ashx> (accessed May 6, 2020).

76. Amy Walker, “Yorkshire man appears in court over alleged leftwing terror offences”, *The Guardian*, June 8, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jun/08/yorkshire-man-charged-following-leftwing-terror-investigation> (accessed June 15, 2020).

77. “Middlesbrough terror suspect appears in court”, BBC News, September 7, 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tees-49610403>; “Britain’s first ‘incel’ bomb maker”, *Daily Mail*, March 26, 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8157661/Britains-Incel-bomb-maker-told-friend-wanted-massacre-place.html>; “Middlesbrough fantasist Anwar Driouich jailed for explosive substance”, BBC News, March 27, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tees-52071379> (accessed May 5, 2020).

78. ‘Incel’ plotters have already committed significant attacks in Canada and the US. See Liam Casey, “Alek Minassian admits to planning, carrying out Toronto van attack”, *Global News*, March 5, 2020, <https://globalnews.ca/news/6635300/toronto-van-attack-suspect-alek-minassia-pretrial/>; “Elliot Rodger: How misogynist killer became ‘incel hero’”, BBC News, April 26, 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-43892189> (accessed May 5, 2020).

79. Jamie Bartlett, “The Next Wave of Extremists Will Be Green”, *Foreign Policy*, September 1, 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/09/01/the-green-radicals-are-coming-environmental-extremism/> (accessed May 6, 2020).

80. Matthew Green, “Extinction Rebellion considers using drones to shut London’s Heathrow Airport”, *Reuters*, May 31, 2019, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-britain-protests-climate-change/extinction-rebellion-considers-using-drones-to-shut-londons-heathrow-airport-idUKKCNIT02RF>

broader aims of agitating against capitalism and overturning the political status quo.⁸¹

Islamism Entrenched

The longevity of such movements remains to be seen. To the extent they pose a risk to both life and the existing political order, they warrant monitoring. What none of these other strains of extremism and/or activism have yet demonstrated is that they pose a risk to innocent life today on the same scale that Islamism does.

While ISIS' strength has diminished from its 2015–17 peak, the tens of thousands of radicals scattered across Europe have not disappeared. In the UK alone, in May 2017, *The Times* reported that there were 23,000 subjects of interest.⁸² Following an internal assessment carried out by MI5, that was reported on in 2020, that number shot up to 40,000 once foreign terror suspects who had not previously visited the UK but whose details had been passed to MI5 by external intelligence services were factored in.⁸³

The UK is not an outlier in Europe. There are over 20,000 individuals on one French government database to monitor the internal Islamist threat.⁸⁴ On France's Fiché S list – containing those assessed to pose the most imminent risk to life – there are around 10,000 religious extremists.⁸⁵ In Germany, a report by the BfV states that there are 26,560 Islamist extremists operating in the country.⁸⁶

Not all of these individuals will be actively planning an attack. However, the scale of these numbers

help explain why, despite increased policy and academic focus on the Far Right, Islamist extremism remains the prominent threat facing Europe. Far Right terror has become increasingly lethal and its threat has certainly increased in recent years. Yet, at present, it does not have the numbers, let alone the coherence of vision, that an Islamic state and eventual restoration of a Caliphate governed by sharia law provides to Islamism's acolytes (albeit with less agreement on the precise structure of this end state).⁸⁷

Yet, European policymakers acknowledge that the challenges posed by Islamism will take on a slightly different form to that of recent years. A report published by the Netherlands' General Intelligence and Security Service suggested that the jihadist movement had “entered a reorientation phase, and now jihadists focus more on spreading their creed or ideology and extending their networks”.⁸⁸

A similar conclusion was reached by the French researcher Hugo Micheron, having interviewed dozens of jihadists detained in French prisons. To some, the Caliphate was the correct destination, but ISIS was not the right form of transportation. Micheron suggested that Islamist activity in France could be increasingly focused on political and judicial subversion, and less on acts of violence.⁸⁹

This would suggest that policymakers may have to focus on issues related to Islamism that are largely distinct from terrorism. Concepts such as Islamist entryism and proselytisation are not new developments to emerge, nor new problems to solve ei-

81. Tom Wilson and Richard Walton, “Extremism Rebellion: A review of ideology and tactics”, Policy Exchange (July 2019), <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Extremism-Rebellion.pdf> (accessed May 6, 2020).

82. Sean O'Neill, Fiona Hamilton, Fariha Karim and Gabriella Swerling, “Huge scale of terror threat revealed: UK home to 23,000 jihadists”, *The Times*, May 27, 2017, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/huge-scale-of-terror-threat-revealed-uk-home-to-23-000-jihadists-3zvn58mhq>

83. Dipesh Gadhur, “Terrorism in the UK: number of suspects tops 40,000 after MI5 rechecks its list”, *The Times*, April 12, 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/terrorism-in-the-uk-number-of-suspects-tops-40-000-after-mi5-rechecks-its-list-pqm6k62ph> (accessed May 6, 2020).

84. The French title is *fichier des signalements pour la prévention de la radicalisation à caractère terroriste* (FSPRT). See “Terrorism: more than 20,000 people registered with the FSPRT”, *Le Journal du Dimanche*, November 4, 2018, <https://www.lejdd.fr/Societe/terrorisme-plus-de-20000-personnes-inscrites-au-fsprt-3793364> (accessed May 6, 2020).

85. “What is France's ‘fichier S’ watchlist – and does it work?”, *France 24*, December 12, 2018, <https://www.france24.com/en/20181212-france-terror-watchlist-fichier-security-attack> (accessed May 6, 2020).

86. The German title is Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz. “2018 Report on the Protection of the Constitution: Facts And Trends”, Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (June 2019), <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/en/public-relations/publications/annual-reports/annual-report-2018-summary>.

87. Mary Habeck, “The U.S. Must Identify Jihadi-Salafists Through Their Ideology, Practices, and Methodology—and Isolate Them”, *The Heritage Foundation Special Report*, No. 200, July 9, 2018, https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/SR-200_web_0.pdf (accessed May 29, 2020).

88. “AIVD Annual Report 2018”, General Intelligence and Security Service (May 2019), <https://english.aivd.nl/publications/annual-report/2019/05/14/aivd-annual-report-2018>

89. “Hugo Micheron: ‘The jihadists are comfortable in territorial and community isolation’”, *Le Monde*, January 6, 2020, https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2020/01/06/hugo-micheron-les-djihadistes-sont-a-l-aise-dans-l-enclavement-territorial-et-communautaire_6024881_3232.html (accessed May 6, 2020).

ther.⁹⁰ However, addressing them deserves a greater emphasis now that the most pressing mission – destroying ISIS’ physical Caliphate – has been largely completed. This should take place while also acknowledging that a dizzying litany of post-Caliphate regional problems – from reconstruction efforts through to the ongoing detention of Western foreign fighters in Kurdish-run camps – remain.

Conclusion

This fifteen-month snapshot of the situation in Europe suggests that, more than ever, ISIS is having to rely on its ideological appeal in order to strike in the continent; that terrorists – in Europe, at least – have been least likely to have their plans disrupted when acting alone; that direct links to foreign terrorist organisations have diminished but not disappeared; and that the Far Right has increased its capacity.

In comparison to the 2014–2017 period, Islamist terrorists in Europe have had the wind taken out their sails. Unfortunately, however, the potency of ISIS in this period has meant that the bar has been raised, and that what counts as progress and an acceptable level of security in 2020 would have been seen as close to disastrous a decade previously.

Furthermore, Islamism in a post-Caliphate era will likely orientate itself in subtly different ways, as jihadists likely look for new ways to spread their worldview and new ways to exert influence.

Much else remains uncertain: what the centre of gravity for jihadists, post-Caliphate, will be, or even if there will be one dominant theatre in the future. Yet, as Suzanne Raine, the former Head of the United Kingdom’s Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre, has observed: “nothing should surprise us about what happens next, but we need to be prepared to be surprised”.⁹¹

European governments must remain agile in their ability to respond.

90. Strangely, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia describes the concept of Islamist entryism in politics as an Islamophobic conspiracy theory. See “Islamophobia Defined: The inquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia”, All Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia (September 2018), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cfffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceec/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf> (accessed May 22, 2020).

91. Raffaello Pantucci, “A View from the CT Foxhole: Suzanne Raine, Former Head of the United Kingdom’s Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre”, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, CTC Sentinel, Vol. 12, No. 7 (August 2019), pp. 13–17, <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/CTC-SENTI-NEL-072019.pdf> (accessed May 29, 2020).