



French teacher beheaded in targeted attack

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Interesting reads

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# Monthly Threat Update

## October 2020

### Threat overview

**Critical:**  
an attack is highly likely in the near future

**Severe:**  
an attack is highly likely

**Substantial:**  
an attack is likely

**Moderate:**  
an attack is possible but not likely

**Low:**  
an attack is highly unlikely

Threat from terrorism to the UK:



Threat from Northern Ireland related terrorism to Northern Ireland:



### Threat Overview

*October witnessed a noticeable increase in the frequency of Islamist attacks in Europe. In France, a spate of attacks related to the ongoing controversy around the publication of caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed led the French Interior Ministry to raise the national security alert system to its highest level.*

In Germany, an attack on tourists signalled that the threat from Islamist extremism persists regardless of any exacerbating national controversies. In his first public address, the new head of MI5 reiterated this, identifying Islamist extremism as the primary terror threat facing the UK.

While the frequency of recent attacks in France likely reflects a specific national dynamic, the heightened threat landscape across the continent likely represents a return to normalcy after COVID-19-related restrictions disrupted attack plans and restricted the ability of terrorists to target the public. A return to strict 'lockdown' measures in response to rising COVID-19 cases would likely see a similar dynamic play out in coming months.



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## French teacher beheaded in targeted attack

On 16 October, 18-year-old Chechen refugee Aboulakh Anzorov entered the Collège Bois-d'Aulne in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, a suburb 30km north-west of Paris, and beheaded teacher Samuel Paty.

Anzorov asked departing students to point out Paty, before beheading the teacher. He then posted a picture to Twitter of Paty's severed head. Responding officers confronted Anzorov near the school, and after a confrontation in which he discharged an airgun, he was shot and killed by police.

Anzorov targeted Paty specifically, as during a civic education class on freedom of expression earlier in October, Paty had shown his class a controversial caricature of the Prophet Mohammed, published in the satirical Charlie Hebdo magazine. The father of a student at Paty's school is alleged to have encourage action against the teacher, including sharing his name

and the school's address on social media. He has been arrested, along with 10 others implicated in the attack.

This was the second attack related to the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack in as many months, following a stabbing outside the form offices of the satirical magazine on 25 September. In contrast to the September knife attack, which saw random members of the public targeted at a symbolic location, Paty's murder was redolent of earlier targeted attacks on individuals who engaged in high-profile behaviour antagonist to Islamists.

The impact of such targeted attacks is sometimes restricted to immediate vicinity of the incident. However, they can also develop into extensive and violent manhunts with a much wider area impacted, as occurred following the 2015 Charlie Hebdo shooting and 2015 Copenhagen Great



French CRS (Compagnies Republicaines de Securite) police officers patrol near the entrance of Le Bois d'Aulne middle school in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, after a teacher was decapitated by an attacker. (Photo by Thomas COEX / AFP) (Photo by THOMAS COEX/AFP via Getty Images)

Synagogue shooting.

Following Paty's murder, President Macron said France would not 'renounce the caricatures' and defended the right publish offensive material. The French Interior Ministry announced action against various non-governmental organisations alleged to have been involved in inciting terrorism.

The response led to backlash both within France, and abroad, where various religious and secular leaders sympathetic to Islamism accused the French government of attacking Islam and called for a boycott of French goods. Islamist terrorist organisations also called for 'revenge' attacks against France.

Since Paty's murder there have been several other incidents on French soil or targeting French interests overseas. To a greater or lesser degree, these are all likely connected to Paty's murder and the subsequent international controversy. Further attacks are probable.

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## Paris vehicular impact attempt

On 21 October, police in Paris arrested seven British citizens of Pakistani origin for attempting to run over a gendarme outside of the Israeli Embassy. The vehicle and another car accompanying it fled the scene. No one was injured during the attack.

The seven Britons have been charged with attempted murder, and while prosecutors have not confirmed that they are treating the incident as terrorism, the location and modus operandi strongly suggest the attack it was.

While Islamist extremist plots in Europe often involve multi-national co-conspirators, an entirely foreign cell launching attacks in a neighbouring country (if this is indeed the case) is unusual. There is realistic possibility those involved were motivated by the political furore which followed the beheading of Samuel Paty.



The attack took place outside the Israeli embassy near the Champs Élysées in central Paris. (Photo: JACK GUEZ/AFP via Getty Images)

## Knife attack in Dresden

On 4 October, a man armed with a knife killed a tourist and wounded another in Dresden. Police did not identify a suspect until 17 October. The suspect in custody is a 20-year-old Syrian man. Prosecutors said the suspect holds extreme Islamist beliefs and had previously been charged with supporting foreign terrorist organisations.

Low-complexity Islamist attacks are not uncommon in Germany. However, the incident is notable for as the attacker was able to evade police for two weeks before being detained. While terrorist conducting mass casualty attacks do sometimes try to escape the scene and evade detection, it is more common for terrorists intent on causing mass casualties to desist only when interdicted by security forces.

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## Nice bladed weapon attack

On 29 October, a man armed with a knife killed three people outside of the Roman Catholic basilica Notre-Dame de in the centre of Nice. The attacker partially beheaded one of the victims. The attack took place over a 28-minute period, before police wounded and arrested the attacker, who was named as a 21-year-old Tunisian man, Brahim Aouissoui, who arrived as a migrant in late September 2020.

The attack was likely, at least in part, inspired to the beheading of Samuel Paty in Paris two weeks earlier. Religious sites, both Christian and Jewish, have been frequently targeted by Islamist extremists in France. While iconic religious sites like major Cathedrals will have terrorist risk mitigation measures, there is often very little protective security at smaller churches, making them relatively soft targets for mass casualty attacks.



French gendarmes secure the area around the Notre-Dame de l'Assomption Basilica in Nice after a knife attacker killed three people. (Photo by Valery HACHE / AFP) (Photo by VALERY HACHE/AFP via Getty Images)

## Security guard stabbed at French Consulate in Saudi Arabia

On 29 October, a security guard at the French Consulate in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, was attacked and wounded by a Saudi man armed with a knife. The attacker was apprehended by Saudi security forces.

The attack occurred against the backdrop of widespread anger at France in the Muslim world following French President Macron's defence of the right to publish material offensive after the murder of Samuel Paty in Paris.

Diplomatic outposts are often targeted by terrorists who do not have the capability to launch attacks directly on the targeted country. Consequently, Western embassies and consulates have strong protective security measures which limit the effectiveness of low complexity methodologies like bladed weapon or vehicular impact attacks.

## Head of MI5 makes first public address

The new Director General of MI5, Ken McCallum, gave a speech on the current national security threats facing the UK on 14 October. McCallum emphasised the threats from hostile states such as China, Iran and Russia, but also underscored that the agency's largest mission remains countering terrorism.



Ken McCallum, Director General MI5

McCallum identified right-wing terrorism as a rising threat, with eight of the 27 plots foiled in past three years emanating from the far-right. However, McCallum also said that Islamist extremism continues to be the largest threat by volume, with "tens of thousands of individuals committed to [the] ideology".

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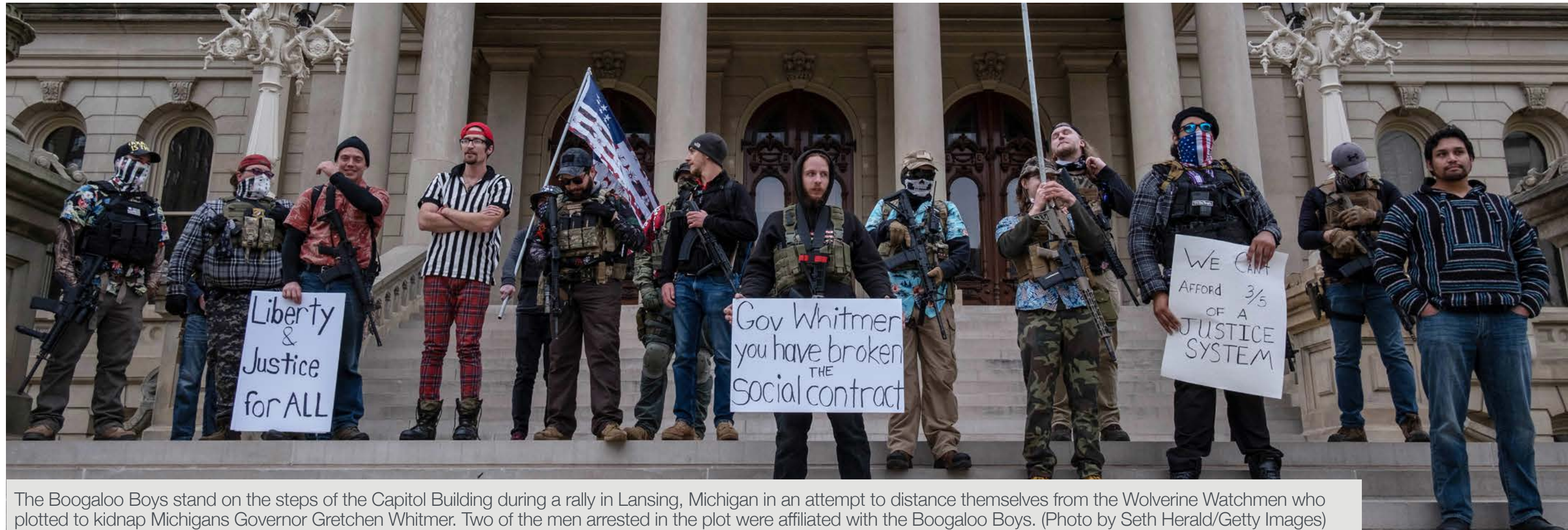
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The Boogaloo Boys stand on the steps of the Capitol Building during a rally in Lansing, Michigan in an attempt to distance themselves from the Wolverine Watchmen who plotted to kidnap Michigan's Governor Gretchen Whitmer. Two of the men arrested in the plot were affiliated with the Boogaloo Boys. (Photo by Seth Herald/Getty Images)

## Plot to kidnap Michigan governor foiled

On 8 October, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) announced the arrests of 13 individuals suspected of plotting to kidnap Michigan governor, Gretchen Whitmer, and violently overthrow the state government. The individuals were linked to a militia called the 'Wolverine Watchmen'. According

to the FBI, the plot developed over several months, with initial plans formulated in early 2020 to kidnap a state official.

The targeting of Whitmer was likely influenced by her strict approach as Governor to enforcing COVID-19 related restrictions,

which both raised her profile and made her a target for criticism of lockdown-sceptical far-right groups. The disrupted plot occurred against the backdrop of a highly polarised political environment in the US, in which efforts by far-right movements to incite civil violence have become

increasingly common. Further plots by members of right-wing militias targeting Democratic Party officials or left-wing civil society organisations are likely.

## Interesting reads:

**New IRA leadership discusses utilising cyber attacks**  
<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/new-ira-alleged-leadership-recorded-discussing-bombing-campaign-and-cyber-attacks-court-hears-39614533.html>

**Tanker incident will be treated as terror, says Isle of Wight MP**  
<https://www.countypress.co.uk/news/18821133.tanker-incident-will-treated-terror-says-isle-wight-mp/>

**Possible drone attack by Taliban in Afghanistan**  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/01/world/asia/taliban-drone-afghanistan.html>

**Hamas uses secret cyberwar base in Turkey to target enemies**  
<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/world/hamas-running-secret-cyberwar-hq-in-turkey-29mz50sxs>

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**Risk Awareness**



**Risk Modelling**



**Risk Management**

## Understanding risk, enabling resilience

Whilst the human cost of terrorism is devastating, the financial impact an incident can have on communities, businesses and economies is generally greater than most realise.

At Pool Re we understand that terrorism is a significant multi-faceted peril that can expose businesses in a complex way. Like many other catastrophic perils, terrorism is a challenge which requires a collaborative approach.

We have been the UK's leading terrorism reinsurer for over a quarter of a century. During this time our SOLUTIONS division have developed a specialist team of

experts who can work with you to help you and your Policyholders understand and manage the terrorism threat.

We believe all organisations and businesses can benefit from a better understanding of the terrorism risk solutions available.

To find out more about Pool Re SOLUTIONS and how your organisation can take advantage of this service please contact us at: **solutions@poolre.co.uk**

## Government advice

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