

Securitas Intelligence Unit

Monthly Intelligence Summary (INTSUM)

August 2021

1 September 2021

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Overview

The aim of the **Securitas Intelligence Unit (SIU) Monthly Intelligence Summary (INTSUM)** is to raise awareness of threats, the potential risks they pose, and other security related news.

Items of intelligence interest featured in this INTSUM have been selected based on their severity and ability to influence the security and threat landscape. Additionally, a selection of global items of intelligence interest have been included to enhance situational awareness and decision making.

If you have any questions about the content of this report, contact the [SIU](#).

Intelligence Cut Off Date (ICOD):	2359hrs, 31 August 2021.
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UK Intelligence Picture



COVID-19



COVID-19 restrictions further eased across the UK in August, with Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales each easing restrictions following England’s move to an emphasis on personal responsibility instead of legal requirement in July. However, rules on face coverings, and guidance on working from home, continue to differ across the UK.

Infection rates and hospitalisations remained broadly stable throughout August; however, both are steadily increasing. There is a concern that the return to education after the summer holidays may result in an increase in infection rates, which has been attributed to the recent rise in cases in Scotland. Scotland has indicated that if there is ‘substantial increase in serious illness’ then it cannot rule out having to reimpose some restrictions.

The most significant single development in August was the easing of self-isolation rules for those who are double vaccinated. While self-isolation measures also continue to vary by UK nation, the easing means that people who are double vaccinated have greater level of freedoms than those who are unvaccinated; this however has continued to fuel accusations of a ‘two tier society’, inciting ongoing protest activity amongst anti-lockdown / vaxx groups.

Based on the reliance on vaccines to mitigate the threat posed by the pandemic, scientists in the UK continue to examine the latest data to issue update advice on vaccinations. This is largely focused on two aims: maximising the percentage of the population who are fully vaccinated, and further protecting the most vulnerable with additional vaccine-based protection.

- On maximising the percentage of the population, the JCVI has announced they recommend 16–17-year-olds to be offered the Pfizer-BioNTech BNT162b2 vaccine.
- In mid-August the JCVI were reportedly close to announcing the groups of individuals who will be eligible for a booster vaccine, however, there is a concern over the lack of clinical data available which will almost certainly impact the initial plans to commence the rollout from September.

SIU Comment: While the overall COVID-19 landscape continues to improve in the UK, there is increasing uncertainty over what the coming weeks and months will bring.

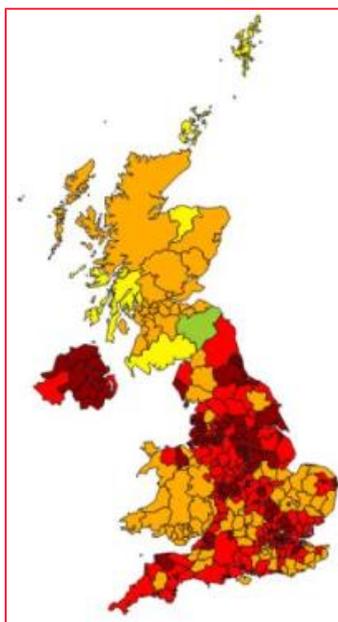
In 2020, August and September saw the easing of restrictions, followed by the introduction of the Local COVID Alert Levels to implement local restrictions in October.

While vaccinations have fundamentally changed the landscape between 2020 and 2021, there is a concern that infection rates are persistent across the UK, and likely to rise with the reopening of schools, which further complicates the picture ahead of the winter flu season.

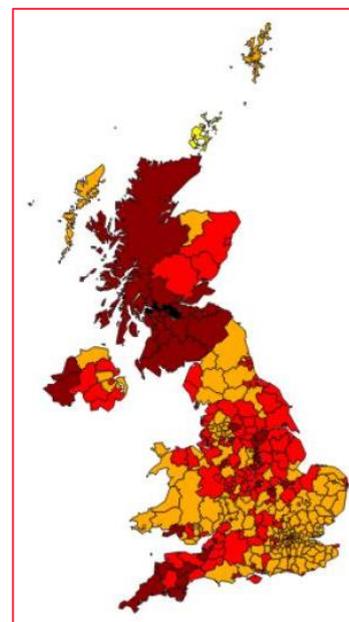
The UK Central Government continues to focus on strategies to ‘live with the virus’, however additional measures may be needed in the near to short term. **End.**

SIU Hotspot Monitor (cases per 100,000 last 7 days).

ASAT 1 August 2021.



ASAT 31 August 2021.



Hotspot rating	Total
MAJOR (+1,000 rate)	0
SIGNIFICANT (+400 rate)	126
SUBSTANTIAL (300 to 399.9)	144
MODERATE (100 to 299.9)	104
MINOR (10-99.9)	5
LIMITED (Up to 9.9 rate)	1

Hotspot rating	Total
MAJOR (+1,000 rate)	4
SIGNIFICANT (+400 rate)	55
SUBSTANTIAL (300 to 399.9)	134
MODERATE (100 to 299.9)	186
MINOR (10-99.9)	1
LIMITED (Up to 9.9 rate)	0

Crime & security



Operation to counter targeted violence results in over 40 arrests

In early August a three-day operation led by the Metropolitan Police's Violent Crime Task Force and including six county forces resulted in 46 arrests. Operation Pandilla was set up to target 'high harm' offenders linked to targeted violence, gangs, and county lines drug operations, using automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) technology to target vehicles known to be linked to violent criminals.

In addition to the arrests, 10 weapons were seized, 22 separate amounts of drugs of varying quantities were recovered, and 20 other illegal items were recovered.

SIU Comment: With the easing of COVID-19 restrictions seeing society beginning to return to normality, police are keen to use the opportunity to get ahead of violent crime. Operation Pandilla is notable for its use of automated technology to identify and target vehicles linked specifically to individuals and may indicate a potential transition to a more technology-led approach to tracking offenders. The success of this operation, with over 40 arrests made in less than three days is likely to bolster the chances of similar operation in the future. **End.**

Plymouth shooting linked to incel ideology

On Thursday 12 August, a 22-year-old man embarked on a 6-minute shooting spree in the Keyham area of Plymouth ending in the fatal shootings of 5 people. This marks the worst mass shooting incident in the UK since the 2010 Cumbria shootings in which 12 people were fatally shot and 11 more injured.

Jake Davison, a licensed shotgun certificate holder, shot his 51-year-old mother Maxine Davison, 3-year-old Sophie Martyn and 43-year-old father Lee Martyn as well as 59-year-old Stephen Washington and 66-year-old Kate Shepherd. Davison shot at 2 others who suffered significant injuries but were in a stable condition at the time of writing. Davison was reported to have used a 'pump action shotgun' which he later used on himself before police were able to apprehend him.

SIU Comment: The incident was widely reported in the national and international press, with particular focus on Davison's links with the 'incel' community – a loose network of mainly men who use the term 'incel' as an abbreviation of 'involuntary celibate'. The group is not recognised as a 'formal' movement with 'members' or any kind of leadership structure and is rather a loose collection of individuals who share their misogynist views online. While previous violent incidents have been linked to the incel community, these are isolated incidents, however they do highlight the potential threats (and opportunities to disrupt these threats) posed by echo chambers on the internet and social media,

Investigations by the press and public in the days following the incident have indicated that Davison's weapon had been confiscated in December 2020 after an allegation of assault, having only been returned to him in July. Reports also suggest that Davison had been in contact with a mental health helpline during the previous 18 months, prompting questions about why he was legally allowed access to the weapon. **End.**

6 people on UK's 'no-fly' identified amongst Afghan evacuees

Security checks carried out on prospective evacuees from Afghanistan following the return to power of the Taliban have indicated that at least six people considered to represent a 'direct threat' to the UK attempted to return to the UK via evacuation flights this month, with one individual making it to Birmingham airport, and another reaching Frankfurt in Germany.

Whilst two of the individuals were known to have boarded flights, the unnamed individual that reached (and was allowed to enter) the UK has subsequently been reclassified as 'not being a person of interest' to security services or police upon 'further investigation'. The findings will raise security concerns following reports that terror groups including ISIS are known to be targeting British soldiers and officials at Kabul airport, and that potential attackers may be posing as refugees or asylum seekers in an effort to enter the UK.

SIU Comment: Despite the Home Office's assertions that security checks being carried out are effective, and that the individual who reached the UK was found not to have been a person of interest, the fact that individuals on the UK's 'no-fly' list are known to be attempting to reach the UK will be of concern, particularly amid the perception of increased threat from terror groups known to be targeting western countries and interests.

Aside from the direct threat from 'imported' groups, there also exists the potential for backlash from Extreme Right Wing (ERW) groups opposed to immigration, who may respond with protest activity and / or targeted violence towards individuals, groups or organisations deemed to be supportive of, or beneficiaries of, relief and evacuation efforts. **End.**

Protest & unrest



Extinction Rebellion launches ‘Impossible Rebellion’ summer campaign

Extinction Rebellion (XR) UK began their summer 2-week campaign on 23 August. Entitled ‘Impossible Rebellion’, the group’s latest action is targeting what they perceive to be the largest contributors to the climate emergency, including public and private organisations. Whilst the event is nationwide, XR’s major campaign typically focus on London due to the capital being the location of the central government, and its role as the UK’s financial hub.

XR continues to urge its supporters to maintain pressure on the government, financial institutions and the energy sector involved in fossil fuels through ‘daily disobedience’ tactics, including non-violent civil disobedience demonstrations, fly-posting, and digital campaigns such as social media ‘storms’.



SIU Comment: This latest iteration of XR’s campaign to tackle the climate crisis has once again seen significant numbers of supporters attend the 2-week-long campaign, which is due to end on 4 September. Police have arrested over 300 protesters and have called the group’s latest tactic of daubing paint on landmarks as “*totally unacceptable*”. It is expected that further activity and arrests will occur before the campaign comes to an end, with XR likely to regroup and debrief this event before switching their focus to the upcoming COP26. **End.**

Anti-vaccine protesters increasingly targeting the media

Anti-vaccination protesters have continued their targeting of the media, who they believe are helping the government promote vaccinations and ‘vaccine passports’, leading to accusations of a two-tier society. Protest groups targeted the BBC’s former headquarters at Television Centre earlier in the month, and on Monday 23 August a group of protestors temporarily occupied the headquarters of ITV News and Channel 4 News in London.

The group marched from King’s Cross Station to ITN’s Gray’s Inn Road headquarters where some supporters gained entry to the building, while hundreds more occupied the outside of the building shouting scientifically unsupported claims about COVID-19 and the vaccine programme. After being dispersed by police the group made their way to Google’s central London offices where they were once again met by police officers.

SIU Comment: The Anti-vaxx movement continues to grow despite the easing of lockdown and a return to normality. The groups’ recent targeting of the media is a new direction that has resulted in incidents of harassment of journalists, who are now concerned for their safety and that of on-air reporters and other staff. This latest incident highlights that the movement is not going away but is instead growing emboldened by the increased level of support. **End.**

Protesters ‘seize’ Edinburgh Castle citing Magna Carta

Approximately 20 protesters entered Edinburgh Castle on 17 August, claiming they were ‘seizing’ the landmark under article 61 of the Magna Carta. The group, who filmed their protest live on Facebook refused to leave when police arrived and claimed the castle “*belonged to the people*” and they were “*taking our power back*”.

All visitors to the castle were asked to leave the castle while police dealt with the ‘seizure’. Police confirmed that one man was arrested for disorder and a police officer sustained minor injuries during the arrest.

SIU Comment: The Magna Carta was first signed in the 13th century and is increasingly being referenced by protesters and protest groups looking to circumvent current legislation. However, the Magna Carta carries little legal weight in modern Britain, as most of its clauses have been repealed and relevant rights ensured by other statutes. With reference to this specific case, the Magna Carta has no standing in Scottish Law. **End.**

Terrorism & extremism



The threat of global terrorism from the 'new' Afghanistan

Recent events in Afghanistan have led to a wave of warnings over the potential increase in terror threats against Western Governments and their respective populations.

Western intelligence agencies have warned Afghanistan could become the new international terrorism hub offering a safe haven for Islamic extremism – the manifestation, radicalisation, and solidifying of Islamic extremist ideologies. Moreover, the establishment of training camps catering to various Islamic extremist groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State could have an adverse impact on the trajectory of global terrorism producing more lethal extremists.

The United Nations (UN) Security Council has reaffirmed its position behind *“the importance of combating terrorism in Afghanistan”* and have called on member states and the general international community to prevent Afghanistan from descending into extremist chaos and becoming a platform for transnational Islamic extremism.

SIU Comment: The issue of stifling the threat of global terrorism is a multi-faceted one. It would involve some form of potential intervention; however, both the UK and US have reiterated their desires of refraining from military deployment, however each have expressed intent to maintain a capability to disrupt terrorist activity in Afghanistan through targeted air and drone strikes. Additionally, too direct an intervention will lead to backlashes from the likes of Russia, China and Iran who have an interest in the unfolding events as a means of disrupting Western influence in the region.

Furthermore, the UK Government announced it will resettle up to 5,000 Afghan nationals who have been displaced. This could trigger a wave of Extreme Right Wing (ERW)-led actions, both online and in person but also could be viewed as potential recruitment opportunities for UK based Islamic extremist groups.

The UK Terror Threat Level is currently set to SUBSTANTIAL meaning that an attack is likely. SUBSTANTIAL is level 3 of 5 on the Terror Threat Level. Terrorism remains one of the most direct and immediate risks to the UK's National Security. SUBSTANTIAL continues to indicate a high level of threat.

A number of officials and authorities have warned that the UK Terror Threat Level should be reviewed in light of events in Afghanistan. Colonel Richard Kemp, former UK Commander in Afghanistan, has urged officials to 'consider raising the UK threat level and increasing counter-terrorist assets available to the intelligence services and police'. **End.**

PREVENT reports link between mental health and radicalisation

Data from the PREVENT programme – a strategy developed by the UK Government as part of the CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy – has revealed up to 7 in 10 people referred suffer from mental health issues. The programme aims to facilitate effective engagement between government departments, local authorities, and communities to reduce the support of terrorism and related ideologies, including limiting the attraction to terrorism.

The police lead behind the PREVENT strategy, Simon Cole, has warned an increasing number of children are being targeted by extreme right-wing (ERW) groups. Cole warned up to 70% of cases referred to the PREVENT strategy suffered from psychological problems.

The SIU has previously reported on the increasing trend of ERW recruiters targeting under-18s in a bid to accumulate future loyal and easily manipulated supporters.

SIU Comment: The targeting of younger and more vulnerable individuals may be a tactic employed by other extremist groups, such as Islamist extremist groups. Additionally, the move towards attracting younger individuals could be seen as part of a long-term goal to solidify a strong support base in order to action long-term plans.

Unless the CONTEST programme is altered to allow for medical evaluation of referred cases, an increase in young and vulnerable cases being referred to the programme is likely. Despite a number of successes, the PREVENT programme has been accused of increased ostracisation of referrals, in other words, referrals are immediately isolated in order to begin de-radicalisation, however, this isolation can lead to the solidifying of extremist beliefs and ideologies. **End.**



Other items of intelligence interest

Bespoke Afghan Resettlement Program

The UK has announced a bespoke Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme which will aim to settle 5,000 people from the country into the UK, with the aim of increasing this to 20,000 people. The priority will be women and children, and those at a greater risk from the Taliban.

The scheme is similar to the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme model, which prioritised those in the greatest need, who were identified by the UN then vetted by the Home Office before being granted permission to settle in the UK.

SIU Comment: The program has provoked a reaction from the extreme right-wing (ERW) community, who have claimed it is ‘disgraceful’ that the UK government is providing homes for Afghan families when there are over 250,000 homeless people in the UK. An escalation in tensions among the ERW as the UK resettles Afghan citizens throughout the country cannot be ruled out. **End.**

UK sanctions 7 Russian nationals for Novichok attack on Alexei Navalny

The UK announced sanctions would be imposed on seven Russian nationals responsible for poisoning Alexei Navalny with the banned Novichok nerve agent. The individuals, who are all members of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) are responsible for planning and carrying out the attack on Navalny in Tomsk on 20 August 2020.

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) announced the Russians would be subject to travel bans and asset freezes.

SIU Comment: Navalny is one of President Vladimir Putin’s most fierce critics and has organised anti-government protests and is the founding member of the Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK). Navalny is one of the most significant opponents to President Putin and has a substantial amount of support in Russia. He spent several months recovering in Germany after falling ill on a plane from Siberia to Moscow and was arrested upon his return to Russia, which resulted in mass protests across the country. The US have also sanctioned the FSB operatives. **End.**

Campaign to tackle sexual violence linked to night-time economy

The Safer Sounds Partnership is extending the ‘Ask for Angela’ campaign in bars and clubs across London with the Metropolitan Police. The safety initiative involves a discreet code-phrase for people who feel unsafe, vulnerable, or threatened by subtly approaching a member of staff at a venue and asking them for ‘Angela’. The code will prompt staff that the individual needs help and a trained member of staff will support and assist them - this could be by guiding them to a taxi, reuniting them with a friend or calling security / police.

The programme was initially developed by Lincolnshire County Council in 2016 and was adopted by the Metropolitan Police in the same year. Other parts of the UK have also rolled the campaign out.

SIU Comment: The initiative is not gender specific and material about the campaign is placed around venues that support it. The Metropolitan Police have extended the scheme during August as restrictions across the capital have eased and night-time economy begins to pick up to pre COVID-19 levels in a bid to make venues as safe as possible. Venues that support the initiative will be offered [Welfare and Vulnerability Engagement \(WAVE\)](#) training, delivered by the police and Safer Sounds, and an intelligence community to share information with other venues, the police, and Safer Sounds. **End.**



Global intelligence picture

AMEA – Africa & Middle East



MV Asphalt Princess hijacking

On 3 August, the Dubai-owned MV Asphalt Princess bitumen tanker was reported to have been ‘potentially hijacked’ by a group of armed men in the Gulf of Oman as it neared Iranian waters. The attacking group totalled up to 9 armed individuals who allegedly demanded the MV Asphalt Princess dock in an Iranian port. Reports indicate the armed group abandoned their mission as nearby Omani and US warships approached the MV Asphalt Princess.

The MV Asphalt Princess is a Panamanian-flagged asphalt / bitumen tanker, owned by Emirati free zone-based Glory International. The incident came a week after a previous incident involving an apparent drone attack leaving 2 MT Mercer Street crewmen dead – British and Bulgarian nationals. Recent tensions in the Gulf of Oman and the wider Middle East between Iran and Israel / Saudi Arabia have escalated into a series of retaliatory incidents.

SIU Comment: Western intelligence services have provided substantial evidence signalling an Iranian-orchestrated attack – specifically a Yemeni-based and Iran-backed group acting under orders from Tehran. Unconfirmed reports also suggest the UK Government authorised the use of special forces in Yemen to track the alleged perpetrators of the fatal attack on the MT Mercer Street.

The maritime incidents are part of a wider pattern of proxy and shadow wars between the heavyweights of the Middle East- Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. Iran in particular has vied for control of the Gulf of Oman and the wider Persian Peninsula under the ruse of ‘enhancing regional stability’. However, Iran has also propped up numerous warring factions in Yemen, Iraq, and Syria in a bid to extend its reach beyond its own borders.

The incident also highlights the increasing security threat to maritime trade in the region. The Strait of Hormuz is one of few vital global shipping lanes in league with the Panama and Suez canals, with an estimated 20% of the world’s crude oil supply passing through the Strait of Hormuz, and Iranian control of the strait would allow it to conduct operations against vessels associated with its rivals. **End.**

Taliban (re)claim Afghanistan as US withdraws

Following the US’ withdrawal from Afghanistan ahead of the 31 August deadline, the Taliban have reaffirmed their victory after seizing control of the capital Kabul on 15 August. With the departure of foreign military forces, the Taliban has effectively retaken control after nearly 20 years since being removed from power in 2001.

The pace, efficiency, and the lack of resistance behind the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan has been described as akin to the *Blitzkrieg* - the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939. With the Taliban having a firm grip over the country it will have unilateral control over both domestic and foreign policies, including selecting its allies and adversaries.

The Taliban has stated plans to form an ‘open, inclusive Islamic government’ indicating the potential for a more moderate stance. However, strict punishments for not observing Sharia law continue to be reported.

Authorities from around the world have warned that the collapse of the Afghan government and return of Taliban rule could accelerate the threat of terrorist groups reforming in the country, intent on launching attacks overseas.

During the evacuation process there were a number of terror attacks targeting civilians and security forces at the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, including a suicide attack by Islamist extremist group Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP / ISKP / ISK / ISIS-K) on 26 August, which killed 182 people, including 169 Afghan civilians and 13 US service personnel.

SIU Comment: While no other country has officially recognised the Taliban as the de jure government of Afghanistan to date, China, Russia, Pakistan, and Turkey have indicated they are prepared to recognise Taliban rule, effectively redrawing the geopolitical map.

Various officials and agencies from around the world continue to warn that the situation has resulted in a heightened terror threat both in the long term and the immediate future. Of note, ISIS-K, the group who launched the attacks targeting the evacuations in Kabul, are opposed to both the US and the Taliban, and have declared a war against the Taliban, the Afghan government and “their US masters”. Whilst ISIS-K are not currently assessed to have the capability to launch attacks outside of Afghanistan, there is the potential for them to incite / inspire attacks by foreign supporters, particularly in the West. **End.**

Jacob Zuma trial postponed until September

Due to an unspecified health condition, former South African President Jacob Zuma's trial has been postponed until 9 September. A number of small protests have been reported in and around the courthouse organised by followers and supporters of Jacob Zuma.

Jacob Zuma was sentenced to 15 months imprisonment for contempt of court in July 2021 which sparked a wave of mass civil unrest resulting in looting and over 300 reported deaths, with many more wounded. The South African army was drafted in to control the riots.

Jacob Zuma was to stand trial for a corruption case involving a \$2 billion arms deal in 2005. The scandal saw Zuma sack his deputy president as a result.

The current President, Cyril Ramaphosa, admitted corruption was a large stain on South African politics during Jacob Zuma's reign. Corruption remains a large thorn in the side of South African politics; however, Cyril Ramaphosa has vowed to tackle the widespread corruption entrenched in South African politics.

South African police are understood to be making arrests of believed instigators of the violent unrest and looting with the Police Minister Bheki Cele advising of a number of "high profile" arrests to be forthcoming, suggesting ministers and civil servants may have had a role in instigating the unrest witnessed last month.

SIU Comment: Former President Jacob Zuma will maintain some support even after the violent unrest witnessed last month. He is supported by the localised protests in and around the courthouse expected to hold the future trials of Jacob Zuma.

The impending arrest of the 'high profile' targets could lead to a degree of localised unrest, with those wanting to avoid a prison sentence inciting further levels of unrest, calling on supporters to take to the streets. Social media played a pivotal role in last month's unrest, both in terms of assisting to incite violence and coordinating safety alerts for communities. **End.**

First Marburg related death recorded in Guinea, West Africa

The World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed through the Institute Pasteur in Senegal the detection of the Marburg virus in Guinea, West Africa after a patient contracted and died from the virus in Guéckédou, Guinea making it the first Marburg-related death on record.

The virus is Ebola-like in that it possesses an extremely high mortality rate (~88%), can be transmitted from animals to humans and has virtually no known treatment or vaccine. The Marburg virus first emerged in Angola in 2005. The initial outbreak is thought to originate from the consumption of 'bushmeat' such as monkeys, bats, rats, and snakes.

The WHO has warned that the Marburg virus, and its potential spread in West Africa, "must be stopped in its tracks" prompting the WHO and local health authorities to begin contact tracing to suppress any risks of further spread.

According to WHO reports, 155 people may have come into some form of contact with the recently deceased patient. However, none of the contacts have displayed symptoms of the Marburg virus.

SIU Comment: The outbreak highlights the ease and dangers of cross-infective diseases between animals and humans, exemplified by the current COVID-19 pandemic. Despite theories from some Western intelligence agencies that COVID-19 is the result of a potential lab leak, until concrete evidence is found, the theory of COVID-19's origins in cross-contamination from animal to human is unlikely to be ruled out.

A global Marburg outbreak would pose significant challenges as there is no known treatment or vaccine, simply supportive care. With a fatality rate of up to 88%, the impact could far exceed that of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the likelihood of a global Marburg pandemic remains low at this time. **End.**

AMEA - Asia Pacific



COVID-19 protesters attempt to force PM out of office in Thailand

Protests in Thailand against the current Prime Minister (PM) Prayut Chan-o-cha have been ongoing throughout August as disgruntled citizens show their growing anger about a worsening COVID-19 epidemic and a chaotic vaccine rollout.

Attempts to stop the protesters have seen Thai police use water cannons and tear gas to disperse protesters near the office of the Prime Minister in Bangkok, with rubber bullets used as protesters attempted to dismantle police barricades. Official sources have confirmed injuries to both police officers and protesters.

SIU Comment: The rallies and protests are being led by groups who also sought former army chief Prayuth's eviction last year, accusing him and his allies of seeking to entrench the military's control of politics.

Opposition lawmakers have also filed a no-confidence motion against Prayuth and 5 of his cabinet ministers, which will lead to a censure debate over the COVID-19 crisis, likely to take place in early September. **End.**



China passes strict new data privacy law

China has now passed a strict new data privacy law that could have serious ramifications for global businesses. The Personal Information Protection Law (PIPL), is similar to Europe's GDPR legislation, with companies required to get user consent to collect, use and share information, and to provide a way for them to opt out. Companies found breaking the rules could face fines of up to 5% of their annual revenue, 1% more than Europe's GDPR rules.

Unlike GDPR, however, the PIPL comes with one major caveat, whilst it is largely written to protect people from private companies monopolising their data, it contains a number of clauses giving state authorities freedom to use the data for a wide variety of purposes. These clauses have led to critics highlighting the changes as another method of surveillance in an increasingly-connected China.

The new legislation will commence from November.

SIU Comment: The PIPL has a number of other stipulations on data sharing - far too numerous to list. However, it is likely to affect global clients, particularly those with regional offices in Hong Kong and Singapore. It stipulates personal data must gain legislative approval before being sent beyond the country's borders and requires explicit approval before any data is handed over to foreign law enforcement. **End.**

Sri Lanka files over 20,000 charges against 25 suspects of the 2019 Easter Bombings

The Sri Lankan Government has filed a total of 23,270 charges against 25 suspects in connection to the Easter Bombings in 2019 that resulted in the deaths of 269 people, including tourists and religious figures and worshippers.

Charges include conspiring to murder, aiding and abetting, collecting arms and ammunition, and attempted murder. The bombing attacks were carried out by Islamic extremist groups who had pledged allegiance to ISIS in the build up to the attack.

SIU Comment: Friction and a communication breakdown between then-President and Prime Minister were blamed for the government's failure to act on near-specific foreign intelligence warnings ahead of the attacks. These claims led to the election of a new President, and it is this regime that has filed the significant list of charges amidst claims of failed investigations in the past. **End.**

Americas – North America



Canada accuses China of ‘retaliation’ over jailing of businessman

Canada has levelled strongly worded accusations of retaliation and political bargaining towards China following two cases of Canadian nationals being tried for espionage in China. The sentencing of businessman Michael Spavor to 11 years in prison and the ongoing trial of former Canadian diplomat Michael Kovrig have been called “absolutely unacceptable” by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken calling the verdict an attempt to “use people as bargaining chips”.

US and Canadian officials believe the cases are politically motivated, with both men being arrested in China in 2018, shortly after the detention of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou in Vancouver on a warrant from the US. Ms Meng is alleged to have misled the banking giant HSBC about the nature of Huawei’s business dealings with Iran, putting the bank at risk of violating US sanctions against the country. Extradition hearings have completed and an announcement on the findings is expected in October.

SIU Comment: With tensions between the US and China continuing to simmer, the continued detention of a top executive of one of China’s most well-known brands in Canada on a US warrant is likely to see further posturing between the two nations – and in this case, their allies.

Canada has held Ms Meng under house arrest in Vancouver since her arrest, and with hearings completed, is awaiting a judge’s verdict. The bar for extradition in Canada is lower, as the judge is not required to assess the guilt of the defendant, only whether there would be sufficient grounds for a trial to take place under Canadian law. In the event that Ms Meng is extradited to the US to face trial, it is likely that US-Chinese relations (and by extension Canadian-Chinese relations) would deteriorate further. **End.**

Earthquake-hit Haiti sees gangs kidnap relief workers

Haiti was thrown into further disarray this month following last month’s assassination of its president, with a 7.2-magnitude earthquake striking the country on 14 August. More than 2,200 people have been reported as killed in the earthquake, with a further 344 reported missing and over 12,000 injured.

Relief efforts are ongoing, but have been complicated by poor weather from Tropical Storm Grace and attacks on aid convoys and kidnappings, with one hospital in the capital, Port-Au-Prince shutting down for two days due to the kidnapping of two doctors, including one of the country’s few orthopaedic surgeons. Tensions are beginning to rise in the country as civilians protest distribution centres over the slow distribution of essential supplies.

SIU Comment: Whilst the international community has been quick to send aid to Haiti in the wake of the disaster, with both the US and Brazil sending aircraft, supplies and personnel to assist in both the search for and the treatment and assistance of survivors, the situation is overshadowed by the disastrous aid efforts following the 2010 earthquake, where both the domestic and foreign governments badly mismanaged the response, leading to widespread protests and strong anti-aid sentiment within the country.

Despite these misgivings, a devastating earthquake so soon after the political turmoil of last month’s assassination has left the Haitian government and its citizens with little option but to rely on foreign aid to try and get the country back on its feet. However, the ongoing gang violence and deteriorating security situation in the country is likely to make for a highly challenging environment. **End.**

Online extremist rhetoric ‘similar to build up to January 6 attack’

A senior Department of Homeland Security (DHS) official in the US has warned that extremist rhetoric online is approaching levels seen prior to the build-up to the January 6 attack on the Capitol Building, with increasing calls for violence based on conspiracy theories and disputed narratives. The DHS issued a new terrorism bulletin this month, warning the public about increasingly complex and volatile threats as well as alerting state and local authorities to an increase in calls for violence online tied to election-related conspiracy theories.

The controversial US withdrawal from Afghanistan has provided further ammunition for critics of the Biden administration, and this reached a peak on 19 August when 49-year-old Floyd Ray Roseberry parked a truck outside the Library of Congress in Washington, telling police that he had a bomb. The area was evacuated whilst the threat was investigated, with Roseberry eventually surrendering and being arrested – no bomb was found, although the truck did contain equipment that could be used in bomb-making.

SIU Comment: The US has battled an increasing extreme right wing (EWR) threat since the runup to the 2016 election, and the outcome of the hotly-contested 2020 election resulted in a violent attack on the US Capitol Building by pro-Trump supporters and EWR groups in which three people died. The recent jailing of the leader of

EWR group 'Proud Boys', Enrique Tarrío, for six months should be seen as a potential flashpoint when Tarrío reports to jail on 6 September.

DHS reports suggest that already-agitated right-wing voters are being further antagonised by online activity from foreign and domestic threat actors - specifically foreign intelligence services, terrorist organisations and domestic extremist influencers, who are using online platforms to spread disinformation and conspiracy theories for the express purpose of trying to sow discord and incite violence. **End.**

Americas – South America



Political tensions in Brazil continue to rise

Simmering tensions in Brazilian politics have continued this month, with the Brazilian Senate leader confirming that he would reject an attempt from President Jair Bolsonaro to impeach Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes. President Bolsonaro had sought the impeachment after Moraes opened an investigation into the president for allegedly leaking confidential reports to the media that support his claims that a disputed electronic voting system was vulnerable to fraud.

These claims are strongly refuted by electoral officials and the courts, who maintain that the systems are both safe and fully auditable. President Bolsonaro recently drew criticism from both national and international observers for suggesting that next year's elections could potentially be postponed if paper ballots were not reintroduced due to his concerns around the voting machines, which have been used in Brazil since 1996.

SIU Comment: Bolsonaro's as-yet unsubstantiated allegations echo those of similar campaigns by former US President Donald Trump, whose repeated claims of vote-rigging led to violent protests in the US in the wake of his unsuccessful 2020 campaign.

Recent polls have suggested that support for Bolsonaro has continued to plummet in Brazil, with the poor handling of the COVID-19 crisis -in which over 500,000 Brazilians have died- a major factor. With popular former president Lula considering another presidential campaign following the quashing of corruption convictions earlier this year, some commentators have suggested that Bolsonaro is attempting to build grounds for a legal challenge in the event of a losing campaign – Bolsonaro has been quoted in the media as stating that he sees three alternatives for his future after the 2022 election: “being arrested, killed or victory”. It is likely that as the situation develops, significant political tension and dispute will continue to spread across Brazil. **End.**

Flooding in western Venezuela kills at least 20

At least 20 people have died and 17 remain missing in the Venezuelan state of Merida following mudslides and flooding caused by torrential rain on 23 August. State governor Ramon Guevara has said that more than 1,200 houses had been destroyed, and telephone and power services were down in some areas. Rescue workers have continued to search the area for survivors. Images on social media have shown mudslides leaving stones and boulders across roads, cars being swept down flooded streets by torrents of water, and buildings being filled with mud.

Officials have called for aid to the region, with over 140 firefighters and civil protection officers deployed to the area, and armed forces stationed in the area have been tasked to assist. State governor Guevara has called for additional support from the central government, stating that neither the state nor the municipal governments have the required resources to help all of the affected areas, and that restoring critical infrastructure such as road access is key.

SIU Comment: Venezuela remains one of the poorest countries in the region, as US sanctions against the country due to allegations of human rights abuses continue to deter buyers in Venezuela's critical oil industry, despite the Venezuelan government's efforts to circumnavigate them.

The localised damage and disruption caused by the flooding and mudslides is unlikely to significantly damage the wider country's operations. However, with local government funding likely insufficient to support the required relief efforts, there will be an expectation for the central government to support, and failure to do so may weaken support for President Nicolas Maduro, who is not formally recognised by a number of countries, including the US. **End.**

Bank robbery in Brazil results in three fatalities

An armed robbery in the city of Aracatuba, Brazil, saw criminals target several banks in the city, exchanging gunfire with police, taking civilians hostage, and leaving a trail of explosive devices across several locations in the city. The attack was carried out by more than 20 heavily-armed men using 10 cars. The group used hostages as human shields during their escape, with photographs showing people tied to the roof and hood of a car being used by the group.

A statement by local police confirmed that one attacker and two civilians had died during the robbery, and that two attackers had been arrested. The attackers appeared to have planned extensively for the heist, with explosive devices planted across the city, and several key access routes into the city blocked by burning vehicles. Reports in the media have suggested that the police response was monitored by the criminals via the use of drones.

SIU Comment: This is the latest in a string of increasingly violent robberies across Brazil in recent years, as part of a phenomenon known as 'New Cangaço' in reference to historic banditry in Brazil in the 1920s. The robberies target

banks and storage companies in small and medium-sized cities, and often consist of dozens of heavily-armed participants. Whilst the majority of robberies have taken place in Brazil, there have been reports that a similar raid in Paraguay was carried out by a Brazilian gang.

Experts have suggested that a COVID-19 welfare program has encouraged groups to target banks in smaller cities, as branches are storing additional cash. Whilst previous robberies have seen assailants willing to take (and potentially kill) hostages, the indiscriminate use of explosives to seemingly distract the police response is a new development, and further raises the risk profile of future robberies. **End.**

Europe



UK embassy worker in Berlin arrested on suspicion of spying for Russia

On 10 August, an employee at the British embassy in Berlin was arrested on suspicion of spying for Russia as part of a joint investigation by British and German Authorities. David Smith, who was employed as security at the embassy, is alleged to have sold documents to the Russian intelligence service. He does not hold diplomatic immunity and will face trial in Germany.

It is reported that Smith had been under surveillance for some time and caused authorities to act after he had not used his bank accounts for several months, arousing suspicion that he had received a cash sum, potentially from a foreign intelligence agency.

SIU Comment: Reports suggest that Smith passed low-grade information to the Russians, including details of visitors to the British embassy. Authorities feared that Smith may be preparing to pass more sensitive information to his handlers, causing officials to swiftly make the arrest.

It is likely that the information passed to the Russians would not be highly classified, due to the role of Smith and his access to information. However, this cannot be ruled out. The incident serves to highlight that whilst sophisticated methods of stealing information, particularly since the introduction of the internet, remain a significant threat, insider threats from individuals with access to information that is not always recorded online continues to remain a threat to national security. The incident has prompted security reviews of contracted staff to UK embassies. Insider threats can arise for varied reasons; grievances, financial troubles, bribery, and negligence are some of the motivations for causing harm to an asset. **End.**

Controversial health pass provokes demonstrations across France

The French Government's controversial 'health pass' system, known as the pass sanitaire, where individuals must display proof of COVID-19 vaccination in order to attend certain venues and events was rolled out to further locations this month. The health pass is part of French law and will be used until at least 15 November, although there is the potential for this to be extended.

France has seen significant protests over the use of the health pass in recent weeks. It is reported over 200 protests have taken place over some weekends, with greater numbers attending each weekend. Protesters have argued the measure infringes on civil rights and liberties.

However, some reports suggest that the French Government is thought to be extending the measure as a means of improving vaccine uptake rates.



SIU Comment: The government implemented the health pass as a requirement to travel and entry to some venues and in recent weeks, police have been enforcing the rules with spontaneous visits to locations. President Macron implemented the health pass requirement as part of the country's strategy of dealing with the pandemic, and that the pass has been put into place to protect the freedom of everyone by limiting the spread of the virus. It is thought the mandate would improve the vaccine uptake rates. 72% of the population in France has received at least one dose of vaccination to date.

The protests have attracted a significant number of people and groups, including those from the far right and far left. Anti-vaxxers, conspiracy theorists, anti-government and gilet jaunes have attended demonstrations.

Furthermore, a number of doctors in France have reported having their health service accounts hacked, with hackers stealing health certificates. Others have confirmed attempts have been made to access their accounts. Health authorities have reported an increased number of forged certificates and forgers are also producing fake negative COVID-19 tests. **End.**

Europol publishes Online Jihadist Propaganda annual report

Europol published the third edition of its Online Jihadist Propaganda annual [report](#) in August. The report delivers a detailed analysis of the most prominent jihadist organisations trends and developments from 2020.

The threat assessment has been collated by the European Union Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU) based on sources including the groups' publications, videos, and speeches.

The 47-page report concentrates primarily on IS and al-Qaeda, as well as their offshoots and focuses on the trajectories of the groups, how they have responded to ever-changing dynamics and attempted to overcome challenges.

SIU Comment: The report, published on 13 August, concludes that these groups have the ability to evolve, restructure and morph into less cohesive entities and the risk of online jihadist propaganda being translated into physical violence remains high.

Furthermore, the Taliban's (re)claiming control of Afghanistan has prompted various officials and global agencies around the world to warn that the return of the Taliban rule could accelerate the threat of terrorist groups reforming in the country, intent on launching attacks overseas. The Taliban's ties to al-Qaeda raises concerns for the globe.

Whilst it is still too early to predict what will occur in the coming weeks and months, the western world and its interests will be under greater threat from extremist Islamic terrorism. The Taliban's victory will almost certainly inspire other extremist Islamic terror groups, including IS, to carry out attacks. **End.**