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# Monthly Threat Update

March 2021

## 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

*There were no significant, confirmed terrorist attacks in the UK or other Advanced Market countries in March 2020. However, a mass-shooting in Atlanta, US, highlights definitional issues in categorising certain attacks as terrorist in nature in different jurisdictions, as well as highlights the threat of Christian fundamentalist violence in the US.*

Separately, an Islamist extremist was found guilty of preparing a bladed weapon attack in London during the first coronavirus lockdown, highlighting the enduring threat of terrorism amidst lockdown restrictions. Further afield, Daesh terrorists killed dozens of people and disrupted liquid natural gas (LNG) production at a Total site in northern Mozambique.

The UK government also released the Integrated Review of security, defence, development and foreign policy this month. The Review highlighted the enduring threat of Islamist and Northern-Ireland related terrorism, with the threat of far-right extremism also remaining a concern. Furthermore, the Review observed that a successful chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) terrorist attack is likely in the UK by 2030.

Counter Terrorism Policing also released a toolkit for businesses on 31 March to assist them in keeping customers safe as lockdown in the UK begins to lift. The toolkit can [be accessed here](#).



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# 2021 Integrated Review predicts a 'likely' CBRN terrorist attack on the UK by 2030

The Integrated Review of security, defence, development and foreign policy was released in March 2021. 'Global Britain in a Competitive Age' describes the government's vision for the UK's role in the world over the next decade and provides a framework for future policy for all governmental departments.

The Integrated Review noted that terrorism will remain a major threat to UK citizens and interests at home and abroad over the coming decade, with a more diverse range of material and political causes, new sources of radicalisation and evolving tactics. In the UK, the main sources of terrorist threat are from Islamist and Northern Ireland-related terrorism with the increasing threat of the far-right and

the lesser threat of far-left, anarchist and single-issue terrorism also highlighted. In Northern Ireland, the risk that groups could seek to encourage and exploit political instability and the paramilitary and criminal activity by both Violent Dissident Republican and Loyalist groups is also adding to the wider security challenges in the Province.

One of the most noteworthy observations was the "likely" probability that a terrorist group will launch a successful chemical, biological radiological or nuclear (CBRN) attack by 2030, echoing statements made by Defence Secretary Ben Wallace earlier this year. The government's fears may have been amplified about a future biological threat following



the coronavirus pandemic which has demonstrated the disruptive effect of a contagious disease. Hamish de Bretton Gordon, a former commander of the UK's chemical and biological weapons regiment, has also drawn attention to the extensive use of chemical weapons by Daesh in Iraq against Kurdish forces. This example, although incomparable in terms of scale of attack, does however highlight the intent of terrorist groups to engage with CBRN materials and raises concerns over the capabilities of returning foreign fighters with knowledge and experience handling these types of material to launch attacks.

Pool Re recently hosted a Bioterrorism Conference in conjunction with the

BioRISC team at St Catharine's College, University of Cambridge, featuring keynote addresses from Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General for Counter Terrorism, Alistair Darling, former Chancellor of the Exchequer, and participation by the Rt. Hon Amber Rudd, former Home Secretary, Lord Mark Sedwill, former Cabinet Secretary and National Security Advisor, and Bruce Carnegie-Brown, Chairman of Lloyds, amongst others. A selection of videos and other resources from the conference will be made available from Monday, 12 April. These [can be accessed here](#).



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Garden Grove, United States. 17th Mar, 2021. Community members and faith leaders gather for a "Stop Asian Hate" vigil in honor of victims of the Atlanta-area spa shootings. at Community Center Park in Garden Grove on Wednesday, March 17, 2021. Photo by Jim Ruymen/UPI Credit: UPI/Alamy Live News

## Atlanta spa shootings highlight increasing violence against Asian Americans

On 16 March, an individual shot and killed eight people and injured another at three Asian American-owned massage parlours in and around the Atlanta metropolitan area in Georgia, US. According to bystanders, the shooter, Robert Aaron Long, said that he was 'going to kill all Asians' during the attack. Police arrested Long several hours after the shooting in a nearby town. Long has not yet been charged with terrorist offences or hate crimes and remains in custody on multiple murder and aggravated assault charges.

Long is unlikely to be charged with terrorist offences. Authorities in the US rarely charge white supremacists or far-right

extremists with terrorism related offences, as to be designated terrorism in the US, authorities require there to be a connection to an 'international ideology' such as jihadism. Nevertheless, this incident is of note as in the UK, it would likely be categorised as a terrorist attack.

US gun laws remain some of the most permissive in the world. However, the House of Representatives recently passed two new gun control bills focused at addressing gaps in existing gun laws, by expanding background checks and giving federal law enforcement agencies more time to vet gun purchasers. Should these bills pass the Senate, this would make it more difficult for would-be terrorists to buy firearms on

the same day they commit attacks, as was the case in the Atlanta incident.

According to police, Long described his actions as a result of a sex addiction that conflicted with his evangelical beliefs and had frequented two of the three massage parlours in the past. Six of the eight victim were Asian or Asian-American women, amidst an increase in violence against people of Asian descent in the US during the COVID-19 pandemic, however race has not yet been established as a motive.

In response to the shooting, CT officers of several police departments around the country, including in New York, increased patrols around Asian American communities as a precaution.

Online rhetoric and conspiracy theories relating to people of Asian descent and COVID-19 are increasing in volume and may lead to further acts of violence in the US and in Europe, particularly as the pandemic and related restrictions endure.



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## 2021 Integrated Review outlines new legislative and organisational tools to counter terrorist threat

The Integrated Review reaffirmed the government's increased commitment to security and resilience over the next decade, outlining new legislative and organisational tools to tackle the pervasive terrorist threat. Highlighting the successful disruption of 28 planned attacks since 2017, the Integrated Review noted the essential work of counter terrorism (CT) agencies, with increased funding for intelligence agencies and CT Policing in 2021-22 and a drive to recruit an extra 20,000 police officers. The review also noted the introduction of new legislation including the Covert Human Intelligence Source Act, Counter Terrorism and Sentencing

Bill and National Security and Investment Bill to improve the tools to fight against terrorism.

The Covert Human Intelligence Source Act provides the power to authorise covert human intelligence sources to participate in conduct which would otherwise constitute a criminal offence. The legislation provides a legal basis for a longstanding tactic used in terrorism prevention. The Counter Terrorism and Sentencing Bill will create a new type of sentence for the most serious terrorist and terrorism-related offenders (aged 18 or over), with a minimum custodial term of 14 years and an extended



Prime Minister Boris Johnson leaves 10 Downing Street for the House of Commons to make a statement on the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy in London, Britain, on March 16, 2021. Photo by Xinhua / Alamy Stock Photo

licence period of between 7 and 25 years. It will also remove the possibility of early release from custody for dangerous terrorist offenders who have committed a serious terrorism offence and received an extended sentence and increase the maximum penalty available for particular terrorism offences. Finally, the National security and Investment Bill aims to tighten the rules governing foreign investment across Britain's critical infrastructure and parts of its defence industries. The bill will grant powers to the government to mitigate risks to national security, establishing powers to scrutinise and intervene in business transactions, such as takeovers.

The review also announced the establishment of new capabilities such as the Counter Terrorism Operations Centre and the National Cyber Force. The creation of the first, single,



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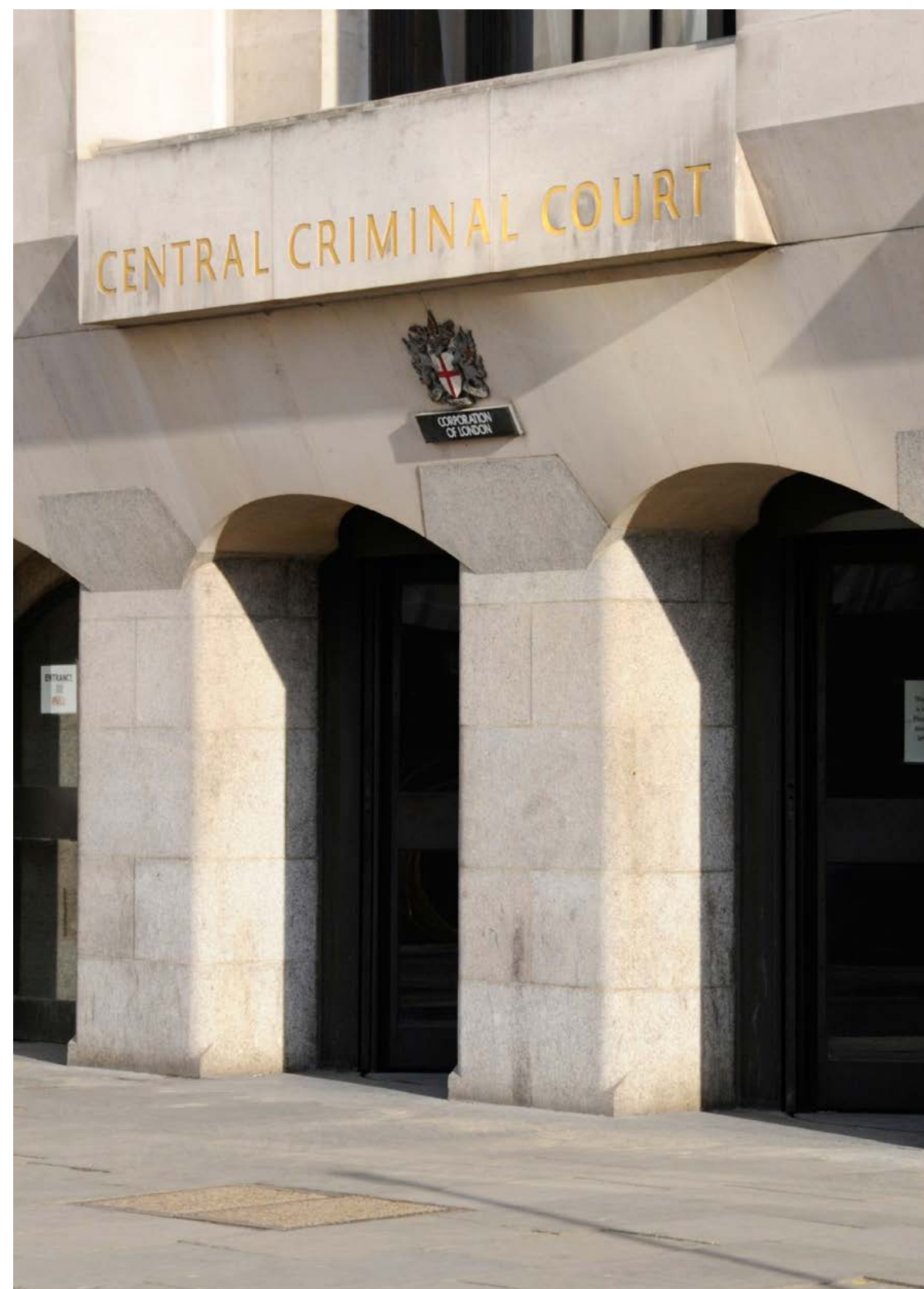
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integrated Counter Terrorism Centre, with all principal actors including government departments, security and intelligence agencies, law enforcement and members of the judicial system will improve the speed of response, strengthen end-to-end management of terrorist offenders and foster the deployment of new capabilities that will help the UK to stay ahead of evolving threats. Established in 2020, the National Cyber Force conducts targeted, offensive cyber operations to support national security priorities, merging defence and intelligence capabilities.

Learning from the pandemic, a focus on national resilience will be a key strategic priority for the government. The establishment of a new Situation Centre based in the Cabinet Office, staffed by the National Security Secretariat with cross-cutting capabilities is expected to improve the use of data and the UK's ability

to anticipate and respond to future crises. The National Security Secretariat will use the facility to "horizon scan" for threats to national security, coordinating information from the Joint Intelligence Committee, the Joint Terrorism Assessment Centre and other departmental assessments.



## Islamist extremist jailed for plotting bladed weapon attack

On 12 March, a jury found 27-year-old Sahayb Abu guilty of preparing an act of terrorism in London, following his arrest in July 2020. According to court records, Abu had bought a sword, a knife, balaclavas and a combat vest. Abu was allegedly inspired by Daesh propaganda. Abu had previously been released from prison in March 2020, originally being jailed for a conspiracy to commit burglary. Several of Abu's sibling have also been involved in extremist activities, including two half-brothers who travelled to Syria to join Daesh.

According to police, Abu had interacted with extremist prisoners during his first stint in prison, who possibly

further radicalised him and cemented his extremist views. It is likely Abu already held some extremist views given his familial involvement in radical Islamist activities. Nevertheless, this case highlights that radicalisation in the prison estate remains a persistent problem. Furthermore, cases of radicalisation between members of the same family may have been exacerbated during coronavirus-related lockdowns, possibly leading to further attack plots in the coming months.



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## German letter bomb attacks raise concerns over postal security

Three people were injured in an explosion at the headquarters of the supermarket chain Lidl in southwest Germany, on 17 February. The wounded staff were airlifted to hospital while employees were evacuated from the headquarters in Heilbronn. A similar explosion was also reported in nearby Eppelheim at a drinks company, with one reported injury. German authorities also confirmed that an explosive device had been identified and disarmed at a parcel distribution centre at Munich airport in the same week.

An unnamed 66-year-old was detained days after the three packages containing explosives were sent to the

food firms. The motive for the attack has not been established, however it has not been described as terrorist in nature. German prosecutors have set up a special commission to investigate the incidents and Germany's food federation has warned members to remain vigilant when receiving post. The attack draws attention to the continued potential for high-explosive substances to be transported undetected through courier services. The recent German letter bomb attacks have proven that even with lockdown restrictions, significant injuries to staff and disruptions to businesses can be orchestrated remotely.



Nada Jumic works in the mail sorting center of the regional post office in Waiblingen, Baden-Wuerttemberg, Germany, Europe. Photo by imageBROKER / Alamy Stock Photo.

The attacks highlight the threat of victim-operated mailed devices. As most businesses will receive a large amount of post and deliveries this offers a potentially attractive route into premises for terrorists to directly attack targets anonymously. Delivered items, including malicious letters, parcels, packages delivered by post or courier, have been a commonly used tactic by terrorists. Letter bomb attacks have also previously been favoured in by anarchist groups against financial institutions, retailers and government buildings. In February 2014 seven letter bombs were sent to Armed Forces recruitment offices in the United Kingdom, believed to be linked to violent dissident republicanism.

Victim-operated attacks occur following an attempt to open an item containing

explosive, incendiary, bladed, or chemical, biological or radiological (CBR) materials. These devices can often look innocuous, coming in a variety of shapes and sizes. Whilst these devices are relatively small in size, however they can be easily screened for by postal services and have varying reliability issues. The attacks in Germany have raised questions over how two out of three devices evaded postal screenings and the obligation of postal services and businesses during COVID-19 restrictions to maintain heightened awareness of the threat of remotely conducted attacks.



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## Dozens killed in Daesh attack in northern Mozambique

On 24 March, armed militants killed dozens of people in the town of Palma in the northern Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique, including several Western nationals. At least one British national remains missing. The group targeted banks, shops and hotels in the area. Palma is the nearest major settlement to a liquid natural gas (LNG) site in Afungi owned by French oil company Total, worth around £30b. The Central Africa Province of Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack.

The increasing threat of Daesh in Central Africa follows a trend of affiliates of the group becoming more prevalent following the reduction in capabilities

of Daesh in Iraq and Syria. It is likely that branches of Daesh will emerge in other hostile environments, most probably in countries in Sub-Saharan Africa where the group can co-opt local issues to spread its ideology. New splinters will then most likely target strategic assets, such as diplomatic mission or hydrocarbon installations or manufacturing centres, particularly those owned by foreign entities. This could pose a threat to existing and future British interests in the region.

Tensions and hostilities may grow towards foreign businesses in the event that western forces intervene in local conflicts. On 31 March, the Portuguese military deployed troops



Internally displaced people (IDP) from Palma gather in the Pemba Sports center to receive humanitarian aid in Pemba on April 2, 2021. - People were evacuated from the coasts of Palma after armed insurgents attacked the city on March 24, 2021. (Photo by Alfredo Zuniga / AFP) (Photo by ALFREDO ZUNIGA/AFP via Getty Images)

to offer assistance to Mozambican security forces. The potential for violent extremism in the region will also likely be exacerbated by COVID-19, which has likely set back progress in developing nations significantly. Increasing conflict in the region could have some blowback to the UK, with fighting abroad serving as a recruiting tool for Islamist extremists at home. Increased violence may also lead to an increase in migrants displaced by conflict, some of whom may come to Europe or the UK, potentially leading to an increase of terrorist violence in the UK in the long term.

### Interesting reads:

**Innovation, Creativity and the Interplay Between Far-right and Islamist Extremism, ICSR**

<https://icsr.info/2021/03/23/literature-review-innovation-creativity-and-the-interplay-between-far%E2%80%91right-and-islamist-extremism/>

**Lessons Learned from UK Efforts to Deradicalize Terror Offenders, CTC Sentinel**

<https://ctc.usma.edu/lessons-learned-from-u-k-efforts-to-deradicalize-terror-offenders/>

**Have the Taliban Changed? CTC Sentinel**

<https://ctc.usma.edu/have-the-taliban-changed/>

**The State of Hate 2021, Hope Not Hate**

<https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/state-of-hate-2021-final-2.pdf>



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Pool Re SOLUTIONS Building resilience against terrorism risk



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](mailto:solutions@poolre.co.uk)

## Government advice

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