



Islamist Attack at NZ Supermarket

MI5 confirm 31 late-stage terror attacks prevented in the past 5 years

French student arrested for school project involving homemade uranium oxide pipe bombs

Bataclan Terror Attack Trial puts Paris Security Services on High Alert

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Monthly *Threat* Update

September 2021



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Threat Overview

There were no terrorist attacks in Great Britain this month. However, the Director General of MI5 warned that the recent withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan would likely exacerbate the terrorist threat to the United Kingdom in future. He also revealed that four late stage terror plots had been interdicted since early 2020.

New Zealand experienced its first Islamist extremist bladed weapons attack when an asylum seeker under police surveillance attacked shoppers at a supermarket in New Lynn, injuring six. The country has subsequently introduced new counter-terror legislation to make it easier to prosecute individuals suspected of engaging in attack planning.

In France, the trial of 20 people involved in the 2015 Paris attacks commenced against the backdrop of heightened security across the country. The trial of individuals involved in the 2015 Charlie Hedo attack last year precipitated a further Islamist attack. Despite additional security measures, an increase in attack planning in the country is a realistic possibility in the near term.

Islamist Attack at NZ Supermarket

On 03 September in New Lynn, New Zealand, a Sri Lankan national carried out a terrorist attack at a supermarket. Six people were wounded before the attacker was killed by police. The incident was designated a terrorist attack by the government. Police confirmed the attacker, named as 32-year-old Mohamed Samsudeen, was a supporter of Daesh. Samsudeen was under police surveillance at the time of the attack due to the potential risk he was assessed to present. On entering the supermarket, the suspect acquired a knife from the shop's stock and began stabbing members of the public. Undercover police officers following Samsudeen immediately responded and shot and

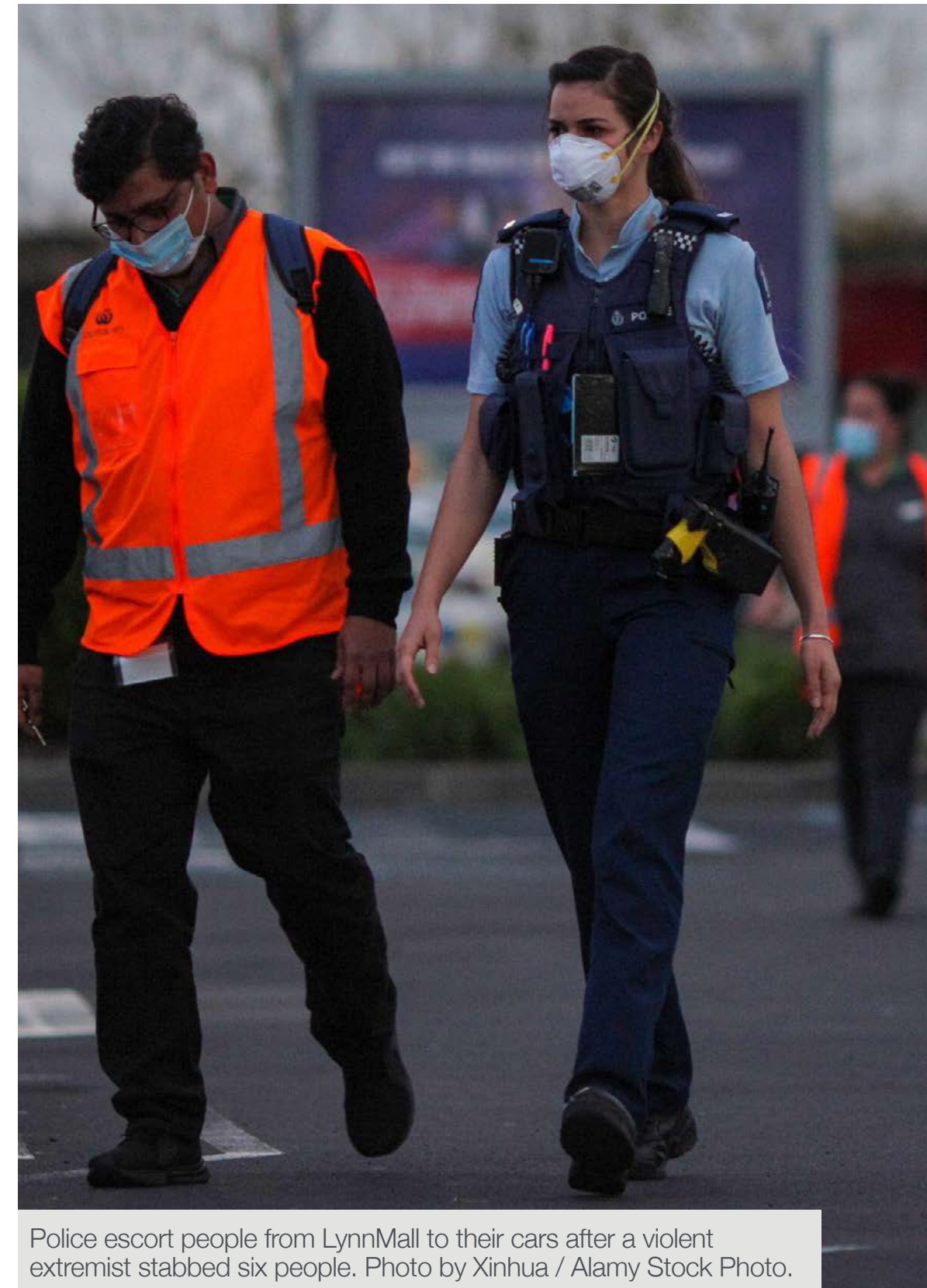
killed him within 60 seconds of the attack beginning.

Police and immigration officials had highlighted national security concerns around the suspect since 2016. He had been arrested several times, and there was at least one unsuccessful attempt to prosecute him on terrorism charges. Despite multiple attempts to deport him, Samsudeen was able to successfully claim refugee status.

The incident reflects institutional and legislative shortcomings in New Zealand's border control regime and anti-terrorism legislation. The UK has experienced similar issues with both the control and monitoring of individuals suspected of planning attacks, and the failure to

deport potentially dangerous foreign nationals. Some of these shortcomings have been remediated by the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019. New Zealand's Prime Minister announced that her government would seek to strengthen domestic counter-terrorism legislation, likely in a similar manner to the UK. New Zealand politicians passed a law on 30 September making plotting a terrorist attack a criminal offence, finally closing a legal loophole identified after the 2019 Christchurch attack.

However, in countries with robust civil liberties, legislative options to control the movements of suspected terrorists are limited. Where there is insufficient proof to



Police escort people from LynnMall to their cars after a violent extremist stabbed six people. Photo by Xinhua / Alamy Stock Photo.

successfully prosecute individuals suspected of planning attacks, it is extremely challenging to prevent those individuals from executing the kind of low complexity attack witnessed in New Lynn. As demonstrated with the Streattham stabbing attack in February 2020, even suspects under close surveillance by police cannot reliably be prevented from acquiring bladed weapons at short notice and using them against the public. While difficult to stop, such attacks are typically 'low impact', resulting in relatively few casualties, only minor disruption, and little or no damage to property.

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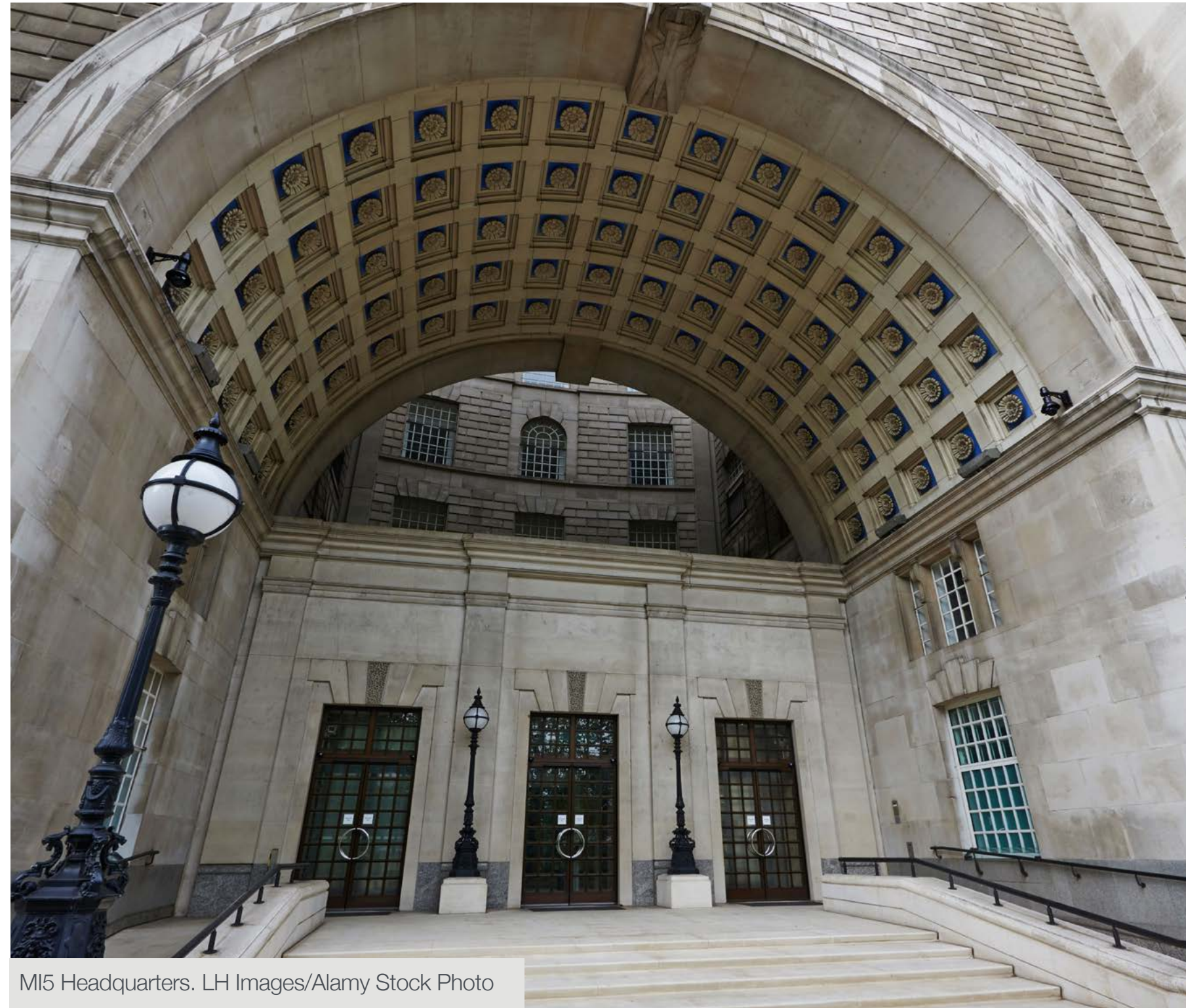
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MI5 confirm 31 late-stage terror attacks prevented in the past 5 years

Speaking to the BBC in early September, Ken McCallum, Director General of MI5, said that 31 'late-stage' terrorist plots had been foiled in the UK since 2017, an increase of four since figures were last made public in October 2020. McCallum's statement is a reminder that the threat to the UK from terrorism remains acute. Nonetheless, the statistics suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic had a suppressive effect on the rate of domestic attack planning, with the frequency of attack plans slowing over the past 18 months.

This is largely expected given the unprecedented restrictions on the public imposed in response to the pandemic. This is likely to have influenced the decision to reduce the national threat level in March from 'SEVERE' to 'SUBSTANTIAL.'

However, with the worst of the pandemic seemingly over, it is likely that the rate of attack planning will return to or exceed pre-pandemic levels in future. McCallum also told the BBC that NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan



MI5 Headquarters. LH Images/Alamy Stock Photo

had 'emboldened' UK-based Islamist extremists which continue to account for the majority of MI5's counterterrorism casework. Furthermore, the threat from overseas extremists may also increase due to the curtailment of counterterrorism activities in Central Asia. Other domestic factors, including ongoing economic and political fallout from the pandemic and Brexit, may also contribute to increased radicalisation, exacerbating the UK's domestic threat landscape over the medium term.

French student arrested for school project involving homemade uranium oxide pipe bombs

In early September, French police arrested a 26-year-old student on suspicion of explosives offenses in the Haut-Rhin region. The unnamed student, who reportedly suffers from mental health issues, had manufactured pipe bombs as part of a higher education project. Police were alerted after the suspect bragged about the devices to fellow students. Police recovered several viable improvised explosive devices (IEDs) from the suspect's home, along with material suggesting a strong interest in right-wing

extremism. The plot attracted considerable attention due to the use of uranium dioxide in constructing the IEDs.

While uranium is a radioactive element, it is unlikely that the IEDs constituted an effective radiological dispersion device (RDD) or 'dirty bomb'. Uranium dioxide, while harmful if ingested, is generally not particularly hazardous, being no more radioactive than uranium ore. Media reporting highlighted that the suspect was able to acquire the uranium dioxide from an

online retailer. However, while the substance is subject to some controls in Europe, it is commercially available for use in a range of legitimate activities. It is unclear what explosive materials were used in the construction of the IEDs.

The suspect's intentions remain unclear, although he reportedly denied intending to use the devices in terrorist attacks. Currently, he has been charged with explosives offences rather than terrorist offences, perhaps indicating a lack of strong evidence of attack planning. The individual's actions also reflect poor operational tradecraft, despite some apparent technical skill. Nonetheless, the difficulty of manufacturing an effective RDD should not be understated. A more potent radioactive material than the commercially available uranium oxide is required,



A staged terrorist attack at the Majestic Hotel in Harrogate which was transformed into a decontamination unit in the aftermath of a dirty bomb being detonated. PA Images / Alamy Stock Photo

and explosives also need to be procured. A device must then be successfully constructed to disperse the radioactive material, and not just incinerate the material upon detonation of the explosives. These challenges mean that attacks involving RDDs are unlikely to occur in developed countries, despite their destructive potential and the significant psychological impact that even a partially detonated device would have on the public and consumer confidence. Nonetheless, other kinds of complex CBRN attack remain a realistic possibility.

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Bataclan terror attack trial puts Paris security services on high alert

On 08 September 2021, the trial of those involved in the November 2015 terrorist attack which killed 130 people across multiple locations in Paris, including the Bataclan Concert Hall. The trial began, expected to last nine months and with a verdict anticipated in May 2022, will try 20 suspects involved in the attacks, including the only surviving attacker, Salah Abdeslam.

While the trial is a significant milestone for the victims and families involved in the 2015 attacks, there are also security concerns associated with the beginning of the trial. French

police are on high alert and security has been tightened across Paris, with the French Interior Minister issuing an alert that threat levels would be elevated due to the trial. The last high profile terrorism trial in France was the 2020 trial of those involved in the 2015 attack at the Charlie Hebdo offices, during which a bladed weapons attack occurred outside the magazine's former offices. Over 1,000 additional police officers have been deployed to maintain security during the trial. However, the terrorist threat to France remains high and there is a realistic possibility of further attacks in the country.



Defendant Mohamed Amri lawyer Xavier Nogueras speaks to the press in front of the temporary courtroom set up for the trial of the November 2015 Paris attacks defendants at the Palais de Justice of Paris. Photo Abaca Press / Alamy Stock Photo

The 2015 Paris attacks saw Daesh operatives armed with assault weapons and person-borne IEDs attack a range of crowded places across the city, including bars, stadia and concert halls. It was the deadliest terrorist attack in Europe since the Madrid train bombings in 2004. Similar attacks in the UK are highly unlikely due to the UK's strict gun laws. Furthermore, Daesh's ability to plan and execute attacks in Europe has been severely curtailed by international action against the group in its Levantine heartland.

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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

Threat level

	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:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Threat from Northern Ireland related terrorism to Northern Ireland:	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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