



Bladed weapons attack outside former Charlie Hebdo offices

Eiffel Tower closed due to bomb threat

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Wales chemical weapons trial
Interesting reads

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Monthly Threat Update

September 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

There were no terrorist attacks in the UK this month. However, a man armed with a bladed weapon injured two people near the former offices of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris. The attack was reportedly launched in response to the magazine's decision to reprint a controversial cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed, first published in 2015. Separately, a Welshman is currently on trial for charges linked to the possession of chemicals and explosives. In addition, police in the US arrested a French-Canadian woman for allegedly sending a letter containing ricin to President Donald Trump.

Further afield, a cyber-attack against a hospital in Germany resulted in the death of a woman. German prosecutors have opened a negligent homicide investigation against the unidentified individual or group involved. In a separate event, the Baghdad offices of British security company G4S were allegedly targeted by a weaponised drone, directed by an unconfirmed group. This event showcases the growing intent and capability of violent groups to weaponise and utilise novel technologies in their attacks.



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Bladed weapons attack outside former Charlie Hebdo offices in Paris

On 25th September, an 18-year-old Pakistani refugee armed with a bladed weapon seriously wounded two people near Boulevard Richard-Lenoir in the 11th arrondissement of Paris. The attack occurred near the former offices of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, which was targeted by terrorists affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in January 2015. The French interior minister described the event as Islamist-inspired terrorism.

The attack occurred during the ongoing trial of individuals accused of abetting the 2015 attack against Charlie Hebdo. At the beginning of the trial, the magazine reprinted controversial cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed that caused widespread offence and were cited as the primary reason for the targeting of the magazine's office in 2015. The reprinting of the cartoons was reportedly a motivating factor for the recent attack.

Generally, individuals or institutions which engage in high-profile behaviour likely to antagonise Islamists risk becoming targets for attacks by extremists. Earlier examples include the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, and the 2015 shooting at the Krudttonden culture centre in Copenhagen.



September 25, 2020, shortly before noon, a man armed with a knife or a machete attacked people in the rue Nicolas Appart in the 11th arrondissement of Paris, where the former premises of the newspaper Charlie Hebdo are located.(Photo by Samuel Boivin/NurPhoto via Getty Images)

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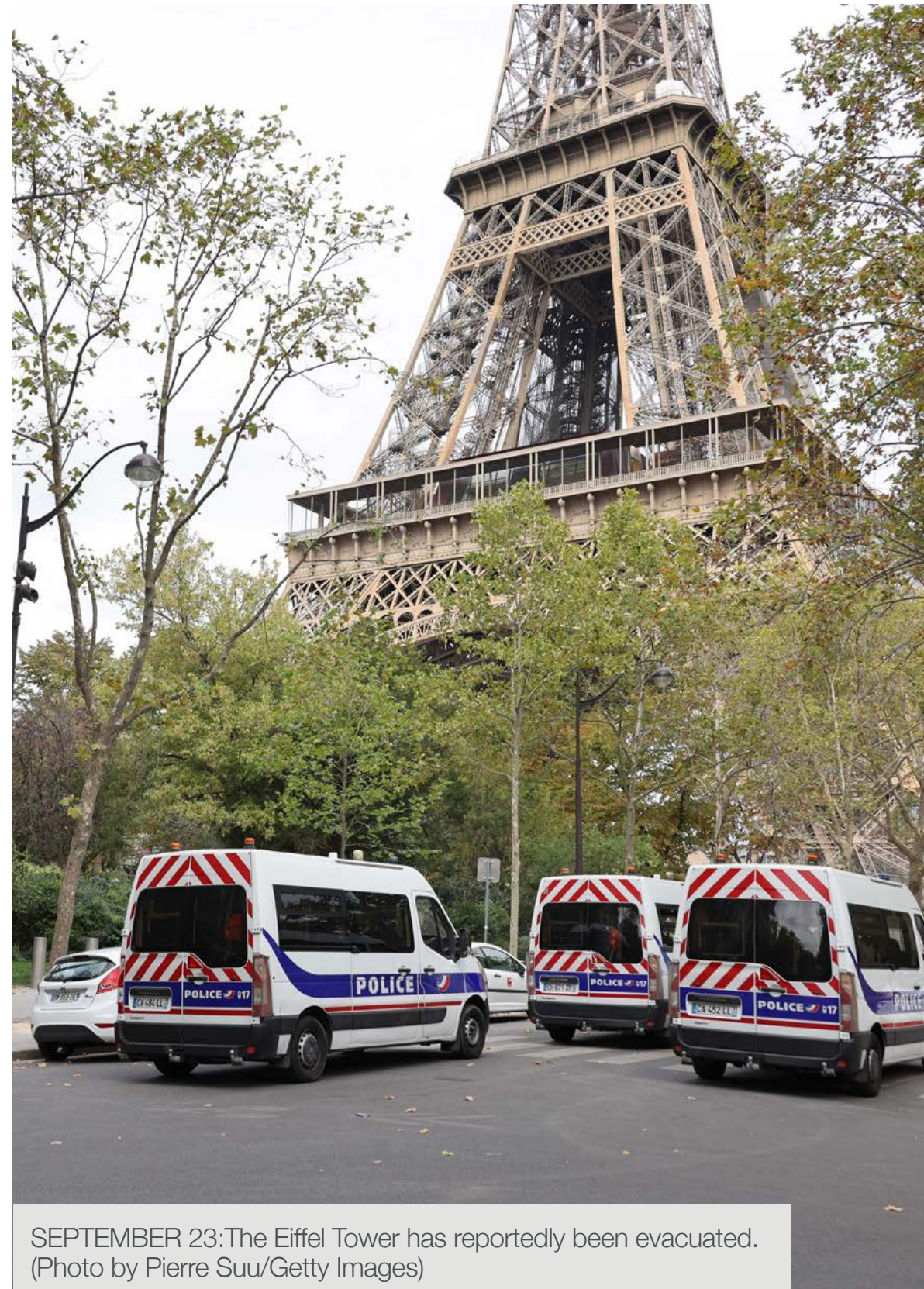
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Eiffel Tower closed due to bomb threat

On 23 September, Parisian police received an anonymous phone call which indicated that a bomb had been planted in the Eiffel Tower. The landmark was evacuated and surrounding streets, including the nearby Pont D'Lena bridge, were cordoned off. A thorough search of the Tower did not reveal a threat and it was reopened to the public approximately two hours after it was closed. While the bomb threat appears to have been a hoax, the identity of those responsible for it, or their intent, remains unclear.

The incident highlights the potential for bomb hoaxes to cause significant

public disruption and business interruption, while consuming limited counter-terrorism resources. Consequently, the penalties for making false bomb threats are severe in most jurisdictions. However, while the police respond to credible threats in the same way regardless of whether it transpires that a viable explosive device is present, losses arising from bomb hoaxes would not be covered by the Pool Re scheme.



SEPTEMBER 23: The Eiffel Tower has reportedly been evacuated. (Photo by Pierre Suu/Getty Images)

G4S Office in Baghdad allegedly targeted by militia

On 3 September, the Baghdad offices of British security company, G4S, were struck by either a drone or missile. No group or individual has claimed responsibility for the attack, and details remain unclear as local security forces removed all debris from the site. However, it seems that a drone was the most likely methodology used, given rockets lack the level of precision required to hit the office in a targeted attack.

The attack may be a response to the killing

of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in January 2020. Iranian-backed groups in Iraq accused G4S of being involved in the attack, due to the company's contracts with Baghdad International Airport where Soleimani was killed. While drones have been used by Iranian proxies to attack hardened infrastructure before, the attack points to the increasing proliferation of the novel methodology.

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Canadian woman charged with sending biotoxin to White House

On 18 September, the mail sorting centre at the White House identified a letter addressed to President Trump which contained the biotoxin ricin. The following day, the US authorities apprehended Canadian woman Pascale Ferrier at the US-Canada border in connection with the letter. Ferrier later admitted to sending the letter with the intent of harming President Trump.

While security screening of letters addressed to

senior US officials means it is highly unlikely that the biotoxin would have reached the President, the incident underscores the ability of even unsophisticated actors to manufacture the lethal biotoxin. While Ricin is highly poisonous, it is not normally absorbed through skin and only presents a serious threat to life when inhaled, ingested, or injected. Therefore, effectively weaponizing the toxin is more challenging than producing it.



The Uniklinik university hospital stands in Dusseldorf, Germany.
(Photo by Lukas Schulze/Getty Images)

Cyber-attack in Germany leads to woman's death

On 11 September, a woman died after being denied access to a hospital in Dusseldorf as the hospital's computer systems had been disconnected from the ambulance network due to a ransomware cyber-attack. In response, local prosecutors have opened a negligent homicide investigation into an unidentified individual or group. If this investigation leads to a prosecution, it would be the first legal recognition that a cyber-attack caused a death.

While the attack was likely financially motivated,

and not terroristic in nature, terrorist groups have long expressed interest in using cyber-attacks as an alternative to conventional methodologies. Al Qaeda has expressly considered attacks against emergency response systems as part of a strategy of 'e-Jihad'. Incidents like the one in Dusseldorf will likely reinforce the belief amongst terrorists that cyber-attacks represent a viable means of causing fear, disruption and threat to life.

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Russell Wadge said he had an interest in explosives from a young age (Photo CPS)

Wales chemical weapons trial

Russell Wadge of Trimsaran, Carmarthenshire, Wales, is currently appearing in court, accused of possessing explosives and chemical weapons. Counter-terrorism police arrested Wadge in June 2019, finding literature relating to white-supremacism on his computer. Wadge was in possession of hydrogen cyanide, an extremely poisonous chemical compound that is used as a precursor chemical in many industries. Wadge claims to be a chemistry enthusiast and had not planned to mount a terrorist attack.

While Wadge's intention or the extent to which he had constructed a viable device remains unclear, the incident highlights the threat of UK-based extremists being able to acquire or produce very volatile and dangerous chemicals with relative ease. Wadge has been charged with possession of banned substances rather than with terror offenses. This probably reflects a prosecutorial decision by the Crown Prosecution Services, made to secure an easier conviction.

To find out more about terrorist use of CBRN, listen to Pool Re's latest webinar on the subject here.

Interesting reads:

Hitler Youth: The rise of teenage far right terrorists
<https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2020/09/13/hitler-youths-the-rise-of-teenage-far-right-terrorists/>

Bahrain says foiled 'terrorist attack' backed by Iran in early 2020

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bahrain-security/bahrain-says-it-foils-terrorist-attack-backed-by-iran-media-idUSKCN26B0PH?il=0>

Far right targets Kent migrant camp

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/far-right-targets-migrant-camp-ww56z57zl>

Man arrested on suspicion of terror offence after landing at Luton Airport

<https://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2020-09-16/man-arrested-on-suspicion-of-terror-offence-after-landing-at-luton-airport>

Teenage neo-Nazi said he was 'getting armed and in shape' for terror attack, court hears

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/teenager-neo-nazi-group-terror-attack-birmingham-crown-court-fkd-a9701591.html>

Grammar pupil had bomb guides and fascist links

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/grammar-pupil-had-bomb-guides-and-fascist-links-scfhwd8jg>

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Building resilience against terrorism risk



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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