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Monthly *Threat* Update

October 2021



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Threat Overview

There was one terrorist attack in Great Britain this month: a bladed weapon attack on Sir David Amess MP in Leigh-on-Sea. The previously unpublicised terrorist threat level for MPs was raised to SUBSTANTIAL and a review of MP security has been ordered. The incident also raised concerns about the effectiveness of Prevent, the Government's counter-radicalisation programme.

Elsewhere in the country, a teenage neo-Nazi was sentenced for terror offences, including attempting to procure 3-D printed firearms. The case underscores the enduring threat from right-wing extremists, and the ongoing intent of terrorists in the UK to acquire more sophisticated weapons.

In Norway, an attack by an assailant using a bow and a bladed weapon killed five. It remains unclear if the attack was motivated by Islamist extremism. Regardless, the incident highlighted the potential lethality of attacks using legally available weapons.

Further afield, in Afghanistan, Daesh's local affiliate (ISKP) claimed responsibility for two bomb attacks, collectively killing nearly 100 people and injuring many more. Deteriorating security in the country does not pose an immediate threat to the UK, but long-term insecurity in the region could have significant domestic security implications for Western countries.

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On 15 October Sir David Amess, a British Member of Parliament (MP), was killed in a premeditated attack during a constituency surgery at Belfairs Methodist Church, Leigh-on-Sea. Ali Harbi Ali, a 25-year-old Briton of Somali heritage, stabbed Amess multiple times but did not attempt to attack anyone else present or leave the scene. He was arrested on suspicion of murder and has been charged with murder and the preparation of terrorism acts. In the aftermath of the attack, the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre raised the previously unpublicised dedicated threat level for MPs to SUBSTANTIAL, bringing it in line with the national threat level.

Court transcripts indicate that Ali had chosen to target an MP up to two

years before the attack and had conducted hostile reconnaissance against at least two other MPs. It appears Amess was ultimately chosen as a target by Ali due to the latter successfully booking an appointment to see the MP at his constituency surgery.

Ali was apparently not known to MI5 as a 'subject of interest' (subject of a current or historic counter-terrorism investigation). However, he was reportedly referred to 'Prevent', the government's counter-radicalisation program, as a teenager. While the Prevent referral suggests a historic interest by Ali in Islamist extremism, there was likely insufficient evidence that he posed a credible threat to warrant further investigation by the police and MI5.

In response to the attack, the Home Secretary ordered police to review the security of MPs under 'Operation Bridger', established in 2016 to improve MPs security after the murder of Jo Cox MP that year. Amess' murder demonstrates the vulnerability of MPs during constituency surgeries. Several measures to improve the security of parliamentarians have been discussed. However, MPs must balance the imperative for personal security with the need to be accessible to their constituents.



Murder suspect of Conservative MP Sir David Amess, Ali Harbi Ali, leaves Westminster Magistrates court in a van. Image ZUMA Press, Inc./Alamy Stock Photo

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Amess murder leads to fresh scrutiny of Prevent programme as MI5 warn of 'bedroom radicals'

Following the recent murder of Sir David Amess MP, MI5, and Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) have raised concerns around the rise of 'bedroom radicals' following 'lockdowns' imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, long periods of social isolation are believed to have made some individuals more vulnerable to radicalisation, which could lead to a long-term rise in attack planning.

Prevent is one of four elements of the UK's counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST) and aims to

stop the radicalisation of vulnerable individuals before they are drawn into criminal terrorist activity. The programme is likely to form a central element of the government's attempts to address the issue of 'bedroom radicals', individuals who self-radicalise having been indoctrinated due to radical online content.

The scheme has faced long-standing criticism for a range of reasons. However, in the context of Amess' murder, media attention has focused on the number of recent



Police tents in Woverhampton Road, Stafford, where forensic officers searched the property linked to London Bridge terrorist attacker Usman Khan
Photo PA Images/Alamy Stock Photo

Islamist attackers who were referred to Prevent but went on to carry out attacks. This includes:

- **Sudesh Amman**
– Streatham High Street attack (Feb 2020)
- **Khairi Saadallah**
– Forbury Gardens attack, Reading (June 2020)
- **Salman Abedi**
– Manchester Arena bombing (April 2017)
- **Usman Khan**
– Fishmongers Hall attack, London Bridge (Nov 2019)

The Home Office published statistics in November 2020 highlighting the number of Prevent referrals in the year previous. This number, 6287, was an increase from the 5738 referrals received in the year previous. Individuals can be referred to the scheme by anyone, including family, schools, healthcare workers, etc, but

participation in the scheme is voluntary. Should any individual referred to the programme be identified as a possible terror suspect, Prevent is not intended to control or monitor terror suspects. This is the responsibility of Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) and MI5. However, most of those referred do not go on to commit terrorist attacks or come to the attention of the security services. It is presently unclear if the programme will be revised in the wake of the attack, but given resource limitations, there is no guarantee that greater police involvement in Prevent would resolve existing issues.

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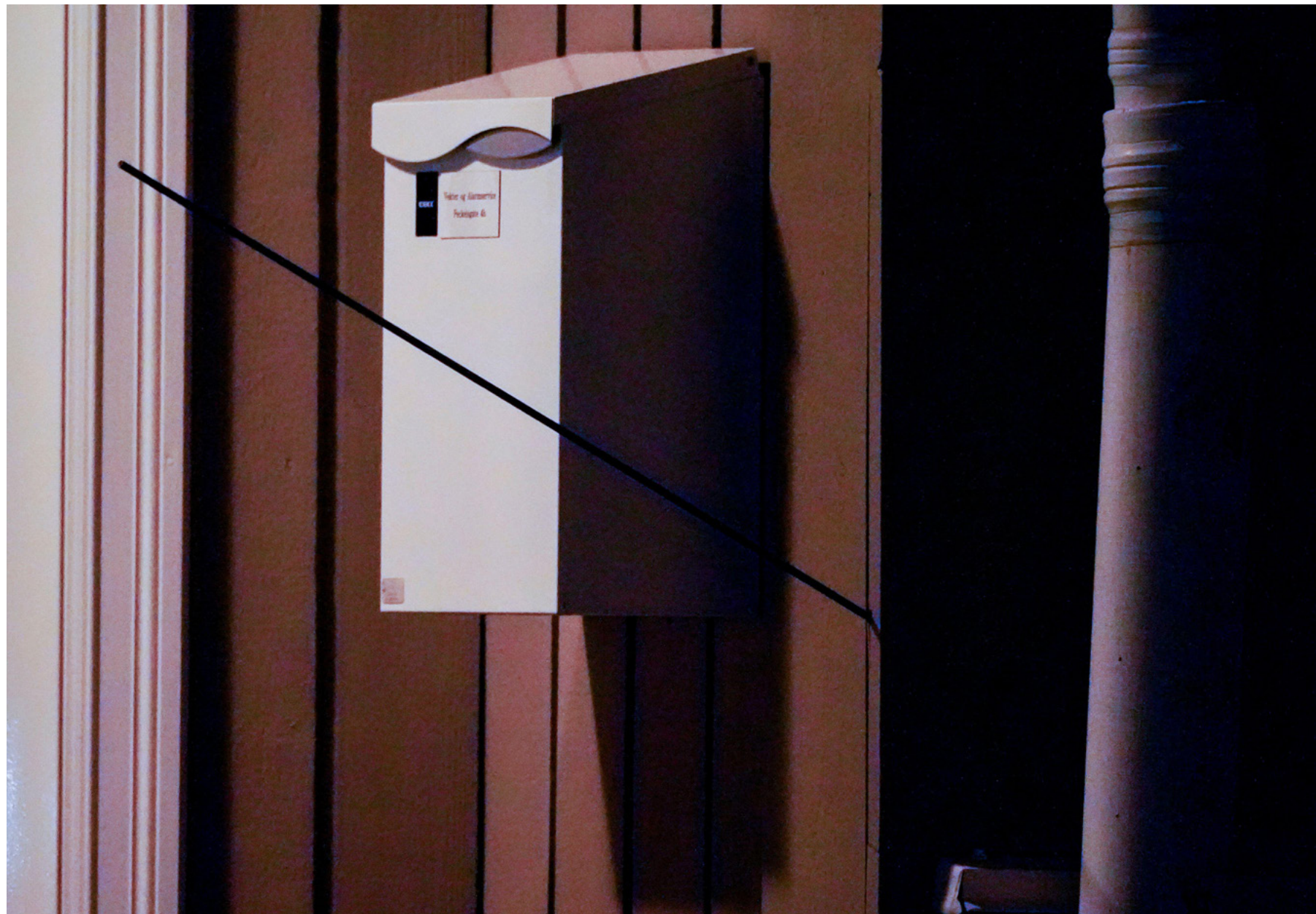
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Norway bow and arrow attack highlights the growing use of unconventional terrorist methodologies

On 13 October, Norwegian police responded to reports of an assailant armed with a bow and arrows attacking members of the public in the town of Kongsberg. The attacker was confronted by police but managed to evade capture after firing arrows at the responding officers. He proceeded to stab and kill five people and is believed to have attempted to kill or wound as many as 24 others with the bow and arrow. Shortly thereafter, the suspect was arrested by armed police. The attack was initially believed to be terrorist in nature, likely motivated by Islamist extremism. Investigations are ongoing, but it appears the suspect suffers from acute mental health issues. The attack is



An arrow left in a wall in Kongsberg city center. Photo NTB Scanpix / Alamy Stock Photo

the deadliest mass killing in the country since the 2011 Utoya and Oslo attacks by a right-wing terrorist.

The employment of a bow by marauding attackers is highly unusual. Right-wing extremists across Europe have been found in possession of tensile energy weapons (crossbows, hunting catapults etc.) but they are not believed to have previously been used in an attack. Available reporting indicates the attacker failed to kill anyone with his bow, reflecting the difficulty of using them effectively. In contrast, the five fatalities were all caused by stab wounds from a bladed weapon, a favoured methodology of European terrorists in recent years. It

remains to be seen whether tensile energy weapons will feature in the attack plans of UK-based extremists in the wake of the Kongsberg attack.

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Daesh's Afghan affiliate claims responsibility for deadly bombings

Two large bombs were detonated at mosques in Kunduz and Kandahar on 08 and 15 October respectively, killing nearly 100 people collectively and injuring many more. Daesh's highly active Afghan affiliate, 'Islamic State Khorosan Province' (ISKP), claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Attacks by ISKP in the country are not new but the bombings reflect the Taliban's difficulty in securing the country since it replaced the Western-backed government in August this year. ISKP does not represent a direct threat to the UK at present, currently lacking the capabilities to

pose a significant threat. Nonetheless, if the security situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate, there will likely be long-term ramifications for the West. The prospect of civil war in the country could lead to new flows of Westerners travelling to Afghanistan to wage 'jihad', potentially returning home with battlefield experience and terrorist tradecraft. Refugees flowing out of the country due to violence also pose a long-term security issue for Europe, as uncontrolled migration generates support for right-wing extremism, while such population flows can be used as cover for Islamist terrorists seeking

to evade border security measures. Furthermore, the Taliban governments current inability to control Afghan territory increases the risk of various terrorist groups using the country as a 'safe haven' from which to plan attacks against the West.



Oct. 8, 2021: the site of an explosion at a mosque in Kunduz city, northern Afghanistan. At least 18 worshipers were killed and over 50 others wounded in a bomb attack. Photo: Xinhua / Alamy Stock Photo

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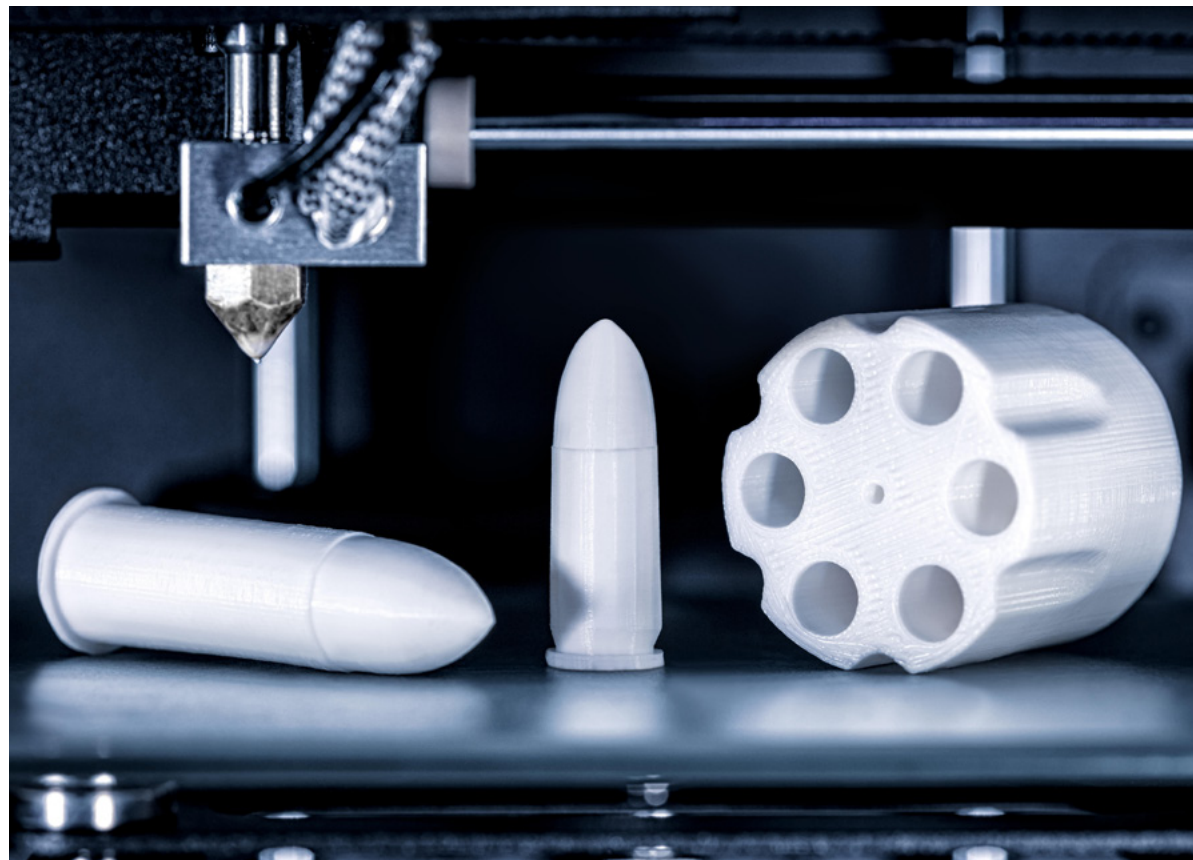
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On 19 October, 18-year-old Matthew Cronjager was jailed for 11 years and four months after being found guilty of preparing acts of terrorism and disseminating terrorist publications.

Notably, Cronjager is alleged to have attempted to acquire a firearm for use in an attack. He reportedly investigated acquiring 3D printed weapons. There has been considerable media attention around 3D printed weapons, and the potential the technology offers for bypassing traditional gun control legislation. While the risk should not be discounted, in practice, there are numerous limitations to 3-D weapons, including the challenge of firing multiple rounds.



Cartridges and revolver drum are printed in a 3D printer. Photo Miriam Dörr / Alamy Stock Photo

Firstly, weapons made entirely from plastics tend to be fragile, and generally require metal barrels and moving parts (which can't be printed). Furthermore, ammunition for these weapons cannot be printed

and needs to be acquired separately. In the UK, unlicensed individuals will have the same difficulty sourcing ammunition as they would firearms themselves. For these reasons, despite the increasing availability of



Models of bullets printed in a U2 3D printer. Photo Eddie Gerald / Alamy Stock Photo

3-D firearm designs online, the weapons are unlikely in the short to medium term to become a regular feature of attack planning in the UK.

However, recent incidents have highlighted extremists

are still attempting to acquire or build 3-D printed weapons. Earlier this year, Dean Morrice was discovered with a 3-D printer and evidence he was attempting to construct a weapon. Despite 3-D

printing technology being difficult to use, it is still developing and there is the potential for extremists to exploit this emerging technology to create novel weapons that are potentially harder to detect. Therefore, the regular use of 3-D printed weapons by terrorists in the UK, whilst unlikely at the moment, could become a more realistic possibility in the future.

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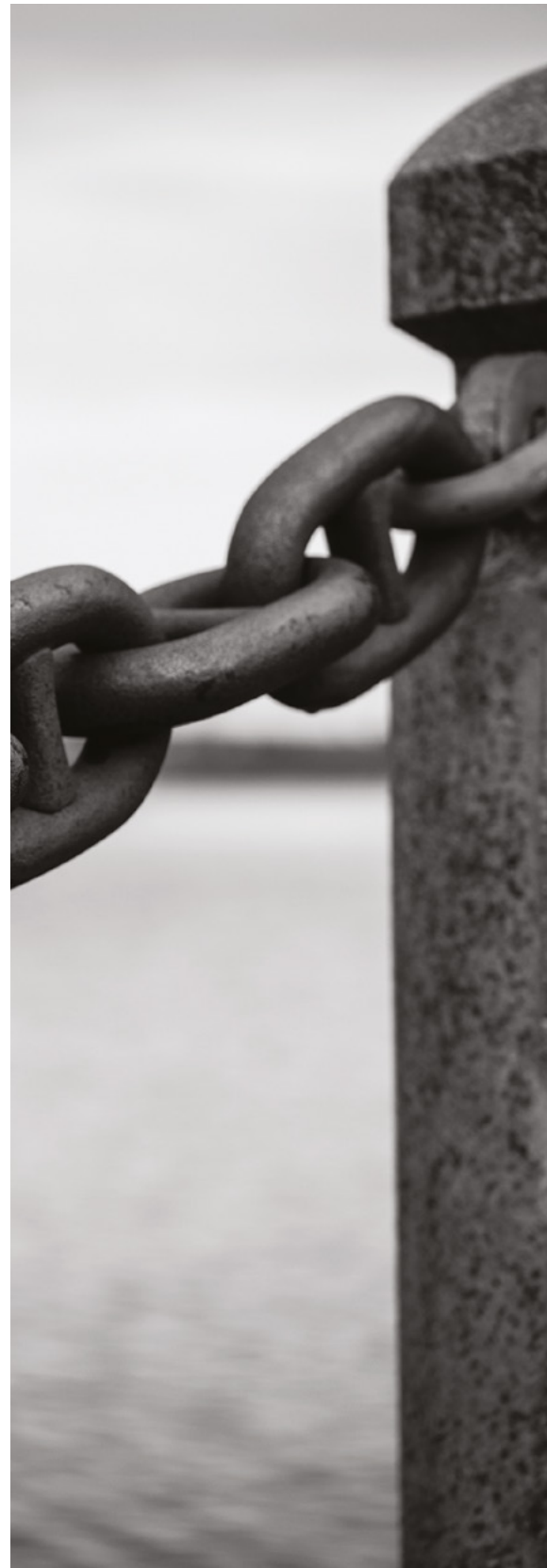
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Understanding risk, enabling resilience

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:	●	●	●	●	●
Threat from Northern Ireland related terrorism to Northern Ireland:	●	●	●	●	●

Government advice

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