



Implications of withdrawal of Western troops from Afghanistan

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Monthly *Threat* Update

July 2021



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Threat Overview

There were no significant terrorist attacks or plots in the UK, Western Europe or North America in July 2021. However, the US and allied NATO forces began their withdrawal from Afghanistan, which is highly likely to lead to a resurgence in Al-Qaeda (AQ) operations in the country. This is likely to pose an increased threat to Western countries in future.

The Home Office also proscribed far-right extremist group 'the Base'. The Base was the third far-right group proscribed by the British Government in the last 12 months and is the fifth right-wing extremist group added to the list of proscribed organisations. This does not indicate an increased threat from the Base. To date, there have been no arrests or plots by Base members in the UK.

Director General of MI5, Ken McCallum, also highlighted the growing threat from hostile state actors, which he described as becoming as serious as the terrorist threat. McCallum highlighted that British universities and research centres are particularly vulnerable to theft of intellectual property or sabotage.

Finally, assailants attacked vaccine centres in France. A centre near Grenoble was flooded and vandalised and another near Biarritz was damaged in an arson attack. Due to the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories surrounding the coronavirus pandemic, vaccine centres and other healthcare facilities may be targeted in further attacks, although such attacks are may not be treated as terrorist in nature.

Implications of withdrawal of Western troops from Afghanistan

On 02 July 2021, American forces withdrew from Bagram Airfield, the largest American military base in Afghanistan. US President Joe Biden said several days later that the American involvement in the war in Afghanistan will officially conclude on 31 August 2021, following nearly 20 years of military engagement. The withdrawal of American troops may further destabilise Afghanistan and create new terrorist threats to Western countries, including the UK.

The decision for American troops to withdraw from Afghanistan has received bipartisan criticism in the US as the decision could destabilise Afghanistan, the wider region and



Bagram Airfield base after all U.S. and NATO forces evacuated in Parwan province, eastern Afghanistan on Thursday on July 8, 2021. Photo by Ezatullah Alidost/ Credit: UPI/Alamy Live News

present a national security threat to the US and wider western world. Former US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton said in May 2020 that the withdrawal of troops has the potential to cause the collapse of the Afghan government and a precipitate a takeover by the Taliban.

The withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan was negotiated in February 2020 in a peace deal between the US and the Taliban. The key tenet of this agreement was the Taliban assuring the US that it will prevent Al-Qaeda (AQ) from operating in its controlled areas, which is currently around a quarter of the country. The Taliban are likely to overthrow the current government in the short to medium term, with

Implications of withdrawal of Western troops from Afghanistan (continued):

Kandahar City likely to fall in the coming weeks and potentially Kabul shortly after.

A key concern amongst analysts and policymakers is that, should the Taliban take control of the county, it will tacitly allow AQ to operate freely within its borders. US General Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff recently commented that the Taliban had 'strategic momentum' in Afghanistan. The group may then begin to plan and prepare attacks against the US, UK or other Western nations largely unchecked. It has largely been suppressed in Afghanistan through intensive counter-terrorism operations by the US military and Coalition forces. AQ has shown intent to continue conflicts with the



Airmen, Soldiers, and personnel prepare to load Apache Helicopters into a C-5 at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. Photo Nelly George / Alamy Stock Photo

US, promising a 'war on all fronts' unless the US removes troops from the rest of the Islamic world. The Taliban itself is unlikely to seek to plot terrorist attacks in western countries.

The threat emanating from Afghanistan towards the west will be exacerbated by both the absence of coalition forces as well as the severely depleted Afghan security forces, who are likely to be defeated by the Taliban. As such, local security forces are unlikely to have the capability to effectively counter any future AQ operations in Afghanistan. The withdrawal will also make it difficult for the US to monitor whether the Taliban is honouring its commitments outlined in the peace deal.

The threat from Daesh Khorasan Province (ISKP) is, however, unlikely to change. ISKP and the Taliban have had an adversarial relationship, and ISKP is most active in areas currently not under Taliban control such as Nangarhar and Kunar provinces. As such, it is unlikely that ISKP will be able to increase its capabilities and direct or encourage attacks in western countries, including the UK. This could, however, lead to a civil war within the country which will fuel extremist activity.

Overall, the withdrawal of US and allied troops from Afghanistan will worsen the UK's national security and increase the threat of international terrorism towards the UK. This will emanate primarily from AQ,

given the group's history with the Taliban. Moreover, reintervention in Afghanistan by the US and NATO allies in the future remains a realistic possibility, particularly if the Taliban does not adhere to the terms of the peace deal.

Home Office proscribes far-right group 'the Base'

On 16 July 2021, the British Parliament approved a proscription order to ban US-based white supremacist terror group 'the Base' in the UK. The Base is the third far-right extremist group to be banned in the UK in the last 12 months, after Atomwaffen Division (AWD) was proscribed in April 2021 and Feuerkrieg Division (FKD) in July 2020. The Base was first formed in 2018 and shares similar ideologies to the previously proscribed AWD, also known as National Socialist Order (NSO).

The Base aims to gather support outside the US, in an attempt to establish white ethno-states and initiate a race war. Identified as one of many organisations to emerge from an international neo-Nazi network, including

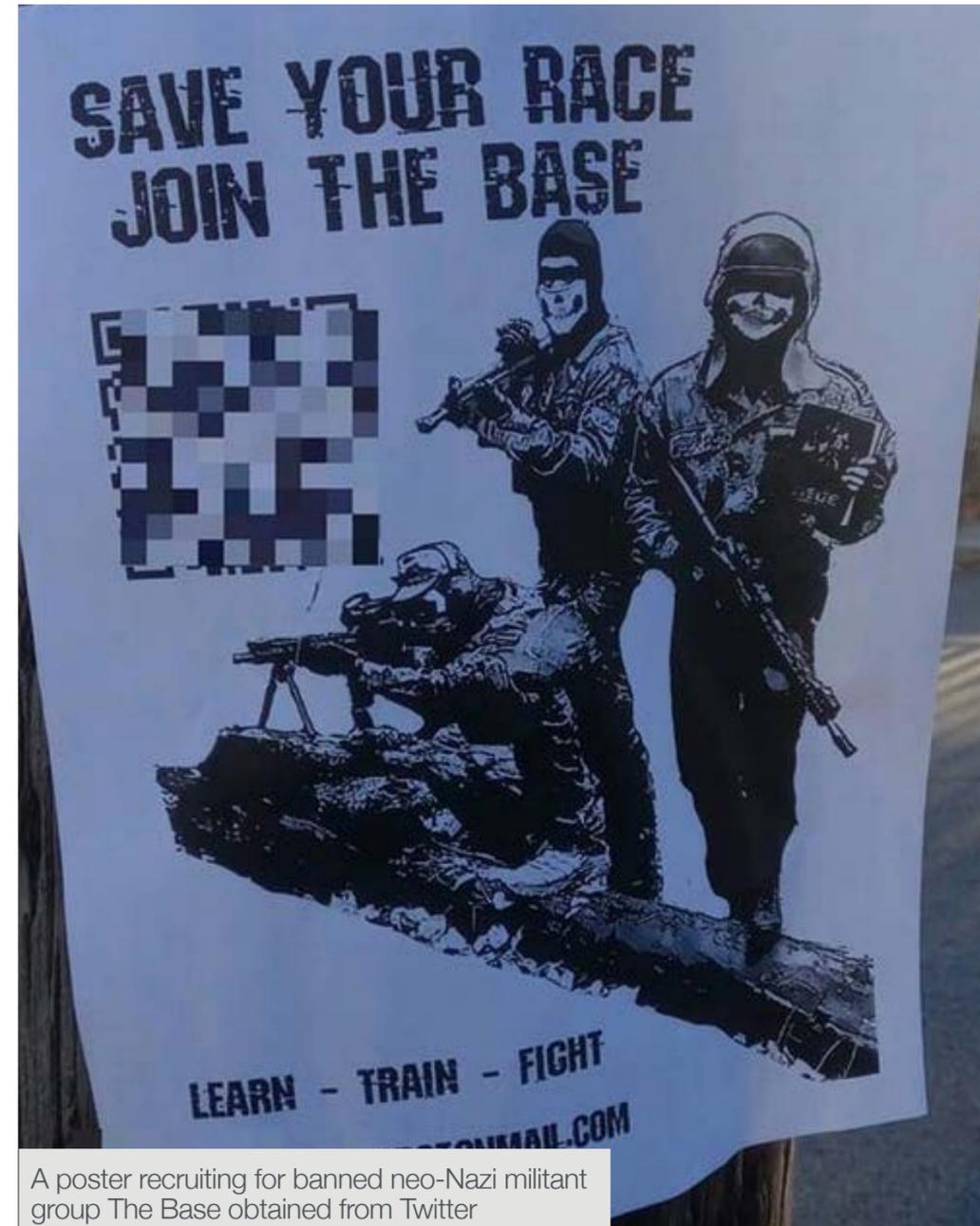
National Action and Sonnenkrieg Division. Members of the group face prosecution in the US on charges of conspiracy to murder for their alleged plot to murder an anti-fascist couple. The Base also promotes violence to achieve its ideologies and members are understood to engage in weapons training when recruited, however there has not yet been an attack attributed to the group in the UK.

Under the Terrorism Act 2000, a group may be proscribed if police and security services believe them to be concerned with terrorism, meaning the group commits or prepares for acts of terror, or promotes and encourages the use of terrorism. The formal proscription of the Base now means those found guilty of charges

relating to involvement with the group will now face up to 14 years in prison, after the maximum sentence was increased under the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Act 2021.

Whilst the threat from far-right terrorism was previously seen as less significant than threats from violent dissident republican groups and Islamist extremists, Neil Basu, Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner for Special Operations, warned that threats from the far-right are rapidly growing.

A statement from Home Secretary Priti Patel highlights the UK's commitment to making it as difficult as possible for these groups to operate domestically, and the action of proscribing such groups also sends a message to



A poster recruiting for banned neo-Nazi militant group The Base obtained from Twitter

other organisations that right-wing ideologies and actions will not be tolerated by the UK. However, far-right extremist groups will likely still continue to operate clandestinely within the UK, regardless of the proscription of other similar organisations.

Vaccine centres in France attacked

On the night of 19 July 2021, a vaccination centre near Grenoble were vandalised and flooded using a fire hose. The next day, another centre near Biarritz was partially destroyed in an arson attack. Both incidents came during a weekend of protests against new coronavirus-related measures, including mandatory vaccinations for health workers and health passes to access most public places.

Such attacks have possibly been exacerbated by politicians such as Martine Wonner calling for anti-vaccine protesters to 'lay siege' to the offices of politicians who backed the government's coronavirus policies. Whilst arguably not terrorist in nature, further such attacks against vaccine centres are a realistic possibility. Conspiracy



Anti vaccines rally called by Nicolas Dupont-Aignan and Florian Philippot, at the streets of the French capital to protest against a new Covid-19 vaccine pass announced by President Macron, claiming the new measures are against civil liberties on July 17, 2021 in Paris, France. Photo Abaca Press / Alamy Stock Photo.

theories surrounding coronavirus have contributed to violence in other countries as well, including arson attacks against telecommunications towers in the UK in March and April 2020.

Moreover, FBI agents in Kansas City, Missouri, disrupted a bomb plot against a hospital in the area. The would-be attacker, Timothy Wilson, a far-right ideologue, died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound as FBI agents attempted to arrest him. Attacks against medical facilities have been a key concern for police and intelligence services during the coronavirus pandemic. Counter-terrorism police in the UK advised medical facilities to increase protective security measures at vaccine centres in the UK in December 2020.

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Director General of MI5 warns of hostile state threats

On 14 July, Director General of MI5, Kevin McCallum, warned that threats from hostile states could have as large a public impact as terrorist attacks, potentially marking a shift in operational focus for the domestic intelligence organisation.

McCallum warned that the threat stems mainly from states such as China and Russia. In particular, he warned that universities and researchers are at risk of having their discoveries stolen or copied, which he argued is happening at scale.

In 2008/2009, MI5 allocated only 3% of its activity to targeting hostile state threats. By 2013/2014, this had increased to 14.5% (more recent numbers are not available due to national security concerns). Given the apparently receding threat of

Islamist extremist terrorism, there is concern that less resourcing will be directed toward counter-terrorism efforts. This may also be exacerbated by financial constraints precipitated by the coronavirus pandemic.



GCHQ Cheltenham, Gloucestershire UK - UK Government Communications Headquarters. Photo Stephen Dorey/Alamy Stock Photo

Interesting reads:

The Conspiracy to Kidnap Governor Gretchen Whitmer, CTC Sentinel
<https://ctc.usma.edu/the-conspiracy-to-kidnap-governor-gretchen-whitmer/>

In the Shadow of Christchurch: International Lessons from New Zealand's Extreme Far-Right, CTC Sentinel
<https://ctc.usma.edu/in-the-shadow-of-christchurch-international-lessons-from-new-zealands-extreme-far-right/>

Pride & Prejudice: The Violent Evolution of the Proud Boys, CTC Sentinel
<https://ctc.usma.edu/pride-prejudice-the-violent-evolution-of-the-proud-boys/>

The Globalization of Far-Right Extremism: An Investigative Report, CTC Sentinel
<https://ctc.usma.edu/the-globalization-of-far-right-extremism-an-investigative-report/>

Baghdad suicide bombing: dozens killed, scores injured in blast at packed Iraq market
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/20/baghdad-suicide-bombing-dozens-killed-scores-injured-in-blast-at-packed-iraq-market>

Ten Years On – The Enduring Legacy of the 2011 Oslo Attacks, Institute for Strategic Dialogue
https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/ten-years-on-the-enduring-legacy-of-the-2011-oslo-attacks/

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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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