

Eco-Terrorism:
assessing current
threats and trends

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Monthly Threat Update July 2022

Threat Overview

For our July monthly threat update, Professor Andrew Silke has assessed the current threat from eco-terrorism in Great Britain.

Pool Re Solutions analysts examine conviction and sentencing data for terrorism charges in Great Britain, comparing figures between May and June and identifying trends relating to the ideologies of those charged.

Finally, we provide a roundup of significant terrorism-related news across advanced market countries throughout July. This includes the use of a homemade firearm in an assassination in Japan, concerns from MI5 and the FBI regarding lone actor terrorism, and the arrest of a teenager regarding an Islamist plot to target the Isle of White festival.

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Eco-Terrorism: assessing current threats and trends

By Professor Andrew Silke

In January 2022, Nikolaos Karvounakis pleaded guilty to charges in connection with the planting of an explosive device in Edinburgh in 2018. Unusually in the context of Great Britain, the incident was not connected to Islamist or right-wing terrorism, but was instead tied to environmental extremism.

Karvounakis claimed to have carried out the attack on behalf of a Latin-American eco-terrorist group, Individuals Tending Toward Savagery. It is unclear though how strong the link between Karvounakis and this group actually was in reality (this is the first and only incident outside of Latin America connected to the organisation), but the incident did highlight that environmental extremism can be involved in terrorism.

The threat posed by environmentally-motivated



Japanese right wing protest against Sea Shepherd and Pete Bethune, and in favour of whaling. Tokyo, Japan, June 2010. Photo Jeremy Sutton-Hibbert / Alamy Stock Photo.

extremists is a long-running and eclectic one. A barrier to understanding that threat, however, is that much of the violence carried out by such extremists does not register on typical terrorism radars. For example, the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) records over 200,000 terrorist incidents since 1970 but only 292 of these attacks are connected to environmentally-motivated terrorists. Many years in the GTD report no eco-terrorist attacks, but this does not mean that there has been no violence. For example, in 1999 animal rights extremists are believed to have carried out over 1,200 fire bombings, acts of vandalism and physical assaults in the UK alone and caused at least £2.6 million worth of damage to property. The GTD however records no incidents at all carried out by environmentally-motivated extremists for the UK for that year.

Eco-Terrorism: assessing current threats and trends (continued)

Eco-terrorist groups tend to be small, with poor command and control structures, often lacking clear leadership, and little in the way of organisational resources behind them. For example, the most well-known of the UK animal rights extremist groups is the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) which first emerged in 1976. The group was formed by Ronnie Lee, a solicitor’s clerk, who was jailed in 1975 for arson. Publicity from his arson trial attracted wider support and after his release the ALF was formed. However the ALF - like most other eco-extremist groups - has always been a somewhat nebulous organisation. It does not possess a clear command structure and even defining membership is somewhat haphazard. The group is best seen as a collection of like-minded people who operate according to a group consensus rather than adhering to policies dictated by senior leaders. Individuals who disagree with the group policy are free to disengage and to practice a

policy of their own choosing. The result is that the turnover of people who consider themselves part of the ALF has been relatively high, with individuals leaving, returning and leaving again in regular cycles.

The nebulous organisation of environmental groups has contributed to a trend of violent acts being committed by lone actors or very small groups of individuals. There have been a significant number of individuals engaging in one-person campaigns of violence in the UK, for example, by mounting letter-bomb attacks or by planting incendiary devices, as illustrated by the case of Barry Horne, one of the most famous animal rights extremists within the UK. Horne died on hunger strike in prison in 2001. He had been serving a prison sentence for a series of arson attacks which had caused £3m in damage.

The vast majority of eco-terrorism attacks involve the use of incendiary or explosive devices, and property damage – rather



A man wearing an Animal Liberation Front hat leads some chanting on the march. Several hundred protesters on the annual march against fur in London march from Leicester Square. Image Peter Marshall/Alamy Live News

than casualties – is usually the primary objective for the attacks. Indeed, environmentally-motivated terrorism has been a particularly non-lethal form of terrorism. Eco-terrorist attacks are 70 times less likely to result in a death compared to the average terrorist incident recorded in the GTD. Given that most eco-terrorism attacks involve the use of incendiary or explosive devices, the extremely low number of deaths clearly reflects a long-running commitment by the vast majority of eco-terrorists to avoid bloodshed.

It is perhaps surprising then, that eco-terrorists are nevertheless disproportionately more likely to use chemical, biological or radiological weapons compared to other groups, showing a rate almost ten times higher than the average rate seen across the GTD.¹

In terms of targets, the majority of attacks focus on businesses, where the intention is often the destruction of property and/or the disruption of business

Eco-Terrorism: assessing current threats and trends (continued)

activity. Research and education facilities and personnel are the next most common targets, often connected to the use of animals in testing and research.

The rise of Eco-Fascism

One emerging area of concern has been the rise of eco-fascism, a nebulous but growing strand of right-wing extremism. This first attracted attention following two extreme right-wing attacks in 2019, first in Christchurch, New Zealand and later in the year in El Paso, Texas. In both cases, the perpetrators published manifestos online before each attack with both partly expounding environmental themes and describing themselves as an “eco-fascists”. The high profile nature of both attacks helped eco-fascism to gain traction within some quarters of the wider far-right biosphere (though it is worth noting that many far-right strands reject the eco-fascist narrative). Within the eco-fascist framework, environmental and climate crises are tied to

overpopulation and immigration. This then is used to justify violence against the far right’s traditional targets of minority groups and other ethnicities. The eco-fascist narrative draws on an eclectic range of sources, though the writings of Theodore Kaczynski are especially prominent. Kaczynski was one of the most lethal of the environmentally-motivated terrorists of the past fifty years and was responsible for a one-man campaign of violence which lasted from the 1970s to the 1990s.

While the ideological framework around eco-fascism is still coalescing, it does represent a serious avenue for the far right to tap into wider concerns around environmental damage and collapse. For some, this may be little more than an opportunistic lever to exploit wider fears and concerns over the environment to help justify hostility against the far right’s traditional enemies. That said, there is disturbing evidence

that eco-fascism appears to be translating into real world attacks from far-right actors who take its ideas seriously. In October 2019, for example, an arson attack was carried out on a mink farm in Sweden. As an attack methodology this was very typical of many previous animal rights arson attacks, though in this case the perpetrators were right wing extremists who had been inspired by eco-fascism.

Is the Climate Change crisis leading to an increase in Eco-Terrorism?

Not yet, is the short answer. Currently there is no strong evidence that growing concerns around climate change have so far translated into a rise in eco-terrorism attacks. While the climate change crisis certainly has a very strong ideological resonance with some environmentally-motivated terrorists, to date this has not translated into a noticeable increase in attacks. Whether that continues to be the case as the climate crisis worsens remains

to be seen. In particular, recent research by Arie Perliger and Mengyan Liu found a strong link between man-made ecological damage and the prevalence of eco-violence incidents.³ As ecological damage increased, so did eco violence. This has potentially serious consequences in a context of increasingly serious impacts of climate change going forward.

Regardless, apprehension around this issue within some government and criminal justice thinking is already evident. This can be partly seen in recent government efforts targeting protest activity typical of groups such as Extinction Rebellion which has sought to introduce tougher punishments for protest-related activity and to restrict the activities of some protestors. Critics of these measures have warned, however, about the potential for these tougher measures to contribute to radicalisation towards more serious violence.



About the author:

Andrew Silke is Professor of Terrorism Risk Mitigation & Resilience at Cranfield University, a post co-sponsored by Pool Re. He is head of Cranfield’s Counterterrorism, Intelligence, Risk & Resilience (CIRR) group and is widely recognised as a leading expert on terrorism and low intensity conflict.

¹ Global Terrorism Database, <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>

² Graham Macklin (2022). The extreme right, climate change and terrorism. Terrorism and Political Violence

³ Arie Perliger and Mengyan Liu, (2022). Exploring the Intersection of Environmental Events and Domestic Political Violence in the United States. Terrorism and Political Violence.

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UK Terrorism Offence Data: July Update

In June 2022, the authorities charged two individuals for terrorism offences, and sentenced a further five individuals in relation to terrorism convictions. This is consistent with the activity in May, during which two individuals were charged, an additional one convicted, and four sentenced regarding terrorism offences.

The rates across both May and June are also consistent with the rates seen in February and March with a continuing number of young people being charged and convicted for terrorism offences. Roughly half of those charged, convicted and sentenced in both May and June were teenagers. This concerning trend indicates a possible increase in the involvement of young people with terrorism in the past six months following the already alarming statistic that 15% of

the almost 200 terrorist-related arrests in the year to March 2022 were of people aged 18 or under.

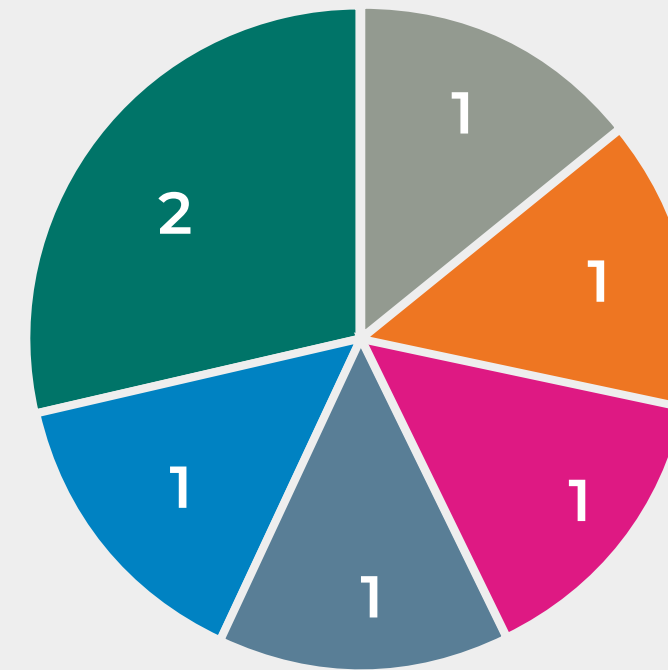
One year on from MI5 Director General Ken McCallum’s warning about the increasing threat posed by far right extremism, all but one of the individuals charged, convicted or sentenced in June were linked to right wing ideologies. This is not to say that the threat from Islamist extremism has disappeared, but is instead a clear indicator that far right activity truly is a cause for concern. Of the 32 plots foiled by British security services since March 2017, 12 were related to right wing extremism. Given the increasing number of far right arrests over the past year, it is likely that we will see further far right plots being uncovered in the medium term, balancing the ideological motivations of plots in the UK.

No. people charged, convicted or sentenced for terrorism offences in June 2022



- Dissemination of a terrorist publication
- Encouragement of Terrorism
- Preparation of Terrorist Acts
- Collection of information useful for an act of terrorism
- Possessing a document containing information useful to terrorism
- Breaches of Counter Terrorism Notification Order

No. people charged, convicted or sentenced for terrorism offences in May 2022



- Membership of a proscribed group
- Collection of information useful for an act of terrorism
- Providing a service to others that enables them to obtain, read, listen to or look at such a publication which would encourage acts of terrorism

Note:
Several individuals in June were involved with more than one offence so appear on the diagram multiple times.

Source: Pool Re internal database

The overall level of terrorism related charges, convictions and sentences in 2022 remains somewhat stable, and is consistent with 2021. However, there is a clear shift towards higher levels of involvement with right wing extremism and increasing numbers of young people being convicted compared to last year. This trend is likely to continue throughout the rest of the year based on arrest data, and it is a realistic possibility that the threat posed by the far right could result in an attempted attack within the next year.

News Roundup

Japan: Gun used to kill former Japanese PM required “minimum knowledge” to construct

On 8 July, Japan’s former Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, was assassinated at a political campaign event. The attack was carried out using a homemade device that had a pistol grip and what appeared to be two pipes covered in black electrical tape. The suspect later admitted to ordering parts and gunpowder on the internet after having searched online for instructions on how to build firearms. Several other handmade guns were confiscated from his residence following the attack.

The assassination of the former Japanese Prime Minister illustrates how firearms can be constructed and used to carry out attacks, even in countries, like the UK, where gun control legislation makes it very difficult to acquire firearms. Experts estimate that



Shinzo Abe, the former prime minister of Japan, was assassinated on Friday by an assailant with an improvised firearm.

the hand-made gun used to assassinate the former Prime Minister could have been constructed in a day or two. These types of weapons, due to their single/low shot capability, would most likely be used to carry out assassinations or close quarter attacks against Police, Military or Government (PMG) targets.

The attack in Japan comes just weeks after an announcement by the UK’s Metropolitan Police that there is an emerging threat in connection with 3D-printed guns in the UK.⁴ Since 2019, six people have been prosecuted in cases involving 3D-printed firearms and four 3D-printed guns have been recovered by the police since 2018. The assassination of Abe illustrates that there are also several alternatives to 3D-printing for those seeking

to create viable improvised weapons.

The fact that Abe was killed by a homemade firearm in a country with stringent firearms regulations highlights the possibility that determined malicious actors in the UK could also produce a lethal firearm to carry out an attack. However, the crude nature of the weapon, as well as legislation against the procurement of ammunition in the UK mean that the likelihood of a malicious actor carrying out an attack using an alternative firearm remains low.

⁴ For more information on this report, please see our [Monthly Threat Update June 2022 - Pool Reinsurance](#).

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UK: MI5 and FBI face a “very difficult cocktail of risks”

On 6 July, at a joint press conference between MI5 and US Security Services, the head of the FBI warned that terrorist attacks are becoming harder to detect because attackers are increasingly lone actors. The Director General of MI5, Ken McCallum, supported the assertion by confirming that MI5 are seeing more attacks carried out by individuals using low sophistication weapons with little planning or training.

Adding to the risk, technological innovation and the encryption services provided by technology companies provide difficult to trace spaces in which criminals and terrorists can operate across virtual borders. As a result, lone actors have become more difficult to detect due to the limited intelligence they leave behind in the planning and run up to their attacks. McCallum also outlined that one in five terrorism investigations in the UK were linked to neo-Nazi, racist ideology or other race-related extremism

– a rate that has remained steady in recent years and has seen increasing international connectivity.

The joint meeting between UK and US Security Services comes amidst a rise in lone actor violence in the United States, Europe and United Kingdom in recent years. The warning of an increase in attacks from neo-Nazi groups and proponents of racist ideologies echoes a broader rise in far right extremism in the UK. Since 2016, 70 people have been convicted for far right terror offences⁵ as experts continue to warn that the threat from neo-Nazi groups in the UK remains high. It is therefore likely that the UK will see an increase in attacks carried out by individuals inspired by right wing ideologies.

Social media platforms will continue to play a significant role in the growth of far right extremism, which has recently been recognised by the



Metropolitan Police. The force issued warnings to parents regarding the risk posed by extremists seeking to radicalise children whilst they spend more time online during the summer holidays. The Metropolitan Police’s warning highlights the continued importance of monitoring far right activity online and militate against the radicalisation of minors.

⁵ For further information, please see: [There’s a new breed of young, violent, far-right activist in Britain: ‘white jihadists’](#) | Matthew Collins | The Guardian.

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UK: Teenage ISIS supporter accused of planning attack at Isle of White Festival

On 11 July, a 15-year-old boy was arrested under suspicion of preparing acts of terrorism. The boy has since been accused of plotting a so-called Islamic State-inspired terrorist attack at the Isle of Wight Festival in June. A court heard that the individual had carried out online research and looked up different kinds of weapons, vehicles and stab vests that could be used in the attack. When arrested, the boy was found carrying a knife and a note entitled “To My Family”. This was alleged to be “a martyrdom note asking his mother not to grieve for him”.

The foiled plot comes amidst an upward trend in youth arrests in the UK. Senior counter terrorism officers recently revealed that more under 18s were arrested for terrorist-related activity between March 2021 and 2022



JUNE 17: Festival goes at The Isle of Wight Festival 2022 at Seaclose Park on June 17, 2022 in Newport, Isle of Wight. Photo by Mark Holloway/Redferns/Getty Images.

than any other annual period on record. Of the 196 arrests for terrorist-related activity during the period, 15% were aged 18 or under.

The arrest also illustrates the continued threat posed by Islamic State-inspired terrorism in the UK. As the UK’s Prevent strategy continues to be reviewed, this foiled plot will galvanise those who agree with Sir William Shawcross, the Independent Reviewer of Prevent, that the government’s counter-terrorism programme has recently been too focused on right-wing extremism and should now also crack down on Islamist extremism.

Regardless of ideology or group, the arrest aligns with recent comments made by MI5 and US Security Services⁶ concerning the continued threat posed by lone actors

and the difficulty in detecting their plans. It is likely that the UK will continue to see attacks and foiled plots by individuals inspired by Islamist and right wing ideologies in the near future.

⁶ For further information, please see our earlier news roundup article – “MI5 and FBI face a “very difficult cocktail of risks” – above.

News Roundup

US: US airstrike stopped ISIS chemical weapons programme intended for Western Europe

Washington officials have revealed⁷ that a 2015 US drone strike foiled a plot planned by Saddam Hussein’s former chemical weapons expert to target European cities. Salih al-Sabawi – a former senior Iraqi official under Saddam Hussein – was recruited by Islamic State in 2014 to create a stockpile of chemical and biological agents. The various weapons found included anthrax, botulinum, neurotoxin and ricin as well as manufactured mustard gas and chlorine-filled bombs.

The report reveals that the weapons were specifically created in order to target Western

Europe and US military bases in Europe. The research carried out by al-Sabawi was going to be used by a unit of mainly French and Belgian volunteers in Europe. These same individuals later orchestrated the November 2015 Paris attacks, killing more than 130 people and wounding around 400.

By late 2016 Islamic State’s known chemical weapons facilities had been destroyed and the liberation of Mosul effectively brought an end to the programme’s active phase. Notwithstanding, it is possible that the group’s ambition to manufacture and use chemical and biological weapons continues. As the report noted, it is likely that some of Sabawi’s former colleagues escaped the drone strike and therefore may still be at large and capable of manufacturing similar weapons.

The report illustrates the continued threat posed to the UK by terrorists seeking to carry out an attack using chemical and biological weapons. That being said, the challenges for non-state actors to acquire, weaponise and successfully deploy CBRN materials mean such attacks in the UK remain unlikely in the near future.

⁷ [For the original report, please see: ISIS planned chemical and attacks in Europe, new details on weapons program reveal - The Washington Post.](#)

UK: UK Government plan to give police officers extra stop and search powers to tackle terrorism

The UK Government has published a new paper outlining plans to give police officers further stop and search powers to protect the public from the threat of terrorism. The proposed plans were introduced following Jonathan Hall QC’s – Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation – review of the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) that are used to supervise terrorist and terrorism-risk offenders on license.⁸

Mr Hall QC’s review was commissioned by the Home Secretary following the Fishmongers’ Hall terrorist attack

in November 2019.⁹ During the attack, two people were killed and three more injured by Usman Khan, who had been released from prison on license a year prior to the attack having served time for other terrorist offences. The draft revised code of practice included in the government’s new paper would allow a police officer to search any convicted terrorists who have been released on license. The draft is set to be debated by both Houses of Parliament.

⁸ [For further information, please see: Police stop and search powers: draft revised code of practice - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\).](#)

⁹ [London Bridge / Fishmongers’ Hall Attack: Terrorism Post-Incident Report - Pool Reinsurance.](#)

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Modelling**



**Risk
Management**

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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.

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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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Silke, Andrew

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