



| Flash |

Terror Threat Ahead of European Summer Events

F-2024-03-27a

Classification: TLP:CLEAR

Criticality: High

Intelligence Requirements: Geopolitical, Physical Security, Terrorism

March 27, 2024

Scope Note: ZeroFox Intelligence is derived from a variety of sources, including—but not limited to—curated open-source accesses, vetted social media, proprietary data sources, and direct access to threat actors and groups through covert communication channels. Information relied upon to complete any report cannot always be independently verified. As such, ZeroFox applies rigorous analytic standards and tradecraft in accordance with best practices and includes caveat language and source citations to clearly identify the veracity of our Intelligence reporting and substantiate our assessments and recommendations. All sources used in this particular Intelligence product were **identified prior to 12:00 PM (EDT) on March 27, 2024**; per cyber hygiene best practices, caution is advised when clicking on any third-party links.

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› Key Findings

- A number of European countries have stepped up security following the attack carried out by Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K) operatives in Moscow on March 22.
- Authorities in France and Germany in particular are in a heightened state of alert in the run-up to the Euro 2024 soccer tournament held across Germany and the Paris Olympics due to take place between June and August 2024.
- European authorities are warning that the Islamic State (IS) threat to Europe is at its highest level in years. This is likely a reflection of the increased threats since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war and the large upcoming spectator events rather than of the group's capabilities, which remain diminished.

| Details

On March 25, 2024, French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal announced that authorities had increased the country's official security threat designation to its highest level.¹ This measure was implemented following a deadly terrorist attack by IS-K on a concert hall outside Moscow, Russia, on March 22, 2024.

¹

[hXXps://www.rfi\[.\]fr/en/france/20240325-french-security-supremos-sanction-raised-terror-levels-after-moscow-attack](https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20240325-french-security-supremos-sanction-raised-terror-levels-after-moscow-attack)

- France had just lowered its threat level in January 2024 after raising it in November 2023 in response to an increase in threats related to the Israel-Hamas war.
- An additional 4,000 French troops will be deployed nationwide and will likely remain in the run-up to the Paris Olympic Games, which are scheduled to take place from July 26–August 14, 2024.²
- Neighboring Belgium maintained its terror threat level but issued similar statements regarding the threat posed specifically by IS-K.³ Italy and Serbia have also increased security around shopping centers and sporting venues.⁴
- German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser announced that border controls will be carried out on German border points during the European Championship soccer tournament from June 14–July 14, 2024. Germany already carries out some border controls, but these are specific to the tournament to “focus on protection against Islamic and other extremists.”⁵

French President Emmanuel Macron added that the group responsible for the attack in Moscow also sought to strike in France, and Attal noted that French authorities had disrupted two attacks this year alone.⁶ Macron is likely referring to the specific IS branch that claimed responsibility for the Moscow attack, Khorosan, which is primarily made up of converted ex-Taliban and Al-Qaeda members in Afghanistan and Pakistan but also in some former Soviet states such as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The threats mentioned by Macron likely date back to October–December 2023, when European authorities warned that there was a “huge risk” of a terror attack in the EU during the holiday period.⁷ The warning highlighted the increased danger of “lone actor”

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[hXXps://www.rfi\[.\]fr/en/france/20240326-france-deploys-extra-4000-troops-nationwide-over-security-concerns-in-run-up-to-olympics](https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20240326-france-deploys-extra-4000-troops-nationwide-over-security-concerns-in-run-up-to-olympics)

³ [hXXps://www.brusselstimes\[.\]com/belgium/980260/terror-threat-level-remains-at-3-in-belgium](https://www.brusselstimes.com/belgium/980260/terror-threat-level-remains-at-3-in-belgium)

⁴ [hXXps://www.voanews\[.\]com/a/italy-raises-security-after-is-claimed-russian-concert-hall-attack/7541846.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/italy-raises-security-after-is-claimed-russian-concert-hall-attack/7541846.html)

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[hXXps://www.naharnet\[.\]com/stories/en/304209-germany-to-impose-security-checks-on-all-its-borders-during-football-s-european-championship](https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/304209-germany-to-impose-security-checks-on-all-its-borders-during-football-s-european-championship)

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[hXXps://www.rfi\[.\]fr/en/france/20240326-france-deploys-extra-4000-troops-nationwide-over-security-concerns-in-run-up-to-olympics](https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20240326-france-deploys-extra-4000-troops-nationwide-over-security-concerns-in-run-up-to-olympics)

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[hXXps://www.euronews\[.\]com/my-europe/2023/12/05/huge-risk-of-terrorist-attacks-in-the-european-union-home-affairs-chief-warns](https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2023/12/05/huge-risk-of-terrorist-attacks-in-the-european-union-home-affairs-chief-warns)

attacks in Europe carried out by individuals inspired by IS and Al-Qaeda online propaganda and the Israel-Hamas war.⁸ During this period, France experienced two such incidents.

- On October 13, a teacher was killed in a knife attack in the city of Arras.⁹ Then, on December 2, one person was killed and two others injured during a knife and hammer attack in central Paris.¹⁰
- Elsewhere in Europe, a gunman in Brussels, Belgium, shot dead two Swedish soccer supporters ahead of a Belgium-Sweden match on October 16, 2023. The gunmen claimed to have been inspired by IS, which at the time called for attacks against Swedish and Danish interests over their tolerance of Koran burnings.^{11,12}
- On November 30 in Germany, police arrested two teenagers allegedly inspired by IS who planned to carry out an attack on a Christmas market in Leverkusen.

Capabilities

Since the attacks in Moscow, there has been increased focus on IS-K, one of the lesser known but highly capable IS branches. Macron's comments, possibly tying the group to holiday period terror warnings, indicate France likely has intelligence that the branch has grown in stature.

- Following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in late 2021, the region may provide IS with a base from which to plan attacks, something that it has denied in its traditional heartlands of Iraq and Syria.
- However, IS-K is an enemy of the Taliban, which successfully neutralized the group in the run-up to 2021. Therefore, it is more likely that IS-K is operating across the porous borders and taking advantage of security gaps inside Afghanistan rather than explicitly operating at the behest of the Taliban.

⁸

[hXXps://www.cbsnews\[.\]com/philadelphia/video/fbi-director-warns-us-facing-unprecedented-number-of-terror-attacks-this-holiday-season/](https://www.cbsnews.com/philadelphia/video/fbi-director-warns-us-facing-unprecedented-number-of-terror-attacks-this-holiday-season/)

⁹ [hXXps://edition.cnn\[.\]com/2023/10/13/europe/arras-france-school-knife-attack-intl/index.html](https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/13/europe/arras-france-school-knife-attack-intl/index.html)

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[hXXps://www.lemonde\[.\]fr/societe/live/2023/12/03/en-direct-attentat-a-paris-le-point-sur-les-dernieres-informations_6203619_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/live/2023/12/03/en-direct-attentat-a-paris-le-point-sur-les-dernieres-informations_6203619_3224.html)

¹¹ [hXXps://time\[.\]com/6303348/quran-burning-sweden-denmark/](https://time.com/6303348/quran-burning-sweden-denmark/)

¹²

[hXXps://apnews\[.\]com/article/sweden-quran-desecration-attack-belgium-0b2b52e448823377d9ed42493960faf6](https://apnews.com/article/sweden-quran-desecration-attack-belgium-0b2b52e448823377d9ed42493960faf6)

- Al-Qaeda, on the other hand, is a historic ally of the Taliban and is highly likely growing inside Afghanistan. Like IS, Al-Qaeda has a history of staging attacks in Europe and inspiring lone actors.

Despite the warnings issued by the EU, it is very unlikely that IS has the capabilities they did during the 2014–2018 period, when IS gained control of considerable territory across Iraq/Syria—allowing it to train and plan regular attacks like the one in Moscow.

- At that time, IS orchestrated regular attacks across Europe, as well as used its online propaganda to inspire lone wolves to carry out attacks elsewhere. In the years since, an effective Western military coalition has drastically reduced the territories under IS control and its online messaging capability.

The events leading to the collapse of IS territory in the Middle East and the subsequent successes of the Taliban in Afghanistan likely demonstrated to these groups that avoiding conflict with the more powerful West is advisable.

- The Taliban likely recognized they could not regain control of Afghanistan until the United States was gone, while IS members likely attributed the collapse of their territory in the Middle East to the U.S.-led military campaign against it.
- Ultimately, IS has aspirations to again orchestrate attacks in the West on a wide scale but needs to regain the safe operating base it requires to exert military superiority locally first, which is why monitoring the group's strength locally in places like Iraq and Afghanistan is important.
- The group still welcomes and encourages lone-wolf attacks in its name. Unlike the orchestrated attack in Moscow, knife/small arms attacks and vehicular assaults require little instruction. They could include unsophisticated improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that attackers learn to build online.
- The circumstances in Moscow were likely an exception; IS-K was likely able to take advantage of security gaps that are unique to Russia, as its security establishment is focused on Ukraine rather than on terror threats coming from its south.

Despite the diminished capabilities of IS and Al-Qaeda, the groups' propaganda capabilities, combined with the radicalizing effect of the Israel-Hamas war, do present legitimate security risks if they inspire lone-wolf actors to carry out terror attacks.

Security forces are most likely concerned about the risk of lone wolves hitting soft targets, such as fans assembling outside stadiums or the type of large public gatherings that take place during the Olympics. The Israel-Hamas War likely also makes continued calls from groups like IS and Al-Qaeda more effective than they have been in years, increasing the probability of an attack.

| Appendix A: Traffic Light Protocol for Information Dissemination

	Red	Amber
WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?	Sources may use TLP:RED when information cannot be effectively acted upon by additional parties and could lead to impacts on a party's privacy, reputation, or operations if misused.	Sources may use TLP:AMBER when information requires support to be effectively acted upon but carries risks to privacy, reputation, or operations if shared outside of the organizations involved.
HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?	Recipients may NOT share TLP:RED with any parties outside of the specific exchange, meeting, or conversation in which it is originally disclosed.	Recipients may ONLY share TLP:AMBER information with members of their own organization and its clients, but only on a need-to-know basis to protect their organization and its clients and prevent further harm. Note that TLP:AMBER+STRICT restricts sharing to the organization only.
	Green	Clear
WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?	Sources may use TLP:GREEN when information is useful for the awareness of all participating organizations, as well as with peers within the broader community or sector.	Sources may use TLP:CLEAR when information carries minimal or no risk of misuse in accordance with applicable rules and procedures for public release.
HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?	Recipients may share TLP:GREEN information with peers and partner organizations within their sector or community but not via publicly accessible channels.	Recipients may share TLP:CLEAR information without restriction, subject to copyright controls.

| Appendix B: ZeroFox Intelligence Probability Scale

All ZeroFox intelligence products leverage probabilistic assessment language in analytic judgments. Qualitative statements used in these judgments refer to associated probability ranges, which state the likelihood of occurrence of an event or development. Ranges are used to avoid a false impression of accuracy. This scale is a standard that aligns with how readers should interpret such terms.

Almost No Chance	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Roughly Even Chance	Likely	Very Likely	Almost Certain
1-5%	5-20%	20-45%	45-55%	55-80%	80-95%	95-99%