

APEC Economic Leaders' Summit

Event Assessment

 ZEROFOX[®] Intelligence

TLP:CLEAR
November 1, 2023

APEC Economic Leaders' Summit Event Assessment

TLP: CLEAR

A-2023-11-01a



Executive Summary

The 2023 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Summit will take place this year in San Francisco, CA, from November 11-17, 2023. This economic forum will be comprised of attendees from 21 different countries—as well as over 1,200 thought leaders and business executives from the member countries—and will focus on building economic growth that is interconnected, innovative, and inclusive.

Due to the high-profile attendee list and the prominence of several large businesses in the San Francisco area, the event also has the potential to see unwanted criminal and security issues, particularly in light of the current geopolitical tensions throughout the world. Protest activity targeting the event and a sideline meeting between U.S. President Joe Biden and China's President Xi Jinping has already been identified, and disruptive cyber and physical activity associated with the Israel-Hamas War is possible. The summit has been classified as a National Special Security Event by the U.S. Secret Service due to the amount of U.S. and foreign dignitaries attending the event, as well as its size and significance.

Security services and logistics at both the city and federal levels have been updated for the areas surrounding the Moscone Center, where the event will be based. These logistical updates will likely have impacts on organizations operating nearby, as employee travel to/from facilities and deliveries will likely be rerouted.



Source: [hXXps://www.apec2023sf\[.\]org/](https://www.apec2023sf[.]org/)

Key Threats



Criminal activity including larceny, motor vehicle theft, and burglary is particularly prevalent in the area.



While direct targeting has not been identified, hacktivist activity is possible given the current geopolitical climate.



Protest activity is highly anticipated and may be disruptive to the summit.



Threats to the event may evolve depending on geopolitical developments elsewhere in the world.



Current geopolitical conflicts have heightened the risk for terroristic-type activity.



Several transportation updates have been made in San Francisco, which may impact transit.

Key Findings

- Crime in San Francisco has made national headlines recently for organized retail theft incidents involving flash mobs, rampant drug usage, and the stabbing death of the founder of CashApp.
- Major protests are most likely to occur near the Moscone Center where the summit is occurring, as well as nearby hotels where delegates are staying.
- While no direct threats have been identified targeting the APEC Summit, much of the world is on heightened alert given the current Israel-Hamas War.
- Politically-motivated hacktivists could attempt to disrupt the APEC Economic Leaders' Summit. Hacktivists often target high-profile events, particularly those that garner a global audience, as these present the opportunity for threat actors to gain notoriety while providing maximum exposure.

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 5:00 PM (EST) on October 30, 2023; per cyber hygiene best practices, caution is advised when clicking on any third-party links.



Crime

San Francisco, while known for its beautiful landscape, is unfortunately also becoming known for crime. Due to the city's rising crime levels and homeless population in recent years, many businesses have closed and departed the downtown area. Union Square—historically a major commercial hub for the city—has seen dozens of businesses leave, with many citing deteriorating downtown conditions and threats to employee and customer safety. Large chains such as Target and Starbucks have also recently announced store closures in the San Francisco area.[1,2] The APEC Summit, held at Moscone Center, is located less than one mile from the Union Square district of San Francisco. Additionally, many of the popular hotel accommodations are located within or adjacent to this area.

yahoo/finance

Why Starbucks, Whole Foods, and others are closing stores in downtown San Francisco

From Amazon to Gap, consumer-facing chains are closing their doors in downtown San Francisco. Soon, Starbucks will be among them.

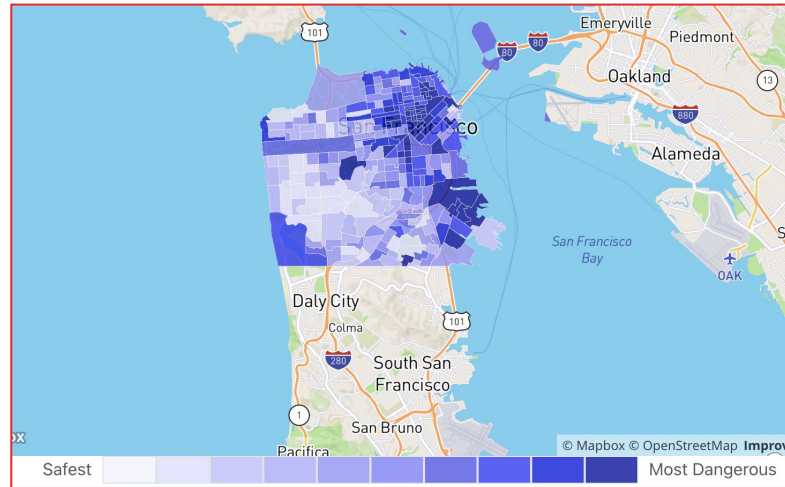
Businesses Leaving San Francisco

Source:

<https://finance.yahoo.com/news/why-starbucks-whole-foods-and-others-are-closing-stores-in-downtown-san-francisco-205713063.html?>

As of October 22, 2023, the San Francisco Police Department has reported 2,259 robbery incidents, a 15 percent increase year-to-date (YTD). Additionally, the agency has reported 5,526 motor vehicle thefts (an 8.9 percent increase YTD) and 26,048 larceny thefts (a 10 percent decrease YTD). The total number of homicides stands at 43, which remains at the same level as this time last year.[3]

The APEC Summit has been declared a National Special Security Event, with the security planning led by the U.S. Secret Service. It is anticipated that the areas surrounding the Moscone Center will be staffed with additional law enforcement and security personnel in an effort to deter criminal activity.[4]



San Francisco Criminal Activity Concentration Around Moscone Center

Source: <https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/ca/san-francisco/crime>

Assessment:

- Crime in San Francisco has made national headlines recently for organized retail theft incidents involving flash mobs, rampant drug usage, and the stabbing death of the founder of CashApp.
- While the city has seen a recent uptick in robberies, violent crime (including homicide) remains at a relatively lower level compared to similarly-sized cities. Property crimes such as larceny, motor vehicle theft, and burglary remain major concerns for the city.[5]

Recommendations:

- Event attendees should remain vigilant about their personal safety, especially if traveling alone or at night.
- Visitors should avoid carrying large sums of money or valuables such as jewelry in public, which may bring unwanted attention.
- Avoid leaving valuables in unattended vehicles.

FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://www.cnn.com/2023/08/30/business/san-francisco-union-square-retail-closures/index.html>
- [2] <https://fortune.com/2023/09/27/target-closing-9-stores-3-in-san-francisco-bay-area-theft-crime/>
- [3] <https://www.sanfranciscopolice.org/stay-safe/crime-data/crime-dashboard>
- [4] <https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/06/us/san-francisco-crime-bob-lee-killing/index.html>



Protest and Disruptive Activity

Multiple activist groups have indicated that they will target the APEC Summit with protests and other disruptive activity in the lead-up to and during the event. The main focus for these protests will involve geopolitical concerns over the current conflict in Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas War, as well as environmental issues. An anticipated meeting between U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping is expected to elicit protest activity as well.

Prior to the start of the APEC Summit, a People's Counter Summit will occur on November 11, followed by a Mass Mobilization on November 12. However, the main protest activity is anticipated on November 15—halfway through the summit. Several notable activist groups are expected to participate, with the groups indicating that they will be taking high-visibility action that day aimed at shutting down the event.[5,6]

Additional protests for San Francisco residents to participate in over the current condition of the city have been promoted on social media. However, attendance and dates of any action have not been confirmed.[7]

There are also concerns that protests against Chinese President Xi Jinping could ensue during the event, although specific dates and times for this have not been identified. In particular, the protests are expected to come from San Francisco's Chinese and Tibetan population. Concerns around this potential activity were exacerbated when a man drove his car into the Chinese consulate in San Francisco on October 9, 2023.[8]

Assessment:

- Major protests are most likely to occur near the Moscone Center where the summit is being held, as well as at nearby hotels where delegates are staying.
- There is the potential for protests to be disruptive based on the caliber of activist groups participating.
- Should protests also occur over the Israel-Hamas War, there is potential that they could become violent based on associated protests that have occurred elsewhere and the high visibility of this event and its attendees.

Recommendations:

- Organizations with operations near the Moscone Center should educate employees on the potential disruptions to their transit and workdays.
- Avoid areas where protests are taking place, as this could draw a response from security forces.

Terrorism

While no direct threats have been identified targeting the APEC Summit, much of the world is on heightened alert given the current Israel-Hamas War. European and American government agencies have put out travel advisories warning their citizens of the potential risks of traveling abroad after the Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) issued a warning on October 16, 2023, regarding France. The French government raised its security alert system to the highest level of "Emergency Attack" in the wake of the terrorist attack in Arras, France.[9,10]

Caution October 20, 2023	Worldwide Caution
Worldwide Caution Due to increased tensions in various locations around the world, the potential for terrorist attacks, demonstrations or violent actions against U.S. citizens and interests, the Department of State advises U.S. citizens overseas to exercise increased caution. U.S. citizens should: - Stay alert in locations frequented by tourists. - Enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to receive information and alerts and make it easier to locate you in an emergency overseas. - Follow the Department of State on Facebook and Twitter.	

Worldwide Caution Alert issued by the U.S. Department of State

Source:

[hXXps://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/worldwide-caution.html](https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/worldwide-caution.html)

On October 25, 2023, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) issued a joint service announcement highlighting the potential of attacks on individuals and organizations due to the Israel-Hamas War and subsequent calls by foreign terrorist cells for their supporters to increase violent behavior in the West.[11]

25 October, 2023

DHS and FBI Public Service Announcement

Threat Environment

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) are issuing this Public Service Announcement to highlight potential threats in the United States from a variety of actors in response to the HAMAS attacks on Israel on 7 October and subsequent activities in the region, including additional calls by foreign terrorist organizations to their supporters seeking to foment violence in the West. This is an update to the 10 October FBI and DHS Public Service Announcement and the 18 October FBI, National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), and DHS Joint Intelligence Bulletin to law enforcement partners. This announcement reflects a fluid and evolving situation; the terrorism threat in the Homeland has remained heightened throughout 2023, but recent events have increased the possibility of potential attacks against individuals and institutions in response to developments in the Middle East.

Service Announcement on Current Threat Environment

Source: [hXXps://www.ic3.gov/Media/PDF/Y2023/PSA231026.pdf](https://www.ic3.gov/Media/PDF/Y2023/PSA231026.pdf)

FOOTNOTES

[5] [hXXps://risingtidenorthamerica.org/2023/10/call-to-action-shut-down-apec-shut-down-the-ceo-summit-on-november-15th/](https://risingtidenorthamerica.org/2023/10/call-to-action-shut-down-apec-shut-down-the-ceo-summit-on-november-15th/)

[6] [hXXps://www.instagram.com/p/Cyblm-7AlH8/?img_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/Cyblm-7AlH8/?img_index=1)

[7] [hXXps://twitter.com/Save_SF_2024/status/1717625221421965742](https://twitter.com/Save_SF_2024/status/1717625221421965742)

[8] [hXXps://www.cnn.com/2023/10/09/us/san-francisco-chinese-consulate-crash-investigation/index.html](https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/09/us/san-francisco-chinese-consulate-crash-investigation/index.html)

[9] ZeroFox Intelligence Flash Report: Governments Worldwide Issue Caution Alerts for Travel - [hXXps://cloud.zerofox.com/intelligence/advisories/22135](https://cloud.zerofox.com/intelligence/advisories/22135)

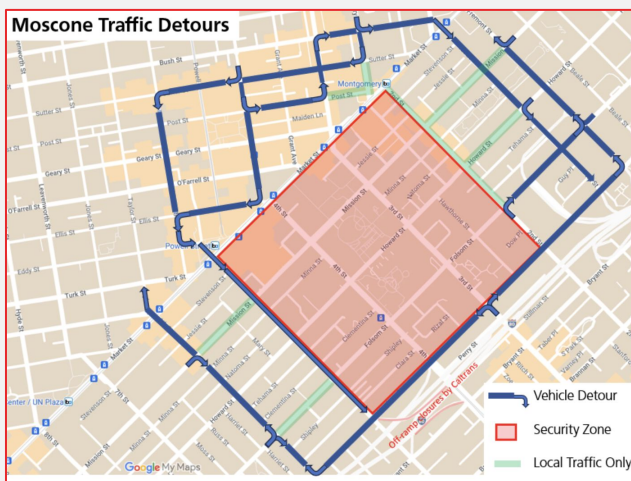
[10] [hXXps://www.osac.gov/Country/France/Content/Detail/Report/07d926be-5645-4d24-808e-22a138b73e40](https://www.osac.gov/Country/France/Content/Detail/Report/07d926be-5645-4d24-808e-22a138b73e40)

[11] [hXXps://www.ic3.gov/Media/PDF/Y2023/PSA231026.pdf](https://www.ic3.gov/Media/PDF/Y2023/PSA231026.pdf)



Logistics Updates

The DHS and U.S. Secret Service have designated the APEC Economic Leaders' Summit as a National Special Security Event. As such, the security at this event will be comprised of local, regional, and national bodies.[12] Over 20,000 people are expected in the area due to the event, and the main transit impacts will take place from November 14-19, 2023, inside designated security zones. These security zones will include screenings for all those entering the area, including commuters and residents, as well for deliveries and other services for operations within that area.[13]



Map of Traffic Detours Around APEC Summit Locations

Source:

<https://www.sfmta.com/projects/asia-pacific-economic-cooperation-apec-transit-and-travel-information>

Assessment:

- Local, regional, and national security teams have implemented a restricted zone around the main summit venues that will alter commuter and other transit areas.
- Because of the various political and business leaders that will be in attendance at the summit, this event will have the highest level of security—particularly in light of current geopolitical tensions.
- All transit through the security zones will involve security screenings, which will likely add delays for employees going to work and deliveries to that area.

Recommendations:

- Organizations operating in the areas surrounding the Moscone Center may need to develop alternative working plans during the summit to account for security in place around the center, as well as transportation modifications throughout the duration of the event that could cause significant delays to those en route to their employment.
- Organizations and individuals should regularly monitor local media for updates to the current transportation plans that impact transit.

Cybersecurity Threats

Politically-motivated hackers could attempt to disrupt the APEC Economic Leaders' Summit. Hacktivists often target high-profile events—particularly those that garner a global audience, as these present the opportunity for threat actors to gain notoriety while providing maximum exposure. Hacktivism targeting the event is most likely to occur through disruptive attacks such as distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) and website defacements; these have become prevalent during global events and are typically launched in an attempt to interrupt services that are essential to the occasion, including broadcasting and event-related websites.

Hacktivism has already accompanied the Israel-Hamas War, and an event such as the APEC Summit, with its high-profile attendee list, would present hackers with an opportunity to cause disruption in support of their various geopolitical views. Pro-Palestinian threat actors have continued to target Israel-based organizations and their allies with disruption and website defacements. Activity continues to be conducted under the campaigns #OpIsraelV2, #OPALLIESOFISRAEL, #ALAQSAFLOOD, and #OpIsrael.[14] Conversely, pro-Israeli hackers have similarly targeted pro-Palestinian organizations, with both sides seeing support from hackers from other countries as well, which threatens to expand the conflict from a cyber perspective.[15,16]

Another potential vector for cyber-related activity could come from a Xi-Biden sideline meeting, which now looks to be confirmed after a recent meeting between U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi moved both sides closer to agreeing to do so. However, in the lead-up to this meeting—and afterwards, depending on the outcome—cyber threat actors could respond with targeting similar to the campaign earlier in 2023 that preceded a visit by U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken to China targeted U.S. State and Commerce Department officials.[17,18]

FOOTNOTES

- [12] <https://www.secretservice.gov/newsroom/releases/2023/10/increased-security-measures-surrounding-apec-leaders-meeting>
- [13] <https://www.ktvu.com/news/small-businesses-dont-feel-prepared-for-apec-conference>
- [14] ZeroFox Internal Collections
- [15] <https://blog.cloudflare.com/cyber-attacks-in-the-israel-hamas-war/>
- [16] <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Israel-Hamas-war/Israel-Hamas-war-draws-Russian-Indian-hacktivists-into-shadow-conflict>
- [17] <https://apnews.com/article/china-usa-biden-wangyi-blinken-8e8928737f20ea092d226d5da08142f2>
- [18] <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/12/us/politics/china-state-department-emails-microsoft-hack.html>



APPENDIX A:

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 the occurrence of an event or development. Ranges are used to avoid a false impression of accuracy. This scale is a standard that aligns 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%

APPENDIX B:

Traffic Light Protocol for Information Dissemination

TLP: RED

HOW IT IS 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.

HOW IT IS SHARED

Recipients may NOT share TLP: RED with any parties outside of the specific exchange, meeting, or conversation in which it is originally disclosed.

TLP: GREEN

HOW IT IS 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.

HOW IT IS SHARED

Recipients may share TLP: GREEN information with peers and partner organizations within their sector or community but not via publicly accessible channels.

TLP: AMBER

HOW IT IS USED

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 IT IS SHARED

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.

TLP: CLEAR

HOW IT IS USED

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 IT IS SHARED

Recipients may share TLP: CLEAR information without restriction, subject to copyright controls.

About ZeroFox

ZeroFox (Nasdaq: ZFOX), an enterprise software-as-a-service leader in external cybersecurity, has redefined security outside the corporate perimeter on the internet, where businesses operate and threat actors thrive. The ZeroFox platform combines advanced AI analytics, digital risk and privacy protection, full-spectrum threat intelligence, and a robust portfolio of breach, incident, and takedown response capabilities to expose and disrupt phishing and fraud campaigns, botnet exposures, credential theft, impersonations, data breaches, and physical threats that target your brands, domains, people, and assets. Join thousands of customers—including some of the largest public-sector organizations, as well as finance, media, technology, and retail companies—to stay ahead of adversaries and address the entire lifecycle of external cyber risks.

READY TO SEE FOR YOURSELF?

Request a Demo:

Sign up on zerofox.com/request-a-demo

Learn More:

Visit zerofox.com

Contact us at sales@zerofox.com / 855.736.1400

