

# West Yorkshire Annual Counter Terrorism Local Profile

January –  
December  
2021



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## Threat Level / National Picture

- For the majority of 2021 the threat to the UK from international terrorism was assessed as SUBSTANTIAL. The threat level was raised to **SEVERE, meaning an attack is highly likely** on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2021. It was raised after two terrorist incidents in the preceding month, reflecting the diverse, complex and volatile nature of the terrorist threat in the UK.
- Since March 2017, CT Policing and UK Intelligence Services have prevented 32 attacks – 18 were Islamist related, 12 Extreme Right Wing Terrorism (ERWT) and two Left, Anarchist or Single Issue Terrorism (LASIT).
- The CT policing network is currently working on a record number of more than 800 investigations. These investigations focus on a range of activities, including fundraising, radicalising and preparing acts of terrorism.
- The level of threat is complex and multi-dimensional and ranges from self initiated terrorism where individuals are intent on carrying out crude attacks to sophisticated networks pursuing ambitious and coordinated plots. The most likely attack methodologies are bladed / blunt force weapons; vehicles; and explosives. However, most of the activity we see is in other forms such as radicalising others, fundraising or preparing acts of terrorism.

**\*\*Please note that not all groups discussed in this document are of counter terrorism interest. The document should be viewed in context\*\***

## Online Extremism

- Online radicalisation of individuals is used in all forms of extremism and terrorism. Extremist and terrorist organisations have the ability to access and disseminate content globally. It is difficult to police and is therefore a persistent challenge for CT policing. The last 12 months has seen an increased shift towards the use of encrypted sites and applications to spread propaganda. Whilst the use of mainstream platforms such as Facebook and Twitter still exist, extremist activity continues to shift onto more encrypted and private communication channels. Whilst these platforms are legitimate and are not indicative of extremist / terrorist activity, lesser-known sites may be less moderated and may allow more radical types of content and discussion. This could ultimately lead to new threats in the online sphere of social media. The use of mainstream media platforms also continues to be exploited by those looking to promote their propaganda and use the online sphere to radicalise people.
- The online environment is ideal for taking advantage of peoples' vulnerabilities and encouraging / facilitating radicalisation, specifically of younger people. Due to the global pandemic, 2021 encountered continued national restrictions, this facilitated a continued increase in time spent online by the majority of the population. It is assessed that a result of the ongoing pandemic the public's attention remained focused primarily on public health threats and not those from terrorism. Online extremist activities may have consequently gone further un-noticed.
- 2021 re-emphasised how terrorist groups such as Daesh rely heavily upon their propaganda being shared online where it has the potential to reach large, diverse audiences and can be used to radicalise, encourage, support and provoke individuals to carry out attacks.
- The last 12 months saw increased amounts of time spent online as a result of the ongoing pandemic. This provided those with an extremist mindset an increased opportunity to produce their own propaganda content and distribute online. Click bait and falling down a "rabbit-hole" of hyperlinks remains a possibility.
- As a result of the global pandemic 2021 saw continued emphasis on online home learning. School closures in early 2021 and school bubbles isolating has meant that we have seen a promotion of online learning for the young and potentially vulnerable by white nationalist groups such as Patriotic Alternative. This had the likely potential to increase at home radicalisation of younger people. Both in the UK and abroad, it has been highlighted that right wing groups have been created online by young people.
- February 2021 saw the launch of the new iREPORTit App. It can be used by the public to report violent extremist content online so that it can be removed via the CTIRU. This new reporting tool is slightly different to the ACT app (which provides information on what to do) and the gov.uk website which is web based and not in app format. You can anonymously report terrorist material you come across online. The project comes amid concerns that the coronavirus pandemic has created fertile conditions for isolated and vulnerable people, including children, to become radicalised.
- In July 2021 the government announced the rollout of a new text alert service to be used to warn people on their phones of life-threatening situations in their area, including terrorist attacks. The public will be sent messages on their mobile devices that will give clear guidance on how they can protect themselves when such events happen.
- 2021 also saw an online partnership between ACT (Action Counters Terrorism) and Netmums. This is an initiative to make CT advice and assistance increasingly accessible to parents of children.

## Extremist Travel

- It remains unlikely that UK citizens fighting abroad will return to the UK during the next few months. Even with current reduced travel restrictions we do not foresee the attempted return of UK citizens as an imminent concern. Stricter border controls continue to hamper returnees. If anyone did attempt to return to the UK, the greatest risk is that they use a clandestine route. Small boat travel methodology is becoming more widely seen. In October 2021 it was revealed that MI6 had joined Home Office efforts to vet migrants crossing the channel for security risks. They are working alongside Border Force officials at Dover.
- With the collapse of the Caliphate in 2019 and tighter travel restrictions imposed throughout 2021 there has been no known travel by West Yorkshire residents to conflicts zones this year. Due to the ongoing world wide pandemic it is highly unlikely that individuals will travel to theatres in 2022 even as some travel restrictions begin to ease.
- In March 2021 a government watchdog reported that there would be no guarantee that the children of Daesh parents who return to the UK from Syria will not pose a threat to the public in future. So far the UK has only seen children who have returned aged under 10. However, the growing number of domestic teenagers becoming radicalised shows the risk of extremism among the young and it is impossible to know how children exposed to extremism in Syria will be affected.

## Al-Muhajiroun (ALM)

- ALM is a proscribed terrorist organisation in the UK which follows an extreme fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. The groups objectives include the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate.
- ALM's leadership advocated support of Daesh, reject fundamental British values and democracy, and support the inclusion of the UK in a Caliphate which is governed under a version of Sharia Law.
- ALM's use of the online sphere remains a risk. The effects of Covid-19 restrictions have also inhibited the group's ability to operate in public spaces. However, recent terror attacks have demonstrated that ALM messaging retains its potency long after its creation.
- Their ideology supports attack planning and members and affiliates have been involved and convicted of planning or committing terrorist offences. ALM believe that terrorist acts are justified in retaliation for the perceived persecution of Muslims.

## Extremism in the Secure Estate

- There is a risk of prisoners, both TACT (those charged and sentenced with terrorist related offences) and Non-TACT (those charged and sentenced with none terrorist related offences), being radicalised in prison and radicalising others. Consequently the rehabilitation of TACT offenders remains a key area of concern both nationally and for the North East.
- The global pandemic has continued to dominated this reporting period, severely impacting prison establishments with many prison estates continuing to operate on a limited regime. Since restrictions in prisons began to ease inline with the rest of the UK intelligence reporting has risen.
- In October 2021 papers were published calling for judges to be given increased powers to sentence the most serious terror offenders to a minimum 14 year jail term with an extended period on licence for 25 years.

## Self-Initiated Terrorism

- The threat from self-initiated terrorism is not linked to one specific ideology, attacks in the past have been committed by those with an Islamist and Right Wing ideology and others who have no ideology at all. Low sophistication methods of attack tend to be used, such as vehicles and knives.
- With continued increased isolation throughout 2021 due to the global pandemic, and the potential to spend more time online, there is capacity for the SIT risk to increase. Furthermore, due to the global pandemic there is a realistic possibility that this may have had an adverse effect on people's mental health. The impact of living in isolation and not having access to the same level of support they are used to may lead to a decrease in an individual's mental health and becoming more vulnerable to extremism / terrorism.
- During 2021 self-initiated attacks in the UK remained somewhat hampered, however, as restrictions began to ease in the later half of the year we saw the attack on Sir David Amess, MP in Leigh-On-Sea, Essex. He was stabbed to death on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2021 by Ali HARBI ALI who is believed to have acted alone although held extremist Islamic beliefs.
- On 14<sup>th</sup> November 2021 Iraqi born Christian convert **Emad AL SWEALMEEN** detonated a homemade body worn IED in the back of a taxi outside Liverpool Women's Hospital. It is believed to have been a failed attempt and did not detonate fully. He was a failed asylum seeker who had suffered periods of mental health issues. His last failed asylum bid was in January 2021 and it is believed he began purchasing materials for the attack in April 2021. No one was killed other than the assailant, the taxi driver David Perry escaped seconds before the car exploded in flames after he heroically locked AL SWEALMEEN in the back of the car.
- It is assessed that as the UK heads towards a more normalised way of living under Plan A in 2022 and people begin to go out once more that the likelihood of a person carrying out a self-initiated attack will be increasingly probable.

## Extreme Right Wing Terrorism (ERWT) / Extremist Right Wing (ERW)

This year saw the proscription of another RWT group called The Base on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2021 of The Base. The following Right Wing groups are proscribed in the UK. A full list of all proscribed organisations can be found on the following website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2>



Sonnenkrieg  
Division



Systems Resistance  
Network (SRN)



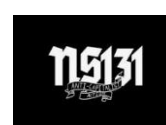
Feuerkrieg  
Division



National Action



Scottish Dawn



NS 131



Atomwaffen Division  
aka National Socialist  
Order



The Base

This year has seen UK wide restrictions ease somewhat and with this there have been more demonstrations, visits and protests recorded across the UK and in WY as was expected. It remains likely that long established groups have continued to adapt to the measures brought about from the pandemic and continue to engage in some form of online group meetings, and have more than likely continued to enhanced their online presence. In November 2021 a report by Hope Not Hate identified the top 52 areas of the UK most at risk from far right extremism, within this list was the local authority area of Bradford but it was not in the top 16 considered of most concern.

**Cultural Nationalism (CN)** is a belief that “Western Culture” is under threat from mass migration into Europe and from a lack of integration by certain ethnic and cultural groups. The ideology tends to focus on the rejection of cultural practices such as the wearing of the burqa or the perceived rise of the use of sharia law. In March 2021 **Stephen YAXLEY-LENNON** aka Tommy ROBINSON visited an address in Huddersfield. This was in relation to an assault and “waterboarding” incident in 2018 at Almondbury School, Huddersfield which was videoed and went viral. It attracted RW attention at the time. The victim sued YAXLEY-LENNON. This trial, which was held in July found YAXLEY-LENNON guilty and ordered him to pay £100,000 libel damages and legal costs, believed to be around £500,000.

In April 2021 five members of **Britain First** attended Batley Grammar School. The group stood outside the school and made a speech which was filmed and uploaded to their website. This was a result of the Batley teacher blasphemy row that escalated this year. In October an Islamic charity Purpose For Life was rebuked by a watchdog for naming the teacher publicly which prompted days of protests outside from Muslim parents enraged about the showing of the Prophet Mohammed cartoon.

**Britain First** have continued to carry out protests throughout the UK over the last year, focusing on hotels that have allegedly been housing asylum seekers. On 03/04/2021 a minibus of eight supporters attended the Travelodge, Mirfield. They entered the hotel displaying their views on the hotel for housing asylum seekers. They had banners saying “Britain First Putting British People First”.

In May a member of the **National Front** ran for election in the Calderdale borough council elections for Todmorden Ward. The candidate did not get elected. The NF describes itself as a ‘radical racial nationalist movement’ whose primary goal is ‘to ensure the survival and advancement of the White Race and the British Nation.’ No issues were reported.

In June **Jayda FRANSEN** previous leader of BF stood as an Independent candidate in the local Batley and Spen by-election in June but failed to get elected.

## Extreme Right Wing Terrorism (ERWT) / Extremist Right Wing (ERW) - continued

**White Nationalism (WN)** - is a belief that mass migration from the “non-White” world, and demographic change, poses an existential threat to the “White Race” and “Western Culture”. Advocates for some sort of “White” homeland, either through partition of already existing countries, or by the (if necessary forced) repatriation of ethnic minorities. At the start of the year **Patriotic Alternative** was exploiting anti-lockdown sentiments amongst frustrated young teens / adults in an effort to recruit them into their cause. Thus highlighting the threat we see to young males in particular. PA hung a giant “End the lockdown” banner off the Humber Bridge and used social media accounts to spread their propaganda and messages. Youngsters are being targeted by this group within the NE region. In February PA began promoting home schooling as restrictions once again forced school closures for a period of time.

They promoted a home school curriculum perceived by many to contain racist elements. PA were also promoting themselves via public online gaming tournaments such as Call of Duty, raising concerns of the group using gaming platforms to attract new members.

In November the Yorkshire branch of PA protested in nearby Hull in response to news of alleged child abuse in the city, however they received minimal media attention.

It is assess that WN will highly likely continue to be supported in WY and attract activity in our force area and region in the course of 2022.

**White Supremacism (WS)** - is a belief that the “White Race” has certain inalienable physical and mental characteristics that makes it superior (with some variation) to other races. Often associated with conspiracy theories that explain the decline in “White” political and social status over the last hundred years. This can also encapsulate a belief in the spiritual superiority of the “White Race”, often describing racial differences in quasi-religious terms (such as “the Aryan soul”).

## COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to dominate this year. The UK was put into a third national lockdown on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021. Emergency measures continued to limit peoples daily lives. The beginning of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout began in early December 2020 across the UK. Subsequent second doses and a booster vaccination programme throughout 2021 have ensued. As predicted, last year, we have finally begun to see a return to a more normalised way of life albeit with some cautious measures still in place. This holds the possibility of reducing the risk and threat we have seen as a direct result of the pandemic as we head into 2022.

### Online

The impact of COVID-19 will present many issues for WY in years to come. CTPNE continues to work with national teams to actively engage with families where young people may be exposed to negative influences online. With schools and colleges having undergone further periods of partial closures at the beginning of 2021 and many people continuing to work from home for the majority of 2021 the impact has been an increase in the amount of time people have spent online. Vulnerabilities have had more opportunity to be preyed upon and those in isolation taken advantage of. It has also presented increased opportunity for people to self radicalise in the home. Here the danger lies in self-initiated terrorism.

At time of writing we are under Plan A with most national restrictions now removed. Educational establishments are open and the mandate to work from home has been rescinded. However, the continued increased time spent online whilst restrictions to work from home were in place and whilst some forms of schooling remain online (particularly for those self isolating / home schooling) there remains the issue of increased risk. People have potentially put themselves at greater risk of online radicalisation and / or of being taken advantage of particularly if there is no alternative mind-set or counter narrative on offer in the home, at school or from family for example.

The use of social media to disseminate COVID-19 booster vaccine misinformation continues to cause issue as it did with the initial vaccine rollouts earlier in 2021. In March 2021 Facebook launched a media literacy campaign to tackle the spread of false information about the COVID-19 vaccine. Whilst not of an immediate CT concern, over the last year we have seen the right wing in particular use conspiracy theories etc. to prey on peoples vulnerabilities. This shows how vaccine misinformation could also be used to recruit and spread right wing propaganda.

### Right Wing / Far Right

Far right groups have continued to use conspiracy theories about COVID-19 as a recruiting tool to attract younger supporters into their realms during 2021. The use of memes and conspiracy theories are attractive to a particularly younger audience and have been used to attract new support.

The evacuation of thousands of Afghan refugees to the UK in 2021 after Kabul fell to the Taliban triggered an increase in far-right groups targeting hotels across the UK where they are being accommodated, arguing that funding should go towards rehousing the UK homeless. This was arguably facilitated with relaxed national restrictions over the summer months. Groups have also claimed the Afghan resettlement scheme will lead to increased unemployment amongst British workers.

### Mental Health

It is likely that mental health of WY has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is assessed that mental illness will continue to play a large role in Prevent referrals seen in 2022 as it remains unknown what affect the underlying health issue contributes to a person's vulnerability to radicalisation.



## Emerging Vulnerabilities

### Drones

The use of drones as a terrorist method remains a wider UK threat. It is another method which terrorist may adopt as technologies advance and monitoring of human targets continues. With the number of personal drones increasing in the UK despite new laws being implemented it is not uncommon to see these fly over critical and sensitive sites (intentionally or not). Internationally terrorists have used drones for a variety of purposes such as surveillance to dropping improvised explosive devices, Daesh have also published the use of drones in propaganda material in recent years. Drones can increase the number of casualties / victims and could potentially be used as a substitute for suicide bombers and reach places with more ease. Drones could for example be used to carry chemical and biological weapons as well as explosives. They can also cover a large geographical scope making them attractive to potential extremists when attack planning. They can be operated remotely and evade air defence systems. The UK Government has in place legislation which gives the police the power to stop and search drone pilots near airports.

### 3D Printed Firearms

In the UK 3D printing is legal but it is illegal to construct a viable, homemade firearm, including 3D printed designs. However, the threat posed from 3D printed firearms is increasing due to improved printing techniques and accessibility of products. Recent developments in 3D printing have improved the capacity and power of available designs, which is likely to make them more attractive for use in crime and, potentially, terrorist attacks.

With reducing costs of 3D printers making them more affordable, cheaper running costs and wider availability these factors will likely facilitate greater usage increasing the potential threat of them being mis-used for printing firearms.

### Threats to MPs

In the wake of the murder of MP Sir David Amess, a terrorist incident, the protection of MPs has again been highlighted as an emerging threat. Media reporting has linked the suspect, 25 year old **Ali HARBİ ALI**, to the preaching's of ALM leader Anjem CHOUDARY. On 21<sup>st</sup> October 2021 HARBİ ALI was charged with murder under the Terrorism Act. It is claimed he is affiliated to IS and was planning an attack for several years. He was charged with preparing acts of terrorism. CT and Non CT policing remain vigilant to the threat against MPs.





### Hamas

On 19<sup>th</sup> November 2021 the UK Government proscribed the political wing of Islamist group **Hamas** in the UK denouncing it as “fundamentally and rabidly antisemitic”. The military wing of Hamas has been proscribed in the UK since 2001. Supporters of the group in its entirety will face up to 10 years in prison under the Terrorism Act.

### School Massacre Attacks – Columbine School Shooting 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

As the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Columbine massacre approaches (2024) it is likely we will see increased reference to the event and possible imitation desires for copycat school massacre style attacks. In September 2021, in the US, four teenagers were charged with a plot to attack Pennsylvania high school in 2024 on the anniversary date. At one of the teens houses was found a Molotov cocktail, bomb components, bomb making instructions, lists of guns, ammunition and tactical equipment. It goes to show that the threat of potential copycat style attacks remains.

## Links and Resources

<p>Anti Terrorist Hotline</p> 	<p>You can report suspicious activity by contacting the police in confidence on 0800 789 321. In an emergency, or if you need urgent police assistance, you should always dial 999.</p>
<p>Act Early Campaign</p> 	<p>Report online: <a href="https://actearly.uk/">https://actearly.uk/</a></p>
<p>Crime Stoppers</p> 	<p>Report anonymously by telephone 0800 555 111 or online <a href="https://crimestoppers-uk.org/give-information/forms/pre-form">https://crimestoppers-uk.org/give-information/forms/pre-form</a></p>
<p>Prevent Referrals</p> 	<p>All information must be sent to your local Fixed Intelligence Management Unit (FIMU). To do this please utilise the mechanisms that are currently in place in your local area:</p> <p>Partners – complete a Prevent referral form and send to FIMU Police – submit an intelligence form</p>