

SEPTEMBER 2021



PREVIEW



Evolving threat of terrorism 20 years after September 11 attacks

Crackdown following unprecedented protests in Cuba



Selected calendar events for September 2021

<p>7 September</p> <p>Independence Day in Brazil</p> <p>● LOW RISK</p>	<p>16 September</p> <p>Malaysia Day in Malaysia</p> <p>● LOW RISK</p>	<p>25 September</p> <p>Parliamentary election in Iceland</p> <p>● LOW RISK</p>
<p>8 September</p> <p>House of Representatives election in Morocco</p> <p>● LOW RISK</p>	<p>16 September</p> <p>Independence Day in Mexico</p> <p>● LOW RISK</p>	<p>30 September</p> <p>Independence Day in Botswana</p> <p>● LOW RISK</p>
<p>10 September</p> <p>World Suicide Prevention Day</p> <p>● NEGLIGIBLE RISK</p>	<p>21 September</p> <p>World Alzheimer's Day 2021</p> <p>● NEGLIGIBLE RISK</p>	<p>1, 9, 21, 27 September</p> <p>Independence Day: Uzbekistan (1), Tajikistan (9), Armenia (21), Turkmenistan (27)</p> <p>● LOW RISK</p> <p>These countries declared their independence from the Soviet Union on the respective dates. The security environment is broadly calm in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, but they are plagued with endemic corruption. Protests are rare, as the governments strictly control public gatherings and often respond with repressive security measures. However, in Armenia, mass protests have occurred due to the instability of the government and the diplomatic tension over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh.</p>
<p>11 September</p> <p>Memorial Day in the United States</p> <p>● LOW – ● MEDIUM RISK</p>	<p>22 September</p> <p>World Car-Free Day</p> <p>● NEGLIGIBLE RISK</p>	
<p>12 September</p> <p>Legislative Assembly election in Macau SAR</p> <p>● LOW RISK</p>	<p>22 September</p> <p>Independence Day in Mali</p> <p>● MEDIUM – ● HIGH RISK</p> <p>The country celebrates independence amid the stain to its democracy after the second military takeover within two years. Commemorative parades are expected, with a higher risk of unrest if there is a perception that the military is trying to hold on to power beyond the transition deadline on February 27, 2022.</p>	
<p>13 September</p> <p>Parliamentary election in Norway</p> <p>● LOW RISK</p>		
<p>15 September</p> <p>International Day of Democracy</p> <p>● LOW RISK</p> <p>The day is observed with the purpose of promoting and upholding the principles of democracy. On this day, individuals and organizations are encouraged to work together to raise awareness through conferences, discussions, and debates. Major events are usually held at the United Nations headquarters.</p>	<p>23 September</p> <p>International Day of Sign Languages</p> <p>● NEGLIGIBLE RISK</p> <p>The day is a unique opportunity to commemorate the linguistic and cultural diversity of all deaf people and other sign language users. This year's celebration goes with the theme 'We Sign for Human Rights' which aims to raise awareness of the importance of sign language and how people should get early access to it as a means of communication.</p>	



Evolving threat of terrorism 20 years after September 11 attacks

The United States will mark the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks that till this day remains one of the most significant events in the history of the modern world. Commemorative events will be held at the attack sites in New York City, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania as families of the victims and the U.S. as a nation come together to cherish the memories of those who lost their lives on a fateful day.

Since the attacks 20 years ago, terrorism has continued to dominate the security agenda of every country in the world. In particular, the western hemisphere also remained on high alert for terrorism for years amid the subsequent Madrid train bombings and the 7/7 attacks in London that killed hundreds in 2004 and 2005, respectively.

Fast forward to today, mass terror attacks appeared to have shown a decline both in the U.S. and Europe since 2018. Coordinated and large-scale attacks have seemingly been replaced by smaller ones that targeted specific individuals or a group of people, resulting in fewer fatalities. Despite this, governments have been warned against getting too comfortable as jihadists will continue to make their presence felt, and it is not inconceivable that a new terror wave is in the making, as shown in several high-profile attacks in Europe in 2020. While some of the attacks are directly attributable to known terror networks such as Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State (I.S.), there were others in which the links were unclear.

Such sporadic attacks were often referred to as IS-inspired, as the individuals might not have received orders from the terror network to do so. Despite less deadly attacks

compared to the ones in Paris in 2015 or Manchester in 2017, the radicalization process of a small number of young people in marginalized Muslim communities in parts of Europe has continued to cause concern for intelligence officials. Apart from that, returning European jihadists from the Middle East have also raised the alarm as some have proven to possess terror intent, resulting in the possibility of a resurgence of attacks that are not as sophisticated or coordinated but still able to generate fear among the populace.



PREVIEW

Across the Atlantic, the threat of jihadists has largely been superseded by right-wing extremists. The deep polarization during the presidency of Donald Trump has seen a rise of attacks that were largely associated with individuals or groups with far-right beliefs. For the 2017-2019 period, the U.S. has seen an exponential rise of attacks and plots on minority groups. Targets often include mosques, churches, synagogues, or even businesses owned by people of color. Although the Trump presidency came to an end in early 2021, the trend of domestic terrorism involving far-right extremists does not seem to have shown any signs of letting up. They are prompting calls for more efforts in combating disinformation campaigns by various right-wing groups, including white supremacist ones.

As world governments focus their efforts on controlling the Covid-19 pandemic, there are concerns that the lack of attention could allow terrorist networks to reach a wider populace in some countries. With more people spending their time online amid lockdown measures, Europol, for instance, had warned that terror groups could use online platforms to encourage individuals to use violence as a way to solve their problems. Moreover, growing discontent caused by unemployment and other economic hardships might also be potentially exploited by them to sow seeds of radicalization, thus furthering their cause of destabilizing a country.



While the number of jihadist attacks in Europe has shown a sign of decrease after its peak in 2017, the white supremacist/ right-wing attacks rose in the U.S., especially during the presidency of Donald Trump from 2016. (Sources: Statista and CSIS)



Crackdown following unprecedented protests in Cuba

Thousands of Cubans took to the streets on July 11, the island has not seen in decades in a show of force. Protesters decried a failing system, and long-simmering anger boiled over into large-scale protests in multiple major cities.

Crowds marched under the banner of “we’re not afraid anymore,” “enough is enough,” and “freedom,” but despite their defiance, authorities have responded with an iron grip. The resulting crackdown has been all-encompassing and ruthless, but the underlying grievances that have fuelled these protests remain unresolved.

Despite rampant crackdowns on media and freedom of speech in the country, the internet and social media apps played a major role in mobilizing and publicizing the demonstrations. On July 11, two major protests broke out in San Antonio de los Baños, near Havana, and Palma Soriano, in the province of Santiago de Cuba, but the movement soon spread to over 15 towns and cities across Cuba through July 17. The slogans used during the protests clearly reference the country’s authoritarian system, but more dire grievances provoked this recent dissent. The Cuban economy has been in a downward spiral for the past years, and residents have been forced to contend with growing food and medicine shortages as well as rising commodity prices. Rampart fuel shortages have also led to long and disruptive power outages across

the country, and all these issues have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. These grievances lie at the heart of the recent protests, with many condemning the government for failing to fulfill its basic functions.

In response, Cuban authorities have been quick to deflect blame. The regime has sought to denounce and minimize the protests and has pointed to the United States embargo and sanctions as the reason for the country’s suffering. In the wake of the protests, hundreds of people have been arrested, and a crackdown on activists and organizers has sought to deter any future action. The government dragnet seems to be getting wider, with authorities using the recent protests as an opportunity to target outspoken dissidents, regardless of their involvement. Authorities have also introduced new measures to further tighten their control over social media and the internet, which will make it considerably more difficult for protesters to mobilize in the numbers they did on July 11.

Cubans are calling for their basic needs to be met, and as long as the government fails to provide food, medicine, and electricity to its inhabitants, they will have to contend with more civil disobedience. Repression and shifting blame will do little to placate the masses, and the Cuban government will need to cope with a new dynamic on the island that sees citizens take to the streets to make their opposition vocal.



On the Radar

Taliban's "blitzkrieg" return to power in Afghanistan raises regional security concerns

A week-long lightning offensive across Afghanistan saw the Taliban capturing multiple provincial capitals and culminated in the seizure of Kabul on August 15. Having met little resistance, the group is now the de facto government of Afghanistan.

For years, the militants controlled the countryside and mounted daily attacks on civilian and military targets. Despite being better equipped, government forces were plagued by corruption and poor leadership. Ultimately, the formal withdrawal of the United States (U.S.) military and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) allies from May onwards eroded what little morale remained among over-extended local forces. The international community has cautiously accepted this surprise fait accompli as there is little appetite to redeploy foreign troops into the theatre beyond facilitating the evacuation of key

personnel. However, the Taliban takeover is in a transition phase, and the situation remains unstable. International observers will carefully monitor how the group addresses key concerns, including civil society issues, the presence of foreign militant groups in the country, and opium production, already the biggest in the world. While violence is also expected to drop significantly in the short term, many pro-government fighters did not fire a shot and may become insurgents themselves. Failure to address any of these issues effectively may risk the country being isolated with the flow of basic goods and movement of people severely restricted. Looking beyond Afghanistan, the Taliban's victory will likely encourage other anti-US militant groups and even near-peer adversaries to adopt the group's resilience, as exemplified by a popular Afghan adage, "You have the watches, we have the time."



On the Radar

Haiti delays planned September referendum amid natural calamities, pandemic, and political violence

Haiti was plunged into a crisis in early July following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse at his residence in Port-au-Prince.

The killing of Moïse came at a time when the Caribbean nation was tethered on the brink of social disorder due to widespread poverty and gang violence. In mid-August, a strong earthquake in the west of Port-au-Prince also added to the country's long list of woes, which the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated. With Moïse gone and the impending power vacuum, there are concerns that the ongoing violence could escalate, causing more hardships to the civilians. Moïse was among the key proponents for a September referendum that will see the position of the prime minister being abolished and Haiti transitioning to

a full-presidential system. The United States (U.S.), which has significant influence in the country, had previously rejected the referendum plan and called for an election to solve the political impasse through local activists begged to differ, saying that the current conditions are just not right for such exercise to take place. Instead, there have been requests by the Haitian government for U.S. troops to be deployed so that order can be restored in a country that is at risk of further unrest. With the referendum now set for November 7, it has been hoped that efforts can be prioritized toward rebuilding the nation hit hard by natural calamities and an escalating pandemic. The delay might offer a brief respite though concerns remain that the constant political violence could derail such efforts, putting the nation into a vicious cycle of uncertainty.



On the Radar

Deepening water crisis poses a long-term challenge for Iran

Since July, a water crisis in Khuzestan has revealed further cracks in Iran as the country experienced its driest conditions in 53 years.

Lack of rain, the building of hydroelectric dams, and farming of water-intensive products like rice, wheat, and sugar cane have been depleting Iran's water resources leading to the severe shortage this year. On top of that, chronic mismanagement and sanction have also caused the situation to fester, sparking protests since mid-July. Locals from dozens of towns and cities of the province went out on the streets to demand urgent response to solve the problem as they faced difficulties with accessing drinking water as well as constant power cuts. Solidarity protests spread to multiple cities, including Tehran, Isfahan, Kermanshah, Tabriz, Urmia, and Ardabil. The recent response from Iranian Supreme Leader Ali

Khamenei following the deadly protests was rather expected, resulting in widespread internet shutdown in Khuzestan and waves of arrests. The harrowing signs of long-term troubles are expected in months to come and pose a challenge to the new president, Ebrahim Raisi, amid increasing hazards of climate change as well as Khuzestan's position as a longstanding hotbed of civil unrest. Iran's assorted opposition groups have also unified into a sustainable movement due to the shared grievance that will add pressure for the current regime. To further tone down the inflamed protests, Raisi must resolve the water crisis through a comprehensive plan that focuses on climate-smart policies and treat the current unrest as more than just another passing convenience for Iran's ayatollahs as it becomes one of the most critical determinants of the republic's stability.



On the Radar

Struggling Myanmar faces a multitude of problems amid junta rule

After a decade of civilian government in Myanmar, the military junta overthrew the then-ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) on February 1 and took over the country.

The development is not completely unheard of. However, since 1948, Myanmar has faced similar disputes of power, including a long civil war. In 2021, amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the historical and very much current political turmoil has positioned its people in a dire situation, as reports indicate health and public services operate in a limited capacity. Since the coup, Safeture has published over 250 alerts on anti-junta demonstrations, with more than 700 protesters killed by the government since. Besides the civilian mobilization, several insurgent

groups are also increasing their activities across the country, especially in Rakhine, Shan, Kachin, Karen, and Mandalay states as government troops wither. Attacks - often explosions and clashes with security forces - have been frequent over the last months. Generally, it is fair to conclude that the scenario in Myanmar will continue to be unstable through September. Anti-government demonstrations can be expected in urban centers such as Mandalay, Yangon, and Kale, and Covid-19 cases are likely to continue their upward trend, leading to further strain of the public health services. Separatist acts should also not be ruled out either, and travelers should account for infrastructure disruptions and adopt heightened security measures.

Risk level categories

● Negligible risk ● Low risk ● Medium risk ● High risk ● Critical risk

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