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SITUATION REPORT

October 23, 2022

Pro-Palestinian Unrest

Attacks, Threats, and Protests Since October 13

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Overview

In response to Israel's campaign in Gaza, Hamas officials called for a "Day of Rage," to take place on October 13, encouraging terrorist attacks and unrest from supporters around the world. Several countries have reported related attacks, threats, and violent unrest on and shortly after the "Day of Rage." In response, many countries such as France and Germany have banned related public demonstrations and deployed security personnel en masse. These severe measures have provoked public backlash and led to further demonstrations in opposition to the crackdowns.

Key Takeaways

1. **The Hamas call for a "Day of Rage" on October 13 has resulted in more civil unrest than violent attacks, but terrorism risks will remain elevated for the foreseeable future.** High-profile violent incidents since October 13 have shown a real cause for concern, and the risk of further attacks will remain while the Israel-Hamas War continues to elevate tensions in the Middle East and prompt unrest around the world.¹
2. **France experienced the most terrorist activity and produced the harshest security response.** A stabbing attack on October 13 and widespread threats across France have prompted bans on public demonstrations and the deployment of thousands of security personnel. A shooting in Brussels on October 16 and violent unrest in Berlin have also heightened tensions and led to significant police responses.
3. **Harsh security responses in affected countries will remain in place and potentially contribute to elevated civil unrest over the coming days.** Widespread bans on public demonstrations - put in place both before and after attacks - have evoked public outrage and calls for civil action in countries such as France and Germany. Several protests have broken out in direct opposition to these bans, and many have concluded with the forcible dispersal of demonstrators.

Incident Details

Following Hamas' call to action, one terrorist attack and hundreds of threats have been reported across France since October 13. A stabbing attack in Arras, France, on October 13 has preceded threats at tourist sites, airports, schools, and other public places. French officials responded with a ban on public demonstrations and the deployment of thousands of security personnel across the country.

- **On October 13,** a suspected islamist attacked a school in Arras, France, killing one teacher and injuring three others.² The assailant was a Chechen-Russian national with family ties to Islamic extremism.³ Officials have attributed the motive behind the attack to the

¹ <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/worldwide-caution.html>

² <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-school-stabbing-heres-what-we-know-about-arras-attack-2023-10-13/>

³ <https://www.politico.eu/article/killing-french-teacher-dominique-bertrand-surge-tensions-over-immigration-bill/>

renewed Israel-Palestine conflict and Hamas' call for action.⁴

- **On October 14**, several popular tourist attractions were the subject of bomb threats in Paris, France. The Louvre, Versailles palace, and Gare de Lyon were completely evacuated following individual threats. Security forces thoroughly searched each location, but determined each threat to be false. The Palace of Versailles was again evacuated on October 17, 18, 19, and 20 due to suspicious items and additional threats.⁵ Each threat, again, proved to be a false alarm.^{6,7}
- **On October 16**, the school building in Arras was evacuated again following a bomb threat called in during a vigil honoring the victims of the October 13 stabbing attack. The threat was later confirmed to be false.⁸
- **On October 18**, fifteen French airports evacuated due to various bomb threats levied against them and reports of suspiciously unattended luggage.⁹ Affected airports included Lille, Paris-Beauvais, Nantes, Toulouse, Nice and Lyon with reported disruptions at Biarritz and Pau as well.¹⁰ This became a repeating occurrence on October 19, with at least fourteen airports receiving threats including: Brest, Carcassonne, Rennes, Bordeaux-Merignac, Beziers, Montpellier, Nantes, and Lille-Lesquin. Over 130 flights were canceled and more delayed as a result. French President Emmanuel Macron was forced to evacuate his personal plane in Lille.¹¹ On October 20, fourteen more airports received threats, although only Bordeaux, Béziers, and Rennes were evacuated.¹²
- **On October 19**, several schools, including six in the city of Toulouse were forced to close as a result of bomb and attack threats.¹³ In Grenoble, two young men were arrested at the Laue Langevin Institute, a nuclear research facility, after they left a suspicious package and reported to guards: "We did it. We delivered a bomb".¹⁴

⁴<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20231016-french-schools-to-honour-teacher-killed-in-terror-attack>

⁵<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2023/10/18/france-airports-versailles-louvre-security-scare-evacuations/71226022007/>

⁶https://mail.google.com/mail/u/3/d/AEoRXRSr01-XsTFHP3sjmhT6OAFtaqlRrz6fAoOpVC0f22drAJdz/#section_query/-in%3Ainbox+-in%3Asent+-label%3AOSAC-AWG+-label%3Aschedule+-has%3Agreen-check+-%7Blabel%3Anews%7D+-label%3Agoogle-alerts+newer_than%3A7d/FMfcgzGwHLgVxSgJLkGlcXTqHRGXgjfn

⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67167918>

⁸<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/french-high-school-where-teacher-was-killed-friday-evacuated-over-bomb-alert-2023-10-16/>

⁹<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/airport-france-lille-paris-bomb-scare-b2431691.html>

¹⁰<https://apnews.com/article/france-fake-bomb-threats-airport-evacuations-5207144ba97668885180fab68a0279cf>

¹¹https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2023/10/20/french-government-growing-impatient-over-bomb-alerts-threaten-prison-terms_6190545_7.html

¹²<https://www.brusselstimes.com/belgium/756145/new-bomb-threats-at-14-french-airports-three-evacuated>

¹³https://mail.google.com/mail/u/3/d/AEoRXRSr01-XsTFHP3sjmhT6OAFtaqlRrz6fAoOpVC0f22drAJdz/#section_query/-in%3Ainbox+-in%3Asent+-label%3AOSAC-AWG+-label%3Aschedule+-has%3Agreen-check+-%7Blabel%3Anews%7D+-label%3Agoogle-alerts+newer_than%3A7d/FMfcgzGwHLgVxSgJLkGlcXTqHRGXgjfn

¹⁴<https://apnews.com/article/france-fake-bomb-threats-airport-evacuations-5207144ba97668885180fab68a0279cf>

- **French authorities believe most, if not all, of these incidents to be empty threats or hoaxes.** Nevertheless, the government has pledged a comprehensive security response and intends to investigate and prosecute any threats to the fullest extent possible. The French government has taken stringent action to combat terrorist threats and civil unrest. Officials have deployed 7,000 soldiers to address security concerns across the country.¹⁵ The government also escalated its terror-warning scale to the highest level, “emergency attack.”¹⁶
- **Since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas conflict, French police had received over 327 antisemitic threats, cases, and reports with 183 arrests for antisemitism.**¹⁷ This prompted a ban on pro-Palestinian demonstrations. Government officials declared attending or organizing any protests on the subject would result in arrests. Authorities also instructed police to increase security at any location where French Jews congregate. The ban itself, however, has generated new demonstrations in protest and demand of its removal.¹⁸ Police employed tear gas and water cannons to break up demonstrations in Paris, Lyon, and Marseilles on October 13 and have continued doing so at subsequent demonstrations.¹⁹ As pro-Palestinian protests continue in spite of the ban, police are reporting issuing 827 fines and 43 arrests in Paris since October 12.

While France has seen the most activity since October 13, significant attacks and threats have occurred in multiple other countries. A shooting in Brussels and multiple bouts of violent unrest in Germany have proven the most serious examples since October 13. Widespread opposition to demonstration bans and police deployments have also generated unrest.

- **On October 13**, threats from Islamist groups in Kenya prompted elevated terror warnings and security deployments in major urban areas. Nairobi and several other high traffic areas are still under the warning.²⁰
- **On October 13** Beijing, China, an Israeli embassy employee was stabbed outside of a grocery store.²¹
- **On October 16** in Brussels, Belgium, an ISIS-affiliated terrorist shot three Swedish tourists, killing two.²² The shooting occurred three miles from the soccer match between Sweden and Belgium in King Baudouin Stadium, forcing officials to stop the game.²³ The gunman, identified as 45 year old Tunisian national Abdesalem Lassoued, was killed in a shootout

¹⁵<https://apnews.com/article/france-louvre-versailles-evacuated-threats-859227d963367d7601575e4a8e1d2d4a>

¹⁶<https://crisis24.garda.com/alerts/2023/10/france-french-government-raises-national-alert-score-to-maximum-level-oct-13>

¹⁷<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-germany-palestinian-supporters-say-they-struggle-be-heard-2023-10-19/>

¹⁸ <https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/12/europe/france-ban-pro-palestinian-intl/index.html>

¹⁹<https://www.politico.eu/article/france-palestine-israel-gaza-cracks-down-on-pro-palestinian-protesters-amid-security-concerns/>

²⁰<https://ke.usembassy.gov/security-alert-u-s-embassy-nairobi-october-13-2023/>

²¹<https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-hamas-war-china-attack-d572e4169dd7f451cb2b2197506bc74c>

²²<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67129117>

²³<https://apnews.com/article/belgium-shooting-swedes-dead-d023a72119dc73ffca7cc61b7a32a955>

with police the following morning.²⁴ Following the attack, Belgian officials placed Brussels on terror alert level four, its highest level, and deployed emergency police personnel throughout the city.²⁵

- **On October 17** in Jordan, pro-Palestinian protestors attempted to reach a border zone with the West Bank in spite of a government-mandated ban on demonstrations. Jordanian police forcibly dispersed the demonstrators using tear gas and riot tactics. A second mob of protesters additionally tried, unsuccessfully, to storm Israel's embassy in Amman.²⁶
- **On October 17** in Berlin, Germany, authorities reported violent clashes with Muslim immigrants in the Neukoelln and Kreuzberg neighborhoods and at Berlin's landmark Brandenburg Gate, injuring several officers and an unknown number of civilians. Two unknown masked assailants firebombed the central Jewish synagogue in the Mitte district. A few hours later, a third man attempted to bypass the perimeter and enter the synagogue while shouting anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic slurs.²⁷ Violent unrest broke out again on the evening of October 18, where rioting resulted in injuries to sixty-five officers and the arrests of 174 people.²⁸ The German government has banned demonstrations in Berlin, and has begun to heavily increase security at vulnerable locations.²⁹
- **On October 21**, pro-Palestinian demonstrators numbering up to 100,000 marched through the streets of London, UK. Officials reported few instances of violent unrest, but the sheer size of the crowd was enough to cause significant traffic problems and other disruptions for several hours.³⁰

²⁴<https://abcnews.go.com/International/brussels-shooter-killed-2-swedish-soccer-fans-act/story?id=104032665>

²⁵<https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/16/europe/belgium-brussels-shooting-intl/index.html>

²⁶<https://crisis24.garda.com/alerts/2023/10/jordan-further-protests-increased-security-likely-in-amman-after-dozens-try-to-storm-israeli-embassy-to-protest-strike-on-gaza-hospital-oct-17>

²⁷<https://apnews.com/article/germany-berlin-synagogue-antisemitism-fdd10f32f7d5efc6da973f00c9a8b030>

²⁸ <https://www.politico.eu/article/65-police-hurt-violent-protest-berlin-palestine-israel-hamas/>

²⁹<https://apnews.com/article/germany-berlin-synagogue-antisemitism-fdd10f32f7d5efc6da973f00c9a8b030>

³⁰

<https://www.reuters.com/world/about-100000-protesters-join-pro-palestinian-march-through-london-2023-10-21/>

Implications for International Education

SafeAbroad Analysts predict extensive demonstrations, both peaceful and violent, will continue and terrorism risks will remain high in the coming weeks.

The following recommendations may help mitigate the risks outlined in this report:

- Travelers should register their travel with the U.S. State Department STEP system in order to receive emergency alerts. Carry contact information for the nearest Embassy or Consulate.
- Travelers should avoid all public demonstrations related to the Israel-Hamas conflict due to the increased risk of violent incidents, especially in countries with demonstration bans in place.
- Travelers should maintain heightened situational awareness including overseeing personal safety as well as the safety of a group if traveling with others.
- Travelers of Jewish or Muslim faiths should practice increased vigilance and caution if displaying religious affiliation.
- Travelers should report any and all suspicious activity, things, and/or persons to authorities as quickly as possible.
- If a suspect of a crime is at large, travelers should gather in a safe and secure area and remain there until the suspect is apprehended by authorities.
- Travelers should reconsider travel to crowded, popular tourist areas in cities following a string of terrorism.
- Travelers should check with their program director and follow any school-specific guidance.

