



Risk Mitigation Consulting Inc.

Intelligence and Analysis Division

OPEN SOURCE UPDATE

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INTENT

This open source periodical is designed to provide an overview of relevant, publicly available information on threat and hazard events and analysis of potential impacts to the interests of the United States, both at home and abroad. This product is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of all threat and hazard news and inclusion in this product does not constitute a confirmation of credibility nor precedence by RMC.



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Threats

Easter Sunday Bombings in Sri Lanka – *Terrorism*

Excerpt: On Easter Sunday, suicide bombers killed at least 253 people and injured some 500 at churches and top-end hotels across Sri Lanka.

Most victims were Sri Lankans, but at least 38 foreigners are among the dead, including British, Indian and US citizens.

The official death toll had reached 359. However, the Sri Lankan government then revised the figure down, blaming a calculation error.

Evidence is mounting that local jihadists linked to the Islamic State (IS) group carried out the attack, and police have made a number of arrests.

Analyst Comment: The Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka were highly coordinated, targeting three churches during crowded Easter services, as well as three luxury hotels. The perpetrators were reportedly a Sri Lankan militant Islamist group known as National Thowheeth Jama'ath (NTJ), although several of the perpetrators are believed to have ties to the Islamic State (IS) terror group and IS claimed some degree of responsibility for the attacks. The apparent targets were Christians (who were observing the Easter holiday at churches), as well as foreigners (who frequent luxury hotels and often are citizens of countries who are part of the anti-IS coalition in Iraq and Syria).

Although NTJ is a lesser-known terror group in the global sphere, the group has known links to the IS terror group, which has historically attempted to expand its reach beyond Iraq and Syria by establishing local affiliate groups (which pledge allegiance to IS), as well as attempting to inspire lone actors via the use of propaganda. IS has other affiliates in Southeast Asia, to include the Abu Sayyaf group in the Philippines, and IS has known to pursue affiliates and territorial claims in countries to include India and Bangladesh. Additionally, in 2014, various jihadist groups consolidated into an al-Qaeda affiliate known as al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), which has claimed responsibility for a number of attacks in the region.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48010697>

North Korea Tests Short-Range Missiles – *Foreign Nation-State Military*

Excerpt: North Korea is once again pressing the boundaries of what it can get away with, returning to missile tests in violation of international sanctions championed by U.S. President Donald Trump. So far, the reaction has been muted.



Trump dismissed Kim Jong Un's move to launch two short-range missiles, six days after the North Korean leader supervised a military exercise in which he fired off several projectiles, including what non-proliferation experts believed was another short-range ballistic missile.

"They're smaller missiles," Trump told reporters. "Nobody's happy about it." The Pentagon confirmed that North Korea tested "multiple ballistic missiles," a description affirmed by Japan's defense ministry.

Analyst Comment: North Korea's latest missile tests were the first the country had carried out in months, and based on the available assessments about the weapons' characteristics, such tests would likely not violate the voluntary moratorium on nuclear and long-range missile testing which the country agreed to as part of denuclearization talks with the U.S. However, many observers have noted that such tests may come as a result of North Korea's apparent dissatisfaction with the status of talks with the U.S., which have largely stalled as of late.

Additionally, in the days following the tests, open source media reporting citing U.S. officials has indicated that North Korea's latest short-range missiles are a copy of an advanced Russian design which could evade U.S. missile defense systems. While this could potentially threaten U.S. assets and installations in the region, such a development would be less concerning than developments regarding nuclear weapons or intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), which could threaten CONUS.

Source: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-05-09/north-korea-fires-unidentified-projectiles-south-korea-says>

U.S. Executive Order Targets Huawei, ZTE – *Foreign Intelligence Entities*

Excerpt: President Donald Trump signed an executive order that could restrict Chinese telecommunication firms Huawei Technologies and ZTE from selling their equipment in the U.S., ratcheting up the battle for control over new 5G technology networks.

The order, which didn't name any countries or companies, declares a national emergency relating to threats against information and communications technology and services.

The U.S. is engaged in a global campaign to keep Chinese tech companies out of advanced 5G networks promising faster connections, enabling uses such as autonomous vehicles and remote surgery. Huawei is pushing to take a global leadership position, but many American officials suspect the company's products could be used by Beijing to spy on Western governments and companies.

The order doesn't outright ban U.S. sales by the companies, but would give greater authority to the Commerce Department to review products and purchases by firms connected to adversarial countries, including China.



Analyst Comment: As noted in the excerpt, while the recent executive order did not specifically name any particular countries or companies (instead focusing on overall information and communications security), it is believed to be largely driven by the potential threat from Chinese telecommunications firms Huawei and ZTE. Both firms have ties to the Chinese government, and it is believed that China could compel the firms to spy on adversaries such as the U.S. via technologies such as 5G networks and individual smartphone devices. Both firms have come under particular scrutiny in recent years, with Huawei/ZTE phones banned from being U.S. military bases in 2018, and procurement of Huawei/ZTE products being banned for official U.S. government purposes as a result of the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act.

Source: <http://fortune.com/2019/05/15/trump-national-emergency-china-5g-huawei-zte/>

May Day Protests in Paris – *Civil Disturbance*

Excerpt: The French police played cat-and-mouse with demonstrators and masked and hooded vandals at the traditional May Day rally in Paris, firing tear gas and charging protesters with truncheons raised, but the large law enforcement presence kept violence below levels feared before the march.

Some store windows were smashed along the parade route, which stretched across the Left Bank of the capital. Vandals threw rocks at a police station and unsuccessfully tried to enter it, and clouds of tear gas floated over the route. In Paris a media consortium counted about 40,000 demonstrators made up of union members, “Yellow Vest” protesters and vandals. The police said there were 28,000.

Some violence always accompanies the May Day rally, but this year the government had warned that the risk was higher since the demonstration would unite the violent elements of the Yellow Vest movement, labor militants and the so-called Black Blocs — a loose international group of anarchist and anticapitalist vandals dressed in black who smashed numerous shop windows last year.

Analyst Comment: Throughout France protests led by the Yellow Vests have been occurring for the past 6 months. Yellow Vests is a decentralized movement with no clear leadership structure or firm agenda. People wearing yellow, hi-vis safety vests began protesting proposed higher gas taxes. The nationwide movement has since grown in size and purpose, expanded its list of grievances to include demands for a higher minimum wage and increased pensions. As this is a decentralized movement, Yellow Vest protests have frequently been organized via social media. While some of the organized protests have been peaceful, others have led to violence. This includes a series of December protests throughout France that left three dead and more than 260 wounded, with more than 400 arrested.

These economic protests have begun to shrink in size. However, masked anarchist protesters known as Black Blocs have recently begun to join in the demonstrations. These protestors have also relied on social media to coordinate events, with Black Bloc adherents using social media to call for a mass gathering in Paris on May Day to raise mayhem. Officials said that as many as



2,000 Black Bloc marchers had been expected. Some Black Bloc demonstrators chanted anticapitalistic slogans, brandished flags with the Soviet hammer and sickle, and held aloft placards in support of Julian Assange and the Palestinians.

The violence brought by the Black Blocs has had mixed reactions from Yellow Vest protestors. However, massive groups of protestors engaging in sporadic violence and surrounding with a large police presence always has the potential to turn into an incident of mass hysteria. On May Day, the heavily deployed riot police arrested around 200 demonstrators.

Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/01/world/europe/paris-may-day-rally.html>

Hazards

Mozambique, India Hit by Cyclones – *Meteorological Hazards*

Excerpt: A rare summer cyclone swept across India and Bangladesh, leaving dozens dead and hundreds of homes destroyed. The storm killed at least 34 people in India and 15 people in Bangladesh. Categorized by the India Meteorological Department as "extremely severe" when it made landfall in India, the cyclone lashed coastal areas with heavy rain and winds of up to 127 miles per hour. The cyclone had weakened by the time it hit Bangladesh.

Casualties in South Asia were fewer than those caused by previous, similar cyclones. The Associated Press reports preparations in India for Cyclone Fani "demonstrated greatly improved disaster readiness since 1999, when a 'super' cyclone killed about 10,000 people and devastated large parts of the state."

The New York Times reports that "authorities in India and Bangladesh, which is geographically especially prone to storms, have prepared for such natural disasters by drafting meticulous evacuation plans and building hundreds of shelters."

Analyst Comment: India evacuated more than 1.2 million people from 15,000 villages and 46 towns in India's Odisha state, including Bangladesh, all within 48 hours. Authorities in both countries sent text messages to tens of millions of people in the storm's path, and in Bangladesh, volunteers went through villages with megaphones, urging residents to move to shelters. The winds damaged half a million houses, uprooted hundreds of thousands of trees and knocked out power, telecommunications and water for millions of people in one of India's poorest states. At least 77 deaths have been reported. Despite the massive evacuations, local governments have not been as successful in their response efforts. Protests have been held, prompted by the slow pace of relief as well as high prices of essential food items and water.

On 14 March Cyclone Idai hit southeastern Africa, bringing high winds and heavy rains. The cyclone killed at least a thousand people in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi. Following the cyclone was widespread flooding, crop destruction, and rapid disease spread. Almost 3 million people were affected by Cyclone Idai. In late April, Mozambique was again hit by a major Category 4 cyclone. Cyclone Kenneth hit just 6 weeks after Cyclone Idai. This cyclone weakened quickly but moved at an unusually slow pace, dropping large amounts of rain and bringing further flooding. Tens of thousands were evacuated prior to the storm. According to the World Food Program, Kenneth has displaced at least 163,000 people, destroyed nearly 30,000 homes and sent nearly 24,000 into shelters. 41 deaths were reported. This is the first time two cyclones have struck Mozambique in the same season.

Both India and Mozambique attempted preemptive evacuations with varying levels of success. Both countries have suffered from the initial destruction brought by cyclones, residual flooding, damage to essential infrastructure, and the spread of disease in affected areas.



Source: <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/06/720786266/rare-summer-cyclone-leaves-dozens-dead-in-southeast-asia>

Ammonia Spill in Illinois – Accidental Events

Excerpt: A chemical leak that caused a toxic plume to hang for hours over a northern Chicago suburb sickened dozens of people, including seven who are in critical condition, officials said.

Lake Forest Fire Chief Mike Gallo said a tractor was towing two separate two-ton containers of anhydrous ammonia when the leak occurred around 4:30 a.m. Initial reports suggested the vehicle was involved in a crash, but the sheriff's office later said that was not the case. The cause of the leak has not been released.

The leak created a toxic cloud that lingered for several hours over Beach Park, about 40 miles (65 kilometers) north of downtown Chicago. Authorities ordered residents within a 1-mile radius to stay inside and close their windows. Area schools were closed for the day.

Analyst Comment: Though the exact cause of the leak is unknown, it originated from containers being towed down a road by a tractor. These containers of anhydrous ammonia are used by farmers as an agricultural fertilizer, adding nitrogen to the soil. The leak created a visible plume of chemical smoke. Hazmat and first responders sought to mitigate the toxic smoke by spraying large amounts of water on it to bring the ammonia down back to the soil and prevent it from going airborne.

Within a few hours the leaking tank was empty and contained. Response was hindered by the need for appropriate protection and breathing gear. Authorities then had to wait for the chemical cloud that had settled over the area to dissipate. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, anhydrous ammonia is a colorless gas that can cause breathing difficulties, burns, blisters and is fatal if breathed in high concentrations.

A variety of HAZMAT substances are transported on both local roads and large interstates. Spills from these transported tanks can occur anywhere and have the potential to affect the area for several miles, potentially polluting the air, water, soil, and/or local residents and responders.

Source: <http://time.com/5577991/chicago-ammonia-chemical-spill/>

Russian Plane Crash Landing – Accidental Events

Excerpt: Russia's national flag carrier Aeroflot has canceled at least 50 Sukhoi Superjet 100 (SSJ 100) flights since a crash landing of the Russian-made aircraft killed 41 people.

The deadly SSJ landing in Moscow on 05 May ended in the plane's tail section catching fire on the runway and raised questions about the jet's safety. A day after the disaster, regional carrier Yamal Airlines said it was cancelling its planned purchase of 10 SSJ 100 planes.



Approximately 50 Aeroflot flights using Superjets have been canceled in the week since the deadly crash landing, the Kommersant business daily reported.

“There were many SSJ 100 cancellations and replacements before the crash,” Boris Rybak, head of the InfoMost aviation research and public relations company, was quoted as saying. “Aeroflot tried not to make it public, but up to one-third of the aircraft were grounded.”

The Superjets had suffered malfunctions in the past but increased media scrutiny forces pilots to cancel flights, added Oleg Panteleyev, an analyst at the Aviaport industry information agency.

Analyst Comment: The Aeroflot flight took off from Moscow bound for Murmansk, a city in northern Russia. Pilots signaled distress soon after takeoff and the plane circled back for an emergency landing. The jet bounced on touchdown and then came down again, hard, and burst into flames. Videos showed the plane skidding along the runway with its nose angled upward, its main landing gear apparently collapsed, its engines and fuselage scraping the ground and flames streaking out behind. Later, flames spread on the tarmac, suggesting that fuel was leaking and burning, as passengers descended the inflatable emergency slides and fled the wreck. Russian investigators looking into the crash landing were focusing Monday on pilot error, equipment failure and bad weather as possible causes. One passenger reported the plane was struck by lightning shortly after takeoff.

Several other aircraft mishaps have recently occurred, resulting in increased scrutiny of airline safety standards. On 03 May, a Boeing 737-800 jet arriving from the Guantanamo Bay military station in Cuba went 100 feet off the runway at Naval Air Station Jacksonville and into the St. Johns River in Florida. The cause is still unknown. Boeing has been under scrutiny in recent weeks following crashes of its 737 MAX jets in Indonesia and Ethiopia.

The U.S. Coast Guard has reported that on 13 May, two floatplanes (aircrafts with pontoons or floats that allow them to land on water) carrying Alaskan cruise ship passengers collided in flight. 6 passengers died and 10 were rescued. As of 16 May, the incident is under investigation.

Source: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/05/13/russias-aeroflot-cancels-dozens-of-flights-following-tragic-plane-crash-a65548>



In the Spotlight

'In the Spotlight' is designed to highlight a threat or hazard event, or associated events, that have been observed over recent history, and provide contextual analysis and trend-based analysis on these events.

Is There an Increased Threat from Iran in the Middle East?

In recent days, a number of events have led some U.S. officials to believe there is an increased threat from Iran in the Middle East, while others have remained more skeptical. In early May, the White House announced that a Carrier Strike Group and Air Force bombers were being sent to the Middle East region due to “troubling and escalatory indications and warnings” related to Iran. Although no apparent, specific reason for the move was given, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told reporters that it was “something we’ve been working on for a little while.”

Concerns began to rise further on 12 May, when four oil tankers (including two Saudi-flagged vessels, a UAE-flagged barge, and a Norwegian-flagged vessel) in the region were attacked near the Strait of Hormuz. While there is currently no information to confirm Iran’s involvement in the attacks, several security experts believe that Iran gave its blessing to such attacks, which may have been carried out by a proxy group. No fatalities or injuries were reported as a result of the attacks, which appeared to be more of an act of sabotage.

On 14 May, the United Kingdom’s Major General Chris Ghika, who is serving a deputy commander as part of Operation Inherent Resolve (the military campaign against the Islamic State terror group in Iraq and Syria), made headlines for pushing back against the Trump administration’s claims regarding a rising threat from Iran. Major General Ghika was speaking specifically about potential threats from Iranian-backed forces in Iraq and Syria, although a U.S. Central Command spokesman pushed back against Ghika’s assessment. The U.S. official stated that “recent comments from [Operation Inherent Resolve]’s Deputy Commander run counter to the identified credible threats available to intelligence from U.S. and allies regarding Iranian-backed forces in the region,”

On 15 May, the U.S. State Department ordered all non-essential American personnel to be evacuated from the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, Iraq as well as a consulate in Erbil, Iraq after claims that Iran-backed militias in the country had moved missiles near bases with a U.S. presence. Despite the comments by the United Kingdom’s Major General the day prior, the UK followed the U.S.’ lead on 16 May, increasing the threat level for diplomatic personnel at various countries in the region citing a potential threat from Iran.

Despite all of the recent developments, some U.S. officials have remained skeptical regarding the alleged threats from Iran, including lawmakers from both major U.S. parties. At least one prominent Democratic lawmaker drew a comparison to the lead-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, in which, she argues, the U.S. was falsely led into a military engagement based on inaccurate information. Both Democratic and Republican lawmakers have expressed interest in receiving a Congressional briefing on the threats from Iran before any decisions are made regarding military



options. Even U.S. President Donald Trump, when asked if the U.S. was headed to war with Iran, told a reporter “I hope not,” and was reportedly growing increasingly frustrated with more hawkish advisors seeking an aggressive approach toward Iran.

The recent situation involving the threat from Iran is still evolving on nearly a daily basis, and much of the information needed to determine the threat is not publicly available. Even open source media reporting only contains limited information, as well as statements from officials who may have varying political motivations. Still, the recent uptick in activity regarding Iran should be cause for concern, as the country has shown that it is willing to act aggressively toward the U.S. and its allies in the past. Additionally, a miscalculation by either side could lead to direct or indirect military hostilities.

Sources: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/05/world/middleeast/us-iran-military-threat-.html>

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<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/iran-news-deep-skepticism-among-us-allies-and-lawmakers-on-threat/>

<https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-iran-war-i-hope-not-2019-5>
