



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

‘Resurgent’ Al Qaeda Looking to Target Planes in Europe – *Terrorism*

Excerpt: Terror group al Qaeda is "resurgent" and looking to carry out attacks on passenger planes in Europe, UK Security Minister Ben Wallace has warned.

In an interview with British newspaper The Sunday Times, Wallace said al Qaeda -- the group behind the infamous World Trade Center attacks that killed almost 3,000 people in the US on September 11, 2001 -- "still aspire for aviation attacks" and is developing technology to bring down planes.

"The aviation threat is real," Wallace said in the interview. "(Al Qaeda) have reorganized. They are pushing more and more plots towards Europe and have become familiar with the new methods."

Analyst Comment: The latest warning by the UK's Security Minister comes shortly after U.S. President Donald Trump's announcement that he would be withdrawing troops from Middle East conflict zones such as Syria and Afghanistan. British intelligence officials, U.S. lawmakers, and other observers have expressed concern that such a withdrawal, if not executed properly, could create conditions favorable to the strengthening of terrorist groups. For example, Syria was previously a safe haven for the Islamic State terror group, which directed external attacks against the West.

However, it is likely that the Security Minister's recent comments relate to the Yemen-based group al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), a branch of al Qaeda that has been particularly active in carrying out external attacks and plots, to include plots against aviation. AQAP claimed responsibility for the 2015 attack against the satirical French newspaper Charlie Hebdo, which resulted in 11 deaths and an additional 11 injuries. Additionally, AQAP is believed to be responsible for the unsuccessful 2010 plot to bomb U.S.-bound cargo planes, and the group claimed responsibility for the 2009 "Underwear Bomber," who attempted to detonate explosives onboard an airplane as it approached Detroit, Michigan.

Source: <https://www.cnn.com/2018/12/23/uk/al-qaeda-planes-uk-gbr-intl/index.html>

String of Domestic Terror Arrests – *Terrorism*

Excerpt: A 20-year-old man is the third person arrested in less than a week for threatening mass killings in the name of a murderous white supremacist Dylann Roof.

Dakota Reed, 20, was arrested at his mother's home in Lake Forest Park, Washington, the county's Daily Herald first reported. Reed, according to social media posts and YouTube videos reviewed by the Herald, is a neo-Nazi who also pledged allegiance to the Ku Klux Klan and a white



supremacist separatist movement based in the Pacific Northwest. Reed posed with multiple semi-automatic rifles in those posts and made explicit threats to murder Jewish people.

At least one of the threats invoked Roof, a white supremacist who murdered nine black worshippers at a South Carolina church in 2015. Reed is the third young white person recently arrested over threats mentioning Roof. FBI agents arrested a twentysomething Toledo, Ohio couple who allegedly planned a mass shooting. One of the pair, Elizabeth Lecron, allegedly sent letters and Nazi literature to Roof in prison. She is one of only four people the mass murder is known to have corresponded with while he sits on death row.

Reed's arrest is also the second arrest in recent days by a young man threatening to murder Jews. Independent of the Roof-inspired couple, a different Toledo, Ohio man was arrested for allegedly planning a synagogue shooting. Damon Joseph, 21, allegedly pledged allegiance to ISIS, and told and undercover FBI agent that he was inspired by the man who murdered 11 Jews in a Pittsburgh synagogue in October.

Analyst Comment: The recent string of arrests highlights the ongoing threat posed by domestic terrorists, particularly those inspired by, or affiliated with white supremacy and anti-Semitism. While the individuals' charges and plot details varied slightly from each other, each case involved a plot to commit violent on the basis of a social or political ideology, fitting the generally-accepted definitions of terrorism. However, it is important to note that the difference between terrorism and a hate crime (when the case involves ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, etc...) can often be unclear.

However, the recent arrests share a common theme of "copycatting" or inspiration by recent domestic terrorist incidents. Three arrests were linked to Dylann Roof, a white supremacist who opened fire on an African-American church in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015, while another was allegedly inspired by the recent shooting at a Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania synagogue by an anti-Semitic gunman. "Copycat" crimes are a widely-studied, albeit not fully-understood phenomenon that may at least partially explain the recent string of arrests. Some academics have speculated that such crimes may be motivated by media coverage of violent crimes (in which copycats may be seeking fame or notoriety). Alternatively, the individuals arrested may have seen previous attacks as a way to participate in an activity that furthers their own ideologies. Regardless of the cause, such "copycat"-style incidents are likely to continue among domestic terrorists and other malicious actors (such as homegrown violent extremists and active shooters).

Source: <https://www.thedailybeast.com/third-dylann-roof-fan-arrested-in-past-week-for-threatening-to-kill>

Senior Chinese Military Officer Calls for Attacks on U.S. Ships in South China Sea – *Foreign Nation-State Military*

Excerpt: The South China Sea is a powder keg, and one senior Chinese military officer seems interested in lighting the fuse.



Dai Xu, a People's Liberation Army Air Force colonel commandant and the president of China's Institute of Marine Safety and Cooperation, suggested at a conference in Beijing that the Chinese navy should use force to counter US freedom-of-navigation operations in the South China Sea, Taiwan News reported.

Taiwan News cited a report from Global Times, the nationalist, state-backed Chinese tabloid that hosted the conference, that quoted him as saying: "If the US warships break into Chinese waters again, I suggest that two warships should be sent: one to stop it, and another one to ram it ... In our territorial waters, we won't allow US warships to create disturbance."

Dai, known for his hawkish rhetoric, argued that the US Navy's operations are provocations aimed at undermining China's sovereignty rather than an attempt to ensure freedom of navigation in international waters. The US Navy regularly sails destroyers and cruisers past Chinese-occupied territories in the South China Sea, while US Air Force bombers tear past on routine overflights that often ruffle Beijing's feathers.

Analyst Comment: The recent comments made by Dai are not necessarily reflective of official Chinese government policy or military doctrine. Additionally, it should be noted that his comments were reported in a publication known for provocative, nationalistic articles. However, such comments highlight the ongoing tensions pertaining to U.S. freedom of navigation operations in and around the South China Sea. China has repeatedly objected to such operations, and a “near-miss” incident documented in September 2018 involved a Chinese naval vessel passing roughly 45 yards from a U.S. Navy vessel in an apparent aggressive action.

In the wake of these rising tensions, Admiral John Richardson, the U.S. Navy's Chief of Naval Operations, met with his Chinese counterparts in early January 2019 with the goal of continuing a constructive dialogue between the two countries. In addition to issues regarding the South China Sea, the two countries remain at odds over the status of Taiwan, a semi-autonomous, contested island state. China asserts that it has the right to govern Taiwan and represent its interest in international bodies such as the United Nations, while Taiwan has a variety of claims to its own sovereignty, which are generally supported by the U.S. government.

Source: <https://www.businessinsider.com/south-china-sea-chinesenavy-ram-us-ships-2018-12>

Marriott Data Breach – Cyber

Excerpt: Marriott International, the world's largest hotel company, said that millions of passport numbers were accessed in a data breach that was first announced in November.

Marriott revealed for the first time, in a statement posted online, that hackers accessed approximately 5.25 million unencrypted passport numbers. The attack resulted in an additional 20.3 million encrypted passport numbers being swiped, but there is no evidence that the hackers were able to decrypt the data, the statement said.



Translated into another code, only available to those with access to a digital key, encrypted data is harder for hackers to obtain and considered more protected, according to experts.

Marriott also said that the breach affected an estimated 383 million “unique guests,” down from the original estimate of 500 million given when the company said in November that its Starwood guest reservations database had been penetrated by hackers.

Analyst Comment: The Marriott data breach was discovered last September and revealed in late December. However, data had been stolen as early as 2014, and overall, this was one of the largest known thefts of personal records. The breach hit customers who made reservations for the Marriott-owned Starwood hotel brands from 2014 to September 2018. This attack was occurring at the same time as a number of other breaches at American health insurers and government agencies, including the United States Office of Personnel Management, in what security research firms and government officials described as an effort to compile a vast database of personal information on potential espionage targets.

The names, addresses, phone numbers, birth dates, email addresses and encrypted credit card details of hotel customers were stolen. The travel histories and passport numbers of a smaller group of guests were also taken. Most of this information is considered Personally Identifiable Information (PII). PII is information that can be used to distinguish or trace an individual’s identity, either alone or when combined with other personal or identifying information that is linked or linkable to a specific individual.

According to recent reporting by The New York Times, this cyberattack was part of a Chinese intelligence-gathering effort, hacking health insurers, government agencies, and the security clearance files of millions more Americans. The hackers are suspected of working on behalf of the Ministry of State Security.

Source: https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/01/04/marriott-hackers-accessed-more-than-million-passport-numbers-during-novembers-massive-data-breach/?utm_term=.6080f18cf256



Hazards

Increasing Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Rising Ocean Temperatures – *Meteorological Hazards*

Excerpt: Greenhouse gas emissions worldwide are growing at an accelerating pace this year, researchers said, putting the world on track to face some of the most severe consequences of global warming sooner than expected.

Scientists described the quickening rate of carbon dioxide emissions in stark terms, comparing it to a “speeding freight train” and laying part of the blame on an unexpected surge in the appetite for oil as people around the world not only buy more cars but also drive them farther than in the past — more than offsetting any gains from the spread of electric vehicles.

Worldwide, carbon emissions are expected to increase by 2.7 percent in 2018, according to the new research, which was published by the Global Carbon Project, a group of 100 scientists from more than 50 academic and research institutions and one of the few organizations to comprehensively examine global emissions numbers. Emissions rose 1.6 percent last year, the researchers said, ending a three-year plateau.

Analyst Comment: Approximately one month after the research on increasing carbon emissions was published, a related analysis of global ocean temperatures was published. Average ocean temperatures are a consistent way to track the effects of greenhouse gas emissions because they are not influenced much by short-term weather patterns. The new report, published in the journal *Science*, shows the world’s oceans are warming far more quickly than previously thought.

The oceans have been absorbing the vast majority of heat trapped by greenhouse gasses. An authoritative United Nations report, issued in 2014 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, presented five different estimates of ocean heat, but they all showed less warming than the levels projected by computer climate models. This suggested that either the ocean heat measurements or the climate models at that time were inaccurate. The new analysis has found that the oceans are heating up 40% faster on average than the United Nations estimated five years ago. The rate is more similar to the computer generate models of five years ago. The researchers also concluded that ocean temperatures have broken records for several straight years.

The surging water temperatures are already killing off marine ecosystems, raising sea levels and making hurricanes more destructive. As the oceans continue to heat up, those effects will become more catastrophic, scientists say. Rainier, more powerful storms like Hurricane Harvey in 2017 and Hurricane Florence in 2018 will become more common, and coastlines around the world will flood more frequently.

Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/05/climate/greenhouse-gas-emissions-2018.html>



Hazmat Spills in Delaware and Florida – *Accidental Events*

Excerpt: A toxic gas leak from a chemical plant near the base of the Delaware Memorial Bridge shut down all lanes of traffic on the busy holiday weekend for more than six hours.

A hazmat crew was called to Croda Inc. in New Castle at 4:16 p.m. for leaking ethylene oxide, an extremely flammable gas, from a tank on the site, according to Holloway Terrace Fire Chief Mark Willis.

At 11:20 p.m., the leak was contained and the bridge reopened.

Ethylene oxide is used to manufacture other chemicals, to sterilize medical devices and as a fumigant, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

The gas was transferred from the leaking tank to a secure one, said fire company spokesman George Greenley.

Analyst Comment: On 3 January 2019, two tractor-trailer rigs and two passenger vehicles were involved in the wreck on Interstate 75 near Gainesville, Florida. Approximately 50 gallons of diesel spilled onto the highway and was ignited, starting a massive fire. Six people died and eight were injured. Authorities extinguished the fire, but the aftermath caused a portion of the interstate to be closed in both directions, causing massive delays. The Alachua County Sherriff's office tweeted that though the crash was in the northbound lanes, the southbound lanes were also closed to keep a route open for first responders, warning "the closure is going to be lengthy." The Florida Highway Patrol said a large amount of personal property, burnt vehicles and vehicle parts scattered across the road.

In both instances, major HAZMAT spills occurred in areas with a high volume of traffic. The spills endangered the lives of those immediately present and caused several deaths in Florida. Traffic was also closed in both directions, resulting in standstill traffic for multiple hours.

Source: <https://www.delawareonline.com/story/news/crime/2018/11/25/gas-leak-closes-delaware-memorial-bridge-both-directions/2109773002/>

Drone Sighting Halts Departures at Heathrow Airport – *Accidental Events*

Excerpt: Departures at Heathrow were temporarily stopped after a drone was reported to have been sighted.

Flights from the west London airport resumed about an hour after police said a drone had been seen.

A Heathrow spokeswoman had said it was a "precautionary measure" to "prevent any threat to operational safety".



It comes after last month's disruption at Gatwick Airport which saw thousands of people stranded when drones were sighted.

Analyst Comment: The drone sighting at Heathrow Airport highlights the hazard posed by the operation of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) in the direct vicinity of airports. Currently, there is no evidence to suggest that the sighting was linked to malicious actors, therefore, the incident should be treated as a hazard as opposed to an intentional threat incident. Even non-malicious UAS operation near airports can interfere with takeoff and landing routes and create a situation in which airspace is unsafe for manned aircraft to operate in. Collisions between UAS and aircraft are a growing concern as small, commercially-available UAS have proliferated widely into civilian hands in recent years.

A similar series of sightings was reported at the nearby Gatwick Airport between 19-21 December 2018, resulting in far more serious disruptions to air travel. Roughly 1,000 flights were cancelled, affecting the travel plans of over 140,000 passengers during the busy holiday travel seasons. As with the Heathrow incident, there is currently no information to suggest that the UAS sightings can be attributed to malicious actors. However, both sightings indicate that mere reported presence of UAS can be enough to disrupt regular airport operations, a fact which may be appealing to malicious actors such as terrorist groups/individuals.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-46803713>
