



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

60% of Female Servicemembers Reportedly Experience Stalking in the Ranks – *Insider Threat*

Excerpt: A new study looking into the prevalence of stalking in the rank-and-file paints a grim picture of a military already fraught with questions that suggest a toxic culture.

The report from the Journal of Interpersonal Violence, titled “An Examination of Stalking Experiences During Military Service Among Female and Male Veterans and Associations With PTSD and Depression,” analyzed responses by 1,733 veterans in an effort to understand not only the rate of stalking during military service, but the impact these experiences have on mental health.

The Uniform Code of Military Justice recently added stalking as a separate article, defined as “repeated maintenance of visual or physical proximity to a specific person; repeated conveyance of verbal threat, written threats, or threats implied by conduct, or a combination of such threats, directed at or toward a specific person; or a pattern of conduct composed of repeated acts evidencing a continuity of purpose.”

Nearly 60 percent of the 315 women veterans who were surveyed reported experiencing an incident during military service that fell under the behavioral components of the UCMJ’s definition, the study reported, a much higher number than previous studies that analyzed the same topic. These behaviors were most often exhibited in the form of unwanted messages, emails or phone calls.

For males on active duty, the reported number was 35 percent, with the most common manifestation being an unannounced or uninvited visit from the offending party. Again, this number is significantly higher than previous studies.

Analyst Comment: The recent study involving stalking highlights concerns regarding toxic work environments for servicemembers (particularly female servicemembers). Of particular note in this study was the prevalence of “unwanted messages, emails or phone calls” which reflects the potential for individuals to carry out stalking-related behaviors through technology, a phenomenon known as “cyber-stalking.” A May 2019 report noted that sexual assault reporting in the U.S. military increased 38% from 2016 to 2018, while enlisted female servicemembers between the ages of 17-24 were reportedly at the highest risk of sexual assault. These issues experienced by female servicemembers have been a long-standing concern among military leadership, although there is a great deal of work to be done in order to reduce/eliminate such incidents.

Source: <https://www.militarytimes.com/off-duty/military-culture/2019/12/19/nearly-60-percent-of-women-experience-stalking-in-the-ranks-study-finds/>



Four Ring Employees Fired for Improperly Accessing User Data – *Insider Threat*

Excerpt: The Amazon-owned security camera company Ring fired four employees who abused internal access and spied on customers as the company faces a negligence lawsuit over hacked home surveillance cameras.

In November, a group of senators asked Amazon a series of questions related to privacy practices at the maker of doorbell security cameras. Amazon said in a letter in January that Ring fired four employees for snooping on users' homes.

"Over the last four years, Ring has received four complaints or inquiries regarding a team member's access to Ring video data," Amazon's Vice President of Public Policy Brian Huseman wrote in the letter addressed to senators.

Huseman said that although the staffers involved were authorized to view video data from the cameras, "the attempted access to that data exceeded what was necessary for their job functions." Amazon said Ring investigated each report promptly and dismissed the workers after it determined they violated company policies.

Analyst Comment: While details on these incidents are limited, they draw attention to the insider threat present in home monitoring and security systems. Though home security systems may be automated in some capacity, audio and video recordings and live feeds are still reviewed by company employees. The reasons for this may vary: some companies utilize recordings to improve their service, as part of a live monitoring service, in emergency situations, etc. Despite the variety of reasons to access this personal data, its presence within a company's data storage will present the opportunity for insider threats to view, listen to, and potentially misuse that information.

Source: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2020/01/10/amazons-ring-fired-employees-snooping-customers-camera-feeds/4429399002/>

Al-Shabaab Attacks Military Base in Kenya Used by U.S. Forces – *Terrorism*

Excerpt: Al-Shabab extremists overran a key military base used by U.S. counterterror forces in Kenya, killing three American Department of Defense personnel and destroying several U.S. aircraft and vehicles before they were repelled, U.S. and Kenyan authorities said.

The attack on the Manda Bay Airfield was the al-Qaida-linked group's first attack against U.S. forces in the East African country, and the military called the security situation "fluid" several hours after the assault.

Five attackers were killed, Kenyan military spokesman Paul Njuguna said. Al-Shabab, based in neighboring Somalia, claimed responsibility for the assault.



Analyst Comment: Manda Bay Airfield is utilized by U.S. forces whose missions include providing training to African partners, responding to crises, and protecting U.S. interests in this strategically important area. The attack on the compound involved indirect and small arms fire. Six contractor-operated civilian aircraft were damaged to some degree.

Kenya is a key base for fighting al-Shabab, one of the world's most resilient extremist organizations. The al Qaeda ally has targeted Kenya in frequent attacks as part of a retaliation campaign against the country for sending troops into Somalia in 2011. Al Qaeda-affiliated al Shabab has waged an insurgency in Somalia since 2008, aiming to topple the government and impose its own strict interpretation of sharia, or Islamic law.

The group has stepped up the pace of its attacks in Kenya since the New Year. Al-Shabab has launched recent attacks against civilian buses, schools, police stations, telecommunications towers, and shopping malls. The group has become a more frequent target for a growing number of U.S. airstrikes inside Somalia. Last year, al-Shabab attacked a U.S. military base inside Somalia, Baledogle, that is used to launch drone strikes but reportedly failed to make their way inside.

Source: <https://apnews.com/65926ee82091f779d28d6a9644fb739f>

“Dirty Bombs” Could Be Manufactured Using Component Found in Common Medical Device – CBRN

Excerpt: Scientific experts warned Congress more than a decade ago that just four teaspoons of radioactive cesium-137 — if spread by a terrorist's “dirty bomb” — could contaminate up to 10 square miles of Manhattan.

The material is commonly found across the United States. Hospitals, blood banks and medical research centers use it in devices called irradiators, which sterilize blood and tissue. Hundreds of the devices are licensed for use, including at least 50 in Southern California.

Each typically contains about twice as much radioactive material as the scientific panel warned could disrupt much of the nation's largest city.

The panel's warning in 2008 came with blunt recommendations: The government should stop licensing new cesium-based blood irradiators, and existing ones should be withdrawn from use. Safer devices that use X-ray technology worked just as well, the panel found.

But after protests from hospitals, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission declined to crack down. Instead, the number of licensed irradiators used for blood — and the risk they pose — has grown, a Los Angeles Times investigation shows.



Analyst Comment: “Dirty bomb” is a slang term for a radiological dispersal device that utilizes explosives as a mechanism for the dispersal of radioactive particles. Such a device could cause death, injuries, as well as the contamination of a large geographic area. Per the Department of Homeland Security, “radioactive materials are used every day in laboratories, medical centers, food irradiation plants, and for industrial uses. If stolen or otherwise acquired, many of these materials could be used in a radiological dispersal device.” As noted in the article, concerns regarding cesium-based irradiators and their potential to be used in the construction of “dirty bombs” have been raised by experts for several years. This is due in part to the prevalence of such devices at medical facilities, as well as the properties of cesium, which can emit radiation for nearly 300 years. Cesium-based irradiators could be targeted by terrorists or other malicious actors intent on producing a radiological dispersal device/“dirty bomb”, to include the potential exploitation insiders with authorized access to such devices.

Source: <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2019-12-27/cesium-137-dirty-bomb>

Texas Church Shooting Stopped by Armed Churchgoer – Active Shooter/Active Assailant

Excerpt: Two parishioners were killed when a gunman opened fire during a church service near Fort Worth, Texas. Another parishioner shot and killed the gunman seconds after the incident began, according to officials and a livestream video of the service.

Jeoff Williams of the Texas Department of Public Safety praised the "heroic parishioners" who stopped the gunman. Several parishioners quickly pulled their guns soon after the first shot was fired.

Two people were treated at the scene and released, officials said.

Matthew Desarno of the FBI said in a press conference that they are still trying to determine the gunman's motive.

Analyst Comment: The shooter was identified as 43-year-old Keith Thomas Kinnunen, who was from the local area, although he had reportedly been homeless at times and had prior arrests and convictions (including weapons-related charges) in a number of states. A motive was not immediately available. The shooting was captured on videotape due to the fact that the church live-streams its services. The video shows Kinnunen entering the church and opening fire, killing two individuals, before being fatally shot by a nearby armed member of the church. The armed churchgoer, Jack Wilson, is a firearms instructor, a former National Guardsman, and former reserve sheriff's deputy. Wilson was also the head of the church's in-house “security team”. Texas state law allows concealed carry permit holders to carry a firearm in places of worship, although places of worship are allowed to prohibit the carrying of firearms if they choose to do so.

Source: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/west-freeway-church-of-christ-shooting-gunman-opens-fire-at-white-settlement-texas-church-today-live-updates-2019-12-29/>



Iran Unintentionally Shoots Down Ukrainian Passenger Jet Amidst Tensions with the U.S. – *Foreign Nation-State Military*

Excerpt: Iran has admitted it unintentionally shot down a Ukrainian passenger plane hours after launching ballistic missiles at Iraqi bases hosting U.S. troops, blaming "human error" for the "great tragedy" that killed all 176 people aboard.

"Armed Forces' internal investigation has concluded that regrettably missiles fired due to human error caused the horrific crash of the Ukrainian plane & death of 176 innocent people. Investigations continue to identify & prosecute this great tragedy & unforgivable mistake," Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Twitter.

The country's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) said in a statement that the military had been on high alert after launching the strikes in Iraq as retaliation for the U.S. killing of top general Qassem Soleimani.

The Ukraine International Airlines Flight PS752 was shot down just hours later, mistaken for a cruise missile.

Analyst Comment: Initial media reports suggested that the Ukrainian passenger jet crashed due to technical/mechanical issues, although speculation quickly arose that the jet had been shot down due recent events involving Iran-U.S. tensions. Just hours before the shoot-down, Iran had launched short-range ballistic missiles at bases housing U.S. troops in Iraq in response to the U.S.'s killing of a high-ranking Iranian military commander. Therefore, it was widely believed that Iranian air defenses would be on high alert for a potential U.S. response.

U.S. officials told media outlets that they had "confidence" that the passenger jet was shot down, and amateur video was released showed the jet being struck by a missile. Iran ultimately publicly admitted responsibility for the incident, citing "human error" as the cause. The incident highlights the potential for military escalation to lead to errors, which can in turn lead to further escalation or unintentional civilian casualties, as seen in this particular case.

Source: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/iranian-military-says-it-unintentionally-shot-down-ukrainian-plane-n1113996>

Chinese National Arrested After Taking Unauthorized Photographs of NAS Key West – *FIE*

Excerpt: Authorities arrested a Chinese national they said was taking photos at a U.S Navy base in the Florida Keys, according to The Associated Press.

U.S. Military Police, after seeing Lyuyou Liao taking photos with his cellphone near the Naval Air Station in Key West, confiscated his phone and called a federal agent. Afterward, Liao was charged with entering Naval property to photograph defense installations.



Liao told Naval Criminal Investigative Service agents that he was using his phone to take pictures of the sunrise, but the agent reportedly found photographs of the Truman Annex, a restricted part of the base, on his phone, according to the AP.

Analyst Comment: Liao's arrest was the second arrest of a Chinese national for photographing NAS Key West since September 2018, when another Chinese national was arrested in a similar scenario. While there is limited evidence available regarding these individuals' motives, NAS Key West is home to a variety of tenant commands and equipment that may be of interest to foreign intelligence entities, to include advanced fighter jets, special operations training, and intelligence activities. The December 2019 edition of RMC's Open Source Update highlights another incident that took place in Virginia, in which Chinese diplomatic personnel breached a sensitive U.S. military base. China will likely continue to target U.S. military installations for its espionage goals, and activities such as unauthorized photography and tests of security may be indicators of espionage activity.

Source: <https://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/476130-chinese-man-charged-with-photographing-navy-base-in-florida>



Hazards

Volcanic Eruption in the Philippines – *Geological Hazards*

Excerpt: Red-hot lava gushed out of a Philippine volcano Monday after a sudden eruption of ash and steam that forced villagers to flee and shut down Manila’s international airport, offices and schools.

There were no immediate reports of casualties or major damage from Taal volcano’s eruption south of the capital that began Sunday [12 January]. But clouds of ash blew more than 100 kilometers (62 miles) north, reaching the bustling capital, Manila, and forcing the shutdown of the country’s main airport with more than 240 international and domestic flights cancelled so far.

An alternative airport north of Manila at Clark freeport remained open but authorities would shut it down too if ashfall threatens flights, the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines said.

The government’s disaster-response agency reported about 8,000 villagers have moved to at least 38 evacuation centers in the hard-hit province of Batangas and nearby Cavite province, but officials expect the number to swell with hundreds of thousands more being brought out of harm’s way. Some residents could not move out of ash-blanketed villages due to a lack of transport and poor visibility. Some refused to leave their homes and farms, officials said.

Analyst Comment: One of the world’s smallest volcanoes, Taal is among two dozen active volcanoes in the Philippines. It is the Philippines’ second most active volcano and has recorded at least 34 eruptions in the past 450 years. The country is part of the Pacific “Ring of Fire,” a seismically active region prone to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. About 20 typhoons and other major storms each year also lash the Philippines, which lies between the Pacific and the South China Sea, making it one of the world’s most disaster-prone countries.

On 12 January Taal shot steam, ash and pebbles up to 10 to 15 kilometers (6 to 9 miles) into the sky. The government volcano-monitoring agency raised the danger level around Taal three notches to level 4, indicating “an imminent hazardous eruption.” On Monday 13 January, lava began flowing out of the volcano while the ash and steam began to slow. Authorities continue to detect swarms of earthquakes, some of them felt with rumbling sounds. The Philippine Institute of Volcanology has warned that 450,000 who live nearby are in danger if the volcano erupts as predicted. Taal’s similar restiveness in the 1970s lasted for about four months.

This eruption is particularly remarkable due in part to the significant amount of ashfall. Inches of ash have coated homes, trees, cars, and roads. Residents are being told to stay indoors and wear masks and goggles outdoors. Aviation officials have advised airplanes to avoid flying at a certain distance from the volcano “as airborne ash and ballistic fragments from the eruption column pose hazards to aircraft.”



Source: <https://time.com/5763630/philippines-taal-volcano-eruption-lava/>

Puerto Rico Struck by Over 1,000 Earthquakes in Less Than 1 Month

– Geological Hazards

Excerpt: More than 1,280 earthquakes have hit Puerto Rico's southern region since Dec. 28, more than two dozen of them magnitude 4.5 or greater, according to the USGS. Among them was a 6.4 magnitude quake that hit on Jan. 7, killing one person and injuring nine others, and a 5.9 magnitude aftershock that occurred Saturday, causing further damage. Government officials say the quakes have caused a preliminary \$110 million in damage, toppled part of a famed rock formation landmark and damaged or destroyed more than 550 homes.

The seismic activity that experts say is unusual but not unexpected has unleashed scientific debate about what's causing it and drawn international attention to the area, where more than 4,000 people have sought shelter as they wonder when the ground will stop trembling.

Analyst Comment: Of the nearly 1,300 earthquakes over the past two weeks, about 100 have been felt by residents. Thousands of people have been sleeping outside or in shelters in fear of structural damages or collapse. On 7 January, a 6.4 magnitude earthquake struck Puerto Rico. Two-thirds of the island was left without electricity and one death was reported. In the last 50 years, 10 earthquakes of magnitude 4 and higher have occurred within 50 kilometers of the recent 6.4 magnitude epicenter prior to Dec. 28. USGS reports that rate of aftershocks following the 6.4 magnitude quake is higher than expected, but still within normal range. The 5.9 magnitude quake was also within the range of what was expected for the aftershock sequence. Based on expert opinions it is believed that the frequency of aftershocks will decrease in the next 30 days.

Overall, Puerto Rico is located in a very seismically active area, with the North America and Caribbean tectonic plates converging at a rate of about 2 centimeters a year. To the north part of the island, the North America plate is moving past and sinking below Puerto Rico, while in the southern region, the Caribbean plate is sinking into the mantle underneath the island. While the frequency of aftershock is likely to decrease over the next month, there is still a chance that further severe seismic activity will occur. The effects of such an event will be compounded by the current disaster recovery efforts.

Source: <https://apnews.com/88b9ce52a088d6962c2c431ab762f801>

Plane Dumps Jet Fuel on LA Schools Before Emergency Landing –

Accidental Events

Excerpt: 20 students and 11 adults from Park Avenue Elementary School in Cudahy, California, were among those treated at the scene by paramedics for skin irritation and possible breathing injuries from fume inhalation after an airliner making an emergency landing dumped jet fuel on the school's playground.



The students and adults—two classes in total—were outside at recess when the incident occurred, according to KNBC and the Los Angeles County Fire Department's Twitter.

According to the L.A. County Fire Department's Twitter account, 6 more patients were treated at Tweedy Elementary School in South Gate, California, 1 adult was treated at Graham Elementary School in Los Angeles, and 6 more were treated at San Gabriel Elementary, also in South Gate. Seventy firefighters tended to the injured at these various scenes, and hazardous materials trucks and ambulances arrived to assist as well.

"Schools immediately called paramedics, who are on the scene and are treating anyone who is complaining of skin irritation or breathing problems," said a statement from the Los Angeles Unified School District. The district reports that no one was hospitalized.

Analyst Comment: Shortly after Delta Flight 89 took off from Los Angeles International Airport, the pilot turned the plane around because of an issue with the engine. On its way back to the airport, the plane dumped fuel over a five-mile swath that included five elementary schools and a high school. An emergency fuel release is used to reduce landing weight. Many jetliners have so much fuel when fully loaded that they take off weighing more than their maximum safe landing weight. Ordinarily, they consume enough fuel along the way to be well below the maximum threshold by the time they land. However, if a flight is cut short soon after takeoff, the plane may still be significantly overweight. Landing while overweight has the potential to damage the aircraft. According to the FAA, there are special fuel-dumping procedures for aircraft operating into and out of any major U.S. airport. However, these procedures call for fuel to be dumped over designated unpopulated areas, typically at higher altitudes so the fuel atomizes and disperses before it reaches the ground. An investigation in the incident is currently ongoing.

Source: <https://www.newsweek.com/plane-dumps-jet-fuel-elementary-school-playground-near-los-angeles-least-44-treated-injuries-1482205>
