



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

Suicide Bomber Strikes New York City at Rush Hour – *Terrorism*

Excerpt: An ISIS-inspired would-be suicide bomber set off a homemade explosive device at the Port Authority Bus Terminal subway station, seriously wounding himself and injuring three others, law enforcement sources said.

The man — a 27-year-old Brooklyn man identified by high ranking police sources as Akayed Ullah — had wires attached to him and a 5-inch metal pipe bomb and battery pack strapped to his midsection as he walked through the Manhattan transit hub.

The man partially detonated the device, which he was carrying under the right side of his jacket, prematurely inside the passageway to the A, C and E trains at Eighth Avenue and West 42nd Street around 7:40 a.m., sources said.

Analyst Comment: On 11 December, an individual identified by media reports as Akayed Ullah attempted to detonate a pipe bomb inside a busy public transportation hub in New York City near Times Square. The bomb, which was concealed under his clothing, only partially detonated, resulting in severe burn injuries to Ullah while only causing minor injuries (such as headaches and ear ringing) to his intended victims. Ullah reportedly told investigators that he was inspired by the Islamic State.

The incident is unique because suicide bombing attacks inside the U.S. are extremely rare. Since 9/11, there have only been two attempted suicide bombing incidents, neither of which were successful, and only one of which was determined to be terror-related. In 2005, a student at the University of Oklahoma student detonated an explosive device (potentially by accident) on a bench outside a crowded stadium, although the bomber was the only casualty and no links to terrorism were found. In 2009, the “underwear bomber” attempted to detonate an explosive device on a flight bound for Detroit. The device did not fully detonate, and the bomber was subdued by passengers and crewmembers. The bomber reportedly had ties to Al-Qaeda propagandist Anwar al-Awlaki.

New York City was also the target of another homegrown violent extremist (HVE) attack on 31 October, when Saifullo Saipov drove a rented truck onto a bike path in Lower Manhattan, killing 8 and injuring 11 others. New York City will almost certainly continue to be an alluring target for transnational terrorists and domestic terrorists/HVEs alike due to its status as a major economic center, an abundance of symbolic targets, and repeated calls by terrorist groups to target the city.

Source: <https://nypost.com/2017/12/11/explosion-reported-at-port-authority-bus-terminal/>



MI5 and Police Thwart Plot to Assassinate Theresa May – *Terrorism*

Excerpt: Security officials believe they have thwarted an alleged plot to assassinate Theresa May by terrorists who would first bomb their way into Downing Street and then kill the prime minister, it has emerged.

Two men were arrested following a joint operation by MI5, the UK's counter-terrorism security service, and police.

Security officials believe the alleged Islamist plot is the ninth to have been thwarted since March this year.

Analyst Comment: The recently-uncovered plot targeting British Prime Minister Theresa May involved relatively complex tactics, techniques, and procedures when compared with the relatively low-skilled attacks that have occurred throughout Europe in recent years (such as vehicle-ramming and knife attacks). However, complex plots such as the November 2015 Paris attacks and the 2016 Brussels attacks were still successful. Moreover, the latest plot is unique because it targeted a prominent government official located within a hard target, while most plots have targeted softer civilian targets. While successful low-skilled attacks will almost certainly continue to occur from time to time throughout Europe, complex plots will likely continue at a less frequent rate, as they are typically easier to disrupt due to the planning and communication required for such plots.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/dec/06/security-officials-thwart-terrorist-plot-to-assassinate-theresa-may>

Gunman Kills 26 in Attack on Rural Texas Church – *Active Shooter/Active Assailant*

Excerpt: A gunman clad in all black, with a ballistic vest strapped to his chest and a military-style rifle in his hands, opened fire on parishioners at a Sunday service at a small Baptist church in rural Texas, killing at least 26 people and turning this tiny town east of San Antonio into the scene of the country's newest mass horror.

The gunman was identified by the Texas Department of Public Safety as Devin Patrick Kelley, 26. Mr. Kelley, who lived in New Braunfels, Tex., died shortly after the attack.

He had served in the Air Force at a base in New Mexico but was court-martialed in 2012 on charges of assaulting his wife and child. He was sentenced to 12 months' confinement and received a "bad conduct" discharge in 2014, according to Ann Stefanek, the chief of Air Force media operations.

Analyst Comment: The Sutherland Springs church shooting resulted in 26 deaths (not including the perpetrator) and 20 additional injuries, making it the deadliest modern mass shooting in a U.S. house of worship and the fifth-deadliest mass shooting in the U.S. overall. The perpetrator, identified as Devin Patrick Kelley, used an AR-15 pattern rifle in the shooting, which was



reportedly motivated by a personal dispute with Kelley's mother-in-law who was a member of the church. As Kelley fled the scene, he was engaged by a local armed civilian, who began a vehicle pursuit of Kelley that lasted several minutes at a high rate of speed. Kelley suffered gunshot wounds as a result of the confrontation by the armed civilian, but ultimately committed suicide at the conclusion of the vehicle pursuit.

Kelley had served in the U.S. Air Force, but received a bad conduct discharge following a court-martial conviction for domestic violence. As a result, Kelley should have been prohibited from purchasing and owning firearms. However, the Air Force failed to report the conviction to the FBI (which oversees the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, or NICS). NICS is the "instant background check" which is required for firearms purchases from licensed gun stores. Because of this failure to share information, Kelley's conviction did not appear in the background check and he was able to successfully purchase firearms, including the rifle used in the shooting. In the wake of this revelation, the Air Force has admitted its error and launched an internal review.

Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/05/us/church-shooting-texas.html>

North Korea Ballistic Missile Test – *Foreign Nation-State Military*

Excerpt: North Korea said Wednesday [September 29th] that it had successfully tested its Hwasong-15, a newly developed ICBM that it said could deliver heavy nuclear warheads anywhere in the continental United States.

The country called the new missile its "most powerful" ICBM, saying it "meets the goal of the completion of the rocket weaponry system" North Korea has been developing for decades. North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un, watched the launch, a broadcaster said, reading a prepared statement on the North's Central Television.

Analyst Comment: On 28 November 2017, the DPRK fired an intercontinental ballistic missile from Pyongyang. According to the Japanese Defense officials, the missile landed in Japan's exclusive economic zone, 600 miles east of Pyongyang. The nose cone is much blunter than on previous versions, indicating that the missile was designed to slow as it flies and protect the warhead as it comes back down. The missiles likely carried a small payload, allowing it to fly farther. There were also likely two additional engines that gave the missile a higher altitude. Most notably, the missile reached the highest recorded altitude of a North Korean missile to date, nearly 2,800 miles.

Intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) are capable of carrying nuclear warheads. An ICBM has a minimum range of 3,400 miles, but experts estimate that the Hwasong-15 has a maximum range of 8,100 miles. In general, experts agreed that the launch was a significant step forward in North Korea's missile development. North Korea has conducted 20 missile tests this year alone.

Source: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/28/world/asia/north-korea-missile-test.html?_r=0



U.S. Charges 3 Chinese Nationals with Hacking, Stealing Intellectual Property – *Foreign Intelligence Entities*

Excerpt: The Justice Department unsealed an indictment against three Chinese nationals in connection with cyber-hacks and the alleged theft of intellectual property of three companies, according to US officials briefed on the investigation.

But the Trump administration is stopping short of publicly confronting the Chinese government about its role in the breach. The hacks occurred during both the Obama and Trump administrations.

The charges being brought in Pittsburgh allege that the hackers stole intellectual property from several companies, including Trimble, a maker of navigation systems; Siemens, a German technology company with major operations in the US; and Moody's Analytics.

Analyst Comment: This hacking incident involved three Chinese nationals who work for a known Chinese government contractor, however, the extent of Chinese government involvement, if any, in this particular case remains unclear. The indictment that was filed by the Department of Justice does not directly accuse the Chinese government of any involvement, however, U.S. government officials and private organizations have long accused the Chinese government of condoning or sponsoring malicious cyber activity to acquire intellectual property.

In August 2017, President Trump signed a memo that directed the U.S. Trade Representative to consider whether to launch a formal investigation into China's alleged intellectual property theft. That memo gives the Trade Representative one year to decide whether an investigation is warranted. China uses hacking to bolster its own economy, by stealing U.S. trade secrets and other information to enhance its domestic industries. For example, in 2016, a U.S. steel company claimed that Chinese hackers stole proprietary information regarding the production of lightweight steel in order to benefit Chinese steelmakers.

Chinese hackers have also targeted the U.S. defense industrial base. Per a Department of Justice press release, in 2016, a Chinese national was sentenced to nearly four years in prison for hacking into the networks of defense contractors to include Boeing in order to steal sensitive military information. The information was allegedly shared with China's military. Additionally, in 2014, the Senate Armed Services committee announced that China had "repeatedly" hacked the computer systems of U.S. companies that are involved in the movement of U.S. military personnel and equipment. While a great deal of malicious Chinese cyber activity is directed toward the aforementioned economic pursuits, malicious cyber activity directed toward the U.S. government, military, and defense contractors is likely to continue; posing a significant national security concern.

Source: <http://www.cnn.com/2017/11/27/politics/china-hacking-case/index.html>



Common Infiltration, Exfiltration Methods Still Successful – Cyber

Excerpt: Many organizations are still having difficulties protecting their systems against the most common infiltration, exfiltration and lateral movement methods used by attackers, according to the latest Hacker’s Playbook report from SafeBreach.

The company provides a platform designed to test an organization’s defenses by continuously simulating attacks and breaches. For the third edition of its Hacker’s Playbook report, SafeBreach has analyzed data from roughly 11.5 million automated simulations conducted between January and November 2017. The simulations covered more than 3,400 attack methods – from exploit kits and malware to brute force and credential harvesting – that allowed the company to see where attackers are blocked and where they are successful.

Analyst Comment: This report indicates that many organizations are still vulnerable to relatively common cyber-attack techniques, including the WannaCry ransomware that made headlines earlier this year. In order to enter a network, an infiltration method must be used. If the organization’s cyber defenses do not stop the initial infiltration, an attacker can then move laterally within the hacked network. Finally, to remove information from the infiltrated network, an exfiltration method must be used. The report, which was based on a series of simulations, highlights several vulnerabilities due to inadequate cyber defenses. Oftentimes, the “attacker” was able to enter a network with relative ease. Once inside, there were no internal scanning processes, allowing for easy lateral movement. Finally, exfiltration was roughly 40-60% successful for some common methods. The firm that authored the report recommends optimizing existing security controls rather than focusing on the latest security “fads.”

Source: <http://www.securityweek.com/common-infiltration-exfiltration-methods-still-successful-report>

Okinawa Protests – Civil Disturbance

Excerpt: The U.S. military has banned its service members in Japan from drinking alcohol and has ordered those stationed on Okinawa to stay on base or in their homes after a fatal vehicular crash on Sunday involving a U.S. Marine.

A Japanese man was killed in the collision, and the blood alcohol level of the 21-year-old Marine in the other vehicle was reportedly three times the legal limit when driving. It is the latest such incident on an island where the American military presence was already controversial.

Analyst Comment: On November 19th in Okinawa, Japan, a U.S. Marine crashed his vehicle into a local man’s truck. U.S. Forces Japan has ordered all 25,000-odd U.S. service members on Okinawa to stay on their base or in their homes and has banned them from consuming alcohol. Service members stationed in mainland Japan also have been prohibited from buying or consuming alcohol, on and off base. Commanders across Japan will lead mandatory training on responsible



alcohol use, risk management and acceptable behavior, U.S. Forces Japan said in a statement. All military members and U.S. government civilians in Japan are required to attend, it said.

Okinawa residents have protested the U.S. military presence on the southern Japanese island for years, in large part due to violent and fatal incidents involving members of the U.S. military. There are around 100,000 U.S. personnel in Japan, including 54,000 military personnel, 42,000 dependents, and 8,000 civilian employees of the department of defense. Okinawa hosts half of the military personnel, according to the official website of the U.S. Forces Japan. In August, tens of thousands of residents protested the presence of U.S. military bases in Okinawa.

U.S. military personnel and civilian contractors working for American forces have been accused of multiple crimes in Okinawa this year. From January to October 2017, two have been arrested on allegations of robbery, two on allegations of rape and six on allegations of violent offenses, according to the Okinawa Prefecture Police website.

Last year, U.S. Forces Japan commanders imposed a similar alcohol ban for 11 days in Okinawa after a 21-year-old service member crossed the centerline on a highway and crashed head-on into two cars shortly before midnight. Although no one died in that crash, it came as service members were supposed to be on curfew, a restriction imposed after a former Marine and current military contractor was arrested on suspicion of raping and killing a local woman.

Source: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-military-imposes-alcohol-ban-across-japan-after-fatal-okinawa-crash/2017/11/19/a8ce40f8-cd98-11e7-8447-3d80b84bebad_story.html?utm_term=.fa58ddb3688a

Hazards

Heavy Snow Triggers Transport Chaos Worldwide – *Meteorological Hazard*

Excerpt: Heavy snow blanketing northern Europe has caused many flight cancellations and delays at Schiphol airport in the Netherlands and Brussels airport. About 400 flights were cancelled at Schiphol - one of Europe's biggest airports - and about 200 in Brussels. Travelers have been advised to check flight updates at home, rather than set off for the airport in bad weather.

In Germany the heavy snow has caused many car crashes and traffic jams, as well as train delays. More than 300 flights were cancelled on Sunday at Frankfurt airport, the busiest in Germany.

The Dutch airport at Eindhoven was temporarily closed because of the snow, and many Dutch schools remained shut on Monday.

Analyst Comment: The effects of early winter weather were felt globally. On 12 December, China was hit by a snow storm and experienced hazardous icing conditions. Unusually early and heavy snowfall also hit the Southern United States on 8 December. Some cities saw snowfall records broken. Hundreds of thousands of customers lost power and hundreds of flights were cancelled as airports were affected. The wintry blast also created hazardous driving conditions throughout southern states, as drivers struggled with the unfamiliar weather.

Source: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-42310933>

California Wildfires – *Meteorological Hazard*

Excerpt: A huge blaze that has devastated swaths of Southern California is on course to become the largest wildfire in the state's modern history and is expected to burn into January.

The Thomas Fire, the biggest of a number of blazes currently burning in California, has torched 270,000 acres, making it the state's third-largest since reliable record-keeping began in 1932. The largest, the 2003 Cedar Fire near San Diego, destroyed 273,246 acres.

Analyst Comment: The Thomas Fire, also known as the Ventura Fire, is on track to be the largest, most destructive fire in California history. In addition to the 270,000 acres, it has also destroyed over 1,000 structures and displaced roughly 100,000 Californians per the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. Lack of rain and strong Santa Ana winds are considered major contributing factors to one of the fastest growing fires in California history; roughly an acre per second in its first nine hours.

As of 20 December, the fire has caused 2 deaths, and claims more land space than every city in California except Los Angeles. Additionally, open source reporting varies on the topic, stating it is anywhere from 15% to 40% contained. The Venture Fire combined with other smaller, but just



as deadly fires, around southern California make this a deadly fire season for the state. In addition to local firefighting resources, two California National Guard C-130's from the 146th Airlift Wing have been activated to assist. The fires are likely to continue to intensify, spread farther, and displace more locals before being fully contained.

Source: <http://www.cnn.com/2017/12/18/us/california-fires/index.html>

Keystone Pipeline Leak – *Accidental Event*

Excerpt: TransCanada, the company that owns and operates the Keystone Pipeline, says that an estimated 210,000 gallons, or 5,000 barrels, of oil have spilled near the small town of Amherst, S.D.

The cause of the leak is under investigation, according to the company's website. TransCanada crews detected a drop in pressure at about 6 a.m. CT Thursday morning and shut down the pipeline, which runs from Hardisty, Alberta, to Cushing, Okla., and Wood River/Patoka, Ill.

Amherst is about 200 miles north of Sioux Falls, S.D., and about 25 miles from the state's border with North Dakota.

Analyst Comment: The first Keystone pipeline, which runs 1,136 miles from Hardisty in Alberta, carries about 500,000 barrels a day of thick bitumen from the oil sands area to pipeline, refining and storage networks in Steele City, Neb., and Patoka, Ill. The Keystone Pipeline is part of a 2,687-mile system that carries crude oil from Alberta to several points in the United States, including Illinois and Oklahoma. TransCanada has been operating the larger Keystone pipeline system since 2010. It spilled oil 35 times that year alone.

The pipeline company, TransCanada, said in a statement that the South Dakota leak was detected around 6 a.m. local time on Thursday. The pipeline was shut down, and the cause of the leak was under investigation. The spill occurred about 3 miles southeast of Amherst on private land, which Walsh described as a "flat, grassy area for grazing." No livestock or drinking water sources appeared to be threatened and no farm buildings or houses are within a mile. The pipeline has had smaller spills — 400 barrels each — in the same region in 2011 and 2016.

Source: <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/11/16/564705368/keystone-pipeline-oil-spill-reported-in-south-dakota>

U.S. Navy Plane Carrying 11 Crashes in the Philippine Sea – *Accidental Event*

Excerpt: President Donald Trump announced that the U.S. Navy was conducting a search for three missing sailors after a plane carrying 11 passengers crashed into the sea southeast of Okinawa.



Eight of the passengers have been recovered alive.

The plane crashed while it was en route to the USS Ronald Reagan, the U.S.'s forward-deployed aircraft carrier.

Analyst Comment: The C-2 Greyhound is a small propeller plane designed for Carrier Onboard Delivery (COD), which includes the transfer of people, supplies, or mail from land to an aircraft carrier that is underway. Early media reports indicate that an engine failure may have been the cause of the accident, and that the pilot was able to perform a “heroic” water landing that allowed for the rescue of the majority of personnel onboard. Still, 3 sailors were missing after the crash, and search efforts were ultimately called off.

There have been a number of additional aircraft mishaps in the U.S. Pacific Command area of responsibility (AOR) in recent weeks. An F-35 on a training mission from Okinawa lost a small panel during flight, while an F-22 was reportedly towed back to its hangar after a landing during drills in South Korea. An Air Force official later stated that the F-22 was towed as a precaution, and that a subsequent inspection showed no issues with the aircraft.

Source: <http://www.businessinsider.com/us-navy-plane-carrying-11-crashes-in-the-philippine-sea-2017-11>

Amtrak Derailment in Washington Causes Multiple Fatalities – Accidental Event

Excerpt: At least three people were killed and scores more injured when an Amtrak train on its inaugural trip on a new route derailed south of Seattle while crossing a bridge above a busy highway, authorities said.

Officials said 13 cars jumped the tracks. A spokeswoman for the Washington State Patrol confirmed three deaths and said all the cars had been searched.

Trooper Brooke Bova, the spokeswoman, said that about 100 people had been injured. A total of 77 people were sent to hospitals, according to CHI Franciscan Health, which operates numerous hospitals in Western Washington. Some patients are in critical conditions, a spokesman said.

Analyst Comment: While the investigation into the 18 December Amtrak derailment is ongoing, preliminary media reporting indicates that there were at least 3 fatalities and roughly 100 additional injuries as a result. The train was on its inaugural journey on a new route when the incident occurred over Interstate 5; a major artery for the Pacific Northwest between Seattle and Portland and the West Coast at large. The train is believed to have been operating at a high rate of speed for the stretch of track where the incident occurred, which may be a significant contributing factor in the crash.



The derailment occurred in close proximity to Joint Base Lewis-McChord; which highlights the ability of offsite events to impact DoD installations. Approximately 20 victims of the accident were transported to Madigan Army Medical Center, which is a level 2 trauma center located on the base. Additionally, Joint Base Lewis-McChord's roads were utilized as detour routes in the hours following the accident, with DoD personnel responsible for traffic control. Personnel who live off-base may also be affected by road closures, detours, and the associated traffic congestion.

Source: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/dr-gridlock/wp/2017/12/18/amtrak-train-derails-in-washington-state-rail-cars-fall-onto-interstate-5/?utm_term=.2c35b3484fcb

2017 – 2018 Flu Season – *Biological Hazard*

Excerpt: This season the potentially deadly virus is in rare form. Public-health experts are predicting that this year's flu will be severe for several reasons. Cases are starting up early, which is one indicator of an aggressive virus. Another worry: Australia's flu season typically augurs that of the U.S., and so far this year, Australia recorded 2½ times as many cases, compared to the same period last year.

What's more, experts report that the flu vaccine, designed to inoculate hundreds of millions of people, may not be as effective as they'd hoped.

Analyst Comment: Experts across the country have predicted this flu season to be worse than recent years for several reasons. The most important of which being a rougher than normal flu season in the Southern Hemisphere. Particularly in Australia, the flu season started sooner and affected more people than recent years, and analysts have assessed the U.S. could follow suit. Additionally, the H3N2 strain is the leading strain the year. This strain triggers the worst outbreaks of the two influenza A viruses and two types of influenza B viruses that circulate among people; resulting in increased deaths and hospitalizations. Analysts have also stated that the recommended vaccine this year, may not be the best match. Finally, to further complicate the issue, new evidence suggests that repeat vaccines of the same target flu strain are not as effective.

Source: <http://time.com/5068553/this-years-flu-virus-could-be-worse-than-usual/>



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.

Atlanta Airport Power Outage

On Sunday 17 December the power went out to Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson Airport, the busiest airport in the world, for nearly 11 hours. The outage affected travel all around the world and led to the cancellation of over 1,000 flights at the airport. According to official sources, the outage was attributed to a fire in an underground electrical facility that damaged two substations and a backup resource serving the airport. Once power was restored, flights were delayed anywhere from a few hours to several days.

Ultimately, authorities concluded that no foul play was involved in the cause of the fire. The area where the fire started is restricted to nonauthorized personnel, requiring key card access, and is under video surveillance. There was no unauthorized access recorded or reported in the moments leading up to the fire.

More than flights, everything requiring technology in the airport was affected; including bathroom stalls. Automated toilets, sinks, and doors were also rendered useless. Internet access and cell phone service at the airport were also severely decreased. Food service was also limited.

International flights were less affected as they were diverted to other airports in the states. However, many domestic flights using Atlanta as a layover or destination location were delayed or cancelled altogether.

While this event was caused by an accidental fire, the complications resulted in confusion and disarray around the world. These affects would potentially be exacerbated if a lone actor, or terror cell were to conduct a dedicated attack with a similar outcome being the objective. An average of 275,000 passengers pass through the airport each day, and it handles an average of 2,500 arrivals and departures daily. Additionally, Hartsfield-Jackson airport serves 150 destinations in the U.S., and over 75 destinations in 50 countries worldwide. All of these factors lend to the location being an ideal target location for would be terrorists or violent actors. Additionally, the power outage at the airport highlights how losing power at one airport affects much more than just flights at that location. Disabled toilets and sinks for extended periods of time increase the potential for a health crisis, particularly with large amounts of people stuck in a relatively small space for any period of time.

Aside from the aspect of terrorism, an aging U.S. airport infrastructure system contributes to the likelihood of events like this happening on a more frequent basis.

Sources: <http://www.cnn.com/2017/12/17/us/atlanta-airport-power-outage/index.html>



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<https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/airplane-mode/atlanta-power-outage-highlights-larger-problem-aging-u-s-airports-n831246>

<http://www.foxnews.com/travel/2017/12/18/power-restored-at-atlanta-airport-after-outage-snarled-air-traffic.html>