



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

Servicemembers Convicted of Narcotics Use and Trafficking in Multiple Incidents – *Insider Threat*

Summary: Since last Fall, there have been a series of high-profile convictions for narcotics trafficking in the U.S. military, sometimes accompanied by weapons charges. A Marine Corps Second Lieutenant was found guilty by general court-martial of the use and possession of Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA, or Ecstasy), along with a series of related charges. He was sentenced to 16 months confinement in September 2020 with credit for time served, followed by a discharge. In November 2020, seven (7) Marines ranking from Lance Corporal to Sergeant were given prison sentences of varying lengths, along with discharges. They were convicted on a range of offenses, including (but not limited to) use and possession of controlled substances, sometimes with intent to distribute. In May 2021, an Army Master Sergeant and his son, a civilian, were arrested in his home by Federal authorities for trafficking a schedule II controlled substance. They were found with more than two (2) kilograms of cocaine, along with firearms and \$100,000 in cash. The two (2) were released on bond and are awaiting trial. Finally, an Air Force Master Sergeant was sentenced to 32 months in prison after he was convicted for selling methamphetamine and several firearms without a license, including an AK-47.

Analyst Comment: There are many underlying causes for servicemembers to use illegal narcotics. Those who serve are no less prone to the stress, family issues, poor judgment, and impulsive behavior that drive some to abuse drugs. But none of those convicted were unaware of the military's rules regarding drug use, let alone sale. The Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) is clear on the prohibitions in place for servicemembers. While some struggle with addiction, some servicemembers will leverage their circumstances for personal gain. In the worst cases, they may be affiliated with established criminal organizations. They join the military in order to learn training and tactics that they can impart to other members, or they seek opportunities to benefit their gang or group. In May 2021, three (3) soldiers at Fort Campbell (on the Kentucky-Tennessee border) were arrested by federal agents for trafficking over 100 firearms from Middle Tennessee to Chicago. Details are still forthcoming. The trafficking of either drugs or weapons undergirds a larger problem in the Armed Forces. Some citizens who engage in criminal behavior—or are willing to do so—are sometimes able to join undetected.

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Moorish Sovereign Citizen Incidents in NJ, MA – *Terrorism*

Summary: Two recent, separate incidents in New Jersey and Massachusetts highlight the ongoing security threats posed by loosely-affiliated sovereign citizen groups known as Moorish groups.

In June in New Jersey, a woman who had recently purchased a home visited the home for renovations when she discovered that the locks had been changed. After calling police, it was discovered that the home was occupied by an illegal squatter identifying himself as a Moorish sovereign citizen who was not subject to local or federal law. Moreover, the woman had received two eviction-style letters the month prior, but they were dismissed by her lawyer as a scam. The letters reportedly claimed that her home was being claimed by someone with connections to the Moorish Sovereign Citizens.

On 03 July in Massachusetts, a standoff unfolded after a state trooper pulled over to observe two vehicles that were stopped on the side of an interstate with their hazard lights on during the early morning hours. The trooper found 11 individuals (many of whom were heavily armed) who stated that they ran out of fuel en route to militia training. After the trooper asked for drivers licenses and firearms permits (which were not produced by the group), he radioed for backup and several members of the group moved to a wooded area on the side of the road, leading to the standoff which lasted several hours. The group described themselves to police as a militia that adheres to “Moorish Sovereign Ideology.”

Analyst Comment: Although sovereign citizen groups espouse a variety of ideologies across the political and social spectrum, they are loosely united by a claimed/perceived independence from U.S. government authority. Per the Anti-Defamation League, the Moorish movement is “An Afro-centric offshoot of the sovereign citizen movement that emerged in the mid-1990s primarily as a result of people merging sovereign beliefs with beliefs from a longstanding religious sect, the Moorish Science Temple.” Moorish sovereign citizens often claim to have special rights because of their “Moorish” status or because they are “indigenous inhabitants” of North America. One extremism expert described Moorish sovereign citizen groups as a “salad bar” ideology, which “cobble[s] together bits and pieces from a variety of sources,” to include “The Moorish Science Temple, Black Hebrew Israelism, Nation of Islam, UFO theories, phony Native American tribes, and the pseudo-legal arguments crafted by white supremacist ‘patriot’ groups in the 1970s.”

Moorish groups and other sovereign citizens remain a potential domestic terrorism threat due to their hostility toward government and law enforcement. The 2016 ambush of police officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana that left 3 dead was perpetrated by a member of a Moorish group. In the recent Massachusetts incident, the incident was resolved peacefully, however there was significant potential for violence due to the heavily armed Moorish group refusing to cooperate with responding law enforcement. However, sovereign citizens also engage in various forms of



harassment, to include the pseudo-legal threats and squatting activities observed in the recent New Jersey incident.

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Two Active Shooter Scares at MLB Stadiums – *Active Shooter/Active Assailant*

Summary: Two recent, separate incidents involving Major League Baseball (MLB) stadiums have involved fears of an active shooter incident.

In Colorado, fears of a potential mass shooting plot were raised after four people were arrested at a hotel overlooking Coors Field (which was set to host the MLB all-star game) on weapons charges. The weapons and ammunition were spotted by a hotel maid, who notified law enforcement. An initial investigation raised concerns of a shooting similar to the 2017 Las Vegas mass shooting, because one of the individuals who booked the room specifically requested a balcony, which overlooked the stadium.

In Washington, D.C., a shooting outside Nationals Park sparked fears of a potential active shooter event inside the stadium. Three people were shot and wounded outside the stadium's gates, with gunshots audible from inside the ballpark. Gameplay was halted temporarily, and many people attending the game began to panic, seeking any available cover/shelter.

Analyst Comment: False alarms, foiled plots, and nearby shooting events can have significant impacts on operations. These particular events both occurred outside MLB stadiums, which may be frequented by DoD along with other sporting events, concerts, and similar mass gatherings. Moreover, the effects observed in each recent scenario could apply to similar situations IVO DoD installations.

The incident at Coors Field likely raised additional security concerns for the upcoming all-star game, which is a high-profile, widely televised event. Additional investigation revealed that the presence of weapons in the hotel room was likely drug-related. Still, the 2017 Las Vegas shooting was the deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history, and authorities had intensified concerns for a similar plot based on the conditions reported by the hotel maid.



The incident at Nationals Park demonstrated a potential emergency communications deficiency, as fans attending the game reportedly did not receive clear instructions from loudspeakers or event personnel for minutes after the initial gunshots were heard. The sense of mass panic led to the evacuation of the crowd, with the remainder of the game being postponed. Some mass panic events in recent history have led to fatal stampede events, therefore the potential for death and injury in a false alarm/nearby event should not be discounted.

Sources: <https://abcnews.go.com/US/denver-police-feared-mass-shooting-mlb-star-game/story?id=78797363>

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Foiled Iranian Kidnapping Plot in NY – *Foreign Intelligence Entities*

Summary: 4 Iranian nationals were indicted after federal authorities foiled a kidnapping plot involving an Iranian intelligence official along with 3 co-conspirators, authorities announced on 13 July.

The target of the foiled kidnapping plot was a New York-based Iranian activist. Additionally, the 4 suspects were allegedly part of a wider plot involving similar kidnappings in additional locations to include Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates.

The FBI had reportedly warned the activist about Iranian surveillance efforts, yet she chose to continue her years-long activism efforts in spite of potential threats.

Analyst Comment: The discovery of the plot highlights the abilities of foreign intelligence entities (FIE) to conduct operations on U.S. soil. Though only one suspect was reportedly an Iranian intelligence official, another was a U.S.-based Iranian national who reportedly provided financial assistance to the plot in violation of U.S. sanctions.

Moreover, the incident highlights Iran's willingness to crack down on political dissidents far outside their own national borders. Other nation-states such as Russia, China, and North Korea have engaged in similar activities abroad, to include kidnappings and targeted assassination of dissidents.

Similarly, in March 2021, Iranian militant groups claimed that they had active cells in Washington, D.C. Though the veracity of this claim can not be confirmed, it is possible that such groups could interface with Iranian intelligence operatives in the U.S. such as the one who led the recent kidnapping plot. Likewise, these groups could potentially provide support to Iranian intelligence operations, to include safehouses, surveillance, or logistical support.



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NATO May Consider Military Response to Cyber-Attacks – *Cyber*

Summary: Following the Brussels Summit in 2021, the members states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) endorsed a new Comprehensive Cyber Defense Policy. Members nations have affirmed their commitment to responding to cyber threats to varying degrees in 2014, 2016, 2017, and 2019. However, the Brussels Summit Communiqué issued on 14 June 2021 formally asserts that NATO may invoke Article 5 on a case-by-case basis for certain cyber-attacks. Article 5 is the cornerstone of the alliance between member nations, formed to counter Soviet expansion in 1949. It states that “if a NATO Ally is the victim of an armed attack, each and every other member of the Alliance will consider this act of violence as an armed attack against all members and will take the actions it deems necessary to assist the Ally attacked.” The Communiqué was issued in the wake of increased ransomware attacks by likely state-sponsored hacker groups, including ones that have affected infrastructure and supply chains. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg previously expressed this same sentiment in 2019 a magazine editorial in tandem with the creation of a new Cyberspace Operations Centre in Mons, Belgium. This most recent declaration solidifies NATO’s acceptance of the cyber realm as a fourth potential battlefield, alongside land, air, and sea.

Analyst Comment: NATO’s collective defense clause has only been activated once following the attacks of 11 September 2001 on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The U.S. has been the target of several likely state-sponsored cyber-attacks, including the SolarWinds hack in December 2020 and the ransomware attack on the Colonial Pipeline in May 2021, both from hacker groups originating in Russia. Tensions between NATO and Russia have been heightened since the country’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, after which NATO announced it would no longer offer support or cooperation of any kind. However, the NATO-Russia Council, established in 2002, was retained in hopes of normalizing relations in the future. However, a series of aggressive overtures by the Russian government has only resulted in continued condemnation and diplomatic retaliation. This includes, but is not limited to, the expelling of 150 diplomats across 25 member nations after an attempted assassination of a double agent in the United Kingdom in 2018. This places NATO in an awkward position. Hacks and cyber-attacks by groups affiliated with Russia or its intelligence service occur frequently. Groups with exotic names like “DarkSide,” responsible for the Colonial Pipeline attack, claim they operate independently. In the latter’s case, this may be true, but for other groups, it is not. Their colorful names, aesthetic, and messaging are often meant to create deniability for Russia while they continue the Kremlin’s cyber-attacks on the U.S. and its allies. Unlike kinetic warfare, actions in the global cyber-war are ongoing and their perpetrators are often more difficult to pinpoint. NATO is undertaking a significant responsibility if it intends



to leverage Article 5 against hostile nation-states for their actions online. Few will claim responsibility for their attacks and the truth will always be difficult to prove.

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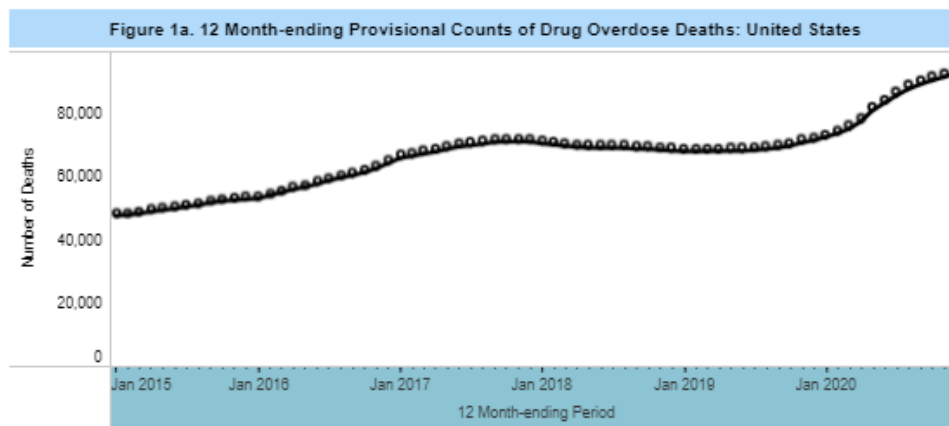
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Record Surge in Overdoses Revealed by CDC Data – *Narcotics*

Summary: The CDC's Provisional Drug Overdose Death Counts were released in mid-July, showing drug overdose deaths reached a record 93,000 last year. This represents a 29% increase from the previous year's 72,000 drug overdose deaths. This is the largest increase from year-to-year since the count rose by 11,000 in 2016. It also continues to follow the general upward trend of the last five years.





Analyst Comment: In examining the CDC death count information, research does not indicate an increase in the number of Americans that started using drugs. The number of increased deaths likely occurred amongst individuals previous struggling with addiction. The ongoing opioid epidemic is believed to have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The increase in overdoses may be in part due to limitations in accessing health care and recovery support services. Additionally, the recession triggered by the pandemic is a potential trigger for thousands of "deaths of despair" from drug overdose, alcohol abuse, and suicide. A majority of the overdose deaths involved fentanyl. Per one expert, the contamination of other drugs, such as cocaine or heroin, with fentanyl results in a 'poisoned drug supply' and an increase in overdoses. The continued proliferation of fentanyl in the U.S. makes it unlikely overdose deaths will decrease this year.

Sources: <https://apnews.com/article/overdose-deaths-record-covid-pandemic-fd43b5d91a81179def5ac596253b0304>

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U.S. Coast Guard Warns Activists Against Traveling to Cuba – *Civil Disturbance*

Summary: In early July, protestors took to the streets in Cuba to call for the resignation of President Miguel Díaz-Canel and the end of the communist government. These protests occurred following 200,000 deaths due to COVID-19, food shortages, and blackouts. Open sources have described the economy as being in freefall after pandemic travel restrictions deprived many on the island of tourist dollars. Some of the protests have erupted into violence, with police cars being overturned in Havana and police using pepper spray on demonstrators. There have been over 100 arrests and at least one (1) death. Cuban Americans have expressed their support for the protests, many having fled the island seeking asylum in the U.S. Some have even gone so far as to suggest traveling in a flotilla from Florida to Cuba with supplies and, if necessary, weapons. A Cuban artist and social media personality living in Florida organized a group that met on 12 July 2021 at Pelican Harbor Marina in North Bay Village. The group was stopped by the Coast Guard over the presence of firearms. The group's leaders announced their plans to regroup. The Coast Guard has warned boat owners and activists not to attempt the voyage, but open sources suggest that some have been able to depart.

Analyst Comment: Americans traveling abroad to report on, support, or participate in international conflicts is not new. Faith-based and nonprofit organizations have often braved dangerous conflicts to deliver supplies abroad. Young citizen journalists armed with cameras, smartphones, and YouTube accounts have reported on the conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere, providing ostensibly unvarnished coverage compared their mainstream media counterparts. The past decade has even seen the rise of "dark tourism," in which companies take customers to conflict zones for vacation. The State Department maintains a website for "High-Risk Area Travelers," and it issues country-specific travel advisories where applicable. In May 2019, permits for private vessels to travel from the U.S. to Cuba were all but discontinued. Leaving the Pelican Harbor



Marina with weapons is certainly enough to warrant the attention of the U.S. Coast Guard in any year. However, once in international waters, private craft are at greater liberty to approach Cuban territorial waters. One flotilla organizer stated that they intended to distribute supplies from outside of that 12-mile radius. How many craft have departed Florida for Cuba and how they have fared remains to be seen. It goes without saying that Americans traveling to a conflict zone, however good their intentions, place themselves and others at significant risk.

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Hazards

Severe Flash Floods in Germany, Belgium – *Meteorological Hazards*

Summary: Rescuers in Germany and neighboring countries were racing to find survivors from the region's worst flooding in decades, as the death toll rose to more than 125 and hundreds remained missing following days of torrential rainfall. The German military joined in the effort to support thousands of rescue workers amid a shortage of helicopters and other hardware. Hundreds of houses have collapsed or have been severely damaged in the western states of Rhineland-Palatinate and North Rhine-Westphalia. The town of Erftstadt near Cologne was evacuated after a landslide spreading from a nearby quarry created a huge crater that quickly reached the edge of the settlement. Towns and villages beneath the Steinbach dam were evacuated for fear that the water pressure could collapse the barrier. Electricity and water supplies as well as telecommunications were cut off in many affected areas and parts of key roads and railways were razed by the enormous volumes of floodwater, in what some residents described to German media as the worst destruction in their region since World War II.

Analyst Comment: While severe floods have occurred in this region previously, an exceptionally large number of deaths have already been reported, though search and rescue operations are still underway. The weather system, a cyclone named Bernd, lingered for an unusually large amount of time, allowing a large quantity of rain to fall in a limited area. Some areas received two months' worth of rain in two days. The storm was pinned between two high pressure areas in a configuration known as a blocking pattern. These areas developed due to the jet stream from the North Atlantic. Additionally, the topography of the region includes numerous small valleys. The infrastructure present was overwhelmed by the quantity of rain, flooding sewers. Though the story is still developing, there is the potential that there was a failure to adequately prepare for heavy flooding. Additionally, water levels remain at critical levels, leaving the potential for levee, dike, or dam failure to occur and cause additional damage. Landslides and sinkholes have been reported as a direct result of the flood.

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Wildfires Amidst Ongoing Drought, Heat Waves in Western U.S. – *Meteorological Hazards*

Summary: More than 70 active wildfires across a dozen states have incinerated a combined area larger than Rhode Island, according to the National Interagency Fire Center, which tracks the coordinated firefighting effort. The center said more than 2.25 million acres have been burned since the beginning of the year, compared to 1.7 million acres in the same period in 2020. A combination of low humidity, wind gusts and dry conditions from the drought are heightening the critical fire risk. The largest of the current fires is the Bootleg fire, a fast-moving wildfire in southern Oregon. So far it has burned more than 200,000 acres. As of 16 July it has been active for a week and is only 7 percent contained.

Analyst Comment: The combination of ongoing drought and multiple extreme heat waves that hit the western U.S. in June and July has dried the vegetation, providing additional fuel for wildfires. This also caused a loss of moisture in the region, intensifying any potential fires. Per the U.S. Drought Monitor, extreme conditions are the most widespread they've been in the last 20 years and intensified at an unusually fast rate. The drought is projected to continue, and potential become one of the worst in recent history. Reservoir levels are near record lows and mountain snowpack is already largely depleted in the area as the winter was dryer than usual. Dozens of all-time heat records have been set in recent weeks in multiple states with the possibility of more records being broken in the coming weeks. There is also the possibility that smoke from the wildfires may provide shade, slightly reducing temperatures. Additionally, water and energy conservation has already been instituted in numerous areas. Negative health impacts have been seen across the region. Extreme heat has already led to hundreds of deaths. Many of the deaths occurred amongst the homeless, the elderly, those with medical issues, and those who work in outdoor manual labor.

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U.S. May be Losing Ground to Delta Variant – *Biological*

Summary: Despite the efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccines against the new Delta variant, vaccination rates appear to be holding at 48.2% of citizens who are fully vaccinated and 55.7% of citizens who have had at least one dose. In 47 states, COVID-19 cases are rising. Although there are exceptions, the vast majority of new infections occur among the unvaccinated. Countries in the Middle East and North Africa have lower vaccination rates and are experiencing a surge of infections. Tunisia has implemented lockdowns again. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates



(UAE) have both donated vaccines. In Latin America, Haiti is the only country whose government has not administered vaccines. The country is experiencing its own surge in infections amid gang violence in Port-au-Prince that has displaced 16,000 residents and the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse on 07 July. The U.S. has sent 500,000 doses of the Moderna vaccine in hopes to stem the tide. The domestic situation is less dire than at earlier points during the pandemic. Nearly half of Americans are fully vaccinated. Infection, hospitalization, and rates are miniscule in the U.S. compared to the peak of the pandemic. The U.S. saw the peaks of daily deaths in January and the peak of daily infections in April. However, a stalled vaccination drive will only allow infections to continue both at home and abroad. On 15 July 2021, Los Angeles County announced that masks would be required indoors by all citizens, regardless of vaccination status. At the moment, this is counter to the guidance issued by both the Center for Disease Controls (CDC) and the California Department of Public Health. Whether other local and even state jurisdictions will follow suit remains to be seen.

Analyst Comment: Certain populations within the U.S., including some military personnel, are hesitant to receive the shots based on a combination of factors, including concerns about on the emergency authorization used by the FDA, side effects, and an overall distrust of the government and vaccines in general. Others simply feel they do not need one because of their relative age and health. This reluctance is driving an increase in infections that may see state and local governments reimplement lockdowns, masking, and other mitigation strategies. Population clustering is one of the most significant factors driving the increase in infections from the Delta variant. Obviously, and though there are exceptions, citizens tend to live and work around people with similar temperaments, practices, and cultural beliefs. In this case, citizens who are less likely to seek out one of the vaccines are more likely to live around each other. This fosters hotspots wherein an infection can spread rapidly. State and local governments have offered incentives to receive the vaccine, including lottery tickets, passes to special events, and even free alcoholic beverages on site. President Biden sought to have 70% of Americans receive at least one shot of the vaccine by this month. The numbers have fallen short. Public health officials and elected leaders are struggling to figure out how to encourage reluctant citizens. As the economy reopens, businesses and educational institutions may require proof-of-vaccination to access their services.

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Submariners Hospitalized from Diesel Exhaust Exposure – *Accidental Events*

Summary: Thirty-three submariners at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, Washington were hospitalized in July. Concern arose from possible exposure of the individuals to exhaust from the USS Michigan submarine. Of the 33, two were reported to experience mild symptoms of acute respiratory distress. All sailors have since been released from the hospital. Exposure occurred during maintenance work. The USS Michigan has been docked at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard for the last 2 years for an extended refit period. Part of the renovations include restoration of the submarine’s diesel generator.

Analyst Comment: The USS Michigan is a nuclear-powered submarine. All nuclear-powered submarines are equipped with diesel generators that serve as a backup power source. These generators are capable of producing exhaust and may be involved in HAZMAT incidents such as the one in the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard. Diesel exhaust, produced by the burning of diesel fuel, is a complex mixture of thousands of gases and fine particles that contains more than 40 toxic air contaminants. These contaminants have both short- and long-term health effects. Per OSHA, “the exhaust from diesel engines contains a mixture of gases and very small particles that can create a health hazard when not properly controlled.” These include many known or suspected cancer-causing substances, such as benzene, arsenic and formaldehyde, air pollutants such as nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, and other fine-particle pollutants with additional health impacts. There is a history of HAZMAT incidents occurring at U.S. Military bases and leading to decades of negative environmental and health impacts. Numerous programs and mitigation efforts have been implemented to reduce the impacts of past incidents.

Sources:<https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/2021/07/13/sailors-taken-hospital-diesel-exhaust-exposure-shipyard/7949328002/>

<https://oehha.ca.gov/air/health-effects-diesel-exhaust>

<https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OSHA-3590.pdf>

On the Radar

- **COVID-19 Travel Restrictions May Ease Soon**
 - The Biden Administration is reviewing COVID-19 travel restrictions on visitors from Europe, following the President’s meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel. A decision is expected within a few days. Since June, there have been interagency working groups with the U.S., Canada, Mexico, the European Union, and Great Britain to discuss easing the travel restrictions implemented at the start of the pandemic. Open sources suggest some restrictions may be eased in August at the earliest.
- **West Coast Suffers Secondary Effects**
 - As discussed in Hazards above, the West Coast of the United States is currently dealing with a combination of extreme heat waves, drought, and wildfires. In the near future, the interrelated nature of these hazards is likely to exacerbate the negative impact of other geological and meteorological events that may occur in the area. For example, heavy rains may trigger flash floods. Areas that are recovering from wildfires will not have sufficient vegetation to hinder the flash floods and the potential for a mudslide or landslide to occur is higher.
- **06 January Capitol Riot Developments**
 - Over 550 individuals have now been charged with crimes in relation to the riot at the U.S. Capitol on 06 January 2021, and at least 27 have pled guilty. Prosecutors called the case “unprecedented” in its scale, stating that the investigation into the events of the day “is likely the most complex investigation ever prosecuted by the Department of Justice.” Additionally, a special commission (similar to the 9/11 Commission) has formed in the U.S. Congress to further investigate the incident. The eventual findings of all relevant investigations will provide a clearer picture into the events of 06 January, to include implications for various I&A Division-tracked threats, to include Insider Threat, Domestic Terrorism, and Civil Disturbance.