



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

Three U.S. Army Soldiers Accused in Gun Trafficking Ring with Chicago Gang – *Insider Threat*

Summary: From September 2019 through May 2021, three U.S. Army Soldiers stationed at Fort Campbell allegedly purchased firearms from multiple licensed gun stores in Tennessee and Kentucky. They allegedly sold and shipped those weapons to members of the Gangster Disciples in Chicago. They accepted payment through online services, including Zelle and Cash App. The firearms were connected to multiple shootings, including one at a party in Chicago last March that killed one and wounded seven others. The three Soldiers were arrested in May 2021, but in April 2022, a federal superseding indictment included nine members of the gang for allegedly participating in the larger firearms trafficking operation. By all accounts, the three Soldiers were not members of the gang and were motivated by financial gain. The indictment includes charges that the group conspired to violate federal firearms laws, among other crimes. The defendants face up to 20 years in prison.

Analyst Comment: The problem of U.S. military personnel who are also members of street gangs and outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) is well known. A 2020 report from the U.S. Army showed that participation in these groups has increased in recent years, although the underlying reasons are less clear. However, in some cases, servicemembers may not be affiliated with gangs, but participate in criminal enterprises for purely monetary gain. In January 2019, two U.S. Navy Sailors were both convicted of selling drugs to at least 45 other Sailors in San Diego County, with many of them being repeat customers. From July 2019 to February 2020, an investigation into a human trafficking operation resulted in the discharge of 24 Marines stationed at Camp Pendleton. A civilian trafficker recruited active duty Marines to transport unauthorized immigrants who had crossed the border. The allegations against the three Soldiers are another instance of an ongoing challenge for both military and civilian law enforcement. DoD guidance advises military leadership to look for visible signs of gang membership. These include tattoos, clothing of a certain color, hand gestures, graffiti, and the presence of clubs or social organizations that may serve as a proxy. Servicemembers engaged in criminal enterprises purely for monetary gain have less incentive to advertise their activities. They only have incentive to pursue customers for their illegal services insofar as they continue to profit. This makes their illicit activities even more difficult to detect.

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Two Islamic State Assailants Conduct Attack in Israel – Terrorism

Summary: On 27 March 2022, the Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for a shooting in which two IS operatives killed two members of the Israeli Police force and injured six others in a shooting incident in Hadera, Israel. After the attack, reports confirmed that IS took responsibility for this attack as the two individuals who committed this act of terror were shown pledging allegiance to the leader of IS via a video posted on social media. This is the first time since June 2017 that IS has claimed responsibility for an attack in Israel specifically. In addition, earlier the same week on 22 March, an Arab-Israeli assailant that had been previously arrested as an IS supporter killed four individuals in Beersheba, Israel. The UN indicated that Israel fell victim to additional attacks in which the attacker intended on joining IS prior to stabbing three individuals inside a shopping center in addition to driving his car into a cyclist and killing the individual. Actions of IS, other terrorist organizations, lone-wolf actors, etc. remain a constant, unpredictable threat not only in Israel, but the Middle East, and many other nations worldwide. These recent attacks have since been condemned by the U.S. Secretary of State and UN as the DoD and governments worldwide continue to monitor terrorist activity.

Analyst Comment: Terrorism has been established as a threat to the State of Israel as Israel's defense establishment recently estimated that approximately 200 Israeli Arabs identify with IS, 20 of which Israel believes may carry out attack on their state on behalf of IS. With presence in the region, it is likely that other IS members will seek to enter Israel to join forces with fellow members. Furthermore, reports have indicated that there is increasing potential for IS attacks in the region due to videos being posted on social media that may be a driver for "copycat attacks". It is probable that Israeli's defense establishment and its officials will seek to harden their security measures both in cyberspace and on the ground in order to mitigate and prevent future IS attacks by identifying IS operatives before they can act. On the weekend of 22 April, the religious festivals of Passover, Ramadan, and Easter overlap which will lead to higher numbers of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian worshipers into Jerusalem. With a history of political and social violence between Muslims (the well-known religion of IS; Sunni Islam) and Jews (~74% of Israeli's population is Jewish), the potential for violence from IS affiliates is worth monitoring as this specific timing of violence in the region has left Israel's government and defense on high alert.

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Russia Uses Hypersonic Missiles in Ukraine – *Foreign Nation-State Military*

Summary: On Sunday, 20 March 2022, Russia said that it had used hypersonic missiles twice against targets in Ukraine, including a fuel depot and an underground munitions storage facility. Hypersonic missiles are capable of flying five to 25 times the speed of sound. However, the use of the term confuses the type of weapon actually deployed with the hypersonic glide vehicles (HGV) that Russia first successfully tested in 2016. HGVs fly fast enough and at an altitude low enough to out-maneuver conventional ballistic missile defense systems. Multiple countries are developing their own version or have successfully tested one. China recently deployed their own variant in July 2021, which circumnavigated the globe. They are also capable of carrying a nuclear payload. The missiles used in Ukraine were Russia's Kinzhal, a variant of the Iskander SRBM, and not its Avangard HGV. The Kinzhangs were launched from MiG-31 fighter jets from a relatively short distance. Both official sources and open sources in the media questioned the timing and emphasis on the hypersonic aspect of the Kinzhal. Many speculated that the prolonged duration of Russia's invasion has compelled them to escalate the conflict and, possibly, to distract from their lack of progress. However, the Kinzhal can maneuver in midair, and it represents a step towards more advanced weaponry.

Analyst Comment: Hypersonic missiles are often misunderstood in open source. Hypersonic speed, meaning above Mach 5, is the most obvious distinction from ballistic missiles. However, ballistic missiles can already exceed Mach 5. There are typically two types of hypersonic missiles that are discussed in open source. There are hypersonic cruise missiles (HCMs) and hypersonic glide vehicles (HGVs). HCMs maintain a set altitude and hypersonic speed regardless of distance and are powered throughout their flight. HGVs are usually launched on tops of ballistic missiles and then glide back through the atmosphere to their target at hypersonic speeds. Traditional ballistic missile reentry vehicles travel into outer space on a trajectory, reaching altitudes of 1,000 kilometers before gravity guides them back to the Earth. HGVs are able to achieve a more direct flight to their targets. There are also hybrid cases. Speed, power, and maneuverability make them suitable for specific military missions and a challenge for standard missile defense systems designed to intercept their ballistic counterparts. However, hypersonic missiles require sophisticated guidance and control systems that continue to present technical challenges. Additional development and testing will continue. While Russia's use of the Kinzhal is concerning, the emerging consensus is that they were deployed for propaganda over their destructive capabilities.



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Pro-Russian Hackers Seek to Spread Disinformation – *Cyber*

Summary: Within the last year, social media disinformation has experienced an increase in activity, including an increase in disinformation linked to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. However, this is not solely an issue in Ukraine; domestic disinformation and propaganda has seen a rise in countries around the world, a tactic which foreign intelligence agencies are currently using. Recent reports by “Meta” have indicated that hackers affiliated with the Russian government have directed their attention towards Ukraine with Russia’s recent invasion. These pro-Russian hackers are attempting to use social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube as an outlet to conduct cyberespionage and disinformation campaigns. Per open-source reporting, as these hackers have transitioned their attention to Ukraine, they have begun spreading false messages about a Ukrainian military surrender. Additional hackers have further spread disinformation by blaming Russia’s invasion on NATO and accusing the Ukrainian military of killing civilians.

Reports have acknowledged a hacking group known as “Ghostwriter” has conducted cyberattack campaigns on dozens of Ukrainian military officials’ Facebook accounts in which they post false messages about a military surrender. Russia’s Internet Research Agency has its own history in creating social media profiles to spread disinformation as well. Cyberattacks with the intent on producing disinformation campaigns are an integral part of the information war we are seeing in Ukraine and is an asymmetric threat tactic that has been utilized by governments such as Russia against countries across the globe to disinform millions of individuals on ongoing conflicts and events.

Analyst Comment: Across the globe, the general public appears to draw their attention towards foreign interference when it comes to disinformation and propaganda campaigns. Although reports indicate that foreign intelligence entities (FIEs) are utilizing disinformation as a tactic, as seen in the Russian invasion of Ukraine, domestic threats are on the rise globally. Hacktivists now have the ability to spread disinformation domestically for public viewing in order to potentially alter social and/or political issues. These hacktivists have demonstrated both their intent and capability to access social media networks. As hackers spread disinformation domestically, states have become a victim to a rise in conspiracy theories. These theories created by hackers have a history of disinforming the public on various topics such as military capabilities, military COAs, political and social ideologies, etc. Groups such as the pro-Russian hacking groups are looking to spread disinformation and propaganda and will continue to adapt their tactics too in order to further alter the public’s opinions and understanding of certain political and social issues.



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Hazards

U.S. Withdraws Some Shanghai Consulate Staff During Covid-19 Outbreak – *Biological Hazards*

Summary: The U.S. State Department has ordered the departure of non-emergency workers from the consulate in Shanghai. A COVID-19 outbreak has resulted in a citywide lockdown for weeks amid a spike in cases that began in mid-March. Residents have experienced difficulties obtaining food and medical care under the new restrictions, which largely force them to stay home. Worldwide and in the U.S., cases are on the decline, with some fluctuations. Cases in the past week have increased approximately 3%. However, officials at the CDC have warned of an impending surge that may begin gradually in the coming weeks and then escalate in the Fall. U.S. officials speaking in open source suggested that numbers in the U.S. may also be artificially low due to a reduction in testing. The newest variant, XE, is a recombinant with parts of BA.1, the original strain of omicron, and BA.2, often called "stealth omicron." It is highly contagious, although the symptoms are less severe than Delta, and citizens may forego testing.

Analyst Comment: State Department employees and their families will leave Shanghai on commercial flights, while China continues its strategy of "dynamic zero-Covid," which purports to reduce the number of cases as much as possible to avoid overwhelming the healthcare system. The picture in the U.S. is less serious, but the City of Philadelphia announced a new indoor mask mandate after a recent uptick to an average of 142 cases per day. There were approximately 4,000 cases per day at the start of the year during the surge of the Omicron variant. Voices in open source media have questioned whether Philadelphia may be the first city to reinstate a mask mandate before others follow. The number of positive cases in Northeastern cities has also been higher than elsewhere in the U.S. At a dinner at a private club in Washington, D.C. on 02 April, there were 72 positive cases among both elected and unelected officials. Some colleges in the region have also reintroduced indoor mandates. Mask mandates, lockdowns, and other mitigation strategies during first two years of the pandemic were a source of controversy within all levels of government, the media, and culture at large. Efforts to reimplement them may be met with significant and similar resistance.

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7.4 Magnitude Earthquake Occurs off Coast of Fukushima Prefecture in Japan – *Geological Hazards*

Summary: On 16 March 2022, a 7.4 magnitude earthquake occurred just off the coast of Japan’s eastern Fukushima prefecture. Initially, a tsunami advisory was issued after this earthquake occurred, but was lifted on the morning of 17 March 2022. A 7.4 magnitude earthquake is considered a major earthquake according to the Richter scale resulting in landslides, liquefaction, and ground failure triggered by ground waves. In this most recent Fukushima earthquake, certain means of transportation were derailed, and two million people were left without power. The transportation system that was affected by the Fukushima earthquake was a bullet train which was carrying approximately 100 people and was derailed as a result. Furthermore, the East Japan Railway Company noted that most of its train services were suspended for safety checks. The epicenter of the earthquake was approximately 20 miles off the east coast of Japan, and about 35 miles below the ocean’s surface. The Circum-Pacific belt is a zone of earthquakes surrounding the Pacific Ocean in which Japan resides on. This infamous belt known as the “Ring of Fire” delivers the majority of the world’s earthquakes (~90%). With Japan’s location residing in the Circum-Pacific belt, the Japanese and DoD installations in the region are consistently monitoring and aware of all earthquake activity.

Analyst Comment: DoD installations across the globe that have a history of seismic activity experience secondary and tertiary effects such as damage to roads, building infrastructure, power plants, and railways that can potentially put an installation and its personnel at risk or delay and limit its ability to effectively operate. With the DoD possessing installations in this region, natural hazards such as earthquakes, tsunamis, and landslides are closely monitored due to the region’s proximity to fault lines which has historically triggered these specific natural hazards. DoD personnel and installations can be negatively impacted by earthquakes and their natural side effects such as tsunamis and landslides. Earthquakes have a large potential for causing large-scale damage, injuries, and casualties within a matter of seconds which has led to increased safety measures to take place to mitigate the impact of such events. Japan has a long history of earthquake occurrences with the largest being a 9.1 magnitude earthquake which struck the Pacific coast of Honshu, Japan. With earthquake records dating back to the 1950s, Japan has experienced earthquakes, regardless of magnitude every year. These occurrences are highly unlikely to come to a halt and Japan will continue to be impacted by earthquakes, tsunamis, and landslides due to its geographic location in years to come.

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Red Hill Fuel Leak – HAZMAT Accident

Summary: In early March it was announced The Defense Department will permanently shut down the Navy's massive Red Hill fuel tank facility that leaked petroleum into Pearl Harbor's tap water, and will remove all the fuel. The contamination of local tap water resulted in nearly 6,000 people, mostly those living in military housing at or near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam being sickened, seeking treatment for nausea, headaches, rashes and other ailments. Approximately 4,000 military families were forced out of their homes and into hotels. By the end of April, recommendations on how to shut the tanks down and remove the fuel in an environmentally safe way will be delivered. After the facility can operate again, the defueling will begin and the process is expected to take about a year, meaning it would be finished sometime next year.

The Red Hill facility, which was constructed in the early 1940s, consists of 20 tanks mined inside a volcanic ridge near Pearl Harbor. Each tank measures 100 feet in diameter and 250 feet high — roughly the height of a 25-story building. They can hold up to 250 million gallons of fuel, or 12.5 million gallons each. Fuel travels 2.5 miles via pipelines to ships and planes waiting at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam. Hundreds of thousands of O'ahu residents — civilian and military — rely on drinking water from an aquifer that sits 100 feet below the fuel storage facility. The Navy's water system serves some 93,000 residents.

Analyst Comment: The ongoing leaks from the Red Hill facility has been a source of local distress and headlines for several years. The first major leak at the facility occurred in 2014, when 27,000 gallons of jet fuel leaked from the storage facility. In early 2020, approximately 7,700 gallons of fuel were collected following another fuel leak. This was not reported until the next year. In May of 2021, a reported 1,618 gallons of fuel leaked from the pipeline. Then, in November of 2021, 14,000 gallons of a fuel and water mix leaked from a fire suppression drain line. This amount was later revised to 19,000 gallons. At the end of the month, use of the Red Hill facility was halted. By late November, residents were reporting illnesses, and in early December rehoming of affected families began. Associated protest activity was reported in December. On 1 April it was reported that a further 30-50 gallons of fuel and water mixture spilled from the Red Hill Fuel Facility. The next week, it was reported that Naval Capt. Albert Lee Hornyak, the commanding officer of NAVSUP Fleet Logistics Center, was relieved of his duties following a series of leadership and oversight failures connected to the Red Hill facility. Though recommendations on how to shut down and empty the facility are under assessment, the defueling process is not currently scheduled. Though use of the facility was halted, it still stored large amounts of fuel that need to be removed. Until this occurs, more leaks are possible. The long-term environmental impact on these leaks in the local aquifer, soil, and water systems will likely be difficult to assess now and need to be tracked for several months if not years.



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Solar Flare Knocks Out Satellites – *Space Weather*

Summary: On February 3, SpaceX launched 49 of its Starlink satellites from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida atop a Falcon 9 rocket. Shortly after launch, the satellites deployed into their initial orbit roughly 130 miles above Earth's surface (SpaceX places them in a low orbit in the event that they suffer a malfunction and need to be de-orbited quickly). The satellites, operating normally, were scheduled to lift to a higher orbit. However, as a consequence of a geomagnetic storm triggered by a recent outburst of the sun, up to 40 of 49 newly launched Starlink satellites were knocked out of commission. The satellites burned up as they re-entered Earth's atmosphere.

Analyst Comment: The geomagnetic storm in question was not particularly severe, rather the timing of the event in relation to the deployment of the SpaceX satellites caused the mishap. NOAA utilizes a 1-5 scale in classifying space weather, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. The geomagnetic storm that impacted the launch was rated a 2 – Moderate. Geomagnetic storms can warm Earth's atmosphere, increasing atmospheric density (and drag) at lower orbits. Most other satellites orbit at higher altitudes, avoiding the atmospheric expansion triggered by space weather. However, these satellites' initial location in low orbit meant they were unable to maintain their position, falling back into the atmosphere. Per SpaceX, “the escalation speed and severity of the storm caused atmospheric drag to increase up to 50% higher than during previous launches.”

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Simultaneous Record Temperatures in Arctic and Antarctic – *Meteorological Hazard*

Summary: In mid-March it was reported that parts of Antarctica were more than 70 degrees (40 degrees Celsius) warmer than average, and areas of the Arctic were more than 50 degrees (30 degrees Celsius) warmer than average. Weather stations in Antarctica shattered records on the 18th of March as the region neared autumn. The two-mile high (3,234 meters) Concordia station was at 10 degrees (-12.2 degrees Celsius), which is about 70 degrees warmer than average, while the even higher Vostok station hit a shade above 0 degrees (-17.7 degrees Celsius), beating its all-time record by about 27 degrees (15 degrees Celsius). The coastal Terra Nova Base was far above freezing at 44.6 degrees (7 degrees Celsius). It caught officials at the National Snow and Ice Data Center in Boulder, Colorado, by surprise because they were paying attention to the Arctic where it was 50 degrees warmer than average and areas around the North Pole were nearing or at the melting point, which is unusual for mid-March. The Antarctic continent as a whole on 18 March was about 4.8C warmer compared to a baseline temperature between 1979 and 2000, the Associated Press reported. On the same day, the Arctic as a whole was 3.3C warmer than the 1979 to 2000 average.

Analyst Comment: One reason these observations are remarkable is the fact that, due to the axis tilt of the Earth, the two locations are in opposite seasons. Observing record heat in both spring and fall is unusual and concerning. Antarctica has the shortest observational record on Earth – weather data has only been collected since the late 1950s across a few locations- making it hard to assess the historic significance of the event. However, generally speaking, extreme temperatures in these regions hasten the melting of the massive ice sheets and glaciers. As these break down, a slow but measurable increase in global sea levels occurs. As sea level rise has been accelerating in recent history, associated hazards have increased in severity. This includes floods, tropical cyclones, storm surges, and erosion to name a few.

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On the Radar

- **China and the Solomon Islands Agree Upon a Security Alliance**
 - A plan has recently been leaked confirming a security alliance between China and the Solomon Islands. This agreement has raised concerns about a potential large-scale military buildup by regional powers in the south Pacific region. Sources indicate that this agreement with the Solomon Islands will allow for Chinese warships to utilize the Solomon Islands as a logistical hub in addition to its military personnel. Nations in this region as well as the United States have expressed their concerns about the possibility that China could use this agreement in order to construct a military base in the Solomon Islands. Furthermore, this strategic location allows for China to expand its military presence in the South Pacific, likely posing a threat towards nearby U.S. installations in Australia and Guam. This is something to monitor going forward as expanded Chinese military presence would pose a threat to U.S. installations in the region and put them increased risk to both the Chinese Foreign Nation-State Military (FNSM) and their Foreign Intelligence Entities (FIEs).

- **North Korea Resumes Testing of ICBMs**
 - In late February and early March, North Korea conducted two tests of its intercontinental ballistic missile system. As noted by earlier I&A Division White Papers, North Korea stopped testing ICBMs in 2017. Though shorter-range missiles have been tested since then, these new tests mark its highest-profile weapons test since November 2017. As North Korea escalates missile testing, potential political demands, public posturing, official government statements, or aid impacts between nations may be seen.