

# TRANSNATIONAL THREATS UPDATE

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*“Globalization has broadened the number of threats and challenges facing the United States. ... The nation requires more from our Intelligence Community than ever before and consequently we need to do our business better, both internally, through greater collaboration across disciplines and externally, by engaging more of the expertise available outside the Intelligence Community.”*

—The Honorable J. Michael McConnell, Director of National Intelligence, Statement for the Record to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 27, 2008

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## Terrorism

### Return of the Troubles?

Three bombs have been planted and claimed by Republican paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland in the past month. Two of the three bombs failed to go off, but threats of a “spectacular” terror attack have set the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) on edge. In preparation for the arrival of a new police chief, the PSNI has set up checkpoints in Belfast and South Armagh, a security measure not seen in several years. In another recall of the mid-1990s, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton has reportedly scheduled an additional stop in Belfast to discuss the recent violence in the midst of her economic trip to Dublin and London next month, according to the Belfast Telegraph. Although the violence has never completely ceased in Northern Ireland, it has subsided since the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 1998.

The detonated bomb went off outside the home of relatives of a Catholic police officer in Londonderry. A second pipe bomb was defused outside the home of the officer’s sister the same night. The most prominent Republican paramilitary group, the Real Irish Republican Army, took responsibility for the bombs as well as for “kneecapping” a man in Derry earlier in the week. Kneecapping is a common punishment to traitors of the Republican

community or to people deemed a threat. In this case, the victim was believed to be a drug dealer.

Because of the GFA, the PSNI went through a series of significant reforms, including a campaign to hire a more representative cross-section of the Northern Irish community. Within 10 years, the force went from less than 1 percent Catholic to almost 20 percent. However, with this shift came major discomfort for the hard-line Republican groups that refused to accept the GFA. Catholic police officers are commonly threatened by the Republican groups because they are seen as giving in to an authority that the hard-line Republicans choose not to recognize. They frequently are more at risk of Republican violence than their Protestant colleagues are.

The third bomb discovered weighed a massive 600 pounds. It was disarmed by the Irish bomb squad in Donegal. It was discovered after warnings were phoned in to local media. Lesser known, but recently more active, Óglaigh na hÉireann (ONH) took responsibility for the bomb, which was the third-largest in the history of the Troubles.

The bomb scares can be regarded as especially detrimental to the ongoing peace process as they come in the wake of two major Loyalist groups disarming and decommissioning in the summer months. The heightened security and police checkpoints leave no doubts about the precarious stability of the region.

### Al-Shabaab Attacks African Union in Somalia

Fighting has heated up in recent weeks in Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the two suicide bombings that occurred on September 17 outside of the African Union headquarters in Somalia that left 21 dead.

The subsequent clashes between Somali police and the militant group left at least 8 more dead, with no end in sight to the urban gunfights that have been breaking out across Mogadishu.

The suicide bombers were able to enter the compound because of UN decals on their trucks. They drove into a crowded market place before detonating. Dozens were injured, including Major General Juvenal Niyoyunguruza, the senior-most official killed so far. Al-Shabaab said that the bombings were retribution for the death of one of their leaders.

Somali officials have called for an increased military presence and better weaponry to combat Al-Shabaab, which is believed to be Al-Qaeda's franchise in Somalia. Colonel Abdullahi Hassan Barise of the Somali Police Force said of the suicide bombings, "It amounts to a declaration of war and we shall respond accordingly." The African Union currently has about 5,000 troops on the ground and Somali leaders have requested an additional 3,000.

### **Mumbai Faces Terrorism Threat**

The threat of terrorist attacks in India is so significant that the prime minister of the state of Victoria in Australia, John Brumby, recently cancelled his trip to Mumbai. Brumby ultimately rescheduled his visit and switched location to Delhi, which intelligence officials regard as safer.

Both Israeli and Australian intelligence services have warned against any travel to India, describing the risk of another terrorist attack as extremely high. An intelligence report released by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade concluded that "credible information indicates that terrorists may be planning further attacks in Mumbai, including at places frequented by tourists, in September or October 2009."

The warning was not limited to Mumbai. Delhi was also described as another location possibly threatened, although the risk was significantly lower there.

### **Update on German Al-Qaeda Cell**

In the May issue of the *Transnational Threats Newsletter*, we reported on Bekkay Harrach, a Moroccan-born German man believed to be the leader of a European Al-Qaeda cell. Throughout the month of September, he released three tapes, unsuccessfully attempting to sway voters in the German elections. He warned of an attack, saying "if the German people decide in favor of continuing the war, they will have handed down their own sentence." However, Angela Merkel, who has staunchly maintained German

involvement in Afghanistan, was reelected just days after the video was released.

A Turkish man living in Germany was arrested when the third video was traced back to his computer. Authorities say he was not involved in its production and are still determining how it came into his possession. Apparently, the man has been a regular visitor to extremist sites.

Because of these videos, security has been heightened during Oktoberfest, which is a suspected target of Harrach's threat. The airspace over Munich has been closed, roadblocks have been set up, and two men have been detained. These men have not been accused of any crime, but the German police claim to be questioning them about their relationship with Harrach.

This would not be the first time Oktoberfest has been the target of a terrorist attack. In 1980, a neo-Nazi bombed an Oktoberfest tent, killing 13 and injuring 200.

## **Regional Security Threats**

### **NDN's Vulnerabilities**

On September 4, the burgeoning Northern Distribution Network (NDN) suffered its first loss when two oil tankers were hijacked by the Taliban and subsequently bombed by U.S. aircraft, resulting in dozens of civilian casualties. This incident surfaced concerns about the NDN's security.

The two oil tankers had just entered Afghanistan from Tajikistan when they were seized by Taliban fighters. The hijacked trucks eventually became stuck in a riverbed. The Germans, who control the Kunduz region where the hijacking occurred, called in U.S. forces to destroy the trucks while they lay stranded. Unfortunately, civilians from a nearby village had converged on the tankers to siphon fuel, and the air strike resulted in 90 deaths.

The NDN was developed when the supply routes through Pakistan were shown to be vulnerable to attack. The NDN has proved successful, but the tanker hijackings highlight new vulnerabilities. Despite this development, defense planners are forging ahead with the NDN, citing the need for alternative routes to Afghanistan. Ultimately, the danger posed by insurgent groups in northern Afghanistan pales in comparison to the threat from militants along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

### **Violence on the Rise in Yemen**

Clashes have once again erupted in the northern region of Yemen. In early September, fighting between the Houthis insurgency and the government was suspended to allow

humanitarian aid to make its way to the war-torn region of Sa'dah. On September 17, however, the Yemeni air force fired on a refugee camp, killing 86 civilians. The government sought a cease-fire two days later but a massive attack by the Houthis effectively ended it.

The September 19 cease-fire was in honor of the holiday of Eid ul-Fitr, which marks the end of Ramadan. The Houthis stood down on September 19 but launched a massive assault on the presidential palace the following day. It was reported that 150 insurgents were killed and 70 were taken prisoner in the attack, while only 2 government soldiers lost their lives. Since then, skirmishes have been daily occurrences, with the insurgents suffering exponentially greater losses than the Yemeni forces.

The government has denied charges that the people killed in the September 17 air strike were refugees, saying that there was no camp in that area, only insurgent settlements. However, the UNHCR expressed serious concern when sources reported that the 86 people killed were mostly women and children. The Yemeni government has claimed that the women and children were being used as shields, but few sources have corroborated that claim. Due to the closed media in the region, the reports from both sides are fairly unreliable.

The Houthi are Zaydi Shi'a insurgents who took up arms to defend Husain al-Houthi in 2004. The group seeks independence from the predominantly Sunni regions to the south. Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh has refused any offers of negotiations and instead has reiterated his determination to defeat the group, even if it takes "five or six years."

### **Russia's Afghan Drug Problem**

The severity of Russia's drug problems is prompting Moscow to focus greater attention on Afghanistan.

President Dmitry Medvedev gave a major speech in early September highlighting the need to address the drug problem plaguing his country. Russia has an estimated 2.5 million addicts, with some 30,000 dying annually of drug-related causes, according to figures cited by Medvedev. He called the situation a threat to national security. He also noted that the Taliban is the source of these drugs and that NATO efforts in Afghanistan must be supported. Moscow even went so far as to propose that U.S. and NATO forces begin a new effort to eradicate poppy fields in Afghanistan, a Bush-era initiative that met criticism from all sides and did little to stop the flow of opiates.

When the Taliban was in government, it strictly controlled and restricted the production of poppy in Afghanistan.

Once the Taliban was overthrown, however, it found drug cultivation to be its best source of funding. Some 20 percent of Afghan opiates leave the country via Central Asia. While some of these drugs are consumed by local markets within Central Asia, the bulk are trafficked to Russia and Europe. All told, experts estimate that the opiate trade in Afghanistan is worth \$4 billion a year.

To help combat the drug problem within its borders, Russia is offering limited assistance to the ongoing war effort against the Taliban. So far, Moscow has allowed 34 trains of Afghanistan-bound supplies to move through its territory. Russia has also offered to let the United States fly military supplies over its air space.

### **Start of a South American Arms Race?**

Venezuela appears to be using a military agreement between Colombia and the United States as a pretext for bolstering its arsenal. The recent Russia-Venezuela agreement seems to be a response to the U.S.-Colombian deal and could signal a regional arms race. In the weeks following the Russia-Venezuela agreement, for instance, the Brazilian Air Force announced it would be upgrading its fleet to include 36 new planes.

The U.S.-Colombian agreement was designed to help combat guerillas from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC) and drug traffickers by expanding the U.S. military presence in the troubled country. Colombia agreed to grant the U.S. military limited use of its air space and access to seven bases.

Several South American countries, led by Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, have demanded further transparency on the agreement and requested confirmation that the deal would be used only to combat drug traffickers in Colombia. Venezuela even used inflammatory language with regards to the agreement during a summit in early August, claiming that "the winds of war were blowing." Colombia maintains that the use of the bases is strictly to combat drug trafficking.

On September 14, Venezuelan officials announced that they had opened a line of credit with the Russian government to purchase arms and military equipment. The \$2.2 billion deal will go toward tanks and anti-aircraft missiles. While Chavez has repeatedly stated that these purchases should not be construed as an act of aggression, Ian Kelly, the U.S. Department of State spokesperson, has expressed concerns.

Venezuelan relations with Colombia have been strained for some time. Caracas only recently reinstated an ambassador in Bogotá after most of the embassy staff had been recalled in July. In 2008, when Colombia sent troops

into Ecuador in pursuit of the FARC, Venezuela put troops on its border with Colombia in solidarity with Ecuador. Shortly thereafter, Venezuela began to restrict cross-border commerce with Columbia.

Since these agreements were concluded, U.S., Swedish, and French companies have courted Brazil for fighter-jet contracts. The final offer for 36 jets had been expected to be accepted on September 21, but the bidding war has been extended to October 2. President Lula da Silva has voiced the desire to become South America's preeminent military power.

## Organized Crime

### The Mafia and the Mediterranean

An informant and former member of the Ndrangheta, the Calabrian mafia, admitted to his involvement in sinking at least three ships containing hazardous, "probably radioactive" waste. He directed authorities to one ship, scuttled in 1992, which contained barrels labeled "Toxic." The ship also allegedly appeared to contain two human bodies, although those reports have yet to be confirmed.

The man also described his participation in the destruction of two additional ships. He claimed that approximately 30 other ships were scuttled in the mid-1990s. The source allegedly oversaw the destruction of a recently located vessel named the *Cunsky*. He said that it contained around 180 barrels of nuclear waste. The source claimed that the mafia was paid between \$2 million and \$20 million to sink the ships and that the drivers of getaway boats were paid \$100,000.

Environmental authorities are taking the lead in the disposal of the waste, which could have catastrophic effects on the Mediterranean if not handled properly. Authorities also cite concerns about the significance of this development for other regions of the world, especially the Americas and Caribbean, where many organized crime groups take their cues from Italy.

Italian organized crime groups have long found creative ways to make money. The mafia has been involved in waste disposal since the EU environmental reforms of the 1980s. The Camorra in Campania has famously controlled waste disposal since the mid-1990s, and it has contracts to remove garbage for several major companies. In the case of the Ndrangheta, the source told officials that pharmaceutical and chemical companies were paying for the disposal of their hazardous waste by any means necessary.

### Police-Gang Connection in Guatemala

UN and Guatemalan officials have announced that they have apprehended a gang of hit men who they believe were behind the murder of a prominent Guatemalan lawyer. What makes this case especially unusual is that the lawyer, Rodrigo Rosenberg, made a recording days before his death. The video opens with the line, "If you are watching or reading this message, unfortunately it's because I've been killed by President Alvaro Colom."

On May 10, Rodrigo Rosenberg was gunned down as he rode his bike through an affluent neighborhood in Guatemala City. No one witnessed the crime but, within days of his murder, the video, which he had asked his family to post on YouTube in the event of his death, gained notice. A special commission set up by the United Nations to oversee corruption claims in Guatemala took an active part in the investigation into Rosenberg's death. The commission, known as the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, announced its findings four months later, concurrently with the arrests of seven suspects.

Of the seven men arrested, five were police officers or military specialists, indicating that there is some cooperation between certain Guatemalan organized crime factions and the country's security forces. A UN official involved in the investigation said that the seven men were functioning as a gang and were involved in several illicit activities such as money laundering and drug trafficking.

Despite the lack of eyewitnesses to the assassination, the hit men left behind significant evidence. Security camera footage shows the car of the gang's leader, William Gilberto Santos Divas, driving away from the scene. A substantial volume of phone activity also connects the suspects with one another.

In the video, Mr. Rosenberg accused the president, the first lady, and the president's private secretary of targeting him. He believed he was in danger because he had spoken out about the assassination of two of his clients, Khalil Musa and his daughter Marjorie Musa. They had objected to a corruption scheme in a Guatemalan bank and were assassinated in March. Mr. Rosenberg apparently had a media appearance scheduled the day of his murder to speak out against corruption and these killings.

### Hong Kong Breaks Up Organized Crime Ring

A Triad crime ring in Hong Kong was successfully disabled just weeks after its leader was murdered. The Hong Kong Police Force took advantage of the power vacuum created by the leader's death, conducting more

than 40 raids in one weekend. The operation resulted in the arrest of 1,000 people in connection with the illicit trade of drugs, weapons, counterfeit goods, and stolen items. The recovered items were reportedly valued at almost \$18 million HKD.

The Hong Kong Police Force's Organized Crime and Triad Bureau successfully infiltrated the Sun Yee On Triad one year ago through a single agent who slowly worked his way up the ranks of the Triad. Then Lee Tai-Lung, the leader of Sun Yee On, was jumped and executed in early August. With the help of the undercover agent, the Hong Kong police took advantage of this opportunity and went on the offensive. The organization is believed to be crippled if not completely destroyed in Hong Kong.

Triads have been active in China for centuries. They behave similarly to the Italian mafia, albeit with significantly higher membership, occasionally in the thousands. They corner various illicit markets and are generally extremely violent. As the economy and technology have evolved, so too have the Triads. In recent decades they have expanded their operations to include counterfeiting, computer hacking, and the pornography market. Sun Yee On is one of largest Triads, believed to have perhaps had tens of thousands of members.

## FARC Arms Proliferation

Recent reports indicate that the FARC has been looking to obtain surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) and that international arms dealers have been looking to sell. According to U.S. intelligence agencies, international arms dealers have attempted to provide surface-to-air missiles to undercover agents for the third time in two years.

Concerns about the FARC's growing capabilities were raised in July, when anti-tank missiles traced back to Venezuela were recovered at a camp operated by the group. Venezuela subsequently denied it had willingly provided the FARC with any weaponry, instead claiming that the missiles were stolen.

Insurgent groups and drug cartels operating in the region have been largely defenseless against aircraft, making such platforms especially effective against these organizations. The introduction of SAMs would inevitably reduce the efficacy of aircraft, forcing a shift in tactics.

## Human Trafficking

### The "Jungle" Dismantled in Calais

A migrant compound known as the "Jungle" was raided in Calais, France, on September 20. Hundreds of illegal immigrants were detained during the raid, which police

said targeted human traffickers. The compound has been described as a scene of "human misery" and at one point housed as many as 700 people in extremely close quarters.

The majority of the 278 migrants detained were from Afghanistan. Many of these migrants have been released from government custody while France processes political asylum applications or proceeds with extraditions. Of those detained, 132 were minors who have since been placed in protective care.

The camp has been under close watch for some time now. Hundreds of illegal migrants fled in April amid reports that the government was planning to close down the camp. Most of the individuals who fled in April reportedly traveled to Britain, although some settled elsewhere in Western Europe. The remaining migrants captured at the Jungle in September were children or people without enough money to buy their way out of France, according to a *Le Monde* report.

France has had a serious problem with immigrant camps such as the Jungle in the past. These communities are havens for criminal activity, and the living conditions pose public health risks. Nearly all the inhabitants of such camps plan to pay traffickers a few thousands euros to gain passage to the UK. The UK reportedly captured some 28,000 illegal immigrants on its borders last year, most of whom had transited through France. Independent groups count 17 operating migrant camps in France alone. The raid on the Jungle took place during Human Trafficking Awareness Week.

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