ON CALL INTERNATIONAL

GLOBAL RISK UPDATE Q3 2018

A message from Ryan DeStefano, Vice President of Security at On Call International

Over the past quarter, we have seen an increase in requests for risk assessments for travel to high-risk markets. We also continue to observe rapid speed of onset security challenges in some politically-tense markets such as the evacuation services required during the Haiti fuel-price increase protests. An increased risk tolerance coupled with an abrupt change in political dynamics both underscore the importance of continued horizon scanning and real-time intelligence to stay educated on evolving risk dynamics.

Equally important, having just returned from speaking to local security experts and hearing from exchange students in Israel, is the ability to guide decision makers in their understanding of the perception of risk, which can possibly be exaggerated, versus the on-the-ground reality, which may enable programming to exist. Our hope with our risk publications is to help you get out in front of risks by providing you with targeted information so you can make more informed decisions on your organization's risk tolerance, and pivot if necessary.

This Global Risk Update looks at the third quarter of 2018 and seeks to help you understand the implications of stories you may have read about in the news, as well as build off of themes we explored in our 2017 Global Risks Review along with the Q1 and Q2 Updates. Our Global Security Specialists and in-house medical experts are taking you beyond the headlines and into what the fall and winter months of 2018 are signaling for global political, security, economic, and health risk.

In addition to the trending stories within each region, we added a special focus on mental health abroad, as it continues to receive increasing attention from organizations across the board. We also dedicated a piece about journalist-specific risks and explored how risk managers can utilize proactive risk management practices. From France to South Africa, from Jerusalem to Uganda, our team is constantly on the move, working to expand our reach and further build our capabilities in service of our main goal: helping you effectively balance risk management and embracing the opportunities the world has to offer.

As ever, we are proud to be a trusted partner in your risk management strategy.

Best Regards,
Ryan DeStefano

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THIS QUARTER IN RISK

ON CALL INTERNATIONAL

An Uneasy Peace in Syria's Idlib Province

In September 2018, Turkish and Russian diplomats announced they had reached a temporary solution to what was promising to be a climactic battle for the future of Syria. For weeks leading up to the announcement, Syrian, Russian, and Iranian forces and their proxies had been preparing for an all-out offensive on the last major rebel-held pocket of Syria: Idlib Province.

Situated along Syria's northern border with Turkey, Idlib is a region of both mountains and plains that are home to rebel forces numbering in the tens of thousands. A myriad collection of groups operate in the area, from Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), to hardline Islamist militants affiliated with Al-Qaeda, to moderates of the National Liberation Front (NLF) which are comprised of former members of the Free Syrian Army who are now backed by Turkey. More than three million noncombatants, most of them refugees from other parts of Syria, have sought refuge here.

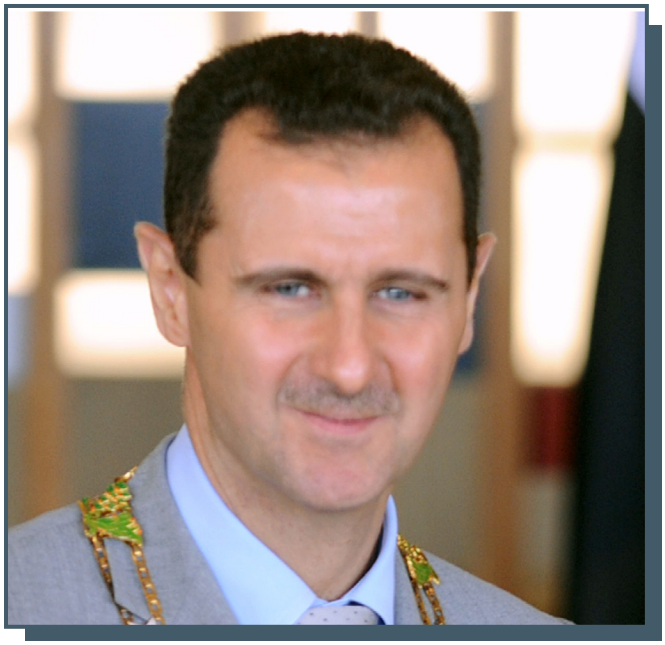
But to Bashar al-Assad, Idlib is a thorn in his side and one of the last serious obstacles to his efforts to consolidate regime control over Syria.

Regime forces and their allies have made significant gains in the past year, all but ensuring Assad will remain in power for the foreseeable future. In November 2017, Syrian government forces regained full control of the eastern city of Deir-ez-Zor from the Islamic State. In April 2018, the rebel-held enclave of Eastern Ghouta (near Damascus) fell to the government following an offensive that saw widely-publicized chemical weapons attacks by Assad's forces.

Finally, in a lightning offensive this past June and July, the regime secured both a symbolic and strategic victory in Daraa, the city where the movement to topple Assad began in 2012.

The regime and its allies employ a familiar set of tactics in their assaults on rebel-held areas. Once encircled, rebel enclaves are pummeled from the air by Russian and Syrian aircrafts, targeted by Russian naval units firing from the Mediterranean, and subjected to intense Syrian, Russian, and Iranian artillery and rocket fire. Syrian units employ particularly brutal and indiscriminate weapons, including chlorine gas and so-called barrel bombs. The latter are barrels filled with highly explosive material, shrapnel, and sometimes chemical weapons that are dropped from helicopters. Regime forces often deploy barrel bombs in sets of twos, dropping the first and then waiting for rescue personnel and civilians to respond before dropping the second on the same target.

Assad's forces favor siege tactics like this one, intending to cripple rebel-held areas by killing off medical personnel, targeting infrastructure and civilians, and making whole areas uninhabitable by rebels and civilians alike. The regime and its allies follow up these bombardments with ground assaults, deploying armored vehicles and infantry to engage the rebel forces that remain. Many of the ground forces deployed in these offensives are Iranian-trained Iraqi and Afghan militia, with elite Syrian units and Hezbollah fighters acting as shock troops. The regime tends to apply intense pressure using these assets before offering rebel forces a deal: withdrawal from the battle zone and safe passage to other rebel-held areas of Syria. Until recently, the primary destination for these fighters has been Idlib.



President Bashar al Assad (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

Idlib Province
(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

Estimates for the number of rebel fighters in Idlib vary, but these forces number in the tens of thousands. Among them are a sizeable number of battle-hardened veterans from other campaigns, foreign fighters who flocked to Syria and face arrest or death at home, and hardline jihadists who have vowed to fight to the death. HTS alone is estimated to have close to 10,000 fighters under its command.

These forces have had years to fortify their positions, stockpile weapons, and gain invaluable battlefield experience.

While the front lines are largely situated along plains and open farmland, Idlib is home to large stretches of more-easily defensible mountainous terrain, and the city of Idlib presents defenders with an opportunity to bog attackers down in an urban street-to-street fight.

Those rebels who don't fight to the death, as HTS proclaims its men will do if Idlib is attacked, will likely withdraw into Turkish-held areas of northern Syria or into Turkey itself, or they will seek to lay-low in Idlib to resume the fight another day. This is already a strategy embraced by Islamic State militants in much of Syria and Iraq. While a fraction of the militants remain behind to delay the attackers, the rest escape to other regions, hide out in rural areas, or attempt to blend within the local population only to return later to launch guerilla strikes against the occupying forces. Even in this scenario, Assad's forces and their allies would likely pay a high, immediate price in lives lost, not to mention the casualties that would inevitably result from the ensuing insurgency.

It is also possible that Assad is merely using the deal with Turkey to buy time for his forces to prepare for a future assault. He has used this tactic time and time again across Syria. Several factors might be limiting the regime's ability to launch a large-scale offensive in the near-term. First, seven and a half years of civil war have worn down Assad's military forces.

Causalities, desertions, a lack of a steady supply of new recruits, and battle fatigue have taken their toll on the backbone of the regime's professional fighting force.

This has forced Assad to increasingly rely on his three primary allies, Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia, for muscle and manpower on the battlefield. But now that Assad's position in Syria is more secure, and taking into account these allies' own losses and political pressure in their home countries to wind down their involvement, Assad could be finding it hard to gather the military backing he needs to conduct an assault on a rebel force that could number as high as 70,000 fighters.

Turkey stands to gain the most by halting any large-scale offensive on Idlib. Any major push by the regime would drive large numbers of Syrian civilians across the border, possibly as many as 800,000 according to estimates by the United Nations (UN). Some 3.5 million Syrians already live in Turkey, and Turkish citizens are determined not to absorb another influx of refugees. This is a primary driver for the city of Ankara's decision to establish "safe-zones" in Syrian provinces neighboring Idlib to the north and east. In areas around the cities of Afrin, Al Bab, and Jarabulus, Ankara has trained, equipped, and supported proxy forces and deployed its own military units in order to create space for displaced Syrians in territory formerly held by the Islamic State and Kurdish militias. Idlib, with its 3 to 4 million civilians and large numbers of armed rebels, is similarly being treated as a critical asset to Ankara. To demonstrate the seriousness with which Ankara is determined to maintain Idlib as a buffer zone, Turkey has fortified at least a dozen "observation points" in the province and reinforced its garrison with heavy weapons and armored vehicles.

Wary of compounding the already stiff resistance their forces would face in an offensive on Idlib by clashing with Turkish forces, not to mention the diplomatic fallout with Ankara that would certainly follow, the Syrian regime's Russian and Iranian partners are more hesitant to commit to a full-scale assault.

Their primary interest in the country is to ensure that Assad remains in power, and although the rebel threat in Idlib is substantial, it no longer poses an existential threat to Damascus. A deal that forces Turkey to reign in the various factions occupying Idlib, and allows Russian and Iranian units to play a role in ensuring compliance, suits them sufficiently, at least for the time being.

For now, the deal is a short-term solution. Assad's government has asserted that all opposition fighters must disarm by December, and Assad himself has emphasized the temporary nature of the deal. Whether or not the deal even survives in the short term is in question, as one of the principle requirements Russia has imposed on Turkey is the withdrawal of radical fighters from the nine-mile-wide buffer zone between the rebels and regime forces in Idlib. Any failure by the hardline jihadists of HTS or other radical factions to fully comply with the terms of the agreement could serve as the pretext Damascus needs to complete its agenda of regaining control over the entirety of pre-war Syrian territory.

At the moment, it appears Ankara has reined in the many rebel groups within the buffer area and is successfully implementing its end of the bargain. As of October 10, 2018, the Turkish government has declared that rebels have withdrawn heavy weapons from the frontline. While this was a crucial first step in the implementation of the agreement, much remains to be seen as to how the truce will hold up. In the coming weeks and months, indications of a breakdown in the agreement between Putin and Erdogan would include a resumption of airstrikes and artillery barrages within rebel territory, repeated and wide-scale clashes within or around the buffer zone that will be jointly patrolled by Turkish and Russian forces, escalating tensions between hardline groups like HTS and Turkish-backed forces, and large movements of refugees towards the Turkish border. All sides have their work cut out for them, but perhaps none more so than Ankara.

Recent actions by Syria's allies, and even its enemies, demonstrate the reality that Assad's regime has secured its footing and will remain in power. In July, China pledged nearly US$20 billion in loans for infrastructure development in Arab countries across the region, with an additional US$100 million in foreign humanitarian aid for Syria and Yemen. China's ambassador has repeatedly signaled his country's intent to play a lead role in the country's redevelopment, a move that furthers China's Belt and Road Initiative. Russia has similarly moved to position itself as a key stakeholder in the reconstruction efforts, with a focus on Syria's oil production. To the south, Jordan has officially reopened its Jaber border crossing. The crossing had been closed since 2015 and facilitates a multibillion dollar trade between Gulf countries, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, and Lebanon. As outsiders begin pursuing redevelopment opportunities, the Syrian government will become further entrenched and more determined to remove any thorns in its side.

Ambush in Central Africa

In July 2018, on a dirt road in rural Central African Republic (CAR), three Russian journalists were shot and killed. Kirill Radchenko, Alexander Rastorguyev, and Orkhan Dzhemal were traveling around CAR investigating the presence of Russian private military contractors. Their killings have shown a spotlight on Moscow's involvement in one of the most war-ravaged countries on Earth. Russian mercenaries, arms dealers, and industrialists have found steady business in a number of global hot spots in recent years, from Eastern Ukraine to Syria and now Central Africa. But why the CAR, a landlocked country crippled by civil war since 2012? What makes this deal lucrative for Russian interests?

Russia is faced with serious long-term challenges, from an economy in decline to a shrinking, aging population. Its influence over international affairs has lessened since the fall of the Soviet Union. Vladimir Putin has sought to change this narrative, in part by strengthening Russia's hand in strategically-important regions like the Middle East and Europe's periphery. Using a variety of tools, from military intervention to Kremlin-linked businesses in infrastructure projects, Putin hopes to create avenues for Russian political influence and economic opportunities abroad.

More common than not is the use of a uniquely Russian hybrid strategy, one that incorporates overt and covert use of Russian military, intelligence, and diplomatic assets to achieve security outcomes that facilitate subsequent Russian economic opportunities. In the case of the CAR, the desired outcome appears to be stability, specifically a close relationship with the EU-backed central government in Bangui, and a baseline level of security so Russian companies can begin exploring CAR's wealth of mineral deposits. To achieve this, Russia successfully lobbied to work around a UN arms embargo on the CAR, arguing that delivering small arms and accompanying military (and, crucially, paramilitary) advisors would help secure the EU-backed central government in Bangui against the rebel factions that have carved up vast tracts of territory outside the capital. In return, Russian companies have been granted concessions to explore the CAR's vast deposits of minerals and rare metals, including diamonds, gold, and uranium.

This type of arrangement is not new, nor is it exclusively employed by the Russian government, but it is an increasingly important practice by foreign powers across Africa and much of the rest of the developing world.

China embraces a similar strategy: access to natural resources in return for investment in infrastructure and arms deals. A Chinese bid to sell weapons to the CAR government was halted by the UN in June, but Russia has a unique history in recent times of employing a particularly militaristic approach and a high tolerance for risk, effectively trading weapons and advisors for access to natural resources like diamonds and oil in areas beset by major conflict.

Moscow's approach in recent years has been characterized by its use of private contractors, most notably from the so-called Wagner Group, who effectively operate as agents of the Kremlin. The notion that this group is even separate from the Russian State is questionable, but it is known that the security services they offer facilitate access for Russian state-owned or state-affiliated companies in conflict areas. In Syria, Russian military intervention followed an agreement between Bashar al-Assad and Vladimir Putin to grant Russia sole rights to Syria's oil production, and the Wagner Group's presence has been widely reported for years. Gazprom, Russia's largest energy giant, and Transneft, the state-owned pipeline company, were even granted permission to field private armies in 2007 with support and equipment provided by the Kremlin. This aggressive approach allows Moscow to insert its forces, and generate profits, in places where other powers are hesitant to enter.

War-torn countries across Central Africa present ample opportunity for Russian financial gain. Chad, Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Cameroon all face threats from insurgencies and need cheap, reliable weapons to equip their militaries. Russia's recent sale of weapons to the CAR government helps to bolster Moscow's clout in the region and strengthen the defense industry. Official mining concessions between Bangui and Moscow have yet to be confirmed but are likely based on the Syrian model. In March 2018, the Russian Foreign Ministry announced they were working with the CAR government to explore "mutually beneficial development of Central African natural resources."

Rare minerals
(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

The three journalists lost their lives reporting on one front of a broad Russian influence campaign that spans across Africa. In countries like Libya, Sudan, and the CAR, the Russians are employing private military contractors. In other places, like Algeria and Egypt, Russian engagement is centered on military sales and defense ties. Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, completed a tour of five former Soviet allies in Southern Africa in March 2018, promoting not just arms sales and defense cooperation, but also joint Russian and African development opportunities, particularly in extractives. This broad push would serve several purposes for Moscow other than revenue. First, the closure of many Russian embassies following the collapse of the Soviet Union diminished Russia's hand across Africa, and in many ways it has lagged behind other powers like China, the EU, and the U.S. in cultivating ties with countries across the fast-growing continent. Russia must now play catch-up. Secondly, Putin has demonstrated a firm commitment to destabilizing NATO. Forging alliances and developing strategic assets on NATO's southern flank would serve this purpose.

While three journalists digging up the nitty-gritty details of Russian private military contractors' involvement in shadowy, pseudo-state-sponsored dealings in the CAR would present a threat to Russian interests, there is not yet sufficient evidence to credibly accuse any party of these murders.

The Russian government was quick to place blame for the deaths on bandits who reportedly made off with cash and camera gear. The journalists were killed on a road near the town of Sibut, some 175 miles north of the capital, Bangui. Sibut is reportedly home to Russian advisers, and the driver who survived the attack has been suspiciously unavailable for comment on the incident beyond some vague initial statements attributed to him. Another Russian journalist who investigated the Wagner Group's activities in Syria fell from his fifth-story apartment in April, several weeks after publishing his findings. The journalists' colleagues have vowed to uncover the truth behind the killings, but until further information is revealed, all one can do is speculate. But this event, considered in the context of high-profile poisonings of Russian dissidents abroad and Russian interference in foreign elections, among other acts, fits into a pattern of brazenness and a low threshold for violence by the Russian state.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Geopolitical transitions and developments, economic rise and fall conditions, and affiliated changes to business and travel environments remain on the forefront of issues that should lead organizations and individuals alike to reflect on their respective horizon scanning and operational/travel presence within the Asia-Pacific region. Aside from elections, including a refreshing Maldives surprise, and economic ebbs and flows, there remain ongoing issues with varying states trying to keep account against China's growing regional influence (or interference campaigns, depending on perspective).

Natural disasters, particularly the recent floods in Kerala, India, and the various temblors in Indonesia, continue to serve as reminders of the need for fortified infrastructure development in some areas and for companies to account for appropriate mitigation and response measures. In this quarter, however, coinciding with World Tourism Day in September, we shall look at some of the pertinent detrimental and instrumental issues pertaining to the tourism industry within the region.

Potential and Pitfalls of the Tourism Industry in APAC

For the cultural and bio-diversity that exists across the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region, tourists and business travelers alike have always had a plethora of choices on destinations to visit. From the honeymoon paradise atolls of the Maldives, to the heights of Mount Everest, the famed Angkor Wat temples of Cambodia to Hollywood film-inspired beaches in Thailand, and the Great Wall of China to the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, there seems to be a place that would satisfy just about anyone's travel appetite.

In the latest UN World Tourism Organization Report, the APAC region continues to see a steady increase in the number of foreign visitors each year (323 million tourist arrivals in 2017, an increase of 5.6% over the previous year).

Over recent years, a new group of inter-regional and domestic tourists, Chinese and Indian tourists to name a few, has also increased significantly.

Chinese tourists, for example, currently account for the highest spenders in terms of foreign travel, approximately $258 billion USD annually.

Taking into consideration the rising economies and educational status of the populace in these types of states, there is a rising number of people with the ability and means to travel extensively, not only in their own countries and regions, but across the globe as well.

Tourism across the region is a significant benefit for many local communities engaged within the industry. The jobs generated through tourism, investment brought in by foreigners and the government, and the ability for locals to feel engaged as part of a global travel community are benefits that cannot be overlooked. In northeast India, for example, a local community in Meghalaya, famous for its scared forests, wanted to sustain their own area and cater to the increasing number of foreigners regularly visiting. As such, they created the Mawphlang Sustainable Tourism Society, which has generated income by providing services to tourists. This income not only helps to employ their own community members, but also to educate their youth in matters relating to sustainable and conservation tourism. This has also resulted in a significant sense of pride, ownership, and achievement for the local community as they garner further attention and accolades within the tourism industry. The fact that eco-tourism initiatives are being considered, even at this level in the region, is a very welcoming perspective.

However, in the midst of all this growth, there also needs to be a discussion regarding the negative repercussions that can arise from this extremely beneficial industry. There are your tales of overcrowded sites and beaches, now known as 'overtourism,' to infrastructural developmental gaps, particularly when compared with Western standards, and even alleged methods by which governments are attempting to utilize tourism as a geo-political tool. It is also important to explore some of the downsides associated with tourism and talk about the types of mitigation measures being implemented locally, to ensure there is no hindrance to tourism growth in the region.

Indeed, it is a great thing that more people are traveling, learning, exploring, and exchanging ideas through the medium of tourism, but sustainability and corresponding positive growth are key.

Even developed nations in the region with adequate infrastructure, very good safety records, and a sound tourism industry, the impact on locales thronged by increasing numbers of tourists is taking its toll. In Japan, for example, the tourism industry is starting to become a victim of its own success. The Japanese government, following the 2011 Earthquake disaster in Fukushima, went on marketing drives to attract more foreign visitors to the country; in 2017 a record 28.7 million tourists visited the country. The numbers are only expected to increase ahead of the Rugby World Cup in 2019 and the upcoming Olympics in Tokyo, with the government aiming to attract a record 40 million visitors by the 2020 event.

For locals who live and work around famous tourist sites, particularly in Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka, the increased number of visitors has resulted in extreme disappointment and anger. Loud, brash, and disrespectful are a few characteristics that can define a significant majority of tourists who rush to visit must-see sites in the country, which often clashes with local sentiments, culture, and mannerisms. Locals in these Japanese communities have no other option but to issue complaints of "tourism pollution" to the authorities.

Incidents of unwelcome tourist behavior in the region have been increasingly reported. A recent luxury cruise in Australia, for example, was significantly disrupted due to more than 1,000 Indian tourists on a company excursion, who reportedly took over shows and cruise activities and engaged in behavior deemed dangerous and barging on unlawful. In Bali, Indonesia, the authorities are coming up with new rules and guidelines for tourists, particularly those visiting sites considered religious, such as temples, following visitor behavior perceived to be abhorrent around these sacred locations. These guidelines include warning tourists not to stand on top of shrines when posing for photos, to be respectfully covered (including both men and women) when visiting temples, and to only allow visitors inside these sites with an accredited local guide.

In other developed countries outside the region, notably European cities, an increase in tourist numbers has even resulted in locals becoming hostile to both tourists and local businesses catering to tourists. This includes local activists taking actions such as sabotaging tour buses and threatening visitors to stay away with crude graffiti messages near hostels and hotels. This can be understandable when taking into account the current top ten countries for over-tourism, are mostly in Europe, including Iceland, Hungary, Denmark, and France. Although locals taking retaliatory actions against tourists has not been the widespread case with tourism destinations in Asia, it could become a factor if current visitor numbers and mannerisms are left unchecked.

The authorities are trying varying measures to address such problems. For example, in Japan they are trying to change their marketing material to promote less-visited areas of the country. Another method has been to target shared-economy accommodation offerings, such as Airbnb, implementing policies that limit their operating capacity and presence in the metro areas, but allowing them to have more listings in less-frequently visited areas.

The further propagation via social media and the increased access the shared economy has allowed has resulted in a whole new surge of travelers across the region.

With rising tourist numbers come increased spending and income generation, but also increased consumption and waste.

While countries like Japan have the economic ability and the infrastructural backing to support mass movements of tourists and deal with waste generated therein, other countries in the region have not been so immune. This lack of proper facilities and infrastructure to account for increased visitors and waste has resulted in disastrous consequences – from areas being closed to visitors, to potential, permanent loss of heritage sites due to overbearing visitor numbers.

Boracay Island in the Philippines and the Phi Phi islands in Thailand are the most recent examples of the impact of high visitor influx. The governments of the Philippines and Thailand were forced to close down access for tourists to these areas this past summer due to severe degradation. In Boracay, ranked the best island to visit in the world back in 2012, there were reports of plastic waste, cigarette butts, and open sewage flowing onto the once white sand beaches. There was rampant illegal development by local authorities and businesses in a bid to try to cater to the increasing number of tourists flocking to the island.

With the halt of tourist arrivals, the taskforce set up by the authorities has been attempting to institute policies and measures in an effort to restore and rejuvenate the once-pristine characteristics of the island. This includes steps such as putting a limit on the number of tourists that can visit at one time, working with local workers to be able to live off the island, investing in waste water treatment facilities and sewage plants, and banning the use of plastics once the island is reopened to the public.

The same has also been occurring at Maya Bay Beach in the Koh Phi Phi islands in Thailand, which came into prominence following the Hollywood film, 'The Beach.' Thai officials have indefinitely shuttered access to the beach this year to allow the area to recuperate from the mass numbers of people who were regularly visiting. Until the recent closure, there was an average of 3,700 people visiting the beach each day. These tourists were, more often than not, 'day trippers' only, who were traveling back and forth between Phuket and Maya Bay via speedboats or ferries. The impact this had on the local maritime environment, including coral reefs surrounding the sites, has been incredibly destructive. The same scenes of mass garbage generation, rampant pollution, mismanaged development, and environmental degradation is being seen at various other once-secluded beaches and idle visit spots, from Myanmar's Ngapali Beach to Vietnam's Mui Ne and Duong Dong Beaches.

Apart from restricting access or numbers of visitors, the local authorities are also instituting rectification steps such as better funding for national park/tourism ministry staff, installation of buoys near reefs to prevent speedboats and ferries from unintentionally running over coral reefs, and most importantly, setting up local tourism education centers. These education centers, focused on sustainable tourism, bring together locals and tourists alike to understand the importance of the environment to the local economy.

Fishing trawler washed up near a hotel following a tsunami disaster in Indonesia. The resiliency of tourist destinations and their ability to recover following major disasters still needs to be addressed in many areas of the region. (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

For locals, the tourism education center allows them to be engaged with, learn from, and contribute valuable perspectives on local business efforts that can help sustain a vibrant tourism economy. For visitors, the education centers offer a chance to learn about the conservation efforts being made by the local populace to maintain the environment and how visitors can play a significant role by being mindful of the footprint they leave behind when visiting the islands. With various opportunities for countries like Thailand in the tourism industry (for example, tourism constitutes close to 20% of Thailand's economy, including a thriving medical tourism scene), it has become imperative for authorities to address these issues.

The increase or decrease of visitors to areas, or the outright restriction of tourists to favored destinations, can have a detrimental impact on the lives and economy of the locals in areas that have come to depend on the industry as their main income. The loss of jobs due to governments forced to shut down popular sites is one cause for concern. Another concern within the tourism industry across the region is the after-effects of natural disasters and how these can negatively impact those dependent on the tourism industry.

As many infrastructural gaps are still present in most Asian countries, directly or tangentially associated with the tourism industry as well, there are significant concerns on the resiliency of tourist sites in or-

der to be able to bounce back or continue catering to tourists following a disaster. After the 6.9 magnitude earthquake that struck the island of Lombok (West Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia) this past August, and several aftershocks that followed, local authorities continue to face challenges to recuperate. There are issues associated with tourism number losses, first and foremost, but also the corresponding need to address the tasks of how to quickly and efficiently resume business. The temblor was significantly felt in Bali Island, but the majority of losses, damage, and fatalities occurred in Lombok Island. At least 560 deaths were recorded, with thousands injured and displaced. The earthquake was the largest and strongest ever recorded in Lombok Island.

We can also factor in the latest earthquake and tsunami to strike another popular tourist island in Indonesia, Sulawesi most recently. The hardest hit areas were in Palu and Donggala, resulting in over 1,800 deaths, thousands more missing, injured, and displaced. The areas' infrastructure, including telecommunications, roads, and buildings, have all been significantly damaged and disrupted. With tourists and locals alike impacted, there were reports of resentment and tensions between locals and visitors, where the latter were allegedly prioritized for evacuation flights prepared by the authorities. Similarly, the destruction and chaos resulted in a fragile security environment with reports of the authorities issuing orders to police and army personnel to shoot at any looters who attempted to raid stores and malls that had been destroyed.

All of these elements do not bode well in the near term to the local communities that rely on tourism. Even as Southeast Asia's largest economy, Indonesia's tourism infrastructure, particularly in areas overpopulated by tourists such as Bali and Lombok, have faced difficulties recuperating following such disasters.

Lombok authorities have already projected a loss of up to 100,000 tourists for the year, owing to the natural disaster event.

During normal times, as most of the local population is engaged in the tourism industry, any major disruption to the number of tourists visiting has the unfortunate trickle-down impact on locals and their ability to sustain their livelihoods.

Popular tourist destinations in the region, such as the examples of Lombok and Sulawesi, also face difficulties with implementing or keeping up to date on risk mitigation measures meant to serve during times of disasters. For example, none of the contingency measures implemented by the local government in Indonesia, such as the 'early warning systems' (EWS),

including buoys and tsunami sensors, were even functional when the latest tsunami struck in Sulawesi. Authorities have attempted to lay blame on other factors, including lack of resources to continually maintain systems, change in local area governance, and unwillingness from locals to maintain systems. With such local conditions, it can be seen how an additional brunt can be felt by the tourism industry, by ways of lack of infrastructural development or response capabilities, following such incidents.

The high inflow of visitors to a country can also result in the establishment of economies and businesses that are detrimental to the local environment and people over the long-term.

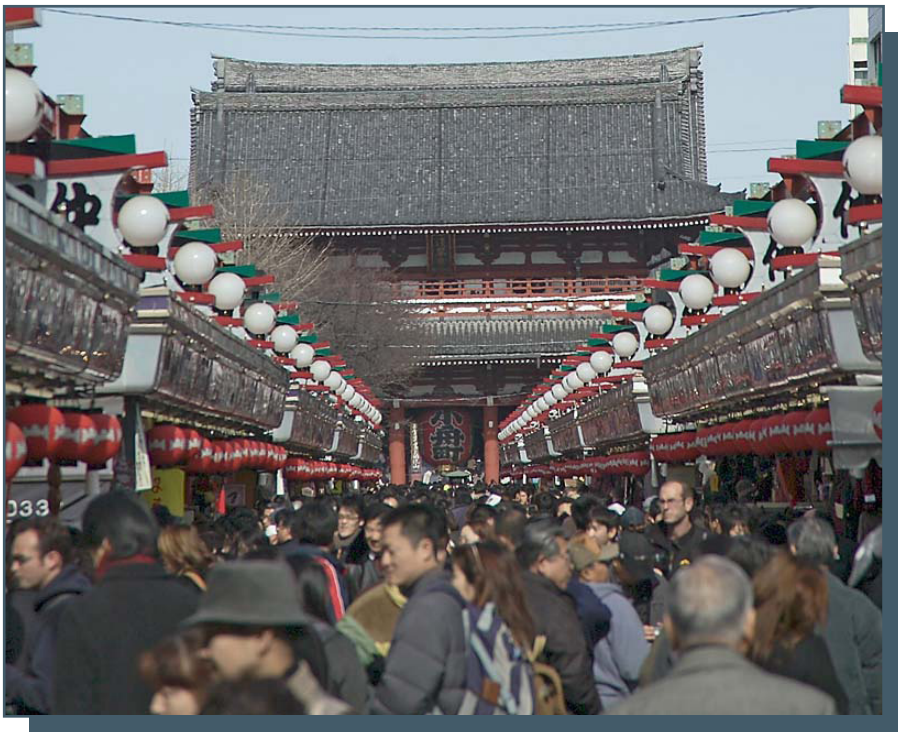
In Nepal, there has been a drive by the government to increase the number of foreign visitors by 2020 to two-million. However, the mismanaged campaign to increase visitors, without comprehensive policies and processes in place, has also resulted in numerous tour operators taking advantage of the sector and engaging in scams, which have recently caught global attention. The latest fraud, related to insurance scams and medical evacuations, has been perpetuated by trekking companies, helicopter/air ambulance outfits, hospitals, hotels, and even tourists themselves. It has now been under investigation since June by the Nepali authorities. The scam has allegedly been ongoing for the past five years within the climbing and mountaineering tourism industry and has cost insurance companies millions of U.S. dollars in losses.

The Nepali authorities have been forced to issue updated guidelines and policies, but in terms of implementation, one wonders if under such an environment, this is all mere lip service and a scramble by the government to appease insurance companies that something is being done. Additionally, this is just one scam that can be attributed to the tourism industry in Nepal, not considering other darker and more insidious operations that occur. These include human trafficking for forced labor, the sex industry, and skin and organ trafficking for medical tourism purposes. Furthermore, it must be reminded that these types of detrimental businesses tied to the tourism industry continue to be present and are even flourishing in other countries across the region.

Moving away from natural disasters and detrimental tourist businesses, by sheer number and contribution to local economies, we can also begin to look on how nation-states have been accused of utilizing tourism as a geo-political tool.

China immediately comes to mind in this regard based on the sheer volume and size of its domestic and foreign traveler numbers. While the country has done significantly well to develop its tourism industry domestically, there have been questions raised regarding their outbound travelers.

With rising numbers of Chinese tourists abroad, there have also been increasing incidents involving Chinese tourists, some of which have resulted in diplomatic spats between the local host government and the Chinese authorities. In Sweden recently, the debatable treatment of a Chinese tourist family at a hostel in the capital Stockholm led to several heated exchanges between Swedish authorities, the local media, and the Chinese Embassy. However, with in-



Overcrowded Asakusa neighborhood in Tokyo, Japan
(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

creasing numbers of travelers and increasing amounts being spent annually by Chinese tourists, the country also has the capability by which to dictate terms in lieu of threats to halt such economic boon to local governments by restricting/advising Chinese travelers against visiting the country. In Thailand (factoring in that the Chinese account for the highest number of tourists now visiting the country), the local authorities were quick to handle a recent issue allegedly involving a Chinese tourist who was manhandled by an airport security guard. The Thai authorities were reportedly under pressure to showcase to Chinese authorities that enough was being done to protect their citizens visiting Thailand following a ferry sinking disaster in Phuket in June 2018, which resulted in several Chinese citizens losing their lives.

As of late, the Chinese authorities have also been accused of leveraging tourism and Chinese tourists to threaten or actually impact countries that are not in alignment with China's geopolitical ambitions in the region and beyond. When South Korea received and installed a defense system (THAAD) from the U.S., aimed at thwarting potential ballistic missile attacks, including from China, the Chinese announced plans to prohibit citizens from traveling on group tours to South Korea, thereby significantly denting Seoul's tourism industry in 2017. In the Maldives, in which the Chinese also now account for the highest number of visitors, there have been similar speculations, particularly as a new government has been elected in the country. With varying development deals on the docket between China and the Maldives, under the purview of the former administration, there are now concerns that China could leverage tourist numbers and tourism investment initiatives (such as the Sinamalé Bridge or China-Maldives Friendship bridge) if the new administration in the Maldives does not continue to pander to Chinese interests. Despite a change in administration at the local level, China – as was the case in Sri Lanka – has previously shown the capacity to continue influence/interfering at the local national political level, even without support of the ruling government.

Further still, the case of Chinese influence and interference in the Republic of Palau is yet another indicator of how damaging such tourism practices by nation-states can be on local tourism. For several years, Chinese investors and tourists had long been investing and visiting the country regularly, bringing about a significant profitable period to the island nation. However, when the country opted to continue to support Taiwan as an ally and to recognize it as a separate state, the Chinese authorities issued a travel ban to its citizens and business investors to halt all travel

and support ongoing in Palau. The impact was so significant that even Palau Pacific Airways was forced to cancel all scheduled flights between Beijing and Palau, owing to the lack of any travelers. Hotels and businesses, including restaurants, transportation services, tour agents, etc. have all been significantly impacted. Current hopes are that the Chinese government will return with further offers to Palau under its Economic Belt and Road ambitions, and local sentiments suggest that people are willing to do whatever it takes to regain that fruitful economic relationship with China despite potential long-term detrimental impacts to the local economy.

While social media has propagated over-tourism to popular destinations, it is also opening up travelers to explore less-traveled and more exotic locations, which could actually use an increase in visitors. Technology is playing other significant roles in this aspect, championing a more globally-conscious and travel-minded tourist. This includes development of online travel resources that provide travelers with information to understand how they can be more sustainable and less impactful through their visits to destinations of interest. In light of sustainability issues being pushed to the forefront, organizations with constituents living and traveling in the region can also play a responsible role by promoting work and leisure travel options that champion such tourism approaches.

It is not only locals who are beginning to be aware of the need to structure a tourism industry that is resilient to the elements locally and can account for temporary disruptions, while not fearing for long-term negative impacts. Governments in the region also see and realize the economic profitability that comes about through the tourism sector and are making efforts to implement policies and laws that still allow for travelers to continually visit, but that ensure long-term sustainability of the destination. In this regard, the Kingdom of Bhutan has been a leading example across the region and the world of how a sustainable tourism industry can exist and flourish, benefiting travelers, locals, and the environment in numerous ways.

Another benefiting factor of tourism has been how it can promote or motivate local area governments to address entrenched security issues in hopes of being able to attract visitors to their respective regions.

The Philippine government, for example, wanted to attract more tourists to Cebu Province, particularly following an assessment by the U.S. Department of State in 2017 informing U.S. citizens to avoid travel to the southern province due to the threat of terrorist attacks. Following intensive efforts by local police and authorities to address the safety and security issues in 2018, the U.S. Consul General was very impressed and felt confident enough with the local arrangements that no travel security alert was issued for Cebu.

Without doubt, tourism will continue to be a mainstay characteristic that drives and contributes immensely in numerous ways to economies and populations across the region. Not only are more people from the region able to travel and cater to travelers, but even in terms of impact data, the numbers speak for themselves.

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) issued a forecast in late 2017, indicating that the ten fastest-growing tourism cities over the next ten years, will be cities in Asia.

These include Chongqing, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing. The other cities on the top ten list are Chengdu, Manila, New Delhi, Shenzhen, Kuala Lumpur, and Jakarta.

The tourism sector in the region does face significant challenges in ensuring that irresponsible, unregulated, and unsustainable tourism is not the forecast of the near and long-term years. There is reason to have hope, however, that there are measures being planned and implemented to face this arduous task. By continuing to raise discussions of these pertinent issues in the tourism industry and promoting more globally-conscious travelers, there can be reason to forecast a continued sustainable growth and realized potential of the tourism sector in APAC.

Russia Increases Provocations Against the West

Russia continues to provoke the West in a series of covert and overt maneuvers. Russia has directly interfered in geopolitical, cyber, and local political circumstances affecting the West though covert espionage operations and aggressive verbal rhetoric. While some of these provocations have seemed to come out of the blue, President Vladimir Putin has long held suspicious and antagonistic views towards the West which in Russia's view includes the United States and Europe, particularly in the form of NATO. Putin suspects the West of attempting to encircle Russia and prevent it from becoming a world power. Russia is threatened by any alignment of the Western nations into entities such as NATO and the European Union and is particularly concerned about the Eastern European countries close to Russia's geographical border.

Many of Putin's actions can be seen as an attempt to play big-power politics with countries that have superior military and geographical resources to Russia.

Given that Putin started out as a KGB agent during the Soviet Era, he has a particularly good grasp on espionage operations for a state leader. Russia's espionage system is highly advanced and well trained, resulting from significant recruitment and experience gained during the Cold War, and is well experienced in operating in Europe. Therefore, espionage is probably Putin's greatest weapon against the West.

Putin has repeatedly tested the West's patience through interference in the Syrian crisis and supporting the Syrian government against rebel groups, the 2013 interference and invasion of the Crimea, and alleged interference in the United States' 2016 presidential election. However, the notable spy incident in March 2018 where alleged spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter were attacked with a novichok gas agent, was the final straw for Western powers. Multiple diplomats were expelled from the United States and Europe, with retaliatory expulsions from Russia. In the past quarter, Britain upped the ante by naming and identifying the two accused Russian agents who implemented the novichok attack. Russia responded by claiming the two citizens identified were ordinary citizens, and the individuals themselves performed a television interview proclaiming innocence. Putin placed doubt on these claims of innocence when he publically stated that Skripal was a "scumbag" and a traitor to Russia. It was suspected that Putin had overplayed his hand and had not expected such a strong diplomatic reaction from Western countries. However, allegations of espionage against Western interests have continued.

Russia has taken provocations a step further by interfering directly in European domestic politics. Russia is alleged to have interfered in multiple countries' elections in past years, through cyber or media campaigns. Russia has particularly focused on countries in Eastern Europe that are feared to be turning towards the West. A notable example of this interference is the case of Macedonia. In June 2018, Greece and Macedonia agreed to end a decades-long dispute by calling on Macedonian citizens to vote in a referendum to change the name of the country to North Macedonia. Prior refusal by the Macedonian government to change the name has led to a consistent block by Greece in the country's attempts to join NATO and the European Union, due to a large ethnic minority of Macedonians within Greece's territory. Russia finds the idea of another Eastern European country joining the Western block to be profoundly threatening and has allegedly directly interfered in name referendum campaigns. The United States and European governments have publically accused the Russians of transferring money to groups against the referendum campaign and of using intelligence services to broadly influence the direction of these campaigns. In addition, Greece expelled and banned four Russian diplomats in July for allegedly interfering in Greek politics by attempting to steal sensitive material that could be used to bribe Greek officials, and interfering in efforts made towards Macedonia's name change.

Russia has also significantly moved into the cyber realm, targeting multiple European governmental and international institutions throughout the continent.

Putin visits Dutch Parliament (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

Britain has accused the Russian Intelligence Services (GRU) of hacking several British targets including the Foreign Ministry and the UK Defense and Science Tech Laboratory. Germany has accused Russia of cyber-attacks on the German parliament, the Bundestag. Dutch authorities have arrested four GRU agents parked near The Hague and accused the agents of trying to intercept codes to gain information on proceedings of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Attacks. These agents are allegedly the same that were involved in cyber-attacks against the Spiez Laboratory in Switzerland, which also works to prevent the use of chemical weapons. Cyber-attacks against such institutions are particularly striking considering Russia's involvement with novichok attacks. Switzerland has also been home to another alleged cyber-attack against the world anti-doping agency, whose activities led to the banning of Russian athletes using illegal drugs in the 2018 elections. Adding to the bevy of accusations, Russia has been accused of attempting to interfere with the MH17 Probe, which found Russia guilty of being behind the missile attack that brought the plane down. Russia has vehemently denied all accusations.

While Russia has been accused of prominent cyber-attacks in the past, the recent wave of discovery has proven to be particularly disconcerting. It is possible that the novichok incident has made European governments more vigilant and aware of Russian cyberespionage behavior than previously, leading to the illusion of an increased number of incidents. It is also possible that Russian agents have been conducting

these activities at high volume in Europe for decades undiscovered. However, it is worth considering Russia's motives for such attacks. Putin's famous paranoia about the West is possibly contributing to the gathering of information, if nothing else, to ascertain the intentions of the West toward Russia. This theory can be corroborated by the targeted institutions' involvement in discussions of Russian crimes and intentions. However, it is also important to consider the theory that something more sinister is in store. In targeting Western governments, Russia could be planning to interfere in more domestic political activities in order to install governments that are hostile to NATO and friendly toward Russia.

It is unclear what Russia hopes to gain by these attacks. It is possible that Russia did not realize the extent of counterintelligence operations that would be lobbied against it in the wake of the novichok crisis.

Putin is not an irrational actor and must realize at some juncture that continuing in this frame could lead to more profound consequences than diplomatic retaliation.

Continuing to deny the existence of espionage activity will not help matters, nor will it deter Western actors from continuing to impose sanctions. "The West" as a concept is a strong entity militarily and ideologically, and Putin's efforts to continue to sabotage the Western system are unlikely to affect the change he is likely hoping for. In addition, Russia's activities are strengthening NATO's resolve with talks of NATO bases being established in Poland and an increasing amount of troops being sent to Germany.

All deterrence movements aside, the implications of Russia's actions are important to consider for travelers and locals alike. Continuing tensions lead to a need for greater awareness of personal and cyber security throughout Europe. It is not advisable to have any sensitive information on personal cell phones and laptop devices in Europe, and especially not in Russia. This is particularly important if involved in any sort of political or international-related activities. If traveling to Russia, it is not advisable to comment on the political situation, and any protests related to Russia's activities in Europe should be avoided. It is hopeful that the revelations that the West is increasingly aware of Russia's espionage activities will deter Putin from increasingly provocative gestures. However, only time will tell if soft power tit for tat will continue to yield satisfactory results.

Far Right Movement Rises in Germany: Analysis and Implications

The past quarter has seen a significant rise in Neo-Nazi and far-right activities in Germany. While other countries in Europe, including Sweden, Austria, Poland, and Hungary have experienced far-right movements, the increase of activity in Germany is particularly worrisome given Germany's unique past as a perpetrator of nationalism and genocide. Recent incidents are particularly striking when considering Germany's achievements the last 70+ years in emerging into the West as a liberal leader and key player in European affairs. It is important to analyze the rise of a fringe right-wing movement emerging in Germany and what this could mean going forward.

Numerous protests occurred in Kandel following the conviction of an Afghan refugee for revenge-killing a sixteen-year-old girl. Most recently, massive protests and counter-protests have taken place following the murder of a German citizen allegedly by Afghani and Syrian migrants in Chemnitz. While far-right protests have become common in recent years, the Chemnitz protest is unique because of the size of the rallies, protester behavior, and lack of effective police response. The province of Saxony, where Chemnitz and Kandel are located, has long been a hotbed of far-right activity. However, the murder of a German citizen has given right-wing groups such as the Alternative fur Deutschland (Afd) party, Pegida, (a traditional anti-Islamist group), and Pro-Chemnitz an excuse to rally individuals to the cause and engage in rampant protests. Several protests occurred in August, with police largely underestimating the magnitude of protester turnout. Counter-protests by liberal groups, including a concert against the far-right movement, have further fueled animosities and led to an increased chance for violence. German authorities are cracking down on the far-right groups, arresting several individuals accused of giving the Nazi Salute (a federal crime in Germany), and are allegedly lawfully surveilling the AfD party.

The most prominent element being surveilled are the younger elements of the AfD. The AfD has incorporated a number of youth into its functions through the establishment of the young alternative party.

Youth are particularly susceptible to right-wing messages due to a general lack of political maturity and a tendency to align with radical ideas.

Protest against right-wing sentiments, Germany
(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

AfD leaders have become well- versed at manipulating youth frustrated with economic issues and confused about German identity to mobilize towards radical politics. It is for this reason that German authorities have particularly targeted surveillance operations toward youth elements of the AfD, causing the party to disband local chapters. Surveillance is a particularly touchy subject in Germany due to the country's totalitarian past of massive surveillance by the Gestapo during World War II and the Stasi in East Germany during the Cold War. Therefore, the fact that German authorities are willing to undergo such measures shows the deep level of concern at growing developments.

The AfD party has been present in German politics for decades. However, recent gains of the party in the 2017 German elections are a cause for increasing concern. The greatest reason behind the far-right's jump and the main source of their recruitment results from the refugee and migrant crisis that has engulfed all of Europe. Angela Merkel's decision to let a massive amount of migrants into Germany has led to a backlash against immigration and calls that Germany's security and culture are being threatened by migration. Far-right groups often believe that Islam is incompatible with the idea of the West, and they protest against

what is seen as an "assault" on German and Western culture. This idea is further perpetuated by incidents of terrorism involving Muslim immigrants and assaults against women and local citizens by migrants. In addition, the German government's failure to effectively account for all individuals migrating into the country has led to a widespread fear of immigrants.

While many European countries are experiencing a new wave of right-wing extremism and xenophobic attitudes, Germany's history of racism has led to increasing concern and calls for vigilance.

These same notions are perpetuated by right-wing groups in other European countries but are particularly concerning in Germany given the similarity of language and nationalist sentiments perpetuated against foreigners today as in the lead up to the National Socialist period.

Parts of the AfD are known to have anti-Semitic tendencies. However, these factions are more subdued by leaders due to the sensitivity of the issue in Germany. The AfD has even established a Jewish faction. However, the sentiments expressed towards foreigners and Muslim immigrants are similar to sentiments once expressed toward Jewish citizens. Ironically, many of the increased anti-Semitism that has been noted does not come solely from the far-right, but comes from migrants themselves. Jewish citizens in Germany have spoken out about increasing acts of violence and harassment perpetuated by migrants and citizens of the Muslim faith. Much of this renewal can be attributed to the Israeli and Palestinian conflict and a confusion that all members of the Jewish faith are Zionists. However, many Muslim migrants are open toward members of the Jewish faith. Attempts have been made to draw Muslim and Jewish youth together to facilitate increased understanding. Efforts have also been made to educate Muslim youth and migrants about the Holocaust - an event not often taught in a majority of Muslim countries.

It is important for travelers and expatriates to be aware of the increasing volatile environment perpetuated by right-wing movements throughout Germany.

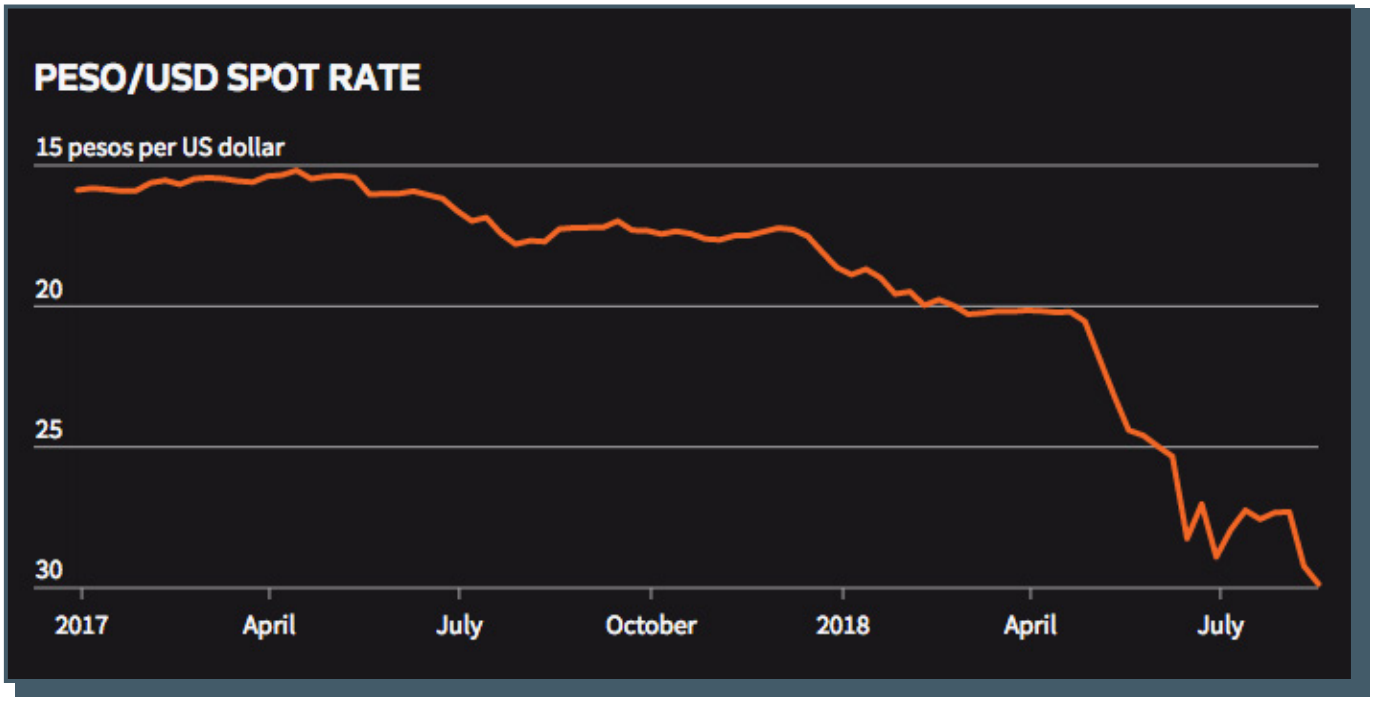
Areas where migrants live and areas in the former German East are particular hotbeds for protest and occasional violence.

In addition, Bavaria has become an increasingly hot zone due to the large amount of migrants. However, this new development should be taken with a grain of salt. German high officials are very aware of historical mistakes and could almost be considered over-sensitive to any sign that far-right movements are gaining volume. The majority of German citizens do not participate in violent protest activity and are generally considered to be welcoming to foreigners. It will be key for the German government going forward to effectively monitor the refugee crisis, include education and cultural diplomacy efforts between different segments of the population, and monitor far-right movements closely.

The Turmoil of Argentina's Debt Crisis

On September 25th, thousands protested in Buenos Aires ahead of a planned 24-hour labor strike in response to President Macri's economic agenda and new austerity measures. Although 2017 was an optimistic year for Argentina economically, 2018 has been marked with turmoil, specifically the falling value of the Argentinian Peso to the U.S. Dollar. As the value of the U.S. Dollar to the Peso rose in April, Argentina's debt became more expensive, forcing Argentina to continue to raise inflation and in the end seek outside assistance from the International Monetary Foundation (IMF).

Originally the IMF bailout package was set at $50 billion, the largest in the history of the IMF. That amount was then raised on September 26th to $57.4 billion. The funds will also become available at a faster pace than originally agreed upon. It is important to note that the bailout funds do not come without stipulations. Argentina is being forced to make spending cuts, raise taxes on exports, restrict intervention from the Central Bank, and ideally have a balanced budget in 2019 - something President Macri is referring to as "financial equilibrium." In order to make these conditions, the Argentinian people will likely feel the pain. These economic issues are also compounded by a severe drought over the past six months, which has affected some of the country's largest exports in soy and grain.



Argentina's Economic Crisis Explained in Three Charts (Source: Reuters)

Travelers can expect the economic woes to translate into further protests throughout the country, the largest in urban areas. The IMF already has a controversial reputation in Argentina, as many of the people blame the IMF for Argentina's worst economic crisis in the early 2000s, which resulted in widespread unemployment and many people sinking below the poverty line. Pension cuts over the past year have led to protests which have become violent at times, and have resulted in a heavy-handed response from police, usually in the form of tear gas and water cannons. Protests erupting out of austerity measures forced by IMF support is not a new concept. This past July, violent widespread protests broke out in Haiti after fuel subsidies were drastically cut as a result of IMF investment. Travelers to Argentina can expect an increase in protests to correlate with pension adjustments and an inevitable rise in costs for basic goods such as food. In October 2019, the country will hold presidential elections, the economy most certainly the prime issue, and the political process mixed with economic issues will fuel further protests in the coming year.

HOT TOPICS IN RISK MANAGEMENT

ON CALL INTERNATIONAL

How Event Organizers Can Utilize Proactive Risk Management Planning

When event organizers begin to conduct security, risk management, and emergency planning for a specific event, the focus tends to be internally on the event property itself and often lacks focus beyond physical security and emergency response. Event risk should be thought of holistically from the perspective of not only how secure the event itself will be, but also other factors:

- What is the political climate going to look like in this location, leading up to and throughout the duration of the event?
- What environmental or natural disaster concerns could happen during the event, and what indirect and direct effects could those disasters have on the event itself?
- What criminal, terrorist, or activist groups have a presence in the area? What customized approach can the event take toward detecting and countering their threats?
- What is the capability of local and national emergency responders at this location? What type of response assets do they have within close proximity? Who should the event organizers liaise with ahead of time as part of the emergency planning process?

A variety of groups may try to target an event for a multitude of reasons. It could be terrorists seeking a high-profile target, kidnappers looking for VIP/ high net-worth attendees, activists targeting sponsors or attendees and seeking publicity, or just general criminal groups looking for targets.

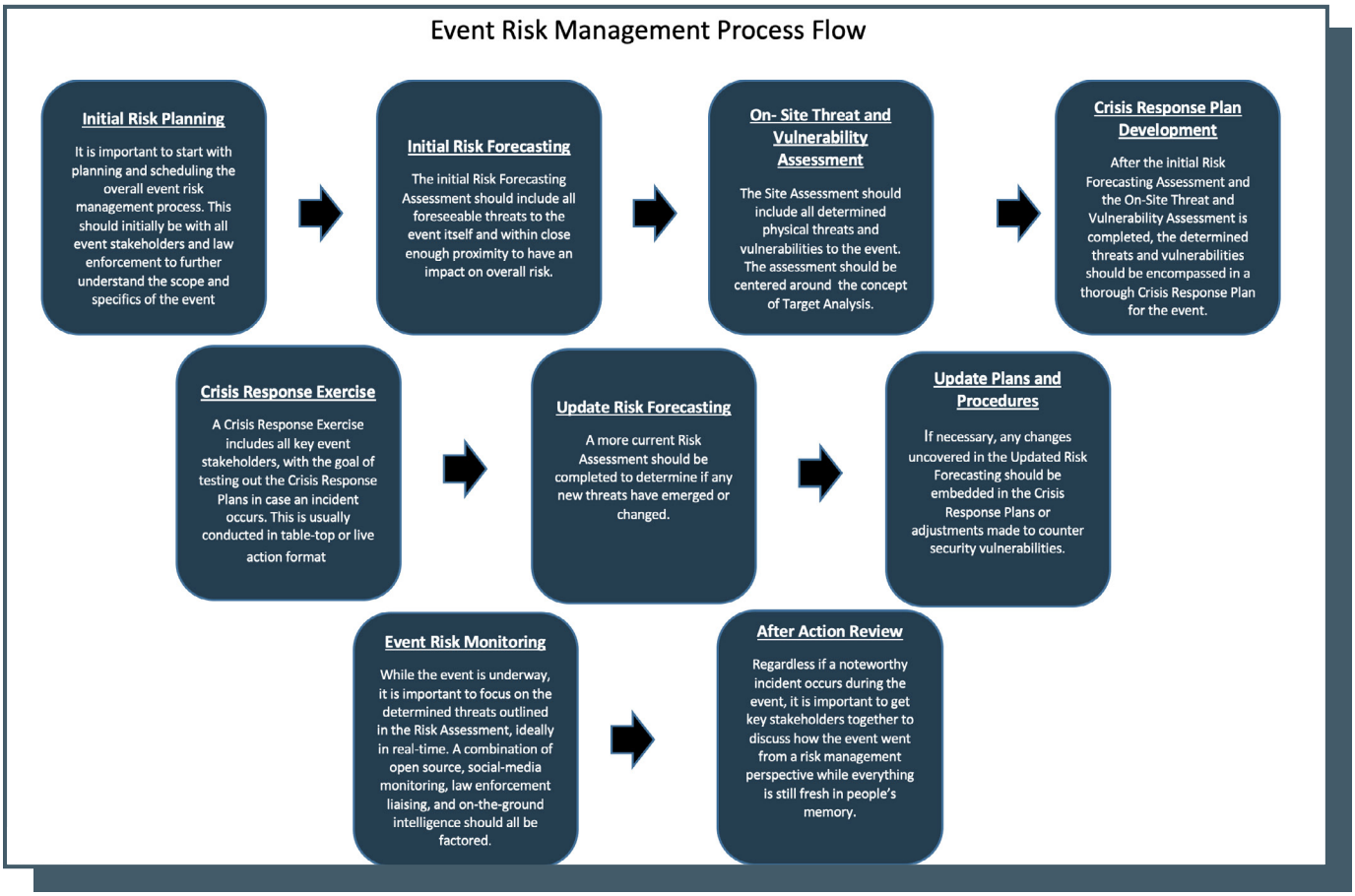
Understanding the trends these groups have, especially their preferred method for attacking targets and avoiding detection, is key. Taking into account their background knowledge on these groups, event risk managers should use the method of target analysis to determine the most likely ways perpetrators could gain access to/attack the event, and then further counter these security vulnerabilities in the planning process.

It is crucial for event risk managers to liaise with local law enforcement and emergency responders prior to developing security and emergency plans. Local law enforcement should be able to provide some level of insight on local groups who could potentially pose a threat in the area. Local law enforcement is also likely aware of any planned political activity within close proximity to the event that could pose a threat or disruption.

Event risk managers need to know what resources (personnel, ambulances, local law enforcement, and emergency services) can be provided on-site at the event, and what type of assets are close enough to support an emergency response in a timely manner.

Leading up to the event, once emergency response plans are in place, it is always advised for all stakeholders, including law enforcement/emergency services, to participate in a Crisis Response Exercise to test the plans.

While severe weather and natural disaster incidents cannot be avoided, event risk managers can aim to be as prepared for these threats as possible. Beyond preparing for the impact to the actual event site, event risk managers should take into account the impact this type of incident could have on attendees trying to travel to or from the event, the damage that could be caused to the surrounding area of the event, and the likely inundation of local emergency services. Tripwires should be built into emergency plans leading up to the event, where if a certain forecast is predicted, a decision must be made if it is wise to postpone or perhaps cancel the event, or whether certain additional emergency preparations must be made.



Event Risk Management Process Flow (Source: On Call International)

Political demonstrations and unrest should never be overlooked when it comes to security and risk planning for major events. Regardless if the event has any connection to politics, government, religion, or is otherwise controversial in any way, political activity can still have either a direct or indirect impact on the event and its attendees.

In September 2017, U2 and Ed Sheeran had to cancel concerts in St. Louis, Missouri, related to the nearby demonstrations and unrest taking place. Although the concerts were not directly related to any of the protests, because so many law enforcement and emergency services were needed to support the demonstration activity, there was a lack of necessary available resources to safely support the concert. The majority of protest activity is non-violent, but many protests seek disruption to garner attention for their protest and visibility for their cause. These disruptions can frequently affect mass-transit and traffic in urban areas and can cause corresponding delays and headaches for event attendees.

Being able to connect the dots when risk forecasting can be very beneficial to understanding how various threats can interact and have cascading results. As an example, if an event is being held in a city like Lima, Peru, and the expected weather patterns during the time of the event based off of historical data indicate the climate should be extremely dry with a potential for a drought, this may not raise an immediate concern to the event risk manager. However, Lima has an electrical grid that runs off a significant amount of hydro-power, and it is important to note that severe drought conditions can affect water levels in critical hydro-electric dams which feed the city's electrical grid. As has happened in the past, the low dam level can cause rolling blackouts throughout the city. If the event risk manager is able to foresee the potential power outage threat based off the historical drought issue, counter-measures to address predicted electrical issues could be implemented.

Different types of events come with unique threats and challenges when it comes to risk management and security.

For instance, a professional auto race may have a much larger physical footprint then a large trade show event and a much different overall environment, and as such, each event's risk forecasting should reflect the uniqueness of the event. As an additional layer of risk management, once the initial risk forecasting is completed and addressed, it can be beneficial to schedule updates to an organization's Risk Forecasting Assessment in appropriate increments leading up to the event, as new threats can emerge and remain fluid (See Event Risk Management Process Flow graphic below). This role of risk forecasting can then ideally be transitioned to a role of risk monitoring as the event kicks off, monitoring some of these threats in real time, synched with overall event security. Risk monitoring could encompass open-source information, social media monitoring, communication with law enforcement, all combined with what security personnel may be seeing on the ground.

Recent Headlines Highlight Worldwide Threats to Journalists

Several high-profile assaults on journalists have been making the headlines in recent weeks and months, highlighting the unique threats reporters and media workers face worldwide. In the first week of October, a prominent journalist who was critical of the Saudi regime went missing and was possibly murdered when he visited the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, a Bulgarian journalist was sexually assaulted and killed weeks afterwards, three journalists were arrested in Myanmar after publishing an article examining shady financial practices by the government, and another journalist was gunned down while he ate breakfast with his wife in southern Mexico. As of October 1st 2018, Reporters Without Borders stated that 56 journalists had been killed since January, with at least ten other deaths currently being investigated.

Scores of journalists lose their lives every year, and while 2018 is not the deadliest year on record, it is notable for the number of reporters who were targeted individually rather than losing their lives in conflict scenarios.

Many of these killings are carried out in a way that seems designed to send a message to others: Back Off.

The case of the missing Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi is notable for the brazenness with which the Saudi government executed his disappearance. On October 2, 2018, Mr. Khashoggi arrived at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul to obtain official documents certifying a divorce so that he could move forward with his planned marriage to Hatice Cengiz, who waited for him outside. Mr. Khashoggi, possibly preparing for something to go awry when he entered the consulate, instructed Ms. Cengiz to call a close advisor to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. After several hours passed without Khashoggi returning, Ms. Cengiz notified Turkish authorities. Since then, the Turkish government has accused the Saudi government of killing and dismembering the journalist. To back up their claim, the Turks released the names of 15 Saudi intelligence officers, including a known autopsy expert, who arrived in Istanbul that day and departed several hours later. As of this writing, U.S., Turkish, and Saudi authorities are all investigating the disappearance, and developments are ongoing, but if Mr. Khashoggi was indeed killed within the consulate, the message is clear: public dissent against Riyadh will not be tolerated.

Missing Saudi Journalist, Jamal Khashoggi
(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

State-sponsored persecution of journalists remains a common theme in 2018. Myanmar, just weeks before the latest arrest of three reporters, sentenced two Reuters journalists to seven years in prison for their reporting on a massacre of Rohingya civilians. While not directly implicated in the murders, Russia is at least suspected in two incidents in 2018. In one incident, three Russian journalists were killed while making a documentary on the Russian paramilitary Wagner Group in the Central African Republic, and in another incident journalist Maxim Borodin fell from his apartment building after publishing a report on the same company.

Reporting on organized crime remains one of the most dangerous practices for journalists.

Mexico continues to rank among the more dangerous places in the world for reporters and media workers, with at least six journalists losing their lives in 2017, likely in connection with reporting on crime and corruption. The double homicide of reporter Jan Kuciak and his fiancé Martina Kusnirova in their apartment in Slovakia was apparently linked to his work connecting Slovakian businessmen and politicians to the powerful 'Ndrangheta' crime network based in southern Italy.

A particularly alarming trend as of late has been the targeting of journalists in Western Europe and the United States, both known for being strong advocates of press freedom.

The June 2018 shooting deaths of four journalists from The Capital Gazette and their colleague in Annapolis, Maryland, and the car-bombing that killed Daphne Caruana Galizia in October 2017, among other aforementioned attacks, have drawn attention to parallel attacks on the press in the public discourse across much of the world.

These attacks, and the disturbing trends they seem to indicate, serve as a reminder of the many challenges journalists face in exposing the truth across the globe. News outlets, NGOs, and governments need to highlight and prioritize the importance of protecting journalists as they carry out their assignments, and tools are being developed and used to help reporters protect themselves. Among other initiatives, the Committee to Protect Journalists has unveiled a multi-faceted "Safety Kit" to provide resources and direction for at-risk reporters, and New York Times journalist Sebastian Junger developed the Reporters Instructed in Saving Colleagues (RISC) program to teach basic first aid and survival to conflict journalists. Efforts like these, as well as the development and use of robust and appropriately tailored risk management practices for journalists, must be prioritized by news outlets and individual reporters alike.

Mental Health Abroad: Medical Advice

Mental health has become a hot topic in the risk community of late, as travelers navigate new countries and situations and encounter differing cultural attitudes about mental illness. It is important for administrators to actively balance security advice with medical advice in preparing travelers with mental health issues and enacting proper response protocols. We asked On Call International's Medical Director, Dr. Michelle Nathan MD, FAAEM, for her insights on this important topic.

Some mental health medications such as Adderall and anti-depressants can be banned in certain countries. How should travelers who require these medications proceed when traveling to these countries? Should they avoid travel to those destinations in the first place?

Dr. Nathan: Scheduled substances such as ADHD medications (Adderall, Ritalin, Concerta) and anxiety medications (Xanax, Ativan, Valium) are frequently banned or severely restricted in many countries. Travelers who take these medications need to check with each country prior to travel. Unfortunately, there is no central resource that contains all this information. Travelers can reach out to the embassy of each country, check the country's tourism website, and consider checking reputable, vetted travel blogs for advice regarding those medications. The decision to travel to those areas is ultimately a very personal one. If travel plans to a country that does not allow those medications is known, the traveler can work with their mental health provider to try alternative methods of managing their condition and to determine if travel is advisable.

What resources should administrators provide to travelers who experience a mental health crisis overseas?

Dr. Nathan: Administrators need to have plans in place, especially for travelers in areas with limited psychiatric resources. This can include a plan for evacuation to a more appropriate area for treatment and stabilization followed by repatriation home as necessary.

What should travelers do prior to embarking to ensure their mental health needs will be met?

Dr. Nathan: Before travel, travelers should meet with their health providers to address stressors they could encounter, coping mechanisms, and possible remote counseling if needed. Travelers should have a primer that details the nature of the journey, the culture, expected demands during travel, and the environment; this primer should be reviewed with the mental health provider. A care plan can be drafted in advance; it can include identifying resources in the travel area or, in the case of group travel, having a medical resource travel with the group.

Some countries do not take mental health conditions seriously or even criminalize those with mental health conditions. What can a traveler and/or administrator do if a traveler experiences a mental health episode in a country where it is not advisable to seek local medical care or help from local authorities?

Dr. Nathan: Keep in mind that many medical conditions can present with psychiatric symptoms. All travelers with a 'mental health episode' should have a medical evaluation first. If the issue is truly psychiatric in nature, then a plan for evacuation to a more appropriate area can be activated.

How can mental health conditions be exacerbated by the overseas environment? Can travelers with no prior mental health history experience issues for the first time abroad?

Dr. Nathan: The most prevalent mental health issues abroad tend to occur with anxiety, bipolar disorder, depression, and ADHD. Fatigue from travel, stress from a different environment, changes in daily structure, and communication (language) barriers can all trigger episodes. Even travelers with no prior mental health history can have challenges as they acclimate to the environment in a foreign country. Travel can result in culture shock with unfamiliar customs and languages, loss of familiar contexts (friends, locations), and isolation; these are challenges that can trigger mental health episodes even in those with no prior history.

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When traveling, every problem is unique—a medical crisis, a political threat, even a common incident such as a missed flight. But every solution starts with customized care that ensures travelers are safe and protected. That's why for over 20 years, On Call International has provided fully-customized travel risk management services protecting millions of travelers, their families, and their organizations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:
www.oncallinternational.com

All information contained herein was gathered using open-source methods. Sources can be made available upon written request to security@oncallinternational.com, or

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