Please be aware System Risk Management has asked all members to prohibit travel to extreme risk countries and regions. Please reference memorandum from the Chancellor regarding procedures relating to international travel to be followed by all System members found at this link:


Should you have any questions, please contact me directly. Thank you.

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**Country Travel Advisory List:**

Any travel to the below listed countries requires an International Travel Questionnaire submission to System Risk Management for review.

- Afghanistan
- Central African Republic
- Cuba
- Gaza Strip
- Libya
- North Korea
- Somalia
- South Sudan
- Syria
- Yemen
Any travel to the specified regions within a country noted below requires an International Travel Questionnaire submission to System Risk Management for review.

Information on Travel Restrictions From Listed Countries: Sudan, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia and Yemen.


- **Armenia**: Within 2km of the line of contact in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region
- **Azerbaijan**: Within 2km of the line of contact in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region
- **Cameroon**: Far North (Extreme-Nord) region and within 50km of Cameroon's shared border with Nigeria in the country's North (Nord) and Adamawa (Adamaoua) regions.
- **Chad**: Ennedi-Est, Ennedi-Quest, Wadi Fira, Quaddai and Sila (which border Sudan), the southern regions of Logone Oriental, Mandoul, Moyen-Chari and Salamat, the northern regions of Tibesti, Borkou and Ennedi-Qest (which border Libya) and the western Kanem and Lac regions.
- **Democratic Republic of Congo**: The eastern Nord-Kivu, Sud-Kivu, and Tanganyika provinces, as well as the north eastern Ituri, Haut-Uele and Bas-Uele provinces and the southern Kasia Central province.
- **Egypt**: North Sinai governornate.
- **Eritrea**: Within 20km of Eritrea's borders with Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Sudan.
- **Ethiopia**: Within 20km of Ethiopia's border with Eritrea in the Tigray and Afar regions, within 20km of the South Sudan border in the Gambela and Benishangul-Gumuz regions, and the Somali region (excluding the two northern zones of Fafan, formerly Jijiga, and Sitti, formerly Shinile).
- **Iran**: Sistan va Baluchestan province
• **Iraq**: Baghdad, Anbar, Salah ad-Din, Kirkuk, Diyala, Ninewa, Karbala and Babil governorates and the northern Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)-held and disputed territory west of the Green Line.

• **Israel**: Within 2km of the shared Gaza Strip-Israel border in southern Israel and all travel to the Gaza Strip due to the threats of conflict and secondary threats of kidnapping and terrorism.

• **Japan**: Within a 20km radius of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Okuma.

• **Kenya**: Within 50km of the Somali border in the Mandera, Wajir, Garissa and Lamu counties.

• **Lebanon**: An area within 15km of the shared border with Syria in the Bekaa and North governorates and Palestinian refugee camps across the country.

• **Mali**: Gao, Kidal, Mopti and Timbuktu regions

• **Mexico**: Due to the high risks of kidnapping, violent crime and an escalating drug cartel-related conflict, red24 currently advises against non-essential travel to the countryside outside of major cities and primary resort areas as well as the states of Tamaulipas, Michoacan, Coahuila, Sinaloa, Nayarit and Guererro.

• **Niger**: Within a 50km radius of Niger’s shared border with Nigeria in the administrative regions of Diffa and Zinder and to within a 100km radius of Niger’s shared borders with Chad, Algeria, Libya and Mali.

• **Nigeria**: Adamawa, Borno, Yobe and Gombe in the northeast. Rural and remote areas within Kaduna, Bauchi, Plateau, Benue, Zamfara, Enugu and Taraba states in the “Middle Belt” and the Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta and Rivers states in the south.

• **Pakistan**: Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces

• **Philippines**: The southern Mindanao region and the Sulu Archipelago.

• **Russia**: Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria (including the Mount Elbrus region).

• **Saudi Arabia**: Within 10km of the shared border with Yemen

• **Somalia**: Most of Somalia except Puntland and Somaliland.
• **Sudan:** Dafur region, South Kordufan state, Blue Nile state and the disputed Abyei region.

• **Tunisia:** The Djebel Chambi National Park (Kasserine governorate) and South of but not including the towns of El Borma and Dhehiba (Tataouine governorate)

• **Turkey:** Within 10km of the shared border with Syria in the Turkish provinces of Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep, Sanliurfa, Mardin and Sirnak.

• **Uganda:** Areas within 30km of Uganda’s shared borders with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan, excluding major towns.

• **Ukraine:** The Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and the Crimean Peninsula.

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**December 18, 2017**

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Africa

GABON (Country Risk Rating: High) - Authorities Arrest Dozens in Libreville after Assailant Wounds Danish Nationals

On Dec. 17, police in Libreville detained dozens of people for questioning, one day after a lone assailant stabbed and wounded two Danish nationals. Most of those arrested in the wake of the incident are West African traders at the artists'
market - a location highly frequented by tourists - where the assailant attacked the victims while they were shopping. Authorities called on people to remain calm, but vigilant.

**Analysis:** While not expressing it publicly, police are treating the attack as an act of terror. The assailant - who reportedly shouted "Allahu Akbar!" ("God is great!", in Arabic) during the assault - claimed that he committed the act as retaliation for purported US attacks on Muslims and the US administration's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The victims are media personnel. They were transported to a clinic; one was reportedly in critical condition but is stabilising.

Authorities immediately arrested the attacker - a citizen of Niger who has been living in Gabon for 19 years - following the incident. More arrests are possible; the market was closed Dec. 17 and could remain so in the coming days as authorities investigate the incident. It remains unclear if the assailant was acting on behalf of, or was inspired by, a terrorist organisation; preliminary reports indicate that he acted alone. The threat of terrorism in Gabon is low; while no known indigenous or international terrorist groups operate in the country, the threat of attack against foreign visitors remains.

**GUINEA-BISSAU (Country Risk Rating: High) - Opposition Groups Reject President's New Calls for Talks**

On Dec. 13, opposition groups and opponents of President Jose Mario Vaz within his own political party rejected the president's calls for new talks to address the ongoing political crisis affecting the country. Vaz asked members of the signatories of the 2016 accord to gather and find a way forward to address their differences. However, the political parties refused to take part in any talks, urging the president to detail points of discussion before they would commit to gather.

**Analysis:** Vaz's move came ahead of the end of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) summit, which took place in Abuja, Nigeria, where the organisation's leaders on Dec. 16 expressed frustrations over the ongoing political crisis in Guinea-Bissau. ECOWAS threatened to impose individual or collective sanctions on Guinea-Bissau if no solution to tackle the crisis is reached by February. Vaz's government failed to abide by an ECOWAS-brokered accord and name a new prime minister. The frustrations are related to a political stalemate over executive power between Vaz and his opponents in his political party, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). The PAIGC rejected Vaz's choice of Umaro Sissoco Embalo as prime minister in December 2016, accusing the president of violating a 2016 accord that called for the nomination of a prime minister agreed to by all. Due to the dispute, Guinea-Bissau's government has not functioned effectively since August 2015, when Vaz fired former prime minister Domingos Simoes Pereira. Opposition demonstrations against Vaz have been taking place in the capital Bissau in recent months. If no solution is found to the crisis, political groups will likely continue to stage anti-government demonstrations, especially in the capital.

**MADAGASCAR (Country Risk Rating: Medium) - Security Increased around Ikongo after Mass Prison Break**

Increased security is in place around Ikongo, southeastern Vatovavy Fitovinany region after a massive prison break Dec. 13. Authorities will likely maintain a high-security presence in the area until calm returns to the town. At least 120 inmates escaped when about 600 villagers from Sahalanono, armed with axes and knives, stormed the penitentiary intending to release 10 particular inmates and execute them extrajudicially. The villagers accused the 10 of having been responsible for murders since May and wanted to kill them to avenge the families of the victims. The Ikongo villagers demanded the release of the 10 inmates to their custody; when the villagers learned that authorities had already transferred them Dec. 12 to another secure prison outside of the town, they became angry and stormed the prison.

Following the incident, soldiers and police officers deployed to the prison and other strategic locations, such as administrative buildings, the police station, and the court, for fear of reprisals as villagers threatened the lives of those involved in the transfer of the wanted inmates. As of Dec. 16, authorities said only a few inmates had been apprehended; a search for escapees is underway.

**Analysis:** Security personnel could implement additional security measures such as erecting checkpoints, including on RN 24, N7, and N12 if the search for inmates is widened to surrounding areas; expect transportation disruptions if this occurs. Crime levels are high in areas of southern Madagascar, and could increase in Ikongo and surrounding districts if many escaped prisoners evade recapture. Criminals, including members of cattle-
rustling groups, locally called dahalos, attack villages and main roads targeting passenger vehicles and security personnel. Authorities deployed soldiers to the south in 2013, but they have struggled to maintain order due to the vast geographic area in which the bandits and cattle thieves operate. Residents have sometimes resorted to vigilante justice as they express frustrations with the country's judicial system, which they say is corrupt and inadequate.

**NIGERIA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Oil Workers Threaten Indefinite, Nationwide Strike**

On Dec. 16, oil workers belonging to the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) union threatened to launch an indefinite nationwide strike starting Dec. 18. The union said the action will go ahead as planned unless local gas and oil companies reinstate workers whom the union claims were wrongly terminated.

PENGASSAN leaders called for the work stoppage, stating that an ultimatum it issued to the companies to reinstate the workers will expire Dec. 18. Unless averted, the strike could result in fuel shortages at filling stations, forcing some to close, and resulting in long queues and traffic disruptions around those that remain open.

**Analysis:** If the walkout becomes protracted, public transportation services may also be curtailed, and possible jet fuel shortages could lead to flight delays and cancellations, primarily affecting domestic airlines. The impact of such a strike would almost certainly be greater in cities that are typically hardest hit by Nigeria's recurring fuel shortages, including Abuja and Lagos. Fuel shortages have already been reported in major cities of Nigeria, including Abuja and Lagos, since Dec. 5 due to reported panic buying. The PENGASSAN strike could further complicate the situation, causing a severe shortage. The union has stated that the strike may extend through the holiday season if its concerns are not addressed. Fuel scarcities occur regularly in Nigeria and are mostly caused by the country's limited refining capacity, which forces Nigeria to import about 75 percent of its needed refined fuel.

**SENEGAL (Country Risk Rating: Medium) - Air Traffic Controllers End Strike at New Blaise Diagne International Airport in Dakar**

On Dec. 16, an aviation union leader said that a 24-hour strike launched Dec. 15 by air traffic controllers at Dakar's newly opened Blaise Diagne International Airport (DSS) ended late that same day. The union cited security issues for suspending the labour action, and indicated that talks are underway with the government to address the workers' demands.

**Analysis:** Airport workers demand improved conditions to accommodate the additional travel required to reach their workplace. The workers have also complained that they did not receive adequate training prior to the Dec. 7 opening of DSS.

**SOUTH SUDAN (Country Risk Rating: Extreme) - Increased Security Likely in Juba through at least Jan. 1 due to Anticipated Holiday Season Crime Surge**

Authorities in Juba plan to deploy additional security personnel across the South Sudanese capital through at least Jan. 1 due to projections of increased crime over the Christmas and New Year holiday season. The government is concerned that criminals could exploit the holiday period to engage in both property and violent crimes, including burglary, armed robberies, carjackings, and looting.

As part of the effort, officials reportedly plan to divide Juba into five security zones, likely separated by checkpoints. Roadblocks are also likely on major roads in the outskirts of the capital.

**Analysis:** While the government's intent is to mitigate the anticipated holiday season crime increase, the deployment of additional security forces may complicate as much as alleviate the problem. Some members of the armed forces are habitually involved in criminal activities and could use their deployments to engage in illicit acts. Incidents of military, police, and intelligence officers assaulting, detaining, and extorting local NGO workers and foreign nationals are reported on a near-daily basis in South Sudan. Uniformed gunmen often use checkpoints in Juba to stop vehicles used by foreign nationals, subsequently robbing, extorting, or assaulting the occupants.
Juba residents report uniformed criminals frequently engage in looting and sexual assault in the Kator, New Site, and Gudele neighbourhoods. Although security personnel are periodically arrested for committing violent crimes, it is unclear whether they are ever brought to trial.

Asia

AFGHANISTAN (Country Risk Rating: Extreme) - Militant Attack Ongoing at National Directorate of Security Training Centre in Kabul

Security forces are responding to a militant attack at a National Directorate of Security training centre in the Afshar area of Kabul midday Dec. 18. Militants began the assault at around 1010, and are reportedly holed up in an under-construction building at the training facility. Heavy and small arms fire are occurring, though there have yet to be reports of any casualties. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Officials have blocked access to the area, and localised traffic disruptions are likely in Afshar in the coming hours.

AFGHANISTAN (Country Risk Rating: Extreme) - Suicide Car Bombing Occurs in Shor Andam Area, near Kandahar

A suicide car bombing took place outside Kandahar, Dec. 17, killing at least one civilian and wounding five others. The blast reportedly occurred in the Shor Andam area in Daman district, to the southeast of the city.

Analysis: The blast targeted a NATO security convoy. There has been no claim of responsibility for the attack.

INDIA (Country Risk Rating: High), THAILAND (Country Risk Rating: Medium) and AUSTRALIA (Country Risk Rating: Low) - Measles Exposure Reported Dec. 9-11

On Dec. 14, health officials reported that an individual infected with measles travelled aboard the following flights while contagious:

- **Dec. 9:** Thai Airlines (TG) Flight 324 from Indira Gandhi International Airport (DEL), Delhi, India to Suvarnabhumi International Airport (BKK), Bangkok, Thailand. This flight was codeshared ANA (NH) Flight 5946.
- **Dec. 9-10:** Thai Airlines (TG) Flight 475 from Suvarnabhumi International Airport (BKK), Bangkok, Thailand to Sydney Airport (SYD) Sydney, Australia. This flight was codeshared Austrian Airlines (OS) Flight 8639, Lufthansa (LH) Flight 9744, and Turkish Airlines (TK) Flight 8020.

The infected individual also visited the Blacktown Hospital Emergency Department in Blacktown, Australia between 2200 on Dec. 10 through 0330 Dec. 11.

Analysis: Measles is a very contagious viral disease. The virus spreads through airborne droplets created when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus can survive up to two hours in an airspace or on a surface where an infected person has coughed or sneezed. Symptoms of measles can develop up to 21 days after exposure and typically begin with a fever, runny nose, sore throat, red eyes, and/or cough, followed by a rash that spreads all over the body. Infected individuals are most contagious five days before and four days after the measles rash erupts. Recovery generally occurs within 10-14 days, but serious complications, including pneumonia, may occur. Complications are most likely in children younger than five years old, adults older than 20 years, and people whose immune systems are weakened by other acute or chronic health conditions.

BANGLADESH (Country Risk Rating: High) - Opposition BNP to Stage Nationwide Anti-government Protests
The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is organising nationwide demonstrations in Bangladesh Dec. 18 to protest alleged government harassment of party leaders and members.

Analysis: The largest gathering will likely occur in Dhaka, possibly outside of the BNP headquarters in Naya Paltan, though sizeable rallies are possible in Chittagong and other main cities and towns. Organisers have not announced specific rally sites, but likely locations include BNP offices and local government buildings.

BNP protests often devolve into clashes with security personnel and/or members of the ruling Awami League party; minor arson attacks and vandalism are possible. Because of the high risk of collateral damage, businesses usually close at the first sign of unrest. Significant transport disruptions are also probable near rallies. Authorities will undoubtedly boost security as a precaution.

INDIA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Further Protests and Clashes Possible in Kashmir Valley after Civilian Driver Killed

Additional protests are possible in the Kashmir Valley after a driver was allegedly shot and killed in a clash between militants and soldiers in Kupwara district late Dec. 16. Locals have refuted the military's claim that the driver was killed during the gunfire exchange; separatists have also criticised the government over the incident. Large-scale protests broke out Dec. 17 when residents from surrounding areas converged on Batpora village for the deceased's funeral. Locals carried the body through the village and blocked the Kupwara-Chokibal road, where clashes with government forces occurred; several civilians and security personnel were injured. Several parts of the Kupwara district, including Thandipora and Kralpora, observed a complete shutdown Dec. 17, causing commercial and transport disruptions. As of late Dec. 17, mobile internet services remained suspended in the district as a precautionary measure.

Analysis: Protests could continue in Kupwara in the coming days and may spread to other parts of the Kashmir Valley. Possible demonstration sites include outside of mosques and at prominent public squares; demonstrators could also march to nearby government and police buildings, resulting in localised ground transport disruptions. Localised commercial interruptions are also possible near protests, as businesses will probably close at the first sign of unrest.

Expect extremely tight security across the Kashmir Valley, especially in Kupwara district. Authorities could introduce movement restrictions in areas where violent unrest occurs. However, protesters regularly defy such police orders, resulting in clashes between the two groups. Authorities may impose curfews and shut down cellular and internet services if further violence erupts.

INDIA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Internet Service Suspension Lifted in Udaipur and Rajsamand

Authorities lifted the suspension on mobile internet service in Udaipur city and Rajsamand District, Rajasthan State, late Dec. 16 as the security situation began to normalise in both areas. Mobile internet service was suspended on the evening of Dec. 13, ahead of Hindu nationalist protests in support of a suspect accused of murdering a Muslim. Police in Udaipur arrested at least 200 hardline Hindu nationalists after rioting broke out during the Dec. 14 protests. Additional demonstrations occurred the following day, though no significant security-related incidents were recorded.

Authorities have also lifted the ban on large demonstrations in affected areas and dismissed rumours of additional rallies planned for Dec. 19 and 25.

Analysis: On Dec. 6, a Hindu man in Rajsamand District recorded himself murdering a Muslim individual from India's West Bengal State. The attacker uploaded and shared the video via social media, saying the action was meant to prevent so-called "love Jihad" - a term hardline Hindu nationalist groups use for the purportedly forceful conversion of Hindu women to Islam through marriage. Police have arrested at least two suspects in connection with the murder.

INDONESIA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Magnitude-6.5 Earthquake Causes Damage and Kills at least Four People in Central and West Java
Emergency response operations continue in Central and West Java provinces after a magnitude-6.5 earthquake struck the southern coastal area of West Java Province at 2347 Dec. 15. The temblor occurred at a depth of 92 km (57 miles) and caused strong shaking near the epicentre. Emergency crews and security personnel have deployed to affected areas in West and Central Java, including Yogyakarta, for rescue and recovery efforts. Indonesia’s National Agency for Disaster Management (BNPB) stated that, as of Dec. 17, the earthquake killed at least four people and injured 36 others, as well as damaged almost 3,000 houses.

Local authorities have declared a state of emergency in the worst-hit areas of Tasikmalaya City, as well as the Taksimalaya, Ciamis, and Pangandaran regencies of West Java, through at least Dec. 22. While these areas suffered the most damage, BNPB claimed the shaking has not affected vital installations and infrastructure, including major roads, bridges, and utility and water supplies. However, disruptions are likely on secondary roads.

At least 12 aftershocks have been recorded as of Dec. 18. Additional tremors could cause damage to infrastructure and buildings in the coming days.

**MACAU SAR / ZHUHAI (Country Risk Rating: Low) - Nation to Mark 18th Anniversary of Portuguese Handover of Macau to Beijing**

Commemorative events marking the 18th anniversary of the transfer of the Macau Special Administrative Region to China will take place in Macau, Dec. 20. Although detailed information is unavailable, officials will likely hold an official flag-raising ceremony at Lotus Square. Additionally, they will stage a parade from the Ruins of St. Paul's to Sai Van Lake Square. The parade will begin at 1500.

**Analysis:** Ground transport disruptions along the parade route are likely. Pro-democracy activists may, as they have previously, attempt to hold demonstrations to coincide with commemorative events. Although there has been no confirmation of any planned protests, such gatherings have previously been held at Tap Seac Square. Authorities may deploy an increased security force presence at this site as a precautionary measure. Despite this, the risk of significant confrontations at these locations, should protests take place, is low, and security forces will swiftly disperse any politically motivated demonstrations.

**PAKISTAN (Country Risk Rating: High) - Authorities Boost Security around Schools and Hospitals in Punjab Province due to Purported Terror Threat**

Government officials have issued a report warning of a potential terrorist threat in Punjab Province. Authorities said that militants affiliated with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) may be plotting to attack security installations, schools, and hospitals, especially in the cities of Faisalabad and Multan. The report said that the assailants had acquired army uniforms, and would likely wear them in any attack.

**Analysis:** Authorities are boosting security around schools and hospitals in the province, especially in Faisalabad and Multan, in response to the warning. Police could establish checkpoints and/or cordon off roads or individual traffic lanes near schools and hospitals as a precaution. Security personnel could briefly shut down mobile telephone towers in select areas, especially while law-enforcement operations are taking place.

Authorities periodically issue security warnings regarding destinations in Pakistan, including Punjab Province. While an advisory does not indicate an imminent attack, the overall threat remains high.

**PAKISTAN (Country Risk Rating: High) - Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Attack on Church in Quetta**

The Islamic State (IS) militant group has claimed responsibility for a Dec. 17 attack on the Bethel Memorial Methodist Church on Zarghun Road in Quetta. Two suicide bombers and several other armed assailants stormed the church in an attack that left at least nine people dead and more than 30 others wounded. Security forces exchanged fire with the gunmen, killing them all. One of the suicide bombers was shot dead before gaining entry to the church, but the other attacker was able to detonate his explosives inside the facility.
Analysis: Expect heightened security and localised transport disruptions until security personnel clear the area and conclude their investigation into the attack. While IS has claimed responsibility for the attack through its Amaq news agency, it provided no proof for the claim. The Jamaat ul Ahrar militant group - a faction of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) - has also claimed responsibility for the attack; the group has similar goals and objectives as IS, and is thought to have pledged allegiance to IS in 2014.

PHILIPPINES (Country Risk Rating: Medium) - TD Kai-tak Continues to Move through Central Regions; Flooding, Landslides, and Major Disruptions Reported

Tropical Depression Kai-tak (Philippines name Urduja) continues to track west-southwestward across the central Philippines. As of 1700 PHT Dec. 17, the storm was about 325 km (202 miles) southwest of Manila. Kai-tak should maintain its strength as it moves over the Sibuyan Sea, Masbate Island, and Panay Island and approaches northern Palawan Island Dec. 17-18. The system is then forecast to lose intensity as it continues west-southwest through the South China Sea, where it will dissipate Dec. 20.

Kai-tak has cut off power and triggered floods and landslides in the region, particularly in the Bicol Region (Luzon) and the provinces of Samar and Biliran (Visayas). The storm killed at least 31 people, injured 19, and forced more than 87,000 people from their homes when it moved across the eastern islands of Samar and Leyte Dec. 16-17. More than 49 people remain missing as of Dec. 18. Most of the dead were from Biliran, which suffered the worst of the landslides. The island province also suffered extensive damage to its roads, bridges, and power system, with restoration of power supply not expected until Dec. 20. Authorities have warned that more floods and landslides are possible through at least Dec. 18. Property damage and more power and communications disruptions are likely on affected islands. Very heavy rainfall may occur within 200 km (124 miles) of the centre of circulation.

Thunderstorms and heavy rain can be expected in other provinces in the Visayas region and Luzon as the slow-moving system tracks westward. Rainfall amounts of 15-30 cm (6-12 inches) are possible across a broad area; some locations on Samar have already received over 97 cm (38 inches) as the system approaches. Localised flooding could occur in and around Metro Manila Dec. 17-18. Mudslides and debris flows may be a problem, especially along the slopes of the Mayon Volcano in Albay Province.

Flights to and from airports serving Tacloban City (TAC), Ormoc City (OMC), Catarman (CRM), Masbate City (MBT), Legazpi City (LGP), Naga City (WNP), Roxas City (RXS), and Boracay (MPH, KLO) could be delayed or cancelled. Flights to and from Bicol and Western Visayas were cancelled Dec. 17. Weather-related disruptions are also possible at Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport (MNL) Dec 17-18. Authorities have halted ferry traffic on some routes in southern Luzon and eastern Visayas as a precautionary measure; cargo handling will likely be suspended at some regional ports.

Kai-tak is no longer forecast to affect southern Vietnam, Brunei, or Malaysia as previously reported.

SOUTH KOREA (Country Risk Rating: Low) - Autoworkers to Stage Additional Strikes at Hyundai Plants in Ulsan, Dec. 18-19

The Hyundai Motor Union announced additional strikes Dec. 18-19 after the company failed to address its demands for higher wages and bonuses. Union members plan to stage eight-hour walkouts on both days at the carmaker's five plants in Ulsan. Hyundai Motor Union represents an estimated 51,000 workers, and tens of thousands of its members could join the action.

Analysis: The labour actions will continue to cause production delays, but significant supply chain disruptions are not anticipated. Autoworkers may also stage demonstrations during the walkouts. The largest protests are likely to occur outside factories, though gatherings at the other locations in Ulsan are possible. Striking workers may block access roads, causing localised traffic disruptions. Police could tighten security around these facilities as a precaution.

THAILAND (Country Risk Rating: Medium) - Insurgents Stage Arson Attack on Bus Headed to Bangkok
Suspected insurgents set fire to a double-decker bus in Betong district in Yala Province in Thailand's Deep South region at about 1420 Dec. 17. The bus, which was operated by Siam Travel Company, was headed to Bangkok when a group of about 10 armed men boarded the vehicle as it was travelling on Route 410 in Ban Kaosod. The armed men told the driver and his assistant, as well as 14 passengers, to alight before they set the bus on fire. The assailants escaped after blocking the road with tree trunks and nails. No one was injured in the incident.

Analysis: While preliminary reports suggested the involvement of the southern insurgents in the arson attack, the Forth Army Commander later said that business conflict could also be a possible motive for the incident. Insurgents in the restive Deep South region typically do not claim responsibility for any attacks, but authorities have blamed most of the violence in the region on the militants. While there are no reliable figures, crime also constitutes a percentage of the violence. The latest attack does not bear the hallmark of most insurgent attacks, which typically target military or police in the region using roadside bombs, grenades, and gunfire.

Central/South America

ARGENTINA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Labour and Activist Groups Plan Protest and Strike in Buenos Aires

Several unions, activist groups, and student organisations plan to protest in Buenos Aires, Dec. 18 against President Mauricio Macri's economic policies and proposed labour-related reforms. Participants will gather outside the National Congress at 1200. In addition, the Association of State Workers (ATE) has called for a 24-hour strike from 0001 Dec. 18. The Argentine Central Workers' Union (CTA), La Bancaria, and the National Federation of University Professors (CONADU) have signalled their intention to participate.

Analysis: The protest has the potential to attract thousands of people. While the organisers are calling for a peaceful protest, violence is possible, especially if police are provoked. Activists at a similar protest at the National Congress on Dec. 14 hurled projectiles, burned debris, and damaged nearby vehicles, prompting police to respond with tear gas and rubber bullets. Tight security, road closures, and traffic congestion near the protest venue are highly likely. Anticipate transport and commercial disruptions.

Labour unions have been protesting President Mauricio Macri's administration almost since his inauguration in December 2015. Macri has cut subsidies for basic goods and utilities, eliminated tens of thousands of union jobs, and removed price controls. Activist groups and unions in Buenos Aires have responded to the president's measures by staging protests and labour strikes. Macri ran for office on a platform that promised free-market reforms, and increased foreign investment and jobs; however, high levels of inflation, rising prices, and decreasing gross domestic product threaten his credibility and raise the likelihood of escalating protest activity in Buenos Aires.

HONDURAS (Country Risk Rating: High) - Opposition Calls for General Strike, Protests after Authorities Uphold Controversial Election Results

Opposition presidential candidate Salvador Nasralla and his main ally, former President Manuel Zelaya, have called for protests and a national strike from Dec. 18 amid allegations of vote fraud. Zelaya also called on opposition supporters to gather at public squares nationwide on the night of Dec. 17. The announcements come one day after the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) declared incumbent President Juan Orlando Hernandez the winner of the November presidential election.

In Tegucigalpa, demonstrators will probably try to assemble at the TSE headquarters, the Presidential Palace, or Parque el Obelisco. Protests are also likely at parks, public squares, and government buildings in other major cities. Some opposition-led demonstrations have escalated into clashes and rioting. As of Dec. 17, between 18 and 22 people, including two police officers, have died during the protests while police have detained more than 1,600 people. More clashes are possible, especially if security personnel attempt to disperse protesters, or if the opposition opts to intensify their protests and resort to more provocative tactics.
Analysis: Security personnel may fire teargas and warning shots to break up unsanctioned rallies. Authorities may reinstate a curfew if future protests result in significant violence or disruptions. The government had previously imposed a nationwide 1800-0600 daily curfew on Dec. 1, before progressively rolling back the restriction as the situation stabilised. Expect ground transport disruptions near any rallies; protesters will likely set up roadblocks on main roads across the country.

On Dec. 17, the TSE declared that Hernandez had won the Nov. 26 presidential election with 42.95 percent of the vote, narrowly beating Nasralla who secured 41.42 percent. The controversial announcement came after more than two weeks of opposition-led protests and rioting in major cities over perceived voter fraud. The TSE announcement appears unlikely to quell the unrest in Honduras. Nasralla has appealed to the international community for support, travelling to the US on Dec. 17 to present alleged proof of electoral fraud. Controversy regarding the legitimacy of the election results intensified after updated results were released Nov. 29, indicating that Nasralla's initial five-point lead had decreased to less than one point. The TSE publicised the updated vote count following a long pause that the TSE blamed on technical issues.

The Organisation of American States (OAS) Secretary General indicated shortly before the TSE's statement that "serious doubts persist about the results." The organisation had earlier recommended that Honduras conduct a partial recount and verify the integrity of its voting system following the fraud claims. The OAS could recommend that the country call new elections if the irregularities are not resolved.

Europe

EUROPE (Country Risk Rating: Not Rated) - Ryanair Pilots Call off Dec. 20 Strike in Ireland and Portugal after Recognising Pilots' Unions

On Dec. 17, unionised pilots with Ryanair (FR) suspended a planned Dec. 20 strike in Ireland and Portugal after company management agreed Dec. 15 to recognise the pilots' unions for the first time in the company's history. The pilots had earlier threatened to strike in several European countries before the end of 2017 and possibly in early 2018. A four-hour pilots' strike inconvenienced hundreds of travellers in Italy and Germany Dec. 15.

Analysis: Although additional strikes are currently not anticipated, any labour upheaval could contribute to service disruptions while Ryanair continues to grapple with a shortage of standby pilots that has forced the carrier to cancel more than 20,000 flights between September 2017 and March 2018. Ryanair has downplayed the potential effects of the possible and planned strikes, though it has conceded that "disruptions may occur." Until the Dec. 15 acknowledgment, Ryanair management had indicated that it would not negotiate with pilots unofficially affiliated with organised labour groups, which paved the way for possible additional work stoppages.


Weather conditions and repair works may cause flight delays at airports in Frankfurt (FRA), Geneva (GVA), Manchester (MAN), Paris (ORY), Thessaloniki (SKG), Zurich (ZRH) early Dec. 18.

- Frankfurt (FRA/EDDF) - Very high delays*
- Geneva (GVA/LSGG) - Moderate-to-high delays*
- Manchester (MAN/EGCC) - Moderate-to-high delays*
- Paris (ORY/LFPO) - Low-to-moderate delays*
- Thessaloniki (SKG/LGTS) - Moderate delays*
• Zurich (ZRH/LSZH) - Moderate-to-high delays*

* The rating reflects average anticipated delays; many individual flights may be on time or - alternatively - delayed for longer periods.

Delay Index

Very High (greater than 45 min)

High (30-45 min)

Moderate (15-30 min)

Low (less than 15 min)

GERMANY (Country Risk Rating: Low) - Small Device Explodes in Veddel S-Bahn Station, Hamburg; Terrorism Not Suspected

A small, crude device exploded on the platform in the Veddel S-Bahn train station at around 1735 Dec. 17. The device scattered screws and other sharp objects. There were no injuries.

Analysis: Officials cordoned off the platform at Veddel station and the S3 train service to Veddel was halted; however, the station has since reopened. No one has claimed responsibility for the incident. Police do not suspect terrorism; their preliminary theory is that the device was a crude firework inside a plastic bag.

NETHERLANDS (Country Risk Rating: Low) - Security Incident at Amsterdam Schiphol Airport Determined Not to Be Terrorism-related

Amsterdam Schiphol Airport (AMS) reopened at around 1720 Dec. 15 following the evacuation of Schiphol Plaza, near passport control, after police opened fire on an alleged knife-wielding assailant. Authorities arrested the injured suspect and reported no other casualties.

Analysis: While the assailant’s motive remains unclear, police ruled out terrorism as a factor in the incident.

ROMANIA (Country Risk Rating: Medium) - Activists Protest in Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca over Judicial Reforms

Opposition activists associated with various organisations marched in Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca Dec. 17 to protest judicial reforms. Participants in Bucharest assembled at Victory Square before marching via Roman Square, University Square, Unirii Square, and United Nations Square to the Parliament building, where they held a rally. A similar demonstration occurred in Cluj-Napoca by the Memorandists Monument (Monumentul Memorandistilor). Both events drew thousands of participants. Additional protests will probably take place in central Bucharest Dec. 18, when lawmakers debate the reforms.

Analysis: Isolated clashes between protesters and police cannot be ruled out during any demonstrations. Foreign nationals are unlikely to be targeted, though bystanders could suffer collateral injury if violence erupts. Opposition activists have been engaging in an ongoing campaign to denounce the ruling Social Democratic Party (PSD). Trade unions, civil society groups, and opposition organisations have staged anti-corruption and anti-government demonstrations since February, when the PSD attempted to pass a controversial emergency decree intended to decriminalise some forms of official misconduct. The proposed reforms will proceed to the Senate Dec. 18. Protests will likely intensify in the upcoming week as the debate over reforms continues. Protests typically occur in the late afternoon and evenings on weekdays, as well as various times on weekends.
TURKEY (Country Risk Rating: High) - Activists Stage Anti-US Protests in Ankara and Diyarbakir over US Recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's Capital

Several political, labour, and civil society groups staged protests in Ankara and Diyarbakir Dec. 17 in response to US President Donald J. Trump's announcement that Washington will recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The gathering in Ankara took place in the city's Anadolu Square (also known as Tandogan Square) and was organised by the Civil Servants Union (Memur-Sen), with the support of several other labour organisations and civic groups. Several thousand people attended the event, which proceeded peacefully.

The rally in Diyarbakir was held at Station Square (Istasyon Meydani) and was organised by the Hur Dava Party (Free Cause Party, or Huda Par), a far right-wing Islamist political organisation. Significant protests with very large crowds occurred at that event, as well as in Kocaeli and Hatay cities.

**Analysis:** Trump's Dec. 6 announcement on Jerusalem was immediately met with large demonstrations near the US Embassy in Ankara, as well as its consulates in Istanbul and Adana, along with protests at mosques and other venues across Turkey. However, popular expressions of outrage on social media, as well as the frequency and size of protests over the issue, have diminished significantly over the subsequent 10 days. Nevertheless, sporadic demonstrations will probably continue in various parts of Turkey during the coming weeks before the protests abate completely; most will likely take place either after normal business hours on weekdays or during the afternoon on weekends.

Middle East/North Africa

ALGERIA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Security Forces Capture Suspected Militant in Bouira

On Dec. 14, the Ministry of Defence announced that security forces captured a suspected militant in Bouira Province. During the security operation, authorities reportedly also uncovered automatic weapons, ammunition, and explosives. Bouira is approximately 85 km (52 miles) southeast of Algiers.

**Analysis:** Bouira province is part of Algeria's restive Kabylie Region, where militancy is common. While security forces did not specify what militant group the suspect was associated with, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Islamic State (IS)-affiliated groups are present in the Kabylie region; however, AQIM affiliates are the most prevalent militant group operating in Algeria. AQIM-affiliated groups largely carry out low-level bombings targeting security forces.

LEBANON (Country Risk Rating: High) - UK Diplomat Found Murdered in Beirut; Terrorism Not Suspected

On Dec. 17, police said they found the body of a female British Embassy employee that had been dumped on the side of that city's Metn motorway. The killing reportedly took place early Dec. 16. The victim was last seen alive leaving a bar in the Gemmayzeh district of Beirut just after midnight Dec. 16.

**Analysis:** Preliminary reports indicate that the victim appears to have been sexually assaulted and then murdered; so far, police do not believe the murder was the result of terrorism or politically motivated. An investigation is underway.

SAUDI ARABIA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Projectile Strikes Al-Harth, Wounding Two People

On Dec. 15, a projectile fired from northern Yemen struck the town of Al-Harth, wounding two civilians. It was not immediately clear if the projectile was a rocket or mortar. Al-Harth is near the Saudi Arabia-Yemen border, in the Jazan Province.

**Analysis:** The projectile was likely launched by the Shi'a Al-Houthi rebels, who are active in northern Yemen.
Violence along the border region has been an ongoing issue since the Saudi-led campaign against the Al-Houthi rebels in Yemen began in March 2015. Cross-border gunfire, shelling, rocket fire, and raids often strike southern areas of Saudi Arabia; more than 150 Saudis - including civilians - have been killed. The Al-Houthis also possess an unknown number of ballistic missiles and launchers that belonged to the Yemeni military and have launched several missiles into southern Saudi Arabia. The Royal Saudi Air Defence Forces (RSADF) have been effective at minimising the ballistic missile threat inside Saudi Arabia. However, those countermeasures are largely ineffective against many of the shorter-range mortars and rockets more commonly used by the rebels along the border.

TUNISIA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Authorities Arrest Suspected Militant in Monastir

On Dec. 15, security forces arrested a suspected militant during a security crackdown in Monastir. According to authorities, the suspect had connections with militant groups in Syria. Monastir is located approximately 130 km (80 miles) southeast of central Tunis.

Analysis: The arrest demonstrates that authorities continue to maintain a heightened level of security nationwide although no major militant attack has occurred in Tunisia since dozens of IS militants from Libya clashed with security forces in Ben Guerdane in 2016. President Beji Caid Essebsi extended Tunisia's nationwide state of emergency for an additional three months on Nov. 11; the security measure has been renewed continuously since its initial implementation after a series of high-profile militant attacks in 2015. However, while officials remain concerned about the possibility of Tunisian militants returning from conflict regions abroad, domestic terrorist groups continue to pose a threat in parts of the country, particularly in the mountainous areas along Tunisia's border with Algeria. On Dec. 11, one soldier was killed, and six others were injured while pursuing militants in Jebel Chaambi in Kasserine governorate. The Al-Qaeda-affiliated Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade later claimed responsibility for the attack.

TUNISIA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Municipal Elections Further Delayed

On Dec. 16, Tunisia's Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE) said that municipal elections scheduled for March will be postponed to May 6. The election body said the delay provides additional time for more preparation. ISIE officials said that the decision to move the polls to a later date was taken at a public meeting attended by all political parties.

Analysis: Municipal polls were scheduled to take place in December, but prior to that, in September, the ISIE postponed them; the parties reached a consensus to hold them on March 25. Tunisia has not yet successfully held municipal elections following the 2011 uprising. Municipalities were dissolved after the uprising and replaced with interim bodies, which continue to run affairs. Political and economic instability continue to threaten Tunisia's democratic transition. The failure to hold municipal elections deals an additional blow to the credibility and perceived effectiveness of Prime Minister Youssef Chahed's government.

YEMEN (Country Risk Rating: Extreme) - US Drone Strike Targets Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula Militants in Yakla

On Dec. 15, a US drone strikes targeted Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) positions in Yakla, leading to an unknown number of casualties. Yakla is in Al-Bayda Province, 200 km (127 miles) northeast of Aden.

Analysis: This was at least the sixth time the US has targeted Yakla in 2017, indicating that, despite numerous drone strikes, AQAP continues to be active in the town. This further underscores the point that, while drone strikes may eliminate some low and mid-level fighters, their ranks are easily replaced by willing recruits. Tribal kinship in Yemen often eclipses affiliation to political parties or loyalty to the government. These deaths often enrage the tribal collective, prompting many to support AQAP and swell the group's ranks. The targeting of Yakla is particularly sensitive since it was the location of an infamous US raid Jan. 29 that killed 14 civilians and one US special-forces soldier. That raid generated considerable anti-US sentiment in Yemen.
North America

UNITED STATES (Country Risk Rating: **Medium**) - Elevated Valley Fever Reported in Arizona, Especially Maricopa County

Health officials in the state of Arizona have reported more than 1,335 Valley fever cases Nov. 1-Dec. 12, with the large majority occurring in Maricopa County and roughly 925 cases identified during November. This number compares to an average of 554 cases reported during November between 2014 and 2016.

**Analysis:** Valley fever is endemic to the states of Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah. According to the US CDC, approximately 10,000 cases are reported each year, mostly from Arizona and California. Cases of Valley fever typically increase after dust storms, which are most common in Arizona between June and September. Arizona has reported a total of roughly 6,270 cases since the start of 2017 through Dec. 12. A total of approximately 5,620 cases were identified during all of 2014, with 7,620 cases in 2015, and 6,100 cases in 2016.

Valley fever, also called coccidioidomycosis, is a respiratory disease caused by the fungus Coccidioides, which is commonly found in the soil and dust in the southwestern US. People become infected with Coccidioides when they breathe in fungal spores from the air. However, not all individuals develop the disease. Symptoms usually develop one to three weeks after exposure and typically include cough, shortness of breath, fever, night sweats, and muscle aches. Although infections are generally mild, severe cases can cause chronic pneumonia. Fewer than 1 percent of infected individuals develop meningitis or infection in the bones and joints. People with weakened immune systems and chronic medical conditions are at greatest risk of severe illness. Valley fever cannot be spread from person to person. Avoid areas with excessive dust, such as construction sites or excavation sites. Wear an N95 respirator when visiting sites with excessive dust. Stay inside when high winds blow soil and dust into the air. Close windows and doors, and use air conditioning systems to prevent soil and dust from entering buildings. Avoid activities that involve close contact with soil and dust, such as yard work, gardening, and digging. Clean skin injuries thoroughly with soap and water. Seek medical attention if symptoms develop within three weeks of being in affected areas.

UNITED STATES (Country Risk Rating: **Medium**) - Power Restored at Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson Airport; Major Flight Disruptions Likely to Continue

Authorities at Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport (ATL) announced that power had been restored at all concourses shortly after midnight on Dec. 18. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is expected to lift a full ground stop for all outbound and inbound traffic through ATL in the coming hours. However, significant flight service disruptions are expected to persist as airlines reposition aircraft and crews and work through passenger backlogs. Delta (DL), Southwest (WN), and United (UA) are expected to be the worst affected by the disruptions, which resulted in almost 1,200 flight cancellations. DL cancelled more than 300 flights scheduled for the morning of Dec. 18; lingering disruptions are likely through at least the afternoon.

**Analysis:** ATL was left without power from around 1300 Dec. 17. Georgia Power indicated that they suspected the cause of the outage to be a fire in an underground electrical facility. The outage affected all terminals, disrupting internet and data service, security and law enforcement equipment, baggage handling machinery, ticketing computers, status monitors, and automatic doors. The FAA's stop order effectively had a ripple effect across nearly all major airports in the North American air traffic control system, as aircraft and aircrews are no longer in place to fulfill scheduled flights.

UNITED STATES (Country Risk Rating: **Medium**) - Winds Ease Slightly; Thomas Fire Still Threatens Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, Calif.

The Thomas Fire continues to expand in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties, even as firefighters make headway to contain it. As of 1430 Dec. 17, the fire had burned approximately 108,860 hectares (269,000 acres) and was 40-percent contained. Authorities lifted some voluntary evacuation orders Dec. 17, but many voluntary and mandatory orders for Santa Barbara and Ventura counties remain in place. Authorities still expect full containment will not be achieved before Jan. 7;
however, the date could fluctuate depending on weather conditions. Future wildfire growth is likely along the complex’s western front. Personnel are focusing on structural defence and building containment lines above the Santa Barbara, Carpinteria, Summerland, and Montecito communities. Reports indicate that the fire has damaged or destroyed more than 1,100 structures, primarily residential buildings. The blaze is threatening an estimated 18,000 additional structures.

**Analysis:** As of Dec. 17, the following mandatory Evacuation Orders are in effect:

- **Santa Barbara County:** City of Santa Barbara - the area east of Highway 154 to Mission Canyon Road, and north of Highway 192 to East Camino Cielo. Montecito and Summerland Area - the area bounded by Highway 192, Highway 101, Toro Cyn, and Summit Road and Country Club. Montecito - the area bounded by Alameda Padre Serra/Highway 101, Highway 192, Mission Canyon Road, and Hot Springs and Summit Road
- **City of Fillmore:** Zone bounded by Sespe Creek, Burson Ranch, Los Padres National Forest, and the Fillmore city limits
- **Fillmore (Unincorporated):** The area bounded by Sespe Creek to the west, Burson Ranch to the east, Fillmore City limits to the south, and Los Padres National Forest boundary to the north; also, the area bounded by Hall Road to the west, Sespe Creek to the east, Fillmore City limits to the south, and Los Padres National Forest boundary to the north
- **City of Ventura:** North of Foothill Road from Cobblestone Road to Kimball Road
- **Ventura County (Unincorporated):** Rose Valley
- **Ventura County (North Coast Area):** The area of Highway 150 between Santa Ana and Highway 192 is still under an evacuation order but is now accessible to residents only

As of Dec. 17, Evacuation Warnings have been issued for the following areas; if you are in these areas, be prepared to leave:

- **Santa Barbara City:** the area from West Mission Street, east to S. Salinas Street from Highway 101, to Alameda Padre Serra
- **Santa Barbara County:** the area west of Santa Barbara City, north to San Marcos Road to Highway 154, and north of Cathedral Oaks Road to the intersection of Highway 154 and north to San Marcos
- **Santa Barbara County:** the area bounded by Constance, Alameda Padre Serra, and South Salinas on the north and east, Highway 101 on the south and West Mission Street to State Street on the west **Santa Barbara County:** All areas south of Highway 101 to the coast and west of the Zoo to San Ysidro Road

**Weather Forecast - Long-term Wind Advisory and Red Flag warnings are finally set to expire by 2000 Dec. 17.** Forecasters expect winds largely to subside by Dec. 18, and they are unlikely to intensify again at least through Dec. 20. Humidity levels are also likely to increase through Dec. 20, which will aid firefighters.

**Transport - As of Dec. 17, all major highways in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties were open.** Some local roads are closed within the wildfire perimeter and mandatory evacuation zones, including SR-33 (between Fairview Road in Ojai to Lockwood Valley Road in Los Padres National Forest), SR-150 (between Ojai and Santa Paula), SR-154 (between the SR-246 junction and the SR-192 junction), and SR-192 (between the SR-150 junction and Camino Viejo Road in Montecito). Officials could impose intermittent, short-notice road closures in the coming days due to fire and emergency response activity, including along US 101 near the Santa Barbara/Ventura county line. A closure of US 101 would cause major transport and logistics disruptions, as it is the only direct highway link between Santa Barbara County and Los Angeles. The shortest alternative route between the two cities is roughly 245 km (150 miles) longer through Kern County.

The wildfire has not affected flight operations at Los Angeles area airports, but air traffic has been prohibited below FL010 above the complex to facilitate a safe environment for aerial firefighting efforts.
Extractives - In addition to destroying hundreds of homes, the Thomas Fire has caused extensive damage to oil and gas fields in Ventura County. Operators have not released information about the extent of damage to specific installations, but the Thomas Fire has burned areas where numerous wellheads, storage tanks, and waterflood, wastewater, compression, transmission, and loading and offloading facilities are located at the Ventura, San Miguelito, and Rincon fields. The fire has also damaged several smaller fields near Ojai. The fire perimeter has expanded westward to the DCOR Rincon, PACOPS La Conchita, and the Venoco Carpinteria processing facilities. If these plants are damaged or destroyed, oil and gas cannot be transferred onshore from platforms A, B, C, Gail, Grace, Habitat, Henry, Hillhouse, Hogan, and Houchin in the eastern Santa Barbara Basin. The fire has most likely compromised pipelines in Ventura County, which could significantly affect crude deliveries to refineries in Los Angeles County.

Russia/CIS

RUSSIA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Police Arrest Terror Cell in St. Petersburg

According to media reports emerging Dec. 16 and 17, the Federal Security Service (FSB) detained seven alleged members of a terror cell that were planning a weekend attack on targets in St. Petersburg. The group was allegedly planning attacks on Kazan Cathedral and other targets. In raids overnight Dec. 13-14, the FSB arrested the suspects and seized "large amounts" of explosive materials, parts for improvised explosive devices, automatic weapons, ammunition, and extremist literature, and dismantled a bomb-making workshop. The group confessed to coordinating with Islamic State (IS) handlers via Telegram, a cloud-based instant messaging service. The FSB has ordered Telegram to surrender its encryption keys; there is no word yet whether Telegram will cooperate.

Analysis: The arrests follow another terror plot foiled by the FSB that supposedly targeted New Years' celebrations and the upcoming presidential elections. It is not yet clear whether the attacks were being directed in retaliation for Russia's recent declaration of "victory" over IS in Syria and the imminent Russian withdrawal of forces from that country. It is also unclear whether there is a connection between the St. Petersburg cell and a counterterror operation in Dagestan Dec. 16, in which three suspected terrorists were shot dead. St. Petersburg was the site of a terrorist attack on the city's Metro April 3, in which at least 14 people were killed, and 50 were injured.

RUSSIA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Tight Security in Central Moscow during New Year and Orthodox Christmas Celebrations Dec. 20-Jan. 9

Authorities in Moscow will significantly boost security throughout the city during Russia's traditional holiday season. The municipality will deploy approximately 13,000 police and the National Guard officers; street closures are likely near important holiday event venues. Additionally, activities associated with New Year celebrations Dec. 31-Jan. 1, and the Russian Orthodox Christmas Jan. 7 will cause significant traffic disruptions in downtown Moscow. The Russian capital will host about 600 official holiday-related events between Dec. 20-Jan. 9. The city's traffic police are advising motorists to plan driving routes in advance and use public transport instead of bringing private vehicles into central Moscow.

Analysis: Petty crime, especially pickpocketing and other forms of theft, typically increase during such public celebrations. There may also be a higher risk of alcohol-related incidents, including assault, at some events. Russia in general has been experiencing a wave of telephone hoax bomb threats nationwide since September. The threats will probably continue through the holiday season, potentially prompting mass evacuations at transport hubs, hotels, banks, shopping malls, and educational establishments in Moscow. Authorities respond to every warning call as a matter of standard security procedure; no explosives have been found since the wave of threats began.

RUSSIA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Truck Drivers Strike over Road Tax

Long-distance truck drivers across Russia began a 10-day protest strike Dec. 15. The drivers are renewing an earlier protest against the Platon road-tax system after the government gaoloed two of their leaders and designated the United Truckers of Russia group a "foreign agent." So far, there have been few protests - drivers participating in the action are
mainly keeping their vehicles off the roads - but some protests have been reported in Chita city and Yekaterinburg. The strike is slated to last through Dec. 25.

**Analysis:** So far, there has been no impact on the nationwide delivery of goods; an earlier protest in late March had little impact on cargo transport. The Russian government implemented the Platon national truck toll system on Nov. 15, 2015. The tariff rates, which doubled on April 15, are linked to distances travelled on federal roads by trucks with cargo loads of 12 tonnes or more. Opponents of the Platon system say that it could hike transportation costs by up to 20 percent and force small cargo truck operators out of business. The system, implemented in southern and eastern Russia, affects the so-called grey transportation market, where movement of cargo is not registered or reported. Russian President Vladimir Putin often relies on the “foreign agent” law to suppress opposition and muzzle dissent.

South Pacific/Oceania

**AUSTRALIA** (Country Risk Rating: **Low**) - Officials Identify Poliovirus-positive Environmental Samples in Melbourne

Health officials detected poliovirus in sewage samples collected from the Western Treatment Plant in Melbourne, Australia, during routine surveillance. According to Victoria Department of Health and Human Services, the amount of the virus detected is too small to cause infection. There are currently no known cases of poliovirus in Australia, and the risk of infection remains negligible.

**Analysis:** This event highlights the persistent threat of polio reintroduction that exists until polio is eradicated worldwide. According to Victoria health officials, the polio vaccination rate in the region is above 95 percent. The most recent locally acquired case of polio in Australia was reported in 1972. Polio primarily spreads through contact with infectious faecal material, sometimes found in contaminated food and water. Infections are generally mild, but one in 200 cases leads to irreversible paralysis. Among those victims, 5-10-percent die when respiratory muscles become affected. The risk of paralysis increases with age. There is no specific treatment for polio.

**NEW ZEALAND** (Country Risk Rating: **Low**) - Severe Weather Forecast for Central, Northeastern North Island

A northward-moving storm front is expected to intensify in the evening of Dec. 18, bringing rainfall and thunderstorms to parts of North Island. New Zealand's MetService predicts the most severe thunderstorms are likely in central and northeastern areas of the island, including Northland, Auckland, Coromandel Peninsula, Bay of Plenty, Rotorua, Taupo, Taihape, Hawkes Bay, and Gisborne. Officials project that as much as 40 mm (1.5 inches) of rainfall per hour could occur in these areas through early Dec. 19. Rainfall has already affected western areas of the island, though the storm produced less precipitation than previously forecast.

**Analysis:** Localised flash flooding and flooding along waterways are possible in affected areas. Heavy rainfall may also produce mudslides, especially in hilly areas. Although widespread business disruptions are not anticipated, ground transport could experience delays, especially during periods of torrential downpours and reduced visibility. Ponding on roadways could lead to closures and diversions without warning. Utility outages may also occur.