No Changes This Week:

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, Enuge 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 25, 2017**

**News summary**

**Africa**

**CAMEROON** - Foreign Governments Advise against Travel in Western Regions amid Increasing Anglophone Militant Attacks

**CONGO** - Government Signs Ceasefire with Pool Department Rebel Group

**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO** - Ugandan Army Targets Militant Group in Eastern Region

**KENYA** - Kenya Railways Suspends Commuter Rail Service in Nairobi

**KENYA** - Nurses at Public Hospitals in Mombasa Threaten to Launch Indefinite Strike

**MOZAMBIQUE** - Threat of Clashes between Militants, Security Personnel Increases in Cabo Delgado Province as Amnesty Deadline Expires

**SOMALIA** - Landmine Reportedly Cause of Explosion in Yaqshid, Mogadishu
**Asia**

**AFGHANISTAN** - Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Suicide Bombing in Kabul

**BANGLADESH** - Autorickshaw Drivers to Stage 48-hour strike in Dhaka and Chittagong

**CAMBODIA and VIETNAM** - Typhoon Tembin Intensifies, Moves Southward

**INDIA** - RSRTC Workers Planning Protests throughout Rajasthan

**INDIA** - Unionised Bank Employees Indefinitely Postpone Proposed Strike

**INDONESIA** - Government Lifts Alert Status on Bali, though Small Eruptions Continue at Mount Agung

**NORTH KOREA** - UN Approves New Sanctions

**PAKISTAN** - Authorities to Bolster Security in Sindh Province for Anniversary of Former Prime Minister's Death

**PAKISTAN** - Search Ongoing for Chinese National Missing in Kahuta

**PAKISTAN** - Teachers Plan Indefinite Sit-in Protest at Bilawal Roundabout, Karachi

**PHILIPPINES** - At least 37 Likely Killed in Fire at Shopping Mall in Davao

**PHILIPPINES** - Hundreds of People Dead or Missing after TS Vinta Landfall in Southern Palawan

**Caribbean**

**JAMAICA** - Police Presence Reduced as Jamaica Constabulary Force Officers Stage Sickout

**Central/South America**

**BOLIVIA** - Doctors and Medical Students Announce Additional Strikes and Protests

**HONDURAS** - Opposition Figures Call for Renewed Protests despite Opposition Candidate's Resignation

**PERU** - Protest at Plaza San Martin, Lima after Former President Pardoned

**Europe**

**FINLAND** - Unionised Bank Employees to Strike Nationwide

**POLAND** - Elevated Hepatitis A Activity Reported Nationwide in December

**Middle East/North Africa**

**EGYPT** - Security Forces Kill Nine Suspected Militants during Raid in Ash Sharqia
EGYPT - Unidentified assailants kill two, wound six in shooting at cafe in El Ayat

ISRAEL - Vehicle explosion injures one in Yarka; terrorism not suspected

JORDAN - Activists continue nationwide demonstrations following US endorsement of Jerusalem as capital of Israel

MOROCCO - Activists stage pro-Palestinian rally in Oujda

MOROCCO - Death of two locals triggers protests in Jerada

TUNISIA - Authorities in Tunis arrest nine suspected members of Al-Qaeda militant cell

TUNISIA and UNITED ARAB EMIRATES - Several Emirates Airlines flights temporarily suspended

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES - Road and flight disruptions possible in UAE through March 2018 due to winter fog

North America

CANADA - Magnitude-5.0 earthquake in Yukon Territory

MEXICO - Elevated Zika virus activity reported in central and northeastern regions September-December

UNITED STATES - All Thomas fire evacuations lifted in Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, Calif.

UNITED STATES - Large fire near Havre, Mont. Prompts closure of Highway 87

Russia/CIS

RUSSIA - Opposition activists stage unauthorised rally in Moscow

South Pacific/Oceania

NEW ZEALAND - Elevated pertussis activity reported in Nelson area October-December

Africa

CAMEROON (Country Risk Rating: High) - Foreign governments advise against travel in western regions amid increasing anglophone militant attacks

Attacks by secessionist militants continue to occur weekly in Cameroon's predominantly English-speaking Northwest and Southwest regions, prompting stringent security measures. Militant activity and counterinsurgency operations occur with greater frequency near Mamfe, Southwest Region, and Bamenda, Northwest Region, but are possible throughout the western regions. The potential for collateral damage during clashes between insurgents and government troops poses a severe threat to personal safety. The US Embassy in Yaounde issued a travel warning Dec. 21, indefinitely advising against all travel to Manyu Division - including Mamfe - as well as all locations within 10 miles of the Nigerian border in the Southwest Region. Moreover, the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office advises against travel to Mamfe and Bamenda.
due to the threat of violence as of Dec. 22. Bamenda is about 225 km (140 miles) north-northeast of Douala and 280 km (174 miles) northwest of Yaounde. Mamfe is around 195 km (121 miles) north of Douala.

Analysis: Military personnel are reportedly deployed to bolster local police; authorities may establish roadblocks, conduct vehicle searches, and periodically close land-border crossings with Nigeria. Officers are systematically reviewing personal identification and freight delivery documentation for the drivers of all public and private vehicles in some urban areas. Security measures and restrictions could cause delays to ground transportation and freight deliveries. The government has imposed nighttime curfews and periodic bans on motorcycle use; restrictions could be extended or intensified without warning. Authorities are restricting telecommunications networks in the western regions, which will likely impede the transmission of information related to security measures and force the use of virtual private networks (VPN) to bypass restrictions.

Anglophone residents accused security personnel of human rights abuses, torture, sexual assault, and looting, following a crackdown on protests in October. Additional large-scale demonstrations are unlikely; security forces will likely use tear gas and gunfire to disperse activist attempts to mobilise. Residents may use intermittent "villes mortes" (general strikes) as an indirect form of protest.

Anglophone militant attacks - including ambushes, bombings, and raids targeting security forces - that began in September are increasingly frequent and sophisticated, despite widespread security deployments. Gunmen stole a large quantity of weaponry during an assault that killed four soldiers near Mamfe Nov. 29 and subsequently conducted coordinated convoy ambushes and raids on fixed positions in the same area Nov. 30, Dec. 7, and 18. According to the government, militant attacks have killed at least 15 security personnel, and secessionists have torched public buildings, including schools, hospitals, town halls, and courts. Separatists are suspected of operating back and forth across the border with Nigeria, where 28,000 people have reportedly fled, and the UN has established refugee camps to accommodate 40,000 refugees in anticipation of further violence.

Stringent security measures that affect the general populace - including curfews, mass arrests, and public assembly bans - are likely increasing moderate Anglophone activists’ support for armed resistance. Over the past year, the government has used increasingly violent tactics to suppress protests in Anglophone regions. The demonstrations began as requests for government resources and expanded to include demands for the devolution of political power. Significant violence during marches in the western regions Oct. 1 - when radical activists called for an independent state of Ambazonia - likely polarised opposition to the French-speaking central government. Autocratic President Paul Biya has repeatedly rejected requests by moderates for federal autonomy in the English-speaking regions and denounced militant calls for independence.

Congo (Country Risk Rating: Medium) - Government Signs Ceasefire with Pool Department Rebel Group

Government officials signed a ceasefire agreement with a rebel group active in Pool Department Dec. 23. The ceasefire takes effect immediately and will see rebels loyal to militia chief Frederic Bintsamou (also known as Pastor Ntumi) halt violent activities, disarm, and permit free movement within the Pool Department. In exchange, the government said that it will halt its offensive against the group and ease security restrictions in the department, allowing residents to travel to their homes.

Analysis: The ceasefire will likely increase stability in southwestern Pool Department, which has been marred by periodic violence since April 2016. Bintsamou’s fighters largely disbanded after a 2003 peace agreement, but the rebels became active again in protest of the March 2016 re-election of President Denis Sassou Nguesso. The government launched air raids on villages in the region, and periodic fighting prompted more than 138,000 people to flee in the ensuing months. The conflict also affected economic growth, as Pool Department surrounds Brazzaville, making it difficult to transport shipments to the main oil port. Rebels regularly stopped trains and cars that tried to travel through the area.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (Country Risk Rating: High) - Ugandan Army Targets Militant Group in Eastern Region
On Dec. 22, the Ugandan army attacked training camps run by the militant group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In addition to air strikes, the Ugandan army also fired long-range weapons from inside Uganda against ADF positions. The exact locations of the strikes are not known, although they likely took place in North Kivu Province.

Analysis: The ADF is suspected of killing 14 Tanzanian troops with the UN Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) in an overnight attack Dec. 7-8 on their base in Semuliki, North Kivu Province, near the Ugandan border. The attack was the deadliest against a UN mission in 24 years. Composed of Islamist rebels opposed to Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, the ADF has been present in the DRC since the late 1990s. The number of ADF fighters in eastern DRC is estimated at 400. Both Rwanda and Uganda have previously intervened militarily in eastern DRC, officially to counter the threat posed by multiple rebel groups operating in the area. However, the Rwandan army, in particular, has been accused of exploiting the area’s immense mineral wealth under the cover of military operations.

KENYA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Kenya Railways Suspends Commuter Rail Service in Nairobi

Kenya Railways Corporation (KRC) announced Dec. 23 that it is suspending service on the Nairobi commuter rail line through Jan. 1. KRC did not disclose why service is being suspended on the rail line, which has stops in Embakasi, Kikuyu, Ruiru, and Syokimau.

Analysis: The suspension may prompt elevated demand for alternative mass transport, including buses. The Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), which connects Mombasa and Nairobi, remains operational.

KENYA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Nurses at Public Hospitals in Mombasa Threaten to Launch Indefinite Strike

Nurses at public hospitals in Mombasa have threatened to launch an indefinite strike Dec. 25. The Mombasa branch of the Kenya National Union of Nurses is sponsoring the walkout to protest the failure of the government to pay overdue salaries. Negotiations to avert the action are ongoing.

Analysis: If the strike goes ahead, significant disruptions are possible at public hospitals in Mombasa for both emergency and non-emergency care. Doctors may turn away patients at some facilities due to limited personnel. Those needing medical assistance may be forced to travel outside of Mombasa or utilise private clinics and hospitals. While no specific plans for demonstrations have been announced, nurses could stage protest marches or rallies as part of their labour action. Violence is possible if police use force to disperse protesters. The upcoming strike follows a four-month nationwide walkout by nurses that began in June. That action prompted major disruptions at public hospitals across the country.

MOZAMBIQUE (Country Risk Rating: High) - Threat of Clashes between Militants, Security Personnel Increases in Cabo Delgado Province as Amnesty Deadline Expires

Security forces are due to begin conducting search operations for suspected Islamist gunmen in northern Cabo Delgado Province following the expiration of an amnesty deadline Dec. 22. The head of Mozambique’s police offered militants the opportunity to surrender and disarm Dec. 14, but attacks on security forces have continued. The counterinsurgency operations will likely initially focus on forested areas in Mocimboa da Praia District, where militant activity appears to be concentrated.

Analysis: Authorities will likely increase security measures in northern Cabo Delgado Province over the coming days. Exchanges of gunfire are possible if police or soldiers encounter resistance from suspects; any use of artillery during such operations will pose a severe threat to property and personal safety. Security personnel may establish roadblocks, conduct vehicle searches, and enforce curfews and movement restrictions without warning. Security measures and restrictions could cause ground transportation and freight delivery delays.

The government is struggling to contain a growing Islamist threat, and an indiscriminate crackdown by security forces could potentially drive up militant recruitment. Militants used debris to force a Rapid Response Unit (UIR) convoy conducting a resupply mission from the town of Mocimboa da Praia to forces near Mitumbate to come to
a halt Dec. 17 and attacked officers that attempted to clear the road. The assailants killed the National Director of Reconnaissance and wounded five other personnel. Gunmen claiming to be "Al-Shabaab" conducted similar raids and ambushes on security personnel in November and October, killing several officers. Authorities have closed mosques in the province and conducted mass arrests in communities perceived to be sympathetic to militants. In the past two months, officials charged 208 people - including 43 foreign nationals - with terrorism-related offences, indicating the insurgency has transnational appeal. However, there is currently little other evidence to connect the militants with the Somali Islamist militant organisation of the same name or international extremist Islamist groups such as Al-Qaeda or Islamic State.

SOMALIA (Country Risk Rating: Extreme) - Landmine Reportedly Cause of Explosion in Yaqshid, Mogadishu

Media reports suggest that a landmine was the cause of the large explosion that occurred in Yaqshid district, Mogadishu, the afternoon of Dec. 23. Three civilians were injured in the blast. The target was reportedly an African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) convoy.

Analysis: No group has claimed responsibility for the incident, but Al-Shabaab militants regularly stage attacks in Mogadishu.

Asia

AFGHANISTAN (Country Risk Rating: Extreme) - Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Suicide Bombing in Kabul

The Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan has claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing that occurred outside a compound of the National Directorate of Security in Kabul's Police District 9 at about 0800 Dec. 25. The blast, which reportedly took place at the intelligence agency's entrance close to Abdul Haq Square, killed at least six people and wounded three others.

Analysis: Officials will probably block access to the area, and localised traffic disruptions are likely in the coming hours.

BANGLADESH (Country Risk Rating: High) - Autorickshaw Drivers to Stage 48-hour strike in Dhaka and Chittagong

Drivers of compressed natural gas (CNG)-run autorickshaws plan to stage a 48-hour strike in Dhaka and Chittagong Dec. 27-28, as part of an ongoing campaign for allocation of new vehicles and cancellation of app-based transport services, among other demands. The Dhaka and Chittagong chapters of the CNG Auto-rickshaw Workers' Unity Council (CAWUC) launched the campaign in late November; they have threatened to launch an indefinite strike if their demands are not met by Jan. 15.

Analysis: The metropolitan areas of Dhaka and Chittagong are each serviced by nearly 10,000 CNG-run autorickshaws. Unless averted, the Dec. 27-28 strike will likely significantly affect autorickshaw availability in both cities and may cause crowded conditions on alternative mass transit, such as buses and taxis, especially during peak morning and evening travel hours. Higher employee absenteeism is possible if workers are unable to arrange other transport, though severe business disruptions are unlikely.

The protesting drivers may stage demonstrations in conjunction with the strike; likely venues in Dhaka include the National Press Club, Bangladesh Secretariat, and the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority. The protests could intensify traffic congestion in the surrounding area. Localised clashes with police and other minor security incidents cannot be ruled out, though major violence is unlikely.
CAMBODIA (Country Risk Rating: Medium) and VIETNAM (Country Risk Rating: Medium) - Typhoon Tembin Intensifies, Moves Southward

Typhoon Tembin continues to track westward through the South China Sea after causing significant damage, flooding, and landslides in the southern Philippines. While the storm intensified slightly as it tracked over the South China Sea, forecasters believe Tembin will weaken into a tropical storm before making landfall in extreme southern Vietnam late Dec. 25. As of 0400 ICT Dec. 25, the centre of circulation was about 450 km (280 miles) southeast of Ho Chi Minh City. Tembin will probably continue to weaken as it skirts over the southern tip of Vietnam and enters the Gulf of Thailand Dec. 26. The storm will then affect Cambodia and southern Thailand as it passes Dec. 26-27.

Analysis: The system may bring sustained winds of 100 kph (62 mph), along with higher gusts, to southern Vietnam as it makes landfall. Heavy rainfall is also likely in much of Cambodia and southern Thailand. Flash flooding is possible in areas experiencing heavy rainfall, while storm surge could produce coastal flooding. Landslides are also possible. High wind gusts could down trees and utility lines; power outages are possible.

The Vietnamese government has begun taking precautions in advance of the storm's arrival. Officials have begun evacuating around 500,000 people from coastal areas in the path of the storm, including Bac Lieu, Ben Tre, Ca Mau, Kien Giang, Soc Trang, and Vung Tau provinces. Officials have also issued small craft advisories and restricted travel from 1200 Dec. 25 to 1200 Dec. 26. Many government offices and schools will close in advance of the storm.

Ground and maritime transport disruptions are likely in southern Vietnam and Cambodia through at least late Dec. 26. Heavy rainfall and/or landslides have the potential to block roads and/or wash away bridges, leading to severe traffic disruptions. Rail disruptions are also possible. Authorities may suspend shipping operations at ports in southern Vietnam. Flight disruptions are possible at Ho Chi Minh City (SGN) and other regional airports.

INDIA (Country Risk Rating: High) - RSRTC Workers Planning Protests throughout Rajasthan

Rajasthan State Roadways Transportation Corporation (RSRTC) workers are planning to stage protests across Rajasthan State Dec. 28 to pressure the government to provide overdue bonus payments.

Analysis: Though the transport workers have not revealed plans to strike, public transport may be reduced if a large number of RSRTC workers join in the protests. Widespread unrest is not anticipated, but localised clashes cannot be ruled out. The RSRTC has not announced specific protest sites, but gatherings may occur in all major cities and larger towns. The largest demonstration will probably take place in the state capital Jaipur.

INDIA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Unionised Bank Employees Indefinitely Postpone Proposed Strike

Two major banking sector unions - the All India Bank Employees’ Association (AIBEA) and the All India Bank Officers’ Association (AIBOA) - have indefinitely postponed an industrywide strike originally planned for Dec. 27. The decision came after IDBI Bank management assured the unions’ representatives that management would resolve the issue of a long-pending wage revision for IDBI Bank employees within a month. The assurance was made in a meeting convened by the Chief Labour Commissioner Dec. 20.

Analysis: The United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) - which comprises all nine unions in the Indian banking sector - had supported the strike. Participation in the walkout would have been high if the strike had proceeded as planned.

INDONESIA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Government Lifts Alert Status on Bali, though Small Eruptions Continue at Mount Agung

The government has revoked the alert status on Bali as of Dec. 22, noting that activity at Mount Agung is unlikely to affect anyone not within a 10-km (6-mile) exclusion zone around the volcano. The alert status within the 10-km zone remains at
The volcano became active in September, prompting the evacuation of 140,000 people. Early Nov. 26, three minor eruptions emitted ash and smoke up to 4,000 metres (13,120 feet) into the air. Prevailing winds carried the plumes eastward, prompting the issuance of a red aviation alert, which signifies that an eruption with significant ash emission is imminent or underway. The alert prompted major flight disruptions at DPS through Nov. 29 and at LOP Nov. 30-Dec. 1. The eruptions and subsequent flight disruptions prompted several governments to advise their citizens to defer travel to Bali until volcanic activity subsided. The volcano's last major eruption occurred in 1963 and killed nearly 1,600 people. Dangerous pyroclastic flows and lahars (debris flows) could occur in valleys and watercourses descending from the slopes of Mount Agung, but these hazards pose no direct threats to Denpasar or tourist areas southwest of the volcano. Heavy ashfall and poor visibility may cause significant ground transport disruptions on Bali.

PAKISTAN (Country Risk Rating: High) - Authorities to Bolster Security in Sindh Province for Anniversary of Former Prime Minister's Death

Authorities plan to significantly bolster security in Pakistan's Sindh Province, particularly in Larkana, for the observance of the 10th anniversary of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's death Dec. 27. Tens of thousands of people, including supporters and activists of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), will probably congregate and pay homage at the Bhutto's family mausoleum in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh.

Analysis: Officials intend to deploy large numbers of security personnel in Larkana in northwest Sindh Province. Increased security measures will likely include CCTV monitoring, metal detectors, bag and body searches, road closures, and special parking arrangements. Authorities will also bolster security at airports in Sindh, including Karachi's Jinnah International Airport (KHI) and Sukkur Airport (SKZ), which may result in immigration and screening delays. Large gatherings will almost certainly cause traffic congestion in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh and surrounding areas.

Terrorism may be a concern during the commemoration of the death anniversary, though authorities have not publicised any specific threats. During the 2016 anniversary observance, intelligence agencies warned of possible
terrorist attacks, particularly in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh, where a large number of PPP supporters and leaders gathered.

PAKISTAN (Country Risk Rating: High) - Search Ongoing for Chinese National Missing in Kahuta

Authorities are continuing a search for a Chinese engineer who went missing in Kahuta, Punjab Province, Dec. 20. The victim worked at the Karot Power Plant and was last seen walking out of a tunnel while talking on his telephone. Investigators are determining whether he may have slipped into a nearby river and drowned, though divers have yet to find any evidence. Police noted that the victim's cellular phone has been turned off, prompting the possibility that the foreign national was kidnapped. Seven Pakistani workers who were on shift with the victim have been detained for questioning.

Analysis: The Chinese national disappeared just weeks after the Chinese Embassy in Islamabad issued a security message Dec. 8 warning of possible militant attacks on Chinese organisations and citizens in Pakistan. Expatriates may be targeted for kidnapping as foreigners are typically able to pay higher ransoms or provide better bargaining chips with the government. However, Chinese nationals may be especially targeted. Several domestic Islamist and separatist militant groups are opposed to Beijing's growing influence in the country, and have conducted a spate of targeted attacks on Chinese nationals and projects - especially the high-profile Chinese-funded China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) - in recent years. The Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the execution of two Chinese nationals who had been kidnapped in Quetta, Balochistan Province, in late May. Following the attacks, the federal government deployed more 15,000 military personnel to protect Chinese nationals and interests in the country.

PAKISTAN (Country Risk Rating: High) - Teachers Plan Indefinite Sit-in Protest at Bilawal Roundabout, Karachi

The New Teachers Action Committee (NTAC) has threatened to hold an indefinite sit-in protest at the Bilawal roundabout in Karachi's Clifton neighbourhood starting Dec. 25. The protest has been called over unpaid teacher salaries. Organisers claim to have mobilised teachers from across Sindh province, meaning that several hundred to a few thousand could participate.

Analysis: Expect increased security and localised traffic delays near the protest site. Major security disturbances are unlikely, though clashes with police could erupt, particularly if authorities forcibly try to disperse the gathering. In a related protest held on Nov. 23, police used baton charges to disperse the crowd, injuring 10 participants. Teacher protests held over different concerns in Karachi in recent days were also marred with isolated clashes.

PHILIPPINES (Country Risk Rating: Medium) - At least 37 Likely Killed in Fire at Shopping Mall in Davao

A fire that broke out mid-morning Dec. 23 is likely to have killed at least 37 employees of the NCCC Mall. Only one body has been recovered, but authorities report 36 people remain trapped; given the intensity of the fire, there is officials believe these people have almost certainly died. The fire started on the top floor of the four-storey mall, which - except for a grocery on the ground floor - was still closed to the public. Emergency responders finally brought the blaze under control early Dec. 24, officials are searching for people potentially trapped inside the building. So far, investigators have not determined the cause of the blaze.

Analysis: Police have blocked off roads around the mall to facilitate the movement of emergency vehicles.

PHILIPPINES (Country Risk Rating: Medium) - Hundreds of People Dead or Missing after TS Vinta Landfall in Southern Palawan

The passage of Tropical Storm Vinta (international name: Tembin) Dec. 22 has caused significant disruptions in the southern Philippines. Preliminary estimates indicate that the storm may have killed at least 120 people - another 160 or more remain missing. The casualty count is likely to increase as reports emerge from more remote locations. At least 70,000 people have been forced to evacuate their homes. Officials said that the number of people affected was higher than expected since many chose not to heed warnings on the storm's approach.
The storm brought torrential rainfall, which caused localised and areal flooding, as well as mudslides; the hardest hit areas include Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, and the Zamboanga Peninsula. Power outages are affecting parts of Agusan del Sur, Bukidnon, Davao del Norte, Davao Oriental, Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Misamis Oriental, Surigao del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, and Zamboanga Sibugay. The government of Lanao del Sur has declared a state of calamity for the entire province, including Marawi City.

The Kabacan River overflowed its banks early Dec. 23, inundating at least 10 villages. The National Highway between North Cotabato and Maguindanao has been flooded in multiple locations. The storm has also been blamed for the sinking of a passenger ferry off Quezon Province Dec. 21, necessitating the rescue of more than 2050 passengers and crew; five people died.

Analysis: Additional rainfall is forecast at least through Dec. 29 for most of the southern Philippines, including areas affected by Vinta, which could result in more flooding and mudslides. Officials at airports and seaports could halt operations if local conditions worsen.

Caribbean
JAMAICA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Police Presence Reduced as Jamaica Constabulary Force Officers Stage Sickout

A number of officers with the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF), the country's main law-enforcement agency, are participating in staged a sickout Dec. 23, resulting in reduced police coverage throughout the country. Additional sickouts are possible in the coming days and weeks. Response times for emergency calls may be slow, and criminals may take advantage of the situation by committing street crimes.

Analysis: The sickouts are intended to apply pressure to the government, which is currently engaged in salary negotiations with the police, while technically avoiding an illegal police strike. The Dec. 23 action took place after prior sickouts; the JCF announced that approximately 10 percent of its 12,000 officers claimed to be too sick to work during the week of Dec. 10-16, a percentage far above what would normally be expected due to true illness.

Central/South America
BOLIVIA (Country Risk Rating: Medium) - Doctors and Medical Students Announce Additional Strikes and Protests

Medical students and doctors staged demonstrations and roadblocks across Bolivia Dec. 23. Many government-run medical centres closed or refused to accept non-emergency cases as part of the action. An association of dentists also intends to hold a 24-hour strike in Cochabamba Dec. 26 in support of the doctors.

Analysis: The protests are in response to a new law that allows the government to imprison doctors who, through negligence and malpractice, cause the death of a patient. While medical students and doctors have held small protests and many employees of government-run medical centres have been on strike since late September, the demonstrations became much more violent on Dec. 22, when protesters threw stones at police, who responded by firing tear gas; at least 17 people were injured. The Bolivian Workers' Centre (COB), Bolivia's largest labour union, said it will hold an emergency meeting to discuss how the COB can contribute to the medical protests. This meeting will likely produce a recommendation that COB workers in sectors unrelated to medicine organise sympathy strikes and protests, which may result in even more confrontational demonstrations.

HONDURAS (Country Risk Rating: High) - Opposition Figures Call for Renewed Protests despite Opposition Candidate’s Resignation
Opposition protests will likely continue in Honduras through late December following the controversial Nov. 26 elections. Opposition presidential candidate Salvador Nasralla announced Dec. 23 that he is resigning from his Opposition Alliance Against the Dictatorship party and said he would return to private life; however, Nasralla has refused to concede defeat in the vote, which he maintains was marred by fraud, and continues to refer to himself as the president-elect. Former president Manuel Zelaya, who supported Nasralla, said that anti-government protests will continue despite the resignation. Though Nasralla had previously said that protests would be put “on pause” until the new year, Zelaya has pledged a “Christmas of resistance,” and vowed to announce new demonstrations designed to prevent President Juan Orlando Hernandez from being sworn into his second term in late January.

Analysis: Protests will likely occur near the presidential palace and other government buildings in Tegucigalpa. Rallies are also probable outside of embassies of countries that have recognised Hernandez as the winner of the vote, including Canada, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, and the US. Demonstrators may attempt to block highways throughout the country, particularly those that lead to Tegucigalpa. Police will likely fire tear gas and live rounds to disperse unauthorised rallies. Expect ground transport disruptions near any protests. Nasralla’s resignation follows US acknowledgement of Hernandez as the victor in the vote Dec. 22. The recognition by the US comes despite the Organisations of American States (OAS) having recently released statistical evidence of electoral fraud and calling for new elections. Officials from the OAS and the UN also jointly issued a statement accusing the Honduran armed forces of having detained and tortured opposition supporters and of causing the deaths of a dozen protesters through excessive force. The OAS and UN statements provoked further protests in Honduras, including a Dec. 21 march to the US Embassy. Nasralla’s resignation will likely reduce the number of demonstrators in the streets. However, Zelaya’s supporters in the LIBRE party, who have a history of raucous demonstrations, may escalate their efforts by launching several high-profile events.

PERU (Country Risk Rating: Medium) - Protest at Plaza San Martin, Lima after Former President Pardoned

Demonstrators gathered in the Plaza San Martin, Lima, late Dec. 24 after President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski issued a pardon to former President Alberto Fujimori, who had been imprisoned on corruption and homicide charges. Some clashes broke out between protesters and police near Plaza San Martin after the crowds attempted to reach the Government Palace; police made use of tear gas to disperse the protesters. The National Human Rights Coordinator’s Office (Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos, CNDDHH), a major nongovernmental organisation, supported the protests and will likely soon announce further related protests.

Analysis: On Dec. 22, Kuczynski narrowly avoided being stripped of his office by the congress, which was investigating allegations that the president misled the public about his connections to a business deal tainted by corruption. The motion to remove Kuczynski failed only after 10 Fujimori supporters who had previously supported the measure surprisingly abstained from the vote. Since then, it had been revealed that those representatives received a phone call from Fujimori’s prison immediately before their decision to abstain, sparking rumours that Kuczynski agreed to the pardon in exchange for votes in congress. Fujimori is extremely controversial in Peru, with many seeing him as having saved the country from economic and political collapse in the 1990s, while others view him as a corrupt and authoritarian leader, and think that the crimes of which he was convicted are unforgivable. The contentious nature of his presidency makes continued protests likely.

Europe

FINLAND (Country Risk Rating: Low) - Unionised Bank Employees to Strike Nationwide

Banking employees in Finland have threatened to strike Dec. 28-29 after the failure of talks aimed at reaching an agreement on proposed changes to their conditions of employment. Unions say that they will repeat the strike Jan. 4-5 if the dispute is not resolved.

Analysis: If the strike proceeds, banking services will likely be limited or unavailable. Cash supplies could begin running low at some ATMs from Dec. 27, as many people may be inclined to withdraw money ahead of the strike; Dec. 25-26 are bank holidays in Finland, which could exacerbate potential cash shortages until after the Jan. 1
New Year holiday. The action will severely disrupt telephone banking services, though will probably have little impact on internet banking.

**POLAND (Country Risk Rating: Low) - Elevated Hepatitis A Activity Reported Nationwide in December**

Polish health officials reported 1,637 hepatitis A cases nationwide Sept. 1-Dec. 15, representing the most recent, available data as of Dec. 22. This number is significantly higher than the nine cases identified during the same period in 2016.

Analysis: Media reports indicate that a large number of hepatitis A cases are among men who have sex with men (MSM, as designated by the WHO). In response, officials are urging that individuals, especially MSM, practise safe sex and ensure they are vaccinated against hepatitis A and, if not, receive the immunisation.

Hepatitis A is a gastrointestinal virus transmitted person-to-person by food and water contaminated by faecal material from an infected individual. Although some infections may be asymptomatic, hepatitis A typically causes a range of symptoms, including fever, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, joint pain, and jaundice. The severity of hepatitis A infection can range from mild illness lasting a few weeks to severe illness lasting several months. Although hepatitis A is rarely fatal in otherwise healthy individuals, severe infection can sometimes lead to liver failure and death. Drink only bottled, boiled, or purified water. Ensure that food is properly handled and prepared. Wash raw produce before eating. Consider avoiding street vendors and unregulated food establishments, which often have substandard hygiene practices. Wash hands frequently with soap and water, or use alcohol-based hand sanitiser if soap and clean water are unavailable. Hepatitis A immunisation is also available.

**Middle East/North Africa**

**EGYPT (Country Risk Rating: High) - Security Forces Kill Nine Suspected Militants during Raid in Ash Sharqia**

On Dec. 24, security forces killed nine suspected militants during a shootout in Ash Sharqia Governorate. Authorities raided a farm in the El Salheya El Gedida area of Ash Sharqia Governorate after receiving information that militants used the area to train and plan militant operations in North Sinai. El Salheya El Gedida is approximately 90 km (56 miles) northeast of Cairo.

Analysis: The raid indicates that authorities have broadened their operations to counterterrorism in North Sinai. El Salheya El Gedida is roughly 190 km (118 miles) southwest of the stronghold of Egypt's Islamic State (IS) affiliate, Wilayat Sinai, in El Arish. Security forces have intensified counterterrorism operations after militants attacked Al Rawdah mosque in Bir al-Abed on Nov. 24, killing more than 300 people. Following the attack, President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi called on the military to use all available force to restore security in the Sinai Peninsula, giving the armed forces a deadline of three months to achieve the goal. While no group claimed responsibility for the attack, Wilayat Sinai remains the most capable group operating in the region, particularly in and around its strongholds of El Arish, Sheikh Zuweid, and Rafah. The Sinai Peninsula has suffered security issues for decades, worsening significantly in the years following the ousting of former President Mohammed Morsi in 2013.

**EGYPT (Country Risk Rating: High) - Unidentified Assailants Kill Two, Wound Six in Shooting at Cafe in El Ayat**

Unidentified assailants shot and killed two people and wounded six others in a shooting at a cafe in El Ayat during the early hours of Dec. 24. Authorities are not investigating the shooting as a terrorist incident. Witnesses allege that the attack was the result of a personal dispute after a fight broke out over the result of a game; the individual who lost reportedly left the cafe and then returned with a second unidentified suspect and carried out the attack. Authorities have yet to apprehend either assailant.

Analysis: There is a moderate threat of crime in Egypt, though violent crime is rare. Foreign nationals are rarely targeted by criminals. Militant groups in the country primarily target security forces or Coptic Christians and
attacks outside of these targeting parameters are unusual. The majority of militant attacks in Egypt take place in the country's restive North Sinai governorate, where the military continues to fight an anti-government insurgency that intensified following the ousting of former President Mohammed Morsi in 2013.

ISRAEL (Country Risk Rating: High) - Vehicle Explosion Injures One in Yarka; Terrorism Not Suspected

A vehicle explosion in the village of Yarka, Northern District, late Dec. 23 seriously injured one person. Authorities have not commentend on the cause of the blast, but terrorism is not suspected.

Analysis: Israel has active organised crime groups that sometimes carry out assassination attempts using small bombs attached to cars. Most attacks are targeted, resulting in few casualties.

JORDAN (Country Risk Rating: Medium) - Activists Continue Nationwide Demonstrations following US Endorsement of Jerusalem as Capital of Israel

Activist groups continue to organise large demonstrations nationwide in Jordan in response to the US administration's controversial Dec. 6 decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Protests show no signs of abating in the near term. Anti-US demonstrations continue to take place every evening outside of the US Embassy in Abdoun, northwest of central Amman. Large demonstrations following Friday afternoon prayers are also likely to continue.

Analysis: Hundreds of demonstrators have regularly gathered in the Rusayfah district of Az-Zarqa Governorate and outside the King Hussein Mosque in Aqaba, the Hajji Rasmi Abu Rakhiya Mosque in central Ma'an, and the Noh al-Qudah Mosque in central Irbid. Most rallies organised after prayers turn into protest marches to nearby points in the city. Marches from the Grand Husseini Mosque to Nakhyi (Palm) Square are common in Amman. Expect localised traffic disruptions. Protests will likely continue in these areas, and demonstrations elsewhere are highly likely. Expect increased security measures during protests. Clashes between protesters and security forces are possible. In Amman, authorities will likely maintain tight security cordons around the US and Israeli embassies. Heightened security and protests may result in road closures.

Demonstrations have garnered popular support throughout the country as activists link the US administration's announcement with their long-term goals of cancelling the Israel-Jordan peace agreement and a plan for Jordan to purchase natural gas from Israel. Jordan also hosts a large population of Palestinian refugees, whom Jordanians hope will leave the country if peace between Israel and the Palestinians is achieved. Israel has maintained de facto sovereignty over all of Jerusalem since mid-1967, but both Palestinians and Israelis continue to assert that they will accept no other city as their capital, and control of the city is extremely important to both groups.

MOROCCO (Country Risk Rating: Medium) - Activists Stage Pro-Palestinian Rally in Oujda

Several organisations, including the ruling Justice and Development Party and Justice and Charity, staged a rally at Place du 16 Aout at 1500 Dec. 24 in the northeastern city of Oujda to protest the US government's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Oujda, which is close to the Algerian border in the Oriental region, is the hometown of Justice and Charity secretary-general Mohamed Abbadi.

Analysis: US President Donald Trump's Dec. 6 decision regarding Jerusalem was highly unpopular and sparked an initial wave of large protests sponsored mostly by secular labour groups across Morocco, but Islamist and pro-Palestinian groups have remained angry, and these organisations may stage more rallies. Security personnel may be more likely to disperse these gatherings, especially events involving Justice and Charity, which is tolerated but officially illegal. Oujda is Justice and Charity's de facto spiritual capital, and security personnel have broken up rallies by the group in the city in the past. Abbadi's home on Boulevard Zerktouni has been under surveillance for more than a decade, and it could be a flashpoint for potential clashes during the Dec. 24 event, although the
largest disruptions can be expected around Place du 16 Aout and the Omar bin Abdul Aziz Mosque in the central part of the city.

MOROCCO (Country Risk Rating: Medium) - Death of Two Locals Triggers Protests in Jerada

Tensions remain high in Jerada following the death of two locals working in an illegal coal mine on Dec. 23. Residents of Jerada staged a sit-in to prevent authorities from transporting the bodies of the victims, and demanded that officials address the lack of development in the region. The sit-in also coincided with demonstrations throughout the city over the cost of electricity. Further demonstrations are possible. Violence is possible if police attempt to disperse the protesters. Expect localised traffic disruptions. Jerada is located about 260 km (160 miles) east of Fez.

Analysis: Citizens were galvanised over the deaths, which were seen as demonstrative of economic issues experienced in Jerada. Many residents lost employment after the closure of the town's only coal mine in 2001. Protests over issues of equality and development initiatives occur frequently in Morocco, particularly after the 2016 death of Mohsen Firk - who was killed while trying to retrieve his illegal fish catch - prompted nationwide demonstrations. The protest movement later evolved to encompass a general drive for justice as well as anger over the ongoing detention of activists.

TUNISIA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Authorities in Tunis Arrest Nine Suspected Members of Al-Qaeda Militant Cell

Authorities in Tunis reported dismantling a suspected Al-Qaeda militant cell composed of nine individuals in Sousse, Kairouan, and Mandouba governorates. According to police, the suspects were communicating with militants hiding in the mountainous areas of the country and plotting attacks.

Analysis: The arrests of the individuals are notable since dismantlement of organised Al-Qaeda-affiliated militant cells are somewhat unusual in major cities. Tunisian authorities typically uncover suspected supporters of the Islamic State (IS) in urban areas of the country, while Al-Qaeda-affiliates, such as the Okba Ibn Nafaam Brigade, traditionally operate along Tunisia's western border with Algeria, particularly in Kef and Kasserine governorates. The Okba Ibn Nafaam brigade primarily targets security forces in low-level bombings.

TUNISIA (Country Risk Rating: High) and UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (Country Risk Rating: Low) - Several Emirates Airlines Flights Temporarily Suspended

The Tunisian Ministry of Transport announced Dec. 24 that, effective immediately, all flights on Emirates Airlines (EK) between Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) would be suspended until further notice.

Analysis: The Tunisian Ministry of Transport made the announcement after UAE officials made a controversial decision Dec. 22 to temporarily ban Tunisian women from entering the UAE. The ban was lifted hours after it was first announced; however, the decision caused considerable confusion and consternation among Tunisian officials and citizens. The UAE Foreign Ministry stated that the Dec. 22 decision was temporary and motivated by security reasons.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (Country Risk Rating: Low) - Road and Flight Disruptions Possible in UAE through March 2018 Due to Winter Fog

Fog periodically affects transport throughout much of the UAE, and coastal cities in particular, during the winter months (generally Oct.-March). Visibility problems are typically worst in January and February, but periodic disruptions remain possible for the duration of the season. Flight delays, diversions, and cancellations often occur. Fog also frequently results in road traffic disruptions and accidents. Most disruptions take place during early morning hours, with fog generally dissipating by mid-to-late afternoon.

Analysis: Although airports in the UAE are equipped with the latest technology, including a Category IIIIB instrument landing system, disruptions due to fog still occur. While such systems allow takeoffs and landings in
low visibility, the UAE General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) does not permit aircraft to taxi when visibility is below 125 metres (410 feet). Less-severe reduced visibility conditions could prompt air traffic controllers to impose a greater distance between aircraft upon departure or approach, causing cumulative delays. Heavy fog creates hazardous driving conditions on many highways, resulting in congestion and accidents. Disruptions are typically more severe in early morning rush hours. Much of the hazard is due to poor local driving practices, such as incorrect use of hazard lights and headlights and not allowing a safe distance between vehicles.

North America

CANADA (Country Risk Rating: Low) - Magnitude-5.0 Earthquake in Yukon Territory

A magnitude-5.0 earthquake occurred in northern Yukon Territory at 0100 Dec. 22. The epicentre was located in a remote area approximately 219 km (136 miles) south of Fort McPherson, Northwest Territories. The quake occurred at a shallow depth of about 1.6 km (1 mile). Weak-to-light shaking was probably felt in northern Yukon Territory and western areas of the Northwest Territories. There were no immediate reports of damage or casualties; however, any assessments will likely be delayed due to the tremor's remote location.

Analysis: Moderate aftershocks are likely in the coming days. Brief infrastructure disruptions could occur after all tremors, as authorities assess for possible damage.

MEXICO (Country Risk Rating: High) - Elevated Zika Virus Activity Reported in Central and Northeastern Regions September-December

Health officials in Mexico have identified more than 1,240 Zika virus cases in Coahuila, Jalisco, Nayarit, San Luis Potosi, and Tamaulipas states Sept. 10-Dec. 9, representing the most recent data available as of Dec. 22. This compares to a total 211 cases reported during the same period in 2016 in these areas.

Analysis: Health officials identified the first locally acquired Zika virus infection in Mexico in November 2015, and officials had reported 15 cases in the states of Chiapas, Jalisco, and Nuevo Leon by the end of the year. Since then, disease activity has occurred throughout most of the country. Mexico reported a total of 7,560 Zika virus cases during 2016 and roughly 3,095 cases since the start of 2017 through Dec. 9. Zika virus is primarily transmitted by the same Aedes mosquito that spreads dengue fever, suggesting that the two diseases will share seasonal trends. Dengue fever activity occurs year-round in parts of Mexico, but national activity is typically highest between August and November, with peak activity occurring in mid-October. In rare cases, Zika virus can be transmitted by contact with infected blood or through sexual contact with an infected individual. Symptoms of Zika virus infection include fever, reddening of the eyes (conjunctivitis), rash, and temporary pain or swelling of joints - typically the hands and feet. These symptoms are usually mild and last four to seven days. Research suggests Zika infection can lead to neurological conditions in any patient. No vaccine or specific treatments are available for Zika virus. Zika virus transmission can occur between currently infected pregnant women and their foetuses; research suggests Zika virus infection during pregnancy may result in "congenital Zika syndrome," which describes a pattern of conditions found in babies infected with Zika virus in utero. These include microcephaly (an abnormally small head), and damage to the developing brain, eyes, muscles, and joints. Babies born with congenital Zika syndrome may not display all these conditions.

UNITED STATES (Country Risk Rating: Medium) - All Thomas Fire Evacuations Lifted in Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, Calif.

Meteorologists forecast that winds are likely to remain relatively light in the areas surrounding the Thomas Fire complex at least through Dec. 26. As of Dec. 24, the fire had burned approximately 110,641 hectares (273,400 acres) and was 70-percent contained, making the Thomas Fire the largest wildfire in California's history. Authorities still expect full containment will not be achieved before Jan. 7, although this date could fluctuate depending on weather conditions. Crews continue to take advantage of the weaker winds and more favourable conditions to reinforce containment lines; all evacuation orders and warnings in Santa Barbara County have been lifted as of 0900 Dec. 21. All mandatory evacuation orders have also...
been lifted in Ventura County, though a long-standing evacuation order for Rose Valley remains voluntary. The public is being urged to remain vigilant of fire conditions and ongoing firefighting response efforts in the area.

Reports indicate that the fire has damaged or destroyed more than 1,340 structures, primarily residential buildings. The blaze is threatening an estimated 18,000 additional structures.

**Weather**
As of early Dec. 24, no Red Flag warnings are in effect for southern Santa Barbara County or Ventura County; however, a Red Flag warning is in effect in nearby Tulare and Kern counties through late Dec. 24. Wind speeds are likely to be low - no greater than 16 kph (10 mph), but very low humidity and dry conditions could lead to new fire ignitions in those areas northeast of the Thomas Fire perimeter.

**Transport**
As of Dec. 24, the Thomas Fire has not prompted an unexpected closure of major highways in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties. Some local roads remain closed within the wildfire perimeter, including SR-33 (between Fairview Road in Ojai to Lockwood Valley Road in Los Padres National Forest). Officials could impose intermittent, short-notice road closures in the coming days due to fire and emergency response activity.

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 unloading 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.

**UNITED STATES (Country Risk Rating: Medium) - Large Fire near Havre, Mont. Prompts Closure of Highway 87**

A large fire at the Big Equipment Company building west of Havre, Mont., US, the afternoon of Dec. 24 prompted officials to close US Highway 87 between mile markers 109 and 111. The fire produced large amounts of smoke; authorities have not said whether the smoke is toxic. Authorities do not yet know the cause of the fire or if there have been any injuries.

**Analysis:** Motorists will be forced to detour around the road closure through the city of Havre. There are no reports as to whether flight operations at nearby Havre City-County Airport (HVR) have been affected.

**Russia/CIS**

**RUSSIA (Country Risk Rating: High) - Opposition Activists Stage Unauthorised Rally in Moscow**

Opposition politician Ilya Yashin staged a demonstration in Moscow Dec. 24 to demand free and fair elections. Authorities refused to grant permission for the rally, stating that the square is unsuitable for large numbers of people. Turnout for the rally was low.
Analysis: Navalny has been touring many Russian cities as part of his campaign for the presidency and to boost the profile of his opposition movement. Although he is officially barred from running for office due to proceedings against him in a fraud case, he believes that status can be challenged in court.

South Pacific/Oceania

NEW ZEALAND (Country Risk Rating: Low) - Elevated Pertussis Activity Reported in Nelson Area October-December

Health officials have identified more than 160 cases of pertussis in the Nelson Marlborough District Health Board (DHB) Oct. 28-Dec. 11, representing the most recent available data as of Dec. 22. According to officials, most of the cases have occurred in Nelson. This compares to an average of 16 cases reported in the Nelson Marlborough DHB between October and December 2014-2016

Analysis: Pertussis outbreaks typically follow a cyclical pattern in New Zealand, with peak activity occurring approximately every three to five years. The last outbreak occurred between August 2011 and December 2013, with activity peaking in November 2013. During this outbreak, health officials reported roughly 11,000 cases. Pertussis activity during 2017 has steadily increased since July, likely representing the start of a new wave. On Dec. 1, the New Zealand Ministry of Health declared a national outbreak. Officials have reported a total of 1,755 cases nationwide since the start of 2017 through Dec. 8. Pertussis - also known as "whooping cough" - is a highly contagious bacterial disease transmitted by respiratory droplets from an infectious person. Pertussis is vaccine-preventable; however, immunity decreases within two years of receiving the vaccination. Health authorities recommend individuals receive a booster vaccination every 10 years. Infections go through several stages. These range from mild illness with low-grade fever and occasional coughing in the early stage, to vomiting, exhaustion, and severe fits of rapid coughing in later stages. Initial symptoms typically begin seven to 10 days after exposure, and the illness may last up to nine weeks before patients fully recover from periodic coughing fits. Infants and children up to four years old are at highest risk, and typically suffer the most severe symptoms. Although the disease is usually mild in adolescents and adults, even mildly ill people can transmit the disease to others.

Visit a doctor to ensure you are vaccinated against pertussis or are immune through previous infection. Emphasise basic health precautions, especially frequent hand washing with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitiser if soap and water are unavailable. If you suspect pertussis infection, call ahead before visiting a doctor to prevent spread at the clinic or hospital.