



GLOBAL RISK UPDATE **Q2 2018**

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

Having spent time this past quarter speaking at some industry events and interacting with like-minded professionals, I continually observe the desire for organizations to conduct more effective horizon scanning and regular reviews of risk to fully understand their operating environments. We routinely find that many departments that “own” travel risk find themselves to be under-resourced, lower priority, and constantly in “fire-fighting” mode. Our hope with our global risk updates is that we help you get out in front of risks by providing targeted information for more informed decision-making on organizational risk tolerance and travel risk management.

This Global Risk Update looks at the second quarter of 2018 and seeks to help you understand the implications of stories you may have read about in the news, as well as build off of themes we explored in our [2018 Global Risk Review](#) and the [1st Quarter Update](#) (released in April). Our Global Security Specialists and in-house medical experts are taking you beyond the headlines and into what the upcoming months of 2018 are signaling for global political, security, economic, and health risk.

In addition to the trending stories within each region, we added a special focus on sexual assault, including case studies and medical advice, as it continues to receive increasing attention from organizations across the board. We also invested additional time and resources into further building out our response network in the Caribbean ahead of this year's [hurricane season](#).

From London to Indonesia, from Jamaica to Puerto Rico, our team is constantly on the move, working to expand our reach and further build our capabilities in service of our main goal: helping you effectively balance managing risk and embracing the opportunities the world has to offer.

As ever, we are proud to be your partner in these endeavors.



**Best Regards,
Ryan DeStefano**

CONTENTS

A Message from Security at On Call International	2
THIS QUARTER IN RISK	5
The Middle East and Africa	6
Iran Facing Currency Crisis and Economic Decline	6
Israel and Gaza Conflict	9
Ebola Outbreak: Prospects and Implications	11
Asia & The Pacific	13
Of Further Democracy Illusions in Pakistan	14
The Overlooked Strategic Maritime Domain	20
Europe & Central Asia	24
Tit for Tat Diplomacy and the Future of Russia's Battle with the West	24
Rise of Protests and Civil Unrest in Europe	27
The End of the European Union?	28
The Americas	31
Brazil Oil Fields Auction: Fuel for Thought and the Brazilian Elections	31
Volcanic Eruptions in the Western Hemisphere	33
Hurricane Season Looms in the Caribbean	34
SEXUAL ASSAULT ABROAD	40
Case Studies	41
Medical Advice	43

THIS QUARTER IN RISK

ON CALL INTERNATIONAL



Iran Facing Currency Crisis and Economic Decline

The past weeks have seen an increase in protests across Iran, as the public grows increasingly enraged with rising unemployment rates and the hyperinflation of the Iranian Rial (IRR). The near-term outlook for Iran is bleak, as the United States' decision to pull out of the nuclear deal has forced Iran into a difficult position and exacerbated underlying issues in the country.

Following the United States' announcement that it was leaving the nuclear accord, Iran first turned to the European Union (EU) in hopes of propping up the economy and continuing to provide needed foreign investment. In response, the EU offered support, stressing the importance of the Iran nuclear deal and recommitting to bilateral relations between the EU and Iran. However, private corporations in Europe have not followed suit, wary of doing business and investing in a country that is under sanctions by the United States.

Reinstatement of U.S. sanctions in August will severely limit Iran's ability to access international markets, and the U.S. is seemingly planning to tighten its grip on Iran's economy even further by targeting the country's oil exports.

The United States plans to target Iran's oil exports by encouraging allies to cut off all imports of Iranian oil beginning in November. Although it is unlikely the United States can remove all Iranian oil from the international market, if they succeed in removing even half, there will be serious ramifications on Iran's economy. Targeting of Iranian oil exports could also lead to a global supply shortage, a void the United States is hoping Saudi Arabia is willing to fill.

In parallel to the economic struggles, Iran is facing a growing currency crisis, as the rial has lost more than 50% of its value since the start of the year. Black market trading is seeing all-time lows of 90,000 rials to the dollar. Attempts by the government to curb inflation have failed miserably, with companies taking advantage of government-issued foreign exchange rates to make fast and lucrative profits. The harshest of critics have begun to compare the state of the IRR to that of the Venezuelan Bolívar, which at this point appears doomed.

Further amplifying the economic and currency issues is general confusion regarding whom exactly within the government is in charge of stabilizing and improving current economic conditions (It is also worth noting there is an under-the-radar water shortage in Iran that is further exacerbating unrest). Unemployment rates in Iran are currently hovering around 12%, with some analysts suggesting that rate could rise to above 15% by the end of the year.

The public seems to have reached a breaking point with Iran's mismanaged economy. As protests in the streets grow more intense, some critics are calling for the resignation of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and a toppling of the regime. Although a complete regime change at this point appears unlikely, pressure is mounting for economic relief.



President Rouhani (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Amid pressure, Iran is expected to turn to China and Russia for support. Although both countries will almost certainly offer some degree of assistance, it's unlikely China or Russia have both the appetite and the resources to fully prop up the country's oil industry and overall economy. Backed into a corner, Iran may begin to make more aggressive threats of its own. Iran lies in a strategic geographical location, allowing the country the ability to significantly disrupt shipping traffic in the Straits of Hormuz and potentially control the illegal flow of goods into Europe.

As we move into the second half of 2018, Iran will be an important flash point to monitor in the Middle East.

At best, the economic situation in Iran can be described as in limbo; and, at worst, the country may be on the brink of a complete economic depression.

Israel and Gaza Conflict

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict has dominated news out of the Middle East in Spring 2018, with the dramatic scenes of violence along the Gaza-Israel border evoking emotionally charged responses from around the world. Dozens of Palestinians were reportedly killed and thousands more wounded as demonstrations often became riots and provoked clashes between rioters and Israeli troops stationed along the border barriers. The rise in tensions between Gaza-based Palestinian groups and Israel began on 30 March, when Palestinians commemorated “Land Day,” which marks the deaths of Arab-Israelis (also known as Palestinian-Israelis) in protests in the Galilee in 1976. This year, Gaza-based Palestinians, most notably the terrorist group Hamas, declared a “Return March,” where Palestinians would camp out along Gaza’s border with Israel, and, at times, attempt to penetrate it. The last day was on Nakba Day, 15 May, which is a Palestinian day of mourning marking the creation of Israel in 1948. Israel has defended itself by stating that radical elements are present among the protestors, while Palestinians have reiterated that they are defending their rights and homeland. Emotions were further charged by the opening of the new U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem on 14 May.

The level of violence along the Gaza border was high, but there have been relatively few related incidents outside of the immediate area. Protests occurred in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa, and other scattered areas.

Although the protest in Haifa was met with a heavy-handed police response that has itself created controversy, daily life in most of Israel has gone on as usual. The situation in the West Bank has also stayed relatively calm. Gaza itself remains imperiled as the humanitarian situation, caused by the Hamas-Israel conflict, continues to worsen. Hamas and other terrorist groups began launching mortar attacks against Israel in June, provoking retaliatory air strikes.

Reports state that Egypt, which maintains a blockade on its own border with Gaza, is trying to mediate a long-term ceasefire, but any ceasefire deal is unlikely to actually result in stability even in the short-term. Both sides have strong demands that are unlikely to result in compromise, especially while Hamas is present in Gaza. The United States, traditionally a peacekeeper in the region, has compromised this status in declaring Jerusalem to be the capital. It is possible European leaders could step up to work out a compromise, but without the backing of the United States, a lasting peace deal is unlikely.

Gaza Strip

(Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))



Ebola Outbreak: Prospects and Implications

The terrifying specter of a widespread Ebola crisis emerged in May in the northwest of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), bringing back memories of the 2014 epidemic in West Africa which caused grave concerns that the disease would spread internationally. Since the outbreak was declared on 8 May, at least 55 cases were reported, with 28 deaths. Previous outbreaks of Ebola in the DRC were limited to a single, rural area and easily contained. Health officials were increasingly concerned with this latest outbreak because it was present in multiple areas and had spread to an urban area. The areas affected within Equateur Province were Bikoro, Iboko, and Wangata. Most notably, cases had been reported within Mbandaka, a major port city along the Congo River, alarming many observers that the disease could be carried down the river to the capital, Kinshasa. Fears were not assuaged when news emerged that three patients in Mbandaka had slipped out of an isolation ward, although all three were later accounted for (one died at home, another died soon after returning).

As disconcerting as the current Ebola outbreak in the DRC is, the regional and international response shows that many lessons were learned from the 2014 crisis.

The DRC is already a challenging environment to operate in, but the Congolese government and international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and Doctors without Borders have responded relatively quickly and effectively. Upon the Congolese Ministry of Health reporting a suspected infection, a WHO investigation team was sent, quickly followed by a response team. Vaccinations were also delivered to the area and administered, after results from its use in 2014 were positive. The public health risk at the national level was considered to be very high by the local government and the WHO, but a Public Health Emergency of International Concern was not declared.



**WHO workers
administer
vaccines**

(Source:
[World Health
Organization](#))

Doctors without Borders announced they will be pulling out of the country on 15 July and handing over control of the Ebola outbreak to the DRC government and health officials. The World Health Organization will remain in the country, along with other NGOs and aid organizations.

The quick turnaround of the Ebola outbreak raises the question of why and how health officials have been able to respond so promptly to contain the outbreak. After the 2014 outbreak, health officials learned that they needed to act quickly. Following the latest outbreak, aid agencies worked fast to identify and isolate individuals who had been affected. Epidemiologists trekked through the Congolese bush to find potential contacts of infected individuals and placed them under a 21-day observation period. In addition, the DRC's government gave approval for an investigational vaccine to be deployed and given to individuals

who had contact with infected patients. The overall effectiveness of this vaccine is unclear; but, if no further cases of Ebola are presented, it could indicate the vaccine has been successful and impact the response to future outbreaks of Ebola.

Along with medical intervention, perhaps the most important response to the outbreak has been education. During the 2014 outbreak, many individuals did not understand the gravity of the outbreak or take necessary precautionary measures, and Western health officials struggled with confronting cultural differences when advocating treatment and burial measures. After the latest outbreak, health officials immediately focused on educating the population on proper prevention and burial practices, and employed a greater degree of cultural sensitivity. This commendable effort could also affect future outbreaks of Ebola in the DRC, as the local population is overall more aware and alert to the threat.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



From major strategic political and policy revisions in China and continued plans for expansion across the region and globally, to a first-summit between a leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea), and a United States of America (US) sitting president—significant geopolitical developments have occurred over the past quarter and are forecasted to have long-lasting implications across the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region.

In May, a major surprise electoral result was presented through the Malaysian polls, which could spell the beginning of the end for recent populist leaders across the region. There remain concerning reports regarding simmering tensions and increased activities (in some areas) associated with the terrorist Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL/IS) group; latest indications can be seen in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other countries in South and Southeast Asia.

While some aforementioned developments will remain a cause for concern for organizations seeking to operate and/or set up business in the region, overall,

APAC continues to remain a beacon of opportunity for enterprise, scholastic, NGO, and leisure populations.

There remain vibrant opportunities, feasible partnerships with local States, and distinctive profitable project opportunities in varying countries. Rapid changes, progress and, at times, a few steps backward, continue the stability forecast across the majority of States in the region. These fluxes will play out both on land and across strategic sea-lanes, and in due manner so will the capability of either forging new alliances or breaking apart old standing relationships between States in the region, which could invariably impact missions for organizations operating in APAC.

Of Further Democracy Illusions in Pakistan

Interaction with and setting up operations in respective States in the APAC region also require due diligence horizon scanning as to what an environment might hold a few months or several years ahead. To help predict varying prospective and seismic shifts within the region, we look to the upcoming polls in Pakistan, where critics already opine that any results will produce no genuine or systematic reforms. In the midst of this negativity, there is a lens for optimism if one cites the fact that this could be the third time in the country's history where there will be a democratic transfer of power from one elected government to another. And on this small optimistic note, might there yet be reason (albeit slight) to believe the country can begin to take steps in the right direction?

During the previous elections held in 2013, the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) party, 'led' by the three-time elected Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, secured a majority and was able to form the government. Since then, Nawaz Sharif in 2017 was barred for life from running for office or being a leader of a political party by the Supreme Court. This was due to his reported involvement in several high-pro-

file corruption cases. Sharif has since alleged that the real reason for his removal from the prime minister office was due to his falling out with the military establishment (i.e. the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)). Sharif's cause was further jeopardized when news reports recently surfaced in India, whereby it was made to appear that Sharif had alleged the ISI (referred to as 'non-state actor') was responsible for orchestrating the 2008 Mumbai attacks. More recently, there have also been several accusations and proof videos of PML-N candidates being threatened or enticed with defecting from their party to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) or to not contest at all.

The military and ISI have long played a significant role in determining the course of Pakistan's national and international political stance. Several ill-fated incidents befalling Sharif since he came to power again in 2013 have led several regional analysts to suggest that ISI involvement is most definitely at play. Despite these alleged attacks and attempts to hinder the PML-N intentions to run for office in the upcoming polls, the party has continued to state that it intends to contest in July.

Heading into the 2018 polls, the PML-N will be led by Nawaz Sharif's brother, Shehbaz Sharif. Due to the family and party's overwhelming support in their local base of Punjab province and even outside, they and the PML-N cannot be easily written off as less than major stakeholders during and after the elections.

Off of the PML-N and Sharif's current woes, one person who has ridden the coattails of associated events in-country to his advantage has been the erstwhile captain of Pakistan's National Cricket team, Imran Khan. Expected to potentially follow in the footsteps of athletes such as George Weah (Liberia) and to some extent, sport stars such as Manny Pacquiao (Philippines) and Arjuna Ranatunga (Sri Lanka), who have transitioned successfully from sports arena to political office, Khan is attempting to do likewise. Having founded the main opposition party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in 1996, the party has finally made

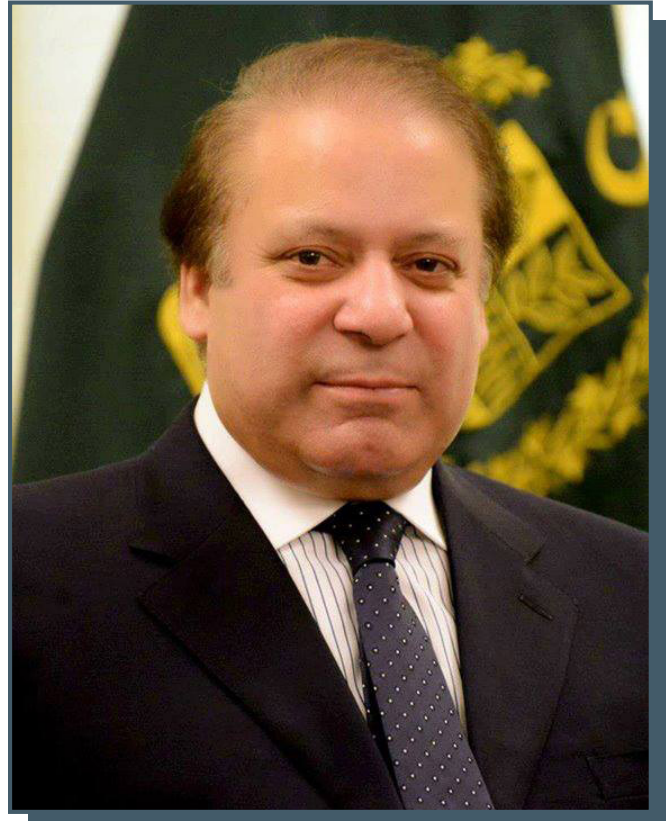
in-roads through Pakistan's social, political, religious, and economic divides, to be acknowledged as the main opposition contender in the upcoming elections.

The PTI claims to be a centrist party that champions freedom of thought, eradication of corruption, a self-sufficient Pakistan, increasing employment opportunities, development and infrastructure considerations, and opposing religious discrimination. These are all agendas that appear very attractive to a vast majority of Pakistanis and, despite personal issues that recently surfaced seemingly to Khan's disadvantage, the tide continues to flow in his favor. However, there remain strong opposing factions within Pakistan to the PTI, including smaller, extreme-right Islamist political parties, which could either derail yet again Khan's chances of securing the coveted prime minister position, or be his saving grace.

One line of thought suggests that the military establishment is backing the PTI and Khan in order to continue the illusion of democracy taking hold in the country. However, the narrative also suggests this relationship has the propensity to rapidly change, even decline drastically, should the military feel they have lost control over Khan and the PTI. This is particularly with regard to issues on which they don't see eye-to-eye: for example, Pakistan's internal/external security infrastructure and how religion will play a role in the country's national affairs moving forward. As such, any rift between Khan and the military establishment could result in another fall from grace for a civil poli-

tician in country, if he is indeed elected. Khan, on his part, continues to deny any associations between the PTI with the ISI and instead points out that during past polls, it was clearly established that the military provided support to the PML-N and not the PTI.

On the religious front, the ISI has been accused of propping smaller extremist Islamist parties, such as the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Ya Rasool-Allah (TLY) party, to participate in protests against the central and state governments as per the military's requirements to control power. Furthermore, the upcoming polls will witness a significant participation from hardline Islamist parties, which will include groups such as the Jamaat-ud-Dava (JuD) and Milli Muslim League (MML). While some analysts might argue (and to an extent, rightly so) that the military is using the groups to channel the upcoming elections and also has full control of which militant groups can or cannot operate in/from Pakistan territory, the reality on the ground is that the Pakistan military faces challenges on several fronts. The army faces its own complications in battles that it continues to orchestrate against other militant groups opposed to its operations, including the Pakistan Taliban, al-Qaeda, and other marginalized ethnic groups that operate in the country. A rise in prominence and power of extremist Islamist groups is worrying for several other groups in Pakistan, including the Christian community, which has actually witnessed a relatively calm and peaceful atmosphere of late.



Nawaz Sharif (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Following the PML-N and PTI parties, several other opposition groups remain that would seek to align or form a coalition government on the basis of the performance of the aforementioned parties. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by Bilawal Bhutto Zardari since its heyday until 2008, has not been able to re-grasp its hold on power, popularity, or influence, even reportedly within its own stronghold of the Sindh province. Nevertheless, the PPP remains popular (it was the party responsible for making Pakistan a nuclear-capable country) and is still expected to play a defining role in deciding the outcome of the upcoming polls and chartering the course of politics in-country, with some suggesting the young Bhutto could even potentially forge a coalition government in the near future.

Remaining political parties and alliances in the upcoming fray include the Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM), led by Farooq Sattar, and Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), led by Fazl-ur-Rehman. There are reportedly close to 12,000 politicians who will be contesting for 849 seats (272 National Assembly and 577 in provincial assemblies). It might not be farfetched to also ponder on the possibility of the former president, Pervez Musharraf, making a resurgent stance for office in Pakistan (although not likely in the upcoming polls). At present, Musharraf has been in a self-imposed exile since 2016, being hounded by the Supreme Court back in Pakistan on high-treason charges and for allegedly planning the assassination of former PPP leader, Benazir Bhutto.

Whoever the selected prime minister and political party will be in the upcoming Pakistan polls – if they can survive the myriad political plays in the lead up to and following the elections, they will most definitely have their work cut out for them.

From balancing the fraught and fragile relationship between a sitting civilian government and the military establishment to ensuring there is actual social, economic, and infrastructural development progress. For example, water shortages and crises continue in various cities across the country, while under developed infrastructure leads to flooding woes during the monsoon season. This has actually become quite the issue, and even in the capital Islamabad, it's become a major voting barometer for locals based on candidates' objectives with regard to addressing it. All this, while trying to maintain a sense of relative peace and stability in a country that has otherwise been continually fraught by ethnic and religious divisions and deadly conflicts.

The military, which continues to battle insurgents in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, is similarly burdened on the Eastern front; the conflict between India and Pakistan appears to have no end in sight. India, on its part, enjoys witnessing a destabilized Afghanistan/Pakistan border area as this puts pressure on the Pakistan military to focus its efforts on two main fronts. It is not far fetched to imagine that any new leader in Pakistan will also attempt to re-engage with the U.S. on several fronts, from economic assistance to security issues of interests to both countries. The relationship between the two allies has been strained since President Donald Trump assumed office, but the U.S. still requires Pakistan's strategic help for any of its objectives in Afghanistan, while Pakistan can also pivot toward its other allies should it receive inadequate help from these quarters. As such, whoever the new leader and party of Pakistan will be, these individuals could also institute changes to deals signed with other countries by the previous government.

One of these projects is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC - part of China's 'Belt and Road' initiative) and related development initiatives. While it is reported that China recently loaned Pakistan another \$1 billion USD as part of this effort (a staggering \$57 billion USD has already been spent by China on CPEC according to some reports), questions remain if a new leader in Pakistan will indeed go Malaysia's recent route - reassessing agreements made by previous administration with China, the former recently suspended deals worth around \$22 billion USD signed between disgraced former Prime Minister Najib Razak and China. The increased presence of Chinese investments and groups in Pakistan has also reportedly been met with suspicion and hostility by local businesses operating in similar sectors. There have also been reports of Chinese-organized crime gangs having an increased influence in major urban centers. Undoubtedly, China will be closely observing the proceedings and their associated reactions regarding any changes in administration that could portend seismic changes in other areas of the CPEC.

Despite the supposed healthy and democratically contested run-up to the polls, to observers of the country (and to use a sports analogy), the country seems poised to participate in yet another cricket match – not of the T20 or One-day variety – but a Test match. A long, arduous session with almost the same roving key players lined up to bat and field yet again, the game, teams, rules of play, and overall governing body, however, remain the same. Recent reports suggest that media houses critical of the military establishment's alleged involvement in the political sector have been unofficially banned or forced to be taken off the air, and politicians who have voiced any opposition to the manner by which the army conducts its operations have also reportedly been targets of assassination attempts.

In light of these very factors that seemingly continue to impede Pakistan's potential and growth, it is surprising there are countries that find themselves in the same spotlight under the international lens, like North Korea, who would still rather be Pakistan at this point – and maybe this speaks other key capabilities of theirs, to an extent. Now, if only the façade of democracy can be pulled away and the main stakeholders (including so called non-state actors) of the country's, present and future, actually worked collaboratively toward alleviating the plight of its masses and achieving the systematic and inherent productive changes Pakistan requires.

The Overlooked Strategic Maritime Domain

In recent years, regional analysts have dedicated significant attention to the geopolitical maritime power dynamics unfolding in the South China Sea. While indeed a strategically and economically monumental maritime region, there is an equally strategic game being carried out by China and like-minded stakeholders in another area of the Indo-Pacific arena – the Arabian Sea and other strategic sea-lanes west of India, including the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea.

This area, and in particular the Red Sea, is the gateway to the Suez Canal. The Suez Canal, serves as a shortcut for commerce to flow between Western Europe and Asia. Approximately 8% of all seaborne trade passes through the Suez Canal each year, making it one of most strategic economic and military chokepoints in the entire world. Add this to China's

aspirations to project itself across the globe (particularly outside Asia), whilst also ensuring the country has access to resources (including minerals and energy), and maintaining dedicated 'shortcut' routes to achieve these objectives, it becomes simple to see how important this maritime area is to China, and invariably, other countries with stakes in the region. China already imports gas, oil, raw materials, and other resources that traverse via the Persian Gulf and these sea-lanes. It no doubt remains vital to China now and in the future to ensure they can protect and secure the flow of goods to and from this channel.

While much has been made of China's aggressive military presence in areas like the South China Sea, where China, for example, has been creating military bases in the Spratly Islands by reclaiming land over reefs, China's maritime activities in the Arabian Sea seem to be vastly underreported and variant.

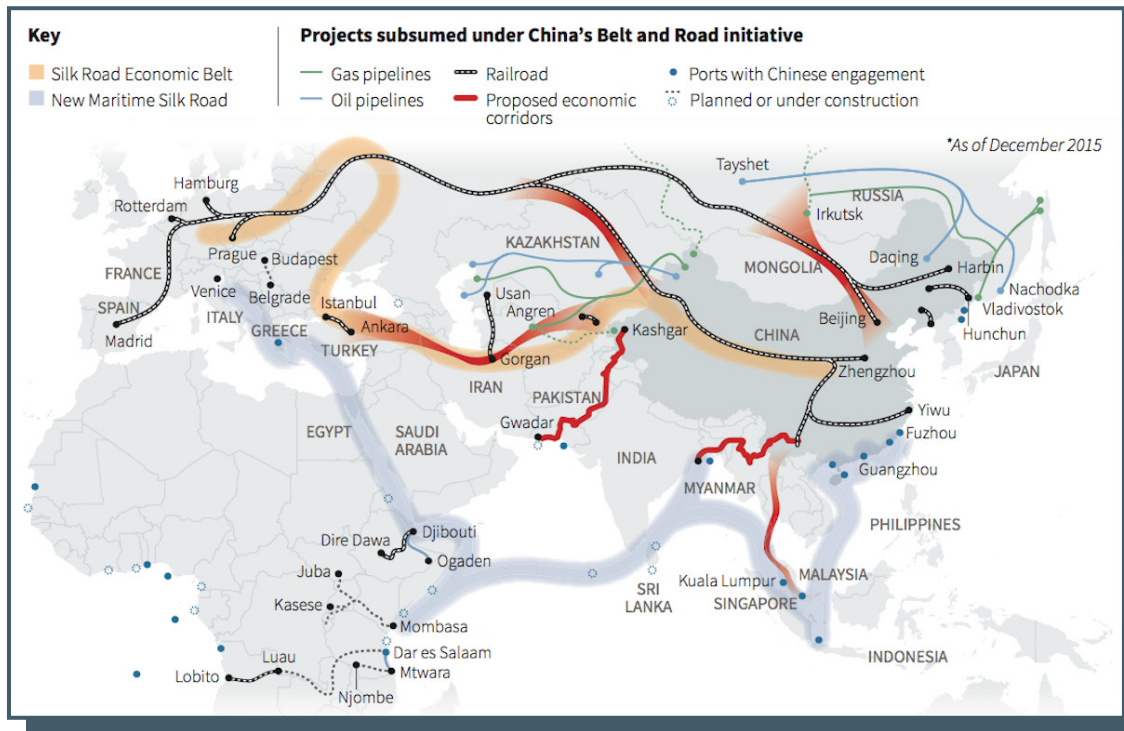
China has been actively engaging, via a different tune (namely economic provisions/loans), in a power and economic dance, primarily versus India and the U.S. in this region. This type of monetary influence is seen to be playing out in areas like Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Pakistan, and countries further west, including Seychelles, Djibouti and other Middle Eastern and eastern African states.

China has been funding substantial transportation and development infrastructure projects in these States in order to gain control of key routes and ports for both commerce and, as per critics of the plan, military purposes. Critics will note that at present, China will fund grand projects in developing countries where they know the host governments cannot realistically pay off debts and, in this matter, can exact real control through financial debt-traps. A recent incident involving the Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka is one indicator of this alleged ploy.

Similar projects coming under increasing observations under this context include the Gwadar Port (Pakistan) and the Friendship Bridge (Maldives). Control in the latter, for example, through seemingly benign projects like a bridge infrastructure, would potentially open up further routes and observation channels for China in areas close to the Lakshadweep Islands (union territory of India). This is because part of any agreement between Maldives and China entails the Maldives accepting a proposal from China, whereby China can develop and operate “research” facilities on the northernmost islands of the country (some reports indicate at least 16 islands). Needless to say, India and the U.S. are opposed to any such agreement and have indicated that the islands and developments can be militarized at short-to-no notice by the Chinese. Smaller nations like the Maldives and Seychelles will likely continue to attempt playing off India and China for “better deals” that suit their internal aspirations. Each larger nation State wants to count these islands as “strategic allies” which, in turn, will be promised generous financial and development support in exchange for long-term presence.

The U.S. also has a strong interest in this maritime region to protect free trade, but also for military purposes in support of operations in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Aden. Moreover, dominance in the maritime sector across the globe, since the end of World War II, has been under the domain of the U.S. Navy, of which China has been a substantial beneficiary. As the U.S. has been further expanding its military footprint by investing in military and naval support resources in areas like Fujairah (UAE) and Duqm (Oman), they must also now contend with the fact their “frenemy” in China is attempting to plant its flag of influence in similar areas.

A tad further afield in the same region, the U.S. also has a vested interest and strategic control in the British-owned territory of Diego Garcia. Diego Garcia serves as a base and prepositioning location for military supply fleets and a long-range bomber airstrip, amongst a myriad of other purposes. Akin to vested States in the South China Sea area, the U.S. will also have a need to balance between all the varying stakeholders in this region.



**Projects
Subsumed Under
China's Belt and
Road Initiative**

(Source: [Business Insider](#))

This overall strategic initiative or objective in the Arabian Sea corridor is yet another spoke in the lofty goals of China's "One Belt, One Road Plan."

While inherently an overland concept, the One Belt, One Road Plan also spans the maritime routes and involves attempts to link 70 countries across Asia, Europe, and Africa. If realized, it would ultimately reshape cultural, trade, communication, and social exchanges across the globe.



Tit for Tat Diplomacy and the Future of Russia's Battle with the West

The Russia World Cup 2018 turned out to be a successful propaganda coup. Visitors are reporting high praise for the country, and President Vladimir Putin has ensured the country's citizens and police are on their best behavior. While Russia's security and publicity record should be lauded, this does not change the fact that a diplomatic standoff continues between Russia and the West.

It remains to be seen whether Russia will up the ante after the conclusion of the Russia World Cup 2018 or whether tensions will die down with time.

The Russian state is alleged to be behind the poisoning of a former Russian spy who had given valuable intelligence information to the United Kingdom. His daughter was also a victim in the attack. The nerve agent used was novichok, a substance that can be inhaled or permeate through mucus membranes. This attack was the last straw in a series of calculated provocations by Russia, which includes the annexation of Crimea, the bombing of civilians in Syria, interference in the U.S. election, and the assassination of other former Russian spies on British soil. While these events led to condemnations and sanctions, the nerve agent attack led 26 countries to expel Russian diplomats in a joint diplomatic condemnation. The plot thickened when it was reported on the 4th of July 2018 that two British citizens had recently been exposed to the nerve agent. The working hypothesis by security officials is that the nerve agent was left over from the previous batch in March.

Despite Putin's predications that the West was too splintered to come together, 26 countries united behind the UK and expelled Russian diplomats, including the United States, which expelled 60 diplomats and closed the Russian Consulate in Seattle following the allegations from the first attack in March. Russia has retaliated by expelling an equal number of diplomats from each country (including 60 from the U.S.) and closed the U.S. Consulate in St. Petersburg.

Putin seems to have finally pushed the West too far and will have to reconsider his previous calculations that Russian actions would have no lasting consequences.

It is not clear how revelations of the latest exposure will further affect relations.

Diplomatic tit-for-tat is a mechanism of soft power that is intended to effect change without resorting to violence. Embassies symbolically represent a state's power, influence, and importance. In closing down an embassy or consulate, the host country is attempting to take away that symbol to send a message to its own citizens and those of the expelled power.

Diplomatic tit-for-tat was a common weapon used by both the United States and Russia during the Cold War. With each side seeking to avoid the use of nuclear weapons, eliminating embassies and consulates was the most effective measure of deterrence and punishment available. In addition, many diplomats and expats on both sides posed as spies, making it prudent to cut off sources of potential espionage. The diplomatic expulsions in 1986, following the arrest of a Russian spy, were particularly effective because the former Soviet Union was desperate for reconciliation with the West and took the threat of diplomatic isolation seriously.

What appears to be different after this round of expulsions is that Russia is not budging. Putin views the West as consistently trying to stop Russia from taking its rightful place in the sun and is particularly threatened by NATO's presence in Eastern Europe and the U.S.' involvement in Syria. Russian officials have repeatedly told the population that the West seeks to isolate and alienate Russia. It is unlikely that Putin will change this view. In fact, Putin might become further paranoid due to the diplomatic retaliation of the West and the increased military exercises of NATO in Eastern Europe.

While traditional diplomacy has reached a standstill, cultural diplomacy in the form of interactions between ordinary citizens points to a positive development. Russian citizens who have not previously had contact with Westerners are reportedly surprised by the openness and friendliness they experienced from Westerners attending the Russia World Cup 2018, as this contradicts the notion perpetuated by the government that the West isolates and is against Russia. In addition, while Western governments might have hoped the diplomatic tensions would lower attendance to the Russia World Cup 2018, Western travelers traveled to Russia in large numbers and were favorably impressed by the country.

As new reports emerged regarding additional novichok victims, it will be interesting to see if further consequences will arise. It is unlikely either side will want to escalate the conflict beyond diplomatic



Vladimir Putin (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

measures. However, Putin will need to eventually address the issue and significantly back off of aggressive measures in order to improve relations with the West. It is unclear whether Putin will be able to do this, due to his ironclad belief that the West is determined to keep Russia down. Ironically, in expelling diplomats, both sides are further isolating prospects for reconciliation. Traditional diplomacy is the best way to solve conflicts without violence and reach understanding about complicated issues. However, cultural diplomacy between ordinary citizens during the Russia World Cup 2018 is a positive development that could have an impact on citizenry response to government measures. It is important for organizations to keep up to date on news items and consider how further diplomatic actions could affect the needs of travelers.

Rise of Protests and Civil Unrest in Europe

European countries have seen an increase in civil unrest and protests in the past months. The increase in protest activity is due to a variety of factors including the rise of right wing movements in response to the refugee crisis, civil unrest due to internal political factors, and reactions to events including Brexit. The influx of refugees has led to a strain in social services, distrust of politicians, and rise of right wing extremist groups that continue to gain favor. Administrators should ensure travelers are up to date on political events that could lead to protests and other disruptions. Protests can disrupt travel plans, functioning of civil services, and even business and academic activities.

Protests are commonplace in Europe during the summer months due to increasingly favorable weather and days of solidarity such as May Day (also known as International Workers' Day).

However, an added layer of civil unrest and nationalistic tendencies have led to increasingly frequent protests and violent outbursts. In France, President Emmanuel Macron's proposed union reforms have led to mass

strikes, particularly by the rail union, which has vowed to strike two out of every five days during the spring and summer months. Students in France have also been protesting against Macron's vow to raise university tuitions. On May Day, planned protests by Union officials were hijacked by an anarchist group known as the "Black Blocs." Leaders of the group called for a day of revolution aimed at sending a message to Macron and other French leaders. Violence ensued with shops being vandalized and fires being started on French streets. Union strikes are commonplace in France, but what are intended to be peaceful protests can provide a prime opportunity for groups with more sinister aims to hijack protests and incite violence.

Political protests have also affected other European states. In Hungary, the re-election of President Viktor Orbán and crackdowns on freedom of speech has led to a series of mass protests throughout the country. In addition, protests continue to occur in Barcelona and Madrid over the incarceration of Catalan independence leaders and the call for extradition of former Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont. Barcelona has also been hit by a string of anti-tourism protestors, who are angry at the increased number and lewd behavior of tourists. In addition to anti-tourism, the spread of far-right movements, nationalist movements, and decisions surrounding Brexit have the potential to lead to escalated and continuous protests throughout Europe this summer.

The End of the European Union?

It is worth considering why nationalist, far-right, and euro-skeptic movements are gaining increased popularity in Europe. Far-right movements have come and gone throughout modern European history. However, after the destruction wrought by Nazi Germany, the European Union (EU) was intended to be a stabilizer that would prevent far-right movements from gaining significant traction. The EU was once appealing to many Europeans who supported the economic and political benefits the institution could give in a wake of insecurity perpetuated by the aftermath of World War II. The EU was intended to be a project of reconciliation, first between Western countries who had been at war on and off for centuries, and later between Western Europe and Eastern European countries who had been behind the Iron Curtain. The initial period of prosperity the EU enjoyed was made significantly possible by U.S. economic assistance and the protection and unification of NATO.

Several elements present at the founding of the European Union have changed, altering the European landscape and leading to increased euro-skepticism.

The most important factor is the economy. In quickly taking on member states with poor finances, the EU has become overwhelmed economically. A financial crisis has overtaken the EU since 2009, particularly affecting the Southern European states and Ireland. Interest rates have skyrocketed, and the gap between wealthy and poor states of the European Union widened. Europeans are concerned the EU cannot provide the answer to financial difficulties and have turned to national governments for solutions. It is traditional

for voters to turn to the far right in times of economic insecurity, which explains the rise of right-wing movements in Italy, Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland, and other member states. However, what is different about the turn to the far right this time is the lack of foreseeable economic change in the future. If the economic situation continues to worsen, it is possible the far right will gain increased control over the minds of the population and euro-skepticism will continue to increase.



European Parliament (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

The economic crisis directly plays into the second factor affecting the future of the EU, which is the refugee crisis. Refugees and migrants from the Middle East and Africa have come in droves to Europe fleeing conflict, oppression, and poverty. The crisis has placed a further burden on European states already struggling to provide for their own populations. Despite an agreement to resettle refugees throughout European member states, many states have not honored this agreement, causing poorer states such as Italy and Greece to bear the sole burden of migration. This has led directly to the election of right wing governments in Italy and Austria and has caused national governments to take drastic measures to force the EU to address the refugee crisis as a whole. Notably, Italy refused to take in a boat of migrants off its coast in June, despite humanitarian pleas from multiple states and organizations. This action was intended to force the EU to honor refugee agreements.

The refugee crisis has also led to an increase in xenophobia. Traditionally, Europe has been a unicultural society, made up mostly of White Christians. This uniculturalism has an ugly history in Europe, dating back to the tragic genocide against the Jewish people during World War II, and xenophobia towards outsiders has not abated. When Eastern Europe was liberated from the Iron curtain, many Western Europeans were against immigrants from Eastern Europe immigrating to Western countries. This sentiment plays out today in countries such as Germany and England where there is sometimes resentment towards Eastern European immigrants who are viewed to be different culturally. Xenophobia is further heightened towards Muslim individuals. Turkey has long sought to be a member of the European Union, but has been thwarted multiple times for, among other reasons, a belief that Islam is incompatible with traditional European values.

The influx of refugees from Muslim countries has led to a general insecurity that European culture and values will be altered, leading to the rise of right wing movements in countries with a high refugee and migrant count, and distrust towards the European Union as a concept.

A large reason why Britain elected to leave the EU was due to suspicion of migrants, and a desire to tighten borders. In addition, European countries such as Denmark and Austria have been successful in passing laws banning the use of face and head coverings in an attempt to force refugees and migrants to assimilate to the European way of life. Other EU countries may follow Britain and elect to leave the EU if the issue of border control and refugee assimilation is not addressed.

Historical memory is also playing a role in increased nationalism and xenophobia. The Polish government has begun calling out the crimes of Nazi Germany, despite a period of relative cooperation and forgiveness between the two countries. Poland recently introduced a controversial law (that has since been re-worded), making it a crime to link death and concentration camps to Poland. The Polish govern-

ment wants to make clear that the blame for this crime lies solely with Germany and to separate the Polish state from complicity. In addition, following austerity measures imposed by the Germans on the Greeks, Greek citizens resorted to calling the German government “Nazis.” It is essential for European States to forgo name-calling and evoking historical memory, as a continuation of the blame-game will help no one.

The goal of the European Union was to foster a sense of trans-nationalism and overcome the nationalist tendencies that had led to centuries of brutal conflicts. In addition, the EU was intended to foster a spirit of reconciliation that could lead to unification after the horrible violence of World War II. It will be crucial in the future for the EU to address economic, border, and political crises facing member states in order to preserve its existence and stall right-wing, nationalist movements.



Brazil Oil Fields Auction: Fuel for Thought and the Brazilian Elections

As Brazil creeps up on a presidential election coming this October, some recent fiscal decisions provide telltale signs of what the next president will inherit and attempt to juggle in office.

In late May, “lorrie” (truck) drivers went on strike in Brazil in objection to the dramatic rise in diesel prices seen in Brazil over the past two years. The strike has crippling direct and indirect consequences on all commerce in Brazil, including flights and cargo deliveries, costing an approximate \$13.5 billion loss to the private sector. The reason for the price spike had been a combination of a diminished currency, the pulling back of domestic subsidies from partially state-owned oil company Petrobras, and a further alignment with international fuel prices.

What is both impressive and alarming is that the trucker strikes were not arranged by an organized union group, but by independent truck drivers who shrewdly leveraged social media to cause such disruption.

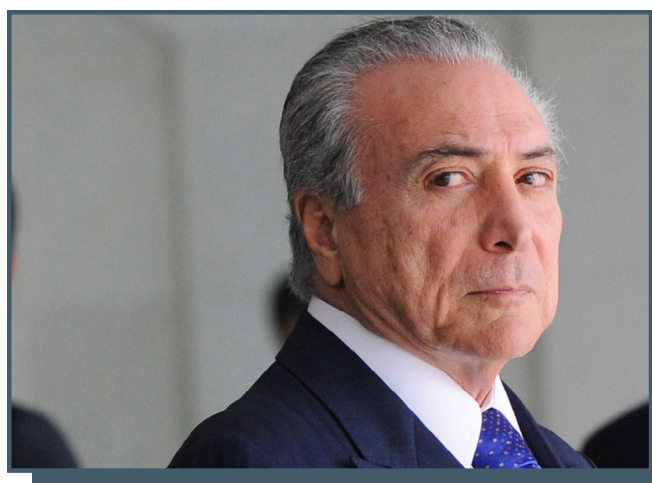
As the days of the truckers’ protest ensued, additional groups joined in for ulterior motives, essentially seeking an excuse to voice frustrations and protest. This is very similar to, yet not quite to the extreme of, what broke out in Nicaragua in April, in which a specific protest over social security reform broke out into a widespread general distaste for the status quo and

a referendum on the president and his administration. An aspect of the protests is the general rebuke of Petrobras in relation to the Petrobras/Oderbrecht corruption scandal in which Petrobras executives were taking bribes in exchange for contracts.

On the ninth day of the strike, President Michel Temer compromised to lower fuel prices to 0.46 reais per liter and enact a 60 day price freeze on the cost of fuel. This came at a hefty projected cost to the government of 9.5 billion reais. This type of revolt regarding oil prices is similar to what was seen in late 2016/early 2017 in Mexico with the “Gasolinazo” riots. Once a state-run oil company tries to shift away from heavily subsidizing domestic markets, immediate political blowback and unrest is inevitable.

On 7 June, a major auction was held for the drilling rights in the presumed oil-rich Campos and Santos Basins off the coast of Brazil. The eventual winner of the largest available plot was a consortium of Exxon Mobil, Portugal’s Petrogal, and Norway’s Equinor. Petrobras, because of its majority state-owned status, exercised its rights to be the operators on any drilling taking place in the area. Auctioning off oil fields is a simple way to raise funds and ideally brings some level of domestic job growth, but it will be tough for Brazil to continue to offset the high cost of social services and a less free-market economy. The truckers’ strike not only drove fear into the Brazilian government but is also a signal of uncertainty to foreign investors that the government can be easily leveraged.

The current leader in the presidential polls is former President Lula da Silva, who will likely not be able to officially run because he is in jail over corruption charges related to the Petrobras/ Oderbrecht Scandal. It is most likely that a candidate who is either on the far-right or far-left will win, which creates greater economic uncertainty. The Petrobras/Oderbrecht scandal has created a bureaucratic stalemate in the Brazilian Congress – there are so many corruption allegations against its members that it is tough for the present administration to implement a political strategy and achieve desired results.



President Michael Temer (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Volcanic Eruptions in the Western Hemisphere

Two major volcanos have been disrupting travel in the Western hemisphere: the Kilauea Volcano on Hawaii's Big Island and the Fuego Volcano in Guatemala. The Kilauea Volcano began erupting in Hawaii on 3 May and has spewed an estimated 250 million cubic meters of lava and counting. It is difficult to determine what the actual financial impact will be on the local economy, specifically when tourism accounts for about 30% of the jobs on the Big Island. It is believed that over 600 homes have been destroyed from the Kilauea eruption, a number that could likely grow.

Volcanos present a unique and dynamic challenge to emergency planners because there simply is no good way to combat lava flow, and the infrastructure and land use within the immediate vicinity could be totally altered.

It could take a significant amount of time before the volcanic activity has passed and responders can start the recovery process. This will also likely set back tourism in these areas.

Hurricane Season Looms in the Caribbean

The 2017 hurricane season brought with it some of the most devastating damage caused by natural disasters in recent memory, including hundreds of fatalities and total damage costs exceeding \$280 billion. All told, there were ten total hurricanes recorded in 2017, six of which were classified as major storms (defined as a Category 3 storm or higher). Coastal areas of the United States and areas throughout the Caribbean were hit hardest, with the most widespread damage seen on small island nations like St. Martin, Dominica, and Puerto Rico. As the Caribbean continues to recover from 2017 storms, the 2018 hurricane season has already begun and the most intense months (typically August – October) are looming. Although recovery efforts have made progress, the Caribbean still bears the scars from last season's storms, and certain areas that are still struggling to recover remain uniquely vulnerable if new storms make landfall in 2018.

Hurricane Harvey was the first major hurricane of the 2017 season, reaching Category 4 level intensity and making multiple landfalls throughout the Gulf of Mexico and the southern coast of the United States from 23 to 31 August. Harvey brought with it the largest amount of rainfall ever logged during a hurricane in the United States and left large swaths of coastal areas in Texas and Louisiana severely flooded. In totality, Harvey is believed to have resulted in over 100 fatalities and somewhere in the vicinity of 125 billion dollars in damage. Despite the significant destruction, the robust infrastructure and extensive emergency response capabilities available in the United States helped to mitigate what could have been even worse damage. As the 2017 hurricane season continued to unfold, storms struck in more austere and remote locations, limiting response and recovery services.

Hurricane Irma officially formed on 30 August 2017, while Harvey was still active. The storm quickly intensified, and by 5 September it had become a Category 5 hurricane. As the storm tracked across the Caribbean with winds reaching up to 180 mph, it caused catastrophic damage to numerous islands – including Barbuda, Saint Barths, Saint Martin, Anguilla, and the Virgin Islands – before continuing to the United States and making landfall on the West coast of Florida. The island nations that bore the brunt of the Category 5 storm were left devastated, with communication and electricity nonexistent in many locations.

Natural disasters can inundate even the most well-prepared and adequately funded emergency response departments, yet Irma struck many smaller countries that already had underdeveloped infrastructure and limited resources.

As a result, the storm left many areas completely uninhabitable, and mass evacuations were necessary to relocate survivors to more stable environments. Official death tolls from Hurricane Irma list 52 direct and 82 indirect fatalities from the storm, while damage costs are estimated at over \$60 billion USD.

Shortly after Irma, Hurricane Maria set eyes on the Caribbean. Hurricane Maria formed on 16 September 2017 and quickly grew to a Category 5 major hurricane with sustained winds of 175 mph. The storm tore through the Caribbean, causing massive destruction to numerous locations including the Lesser Antilles and Puerto Rico. Total damage estimates from the storm exceeded \$90 billion USD, making the storm the third-costliest hurricane of all time. The estimated number of fatalities caused by the storm varies significantly, and has been a point of important research, serious debate, and ongoing contention. The official death toll in Puerto Rico from Hurricane Maria is 64 people. However, a study by the New York Times in December 2017 provided evidence that the storm actually could have resulted in up to 1,052 deaths. A subsequent study by Harvard in May 2018 estimated that at least 4,600 people died in Puerto Rico as a direct result of the storm. These studies analyzed mortality rates in Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria against average mortality rates in prior years

and argue that the failure of the power grid, medical supply shortages, and limited resources caused by the storm resulted in hundreds (or thousands) of deaths that were not accurately accounted for (i.e. instead of listing Hurricane Maria as a contributing cause of death, official records simply listed terms like “natural causes”). Under increased pressure, Puerto Rico is reported to be reevaluating their official death toll from the storm.

Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria were the most damaging storms that occurred in the region in 2017; however, there were other hurricanes that could have been just as severe had their paths diverted in a different direction. For example, Hurricane Jose formed in early September while Maria was still wreaking havoc. The storm reached a Category 4 level with sustained winds of 155 mph and originally raised fears that it would follow a similar path as Maria, further devastating areas that had just been hit. Hurricane Jose ended up moving out into the Atlantic, and the damage caused by the storm was minimal in comparison to other hurricanes from 2017. However, the prospect of two highly destructive hurricanes in the Caribbean at one time provided organizations with an impetus to reconsider emergency planning in the region.

For travelers in the Caribbean and organizations operating in the region, the 2017 hurricane season offered some important takeaways. First and foremost, it's vital to understand the definitions related to tropical storms and hurricanes. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)'s Hurricane Center publishes a very useful chart that provides hurricane category definitions and corresponding damage estimates. Familiarizing oneself with the damage projections for each category of hurricane can help organizations make more informed decisions when a storm is imminent. For example, once a storm reaches Category 1 Level, extensive damage and power outages that last for several days are likely to occur. If a storm reaches the Category 5 Level, NOAA specifically notes the area affected will be uninhabitable for weeks or months. Using these damage estimates as a reference point, travelers and administrators should then assess whether or not to preemptively evacuate an area when a hurricane is approaching.

Furthermore, it is critical that organizations fully understand the nuances of their natural disaster evacuation insurance and emergency travel assistance services. When it comes to hurricanes, insurance contracts will typically have language stipulating evacuation coverage in relation to a designated time period after the storm is declared “named.” Often, organizations will not be able to trigger coverage until a Hurricane Watch or Hurricane Warning has been issued by NOAA. However, Hurricane Watches and Warnings are issued no sooner than 48 hours before a hurricane is expected to make landfall. At this point, resources in an area are typically in high demand, affording organizations few options to take proactive steps to aid or evacuate their travelers in the path of the storm.

Administrators should work with their insurance and travel risk management firms to understand coverage related to natural disasters and discuss proactive measures to aid travelers when a hurricane is scheduled to make landfall. These proactive steps can go a long way in reducing stress and associated costs that arise in post-disaster environments.

For example, it’s much more cost-effective to evacuate constituents via commercial air before a storm strikes than it is to charter an aircraft post-disaster.

Of course, in addition to knowing definitions and understanding coverage, administrators should ensure they have response plans in place. The 2017 hurricane season showed how challenging evacuations can be both prior to and after a hurricane strikes. Organi-

organizations operating in the Caribbean should have formalized Emergency Action Plans (EAPs) that detail how an impending hurricane should be handled. A key component of an EAP is Operational Security Levels (levels that detail a specific security posture based on the severity of the identified threat) and corresponding communication plans that keep everyone informed. It is important that once a formal EAP is developed, administrators and travelers are trained on the plan and conduct regular drills to best ensure preparedness. Organizations with operations in the area may also want to consider conducting site evaluations to better understand the vulnerability of their assets to wind damage, flooding, loss of utilities, etc.

Recovery efforts in the Caribbean from the 2017 hurricane season have been mixed. In Barbuda, Irma demolished 90% of buildings, and evacuees from the island have been slow to return. In other areas like St. Martin, Dominica, and St. Barts, power took months to be fully restored, and infrastructure repair remains ongoing. Stories of the complicated and costly recovery process in Puerto Rico have been well-covered by the international media. Puerto Rico's electrical infrastructure was almost entirely destroyed by the storm, resulting in an expansive project to rebuild the grid and re-supply power to the country. In the months since the storm, Puerto Rico's hasty effort to rebuild the electrical grid has resulted in complications including line failures and cascading blackouts. As of March 2018, at least 200,000 Puerto Ricans

were still without power, and a further 200,000 are reported to have left Puerto Rico during the aftermath of the storm. Of further note in Puerto Rico is the cascading effect Hurricane Maria has had on the economy. Even before Hurricane Maria struck the island, Puerto Rico suffered from a lagging economy and job shortages. As a result of the storm, numerous manufacturers of medical devices and pharmaceuticals (an industry that makes up 30% of Puerto Rico's overall economy) were forced to shut down and have been slow to recover, causing medical supply shortages across the world and a further drag on the country's economy.

In addition to the widespread damage left behind, the 2017 hurricane season also raised a number of open questions about the future outlook for the Caribbean and the region's resiliency. Hurricanes have long been a concern among island nations; however, with warming waters and rising sea levels, these storms are only expected to grow more severe and damaging.

A six inch rise in sea levels may not seem like a lot on the surface, but it can have a sizeable impact on storm surge and flooding when a hurricane hits.

Many of the current questions facing the region are similar to those the city of New Orleans faced in 2005 following Hurricane Katrina: at what point does an organization make the decision not to rebuild in an area (especially smaller island nations, with limited economies and an ever-increasing threat of further hurricane devastation)? At what point do residents of Caribbean countries ravaged by major hurricanes make the decision not to return because the threat of losing everything again to a natural disaster is too grave of a prospect to consider; or, at what point do residents make a logical calculation of risk and simply decide the threat is too great to return? For a region where the economy is so reliant on tourism, will travelers return to hurricane-devastated countries, or will they be deterred by the damage and ongoing rebuilding efforts? If the decision is made to rebuild, how is it done both quickly and in a way that creates resilience and protection against future storms?

Amid recovery efforts, there have also been success stories – notably the Virgin Islands which were able to quickly and efficiently rebuild thanks to public-private partnerships that expedited processes. And even with the effects of climate change, not every year will be like the 2017 hurricane season. The more extreme years tend to occur when weather patterns that weaken hurricanes are not present – like an El Nino and/or chaotic, hurricane killing winds in the Atlantic. As for the 2018 Hurricane season, NOAA is currently predicting near-normal or above-normal hurricane activity. However, be sure to follow updates from NOAA as this outlook will be updated in early August to coincide with the onset of the peak months of the hurricane season. Last year, NOAA increased their hurricane predictions to account for the remarkable weather activity they were observing.



Hurricane Maria (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

SEXUAL ASSAULT ABROAD

ON CALL INTERNATIONAL

Case Studies

When planning a trip, smart travelers will proactively inquire about the security landscape of the area, such as looking into violence or crime in the area they are headed. While this is a necessary and applauded step to take from a travel risk perspective, travelers should also take steps to vet their accommodations.

Travelers often operate in the mindset that they are safe as long as they stay within the hotel or resort property.

While generally that is true, some serious incidents do occur on hotel or resort property. In the same lens that travelers will usually look at a resort online to view pictures of the pool and balcony, they should also be judging their choices on the security reputation of the property.

Another serious concern at resorts is the threat of sexual assault or date rape by other guests or resort staff. In February of 2018, a 22-year-old Canadian woman went missing from her hotel room while on

vacation in southern Mexico. At approximately 0130 in the morning, she returned to the hotel room but couldn't speak and lacked muscle control. Her mother, unsure of what happened, put her daughter to bed. At around 0430 a.m., the young woman was missing again. The mother ran around the hotel yelling for her daughter in all areas of the resort. She contacted staff at the front desk and hotel security, both of whom were not helpful. Eventually she saw her daughter, still incoherent, and mostly naked, being escorted by two security guards to her hotel room. A guest at the hotel was chasing after the girl, allegedly irate that the guards had taken her from him. The next morning the daughter had no recollection of what happened. The mother asked the hotel to help contact the police to report the crime but apparently received very little assistance.

This is not a problem isolated to Mexican resorts. These types of incidents are also a major concern for travelers staying on resorts in the Caribbean. In Jamaica, several widely known resort groups had similar incidents perpetrated on guests by hotel staff. This appears to be a resort cultural problem, where local

employees don't feel comfortable coming forward to report suspicious behavior or an apparent crime. While the resort chain has taken additional measures to train hotel staff and implement stricter security and surveillance, it is important for travelers to understand that just because the resort brand is well-known, it does not mean these risks are not present.

Along with sexual assault, there are other risks that could manifest at resorts, which many travelers may not be considering. In 2017, several notable incidents occurred in Mexico, resulting in dangerous incidents of tainted-alcohol poisoning. A young Wisconsin woman and her brother consumed "tainted alcohol" at a popular international resort chain in Mexico, resulting in the hospitalization of both individuals. As a result of the Wisconsin woman's death, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel conducted extensive reporting on the threat of tainted alcohol in Mexico and the dangers to travelers who unknowingly consume it. The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel interviewed roughly 150 accounts of suspected alcohol tainting in Mexican resorts and found the primary locations of concern to be Playa del Carmen, Riviera Maya, Puerto Vallarta, Los Cabos, and Cancun. The Mexican government believes that around 36% of all alcohol within the country is deemed "illegal," meaning it is produced or sold in an unregulated fashion. The main driver of tainted alcohol in Mexico is to cut corners and avoid a hefty 53% excise tax on spirits. Producers or bootleggers of this type of alcohol will use dangerous tricks like mixing tequila flavored powder with in-

dustrial chemicals like paint-thinner or methanol. An additional layer of concern is that some resorts have been known to refill legitimate bottles of spirits with tainted alcohol, which makes it tougher for patrons to spot the inauthenticity.

Some proactive vetting of resorts that travelers can take is digging deep into the resort reviews on popular websites like Trip Advisor for anything that may stick out as a red flag and doing simple research on the hotel and chain.

Regarding the threat of tainted/bootleg alcohol, it is best practice to stick to bottled beers and wines that are brand name, and travelers should ask the bartender to open the bottles in front of them. Travelers should also proactively research the appropriate local medical facilities nearest the resort, to be prepared should an incident occur. It has been shown that although front desk staff/concierge can be helpful with more traditional requests, they may lack proper training to help support travelers in need of emergency support.

Medical Advice

Sexual Assault abroad has become a hot topic in the risk community as of late, as the “Me Too” movement gains traction in the media, and travelers face ever-evolving threats.

It is important for administrators to actively balance security advice with medical advice in preparing travelers for the possibility of sexual assault and enacting proper response protocols.

We asked On Call International’s Medical Director, Dr. Michelle Nathan MD, FAAEM, for her insight.

What steps can administrators take to prepare their travelers for the possibility of sexual assault?

Dr. Nathan: The possibility of sexual violence needs to be discussed with travelers. Although sexual violence can happen to anyone, certain travelers are at higher risk. These include: young females traveling alone, individuals traveling in areas with a higher prevalence of sexual assault (central southern sub-Saharan Africa, Australasia, Andean Latin America), young males and females in areas with popular nightlife-centered tourist resorts, and young gay and bisexual males.

There are some strategies that can help minimize the risk of sexual assault. Solo travelers should try to have meals with others. All travelers need to exercise caution with alcohol and drug use. Prior to travel to an area, one should try to identify unsafe areas and avoid those areas. Travelers should lock doors and windows to their rooms, even when they are in the space. Travelers need to have an awareness of local customs and try to adhere to cultural dress norms. Female travel-

ers may consider carrying emergency contraception (EC) if they are traveling to a country where it is not readily available. The International Consortium for Emergency Contraception (www.ceinfo.org) maintains a database of EC availability in individual countries.

What are the psychological effects of sexual assault? How can administrators best support victims while they are abroad?

Dr. Nathan: The psychological effects of sexual assault are variable, but there are some common effects. Initial reactions include shock and numbness, anger, a sense of vulnerability, self-blame, and an inability to trust others. In the longer term, victims often develop post-traumatic stress disorder with uncontrollable thoughts, anxiety, nightmares, and recurrent flashbacks. Depression and suicidal thoughts are common. Substance abuse can develop as a result of these effects.

Victims of sexual assault need support from peers, friends, and family. Support can be expressed by believing the victim's story, reminding them that they are not at fault, and avoiding judgement. Support can also be provided by offering to be with the victim when they report the incident or seek medical care for the incident. A traveler may need to return home for ongoing counseling.

What do victims need to do after sexual assault? If it is not advisable to go to a hospital due to security concerns, what alternate steps can victims take?

Dr. Nathan: Victims of sexual assault should contact their country's embassy or consulate. U.S. consulates are available for emergency assistance and will often assist in taking the appropriate steps after assault. Victims should seek medical care. The goal of medical care is to treat acute injuries, screen for and diagnose sexually transmitted disease, provide prophylactic treatment as needed, and provide emergency contraception. If it is feasible, victims should inform police of the event; the consulate can provide guidance on whether this is an appropriate step in each case. If victims cannot seek medical care, evacuation can be considered for access to appropriate care. Americans traveling abroad can also seek assistance from Pathways to Safety International (www.pathwaystosafety.org), an organization that provides sexual assault support and help for Americans traveling abroad.

The focus is often on female victims of sexual assault, but what about male victims? Is there anything different about male victims' psychological recovery in the wake of an incident?

Dr. Nathan: Male victims of sexual assault have many of the same psychological effects as female victims. However, sexual assault in males often raises doubt and questions about sexual identity for the victim.

There can be reporting barriers related to male sexual assault, especially in countries where same-sex relationships are banned. There are far fewer resources for male victims and less opportunity for early psychological intervention. Male victims are also more likely to develop substance abuse disorders after sexual assault.

There are increasing reports of date rape drugs being used to spike drinks at hotels and bars abroad. What are the most common type of drugs used for this purpose? What signs or symptoms of drink spiking can travelers look out for in themselves or others?

Dr. Nathan: Drug-facilitated sexual assault occurs when alcohol or drugs are used to compromise an individual's ability to consent to sexual activity. Alcohol is the most common drug that is used. Prescription drugs including sleep aids, anxiety medications, and muscle relaxers are often used for this purpose. Illicit drugs such as GHB, rohypnol, ecstasy, and ketamine are often tasteless and odorless and can be readily used for this purpose.

Travelers need to be particularly cautious when drinking alcohol. Avoid large-batch drinks that can have a deceptively high level of alcohol. Do not leave a drink unattended; if it is left unattended, replace it with a new drink in a new glass. Do not accept drinks from others; whenever possible, travelers should go to the bar, watch it being poured, and carry their own drinks. Finally, individuals should be self-aware and recognize their own levels of intoxication.

There are some signs that raise concern for spiked drinks. These include: difficulty breathing, feeling intoxicated with minimal alcohol ingestion, sudden body temperature changes (teeth chattering, sweating), sudden dizziness or disorientation, and loss of bowel or bladder control.



About ON CALL INTERNATIONAL

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

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:
www.oncallinternational.com



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

On Call International
Attn: Security Department
11 Manor Parkway, Salem, NH 03079.

The information provided to you within this report has been compiled from a multitude of available sources and is based on current news and analysis at the time of writing. The security team at On Call International, LLC. has provided this analysis, supporting advice and recommendations in good faith to assist you in mitigating risks that could arise. However, no implied or express warranty against risk, changes in circumstance, or other fluid and unforeseen events can be provided. By reading this report, you agree that any reliance you place on this information is therefore strictly at your own risk and that you will not hold On Call International, LLC. or the authors responsible for any inaccuracies, errors or oversights herein. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise without the prior permission of On Call International, LLC.