



GLOBAL
GUARDIAN

GLOBAL DIGEST

MAY 2019

Executive Summary

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Q2 of 2019 can be described in one word: disruption. From the expanding trade conflict with China, to the mounting geopolitical tension with Iran, to the fraying of the European Union, the current changes to the global order will not only affect international politics – they continue to move the global security environment further into a state of flux.

Latin America is on pace to experience its deadliest year in the last decade, Sri Lanka is recovering from the deadliest terrorist attack since 9/11, all while the Trump administration's maximum pressure campaign on Iran holds the potential to engulf the Middle East in a conflict that could have serious repercussions on the global energy supply. Outlined below are some of what we believe to be the major disruptions that Global Guardian is currently tracking.



LATIN AMERICA

VIOLENCE & POLITICAL CHANGE

Mexico's homicide rate rose for the second straight year, making 2018 the deadliest ever with an average of 91 murders per day. While Mexico is under new leadership, 2019 is unlikely to see a real drop in homicides as the drug cartels continue to fracture and fight over new resources and territory such as oil pipelines and smuggling routes. Traditionally safe places like Los Cabos and Cancun are now high-risk destinations. In Venezuela, the crisis over the presidency has taken a turn, as a failed coup has led to further political crackdowns, pushing the nation further towards the brink of a civil conflict. The ever-increasing levels of violence across large swaths of Latin America underscore the necessity of using executive protection services.

EUROPE

EU PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS – THE CENTER DID NOT HOLD

Even before Brexit and Italy's election of a populist coalition, the European political center's grasp on power has been on the decline. The results of the May 2019 European Parliamentary election highlight the fracturing of Europe's political landscape amid a wave of social upheaval and political change. A clear rebuke to the handling of eurozone financial crisis, the massive influx of refugees and lack of economic growth, Europe's two big-tent centrist parties failed to reach a majority for the first time. The growing prominence of the nationalist parties was mirrored by the electoral success of the ultra-progressives in what has become the most polarized European political environment in decades. Collectively, Eurosceptic parties will comprise about a quarter of the Parliament. Meanwhile, the success of the United Kingdom's single-issue pro and anti-Brexit parties likely foreshadow the looming pressure that will be placed upon Britain's two main political parties to move away from any middle of the road approach to Brexit. A polarized European Parliament will act as a major source of disruption and uncertainty for the European Union (EU), as the EU's budget, top positions, and policy on trade agreements, the environment, and economic regulations will be fought over by a more fractured Parliament. As Europe's political fragmentation continues, the frequency and severity of protests will continue to disrupt business travel.

CHINA

TRADE WAR ENTERS NEW PHASE AS CYBER THREATS PERSIST

Recent tit-for-tat tariffs have increased tensions between the U.S. and China amid an ongoing trade war. The U.S. government is trying to stop U.S. companies from buying Huawei equipment and is pressing allies to do the same, having added Huawei Technologies Co Ltd and 70 affiliates to its "Entity List" - a move that bans the company from acquiring components and technology from U.S. firms without government approval. U.S. security experts are concerned the gear could be used by China's government for espionage. The Huawei case shows how geopolitics and economic policy are converging and impacting each other. As more countries award Huawei with contracts to build 5G networks, the more vulnerable companies and their executives will be to Chinese cyber espionage. Device and network hardening will become even more important for businesses operating in countries using Huawei 5G networks.

AFRICA

BELEAGUERED BASHIR TOPPLED IN SUDAN

After ruling Sudan with an iron fist for 30 years, president Omar al-Bashir was sacked in a bloodless military coup d'état on 11 March 2019. The ouster comes amidst wide-scale protests that resulted in 80 deaths, including five soldiers who were killed defending the protesters from the regime's paramilitary forces on 09 March. The continuation of the crisis hinges on the speed at which the Transitional Military Council can devolve power to a civilian-led government. Until power firmly rests in the hands of civilian technocrats, Sudan will continue to teeter on the edge of chaos. Travel to Sudan's population centers, especially areas of protest should be avoided.

SOUTH ASIA

SRI LANKA EASTER BOMBINGS AND ANTI-MUSLIM POGROMS

On 21 April 2019, over 250 people were killed and over 500 injured after a series of coordinated suicide bombings took place across Sri Lanka at three luxury hotel restaurants and three Catholic churches on Easter Sunday. While ISIS has claimed responsibility for the attacks, there is no evidence of direct involvement, and government officials suspect two domestic Islamist militant groups were behind the attacks. On 12 May, in two separate towns, anti-Muslim pogroms targeted Muslim-owned businesses and Mosques, underscoring the current inter-ethnic tensions in the small island nation. The six coordinated attacks and the current tensions highlight the importance of tracking employees and family members while they are traveling in the event of a catastrophic terrorist attack.





SECURITY SPOTLIGHT: US-IRAN SHOWDOWN

The Persian Gulf region is primed for instability as US and Iranian-allied countries are in close proximity in the Gulf with no de-escalation measures in place.

Rising tensions between the United States and Iran has raised the specter of conflict between the longtime geopolitical rivals. On 15 May 2019, the U.S. State Department ordered the departure of non-emergency U.S. government employees from Iraq, and advised Americans to depart Iraq. Despite offers by Japan, Iraq and Oman to mediate, the situation is fluid and any escalating incident, even accidental, could trigger serious blowback in Iraq and across the region.

RECENT EVENTS

Over the past month, President Trump has designated the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization and doubled down on oil sanctions. In turn, Iran has responded by designating US as terrorists, threatening Saudi and UAE oil exports, and declaring its intent to re-start nuclear activities.

- 24 May 2019: President Trump authorized the sending of an additional 1,500 US troops to the Middle East, and bypassed Congress in order to expedite arms sales to Jordan, the UAE and Saudi Arabia
- 20 May 2019: Houthi launched missiles aimed at Taif and Jeddah and Mecca, Saudi Arabia were intercepted by Saudi air defense batteries
- 19 May 2019: Iraqi Shia militia fire rocket towards the Baghdad International Zone possibly targeting the US Embassy
- 16 May 2019: The USS Lincoln carrier strike group arrived to the Persian Gulf
- 15 May 2019: Iranian-backed Houthi rebels Yemen conducted drone strike on a Saudi ARAMCO pipeline in Saudi Arabia. In response, unconfirmed reports suggest that an incident in Iran's Tabriz's Oil facility was due to a Saudi cyber-attack.
- 12 May 2019: Four oil tankers off UAE's Fujairah port were sabotaged allegedly by Iran
- 03 May 2019: The US green-lighted the sale of Patriot Missile installations to the UAE

TRIGGERS AND TRIPWIRES

The situation in the Arabian Gulf is very fluid and one miscalculation by the US, Saudi Arabia or Iran could lead to an undesired regional conflict. Recent moves by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton - aggressive rhetoric and high-level meetings with regional players - have echoed those taken in the lead up to the 2003 Iraq War.

Iran will not negotiate with the US or other governments from a position of weakness. This means that in the lead up to the renegotiation with the Europeans to keep the JCPOA (Iran Deal) alive, the Iranians will likely change their bargaining position by increasing tensions. Any of the below measures taken by Iran hold the potential for a miscalculation that will lead to regional conflict. Iran can do so by:

- a. Threatening to choke off shipping routes
- b. Attacking Arabian Gulf oil infrastructure
- c. Harassing US naval vessels (in attempt to compel the US to "fire the first shot")
- d. Commanding Iraqi Shia militia to surgically attack US companies or US forces operating in Iraq
- e. Hezbollah and or other proxies to escalate tensions with Israel

ADVICE

1. Keep a low profile
2. Remain vigilant while in Iraq, especially at oil and gas facilities and/or any companies or buildings related to US interest
3. We will continue to monitor the situation for any tripwires or indications of further instability



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CONTACT US

Please contact the 24/7 Global Guardian Operations Center at any time with questions or comments on this special report, or for any travel security need.

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