

Worldwide Caution

April 10, 2014

The Department of State has issued this Worldwide Caution to update information on the continuing threat of terrorist actions and violence against U.S. citizens and interests throughout the world. U.S. citizens are reminded to maintain a high level of vigilance and to take appropriate steps to increase their security awareness. This replaces the Worldwide Caution dated September 25, 2013, to provide updated information on security threats and terrorist activities worldwide.

The Department of State remains concerned about the continued threat of terrorist attacks, demonstrations, and other violent actions against U.S. citizens and interests overseas. Kidnappings and hostage events involving U.S. citizens have become increasingly prevalent as al-Qa`ida and its affiliates have increased attempts to finance their operations through kidnapping for ransom operations. Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) are particularly effective with kidnapping for ransom and are using ransom money to fund the range of their activities. Kidnapping targets are usually Western citizens from governments or third parties that have established a pattern of paying ransoms for the release of individuals in custody. Current information suggests that al-Qa`ida, its affiliated organizations, and other terrorist groups continue to plan and encourage kidnappings of U.S. citizens and Westerners. U.S. citizens should closely monitor Travel Warnings and Alerts, as well as Country Specific Information, on the [Department of State's travel website](#) to review the latest safety and security information for destination countries.

Information also suggests that al-Qa`ida and its affiliated organizations continue to plan terrorist attacks against U.S. interests in multiple regions, including Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. These attacks may employ a wide variety of tactics including suicide operations, assassinations, kidnappings, hijackings, and bombings.

Extremists may elect to use conventional or non-conventional weapons, and target both official and private interests. Examples of such targets include high-profile sporting events, residential areas, business offices, hotels, clubs, restaurants, places of worship, schools, public areas, shopping malls, and other tourist destinations both in the United States and abroad where U.S. citizens gather in large numbers, including during holidays.

In early August 2013, the Department of State instructed certain U.S. embassies and consulates to remain closed or to suspend operations August 4 through August 10 because of security information received. The U.S. government took these precautionary steps out of an abundance of caution and care for our employees and others who may have planned to visit our installations.

U.S. citizens are reminded of the potential for terrorists to attack public transportation systems and other tourist infrastructure. Extremists have targeted and attempted attacks on subway and rail systems, aviation, and maritime services. In the past, these types of attacks have occurred in cities such as Moscow, London, Madrid, Glasgow, and New York City.

EUROPE: Current information suggests that al-Qa'ida, its affiliated organizations, and other terrorist groups continue to plan terrorist attacks against U.S. and Western interests in Europe. Additionally, there is a continuing threat in Europe from unaffiliated persons planning attacks inspired by major terrorist organizations but conducted on an individual basis. In the past several years, organized extremist attacks have been planned or carried out in various European countries. In October 2013 and twice in December 2013, suicide bombers targeted mass transportation in Volgograd, Russia, killing at least 70 people. In May 2013, in London, two Islamic extremists, unaffiliated with any group, killed a British soldier. The reported reason for the attack was to avenge the deaths of Muslims killed by British soldiers. On February 1, 2013, an individual detonated a bomb at a side entrance to the U.S. Embassy in Ankara, killing one Embassy guard and injuring others. The Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (Devrimci Halk Kurtulus Partisi/Cephesi or DHKP/C) claimed responsibility on its website for the attack. The DHKP/C has stated its intention to commit further attacks against the United States, NATO, and Turkey. European governments have taken action to guard against terrorist attacks, and some have made official declarations regarding heightened threat conditions.

MIDDLE EAST and NORTH AFRICA: Credible information indicates terrorist groups also seek to continue attacks against U.S. interests in the Middle East and North Africa. The U.S. government remains highly concerned about possible attacks against U.S. citizens, facilities, businesses, and perceived U.S. and Western interests. Terrorist organizations continue to be active in Yemen, including al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Security threat levels remain high in Yemen due to terrorist activities and civil unrest.

A number of extremist groups operate in Lebanon. As a result of spillover violence from the Syria crisis, Sunni groups are active and Hizballah, a group designated by the U.S. government as a terrorist organization, is also present. Sunni extremists have escalated the frequency and scope of indiscriminate bombings and small arms attacks against Lebanese Shia targets in Beirut, in addition to other locations throughout the country including Hermel and Aarsal in eastern Lebanon. Other incidents, sometimes attributed to sectarian retaliatory actions, have occurred along the coast in Sidon and in Tripoli in northern Lebanon. Many of the attacks have targeted specific individuals or venues, but in all cases have resulted in death and harm to passersby in the vicinity. Although there is no evidence these attacks were directed specifically at U.S. citizens at this time, there is a real possibility of "wrong place, wrong time" harm to U.S. citizens. On February 19, twin suicide car bombings targeting the Iranian Cultural Center in a southern Beirut suburb killed at least seven people and wounded over 128 others. The al-Qa'ida-linked Abdallah Azzam Brigades claimed responsibility for the attack. The same group also claimed responsibility for a double suicide bombing on November 19, 2013 that targeted the Iranian Embassy in south Beirut, which left at least 25 dead, and 150 injured. On December 27, 2013, a car bomb in downtown Beirut killed former Finance Minister Mohammad Chatah, and seven others, while injuring more than 70.

Iraq is experiencing levels of violence not seen since 2007, and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, formerly known as al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI)), is increasingly resurgent. Although U.S. interests have not been targeted directly, the threat of attacks against U.S. citizens, including kidnapping and terrorist violence, continues, even in Baghdad's International Zone. Bahrain continues to see bouts of sectarian violence, with Shi'a insurgents conducting increasingly lethal IED attacks against Bahraini Government targets to include facilities and security forces. Al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its affiliates are active throughout North Africa. In Algeria, terrorists sporadically attack Westerners and Algerian government targets, particularly in the Kabylie region, and near Algeria's borders with Libya

and Mali. Terrorists have targeted oil processing plants in Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. In Libya, various groups have called for attacks against U.S. citizens and U.S. interests. For instance, in October and December 2013, extremist groups in Libya made specific threats against U.S. government officials and U.S. non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Libya. Because of the presumption that foreigners, especially U.S. citizens, in Libya may be associated with the U.S. government or U.S. NGOs, travelers should be aware that they may be targeted by extremist groups seeking to injure or kill U.S. citizens, and should act accordingly with extreme caution. In addition, on December 5, 2013, a U.S. citizen teacher resident in Benghazi was killed in a drive-by shooting near his home.

Some elements in Iran remain hostile to the United States. U.S. citizens should remain cautious and be aware that there may be a more aggressive focus by the Iranian government on terrorist activity against U.S. citizens. Continuing political and social unrest in Egypt has led to large demonstrations that have turned violent.

No part of Syria should be considered immune from violence, and throughout the country the potential exists for unpredictable and hostile acts, including kidnappings, sniper assaults, large and small-scale bombings, and chemical attacks, as well as arbitrary arrest, detention, and torture. There is also a threat from terrorism, including groups like ISIL and al-Nusra Front as well as other extremist groups. Tactics for these groups include the use of suicide bombers, kidnapping, use of small and heavy arms, and improvised explosive devices in major city centers, including: Damascus, Aleppo, Hamah, Dara, Homs, Idlib, and Dayr al-Zawr. Public places, such as government buildings, shopping areas, and open spaces, have been targeted. Since the start of the uprising against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime in March 2011, the United States has received reports of 256 foreigners kidnapped in Syria, 80 of whom are still in captivity. The majority of the victims are journalists and aid workers.

AFRICA: A number of al-Qa'ida operatives and other extremists are believed to be operating in and around Africa. In February 2012, the emir of U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization al-Shabaab and al-Qa'ida's leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, announced the alliance of the two organizations. Al-Shabaab has taken credit for the attack on the shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya on September 21, 2013, which claimed the lives of over 60 people and injured over a hundred more, including U.S. citizens. In the past year and a half, there have been numerous other attacks involving shootings, grenades, or explosive devices in Kenya. Over 100 people died in these attacks, and more than 200 people were injured. No U.S. citizens were among the casualties. Fourteen grenade and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks have occurred in Nairobi, illustrating an increase in the number of attacks and an advance in the sophistication of attacks.

Al-Shabaab assassinations, suicide bombings, hostage taking, and indiscriminate attacks in civilian-populated areas are also frequent in Somalia. Terrorist operatives and armed groups in Somalia have demonstrated their intent to attack Somali authorities, the African Union Mission in Somalia, and non-military targets such as international donor offices and humanitarian assistance providers. Additionally, the terrorist group al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has declared its intention to attack Western targets throughout the Sahel (an area that stretches across the African continent between the Atlantic Ocean and the Red Sea to include Senegal, Mali, Algeria, Niger, Chad, Sudan, and Eritrea). It has claimed responsibility for kidnappings, attempted kidnappings, and the murder of several Westerners throughout the region, including southern Algeria. Violent extremist elements including, but not limited to Ansar al-Dine, the Movement for Oneness and Jihad (MUJAO), al-Qaida in the Lands of Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and extremists tied to the newly formed al-Murabitun, remain active in the

region. AQIM-related threats against Westerners in Mali and elsewhere increased following the initiation of the U.S.-supported, French-led intervention in northern and central Mali, where the security environment remains fluid. In neighboring Niger, terrorists formerly associated with AQIM conducted suicide attacks targeting a French mining facility and a Nigerien military compound in Agadez in late May of 2013.

The loosely organized group of factions known as Boko Haram continues to carry out significant improvised explosive device and suicide bombings in northern Nigeria, mainly targeting government forces and innocent civilians. Boko Haram and splinter group Ansaru have also claimed responsibility for the kidnappings of several Western workers and tourists, both in northern Nigeria and northern Cameroon; Ansaru has murdered virtually all of its hostages in the face of real or perceived rescue attempts, while Boko Haram allegedly received a large ransom payment for the release of a French family abducted near a tourist park in northern Cameroon. Late 2013 saw an increase in Boko Haram attacks and clashes with Nigerian government security forces in northern Nigeria. Boko Haram has also targeted women and children for kidnapping, reportedly kidnapping women in northern states for marriage as “slave brides.” Boko Haram is known to descend on whole towns, robbing banks and businesses, attacking police and military installations, and setting fire to private homes. In 2013, extremists have also targeted both Nigerians and foreign nationals involved in polio eradication efforts in northern Nigeria. Extremists attacked a school in northeast Nigeria, killing over 40 students, and have called for further attacks on educational institutions. Several agencies that have partnered with the U.S. government in the field of public health development in northern Nigeria have curtailed their activities in response to these threats. The president of Nigeria declared a state of emergency in three northeastern states in response to activities of extremist groups.

U.S. citizens considering travel by sea near the Horn of Africa, the Gulf of Guinea, or in the southern Red Sea should exercise extreme caution, as there have been armed attacks, robberies, and kidnappings for ransom by pirates. The threat of hijacking to merchant vessels continues to exist in Somali territorial waters and as far as 1,000 nautical miles off the coast of Somalia, Yemen, and Kenya in international waters. There has also been a recent rise in piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea, including hijackings.

U.S. government maritime authorities advise mariners to avoid the port of Mogadishu and to remain at least 200 nautical miles off the coast of Somalia. In addition, when transiting around the Horn of Africa, the Gulf of Guinea, or in the Red Sea, it is strongly recommended that vessels travel in convoys and maintain good communications at all times. U.S. citizens traveling on commercial passenger vessels should consult with the shipping or cruise ship company regarding precautions that will be taken to avoid hijacking incidents. Commercial vessels should review the Department of Transportation Maritime Administration's [Horn of Africa Piracy](#) page for information on maritime advisories, self-protection measures, and naval forces in the region. Review our International Maritime Piracy [Fact Sheet](#) for information on piracy in the southern Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean.

SOUTH ASIA: The U.S. government continues to receive information that terrorist groups in South Asia may also be planning attacks in the region, possibly against U.S. government facilities, U.S. citizens, or U.S. interests. The presence of al-Qa'ida, Taliban elements, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, indigenous sectarian groups, and other terror organizations, many of which are on the U.S. government's list of designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations, poses a potential danger to U.S. citizens in the region. Terrorists and their sympathizers have demonstrated their willingness and ability to attack locations where U.S.

citizens or Westerners are known to congregate or visit. Their actions may include, but are not limited to, vehicle-borne explosive attacks, improvised explosive device attacks, assassinations, carjackings, rocket attacks, assaults, or kidnappings.

Such attacks have occurred in a number of South Asian states, including Pakistan, where a number of extremist groups continue to target U.S. and other Western citizens and interests, and Pakistani government and military/law enforcement personnel. Suicide bombing attacks continue to occur throughout the country on a regular basis, often targeting government authorities such as police checkpoints and military installations, as well as public areas such as mosques, and shopping areas. U.S. citizens are increasingly targeted for kidnapping. No part of Afghanistan should be considered immune from violence, and throughout the country the potential exists for hostile acts, either targeted or random, against U.S. and other Western nationals at any time. Elements of the Taliban and the al-Qa'ida terrorist network, as well as other insurgent groups hostile to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, remain active. Insurgents continue to target various U.S. and Afghan government facilities, including a sophisticated, multiple-explosives and small-arms assault against the U.S. Consulate in Herat which killed two security guards and injured another 20 in September 2013. Insurgents also are increasingly targeting U.S. and foreign security convoys traveling in Kabul. In early February 2014, a lone vehicle borne improvised explosive device detonated in close proximity to a U.S. security convoy, killing three civilian contractors. There is an ongoing threat of kidnapping and assassination of U.S. citizens and non-governmental organization (NGO) workers throughout the country.

India has experienced terrorist and insurgent activities that may affect U.S. citizens directly or indirectly. Anti-Western terrorist groups, some of which are on the U.S. government's list of designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations, have been active in India, including Islamist extremist groups such as Harkat-ul-Jihad-i-Islami, Harakat ul-Mujahidin, Indian Mujahideen, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e Tayyiba. Terrorists have targeted public places in India frequented by Westerners, including luxury and other hotels, trains, train stations, markets, cinemas, mosques, and restaurants in large urban areas.

CENTRAL ASIA: Supporters of terrorist groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, al-Qa'ida, the Islamic Jihad Union, and the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement remain active in Central Asia. These groups have expressed anti-U.S. sentiments and may attempt to target U.S. government interests.

EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC: Information from confirmed sources suggests that there is a continued risk of armed terrorist and criminal groups operating and planning attacks against foreigners, including U.S. citizens, in the East Asian and Pacific region. Extremist groups in the region have demonstrated the capability to carry out attacks in locations where Westerners congregate.

There is a risk of travel to the southern Philippines, specifically related to kidnapping threats in the Sulu Archipelago and the ongoing threat of violence on the island of Mindanao, particularly in Central Mindanao. U.S. citizens should defer non-essential travel to the Sulu Archipelago, due to the high threat of kidnapping of international travelers and violence linked to insurgency and terrorism there. U.S. citizens should continue to exercise extreme caution if traveling to Mindanao. In 2013, separatist and terrorist groups increased the tempo and scale of their activities and confrontations with Philippine security forces, with increased bombings, attacks on civilians and political leaders, and battles with security forces. In September 2013, elements of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) occupied

portions of the city of Zamboanga and engaged in a lengthy battle with security forces which reduced large parts of the city to rubble.

The U.S. government has designated two groups, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), as Foreign Terrorist Organizations. JI is linked to al-Qa'ida and other regional terrorist groups and has cells operating throughout Southeast Asia. On November 15, 2013, gunmen, linked to the Abu Sayyaf Group, raided a resort on Pom Pom Island off the eastern coast of Sabah, killing a tourist from Taiwan and taking his wife hostage. On December 20, Philippine authorities recovered her in a forest near the village of Talipao on the island of Jolo. Some media reports indicated she was released in exchange for a ransom payment. On December 2, Royal Malaysia Police announced the arrest of two suspects in Semporna, eastern Sabah, allegedly linked to the attack. Kidnappings-for-ransom occur in these areas. In addition to incursions on the coastal and island resorts themselves, criminal or terrorist bands may attempt to intercept boats ferrying tourists in the area.

Before You Go

The Department of State urges U.S. citizens living overseas or planning to travel abroad to enroll in the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#). When you enroll in STEP, we can keep you up to date with important safety and security announcements. Enrolling will also make it easier for the Embassy to contact you in the event of an emergency. You should remember to keep all of your information in STEP up to date; it is particularly important when you enroll or update your information to include a current phone number and e-mail address.

U.S. citizens are strongly encouraged to maintain a high level of vigilance, be aware of local events, and take the appropriate steps to bolster their personal security. For additional information, please refer to [Traveler's Checklist](#).

U.S. government facilities worldwide remain at a heightened state of alert. These facilities may temporarily close or periodically suspend public services to assess their security posture. In those instances, U.S. embassies and consulates will make every effort to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens. U.S. citizens abroad are urged to monitor the local news and maintain contact with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

As the Department of State continues to develop information on potential security threats to U.S. citizens overseas, it shares credible threat information through its [Consular Information Program](#) documents, including Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts, Country Specific Information, and Emergency and Security Messages, all of which are available on the Bureau of Consular Affairs website. Stay up to date by bookmarking our [website](#). Follow us on [Twitter](#) and the Bureau of Consular Affairs page on [Facebook](#) as well.

In addition to information on the internet, travelers may obtain up-to-date information on security conditions by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the United States and Canada or, from other countries, on a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444. These numbers are available from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm Monday through Friday, Eastern Time (except U.S. federal holidays).