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WAR, TERRORISM AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE NEWSLETTER



Staff at six oilfields in Libya have been evacuated since 10 April amid fears of an imminent IS attack

Libya: Threats of IS attacks trigger oilfield evacuation, highlight growing instability

Staff at six oilfields have been evacuated since 10 April, prompted by fears of an imminent Islamic State (IS) attack. The Wafa field was completely evacuated, and the Tibesti, Bayda, and three other fields were partially evacuated following intelligence that fighters amassing in the coastal town of Nawfiliya were preparing to strike. IS on 2 April reportedly killed five guards at the Bayda field as nearby municipal forces rallied to defend the facility.

Energy infrastructure will remain among militants' principal targets. Despite controlling a swath of central Libya since March 2015, IS has been unable to capture any oil facilities. The country's myriad armed groups in recent months have frequently repelled the group's attacks. However, IS will retain the capability to attack facilities to the south-east of Sirte and Nawfiliya, and south of the Sidre and Ras Lanuf oil terminals.

Emerging co-operation between political factions and militias is unlikely to defeat IS within the next six to 12 months. Following the US bombing of IS facilities in Sabratha and the unity government's arrival in Tripoli last month, rival groups are increasingly working together to combat IS. However, this co-operation is not sufficient to stop IS carrying out attacks on politically and economically significant targets.

IS is seeking to make rapid strategic gains ahead of a Libyan forces offensive supported by renewed Western intervention. The unity government's arrival paves the way for operations led by militias from the north-western city of Misrata supported by Western airstrikes and special forces. IS has not seized any significant new territory since February 2015. If it captured or destroyed oil facilities this would show its strength and help it to recruit fighters.

IS's operations in Libya are increasingly driven by events in Syria and Iraq. The group has sent commanders and hundreds of recruits from more than a dozen countries to Libya to reinforce its operations and expand its influence there. The group's Libyan strongholds could serve as a refuge for fighters if IS were forced out of Iraq and Syria.

Burkina Faso: Warning from mines ministry points to increased terrorism threat at mining sites in north

Mines Minister Alpha Oumar Dissa on 7 April sent a notice to the Chamber of Mines to warn mining companies of the threat of terrorist attacks on mining sites. According to the letter, the gendarmerie has reported recent meetings between the head of an al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) cell and a driver working at a mining site in the northern Sahel region.

The letter points to AQIM's growing intent to target industrial mine sites. AQIM has not targeted industrial sites in the Sahel since mid-2013. An attack on a remote mining site in Burkina Faso would not generate the same level of publicity as recent attacks on West African capitals. However, AQIM would be likely to portray it as an attack on the 'appropriation' of local resources by Westerners. The presence of large quantities of explosives on mining sites could also encourage AQIM to seize material for suicide bombings.

Operators in the Sahel region and – to a lesser extent – Nord and Centre-Nord regions will be most exposed, given their proximity to Islamist militant strongholds in northern Mali. The risk of attacks is likely to remain low in other parts of the country, where AQIM would have greater logistical difficulties in carrying out an operation.

An incident on the scale of the 15 January hotel attack in the capital Ouagadougou is unlikely in the coming months amid enhanced surveillance and new security measures at upmarket hotels. However, the government is in the early stages of rebuilding its security and intelligence apparatus after the political transition. As a result, militants may seek to exploit intelligence and security gaps to carry out smaller-scale attacks on less protected entertainment venues frequented by expatriates.

Worldwide incidents

NORTH AMERICA

US: Republican members of the US Senate on 17 March introduced a bill that would impose new sanctions on Iran for the ballistic missile tests it has carried out in recent weeks. A parallel bill targets Iran's domestic human rights violations and its support for designated terrorist organisations elsewhere in the Middle East.

EUROPE

Russia: Masked men on 9 March attacked six journalists and two human rights activists from the Committee for Prevention of Torture (KPP) in Ingushetia (North Caucasus), near the border with Chechnya. There were no fatalities, but some activists were hospitalised.

Belgium: Around 100 left-wing, far-right and local protesters were arrested in the capital Brussels on 2 April while breaking an official ban on demonstrations. One woman was severely injured during small-scale clashes between local residents and the police.

ASIA

Pakistan: Sindh's police counterterrorism unit on 7 April announced that around 25 militants affiliated with IS were operating in Karachi. Officers on 5 April killed two IS-affiliated militants during a raid in Pakistan's commercial capital, and unearthed caches of weapons and explosives and plans for terrorist attacks in the southern city.

Afghanistan: Three rockets on 28 March struck the new parliament building in Kabul without causing casualties. A bomb attached to a bicycle exploded near the diplomatic quarter in the capital on 25 March, injuring one person. The Taliban claimed both attacks.

Thailand: A shooting by suspected Malay-Muslim insurgents on 29 March in Rangae district (Narathiwat province) killed three police officers. A spike in attacks in the deep south in the past month has killed at least 13 police officers and defence volunteers.

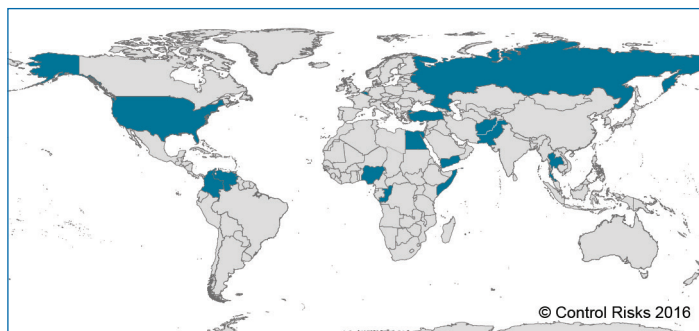
SOUTH AMERICA

Colombia: Following more than two years of informal talks, the government and representatives of the National Liberation Army, the country's second most powerful leftist guerrilla group, on 30 March announced the start of formal peace negotiations.

Venezuela: Two police officers were killed during clashes with student activists in the city of San Cristobal (Tachira state) on 29 March. The officers were struck by a bus hijacked by protesters. The protest, which was a response to recent increases in public transport fares, also resulted in 12 injuries.

AFRICA

Congo (Brazzaville): Gunmen on 4 April reportedly attacked police buildings and clashed with security forces in opposition strongholds of Brazzaville, resulting in 17 fatalities according to government figures. The authorities blamed the attack on the Ninjas, a militia group active in the Pool region in the 1990s and early 2000s.



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Nigeria: The military on 2 April said that it had arrested Islamist militant leader Khalid al-Barnawi in Lokoja (Kogi state). Al-Barnawi is reported to be the head of Ansaru, an offshoot of Boko Haram that is ideologically aligned to AQIM and focuses on high-profile kidnaps and attacks on global interests.

Somalia: Six people, including two Turkish nationals, were killed on 30 March when gunmen targeted their vehicle in a drive-by shooting in Mogadishu. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack. Four people were killed in Mogadishu on the same day during a shoot-out between rival members of the Somali army.

MIDDLE EAST

Yemen: A UN-brokered ceasefire came into effect on 11 April. The government, the Saudi-led military coalition and the Zaidi Shia Houthi movement and allied forces loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh announced their commitment to the ceasefire. In the first hours of the ceasefire, violations were reported in Taiz, Jawf, Marib, Shabwa, Baydaa, Ibb, Dhalea and Hajjah provinces.

Turkey: Assaultants suspected to have links to IS on 10 April shot and injured a Free Syrian Army-linked journalist in the south-eastern city of Gaziantep. The attack followed the shelling of Kilis with rockets launched from IS-held territories on 7 April. Meanwhile, the Israeli and US embassies in Turkey published travel warnings on 8 and 9 April, with the former advising its citizens to depart the country immediately.

Egypt: The security forces on 8 April said that at least five soldiers, one military officer and a civilian had been killed and 15 others injured in two attacks on armoured personnel carriers in North Sinai. IS affiliate Sinai Province claimed responsibility for the attacks in Rafah and Sheikh Zuweid, which involved improvised explosive devices.

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