

22 December 2014

**Focus Countries**[Algeria](#)[Kuwait](#)[Morocco](#)[Syria](#)[Bahrain](#)[Lebanon](#)[Oman](#)[Tunisia](#)[Egypt](#)[Libya](#)[Pakistan](#)[Turkey](#)[Iran](#)[Mali](#)[Qatar](#)[United Arab Emirates](#)[Jordan](#)[Mauritania](#)[Saudi Arabia](#)[Yemen](#)[Foreign Ministry Advisory Links](#)**ALGERIA**

**On December 22, 2014 the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade updated the travel advisory issued on September 24, 2014.**

There is no significant change in the overall threat level. However the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade now strongly advise against travel to parts of Algeria within 450 kilometres of Mali and Niger and within 100 kilometres of Mauritania, Libya and Tunisia. The advisory also includes updated language (underlined below) stating that "In 2014, attacks occurred in Sidi Bel-Abbès (440 km west of Algiers) and Tizi Ouzou (90 km east of Algiers), demonstrating the threat across the country. A French national was kidnapped and later killed in the mountainous area of Tizi Ouzou, in the Kabylie region, on 21 September 2014." The advisory includes new language stating that "on 3 November 2014, militants fired on a convoy of foreign construction workers in Bouria province. A number of protests have occurred across Algeria in 2014, with some resulting in violent clashes between police and demonstrators."

We advise you to reconsider your need to travel to Algeria at this time because of the high threat of terrorist attack. If you do decide to travel to Algeria, you should exercise extreme caution. You should avoid political gatherings and demonstrations, monitor the media for developments which could affect your safety and follow the instructions of local authorities. The deteriorating security environment across the Sahel has adversely affected Algeria. In 2014, attacks occurred in Sidi Bel-Abbès (440 km west of Algiers) and Tizi Ouzou (90 km east of Algiers), demonstrating the threat across the country. We regularly receive information indicating that terrorists are planning attacks against a range of targets, including places frequented by foreigners and Western interests, as well as premises and symbols associated with the Algerian Government. Terrorists have in the past mounted attacks on significant dates and anniversaries, but attacks could occur anywhere and at any time. You should take particular care in Tizi Ouzou, Bouira, Bourmedès and Bejaia provinces (east of Algiers) in the Kabylie region. You should avoid travel by road throughout Algeria, especially in the Tamanrasset and Illizi provinces in southern Algeria due to the presence of armed groups. All road travel outside city limits must be cleared in advance by police authorities. We strongly advise you not to travel to parts of Algeria within 450 kilometres of the borders with Mali and Niger and within 100 kilometres of Mauritania, Libya and Tunisia. , due to the threat of terrorism, banditry and kidnapping. Kidnapping, by both criminals and terrorists, is a real threat in Algeria, particularly outside major centres. Kidnappings occur frequently in the Kabylie region in north east Algeria and in the trans-Sahara region in the south. A French national was kidnapped and later killed in the mountainous area of Tizi Ouzou, in the Kabylie region, on 21 September 2014. Australia does not have an embassy or consulate in Algeria. The Canadian Embassy located in Algiers, provides consular assistance to Australians in Algeria. This

service includes the issuance of Provisional Travel Documents. The Australian Embassy in Paris, France, can also assist Australians in Algeria.

[Return to Top](#)

## **BAHRAIN**

**Three police officers were wounded when a bomb exploded near an area they were patrolling in the predominately Shi'ite village of Bani Jamra outside of Manama on Friday. In a separate incident, one protester was injured during a clash with police in the Shi'ite village of Sanabes late on Friday.**

A bomb blast in a Shiite village in Bahrain, the scene of simmering unrest since anti-government protests were crushed in 2011, has left three policemen slightly wounded, officials said. The three were on patrol in the village of Bani Jamra when the blast occurred, the Gulf kingdom's Interior Ministry said in a statement on Twitter posted late Friday. It said that the three sustained minor injuries, describing the explosion as a "terrorist" blast and adding that "necessary steps are being taken," without elaborating. Witnesses said that the blast occurred late Friday and that security forces swiftly sealed off the village, which lies not far from the capital Manama. They added that a young protester was also injured in clashes with police in another Shiite village, Sanabes, late Friday. Attacks against security forces have intensified this year. (Daily Star, 20-December)

[Return to Top](#)

## **EGYPT**

**Five more militants have been killed in the Sinai during a raid by military forces on a farm in al-Sharqiya province. The militants, members of Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (Champions of Jerusalem), were described as "most dangerous" jihadis and had explosives' belts for suicide attacks, a car laden with explosives and bomb-making material.**

Egypt's Interior Ministry says security forces killed five militants from a Sinai-based group allied with Islamic State extremists during a raid in the country's north. The ministry says Sunday's raid targeted a farm in al-Sharqiya province where some members of Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, or Champions of Jerusalem, were hiding. It describes those killed in the shootout as "most dangerous" jihadis. The statement says two were wanted by the Supreme Security Court for participating in terrorist attacks. It says one security officer was wounded in the shootout and that a weapons cache was seized, including explosives' belts for suicide attacks, a car laden with explosives and bomb-making material. The Sinai-based group has carried out scores of attacks in Egypt since the July 2013 overthrow of Islamist President Mohammed Morsi. (Daily News 22 December)

[Return to Top](#)

## **IRAN**

Nothing Significant To Report for Today

[Return to Top](#)

## **JORDAN**

**After an eight-year moratorium on death sentences was lifted, eleven men were put to death by hanging on Sunday, all of them having previously been convicted on murder charges from nearly ten years ago. More than one hundred prisoners remain on death row including twelve women.**

Human rights groups took Jordan to task on Sunday as the country ended an eight-year moratorium on the death penalty with the hangings of 11 men convicted of murder. The men were executed at dawn in a prison about 70 kilometers from the capital Amman, interior ministry spokesman Ziyad Zoobi was quoted as saying by

the official Petra news agency. Authorities said the men were all Jordanians convicted on murder charges, with no links to politics or extremism, in 2005 and 2006. A source in the prison system said the men were mostly in their 40s. "Some of the prisoners asked to have their final words passed on their families, others asked only to smoke a cigarette," the source said. Jordan's last previous executions were in June 2006 and 122 people have since been sentenced to death. Interior Minister Hussein Majali suggested recently that the moratorium might end, saying there was a "major debate" in Jordan on the death penalty and that "the public believes that the rise in crime has been the result of the non-application" of capital punishment. Experts said the government was responding to a rise in Jordan's crime rate. "The authorities have been confronted in recent years with a wave of violence, criminality and murders and want to meet the challenge by opting for deterrence and the renewed application of the death penalty," said Oraib Rantawi, head of Amman's Al-Quds Center for Political Studies. But rights groups denounced the ending of the moratorium, saying it would make little difference to rising crime. "We are surprised by this decision, which is a step back for Jordan," said Taghreed Jaber, the regional director for Penal Reform International. The head of Jordan's Adallah (Justice) rights group, Assem Rababa, said the country's authorities would be better off tackling the root causes of crime. "Political and economic problems are fostering crime," he said. "The authorities should not make a headlong rush (into executions) while ignoring these problems." China by far carried out the most executions in 2013, numbering in the thousands, followed by Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the United States, human rights group Amnesty International said in a report in March. (Arab News, 21-December)

[Return to Top](#)

#### KUWAIT

Nothing Significant To Report for Today

[Return to Top](#)

#### LEBANON

**Militants from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) issued new videos on Friday threatening to kill three of the twenty five police and soldiers still being held hostage. The speaker on the video is blaming the Lebanese government for their support of the Shi'ite group Hezbollah whose fighters continue to support the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.**

ISIL has earned drawn the world's attention with its release of video footage of its executions of Western hostages, captured soldiers and civilians accused of breaching its version of Islamic law. In the latest instance, a French-speaking fighter threatened on Friday to execute Lebanese soldiers held hostage by ISIL, saying three prominent anti-ISIL Lebanese politicians would be responsible for their deaths. The threat was made in a video AFP news agency obtained from Wissam al-Masri, a Salafist religious leader who is mediating the release of 25 police and soldiers held by ISIL and the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda, al-Nusra Front. Four hostages have already been executed. The video, filmed in a field with hills in the background, shows three men in blue uniforms, each kneeling in front of a fighter holding a knife to his throat. The unidentified speaker was wearing a hood and his companions' faces were uncovered. From his speech, it was not possible to determine if he was from Lebanon, where French is widely spoken, or a third country. Thousands of fighters from France and countries in North Africa where French is spoken have flocked to ISIL ranks. The speaker attacked the politicians for what he said is their support for Lebanon's mainly Shia group Hezbollah, whose fighters are aiding Syrian President Bashar Assad in the civil war against largely Sunni Muslim rebels that include ISIL. "To the allies of France in Lebanon - Hariri, Geagea and Jumblatt - the Islamic State is at war with Hezbollah, which is meddling in the affairs of Muslims in Shams [Syria] and has killed our women and our children," he said, referring to Saad Hariri, a Sunni former prime minister; Samir Geagea, a Christian leader; and Walid Jumblatt, chief of the Druze community in Lebanon. (Al Jazeera, 20-December)

[Return to Top](#)

## LIBYA

Nothing Significant To Report for Today

[Return to Top](#)

## MALI

**On December 19, 2014, the U.S. Embassy in Bamako issued the following security message:**

**This message reminds U.S. citizens of the potential for terrorist attacks in Bamako during the holiday period.**

The U.S. Embassy in Bamako has been informed by local security forces of potential terrorist attacks in the coming weeks against unidentified establishments frequented by westerners. Malian authorities are investigating the threat. The Embassy reminds U.S. citizens that the potential for terrorist attacks in Bamako continues to exist. U.S. citizens are encouraged to review their personal security plans; remain aware of their surroundings; and monitor local events. The Embassy reminds U.S. citizens to be vigilant during the upcoming holiday season. Crime rates often spike around the holidays and this upcoming holiday season is unlikely to be an exception, particularly given recent reports of armed break-ins in the ACI-2000 neighborhood, carjacking incidents, and reports of harassment by police. Crime in Mali is rampant, indiscriminant, at times violent, and happens in all parts of Bamako and throughout the country. The U.S. Embassy recommends that U.S. citizens remember the importance of practicing the following personal security strategies:

- Carry a fully charged cell phone on your person at all times.
- Do not exhibit large amounts of cash when shopping.
- Drive with windows up and doors locked.
- Be aware of the potential for crime when moving about the city, particularly in non-daylight hours, and move at night in groups of two or more if possible.
- Be cognizant of potential surveillance around your home, or being followed between locations.
- Look for emergency escape routes and presence of security personnel at public venues.
- If you are the victim of a crime, try your best to remain calm and begin talking with assailants to lower your/their anxiety. Historically, most carjackings and robberies have been de-escalated by compliance and cooperation with criminals.
- Traffic stops are conducted throughout Bamako. During legitimate traffic violations, the police typically deal with the matter at the point of the incident. It is rare that police will pursue vehicles on motorcycles for legitimate traffic infractions. Do NOT follow the police anywhere, or allow them inside your vehicle. If you are harassed by police, display your identification (diplomatic card or copy of passport bio page), and contact the Embassy.

[Return to Top](#)

## MAURITANIA

Nothing Significant To Report for Today

[Return to Top](#)

## MOROCCO

**On December 19, 2014, the UK Foreign Commonwealth Office issued updated the travel advisory issued on December 01, 2014:**

**There is no significant change in the overall threat rating. The advisory includes new language stating that "heavy rains in late November 2014 affected several areas of Morocco including Taghazout, Guelmin, the coast between Sidi Ifni and Agadir, and some parts of the High Atlas mountains. All affected routes have now re-opened. Take care when driving in these areas as repair works are underway to bridges and road surfaces along several routes."**

Most visits are trouble-free. There is a general threat from terrorism. The Moroccan authorities have warned of an increased threat linked to the number of Moroccans belonging to international terrorist organisations

operating in Syria and Iraq. Heavy rains in late November 2014 affected several areas of Morocco including Taghazout, Guelmin, the coast between Sidi Ifni and Agadir, and some parts of the High Atlas mountains. All affected routes have now re-opened. Take care when driving in these areas as repair works are underway to bridges and road surfaces along several routes. There have been some demonstrations in various locations across the country. Most of these have been peaceful. Morocco has a poor road safety record. If you're travelling to Western Sahara, you should read our travel advice for this disputed territory.

[Return to Top](#)

## OMAN

Nothing Significant To Report for Today

[Return to Top](#)

## PAKISTAN

**More than twenty militants were killed as government forces continued air strikes in Tirah Valley in the Khyber Agency on Saturday. In other developments:**

- **At least five people were killed after a U.S. drone fired two missiles at a compound in the Mada Khail neighborhood of Datta Khel in North Waziristan on Saturday.**
- **A police officer and a paramilitary soldier along with two militants were killed after security forces attacked a militant hideout in the Mechani neighborhood of Shabqadar (near Peshawar). Both militants were part of Tehreek-i-Taliban (TTP).**
- **Five TTP militants including a local commander were killed after security forces raided their hideout in the Gujjar Gadi neighborhood of Matni (near Peshawar).**

Reports say 21 fighters have been killed in aerial strikes in the Tirah Valley in Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Agency. The country's leaders pledged decisive action in the wake of Tuesday's school massacre in Peshawar, capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, which left 149 people dead, most of them children. The rampage brought international condemnation and fuelled calls in Pakistan for action against armed fighters. Saturday's bombardment comes a day after Pakistan hanged two convicted men in the first executions since 2008 after the government ended a moratorium on the death penalty in the wake of the school massacre. Officials said that there may be 10 more executions in the coming days: six in Punjab province and four in southern Sindh province. Meanwhile, US drone strikes in Data Khel area of North Waziristan province left five people dead on Saturday, Pakistani security officials said. "A US drone fired two missiles at a compound in Mada Khail neighbourhood of Data Khel area in North Waziristan killing five militants. The death toll is expected to rise," a senior security official requesting anonymity told AFP news agency. Also on Saturday, nine people including a policeman and paramilitary soldier were killed in two separate incidents when security forces hit suspected rebel hideouts in the northwest, officials said. In the first incident, police and paramilitary soldiers raided suspected hideouts in the Mechani neighbourhood of Shabqadar, a town around 30km north of Peshawar. "A soldier of the Frontier Corps and a policeman embraced martyrdom in an exchange of fire with militants in Mechani neighbourhood of Shabqadar Saturday morning," local police official Wilayat Khan told AFP. He said two fighters belonging to Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the group behind Tuesday's school massacre were also killed. In the second incident, five members of the TTP including a local commander were killed officials said. "Five members of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) were killed in a raid on their hideout in Gujjar Gadi neighbourhood of Matni, around 16 miles (25km) south of Peshawar," a senior security official told AFP. The Pakistani army has been waging a major offensive against longstanding Taliban and other rebel strongholds in the restive tribal areas on the Afghan border for the last six months. (Al Jazeera, 20-December)

**With the moratorium on carrying out death sentences lifted, two people were executed by hanging in Faisalabad on Friday night. Dr. Usman, a former soldier in the Army's Medical Corps, was executed for his involvement in an attack on the headquarters of the Pakistani Army in Rawalpindi in 2009. Arshad Mehmood was executed for his involvement in an al-Qaeda inspired assassination attempt against former President Pervez Musharaff in 2003. On Sunday, four more people were executed by hanging, all of the prisoners having previously been convicted for their involvement in an attack on Musharaff. Prior to this weekend, there had been no executions since 2008. There can be up to six more executions in the coming days, four in Lahore and two in Sukkur.**

Aqeel alias Dr Usman and Arshad Mehmood have been executed in Faisalabad on Friday night, in the first capital punishment carried out in the country since Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif lifted the moratorium on the death penalty, sources said. Usman a former soldier of the army's medical corps, was executed in relation to an attack on the headquarters of the Pakistan Army in 2009 in Rawalpindi. Arshad Mehmood, was executed for an assassination attempt on former military ruler, General (ret'd.) Pervez Musharraf. "Aqeel alias Usman and Arshad were hanged in Faisalabad Jail at 9:00 pm," a Punjab govt source told Reuters. Security had been tightened at Faisalabad's central and district prisons ahead of the executions. The black warrant for Dr Usman was signed by Army Chief General Raheel Sharif late on Thursday night. The prime minister had lifted the moratorium a day after terrorists attacked Peshawar's Army Public School, killing 141 people, most of them children. Earlier on Friday, the UN human rights office had made an appeal to refrain from resuming executions, saying this would not stop terrorism and might even feed a "cycle of revenge". "To its great credit, Pakistan has maintained a de facto moratorium on the death penalty since 2008, and we urge the government not to succumb to widespread calls for revenge, not least because those at most risk of execution in the coming days are people convicted of different crimes, and can have had nothing to do with Wednesday's premeditated slaughter," UN human rights spokesman Rupert Colville said. Eleven soldiers had lost their lives in the Oct 10, 2009 attack when 10 heavily armed militants wearing suicide vests stormed the army's General Headquarter (GHQ) holding off commandos for hours. Dr Usman, who was caught injured during the Oct 10 raid on the army headquarters by militants, was sentenced to death in 2011 by a military court which had awarded prison terms to others in the GHQ attack case. A retired soldier, Imran Siddiq, was awarded life imprisonment in the case at the time whereas three civilians — Khaliqur Rehman, Mohammad Usman and Wajid Mehmood — were given life terms while two others, Mohammad Adnan and Tahir Shafiq (both civilians), were given eight and seven years jail sentence respectively. Apart from Dr Usman, who was caught during the attack, other serviceman and five civilians were found guilty of abetment. Their trial by the military court, which was headed by a brigadier, had lasted over five months and had taken place at an undisclosed location. Mehmood, who was a trooper, was among the five sentenced to be hanged for their role in an Al Qaeda-inspired assassination attempt on Musharraf's life in late 2003. Musharraf, who was in power at the time, narrowly escaped the bid when two suicide car bombers rammed his motorcade on Dec 25, 2003, in Rawalpindi. Fifteen people were killed in that attack. It was the second attempt on Musharraf's life that month, and several soldiers, air force personnel and militants were arrested after the two attacks. Mehmood and civilians Zubair Ahmed, Rashid Bhatti, Rashid Qureshi, Ghulam Sarwar and Akhlaque Ahmed were convicted in the case. (Dawn, 20-December)

Four death-row prisoners, who were convicted for involvement in an attack on former military ruler Gen (r) Pervez Musharraf, were executed on Sunday at a district jail in Faisalabad. Civilians Zubair Ahmed, Rasheed Qureshi, Ghulam Sarwar Bhatti and Russian citizen Akhlaque Ahmed were shifted from Faisalabad Central jail to the death cell in a district jail late on Saturday. The prisoners had to be shifted to a district jail under strict security measures because the lever which is used to open the trapdoor to carryout hangings was not present in the Central jail. Family members of the death-row prisoners were allowed to meet the convicts for the last time prior to the hanging. Security was tightened in the city to avoid any untoward incident. Additional contingents of security personnel were deployed while containers and barricades were placed on the routes leading to the district jail. Similarly preparations were underway in Lahore for the execution of four death row prisoners in Kot Lakhpat Central Jail. The executions are expected to be carried out within the next 24-36 hours. All routes leading to the jail were sealed with the deployment of military personnel and installation of cellphone jammers

around the jail premises. In Sukkur, authorities called in the relatives of two terrorists, belonging to the banned Lashkar-i-Jhangvi who had been sentenced to death 10 years ago in a sectarian killing case, to hold a final meeting on Monday. An antiterrorism court on Friday had issued black warrants for Attaullah alias Qasim and Mohammad Azam alias Sharif who had been given death sentence by an antiterrorism court in July 2004 for killing Dr Ali Raza Peerani on sectarian grounds in June 2001 in the Soldier Bazaar area. Both terrorists were arrested from Karachi. Tuesday has been decided the day of their execution. (Dawn, 21-December)

**On December 22, 2014, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade updated the travel advisory issued on November 19, 2014.**

There is no significant change in the overall threat rating. The advisory included new language stating that “on 21 December 2014, local authorities warned of a heightened threat of attack in Pakistan, including Islamabad, in coming days. Australian officials in Islamabad have been advised to minimise their use of restaurants and international hotels, to limit visits to shopping areas, avoid walking in Islamabad and avoid Kohsar Market in F-6, Centaurus Mall in F-8 and Safa Gold Mall in F-7 in Islamabad. Australians in Pakistan should minimise travel in public places and remain in a safe place until further notice. If you are in Pakistan and hold fears for your safety you should depart by commercial means if safe to do so.” The advisory includes updated language (underlined) stating that “staff have been advised to minimise their use of restaurants and international hotels, to limit visits to shopping areas and avoid walking in Islamabad.”

We strongly advise you to reconsider your need to travel to Pakistan at this time due to the unpredictable security situation, including the high threat of terrorist attack, kidnapping and sectarian violence. If you do decide to travel to Pakistan, you should exercise extreme caution. If you are in Pakistan and concerned for your safety, you should consider leaving if it is safe to do so. On 21 December 2014, local authorities warned of a heightened threat of attack in Pakistan, including Islamabad, in coming days. Australian officials in Islamabad have been advised to minimise their use of restaurants and international hotels, to limit visits to shopping areas, avoid walking in Islamabad and avoid Kohsar Market in F-6, Centaurus Mall in F-8 and Safa Gold Mall in F-7 in Islamabad. Australians in Pakistan should minimise travel in public places and remain in a safe place until further notice. If you are in Pakistan and hold fears for your safety you should depart by commercial means if safe to do so. On 14 November 2014, the US Government warned that unspecified terrorists may be planning to target Western-affiliated international schools in Islamabad at an unknown date and time. Terrorist attacks can occur anywhere at any time in Pakistan. There is a high threat of terrorist attack against places that are frequented by foreigners, including Australians. The Pakistan Army is currently undertaking a counter-insurgency operation in the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA) of northern Pakistan, resulting in military action and a large number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Due to possible retaliatory terrorist incidents by militants, security forces across Pakistan have been placed on high alert. There may be an increase in the presence of security forces, and restrictions on movement at short notice. Pakistan’s civil aviation facilities have been targeted by terrorist groups. In June 2014 a group of terrorists attacked the cargo-handling section of Jinnah International Airport in Karachi, resulting in 30 deaths (including all the terrorists) and gunmen fired at a passenger airliner as it was landing at Peshawar Airport, killing one passenger and injuring two crew members. Further attacks on aviation facilities are likely. Travellers should check flight status and airport operations prior to travelling and remain alert for security developments. Security at the Australian High Commission in Islamabad has been strengthened and remains under constant review. Staff have been advised to minimise their use of restaurants and international hotels, to limit visits to shopping areas and avoid walking in Islamabad. There have been a number of recent terrorist attacks in Islamabad. In May 2014, bombs were detonated in the F-6 market area and G-9 sector of Islamabad. This follows an attack on a fruit and vegetable market on the outskirts of Islamabad in early April and a suicide attack on a court in the F-8 market area in early March. Australians in all parts of Pakistan should avoid demonstrations, political events, rallies and processions and large-scale public gatherings, as they may turn violent. Demonstrations could also be targeted at perceived western interests. As a precaution, you should avoid areas where people congregate after Friday prayers. There is a high threat of kidnapping across the whole of Pakistan, but particularly in Karachi, Balochistan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Australians should ensure that they have personal security measures in place, seek professional security advice and take out kidnapping insurance. Political and sectarian violence continues in

Karachi. There has been a high death toll as a result of escalating violence in the city. We strongly advise you to reconsider your need to travel to Karachi. We strongly advise you not to travel to FATA, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (including the Swat Valley and Peshawar), and Balochistan due to the extremely dangerous security environment and the ongoing counter-insurgency operation in FATA. On 16 December 2014, terrorists attacked a school in Peshawar resulting in over 140 deaths. If you are in these areas, you should consider leaving. Australians in FATA should depart immediately. On 5 May 2014, the World Health Organization declared the international spread of wild poliovirus a "public health emergency of international concern" and has issued temporary recommendations that may affect your travel to Pakistan. Given the unpredictable security situation and high threat of terrorist activity and violence, we strongly recommend that you register your travel and contact details with us so we can contact you in an emergency. The Australian High Commission operates a text message alert system for registered Australians.

**On December 19, 2014, the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad issued the following security message:**

**This message advises U.S. citizens to be extremely cautious about granting access to their residences, even to established companies, for the immediate future since the Embassy has been informed of plans by terror groups to gain access to U.S. citizen residences.**

The Embassy has been informed of plans by terror groups to gain access to U.S. citizen residences through visits by construction, maintenance, or utility companies, as well as other technical service providers. U.S. citizens should be extremely cautious about granting access to their residences, even to established companies, for the immediate future. Recent terror attacks in Peshawar and the resulting Pakistan Government response may raise the possibility for future threats. The U.S. Embassy in Pakistan urges U.S. citizens to vary their times and routes when traveling anywhere in Pakistan, and to avoid travel patterns to such locations that would allow other persons to predict when and where they will be. Depending on ongoing security assessments, and as part of routine operational security measures, the U.S. Mission occasionally places areas such as hotels, markets, airports, and/or restaurants off limits to official personnel.

[Return to Top](#)

**QATAR**

Nothing Significant To Report for Today

[Return to Top](#)

**SAUDI ARABIA**

**Four militants were killed during a clash with security forces in the Awamiya region on Saturday. The militants were believed responsible for the death of a security forces member last Sunday. Sources also indicated that one male teenager was accidentally killed during the security operation.**

A teenager was accidentally killed during a Saudi raid against "terrorists" in a town populated by minority Shiites, residents of the area said on Sunday. The interior ministry said it killed four militants during Saturday's operation in Awamiya town to arrest the suspects who shot dead a soldier a week earlier. But residents gave the toll as five and said they included a youth aged 16 or 17. "One of them I'm sure is not involved," an activist in the area said. "He was killed in his car." A resident of Awamiya said the youth appeared to have been killed "by mistake. One of the bullets got in his neck, while he was driving." Both sources declined to be named. Asked about the claims, the interior ministry said that police in the Eastern Province, which includes Awamiya, were to issue a statement. On Saturday, the ministry said the four militants died during a shootout. They included the prime suspect in the killing of soldier Abdelaziz bin Ahmed al-Assiri, who died on December 14 when security personnel came under fire from farms near Awamiya. Photographs circulating on the Internet purported to show a building riddled with bullet holes from Saturday's operation, armoured cars in the streets, and burned civilian vehicles. "It's actually a big operation" which left townsfolk cowering inside their homes, the first resident said, adding that some of those killed were well-known as "criminals" in the area. The town, just west of Dammam city on the Gulf coast,

has witnessed clashes between security forces of the Sunni dominated kingdom and protesters from the minority Shiite community. Earlier this month, a court sentenced to death a man who opened fire numerous times on police in Awamiya. Most Saudi Shiites live in the oil-rich east, and many complain of marginalisation. (Middle East Online, 21-December)

[Return to Top](#)

## SYRIA

**In-fighting among the oppositions groups continued as fighters from al-Qaeda linked al-Nusra Front clashed with fighters from a militia group (Yarmouk Brigade) aligned with the Western-backed Free Syrian Army in the southern Deraa province on Friday. Al Nusra Front accuses Yarmouk Brigade of declaring allegiance to the Islamic State, an accusation that is strongly denied by the Yarmouk Brigade. In a separate development, the FSA confirms that Uraba Idris, a defected army officer, is being held by ISIS but denied that he has been executed.**

Nusra Front militants clashed Friday with a leading militia from the Free Syrian Army in southern Deraa province, after attempts to separate the sides failed to prevent the fighting. The Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, has accused the Yarmouk Brigade of declaring allegiance to its bitter rival ISIS, a charge vehemently denied by the FSA group. The clashes between the two sides were taking place in several parts of western Deraa province, according to local activists and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an anti-regime monitoring group based in Britain. A recently formed alliance of rebel groups in Deraa sent a force of "peacekeepers" to end the clashes, they said, but the effort has yet to bear fruit. The Yarmouk Brigade has released several statements denying that it was allied with ISIS, and offered to send its top commanders to a neutral unit, to be turned over to a unified court body to settle the matter, provided that the Nusra Front do the same. The Nusra Front has been fighting in alliance with a range of FSA and Islamist militias in the south, and the coalition of groups has seized territory in recent weeks from regime forces. Rebel groups are now surrounding the army's 82nd brigade outside the town of Sheikh Miskeen, which was seized recently by the rebels. The Yarmouk Brigade issued a call to residents of Deraa province to "pull your sons out of the Nusra Front," which it blamed for delaying progress by rebel groups in their battles against regime forces. The Nusra Front said that one of its leading figures, Abu Maria al-Qahtani, had been wounded in the fighting with the Yarmouk Brigade, but was expected to survive. Nusra has accused the Yarmouk brigade of detaining three of its members and a female civilian affiliated with the group over the last week, which led to the upswing in tension. Meanwhile, in the Qalamoun region bordering Lebanon, local anti-regime activists denied that a prominent FSA commander had been executed by ISIS militants, in yet another spike in tension among insurgent groups. They said Uraba Idris, a defected army officer who earlier fought regime forces in the city of Homs, was being held by ISIS, but had not been killed. The Nusra Front and ISIS have been cooperating in battles against regime forces and Hezbollah in the Qalamoun region, but several reports have said ISIS is now demanding that all rebel groups in the region, including Nusra, pledge allegiance to the Al-Qaeda offshoot. In the city of Aleppo, the Observatory said that pro-regime media was falsely reporting that government troops had made key gains north of the city. The fighting in the Handarat region has seen incremental gains by both regime forces and rebel groups in recent days, resulting in a stalemate as the regime seeks to cut off the main rebel supply line between Aleppo and Turkey, observers and local activists say. (Daily Star, 20-December)

**Militants from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) publicly executed a Syrian man who was accused of planting tracking devices that lead to deadly government air strikes in October and November. After the execution, the crucified body was paraded through the streets.**

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant group has publicly executed a Syrian it accused of planting tracking devices for deadly government air strikes, according to the SITE intelligence group. SITE posted footage of the accused being paraded before a crowd but the video deliberately freezes at the point an ISIL fighter pulls his head back and holds a knife to his neck. After the execution, in Syria's northern Aleppo province, the fighters

paraded the body of the accused on a cross. ISIL claimed that that more than 190 people had been killed in the air strikes that the man had abetted. In October and November, the Syrian government sharply intensified its air strikes on areas held by ISIL or other rebel groups. In just 40 days, about 2,000 strikes killed more than 500 people, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Some of the deadliest hit the ISIL "capital" of Raqqa on November 25, killing at least 95 people, but air strikes have also hit the group in the eastern part of Aleppo which they control. (Al Jazeera, 20-December)

[Return to Top](#)

## TUNISIA

**While official results won't be made available until later today, eighty eight year-old Beji Caid Essebsi claimed victory, toppling incumbent Moncef Marzouki, in the runoff election that took place on Sunday. Earlier, his party (Nidaa Tounes) gained control in Parliamentary elections that occurred back in October. Marzouki has not conceded, claiming the race is too close to call. Turnout for the vote will likely be just under fifty percent indicating some level of voter fatigue in the country.**

Veteran politician Beji Caid Essebsi has declared victory in Tunisia's presidential run-off vote, seen as the last step in a shift to full democracy four years after an uprising toppled long-time leader Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali. Official results are not due until Monday and his rival, the incumbent president, Moncef Marzouki, refused to concede defeat. Soon after polls closed, Essebsi, an 88-year-old former parliament speaker under Ben Ali, announced that he had won by a clear margin and jubilant supporters took to the streets of the capital in celebration, chanting "Beji President!" Victory for Essebsi would enable him to consolidate power, with his new secular party, Nidaa Tounes (Call for Tunisia) already controlling parliament after defeating the main Islamist party in legislative elections in October. "I dedicate my victory to the martyrs of Tunisia. I thank Marzouki, and now we should work together without excluding anyone," Essebsi told local television. But Marzouki's campaign manager, Adnen Monsar, dismissed the claim and said it was still too close to call. "Nothing is confirmed so far," Monsar told reporters. The landmark second-round vote sets Tunisia apart from the turmoil of other Arab countries that went through uprisings that started in 2011 and were known by some as "the Arab Spring". An hour before polls closed, election officials reported a turnout of 48 percent, suggesting voter fatigue in a country with around 5.3 million registered voters, voting for the third time in two months. Turnout in the previous two contests was just under 70 percent of registered voters. The election was held amid tight security and the closure of main border posts with strife-torn neighbour Libya and is considered Tunisia's first free presidential election since independence from France in 1956. "This election doesn't interest me," said a young man sitting in a crowded cafe in front of a polling station in the capital Tunis' lower income neighbourhood of Yasmina. "I voted before, but I feel the candidates lie. They promise to create jobs for the youth and improve living conditions, but they don't keep them." Essebsi, the favorite after taking 39 percent of the vote in last month's first round, has promised to restore the "prestige of the state" after unrest and economic problems marked the years since the uprising. "I voted for Beji Essebsi, because he has a lot of experience, and we have a lot of faith in him that he will fix the country," one supporter told Al Jazeera. Marzouki, who took 33 percent of the vote last month, has warned that Essebsi, whose party also won October's parliamentary election, will bring back the authoritarian policies of previous regimes. Tunisia's moderate Islamists, who still have a great deal of backing in the country, have not officially backed either candidate, but are believed to lean towards Marzouki. (Al Jazeera, 21-December)

**On December 22, 2014, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade updated the travel advisory issued on July 30, 2014.**

There is no significant change in the overall threat rating however the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs now advises Australians not to travel to southern Tunisia and areas north of Nefta within 30 kilometres of the Algerian border due to the high threat of terrorist attack and kidnapping. The advisory also includes updated language stating that “parliamentary and presidential elections have taken place across Tunisia between October and December 2014.” The advisory also includes new language stating that “on 30 November 2014, a police officer was kidnapped and beheaded in Tourif district, Kef province. On 5 November 2014, five soldiers were killed in an attack on a bus near El Kef, close to the border with Algeria. On 14 December 2014, Libyan forces carried out raids on the Libyan side of the border close to the Ras Ajdir crossing point.”

We advise you to exercise a high degree of caution in Tunisia because of the unpredictable security situation, and the risk of terrorist attack, civil unrest and kidnapping. Parliamentary and presidential elections have taken place across Tunisia between October and December 2014. The Tunisian authorities have warned that attacks may occur in the period surrounding the elections. You should avoid all election-related events and political protests as they may turn violent. A nation-wide state of emergency, which had been in place since January 2011, was lifted on 5 March 2014. However, authorities may still restrict travel or enforce local curfews with little or no notice. It is important that you observe instructions given by local security authorities and your tour operators or hotels. The presence of extremist elements in Tunisia, as well as the deterioration in security in neighbouring Libya and Algeria, poses a threat to foreign travellers. You should maintain a high level of security awareness. There has been a recent increase in terrorist activity in Tunisia. Al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has made threats in the past against a range of public targets in Tunisia, including places frequented by tourists. We advise Australians not to travel to southern Tunisia, including borders with Algeria and Libya, due to the high threat of terrorist attack and kidnapping. This covers all areas south of and including the towns of Nefta, Douz, Medenine, Tatouine and Zarzis. We advise you not to travel within 30 kilometres of the border with Algeria north of Nefta because of the ongoing threat of terrorist attack and kidnapping. Military operations against suspected terrorists in this region have been ongoing since April 2013. We advise Australians against all travel to the Mount Chaambi National Park due to ongoing violent clashes and the high threat of terrorist attack and kidnapping. On 16 July 2014, a large number of members of the security forces were killed and injured in a militant attack. Australia does not have an Embassy or Consulate in Tunisia. The Canadian Embassy located in Tunis, provides consular assistance to Australians in Tunisia. This service includes the issuance of Provisional Travel Documents. The Australian High Commission in Malta can also assist Australians in Tunisia.

[Return to Top](#)

## **TURKEY**

**A large protest organized by labor unions in the Kizilay district of Ankara on Saturday was met with a response as police used teargas and water cannons to disperse the protesters while also arresting dozens (some sources indicating nearly one hundred arrests). The protesters were demonstrating in favor of secular education.**

Dozens of demonstrators were arrested on Saturday in the Turkish capital Ankara as police used pepper spray and water cannon to disperse a protest in favor of secular education. Police moved in on the protest, organized by labor unions, in the Kizilay district of Ankara with protesters forced to take cover from the jets of water and pepper spray, an AFP photographer reported. Some reports said as many as 100 people may have been arrested, including the head of the Egitim-Is education union Veli Demir. Many activists have been angered by the interventions of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the Turkish education system which they allege have undermined the country's secularity. The government lifted a ban on female students wearing the Islamic headscarf in high schools and has encouraged the opening of Imam Hatip schools which mix religious education with a modern curriculum. Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday praised as “clean and lawful” the legal process against his opponents that has been sharply criticised by the EU and includes an arrest warrant for his arch-foe Fethullah Gulen. “I have been watching this process closely as president of this

country. Everything is lawful and in line with procedure ... a really diligent and clean process is going on at the moment," Erdogan said in a televised speech in Istanbul. "The police and judiciary are not repeating the mistakes of the past," he added. Erdogan defended the detention of journalists as part of the probe, saying that some journalists were using the profession as a "mask" for other activities. He argued that the detention of journalists was nothing unusual, referring to the arrests in Britain over the phone-tapping scandal that rocked the tabloid press there. His comments came a day after an Istanbul court issued an arrest warrant for the US-based Gulen, who Erdogan accuses of running a "parallel state" from his exile in the US state of Pennsylvania.

[Return to Top](#)

## UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Nothing Significant To Report for Today

[Return to Top](#)

## YEMEN

**More than forty Shi'ite al-Huthi rebels were killed in a revenge attack by Sunni tribesmen in Arhab on Sunday. Earlier, the al-Huthi's had kidnapped an equal number.**

Dozens of Houthi rebels have been killed in central Yemen in a suspected revenge attack after at least 40 people from a rival tribe were kidnapped by the Shia group, sources told Al Jazeera. At least 42 Houthis were killed by Sunni tribesmen in Arhab on Sunday, a local source said. The Houthis, who have been pushing for control of Arhab, an area some 30km northeast of Sanaa, have used heavy weaponry, including tanks and artillery to shell homes and neighbourhoods, in fighting that has left dozens dead. The rebels were previously based in the northern highlands, where Yemen's Zaidi Shia minority is concentrated, but they have made significant advances in provinces south of Sanaa since seizing the capital in September. Establishing themselves as Yemen's new powerbrokers, the Houthis have been expanding their territory in western and central Yemen, and have been accused of trying to settle old scores as they wage battles with opposing tribes. (Al Jazeera, 21-December)

**A rocket attacks against a gas liquefaction plant co-operated by Total at the Balhaf gas export terminal on the Gulf of Aden has been claimed by al-Qaeda. Declaring that the facilities belonging to Total were a legitimate target, al-Qaeda claimed that the facility had been used to launch drone attacks against militants in Yemen. A Total spokesman said that there were no casualties or material damage from the rocket attack.**

Al-Qaeda had claimed a Thursday attack by two Katyusha rockets at a gas liquefaction plant co-operated by Total in Balhaf gas export terminal on the Gulf of Aden Al-Qaeda militants have declared that buildings belonging to French energy producer Total in Yemen are "legitimate targets" for their operations. The militant organization said on Twitter on Sunday that Muslims who work in the French multinational company's establishments in Yemen should stay away from the buildings. Al-Qaeda had claimed a Thursday attack by two Katyusha rockets at a gas liquefaction plant co-operated by Total in Balhaf gas export terminal on the Gulf of Aden – the country's largest-ever industrial project. It claimed on Sunday that the plant had been used as a base for launching drones used to strike militant sites in Yemen. The Balhaf terminal's administration had said that Al-Qaeda's rockets, of which one fell into sea, left no casualties or material damage. It also said that the attack has not halted the terminal's operations but maintained that security had been reinforced at its perimeter. The Belhaf terminal, built at a total cost of \$4.5 billion and which went online in 2009, exports liquefied natural gas to Asia and Europe. French energy giant Total holds a 39.6-percent stake in the project. (World Bulletin 21 December)

[Return to Top](#)

## TRAVEL ADVISORIES GLOBAL

### **Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**

#### **AFGHANISTAN**

Current Advice Level: Do not travel. Change Summary: This advice contains new information in the Summary and under Safety and Security (On 20 December the US Government warned of reports of possible suicide attacks before Christmas against international personnel of the American University residing in Aladuddin Village, Kabul City. There has been a surge in attacks on Western and Afghan Government interests across Afghanistan since November 2014, particularly in Kabul, where convoys and compounds have been attacked resulting in many deaths and injuries. We continue to receive reports of planning for further attacks and expect attacks to be ongoing for the next several weeks). The overall level of the advice has not changed. We continue to advise Australians not to travel to Afghanistan because of the extremely dangerous security situation and the very high threat of terrorist attack.

### **Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs**

#### **CHILE**

Latest update: The Entry/Exit Requirements tab was updated – visas. Risk level: Exercise normal security precautions.

#### **HONG KONG**

Latest update: The Security tab was updated - demonstrations. Risk level: Exercise normal security precautions.

### **UK Foreign Commonwealth Office**

#### **CÔTE D'IVOIRE (IVORY COAST)**

Latest update: Safety and security section (Crime) - increased troop deployments throughout the country, particularly in the north and west in response to an increase in banditry and overall insecurity during the Christmas holiday season; take extra care if you're planning road journeys over the holiday period.

#### **ETHIOPIA**

Latest update: Entry requirements section - increase in visa fees.

#### **HONG KONG (SAR OF CHINA)**

Latest update: Summary - removal of advice about protest sites outside the Central Government Offices (CGO) and Legislative Council building in Admiralty.

#### **ITALY**

Latest update: Health section - reports of avian influenza (bird flu) in a flock of farm turkeys in the Veneto area.

#### **MEXICO**

Latest update: Summary - illegal roadblocks reported more frequently, particularly in the state of Guerrero; if possible, travel by air if you're visiting a major tourist destination in Guerrero.

#### **PORTUGAL**

Latest update: Health section – removal of advice about Legionnaire's disease.

#### **SOUTH SUDAN**

Latest update: Summary - removal of advice about anniversary on 15 December.

#### **SRI LANKA**

Latest update: Summary section - Flooding in Anuradhapura and Habarana areas.

## NOTICES & SPECIAL REPORTS GLOBAL

### AFGHANISTAN

**On December 20, 2014, the U.S. Embassy in Kabul issued the following emergency message:**

The U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan received the following information concerning an imminent threat to U.S. citizens living in Afghanistan: There are threat reports suggesting the possibility of suicide attacks before Christmas against international personnel of the American University residing in Aladuddin Village, Kabul City. The Embassy is taking this threat seriously and advises American citizens to avoid the area. Please note that with recent attacks in Kabul, the U.S. Embassy encourages all U.S. citizens planning to travel to or living in Afghanistan to review the State Department's travel warning regarding Afghanistan, located here:

<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings/afghanistan-travel-warning.html>. We will continue to provide current threat information as we receive it.

**On December 20, 2014, the U.S. Embassy in Kabul issued the following emergency message:**

The U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan received the following information concerning an imminent threat to U.S. citizens living in Afghanistan: The Embassy has been notified that on December 20, 2014, the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MOI) has increased security between 10th and 15th streets in Kabul City, Afghanistan. MOI is reportedly looking for a Red Toyota Surf with unknown license plate, that has explosives within the vehicle and is looking for a target. No further information is available at this time. Separately, two suicide bombers (SBs) plan an imminent attack on the vehicle of the Head of the United Nation's (UN) Kabul Office. The SBs plan to walk around the Zambak Square roundabout in Kabul City, Kabul Province, Afghanistan, and target the Head of the UN office's vehicle as the vehicle slows in the roundabout. The SBs also plan on wearing either Afghan National Army or Afghan National Police uniforms to close the distance on their target. Please note that with recent attacks in Kabul, the U.S. Embassy encourages all U.S. citizens planning to travel to or living in Afghanistan to review the State Department's travel warning regarding Afghanistan, located here: <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings/afghanistan-travel-warning.html>. We will continue to provide current threat information as we receive it.

**On December 19, 2014, the U.S. Embassy in Kabul issued the following security message:**

The U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan received the following information concerning a threat to U.S. citizens living in Afghanistan: As of early December 2014, militants were planning to attack a Western, possibly American, non-government organization (NGO) in Kabul City, Afghanistan. Surveillance had been completed and the attack was likely to take place within 2-4 weeks. The NGO office was possibly located close to the Ministry of Interior and the Afghan Passport Authority in Kabul City. There was no further information regarding the timing, targets, or methods of the attack. Please note that with recent attacks in Kabul, the U.S. Embassy encourages all U.S. citizens planning to travel to or living in Afghanistan to review the State Department's travel warning regarding Afghanistan, located here: <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings/afghanistan-travel-warning.html>. We will continue to provide current threat information as we receive it.

### DJIBOUTI

**On December 21, 2014, the U.S. Embassy in Djibouti issued the following emergency message:**

As we enter this holiday season, U.S. Embassy Djibouti reminds U.S. citizens of the continued threat of potential terrorist attacks in the country. The U.S. Embassy advises U.S. citizens to review their personal crisis response plans, remain vigilant, and exercise caution in areas frequented by westerners. U.S. citizens are also advised to maintain a high level of vigilance at all times and take appropriate steps to enhance their personal security. U.S. Embassy Djibouti is taking prudential measures to enhance security. Only individuals with pre-approved visa interview appointments will be able to enter the consular section. U.S. citizens with after-hours emergencies should call +(253) 77-87-72-29.

## ETHIOPIA

### **On December 19, 2014, the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa issued the following security message:**

U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa wishes everyone a happy holiday season and reminds U.S. citizens to be vigilant during the season and of the continued threat of potential terrorist attacks in the country. The targets for these attacks could include large gatherings at hotels, restaurants, nightclubs, shopping malls, and places of worship. U.S. citizens are encouraged to review their personal security plans, remain aware of their surroundings, and monitor local events. Consider the following security tips during the holiday season:

- Remember that crowds are very dynamic and that security situations can change quickly in large gatherings, with the potential to escalate into violence with little advance notice. Have an exit plan.
- Know the nearest "safe areas"- such as the nearest police station.
- Avoid areas of protests, rallies, or demonstrations.
- Take extra precautions when driving through crowds. Always keep windows up and doors locked. Plan your route in advance to avoid expected areas of congestion and chokepoints. Maintain space to maneuver in traffic. Park only in controlled, safe locations.
- Ensure you and your family members know what to do in an emergency.

## WORLDWIDE

### **On December 19, 2014, the U.S. Department of State issued the following travel alert:**

The lone wolf attack in Sydney, Australia on December 15, 2014, resulting in the deaths of two hostages, is a reminder that U.S. citizens should be extra cautious, maintain a very high level of vigilance, and take appropriate steps to enhance their personal security. This Travel Alert expires on March 19, 2015. An analysis of past attacks and threat reporting strongly suggests a focus by terrorists not only on the targeting of U.S. government facilities but also on hotels, shopping areas, places of worship, and schools, among other targets, during or coinciding with this holiday period. -U.S. citizens abroad should be mindful that terrorist groups and those inspired by them can pose unpredictable threats in public venues. U.S. citizens should remain alert to local conditions and for signs of danger.

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### **Foreign Ministry Advisory Links**

<b>Australia</b>	<a href="http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/">http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/</a>
<b>Canada</b>	<a href="http://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories">http://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories</a>
<b>United Kingdom</b>	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/">https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/</a>
<b>United States</b>	<a href="http://travel.state.gov/">http://travel.state.gov/</a>

[Return to Top](#)

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Please direct any questions, comments or requests for additional information to:

#### **James F. Gartner**

Managing Director

CSC | Corporate Security Concepts, Inc.

[james.gartner@thegarlingroup.com](mailto:james.gartner@thegarlingroup.com)

+1 (412) 506 3343 Office

+1 (412) 427 0452 Mobile

+1 (703) 995 0355 Fax

To subscribe/unsubscribe to this service please send an email to: [james.gartner@thegarlingroup.com](mailto:james.gartner@thegarlingroup.com).

This report contains information from travel advisory updates published by the governments of Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States.