

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Bureau of Consular Affairs

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## **Worldwide Caution**

**February 12, 2010**

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 July 29, 2009, 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. Americans are reminded that demonstrations and rioting can occur with little or no warning. Current information suggests that al-Qaida and 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. The following incidents illustrate the continuing desire of extremists to strike American targets and perceived interests: On January 25, terrorists exploded a bomb outside three major hotels favored by Western journalists in the center of Baghdad, killing at least 37 and wounding more than 100; on October 5, 2009, five people were killed and about 10 were injured, including one U.S. citizen, by a bombing near the offices of the United Nations World Food Program in Islamabad, Pakistan; on August 15, 2009, a suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonated near the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Headquarters, not far from the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, killing at least seven people and injuring nearly 90 more.

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, and locales where Americans gather in large numbers, including during holidays. On January 1, 2010, a suicide bomber attacked spectators at a volleyball game in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan. The attack killed at least 95 people. On December 28, 2009, a suicide bomber attacked a Shiite religious procession in Karachi, killing at least 22 people and injuring more than 60. On October 28, 2009, a UN guest house in Kabul was attacked, killing five UN workers, including one American. On the same day, two rockets struck the foreigner-frequented Serena Hotel and the President Palace, also in central Kabul city.

Americans are reminded of the potential for terrorists to attack public transportation systems. On December 25, 2009, a Nigerian national attempted to detonate a bomb on board a U.S. airliner

landing in Detroit; Yemen-based al-Qa'ida affiliates claimed responsibility for the incident. Police officers arrested a man with explosives at the New Delhi Railway station in New Delhi, India on August 25, 2009; and suspected Maoist rebels detonated several explosives at the railway station in Orissa, India on the same day. Other incidents include multiple anti-personnel mine detonations on passenger buses in June 2008 in Sri Lanka, multiple terrorist attacks on trains in India in 2006, the July 2005 London Underground bombings, and the March 2004 train attacks in Madrid. Extremists also may select aviation and maritime services as possible targets, such as the August 2006 plot against aircraft in London, or the December 2006 bomb at Madrid's Barajas International Airport. In June 2007, a vehicle was driven into the main terminal at Glasgow International Airport and burst into flames, but the bomb failed to detonate.

### **The Middle East and North Africa**

Credible information indicates terrorist groups seek to continue attacks against U.S. interests in the Middle East and North Africa. Terrorist actions may include bombings, hijackings, hostage taking, kidnappings, and assassinations. While conventional weapons such as explosive devices are a more immediate threat in many areas, use of non-conventional weapons, including chemical or biological agents, must be considered a possible threat. Terrorists do not distinguish between official and civilian targets. Increased security at official U.S. facilities has led terrorists and their sympathizers to seek softer targets such as public transportation, residential areas, and public areas where people congregate, including restaurants, hotels, clubs, and shopping areas.

Countries in the region continue to experience varying levels of violence. On December 8, 2009, Iraqi government buildings in Baghdad were targeted by car bombs. On October 25, 2009, two massive car bombs exploded outside Iraqi government buildings in a heavily secured area of Baghdad, killing more than 150 people and injuring 500 more; prior to that, on August 19, a series of car bombs and mortar attacks occurred in Baghdad, killing at least 77 people and injuring nearly 500. On August 28, 2009, al-Qaida operatives were involved in a suicide bombing in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia that injured the Saudi Assistant Minister of Security. These events underscore the intent of terrorist entities to continue to target a variety of facilities in the region, including those belonging to local governments and/or where Westerners may be present.

Potential targets are not limited to those companies or establishments with overt U.S. ties. For instance, terrorists may target movie theaters, liquor stores, bars, casinos, or any similar type of establishment, regardless of whether they are owned and operated by host country nationals. Due to varying degrees of security at all such locations, Americans should be particularly vigilant when visiting these establishments.

The violence in Iraq and conflict between Palestinians and Israelis has the potential to produce demonstrations and unrest throughout the region. The armed conflict between Israeli forces and Hamas in Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009 raised tensions and sparked demonstrations throughout the world. The Department of State continues to warn of the possibility for violent actions against U.S. citizens and interests in the region. Anti-American violence could include possible terrorist actions against aviation, ground transportation, and maritime interests,

specifically in the Middle East, including the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, the Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa.

The Department is concerned that extremists may be planning to carry out attacks against Westerners and oil workers on the Arabian Peninsula. Armed attacks targeting foreign nationals in Saudi Arabia that resulted in many deaths and injuries, including U.S. citizens, appear to have been preceded by extensive surveillance. On February 22, 2009, there was a bomb attack targeting a popular tourist destination in Cairo, Egypt's Old City. Tourist destinations in Egypt frequented by Westerners were also attacked in April 2006 resulting in many deaths and injuries, including Americans. Extremists may be surveilling Westerners, particularly at hotels, housing areas, and rental car facilities. Potential targets may include U.S. contractors, particularly those related to military interests. Financial or economic venues of value also could be considered as possible targets; the failed attack on the Abqaiq oil processing facility in Saudi Arabia in late February 2006 and the September 2006 attack on oil facilities in Yemen are examples.

### **East Africa**

A number of al-Qaida operatives and other extremists are believed to be operating in and around East Africa. Americans considering travel to the region and those already there should review their plans carefully, remain vigilant with regard to their personal security, and exercise caution. Terrorist actions may include suicide operations, bombings, kidnappings, or targeting maritime vessels. Terrorists do not distinguish between official and civilian targets. Increased security at official U.S. facilities has led terrorists to seek softer targets such as hotels, beach resorts, prominent public places, and landmarks. In particular, terrorists and likeminded extremists may target international aid workers, civil aviation, and seaports in various locations throughout East Africa, especially in Somalia. On December 3, 2009, a suicide bomber killed 22 civilians, including three Somalia Transitional Federal Government ministers, during a graduation ceremony for a local university. On September 17, 2009, terrorists launched coordinated suicide-bomb attacks against an African Union peacekeeping base, involving two car bombs against local and international targets. On July 17, 2009, three NGO workers were kidnapped by unidentified gunmen from their base in Mandera, Kenya, located on the border with Somalia. Americans in remote areas or border regions where military or police authority is limited or non-existent could also become targets.

Americans considering travel by sea near the Horn of Africa or in the southern Red Sea should exercise extreme caution, as there has been a notable increase in armed attacks, robberies, and kidnappings for ransom at sea by pirates in recent months. Merchant vessels continue to be hijacked in Somali territorial waters, while others have been hijacked as far as 1,000 nautical miles off the coast of Somalia, Yemen, and Kenya in international waters.

The 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 or in the Red Sea, it is strongly recommended that vessels travel in convoys, and maintain good communications contact at all times. Americans 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 suggested piracy countermeasures for vessels transiting the Gulf of Aden.

## **West Africa**

The terrorist group, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), has become increasingly active in the West African countries of Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, as well as in parts of North Africa.

AQIM uses regions of these countries as safe havens and platforms from which to conduct operations. Formerly known as GSPC (Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat), AQIM has been designated a terrorist organization by both the United States and the European Union. On November 14, 2009, heavily armed individuals attempted to kidnap U.S. Embassy employees in Niger. On August 8, 2009, a suicide bombing near the French Embassy in Mauritania injured two French national guards and one Mauritanian citizen. On June 23, 2009, gunmen murdered an American citizen in Nouakchott.

AQIM has declared its intention to attack Western interests and targets. AQIM is known to operate particularly in the northern region of Mali, within Mauritania, and along the border shared between Niger and Mali. In addition to being a threat to Westerners, AQIM contributes to civil unrest and banditry, which reinforce longstanding security concerns in West Africa. U.S. citizens are urged to avoid travel to these areas without an official escort. U.S. government personnel are required to obtain advance written approval to travel to these areas.

## **South and Central Asia**

The U.S. government continues to receive information that terrorist groups in South and Central Asia may be planning attacks in the region, possibly against U.S. government facilities, American citizens, or American interests. The presence of al-Qaida, Taliban elements, indigenous sectarian groups, and other terror organizations, many of which are on the U.S. government's list of foreign terror organizations, poses a potential danger to American citizens in the region. Terrorists and their sympathizers have demonstrated their willingness and capability to attack targets where Americans or Westerners are known to congregate or visit. Their actions may include, but are not limited to, vehicle-borne explosives, improvised explosive devices, assassinations, carjacking, rocket attacks, assaults or kidnappings.

Since October 2009, terrorists have executed coordinated attacks with multiple operatives using portable weaponry such as guns, grenades, RPGs and suicide vests or car bombs in Pakistan. U.S. citizens have been victims in such attacks. The October 2009 attack on the UN World Food Program in Islamabad injured one U.S. citizen.

On October 15, 2009, a series of attacks occurred throughout Pakistan. Teams of gunmen simultaneously attacked three law enforcement facilities in Lahore, and another bomb exploded outside a residential building used by government employees in Peshawar. These attacks killed at least 26 people and injured another 35. In June 2009, gunmen stormed the Pearl Continental

Hotel in Peshawar, Pakistan, and detonated a bomb that resulted in several deaths and scores of injuries. In February 2009, Taliban insurgents conducted a coordinated terrorist attack on three government buildings in Kabul, Afghanistan, which resulted in the death of at least 26 and the wounding of 80 individuals. Between October 2008 and June 2009, several American citizens were kidnapped in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In November 2008, coordinated terrorist attacks on luxury hotels, a Jewish community center, a restaurant, train station, hospital, and other facilities frequented by foreigners in Mumbai, India, killed more than 170, including six Americans. In Afghanistan, kidnappings and terrorist attacks on international organizations, international aid workers, and foreign interests continue.

Previous terrorist attacks conducted in Central Asia have involved improvised explosive devices and suicide bombers and have targeted public areas, such as markets, local government facilities, and, in 2004, the U.S. and Israeli Embassies in Uzbekistan. In addition, hostage-takings and skirmishes have occurred near the Uzbek-Tajik-Kyrgyz border areas.

### **Before You Go**

U.S. citizens living or traveling abroad are encouraged to register with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate through the State Department's travel registration web site at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/> so that they can obtain updated information on travel and security. Americans without Internet access may register directly with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. By registering, American citizens make it easier for the embassy or consulate to contact them in case of emergency. 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 "A Safe Trip Abroad" found at <http://travel.state.gov>.

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. Americans abroad are urged to monitor the local news and maintain contact with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

As the Department continues to develop information on any potential security threats to U.S. citizens overseas, it shares credible threat information through its Consular Information Program documents, available on the internet at <http://travel.state.gov>. 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, outside the United States and Canada 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.)