

June Monthly Incident Bulletin

Featured Countries: Mexico, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan

Mexico



Seven tourists kidnapped near Acapulco

Seven tourists were kidnapped on the main road to Acapulco (Guerrero state) on 18 May 2008. The seven men were intercepted by a group of armed men about 100km outside of Acapulco and were forced into another vehicle. An eighth man escaped and reported the incident to the police. They found the abandoned car riddled with bullets and covered in blood stains.

Nigeria



Kidnap of expatriates and attack outside oil compound highlight persistent insecurity in Niger delta

On 19 May unidentified gunmen attempted to rob a bank outside the compound of a major oil multinational

on Bonny Island (around 25 miles (40km) south of Port Harcourt, Rivers state) in the oil-producing Niger delta region. On 17 May a Lebanese national was kidnapped at a construction company in Ikot Ekpene local government area in the south-eastern state of Akwa Ibom, while unidentified gunmen on the same day abducted three foreign nationals in a separate incident at a construction company in Ibima town (Rivers state).

The incidents highlight the persistently volatile security environment in the Niger delta, where it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between the militant and criminal groups that operate both onshore and offshore. Meanwhile, the attempted bank robbery underlines the significant threat of targeted robberies on banks in the region, particularly around oil and gas facilities, which are likely to be carried out by militant groups seeking to finance their activities. Control Risks comments that particularly following the resumption in April of the violent campaign of the main militant group in the region, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), militants and criminals in the region are increasingly likely to employ a range of tactics, among them kidnap-for-ransom, pipeline bombings and acts of sabotage targeting oil installations.

Oil supply vessel hijacked in delta and US\$250,000 ransom demand made

Gunmen hijacked the Lourdes Tide, an oil supply vessel, and took its eleven man crew hostage on 13 May 2008 off the coast of Onne (Rivers state). The kidnapers demanded a 30m naira (US\$250,000) ransom for the safe release of the vessel and the crew, which comprises one Portuguese, a Ukrainian and nine Nigerians. The vessel is operated by Tidewater Nigeria Ltd and was ferrying supplies for major US oil company, Chevron. Spokesmen from both companies have said they will make every effort possible to ensure the hostages timely release. Lt Colonel Musa Sagir, the Nigerian Joint Task Force (JTF) spokesman, told the media that the kidnapers' identity was unknown but that they had demanded the ransom be delivered to Efoko (Rivers state). A spokesman from the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) denied that the group was involved in the hijack but said they knew who was responsible and did not support their motives. On 16 May, security forces announced that the hijackers had dramatically reduced their ransom demand to 5m naira (US\$42,000).

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Somalia



Two Aid Workers Kidnapped

Dozens of heavily armed gunmen kidnapped two Italian aid workers and their Somali colleague in Awdhigle near the capital Mogadishu on the morning of 21 May 2008. The men surrounded the aid workers' house, blindfolded the Italian man and woman and Somali man and took them away. It was not clear who the gunmen were and no immediate contact was made. The Italians work for Coperazione Italiana Nord Sud, which carries out agricultural projects in the area.

Piracy attacks off the coast of Somalia

Somali forces rescued a hijacked ship, the Dubai-flagged al-Khaleej, on 22 April 2008 off the coast of Bosasso (Puntland) in the Gulf of Aden. News of the ship's hijack only emerged after security forces from Puntland had successfully stormed the vessel and arrested seven pirates. It was not clear how many hostages were held on the ship, which was transporting food from United Arab Emirates to Somalia. The Puntland security affairs minister, Abdullahi Said Samatar, told reporters that the arrested pirates may face the death penalty if they are convicted. Samatar also endorsed plans by the US and French government to draft a UN resolution enabling international navies to pursue pirates into Somali territorial waters.

Spanish Tuna Fishing Trawler

A Spanish tuna fishing trawler, with a crew of 26, was hijacked by pirates approximately 250 miles from the Somali coast on 20 April 2008. The trawler, named Playa de Bakio, was fishing in Somali waters when it was boarded and seized by the pirates, who were

armed with automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenade launchers. Although the boat was damaged in the attack, nobody was injured and the vessel was last seen heading towards the Somali coast. Spanish media reported that the vessel was bound for the Somali town of Gaan. There were unconfirmed reports that the trawler was attacked in the same area that the French luxury yacht, Le Ponant, was hijacked on 4 April 2008. Spanish media quoted the ship's captain, 55-year-old Amadeo Alvarez, on 21 April as saying that the crew, 13 Spaniards and 13 African nationals, were in good health and the pirates' motivation was purely financial.

A government source declared that a Spanish naval frigate that was in the Red Sea was heading towards the area of the incident and international naval forces already in the area had been alerted to the incident. The pirates released the vessel on 26 April following the alleged payment of US\$1.2m ransom. The Spanish government denied paying a ransom to the pirates, but would not comment on whether the ship's owners had negotiated a financial settlement. Spanish media sources reported that negotiations had taken place between agents of the owner, who is based in the Basque country, and the pirates' representatives in a London hotel.


Sudan



Four Oil Workers and a Sudanese Diver Kidnapped

Four Indian oil workers and their Sudanese driver were kidnapped on 13 May 2008 close to the disputed Abyei region. The victims, who are all in their thirties and said to be in good health, were surrounded as they travelled by car from Neem oilfield to Heglig late in the

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afternoon. They are employees of an oil services firm, Petro Energy Contracting Services, which is contracted by the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC) consortium. The kidnappers, believed to be members of local tribes that dispute their share of the revenue from the oilfields in their land, took the victims to a village approximately 40 km south of the Neem - Heglig road. Although the kidnappers' demands were not made public, an Indian embassy spokesman confirmed that negotiations were underway to secure the five men's freedom.

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