



# Biweekly Intelligence Report

21 Jan - 3 Feb 2025  
Edition #013



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## EUROPE

AnCR

- |    |   |          |
|----|---|----------|
| 1. | UK – Eco-activist group vows further attacks  | High     |
| 2. | Russia – Spy ship loitering in British waters | Moderate |
| 3. | Russia / Ukraine – Ceasefire update           | Moderate |

## CENTRAL & SOUTH AMERICA

AnCR

- |    |   |          |
|----|---|----------|
| 1. | Venezuela / U.S. – Venezuelan repatriation agreed | Moderate |
| 2. | Colombia / U.S. – Immigrant deportation dispute   | High     |
| 3. | Colombia / Venezuela – Maduro supporting ELN?     | Moderate |
| 4. | Venezuela / U.S. – Tren de Aragua crackdown       | Moderate |

## NORTH AMERICA & INTERNATIONAL

AnCR

- |    |  |      |
|----|--|------|
| 1. | Mexico – Cartel counter-intelligence reach       | High |
| 2. | RMI's Travel & Security Risk Management services | N/A  |
| 3. | U.S. / Panama – "America First" in South America | High |
| 4. | Mauritius – Chagos Islands dispute               | High |

## MIDDLE EAST

AnCR

- |    |   |          |
|----|---|----------|
| 1. | Israel – Political turmoil ahead & Houthi threats | Moderate |
| 2. | Iran – IRGC exercises threaten maritime security  | High     |
| 3. | Yemen – Hong Kong-flagged vessel evacuated        | Moderate |

## AFRICA

AnCR

- |    |  |          |
|----|--|----------|
| 1. | DRC / Rwanda – M23 rebels seize Goma           | Moderate |
| 2. | Mali, Burkina Faso & Niger – ECOWAS withdrawal | High     |

## INDO-PACIFIC

AnCR

- |    |   |          |
|----|---|----------|
| 1. | Philippines / China – Espionage arrests | High     |
| 2. | China – DeepSeek information security   | High     |
| 3. | International – Avian Influenza update  | Moderate |

**Probability Yardstick**  
**AnCR (Analytical Confidence Rating)**

Subscribe [HERE](#) for our weekly Venezuela threat-based reporting





# EUROPE

## United Kingdom

### Climate activists sabotage major insurance companies linked to fossil fuels:

On 20<sup>th</sup> January, activists from the 'Shut the System' group cut fiber optic cables in four English cities, disrupting the business operations of several major insurance companies, including AIG, AXA and Lloyds of London. The group claimed that the activists cut the cables while disguised as electrical engineers, showcasing a level of sabotage tradecraft proficiency. 'Shut the System' has pledged to collapse the fossil fuel economy through targeting of property and machinery of the “destructive industries owned by the wealthiest and most responsible for the greatest crisis humanity has ever faced”.

**RMI Comment:** As it is *Almost Certain* that the effects of climate change will continue to polarize society, an increase in more ‘spectacular’ forms of disruption and sabotage to the fossil fuel industry is *Likely*. Smaller, underground groups are less bound than traditional environmental non-governmental organizations, which they *Probably* view as outdated and ineffective in effecting policy change. This is compounded by their perception that the fossil fuel industry is precipitating an existential crisis, which therefore justifies their actions.

Currently, this is *Probably* limited to small groups of activists conducting direct action operations against peripheral infrastructure, alongside (but not necessarily coinciding with) traditional ‘sit-ins’ to disrupt central business locations. However, there are no indications that radical environmentalists either lack the intent or technical understanding or capabilities to launch more sophisticated and impactful attacks on their targets.

As escalations from 'Shut the System' and other groups are *Probable*, it is a *Realistic Possibility* that there are operations currently ongoing to reconnoiter vulnerable locations for future exploitation and attack through technical methods, i.e., the use of uncrewed aerial / surface vehicles, through to cyber, insider threats providing information and the social engineering of innocent employees to provide actionable and sensitive information. This threat spans all of Europe and the U.S. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **HIGH**



**RMI Recommendation:** Given the motivations of 'Shut the System' & others and the vulnerabilities of facilities in the fossil fuel industry, the threat level is assessed as HIGH. This spans from non-physical disruption to the destruction of essential equipment within global supply chains. Comprehensive Security & Operational Resilience (CSOR) surveys are recommended for the highest levels of assurance against threats to your operations. **Ends.**

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# EUROPE

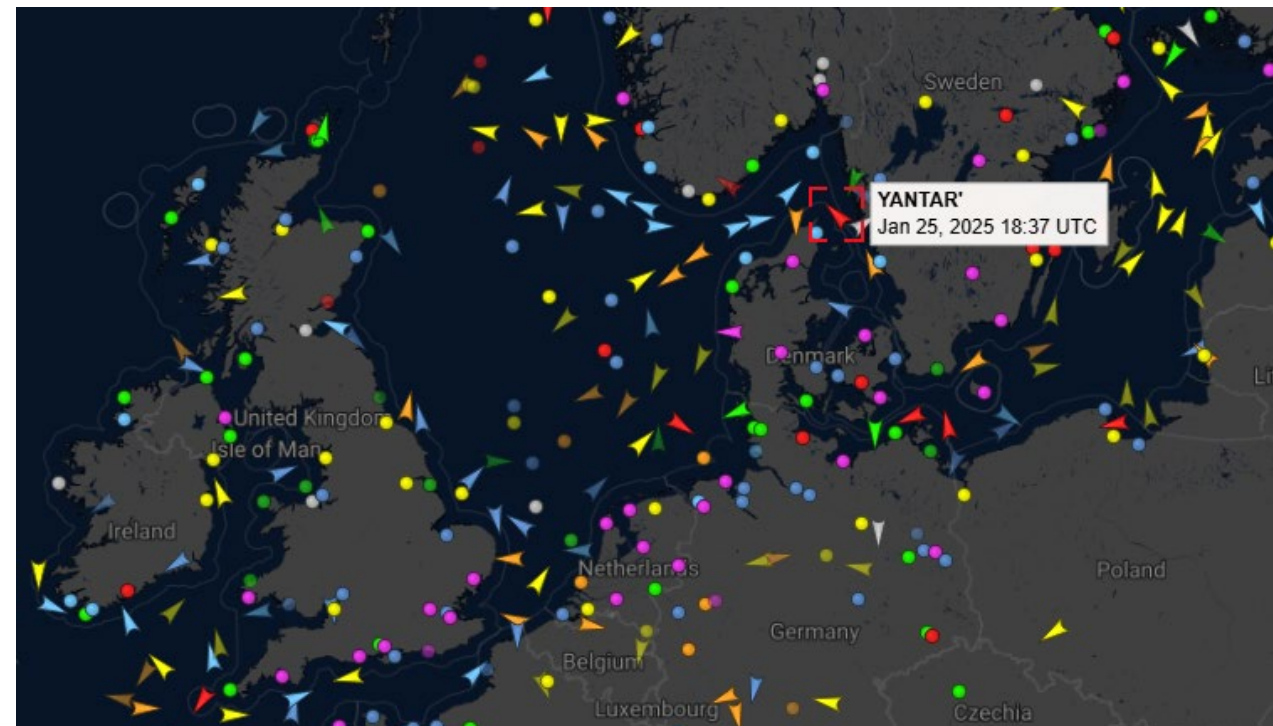
## Russia & United Kingdom

**Russian specialized underwater unit undeterred by increased NATO presence:** On 22<sup>nd</sup> January, two Royal Navy vessels were sent to track the Russian Main Directorate of Deep-Sea Research's (GUGI) intelligence collection ship, Yantar, as it transited through Britain's exclusive economic zone, 45 nautical miles from the coast. Yantar can deploy remotely operated vehicles and deep-diving manned submersibles in addition to information gathering capabilities used to chart the locations and vulnerabilities of undersea infrastructure.

The British Defense Secretary, John Healey MP, issued a statement to the House of Commons directly aimed at President Vladimir Putin: "We see you. We know what you are doing", before concluding by stating that the world is in a new era of threat which demands a new era for defense, alluding to the elevated priority that Russia and China are placing on gray zone operations – intended to degrade adversaries' capabilities without diminishing their own.

**RMI Comment:** Nevertheless, the GUGI ship was *Probably* successful in its task of mapping undersea infrastructure and did so in compliance with international rules of navigation. Yantar entered British waters with its Automatic Identification System (AIS) on; Russia chose to conduct this act of strategic espionage overtly. Now in the North Sea, with its onward destination *Almost Certainly* the Baltic Sea – where various recent Russian sabotage operations were conducted, the Yantar will continue its information-gathering operations to shape and help plan for future brazen Russian sabotage attacks against NATO allies.

Furthermore, while Yantar complies with international rules of navigation, its presence in sovereign NATO waters necessitates military responses, providing intelligence on ship and aircraft response times and protocols which are beneficial for Russian vessels conducting future direct sabotage operations, enhancing Russia's strategic maritime gray zone capability. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **MODERATE**

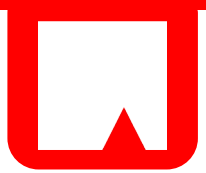


**RMI Recommendation:** The assessed threat level is MODERATE, although escalations in scope and scale of sabotage operations are *Likely* in 2025. NATO members are most *Likely* to be targeted by Russian sabotage operations and have therefore bolstered their defensive posture. The same is recommended for private entities involved in the provision of critical infrastructure (energy, communications, water etc.) across Europe and the U.S. **Ends.**

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# Russia, Ukraine & the United States



**Trump presidency raises prospect of peace in Ukraine:** On 26<sup>th</sup> January, an unverified leak of President Donald Trump's 100-day plan to end the Russia-Ukraine war was published. It suggested that, following initial meetings between Presidents Trump, Zelensky, and Putin between February and March, a ceasefire is expected to be called before a complete prisoner exchange is carried out. Ukraine would then be required to hold presidential elections at the end of August and will not be granted NATO membership, but it will be allowed to join the European Union by 2030. Ukrainian territories seized by Russia will be retained, but Ukraine is not forced to recognize the sovereignty of Russia over them. Some sanctions against Russia will be immediately lifted with the remainder to be lifted over the course of three years.

On 1<sup>st</sup> February, President Trump's special envoy for Ukraine, Keith Kellogg, stated the U.S.' intention for Ukraine to hold elections by the end of 2025, which would be in line with the leaked plan to achieve peace in Ukraine. This statement followed the 31<sup>st</sup> January comments from President Trump that the U.S. and Russian officials were "already talking" about ending the war.

**RMI Comment:** On 22<sup>nd</sup> January, President Trump threatened President Putin with high tariffs and harsher sanctions if Russia is unwilling to begin negotiations. It is *Highly Unlikely* that economic coercion will be sufficient to compel Russia to halt its war, despite the serious economic issues Russia faces – the U.S. and EU have pursued this strategy since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 to no avail. There will *Almost Certainly* be significant mutual distrust between all parties involved in possible peace negotiations; Kyiv is seeking enduring security guarantees to protect against Russian hostility in the future. This desire is weakened by the *Highly Likely* refusal of Ukrainian accession to NATO.

It is *Probable* that the leaked plan is consistent in large part with the actual U.S. plan for peace in Ukraine, and while serious concessions are being asked of Ukraine, President Zelensky's recent rhetoric surrounding the war indicate he is *Likely* willing to accept them in exchange for security guarantees, although the form of those security guarantees are presently unclear. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **MODERATE**



**RMI Recommendation:** While the threat level across Ukraine is assessed as HIGH due to ongoing strikes which have a *Remote Chance* of stopping in the immediate term, the longer-term threat level is assessed as MODERATE, with the probability of a ceasefire and reduction in conflict appearing increasingly *Likely*. As tentative 'back-channel' negotiations are *Probably* ongoing, it is difficult to provide a timeframe for this.

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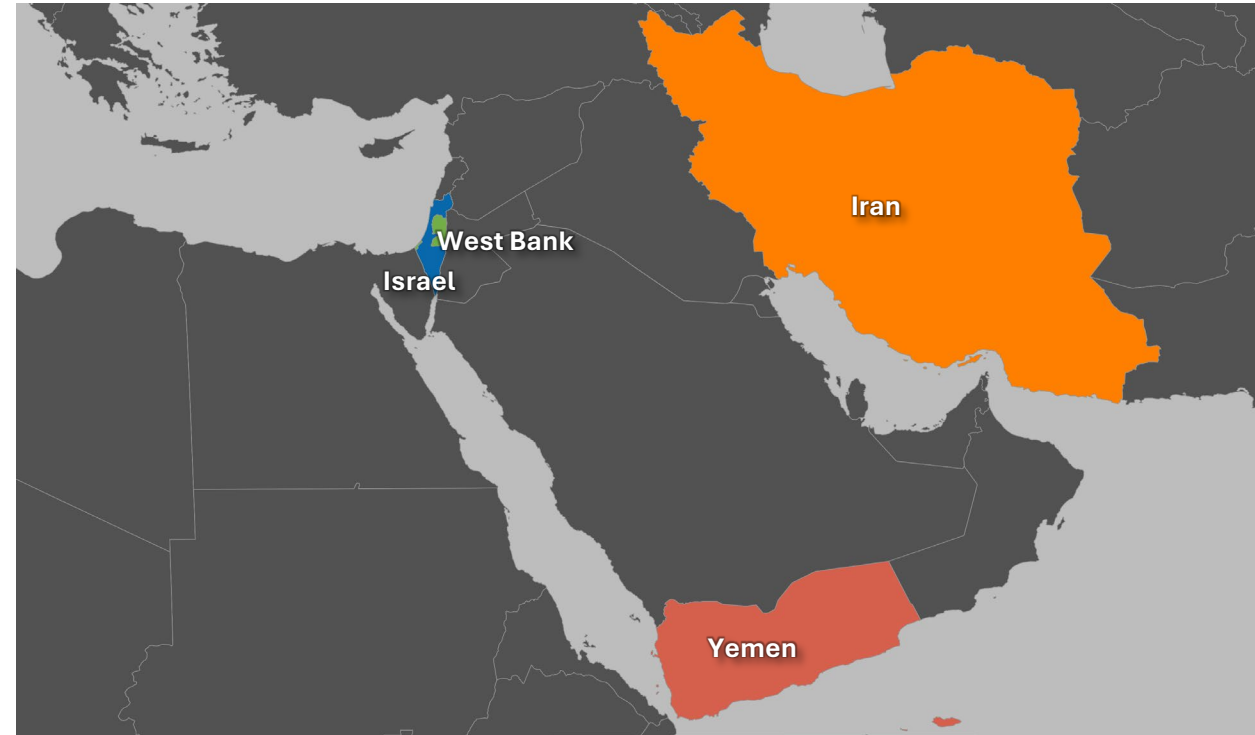
# Israel & the Houthi Threat

**Political turmoil expected in Israel's future following ceasefire:** Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ruling coalition government is fracturing, following the first phase of the Gaza ceasefire. President Trump is also seeking to build on the ceasefire declaration to re-invigorate the Abraham Accords, which saw Israel normalizing ties with Gulf Arab states during his first term. Far-right elements in PM Netanyahu's government are vehemently opposed to Palestinian statehood, which is a condition for Saudi Arabia to normalize its ties with Israel.

Israeli messaging on the second phase of the ceasefire has left headroom for PM Netanyahu to appease the far-right in the ruling coalition who want a return to war with Hamas. This support is crucial to maintaining a majority in the Knesset, following the departure of former National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir's Otzma Yehudit party from the coalition on 19<sup>th</sup> January caused by the signing of the ceasefire.

Despite the ceasefire, Israeli military operations have not halted entirely. On 22<sup>nd</sup> January, Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) conducted a clearing raid on the refugee camp in Jenin in the West Bank. A total of 10 people were killed and 40 wounded as a result. It has been reported that the impetus for Israel's expansion of war aims to include security in the West Bank is being driven by the demands of Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich who has threatened to leave the coalition if war is not resumed following the conclusion of the first phase of the ceasefire.

**RMI Comment:** As the Gaza ceasefire is *Highly Unlikely* to hold through the second phase due to internal political pressure from far-right elements within the Israeli government, this will *Probably* provide the Houthis with sufficient justification to resume strikes on Israel and its merchant ships. In turn this will *Probably* see a kinetic reaction from both Israel and Western partners, resulting in the *Highly Likely* renewal of unconstrained Houthi attacks on most shipping in the Red Sea. While President Trump has re-designated the Houthi rebel group as a terrorist organization and has stated that the U.S., if provoked, will "eliminate the Houthis' capabilities and operations," this will prove exceptionally difficult if Iran's supply routes into Yemen are not also directly targeted, which is a *Highly Unlikely* eventuality. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **MODERATE**



**RMI Recommendation:** The threat level is MODERATE, ceasefire conditions have so far been upheld, but there are far-right elements within the government pushing for off-ramps from the ceasefire agreement to force further Palestinian emigration from the West Bank, enabling settlers to 'reclaim' territory held by Palestinians. Continued IDF operations in the West Bank, and the *Probable* reprisals will escalate the threat to HIGH and beyond. **Ends.**

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# MIDDLE EAST

## Iran

**Iran offers a deniable challenge to U.S. naval power in the Persian Gulf:** On 24<sup>th</sup> January, UKMTO issued two separate reports from the Persian Gulf regarding attempts made by Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) to redirect vessels into Iranian territorial waters through both physical maneuvers and radio hailing. The incidents occurred during the naval element of IRGC exercise Great Prophet 19, which began on January 19<sup>th</sup>. While Great Prophet 19 has been touted by Iran as a defense-focused exercise, the actions of the Iranian Navy offers a more accurate picture of its offensive nature, with the U.S.-flagged *Liberty Power* cargo ship being approached aggressively by an Iranian vessel to try and force it into Iranian territorial waters.

**RMI Comment:** The IRGC has a history of challenging maritime stability, particularly in the strategically important waters surrounding the Persian Gulf. These actions include the harassment of commercial vessels, such as the two-months-long seizure of British-flagged *Stena Impero* in 2019, and the use of sea mines, which pose persistent hazards to commercial shipping. Additionally, incidents such as the 2019 Gulf of Oman tanker attacks and repeated interference with vessel navigation from GPS jamming and spoofing underscore Iran's intent to disrupt maritime stability. These efforts, often conducted under the guise of legitimate operations or exercises, enable Iran to gather intelligence, exploit vulnerabilities, and shape future operations in a more covert and deniable manner. NATO and allied forces remain vigilant, but their response is constrained as long as Iran complies with international laws governing navigation.

Iran's recent harassment of vessels is *Highly Likely* a calculated show of force of its maritime presence in the Persian Gulf. The decision to launch the maritime portion of the exercise days after the inauguration of President Trump is *Almost Certainly* intentional. Iran is sending a message that it retains the ability to control and disrupt critical maritime chokepoints within its sphere of influence. Harassing U.S.-flagged ships specifically serves as a direct challenge to U.S. naval power in the region, aiming to test the limits of U.S. responses while reinforcing Iran's narrative of resisting external pressure. **Ends.**

### UKMTO WARNING

#### INCIDENT 001-25 - SUSPICIOUS APPROACH

Incident Date:  
24 Jan 2025

Incident Time:  
0300UTC

Source: Master  
Issued: 24 Jan 2025 0400UTC

UKMTO has received a report of an incident 86NM northeast of Ras Tanura, Saudi Arabia. The Master reports vessel approached by a small military craft and is flashing a green laser light towards the bridge. The small military craft keeps hailing vessel to turn to port towards Iranian territorial waters.

Authorities are investigating.

Vessels are advised to transit with caution and report any suspicious activity to UKMTO.



UKMTO Watchkeeper  
Email: [watchkeepers@ukmto.org](mailto:watchkeepers@ukmto.org)  
Emergency Tel: +44 (0)2392 222060  
Website: [www.ukmto.org](http://www.ukmto.org)

**UKMTO**  
United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations

UKMTO Watchkeeper  
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Emergency Tel: +44 (0)2392 222060  
Website: [www.ukmto.org](http://www.ukmto.org)

**UKMTO**  
United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations

Current assessed threat level: **HIGH**



**RMI Recommendation:** The threat level is HIGH. Strict adherence to transit advice is recommended throughout the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and parts of the Gulf of Oman. The hailing of, and physical attempts to route vessels into Iranian territorial waters is a *Likely* indicator of intent to seize foreign-flagged vessels, *Highly Likely* via falsified accusations of territorial maritime violations. **Ends.**

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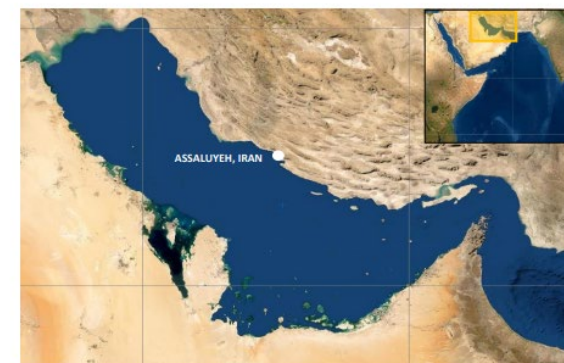
### UKMTO NOTICE

#### SECURITY NOTICE

Issue Date:  
24/Jan/2025

Issue Time:  
0930UTC

UKMTO has been made aware of several incidents involving VHF radio challenges to vessels in the Northern Arabian Gulf. Some of these VHF challenges include demands to alter course. It is assessed that these are most likely part of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) large scale exercise, Great Prophet XVIII widely reported in Iranian media sources. These exercises have warned mariners that vessels whether in or near to Iranian territorial waters may experience VHF hailing.



VESSELS TRANSITING THE AREA ARE ADVISED TO EXERCISE CAUTION



# MIDDLE EAST

## Yemen



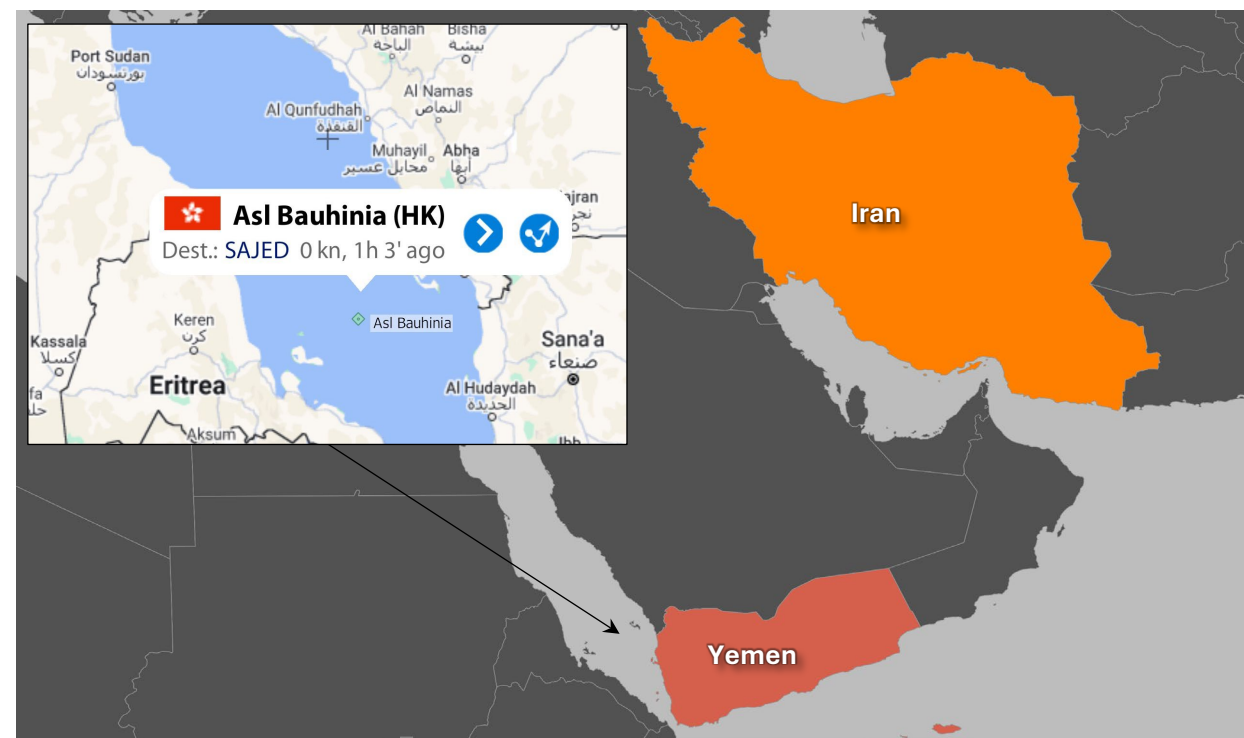
**Hong Kong flagged container ship evacuated off Yemen's coast:** On 28<sup>th</sup> January, the all-Chinese crew of the *ASL Bauhinia* evacuated the vessel following a cargo explosion and fire which occurred at 0200 AM local time. The ship is currently adrift and poses a navigational risk to other vessels in the area. An investigation by the Joint Maritime Information Center has confirmed that the cause of the fire was not related to Houthi military activity.

**Houthis released crew of cargo ship captured in November 2023:** On 22<sup>nd</sup> January, the crew of the *Galaxy Leader* were released by the Houthis. A total of 25 individuals from the Philippines, Mexico, Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine were freed from the vessel which was seized at the start of the Houthi rebels' Red Sea campaign following the onset of the war in Gaza.

**RMI Comment:** This is a positive development; the release of the *Galaxy Leader's* crew represents a significant de-escalation to the threat in the Red Sea. There has been a minor increase in the number of vessels transiting through the Bab el-Mandeb following the announced partial restriction of Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, though market sentiment leading to a return to pre-crisis levels is *Almost Certainly* a distant prospect. Those transiting the strait include U.S. and UK-associated vessels, which have been successful with no reported incidents.

Whilst the fire on *ASL Bauhinia* was unrelated to military activity, the Houthi rebels *Almost Certainly* retain a credible targeting capability around Yemen's littoral and further into the western Arabian Sea through both missile and unmanned aerial and surface vehicles which will *Highly Likely* continue to disrupt shipping in the region as the Israel – Hamas ceasefire appears tentative at best. Furthermore, the Houthis either lack the ability or the willingness to accurately identify and distinguish 'appropriate' targets (i.e., Israeli, U.S. & UK affiliated vessels).

It is *Highly Likely* that the Houthis' pause of attacks in the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb Strait is currently being used to regroup and rearm in preparation for future kinetic activity. Control of these strategic maritime chokepoints will *Almost Certainly* continue to be pre-eminent in the Houthis' exertion of power. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **HIGH**



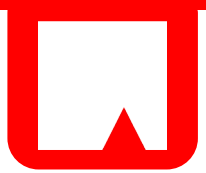
**RMI Recommendation:** The threat level is currently assessed as HIGH. Although U.S. & UK vessels have transited through the waters surrounding Yemen recently, there remains a considerable risk to life and is not currently recommended. If transit through the Red Sea or Bab el-Mandeb is unavoidable, additional precautions and stringent security measures should be in place to assure the security and safety of your vessel and crew.

**Ends.**

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# The United States & Venezuela



**American detainees freed and progress made on deportation flights:** On 31<sup>st</sup> January, President Donald Trump's special envoy, Richard Grenell, flew to Venezuela to meet with President Nicolás Maduro to secure the release of six Americans detained by Caracas. Shortly after Grenell landed, the detained Americans were released, with President Trump issuing a statement that Venezuela had agreed to receive "all Venezuela illegal aliens who were encamped in the U.S., including gang members of Tren de Aragua (TdA)." During the meeting, President Maduro stated that this was the "first step" in (re-setting) the relationship between him and President Trump.

**RMI Comment:** Recent U.S. diplomatic engagement across South America has been incredibly impactful, underscoring the priority that the Trump administration is *Likely* to place on its immediate sphere of influence. However, President Maduro's decision to accept migrants is *Highly Unlikely* indicative of Venezuelan compliance with U.S. foreign policy – the Maduro regime will *Almost Certainly* use the move as a limited form of transactional engagement, which can easily be retracted for leverage in future negotiations. Furthermore, the tacit legitimization of the Maduro regime following the successful Grenell meeting will *Probably* serve to further disenfranchise opposition figures in Venezuela, whose recent attempts to muster resistance to President Maduro collapsed in days.

This is a significant deterioration for the prospect of regional stability in Latin America, a *Likely* emboldened Maduro regime – which is known to operate in collusion with organized crime, receiving scores of repatriated Venezuelans with little to offer them in terms of financial opportunities and security. Emigration from Venezuela is *Almost Certain* to continue; though the end destinations for migrants are *Highly Likely* to be more concentrated in Colombia, Guyana, and Brazil than previously. While most of the repatriated Venezuelans will be political refugees escaping the Maduro regime, Venezuela's position as a logistics hub for illicit activity, and the vulnerability of Venezuelans due to the dire economic situation, make it more *Likely* there will be an influx of repatriated Venezuelans into organized crime – these individuals could *Plausibly* be used to further President Maduro's interests in the Essequibo region and north-western Colombia, acting as irregular destabilizing criminal forces. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **HIGH**



**RMI Recommendation:** The assessed threat level is HIGH, with the threat emanating from the assessed *Likely* increase of organized crime is expected to be concentrated along Venezuela's porous borders. Proactive monitoring of criminality is recommended, which will shape the necessary security posture. Extortion and infiltration into hubs of economic activity in the countries surrounding Venezuela is a *Realistic Possibility*. **Ends.**

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# Colombia, the United States & China

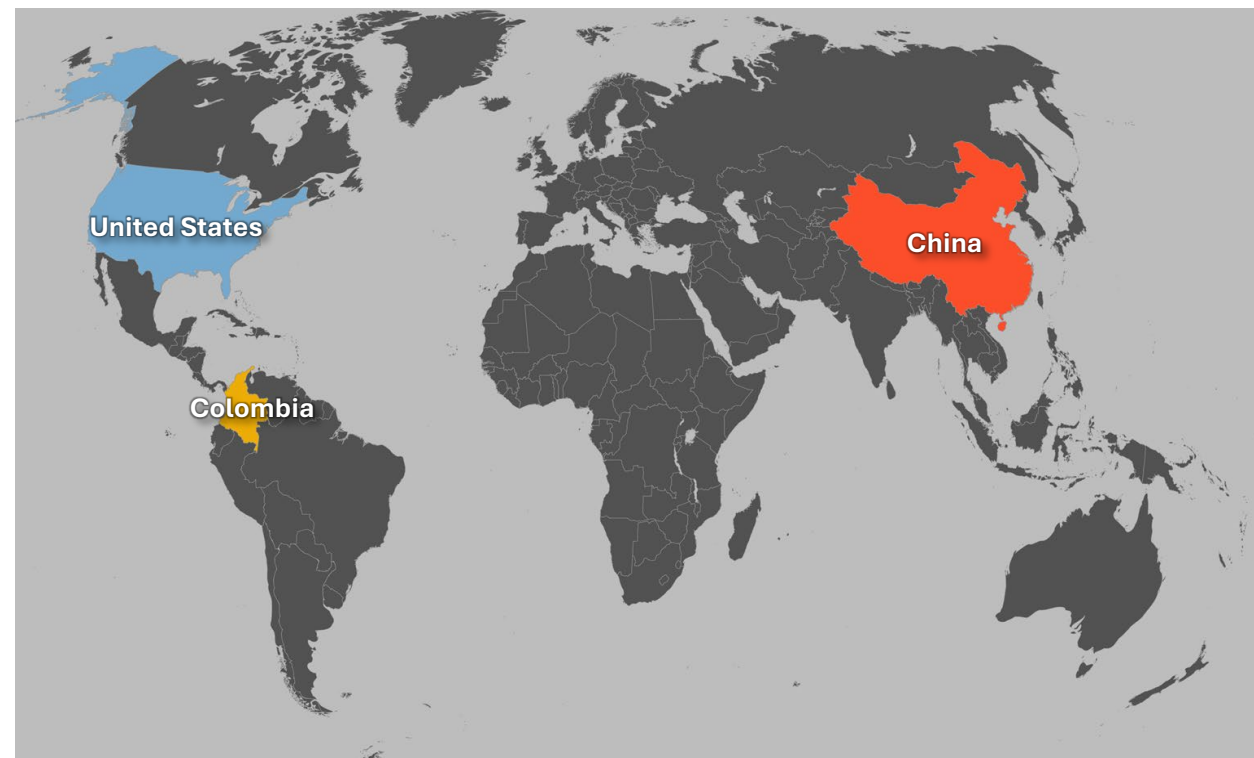


## Heightened tensions surrounding migrant deportations and potential trade war:

On 26<sup>th</sup> January, a resolution to the impasse over Colombia accepting flights of deported migrants from the U.S. was reached following President Trump's threats of sanctions and tariffs on Colombian imports. Bogota's initial decision to refuse two U.S. military aircraft carrying migrants saw President Trump ordering visa restrictions on Colombian officials and 25% tariffs on Colombian imports, which would rise to 50% from 3<sup>rd</sup> February. Colombian President Gustavo Petro announced retaliatory sanctions on U.S. imports but subsequently rescinded these measures and agreed to all of President Trump's terms relating to the deportation of migrants. The U.S. tariffs are now held in reserve and will not be signed unless Colombia fails to honor the agreement made. Prior to the reversal, President Petro released a statement on social media heavily criticizing President Trump personally, stating "you are going to wipe out the human species because of greed" and "you consider me an inferior race and I'm not, nor is any Colombian".

**RMI Comment:** While the dispute over migrant flights is ostensibly settled, the recent spat has *Highly Likely* damaged, at least temporarily, relations between the U.S. and Colombia and *Possibly* risks fracturing the strategic partnership between Colombia and the U.S. – with China poised to gain. President Petro's disapproval of President Trump's economic coercion is clear, and China's ambassador to Colombia was quick to urge stronger economic links between the two countries on 26<sup>th</sup> January following this very short-lived developing 'trade war'.

Buttressed by the previously reported *Highly Likely* recent Venezuelan support for ELN attacks in Colombia, the traditionally strong defense relationship between Colombia and the U.S. is *Unlikely* to falter as both countries remain determined to combat narcotics trafficking. Economically however, Colombia's relationships are more complex; Colombia has yet not joined the Belt and Road Initiative, although China has provided significant economic support in the development of Colombian infrastructure, a trend which has accelerated under the left-wing Petro government since 2022. Future aggressive U.S. foreign policy risks the economic realignment of its strategic regional partner, Colombia, towards an ambitious China. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **LOW**



**RMI Recommendation:** No distinct recommendations at this stage; it remains to be seen how President Trump's administration will seek to leverage tariffs and other punitive economic policies to compel foreign states to comply with U.S. foreign policy. A trade war with China poses the most severe risk to the global economy; there is *Likely* pressure to deter both states from pursuing significantly escalatory economic measures. **Ends.**

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# Colombia & Venezuela

**Maduro Regime approved an ELN guerrilla attack in Colombia:** On 27<sup>th</sup> January, leaked government intelligence reports (unsighted) revealed that Colombian National Liberation Army (ELN) insurgents passed through the Venezuelan border states of Táchira and Zulia before launching their attack on dissident factions of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) on 16<sup>th</sup> January. President Maduro's support of, and cooperation with, ELN has been widely reported, though the recent ELN attacks in Catatumbo has forced a response from Colombian President Gustavo Petro, who suggested that the Maduro regime is complicit in allowing ELN to operate within Venezuela, while President Maduro claimed that Colombian authorities are sheltering members of the Venezuelan Tren de Aragua gang. On 31<sup>st</sup> January, a joint military operation between Colombia and Venezuela was announced to restore territory lost to ELN, though Venezuela's contribution is limited to operations on Venezuelan territory.

**RMI Comment:** It is *Highly Likely* that the Maduro regime gave authorization for the ELN attack and has allowed ELN transit and accommodation in Venezuela. The Maduro regime has *Almost Certainly* long been involved with international narcotics smuggling as a source of revenue generation, through collaboration with the ELN, the Sinaloa Cartel and Venezuela's own Cartel of the Suns and embedded trafficking cells within the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB). The Maduro regime *Probably* authorized the ELN attack in Catatumbo to signal Venezuela's discontent towards Colombia's lack of recognition of the Maduro presidency. Lacking the traditional mechanisms of statecraft, the Maduro regime will *Likely* continue to rely on irregular means, such as criminal proxies, to influence its regional adversaries.

President Maduro's response to the ongoing conflict in Catatumbo will be telling – it is *Highly Likely* that Caracas will continue covertly supporting and enabling the ELN in pursuit of control of illicit flows of drugs and humans and illegal mining operations. Similarly, the outlook in Catatumbo remains bleak; the porous border, dense jungle terrain and the lucrative illicit economy will *Almost Certainly* continue to serve as driving forces in persistent, and insoluble, armed conflict. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **HIGH**



**RMI Recommendation:** President Maduro's support of ELN (and other transnational crime organizations) necessitates a heightened personnel and asset security posture, especially if operating in the vicinity of porous border regions or trafficking routes. **Ends.**

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# Venezuela & the United States



**Tren de Aragua leader captured amidst U.S. crackdown:** On 26<sup>th</sup> January, joint operations between the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) led to the arrests of approximately 1,200 individuals, including 67 members of Venezuela's Tren de Aragua (TdA) criminal gang. This followed the 20<sup>th</sup> January designation of various cartels and criminal organizations by the U.S. as foreign terrorist organizations, specifically labeling TdA as a state-sponsored organization, working as part of Venezuela's efforts to blend the state with criminal entities and networks.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> January, Chilean authorities conducted a series of raids targeting TdA members linked to the assassination of a Venezuelan dissident. It is reported that there is substantial evidence that the murder was ordered by Venezuelan authorities. President Maduro on 22<sup>nd</sup> January stated that TdA is a “construct, an instrument of policies to attack the people, destabilize our country and facilitate interventionist scenarios to dominate and colonize Venezuela”, after the Venezuelan Attorney General's Office stated that the group has been dismantled in Venezuela.

**RMI Comment:** The fabrication of an imperialist threat is consistent with President Maduro's rhetoric, but in this instance, it contradicts the Venezuelan Attorney General – showcasing the lack of a ‘party line’ regarding TdA. It is *Highly Unlikely* that senior figures in Venezuela would be unaware of the regime's involvement with criminal organizations; the most *Likely* explanation of the divergent narrative is President Maduro's disregard for the truth as well as the international community's inability to punish his regime for its role in supporting illicit and criminal activity.

Concrete evidence linking the Maduro regime to TdA activity has not yet been released, but it's *Highly Likely* that Venezuela offers at least tacit support to the criminal organization, enabling TdA to act as an extension of Venezuelan foreign policy, in a similar vein to Colombia's ELN, and avoiding legal culpability. Further acts of political violence beyond Venezuelan borders, destabilizing criminal enterprises and similar are *Almost Certain* to continue, despite the recent spate of arrests. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **MODERATE**



**RMI Recommendation:** While TdA pose a marked threat to those in their immediate vicinities, the threat is localized and is *Likely* to remain within the realms of traditional organized crime activity (human and narcotics trafficking, extortion, kidnapping etc.). The threat is amplified significantly if operating in locales in proximity to the illicit revenue sources of the Venezuelan government. **Ends.**

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## AFRICA

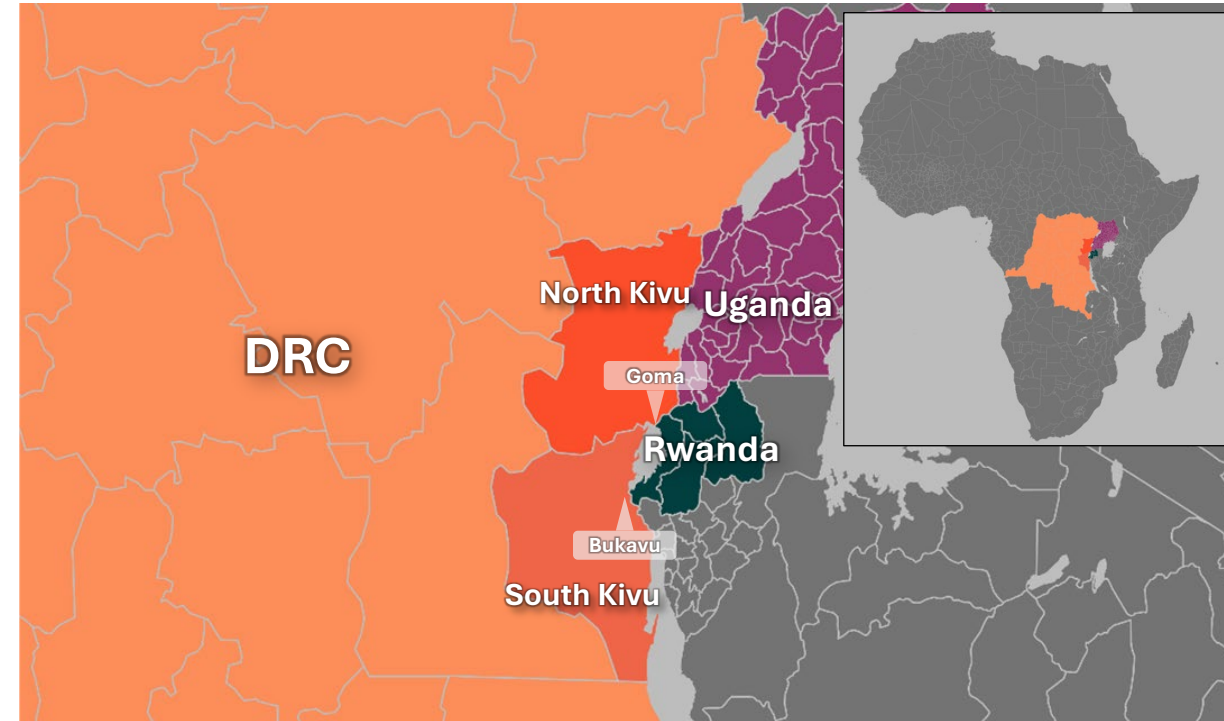
# DRC & Rwanda

**Rwandan-backed M23 rebels seize key trade node & displace 500,000 civilians:** On 25<sup>th</sup> January, the ongoing fight between the Democratic Republic of the Congo Armed Forces (FARDC) and M23 rebels in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) intensified. By 27<sup>th</sup> January, M23 claimed it had control over the city of Goma, capital of North Kivu province, alongside reports of the presence of Rwandan Defense Force (RDF) soldiers in Goma. On 29<sup>th</sup> January, to expand the group's control over eastern DRC, M23 rebels began advancing south towards Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province. It has also been reported that approximately 4,000 FARDC soldiers surrendered to the Congo River Alliance, a coalition of anti-Congolese rebel factions, including M23.

The South African Minister of Defense, Angie Motshekga, stated that if Rwandan Defense Force personnel engage South African forces in DRC it would be considered a declaration of war, which Rwandan President Paul Kagame dismissed. South Africa has thus far resisted calls from DRC President Félix Tshisekedi to deploy additional forces to assist in combat operations against the M23 offensive, instead opting to suggest the resumption of trilateral peace negotiations between DRC, Rwanda, and M23.

**RMI Comment:** South Africa's efforts to act as a peace mediator in this conflict are complicated by DRC severing its diplomatic ties with Rwanda following the involvement of the RDF in the ongoing M23 offensive. North Kivu has historically been a regional hotspot for instability owing to its mineral wealth and proximity to Rwanda and Uganda, both *Almost Certainly* actively supporting and enabling M23 operations against FARDC. Goma itself acts as a key regional logistics node – its loss represents a significant setback for the DRC government; both Rwanda and M23 will *Almost Certainly* look to consolidate control over the city, though it is *Probable* that control will return to DRC in the medium-term (6 months+).

The proliferation of violence in DRC has exacerbated the already dire humanitarian situation in eastern DRC – the International Committee of the Red Cross have reported that 500,000 civilians have fled Goma since 26<sup>th</sup> January, further amplifying the spread of infectious viruses as well as the erosion of regional stability emanating from the recent M23 offensive. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **EXTREME**



**RMI Recommendation:** The threat level is assessed as EXTREME in eastern DRC. While offramps exist in the form of trilateral peace negotiations, it remains *Highly Unlikely* that President Tshisekedi will be willing to cede longer-term control of Goma, which is currently being held by the Rwandan-backed M23 rebel group, weakening the position of the DRC. A regional security response is required alongside international pressure on Rwanda to stop its support for M23 and restore relative stability to the region. **Ends.**

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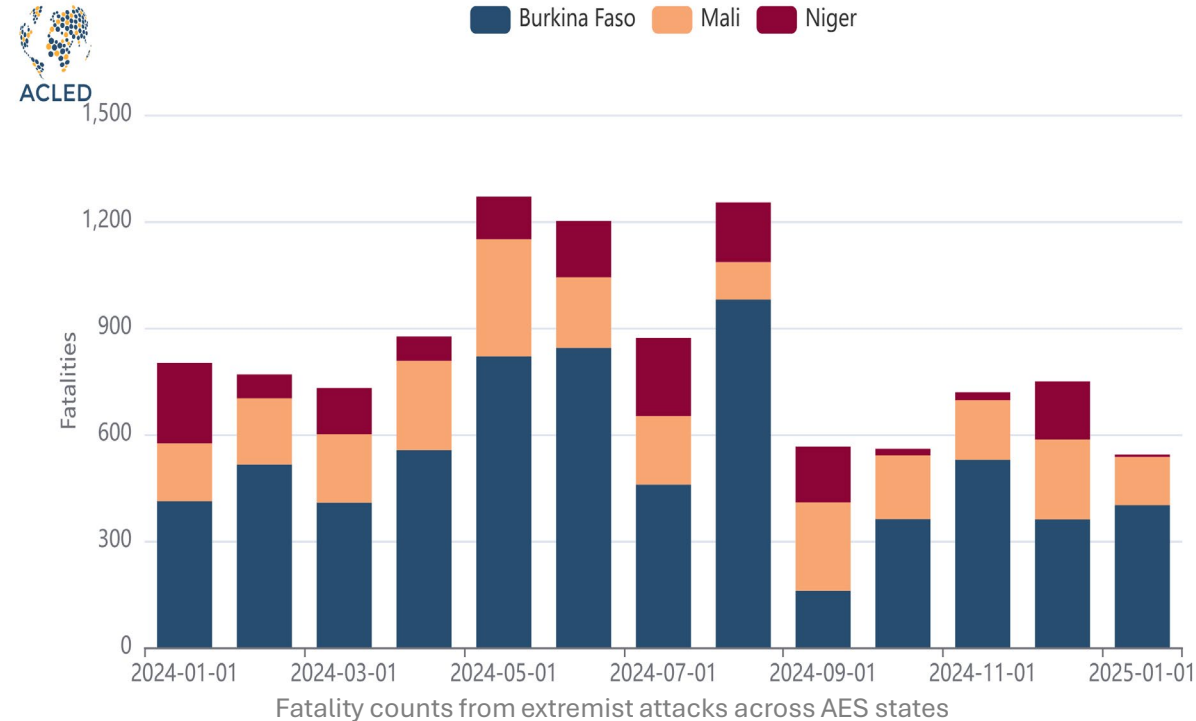
## AFRICA

# Mali, Burkina Faso & Niger

**States torn by extremist violence leave regional bloc:** On 29<sup>th</sup> January, the process of withdrawing Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) ended. The three countries established the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) in September 2023, an alliance whose origins lie in the members' opposition to ECOWAS' threats of military intervention to restore democratic rule during the 2023 Nigerien crisis, which saw General Tchiani propelled to rule as the head of a military junta in Niger. The formation of the AES has been accompanied by a marked rise in anti-French sentiment and the institutional pursuit of a distancing from France, previously reported in Editions #011 and #012 of this report. On 29<sup>th</sup> January, the Prime Minister of Burkina Faso, Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo pledged greater relations with Russia, spanning counter-extremism, energy and transport partnerships as well as the increased Russian participation in the wider Sahel.

**RMI Comment:** The Sahel region remains one of the most unstable regions in the world, plagued by escalating jihadist activity that has displaced millions – this departure from ECOWAS is *Highly Likely* to compound the difficulty in reversing the deteriorating security situation as shared security frameworks will *Probably* be limited to AES members, who are all actively engaged in addressing the instability being driven by extremism in their own countries. The AES members now find themselves in a delicate position as they navigate the difficult task of combating extremism without the support of ECOWAS or the international community, both critical of their military coups and leadership. In the absence of a coordinated regional security approach, these states will *Almost Certainly* struggle to coordinate unified and effective responses to the insurgent groups that have entrenched themselves across the Sahel.

Economically, the members of AES are *Likely* to suffer as a result of the withdrawal, despite ECOWAS assuring that goods and services originating in the three countries shall be treated in accordance with the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme – its free trade area mechanism. The ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development will *Highly Likely* restructure its investment priorities. In the short-term this will harm the development of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, and over the longer-term, this will offer fertile ground for ever-deepening relations with China and Russia. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **EXTREME**



**RMI Recommendation:** The threat level across the Sahel is EXTREME; this development will *Highly Likely* serve to exacerbate the difficulties AER member states face in addressing rampant violent extremism across the Sahel. Travel to Sahel states should only be conducted with appropriate prior understanding of the threat associated with the planned visit locations alongside the necessary physical protection measures required. **Ends.**

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# NORTH AMERICA

## Mexico



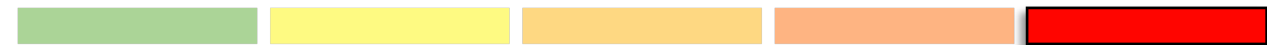
**Sinaloa Cartel counter-intelligence operation uncovered:** On 21<sup>st</sup> January, the Mexican Secretariat of National Defense raided an undercover Sinaloa Cartel surveillance center in Cuilacán, following multiple shootings in the area. The subsequent investigation of the facility determined that the Sinaloa Cartel had direct access to the state police's command centre, enabling cartel members to view feeds from cameras installed by the government. Sinaloa officials denied reports of the Sinaloa Cartel's access to government surveillance feeds, but police corruption throughout Mexico is endemic, with various anonymous whistleblowers alleging that state-owned technology is regularly being sold to cartels.

**RMI Comment:** The discovery of the Sinaloa Cartel's access to government surveillance systems underscores the extensive reach and sophistication of cartel operations. For businesses, particularly those in energy, manufacturing, and transportation, the threat posed by cartels remains significant. Cartels routinely engage in extortion, theft, and violence, disrupting supply chains and exposing employees to serious safety risks. Furthermore, cartels exploit weaknesses in law enforcement and judicial systems, operating with relative impunity, creating an unpredictable and high-risk environment for both domestic and foreign businesses.

The Mexican state faces considerable challenges in addressing cartel influence. Endemic corruption at various levels of government and law enforcement undermines anti-cartel efforts, despite periodic crackdowns, including high-profile displays of military activity; cartels continue to adapt their tactics and procedures, leveraging technology and local networks of informants and spotters to maintain information superiority, enabling successful operations. The threat landscape in Mexico necessitates a heightened security posture and the need for robust risk mitigation practices, such as secure logistics facilities, threat monitoring, and employee protection measures. Under the Trump administration, the U.S. is *Highly Likely* to take a hardline stance on cartel activities, particularly when American business interests are at risk. However, the administration's approach may further strain U.S. / Mexico relations, potentially impacting cross-border trade and investment alongside recently imposed 25% tariffs on trade from Mexico into the U.S. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **EXTREME**



**RMI Recommendation:** The assessed threat level is EXTREME, but there are nuances depending on location and mitigations in place. Risk mitigation strategies for businesses operating throughout Mexico must be robust and understood by the entire chain of operations, including employee protection measures and threat monitoring. Contingency plans should be in place to safeguard operations against volatility at short notice. **Ends.**

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# RMI Intelligence & Security Services

## Travel & Security Risk Management



Both at home and abroad, executives and other high-profile individuals are facing growing threats ranging from a spectrum of threats spanning individual radicalized actors to organized transnational criminal organizations. RMI offers individually tailored security solutions to identify and mitigate these threats, assuring your safety to the highest standards. For example:

### Some identified incidents

- **Incident:** On 27<sup>th</sup> December 2024, three U.S. citizens were shot dead following an attack on their vehicle with U.S. plates in Durango, Mexico.
  - **Motive:** Authorities investigating the murders suspect the incident was a robbery, but the investigation has not been conclusive.
  - **Security Implications:** When transiting through high-risk areas, showcasing your nationality through plates or other signifiabale indicators *Highly Likely* increases your risk profile.
- 
- **Incident:** On January 5<sup>th</sup>, a U.S. citizen visiting family in Ciudad Juárez was killed by a Mexican state police officer for yet unknown reasons.
  - **Motive:** It remains unclear what led the police officer to shoot the vehicle that the US citizen was driving, investigations are currently ongoing, there are no immediate lines of enquiry ID'ing any justification for this lethal engagement.
  - **Security Implications:** In addition to the pervasive threat emanating from transnational organized crime in Mexico, it is *Highly Unlikely* that law enforcement personnel you encounter will operate in a manner which is recognizable to U.S. citizens – corruption, bribery and complicity with cartel activity can be expected. As such, the expected protection and safety provided by law enforcement cannot be entirely relied upon.

### RMI's solutions

- **Pre-Travel Threat Assessments:** Tailored to your needs and itinerary, essential in enabling effective planning and risk mitigation.
- **Executive Protection:** Highly-trained and experienced Executive Protection (EP) operatives on hand to support and assure your security.
- **Secure Transportation:** Trusted transportation services to ensure no need for insecure public and private transport or walking alone in dangerous areas.
- **Crisis Resolution & Planning:** Access to a global network of specialized security and medical professionals capable of rapid evacuations and responses.
- **Medical Equipment and Training:** Best via our EP professionals, but as a minimum, travel with trauma kits necessary to conduct critical life-saving medical procedures in an emergency – and know how to use them.
- **Information Security Consulting:** This is a critical and often overlooked risk. Individuals can be targeted if their movements and details of movements and finances are shared, this is particularly the case on corporate IT systems. Ensure the 'Need to Know' principal is applied particularly around movements of individuals - don't make criminals' life easier. Also, ensure all anti-virus software is up to date and cyber/Social Media hygiene measure are in place.

**Let RMI plan all this, and more, to ensure your safety and security**



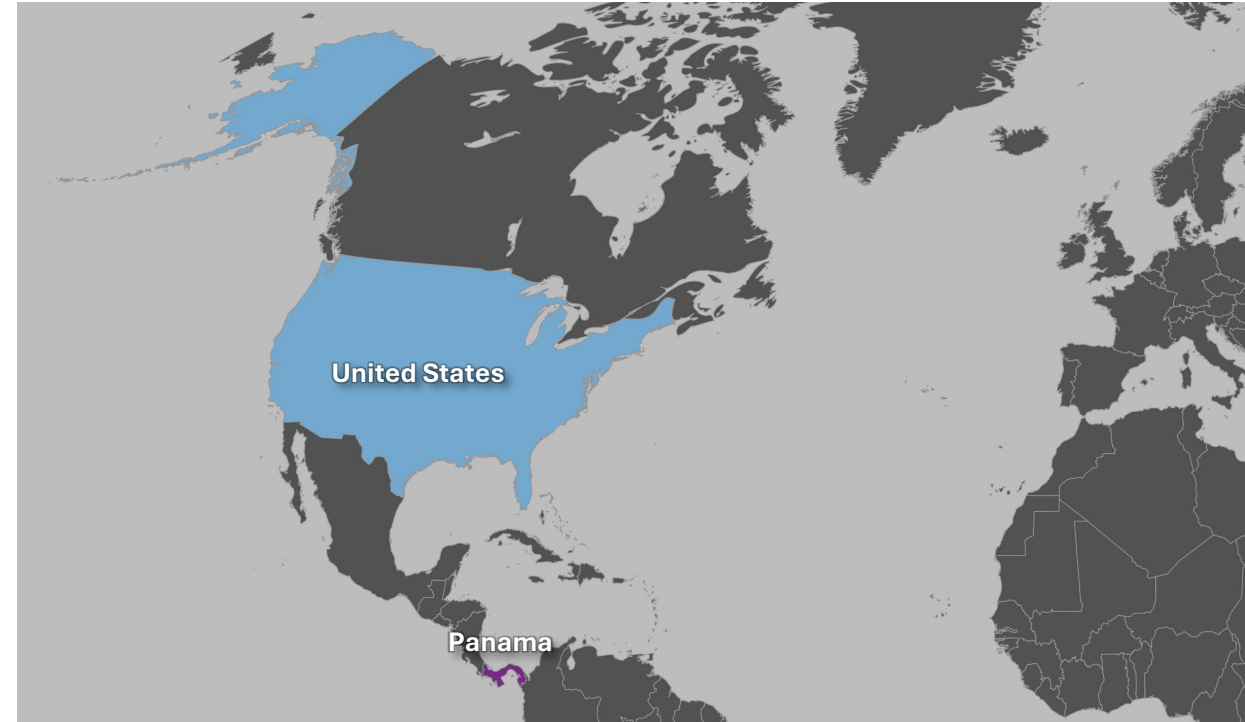


# United States & Panama

**Secretary of State Marco Rubio's visit to Panama proves positive:** On 2<sup>nd</sup> February, U.S. Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, met with Panamanian President, José Raúl Mulino. The two discussed the reduction of Chinese influence in the country, which included the decision to withhold Panama's renewal of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), due in 2026. There are additional reports that Panama has promised all U.S. naval vessels free passage of the Panama Canal – one of President Trump's demands. Panama's decision to withhold its renewal of participation in the BRI is the first in Latin America. Finally, President Mulino offered an airstrip near the Darien Gap to facilitate repatriation of migrants, another key policy concern for the Trump administration.

**RMI Comment:** In Panama, Secretary of State Rubio's trip offers a more comprehensive victory for the U.S., with the reported withdrawal of Panama from the BRI alongside the use of the canal at no cost by the U.S. Navy, both direct strategic wins. The U.S. is *Highly Likely* consolidating its influence in S. America, but there remains a *Remote Chance* that China will be willing to concede this loss without retaliation - Most *Likely* in the form of economic competition and supply of fentanyl precursors to transnational crime groups in Mexico – especially in the light of the recently imposed 10% tariffs on Chinese goods.

Previously covered in **Edition #009** of this reporting, the Chinese Communist Party's involvement in the illicit flows of fentanyl to the U.S. is used to internally destabilize the U.S. and incur significant economic costs through the healthcare system and law enforcement. The *Probable* increase of Chinese exports of fentanyl precursor will continue to destabilize and threaten U.S. national security but is *Unlikely* to achieve foreign policy concessions from the U.S. as the Trump administration appears to be determined on fortifying its position as hegemon across the Americas. Chinese competition for influence in Panama will *Almost Certainly* continue, but the Panamanian decision to withhold its renewal of the BRI is *Likely* to test the levers of Chinese foreign policy, which has long relied on economic support to enable infrastructure development. Departure from this modality in imposing punitive economic measures is misaligned with China's self-portrayed image as a friend and partner to developing nations and would *Probably* be harmful to its global position. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **LOW**



**RMI Recommendation:** The current assessed threat level is LOW. U.S. diplomatic engagement has been successful in consolidating the U.S. position in Panama and while this will *Almost Certainly* provoke China to respond, its escalatory options are somewhat limited and are bounded to the confines of ongoing support to Mexican cartels and the trade war over strategic natural resources with the U.S. which is *Highly Likely* to continue shaping U.S. – China relations long into the future. **Ends.**

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# Mauritius & the Chagos Islands



## Strategically vital Chagos Islands sovereignty dispute – China to be victorious?:

The UK's proposed deal to cede sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius but retain access to the Diego Garcia military base through a 99-year lease has been described as “calamitous” and risks the special relationship between the U.S. and the UK by Robert Wilkie, a senior official in the U.S. Department of Defense. U.S. officials are concerned that the proposed deal grants ownership of the islands to a country aligned with China. This concern has been amplified by the Prime Minister (PM) of Mauritius, Navin Ramgoolam calling for a closer relationship with China, while insisting that Beijing will not be allowed to take control of the Chagos Islands.

**RMI Comment:** The concern of Chinese encroachment into Mauritius is not unfounded; in 2015, India signed a deal with Mauritius to construct a military base on the Agalega Islands, part of sovereign Mauritian territory. Situated along major international maritime trade routes between Asia and Africa, Diego Garcia is a vital node for projecting power throughout the Indo-Pacific region as well as protecting U.S. maritime trade interests in the Indian Ocean. The new UK government has managed to maneuver itself into a corner, with what appears at best a naive piece of diplomacy that looks set to be rejected by its key ally, the U.S. Terrible optics all round for the UK.

With the strategic importance of Diego Garcia in mind, there is a *Realistic Possibility* that beyond the immediate term, the dispute over the sovereignty of the Chagos Islands could become a regional flashpoint of great power competition between the U.S. and China, impacting trade flows through the Indian Ocean, carrying the *Probable* increase of shipping costs and delays in shipping. Even if China is unable to secure basing rights in the near term, increasing Chinese influence in Mauritius poses a risk to regional stability as China will *Highly Likely* seek to leverage its economic power with Mauritius to enable activity hostile to the interests of India and the U.S., including but not limited to; hostile technical reconnaissance of sensitive platforms, interference through deniable means, i.e. ‘fishing’ vessels and the expansion of People’s Liberation Army Navy presence into the western Indian Ocean. These concerns are valid and are consistent with Beijing’s aspirations of developing a more expeditionary and capable navy. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **VERY LOW**



**RMI Recommendation:** The assessed threat is VERY LOW; President Trump’s administration’s concern over potential Chinese encroachment is justified. There is the *Realistic Possibility* the U.S. will either veto or pressure the UK to stop this treaty. Any developments indicating a change in posture by Mauritius towards China will represent a serious challenge to regional stability as well as the position of India and the U.S. in the Indian Ocean. **Ends.**

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# INDO-PACIFIC

## The Philippines & China

**Series of arrests on Chinese nationals suspected of espionage:** On 17<sup>th</sup> January, Deng Yuanqing was arrested on suspicion of espionage. Subsequent investigations carried out by the Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP) revealed an additional network of Chinese nationals who were also arrested, alleged as having conducted hostile reconnaissance via unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) as well as using sophisticated equipment to map out Philippine critical national infrastructure (CNI), including military bases, power plants, substations of the national grid, Malampaya gas field, and a military signal frequency.

On 29<sup>th</sup> January, Philippine National Security Council spokesman Jonathan Malaya suggested that China is managing an extension network of agents to infiltrate the Philippines' security apparatus and urged lawmakers to pass a pending Bill amending the outdated Espionage Act, which currently only applies during times of war, to counter foreign interference against a backdrop of instability and tension over the South China Sea (SCS).

**RMI Comment:** These recent events fit into a broader pattern of a Chinese campaign targeting CNI and increasingly assertive gray zone operations in the SCS. Similar in application to Russia's *Yantar* intelligence-gathering vessel, Chinese assets are *Highly Likely* mapping strategic targets in the event of future confrontation. The implications of Beijing's approach to intelligence gathering in the Indo-Pacific is *Likely* distinct from its operations in the West – there is a credible risk of miscalculation in gray zone operations across the first and second island chains leading to escalation.

China's willingness to operate in a state of persistent gray zone warfare in the SCS provides an asymmetric advantage against regional states, and the recent underwater cable cutting off the coast of Taiwan indicates Beijing's increasingly brazen posture. With lessons learned by the response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine (2014 – present), international sabotage campaign, and targeted eradication of political enemies, China is *Almost Certainly* willing to accept international condemnation, which carries minimal tangible loss for geostrategic advantages over its adversaries. This has normalized China's activity, which is currently undeterred. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **MODERATE**



**RMI Recommendation:** The assessed threat is MODERATE. Chinese espionage will *Almost Certainly* remain an enduring threat – both to the national security to states in its vicinity and to Western businesses. As states have the responsibility of identifying and monitoring espionage activity, businesses have the task of protecting their systems, intellectual property and sensitive business information from the *Highly Likely* network of embedded agents. **Ends.**

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# INDO-PACIFIC China

**Series of warnings against Western use of DeepSeek AI:** On 31<sup>st</sup> January, Taiwan has become the latest state to ban the DeepSeek AI platform across public sector networks and CNI, citing concerns of national security. The move follows growing global scrutiny of the Chinese AI startup, with the U.S., UK, Italy, Ireland, South Korea and Australia raising questions about its data practices. Taipei's Ministry of Digital Affairs stated that DeepSeek's operations involve "cross-border transmission and information leakage risks," constituting a direct threat to national information security. Italy's Data Protection Authority has already blocked the AI service and launched an investigation, citing non-compliance with transparency and data handling regulations.

Beyond regulatory actions, security researchers recently uncovered an exposed DeepSeek database containing over a million records, including user queries and internal system logs. While DeepSeek has attempted to downplay the severity of the incident, the breach reinforces fears about the platform's ability, or willingness, to safeguard sensitive data.

**RMI Comment:** Texas became the first state to ban DeepSeek on government-issued devices, with Governor Greg Abbott citing concerns over potential Chinese state access to personal information. Given Washington's broader push to curb Beijing-linked tech influence, further restrictions on DeepSeek in the U.S. and its allies are *Highly Likely*.

There is a significant information security risk associated with the use of DeepSeek due to the storage of data in servers in China, which are susceptible to China's 2017 National Intelligence Law which compels Chinese companies to provide information which *may* threaten the national security of China– the definition of which will *Almost Certainly* be provided by the Chinese Communist Party, with no option for DeepSeek to reject. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **HIGH**



**RMI Recommendation:** The assessed threat is HIGH – personal or sensitive data should not be entered into DeepSeek, as there is a high likelihood of that data being exploited by the Chinese Communist Party, which effectively holds unrestricted access to all of the data that it collects. **Ends.**

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# INTERNATIONAL [Medical Intelligence]

## Avian Influenza



**First reported outbreak of novel avian influenza reported in California:** On 27<sup>th</sup> January, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced the first confirmed case of an infection of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N9 on a duck farm. The concern is whether this novel H5N9 will cause an increase in human transmissions and become a pandemic subtype. Epidemiological investigations are ongoing to assess the risk of H5N9, but it's *Highly Unlikely* any conclusions will be drawn soon.

**RMI Comment:** While there has been no further reported cases of human infections or deaths because of HPAI in the US during this reporting period, a total of 53 confirmed as of 31st January outbreaks of HPAI have been reported on commercial and non-commercial poultry sites across the U.S. since 21<sup>st</sup> January. **Ends.**

**Two cases of confirmed in UK:** On 27<sup>th</sup> January, the UK Health Security Agency (HSA) announced that a poultry worker had been infected by HPAI H5N1. This marked the first detection in a human in the UK since 2023. Since 1<sup>st</sup> December 2024, there have been 26 reported cases of H5N1 in poultry, while 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024 – 30<sup>th</sup> November 2024 saw a total of three reported cases.

**RMI Comment:** While the reported cases of H5N1 have significantly increased, the UK HSA assesses the threat to humans as very low, despite the case fatality rate of H5N1 being 54%, published in a 2003-2024 study by the World Health Organization. Sporadic cases in humans are to be expected in individuals working closely to large flocks of birds, but the current lack of identified cases of human-to-human transmission continues to significantly reduce the risk to the wider population. **Ends.**

**Epidemiologist suggests migratory waterfowl could drive human infections:** On 27<sup>th</sup> January, Dr. Michael Osterholm stated the primary species of bird impacted by HPAI is migratory waterfowl – the spread of particles of their feces through the wind carries the virus as if it were an environmental disease, infecting commercial animals. Dr. Osterholm continued, stating that as the virus is airborne, there will be additional cases in humans but provided limited explanation as to why this would occur.



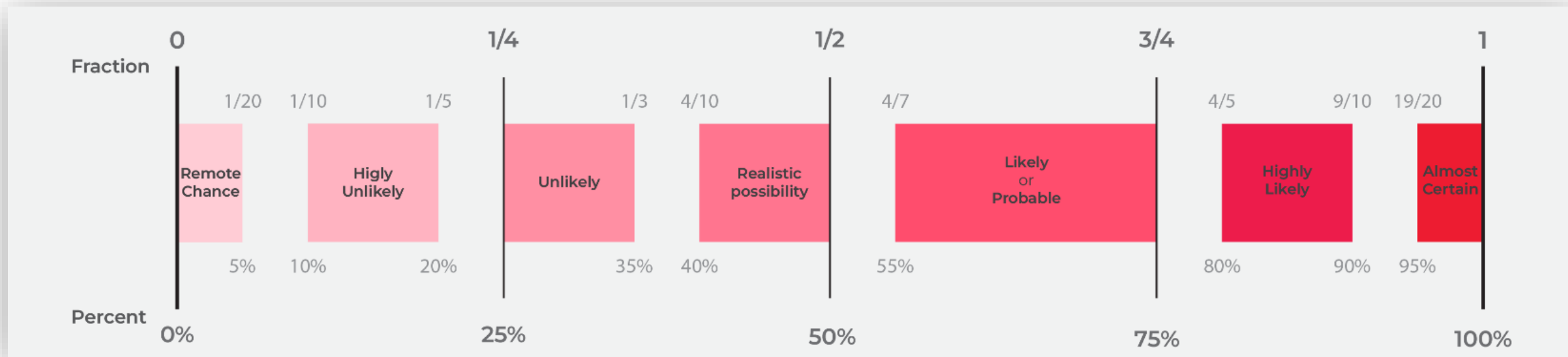
Current assessed threat level: **LOW**



**RMI Recommendation:** The current assessed threat level is LOW. The WHO recommends limiting exposure to potentially infected poultry and environments and performing good hand hygiene to mitigate risk of infection. Experts warn of the risk increasing dramatically if human-to-human transmission is identified, but to date there have been no reported cases of this occurring. **Ends.**

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# Probability Yardstick



## Analytical Confidence Rating (AnCR)

**HIGH.** Uncertainties remaining should have negligible or no effect on the key judgement(s).

**MODERATE.** Uncertainties remain that could expose the key judgements to change.

**LOW.** Critical uncertainties remain that could invalidate the key judgements.

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