



# Global Intelligence Review

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## **CYBER**

**Departing remarks by the National Counterintelligence and Security Center (NCSC) Director highlight the growing number of spyware firms and the threat from state-backed actors.** The NCSC Director, Michael Casey, warned that these actors, often criminal in nature or more likely linked to China or Russia, use spyware and ransomware to exploit vulnerabilities. Casey warned that nearly 100 countries have invested in spyware and are actively utilizing it, due to the increasingly availability from new spyware firms. Despite growing awareness, outdated software and unsecure devices remain frequent targets, leaving both government and private sector systems exposed. Attacks on critical infrastructure, such as energy grids and healthcare systems, could disrupt services and threaten national security. Governments and industries can improve cybersecurity by updating software, using stronger encryption, and sharing threat information to reduce these risks.





## AMER

**United States (California): Wildfires in Los Angeles County remain largely uncontained and continue to burn, causing disruption and posing a threat to nearby communities.** Since 7 January, Southern California has been ravaged by a series of wildfires, notably the Palisades and Eaton fires. The Palisades Fire has consumed approximately 23,713 acres, resulting in 10 fatalities and the destruction of 5,829 structures, and is currently 52% contained, as of 20 January. Meanwhile, the Eaton Fire has burned 14,021 acres, claimed 17 lives, and destroyed 89,391 structures, and remains 81% contained as of 20 January. These fires have forced the evacuation of over 150,000 residents. The rapid speed is attributed to the strong Santa Ana winds, reaching up to 100 mph, coupled with prolonged drought conditions. Transportation routes have also been severely affected, as of 20 January, and several highways in Southern California remain closed. The [Pacific Coast Highway](#) (State Route 1) is closed southbound between Malibu Canyon and the Santa Monica Freeway (1-10), and northbound from the McClure Tunnel. [Topanga Canyon Boulevard](#) (State Route 27) is fully closed. In the Altadena area, [Angeles Crest Highway](#) (State Route 2) is closed eastbound, and the [San Gabriel Canyon Road](#) (State Route 29) is fully closed north of Azusa, allowing only residents entry. Continue to avoid all non-essential travel in wildfire-affected regions, plan alternative routes to bypass all highway closures, and monitor local emergency updates for evolving conditions.

**United States: Removal of key safety features by the manufacture of DJI drones will heighten aviation risks.** On 13 January, Da-jiang Innovations – commonly known as DJI – announced that they were scrapping their robust geofence programming that prevents drone operators from flying in restricted zones. The



Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) prohibits unofficial drone use in certain zones like airports, military bases, nuclear plants, and other critical infrastructure. DJI's geofencing previously prevented users from operating their drones within these areas. However, now they will just receive an "in-app alert" that they are flying near a FAA-designated controlled airspace and compliance will be reliant on user-adherence. This poses a danger to the physical safety of infrastructure and aviation as well to the information security of these areas, which will be vulnerable to invasive drones. Recently, a drone flying illegally over the Palisades wildfire – a temporarily restricted zone – crashed into a firefighting aircraft and caused serious damage. Estimates state that DJI controls nearly 90 percent of the global consumer drone market, making their pervasive presence within the US one that has garnered increasing concern and criticism. DJI is an officially designated entity of the Chinese government and is under active investigation for posing a national security threat, which could eventually result in a ban on new drone sales within the US.

**United States: Expect disruption during the annual pro-life demonstration in the capital Washington DC slated to take place on 24 January.** Participants with the Catholic-led pro-life movement will gather from 11:00 (local time) at the [National Mall](#) before marching to the [Supreme Court](#). Counter-demonstrators with the pro-life movement will gather outside the Supreme Court at 12:00 (local time). Tens of thousands are expected to attend the protest, suggesting disruption in the area is likely. Clashes between protestors and security forces cannot be ruled out.

**Mexico: Monitor efforts to decouple with China due to pressure from the incoming Trump administration.** The rapidly expanding presence of Chinese companies within Mexico has become a point of increasing tension with the US.



Skyrocketing foreign direct investment, far reaching in-roads into the Mexican car market, and thousands of Chinese state- sponsored infrastructure projects are all signals of the deepening relationship between the two countries. Within the digital landscape, various companies have been identified by the US Defense Department of Defense as linked to the Chinese military – a point of considerable concern to national security. President Trump strongly favors a hawkish stance on China, citing unfair trade regulations, and is liable to pressure US allies – like Mexico – to adopt his position. Mexican President Sheinbaum has signaled that she would like to introduce more oversight and transparency into the country’s relationship with China, while also calling for a strengthening of the domestic economy. Business opportunities between the US and Mexico are likely to increase in response to efforts to decouple from China.

**Columbia: The outbreak of violence in the [Catatumbo](#) region continues to escalate, signaling renewed regional insecurity.** On 17 January, reports emerged that the National Liberation Army (ELN) – a US-designated terrorist group – killed several dissident members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC) rebel group and engaged in aggression that has led to significant civilian displacement. As of 21 January, the guerilla violence has expanded to clashes between the ELN and several other rival FARC splinter groups – killing approximately 100 and displacing 20,000 people. This is the largest outbreak of violence in recent years and has the potential to destabilize the security environment in rural areas of western regions. Negotiations to end nearly 60 years of violence with the ELN have been intermittent since 2022; FARC made a peace deal with the Columbian government in 2016 and has since become a legitimate political party – although there are splinter dissident groups that have continued to maintain illegal operations. President Gustavo Petro has again halted the ongoing peace



negotiations with ELN, declared a localized “state of unrest,” and sent soldiers to the western border area. The ELN has consistently demonstrated over the past two years that they are unwilling to abandon guerilla violence as a tactic. Stakeholders should monitor the situation in Catatumbo for further signs of deterioration that could spread more widely and implement strict security protocols for any operations or travel in the western regions.





## EMEA

**Israel:** **The ceasefire agreement with Hamas is unlikely to hold over the coming years as long as Hamas remains in control of the Gaza Strip.** On 19 January, a ceasefire agreement with Hamas went into effect, pausing the conflict in Gaza. The agreement has 3 phases, each lasting 42 days, with the first phase involving the release of 33 hostages from Gaza in exchange for 1,904 Palestinian prisoners. The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) will also pull back from densely populated areas. The IDF would still control the entry and exit points to the Gaza Strip, including the Philadelphia corridor on the border with Egypt and buffer zones on the borders. Negotiations for the second phase will begin on 3 February and are outlined to include a permanent ceasefire agreement, the exchange of the remaining hostages for Palestinian prisoners, and a full withdrawal of the IDF from Gaza. The third phase of the deal will involve the rebuilding of Gaza, fully opened border crossings, and the release of the remains of deceased hostages. The United States, Egypt, and Qatar will put a joint team in Cairo to monitor the ceasefire and gave verbal guarantees to Hamas that the ceasefire would continue until phase 2 was negotiated.

Though the war did not fully eliminate Hamas, one of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's primary goals, it has degraded their military capabilities. Their regional allies, Iran and Hezbollah, have also been degraded or deterred. In light of the collapse of Iran's Axis of Resistance in Syria and Lebanon, Hamas has lost the ability to open up multiple fronts against Israel and is now in a weaker position. However, Hamas remains the sole governing power in the Gaza Strip and views its continued presence and governance of Gaza as a victory over Israel. The United States also assessed that Hamas had recruited as many militants as it had lost in the conflict, showcasing its ability to reconstitute quickly, even if its ability to rearm is stunted, it will continue to control Gaza. This will cause any ceasefire deal to be temporary as Netanyahu and his government have made eliminating Hamas its highest priority. It



remains probable that hostilities could reignite should both sides fail to reach an agreement in Phase 2 of negotiations. Furthermore, given the maximalist fundamentalist views of Hamas that present a direct threat to Israel's national security, another conflict will inevitably erupt over the next decade.

**Mali: The seizure of over 245 million USD worth of gold from Barrick Gold further highlights the difficulty of operating domestically for Western based companies.** On 11 January, Mali's military-led government seized approximately three metric tons of gold from Barrick Gold's Loulo-Gounkoto mining complex. The confiscated gold was transported by military helicopters to the state-owned Banque Malienee de Solidarite (BMS) in the capital Bamako. This stems from a protracted dispute over revenue sharing and alleged unpaid taxes, with Mali's government claiming that Barrick owes 500 million USD. In response, Barrick has temporarily suspended operations at the Loulo and Gounkoto mines. The dispute reflects the growing assertiveness of Mali's military-led government in renegotiating terms with multi-national corporations to obtain greater control over natural resources. However, this approach risks deterring foreign investment, which is critical for sustaining long-term development in resource-dependent economies.

**Serbia: Widespread student protests over alleged government corruption continue persist, causing disruption in urban centers.** Since the deadly collapse of the concrete canopy at a train station in Novi Sad on 1 November 2024 called attention to perceived endemic corruption – students have led consistent protests. The persistent civil unrest reflects broader discontent with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and his increasingly autocratic regime. Frustration over stalled EU membership efforts and receding democratic norms have fueled the protests, which





formally seek greater accountability for the rushed and corrupt construction process that led to the incident. Recent protests have highlighted civil rights violations against protesters by the Serbian Security Intelligence Agency (BIA), which have been documented for harassing individuals and harvesting their personal information to publish online. Protests have regularly interrupted transportation and caused disruption in urban centers since November and can be expected to continue over the coming weeks.

**Turkey: Continue to monitor the situation as peace talks between the government and Kurdish militants could lead to stabilization in the Kurdish territories.** Politicians on both sides of parliament and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an insurgency group, have signaled the possibility of a political settlement to end a 40-year conflict between Turkey and the PKK. The conflict, ongoing since 1984, began when the PKK started an armed insurgency to form an independent Kurdish state. Over the years, the goal shifted to increased rights and autonomy for ethnic Kurds. The latest discussion of a political settlement was initiated by Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), who has long opposed Kurdish identity and rights. Bahçeli suggested parole for PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, who is serving life in prison, if he renounced violence and disbanded the organization. The suggestion has been endorsed by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Öcalan, who stated he was ready to work towards peace.

The former chairs of the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM), Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, released letters from prison after being visited by a party delegation on 11 January stating they would support Öcalan should he call for an end to the violence. The new attempt at a peace process comes as Erdoğan is attempting to achieve a third presidency, which is illegal under the constitution, and lacks the 45 votes needed to change the constitution or call for early elections. The



DEM currently controls 57 seats in the parliament, and Kurds make up around 19% of the population. Winning both sides over with a peace agreement could help him call early elections and secure a win.

As talks have continued, rival Kurdish leaders Masoud Barzani of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), leader of Iraq's Kurdish autonomous zone, and Mazloum Abdi of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) had a historic meeting on 16 January to discuss unifying the Kurdish position during Syria's transitional phase. The meeting also explored how to separate (SDF) from the PKK, an association that has caused frequent clashes between the SDF and the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA). The SDF could end its association with the PKK, and use the KDP's diplomatic links with Erdogan to mediate an end to the conflict, strengthening stability in the Kurdish regions of Syria, Iraq, and Turkey.

**Baltic Sea: The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) announced a new initiative to protect undersea cables in the Baltic Sea, highlighting a persistent Russian hybrid threat.** The release on 14 January of the creation of a new NATO mission signaled the increasing concern in Europe surrounding critical underwater infrastructure. The force would consist of frigates, maritime patrol aircraft, and a fleet of naval drones to enhance security and provide deterrence. Approximately 95 percent of worldwide internet traffic goes through underwater cables, generating an estimated 10 trillion USD worth of global financial transfers daily. Russian submarines and ships have been accused of allegedly cutting internet undersea cables with increasing frequency since the onset of the war with Ukraine in 2022. This hybrid tactic is meant to place pressure on Ukraine's allies in Europe indirectly. The campaign has sparked diverse novel efforts to combat the emerging threat through deepening collaboration. As the Baltic Sea becomes more militarized, the potential for incidental escalation rises.



## APAC

### **South Korea: Civil unrest is likely to persist and intensify over the coming days after officials detained President Yoon Suk Yeol.**

On 15 January, President Yoon was detained by police at his residence after they clashed with protesting supporters and the Presidential Security Service (PSS). In turn, this led to mass protests at the building where he was detained, including the self-immolation of one protestor. Following Yoon's apprehension, he was formally arrested on 19 January at the Seoul Western District Court, allowing his detention to be extended for 20 days. The arrest warrant was granted after a judge agreed that if Yoon were released, he could destroy evidence. After he was formally arrested, his supporters rioted in and around the Court, destroying its entrance and demanding to see the judge who granted the warrant. Rioters also clashed with police, leading to 90 arrests and the injury of several police officers. Investigators are examining whether Yoon's declaration of martial law equated to an attempted rebellion and abuse of power and should be turned over to prosecutors for an indictment. Should Yoon be formally indicted, incidents of civil unrest and street violence between his supporters, counter-protesters, and police are likely to intensify. Travelers are advised to monitor the situation and avoid protests and government buildings out of precaution.