ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT: SECURITY ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Country
Egypt, the largest state in the Arab world with 82 million inhabitants, is moving slowly from an authoritarian political system to a democracy in which Islamists form the largest political opposition. The country continues to be threatened by al Qaeda, although the Egyptian government has made great strides in recent years to provide a safe environment for foreign companies in order to promote foreign investment.

City
Alexandria is a port city of 3.3 million inhabitants along the southeastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea. It is the second-largest city in Egypt and a hub for international trade in the region. The city stretches out for about 20 kilometers (12.4 miles) along the coast and is home to many popular seaside resorts, making it an attractive destination for tourists from all over the world. Alexandria lies to the south of the Mediterranean and to the north of Lake Mariout, near the outlets of the Salam canal. Founded by the Macedonian King, Alexander, the city has a rich history dating back well over 2,000 years. Due to its large tourism industry and reliance on trade, Alexandrians are receptive to foreigners.

Terrorism
Egypt is the birthplace of modern Islamist militancy, which emerged there in the early 1970s following Egypt’s defeat in the 1967 war with Israel. That, along with a brutal crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood, radicalized the Islamists, who took up arms to achieve their political objectives. Egypt fought as many as five different militant groups until the late 1990s, when the government essentially quelled the movement. Al Qaeda’s announcement in August 2006 that a faction of the Egyptian jihadist group Gamaah al-Islamiyah had joined the transnational jihadist movement, coupled with tensions that flared in the wake of the Hezbollah-Israeli conflict, raised the threat of terrorism in the country. However, the threat has yet to materialize and Gamaah al-Islamiyah has since condemned al Qaeda.

Terrorists have repeatedly struck the tourism industry -- the engine of the country’s economy -- as a means of weakening President Hosni Mubarak’s regime. Attacks against Western tourists at Luxor in November 1997 were an example of this strategy, prompting Cairo to crack down even harder on militant groups. Intra-jihadist struggles flared up in 2004, when al Qaeda-linked jihadis resurfaced and began attacking hotels, mostly in the Sinai Peninsula. These attacks have coincided with local holidays and have tended to target Western and Israeli tourists who come to beachside towns for summer vacation. No major attacks on Egyptian tourist sites have occurred since 2006, and there have been no major terrorist attacks of any kind in Alexandria, although tensions between the Orthodox Christian Coptic
population and Muslims periodically flare up and cause violence in the city. In June of 2007, two separate skirmishes led to anti-Coptic protests, and Coptic churches in and around Alexandria were targets of looters and vandals. In April 2006, a series of knife attacks in Coptic churches in Alexandria killed one person and left 12 others injured. There is no indication that any of the lodging areas or conference facilities for the Wikimania Conference are being targeted for militant activity.

Because of Egypt’s legacy as the birthplace of modern militant Islamists and the potential for attacks, the threat of terrorism in Alexandria is medium.¹

Crime
Violent crime in Egypt is a rare occurrence, and the crime threat to foreigners is generally low. Petty theft in tourist areas can be a serious problem, as individuals who are perceived to be wealthy are often targeted for small-scale theft.

The relatively safe atmosphere in Egypt in terms of crime is largely a byproduct of heightened security following the terrorist attacks in the Sinai and Cairo. Police forces are nationalized and have a visible presence in most public places, greatly reducing the threat of violent crime. Police are typically well-trained and well-equipped to deter criminals, though they are not always capable of investigating crimes or prosecuting the offenders. As in any other large international city, petty crime against foreigners is a concern in Cairo, and visitors -- especially women traveling alone -- should take all prudent precautions to avoid being a victim of criminal elements.

Sexual harassment also has become a common occurrence, especially aimed at women in Western dress. While assaults are primarily verbal, physical assaults also occur.

The crime threat to foreigners in Alexandria is medium.²
**Political Instability**

Compared to other Middle Eastern and North African countries, Egypt is a politically stable country. Any immediate destabilizing threats are quickly neutralized by Egypt’s effective security services. The government’s security apparatus has been successful in keeping tabs on opposition groups and arresting their leaders. Consequently, groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood -- the main opposition to the ruling regime -- are severely hampered in conducting any mass demonstration. Indeed, it is difficult for any Egyptian opposition group to engage in any mass political maneuver, such as a large demonstration, without being rounded up or infiltrated by the security forces.

**SECURITY ASSESSMENT**

Rallies and demonstrations against the Egyptian government are rare, though public demonstrations in Egypt frequently coincide with external political events throughout the Middle East. When they do occur, demonstrations typically are at universities and mosques. So far, no protests have focused on Western businesses, even when protesters have rallied against the policies of a Western government. There is almost always a heavy security presence prepared to deal with any violence that could occur. Visitors should steer clear of large gatherings and demonstrations, since Egyptian security demonstrates little discretion when using force to put down such activities.

Tensions over the Gaza Strip embargo threaten the Egyptian border at Rafah, where a breach occurred in January 2008. Egyptian authorities seem unwilling to allow a second breach. This should not be an issue for visitors to Alexandria, which is over 400 kilometers (248 miles) from the Gaza Strip.

The overall threat of political instability in Alexandria is low.³

**Miscellaneous Threats**

The biggest risks to foreigners in Egypt are driving and traffic-related problems. Narrow streets in urban areas contribute to traffic congestion and a general disregard for rules, while roads and automobiles throughout the country are poorly maintained. Travelers should be prepared for rough roads, erratic driving, donkey carts and overloaded trucks. Lethal accidents involving public mini- and microbuses are common occurrences, with the last occurring May 1, killing nine passengers. Taxis are considered the safest form of travel. "Yellow taxis" -- which must be ordered by phone, usually by a concierge -- operate by meter and are typically the
most honest with their fares. Unsanctioned taxis are known to overcharge and not operate by meter. Pedestrians are urged to be vigilant while crossing streets, as drivers often disregard signals.

Health care in major cities like Cairo and Alexandria is typically adequate for non-emergency matters. Visitors are encouraged to confirm coverage with their insurance company before leaving for Egypt. If necessary, it is advisable to obtain short term travel insurance during the trip that includes coverage for medical evacuation. While the tap water in Alexandria is treated to make it safer to drink, some travelers report experiencing digestive problems after drinking the water, making it advisable to drink only bottled water when possible.

Major earthquakes and other natural disasters are rare in Egypt and pose a low threat to the city of Alexandria.

The miscellaneous threat to Westerners in Alexandria is medium.4

**Travel Recommendations**

Many security preparations for a trip overseas should begin long before departure.

- Travelers should make a copy of their passports and other important documents, such as credit cards. One copy of these documents should be left at home with a trusted family member or friend in case of an emergency, and the traveler should bring one copy when traveling to be left in a safe location, such as a hotel safe.
- It is advisable for visitors to register their travel with the embassy of their nationality in Egypt to receive security notices and other urgent information while in the country. Phone numbers for the embassy should also be programmed into cell phones for easy access. (The U.S. Embassy in Cairo is the closest U.S. diplomatic mission to Alexandria.)
- Travelers should provide family members and/or co-workers with a copy of their travel itinerary and hotel information before departing.
- In order to decrease the amount of cash needed while traveling, it may be useful to secure traveler’s checks or a prepaid bank-issued debit card.
- Travelers should secure international customer service numbers for their banks and credit card companies in the event of a lost or stolen card. Keep in mind that "1-800" numbers used in the U.S. will not work when dialing from overseas. Most financial companies maintain a local U.S. phone number for international customer service and encourage their customers to call collect in the event of an overseas emergency.
- When deciding what to bring on the trip, travelers should not take anything they are not willing to part with. While somewhat unlikely, theft or loss always is a possibility when traveling.
- All electronic data stored on laptops and other electronic devices should be backed up prior to departure. To the extent possible, all data not needed for the trip should not be saved on the device in order to protect as much as possible against theft, loss or damage. Sensitive data that must be brought on the trip can be further protected using encryption.

While in transit, travelers should maintain a high level of situational awareness and be conscious of their surroundings.
• Airport terminals around the world are notorious for criminal activity. Luggage theft is particularly common because travelers are less vigilant after long intercontinental flights and exhausted due to time changes.
• Theft of luggage and personal electronic devices, including laptops and digital cameras, has been reported in Egyptian airports. Pick-pocketing and other petty crimes also have been reported.

Upon arrival in Egypt, travelers can take a number of common-sense precautions to guard against common criminal acts and other potential security threats.

• Upon arrival at the hotel, travelers should examine escape routes and emergency exits that are available in the event of an emergency. While a terrorist attack is not likely, militants in Egypt have attacked hotels frequented by tourists. Knowing where the exits are also is valuable in the event of a more common emergency, such as fire.
• When in public, travelers should maintain a low profile whenever possible in order to minimize the perception that they are wealthy or have valuable items in their possession. Expensive jewelry, electronics and large sums of money should not be displayed in public.
• Travelers should not carry large sums of money. When possible, travelers should distribute their cash and credit cards in different pockets or bags. Identification and other important documents should be carried separately from money and credit cards.
• Public transportation in Alexandria can be very dangerous, due to poorly maintained vehicles and the threat of criminal activity. Travelers should utilize taxis and other methods of transport when possible.
• ATMs and other areas for changing money are often attacked by criminals. When possible, travelers should attempt to change money in secure locations, such as the hotel lobby or an ATM located inside a bank.
• Computers and electronic devices are a favorite target of criminals around the world. Frequently, thieves will attempt to steal any bag that appears to contain a laptop. To deter criminals, travelers should use bags that do not showcase computer company logos.
• Travelers should be especially vigilant at night, when most petty criminal acts occur in Alexandria.
• Visitors should be sure not to break any local laws, especially those involving drugs or prostitution, as foreigners are typically fully prosecuted when caught in such situations and Egyptian law deals very harshly with offenders. Extreme caution should be displayed in places like bars and nightclubs where foreigners can be lured into potentially illegal behavior.

There are a number of cultural norms in Alexandria and the rest of Egypt that travelers should be aware of while in the country. Visitors who adhere to these customs will show respect for local culture and traditions; those who fail to follow them are not likely to encounter any particular problems.

• Visitors to Egypt should attempt to respect Islamic culture in their dress and behavior. Women especially should make an effort to dress modestly, including covering their shoulders and legs whenever possible. In order to avoid potential sexual harassment as much as possible, women should attempt to travel in groups at all times.
• Egyptians speak Arabic and respond very positively to tourists who make any attempt, however small, to speak their language. English is also commonly spoken in most tourist areas of the city.
• It is not required, expected or suggested for non-Islamic women to wear a hijab (Islamic head cover).
• For beachgoers, bathing suits of any variety are acceptable, but it is a good idea to bring extra clothes to cover up with when going to or from the beach.
• Exposing the soles of your feet at any time is considered an affront to Egyptians, making leg crossing very problematic.
• Physical closeness in public between members of the opposite sex is frowned upon. Public displays of affection, between both homosexual and heterosexual couples, are discouraged and often draw negative reactions from locals.

1. Terrorism threat levels. Low: No known credible threat. Medium: Potential but unsubstantiated threats by capable indigenous or transnational actors. High: Demonstrable history and continued potential for militant attacks against generalized targets. Foreigners and/or foreign facilities are not specifically targeted. Critical: Demonstrable history and continued likelihood of militant attacks. Foreigners and/or foreign facilities are specifically targeted.

2. Crime threat levels. Low: Relatively low crime rate, mainly property or petty crime. Medium: Generally high crime rate with incidents of property crime that specifically targets foreigners, low potential for violence. High: Generally high crime rate with incidents of property crime that specifically targets foreigners, probability of violence and moderate risk of physical crime. Critical: Extensive criminal activity targeting foreigners with a high possibility of physical crime, including violence and kidnapping; heavily armed criminal elements abundant.

3. Political Instability threat levels. Low: No or minimal visible activity directed against the government. Medium: Sporadic street demonstrations, largely peaceful. High: Routine large-scale demonstrations, often affecting traffic and having the potential for violence. Critical: Endemic strikes, protests and street demonstrations almost always affecting traffic with a high probability of associated violence.

4. Miscellaneous threat levels. Low: Little or no known threats posed by disease, weather, natural disasters, transportation hazards or other dangers. Medium: Moderate level of risk posed by some or all of these threats. High: Considerable danger posed by some or all of these threats. Critical: Extremely high level of danger posed by some or all of these threats.