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SITUATION REPORT

May 26, 2023

Nakano and Tokyo Shootings

IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAVELERS IN JAPAN

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Overview

On May 25 and 26, two shootings occurred in Japan, a country well known for its low levels of gun violence. Anticipate ongoing travel disruptions and security measures throughout the country as the investigations continue in Nakano and Tokyo.

Key Takeaways

1. **Although Japan is known for its low levels of gun violence, at least five people have been killed in two unrelated shootings in the past 24 hours.** While Japanese police typically record between one and ten gun deaths per year, this week's shootings reflect a sharp increase in gun violence compared to usual rates.¹
2. **Four people were killed in a spree in Nakano City on May 25 before local police apprehended the suspect.** Shelter-in-place orders were issued for the surrounding areas during an armed standoff with security officials but were lifted on the morning of May 26.
3. **One man was killed in a shooting at JR Machida Train Station in Tokyo on May 26.** Although one man has been arrested as of Friday evening, one or more suspects are still at large, allegedly traveling in a white van.
4. **While these two incidents are likely not connected, increased security measures and travel disruptions are expected as the investigations continue.** Travelers should anticipate train delays and cancellations as police continue looking for suspects in both shootings.

Nakano Shooting - May 25, 2023

On May 25, four people were killed in a combined stabbing and shooting in Nakano City, Japan. While the suspect initially evaded police capture, he was ultimately apprehended after an overnight hostage situation.

Masanori Aoki, a Japanese national, attacked pedestrians on the street in Nakano, Japan on the afternoon of May 25, stabbing multiple women with a knife and opening fire on police using a hunting rifle before retreating to his father's home.² The initial attack left two women and two male police officers dead, and Aoki then held two of his relatives captive overnight in the home of his father, local Assemblyman Masamichi Aoki.³ An armed standoff ensued, with police surrounding the house and issuing an evacuation order to those within a 300-meter zone and a shelter-in-place order for the surrounding area.⁴

Aoki surrendered himself to police around 4:30 AM the morning of May 26, and the evacuation

¹ <https://time.com/6195409/japan-gun-control-regulation/>

² <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14917345>

³ <https://www.cnn.com/2023/05/26/asia/japan-nakano-shooting-stabbing-friday-intl-hnk/index.html>

⁴

<https://www.middletownpress.com/news/world/article/4-injured-by-man-carrying-rifle-and-knife-in-18118359.php>

and shelter-in-place orders were subsequently lifted, ending the immediate traffic and security disruptions.⁵ Additional police units remain in the area to provide backup support as the investigation continues, but most areas outside of the immediate vicinity of the Aoki house are no longer restricted to traffic by foot or by vehicle. Ongoing delays and disruptions connected to temporary security measures may remain in place to ensure the safety of citizens and that no copycat attacks follow.

Early reports suggest the attack is reportedly connected to a mental health episode, with victims chosen at random. Recent violence targeted against political leaders, such as the assassination of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2022, and the failed attempt to assassinate Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in April 2023 made early connections to local politician Msamichi Aoki point to a targeted attack; however, police have reported that based on their interviews, the attack was a spree-attack that chose targets off the street at random. The lack of a political motive makes this attack a rare, isolated instance where gun violence was directed toward civilians rather than a specific political or public figure.

Tokyo Shooting - May 26, 2023

On May 26, a man was shot to death in the shopping center connected to Tokyo's high-traffic JR Machida Train Station. While one suspect is in police custody, law enforcement officials report that one or more accomplices are still on the run.

Initial police reports state that around 8:00 PM an unidentified man was shot near a cafe in the Machida Terminal Plaza, a commuter shopping center connected to the JR Machida Train Station in Tokyo.⁶ Medical staff and security personnel were dispatched within several minutes, confirming that one man was shot multiple times in the chest, and given medical attention at the scene of the shooting before passing away in a nearby hospital.^{7,8}

Reporters on the scene witnessed two men flee on foot before escaping in a white van.⁹ According to police, the two are described as having short hair and being in their 50s.¹⁰ The shooting is likely related to organized crime, as the victim was a known associate of a local gang.¹¹

The use of a handgun in the shooting has been confirmed by video footage and police statements.¹² An individual implying knowledge or involvement in the shooting has turned himself in to the Kanagawa Prefectural Police while in possession of a handgun, additional suspects or associates are still being searched for.¹³ The white van has not been identified.

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<https://www.middletownpress.com/news/world/article/4-injured-by-man-carrying-rifle-and-knife-in-18118359.php>

⁶ <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20230526/k10014079771000.html>

⁷ https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20230526_44/

⁸ <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20230526/k10014079771000.html>

⁹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/man-dead-in-shooting-in-japans-tokyo-area/>

¹⁰ <https://www.sankei.com/article/20230526-X67M76VK3ZIBBBSXYBFFYDKUYQ/>

¹¹ <https://www.yomiuri.co.jp/national/20230526-OYT1T50246/>

¹² <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20230526/k10014079771000.html>

¹³ https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASR5V6WN7R5VUTIL03V.html?iref=comtop_7_02

Implications for International Education

SafeAbroad Analysts anticipate travel and security disruptions throughout Japan in the coming days. While these attacks are likely unrelated, they are a significant deviation from typical crime patterns in Japan and may result in an increased security presence throughout the country.

Heightened security is expected at transportation hubs near Tokyo as police continue searching for suspects linked to the Machida Train Station shooting. Travelers should be vigilant and aware of their surroundings and fully comply with all official police directives. Carefully monitor local news for more information on these attacks and plan all travel routes accordingly. Contact local authorities and your program manager or the closest embassy or consulate in case of an emergency.

