Kidnap Briefing 2022

Warren Risk, Crisis, Intelligence Consulting

KIDNAP 2022

Global Briefing

- **COVID 19 impact**
- **Afghanistan evacuation**
- **ISIS threat in Iraq and Syria**
- **The Sahel regional risks increase**
- **Ukraine and Russia**
- **Global instability**

The kidnapping epidemic continues across many regions, like Nigeria where the victims are indiscriminately targeted or carefully selected, dependent often on the perpetrators.

However, COVID 19 has seen a similar more discreet kidnap epidemic evolve in numerous parts of Africa, Asia and the Americas.

The growing global financial crisis is in many areas increasing kidnap activity, but often reducing quality targets like travelling business persons and foreign nationals due to more limited travelling.

This has seen an enormous spike in localised kidnappings, often where impoverished families get little support, loose significant funds and property or worse things end badly with a fatality.

The authorities in many of these regions have been consumed by the pandemic, fiscal crisis, war, or significant security issues, with the fiscal crunch only increasing corruption too. All this is leading to limited affordable trusted resources available to support successful kidnap repatriations.

For local families and employers the situation is precarious, for foreign nationals, NGOs, business, exploration and other travellers, there are options, and significant precautions and preparations can be undertaken to mitigate the risks or manage any crisis.

Afghanistan

- **The kidnapping risk remains severe across much of the country**

- **The security situation is extremely fluid**

- **Safe repatriation is more complex now**

- **Serious precautions are required**

The kidnap trends and types are significantly more fluid than normal. Instrumentally motivated kidnappings like ransoms remain seriously problematic in increasing regions, but expressive incident types are ever more dynamic, fuelled by COVID 19 tragedies, poverty, mental illness and drug dependencies. Furthermore, especially amongst some militia and terrorists groups, protean incidents where the motive can be influenced by effective negotiation strategies continue to increase, a crucial, (but controversial) positive though in mitigating unnecessary fatalities.

It remains the case that when the victim has received specialist training, their family/employer know what, and what not to do in the initial stages of a kidnapping, and specialist kidnap response consultants are engaged, then a safe repatriation is significantly more likely.

Afghanistan

The security vacuum across Afghanistan has seen an increase in localised kidnappings, but a decrease in victims of travelling foreign nationals, primarily due to a significant decrease in the country. It is very likely as more NGOs, business travellers, media, etc return, the kidnap incidents targeting foreigners will increase significantly. Tribal, terror, and criminal groups still see ransoms as a part of their business plan and Taliban governance and security remains seriously fractured. Serious precautions are required.

Iraq and Syria

Increased security stability across most of Iraq has seen the kidnapping trend reduce. ISIS continue to be active and target local officials, shepherds and fishermen for kidnapping for ransoms, information or intimidation, but will target foreign nationals where they can, with several cells still focused on this.

Corruption remains high amongst some officials and militia groups, with militia factions and criminal groups targeting foreign nationals occasionally.

Incidents can generally be resolved in a timely manner in Iraq when ransoms are paid, but civil unrest due to political instability increases the risks, with precautions required.

In Syria the risks are far more convoluted, with many groups and factions kidnapping. Military and terrorist activity across much of the country causes much volatility, complicating the management of such incidents with fatalities a significant risk. Serious precautions are required.

The impact of conflict, unrest and COVID 19 in both Iraq and Syria will likely continue to accelerate the kidnapping risks and whilst this will initially impact domestic incident trends mostly, it will likely lead to further elevated risks for travelling foreign nationals.

Iraq and Syria

- ISIS cells remain active in both Iraq and Syria some with a focus on kidnapping

- Terrorist groups will often accept ransoms/charitable donations in protean incidents. This is controversial with many legal nuances

- Militia/Criminal kidnappings remain common

- Repatriation in Iraq can be often resolved in a timely manner

- Repatriation in Syria is complex

- We anticipate an increasing risk here

Nigeria

- **Kidnap epidemic**

- **Expanding terrorism**

- **Significant banditry**

- **Organised kidnap gangs**

- **Piracy and kidnap gangs**

- **Complex repatriation**

- **Virtual kidnapping and scams**

Nigeria

Kidnapping across Nigeria is of an epidemic proportion. Whilst the majority of victims are local business persons, religious workers, officials, NGOs and or their families, nobody is immune.

Foreign nationals are regularly targeted and the use of social media and online information to target victims is increasing.

Nigeria also exports significant levels of virtual kidnapping and other scams. Some recent virtual kidnappings we have worked on have been very sophisticated often using romance type scams to lure a victim into a virtual kidnapping scam. Significant monetary losses occur each year to these clever sophisticated scams with victims to emotionally attached to raise the alarm

Perpetrators in Nigeria are broad, from terror groups, bandits, organised criminal gangs and opportunist criminals.

Piracy gangs operating with kidnap gangs during the pandemic period also complicated the risks and timely repatriations.

Repatriation in Nigeria can be very complex with case time trends increasing. Serious precautions are required across Nigeria and precautions required too against sophisticated virtual kidnap scams that regularly occur against innocent victims in Europe, Australia and America.

Always seek advice before paying any money

The Wider Sahel Region

Criminal kidnappings across most of the other Sahel countries were relatively low, but with Jihadist groups and factions growing, COVID 19 consequences and increasing migration complexities, the kidnap risk is increasing.

Terrorist and militia factions are expanding into new areas, across borders, and are shifting their revenue models. Ransoms have formed a part of many such models with some receiving significant contributions from countries we shall not name for the safe repatriation of their foreign nationals.

Criminal copy cat models are never far from such developments and as such the risks increase.

The risks do vary between countries and regions as do the trends and repatriation process, so professional advice is always crucial.

Africa Other Countries

Africa as a whole continues to have more reported kidnappings than any other region with Nigeria the largest contributor, but the Sahel region, Libya, Mozambique, DRC, and South Africa all contributing significantly. Foreign nationals require precautions across Africa, serious precautions in many areas.

Somalia remains a significant risk requiring serious precautions and the risks are increasing in Ethiopia due to volatile regions.

Sahel and Africa Generally

- The Sahel risks increase as Jihadist groups expand across borders

- Criminal copycats are increasing after large ransom payments became more public

- Regional risks vary significantly

- Africa has more reported kidnappings than anywhere else globally

- Foreign nationals regular targets

- South Africa, DRC, Mozambique, Libya, Somalia, Ethiopia high risk regions

Americas

- **Mexico risk increasing again**

- **Haiti significant kidnapping phase**

- **Migration significant targeting**

- **FARC splinter groups Columbia**

- **Significant organised crime and gang culture across the Americas**

- **Drug trade compounds risks**

- **Significant corruption many regions**

- **Child abduction increased reporting**

The Americas

This is a region significantly complicated by migration, drug cartels, militants, high crime rates, gang cultures, weapons availability and political fragility, further compounded by the pandemic. The Americas has the second largest level of reported annual kidnappings and a significant level of unreported cases.

Foreign nationals are regularly targeted in many regions and precautions are required, significant ones in some regions.

Mexico, Venezuela, Haiti, Columbia are all problematic, but the United States has a more significant problem than is usually discussed.

Virtual and Express kidnappings are also very high in the Americas as are incidents involving the abduction of children. These occur in many regions around the world, but reporting here is more robust than many other regions, inflating the levels relating to reported kidnappings.

Mexico incidents had decreased in recent years, but are on the rise again and Haiti incidents increased significantly. Organised criminal groups and kidnap gangs are the primary perpetrators, but opportunistic incidents are also high.

FARC splinter groups and other Columbian militants continue to target foreign nationals despite Peace Agreements and the risks in parts of Colombia remain high, with precautions required.

In North America there has been an increase in Virtual Kidnappings with precautions required.

Beyond Iraq and Syria in the Middle East

The Middle East is the third largest reporter of kidnapping incidents and not just because of Iraq and Syria.

Iran and its militias are prone to kidnapping and holding hostages and more than half of all incidents in the Middle East involve Iran. Safe repatriation here is extremely convoluted and often becomes political. Iranian kidnappings in Yemen are a significant risk too.

Kidnappings continue to increase in Yemen, but reduced in Lebanon and Turkey in 2021/22.

Foreign nationals can be targeted across the Middle East and precautions are always required in most regions. The perpetrators are usually militias or terrorists cells, with active criminal perpetrators in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt and Cyprus.

The Middle East still only reports circa 9-12% of global kidnapping incidents, significantly less than Africa and the Americas that combined make up around 70-80%.

The risks of operating or travelling in some parts of the Middle East is low when precautions are taken. Hence its critical individuals and organisations seek professional unbiased advice on the risks and precautions required to mitigate and manage them effectively.

Prevention is always better than the cure when it comes to the heinous crime of kidnapping.

The Middle East

- Iran is a significant risk with repatriation convoluted and incidents often politicised

- Iranian incidents make up more than 50% of all those in the Middle East

- The situation in Syria, Iraq and Yemen remains fluid with significant risks

- Precautions are required across most of the Middle East and always seek advice

Europe

- **The Ukraine invasion has impacted reporting**

- **Significant cost of living issues caused by war, COVID-19, etc has increased crime**

- **Migration and human trafficking significantly impacts the dynamics of kidnapping**

- **The risks across most of Europe remain lower than many other regions**

- **Virtual kidnapping scams are high and increasing across Europe**

Europe

In recent times Europe always had the lowest or near lowest of reported kidnappings, but the Russian invasion of Ukraine has fractured effective reporting and increased the risks in some regions.

The pandemic in Europe and the fiscal impacts of this, the Russian invasion, and the UK's exit from the European Union, have all contributed to significant cost of living issues, increased poverty and increased crime.

Organised crime, migration and human trafficking play a significant part in the kidnapping dynamics of Europe and foreign nationals are targeted for ransoms far more often than publicly reported in some regions.

Still the overall percentage of reported kidnapping incidents is likely to remain below 10%, dependent upon how Russian forced relocations and POWs as well as any security vacuum following war in the region, impacts such crimes.

The targeting of European foreign nationals by Russian organised crime syndicates has occurred previously and could well increase depending on the evolution of the Russia v West situation.

Finally Europe continues to see significantly high numbers of Virtual kidnapping type scams requiring vigilance and precautions.

Asia

The greatest issue with Asia is accurate reporting in many regions which ensures Asia's kidnapping incident figures remain superficially low. Reports regularly suggest Asia only equates for about 5% of global kidnapping incidents, yet we are regularly involved in assisting foreign nationals in the Philippines, Pakistan and India where targeting is far more common than publicly or sometimes officially reported.

The abduction of children and abductions for religious conversion and even body parts, is also high across parts of Asia.

Chinese nationals are regularly targeted in places like the Philippines as a consequence of gambling networks and organised crime. Piracy in parts of Asia, like off the Philippines also increases kidnap incidents.

Furthermore, Chinese detentions, forced removals and unofficial arrests are a risk in China and Hong Kong.

Travel/operations in much of Asia are generally a lower risk than many other regions, but does require professional assessment and sensible precautions.
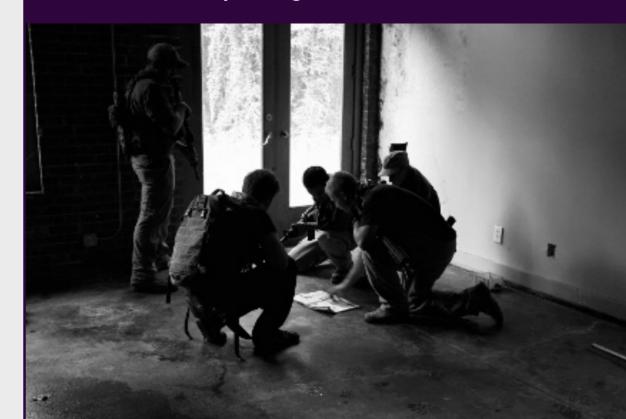
Criminal opportunists and organised crime and kidnap groups are common and often sophisticated, increasingly using social media and online activity to target victims.

Terrorist cells and militias also provide a kidnap risk in several Asian regions.

Russian hostilities may increase the risks in some regions.

Asia

- **Inaccurate superficial reporting lowers the risk on paper only**
- **The risks remain high in some regions requiring precautions**
- **The Philippines, Pakistan and India continue to see incidents**
- **Chinese detention risks high in some regions**
- **Travel across much of Asia is a lower risk with professional assessment and precautions**
- **Asian, Middle East countries clash in some reporting**

Kidnap Risk Mitigation

With sensible risks assessments, management and precautions almost anywhere can be safe from kidnap incidents.

Our core safety precautions:

- You must really research and know the region, risks, dangers, culture, laws, and customs of where you are going.

- You should get training in or know how to operate safely in higher risk regions and how to survive a hostage ordeal.

- Your clothing, luggage, behaviours, what is on your phone or computer can all increase or mitigate risks.

- Your family/employer should know exactly what and importantly what not to do if contacted saying you are a victim.

- A Crisis Management Team should be pre-arranged and trained in both incident and kidnap management, or professionals retained.

- You, your family and or employer should have contingency plans for all types of incidents, including all kidnap, abduction types and virtual kidnappings.

- You should have a mechanism for receiving confidential intelligence alerts and briefings throughout your travel and emergency plans to evacuate at anytime

Kidnap Risk Mitigation

- **Know the region and risks**

- **Specialist training (1-2 day programs available)**

- **Your family/employer has a crucial role**

- **Who is your Crisis Management Team and are they appropriate**

- **Quality comprehensive Contingency Plans**

- **Continuous quality, timely accurate intelligence updates**

- **Evacuation plans**

- **Seek specialist help and advice**

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The Kidnapping Risks

In the big scheme of things kidnap risks feel low or inappropriate for many people, mostly as the likelihood of an incident for most people in safe regions is low. However, the concept of effective risk management includes analysis of the likelihood v the consequences.

Trust us, the consequences of a kidnapping are usually at best horrific for the victim, family, and friends and can often be tragic. Take that consequence and add an increased risk region, unprepared victim, family/employer and the risks are far higher than most anticipate.

The risks are very real for people travelling in many regions, even what some would call benign or holiday destinations. Country travel advisories rarely share full details as they are diplomatically created to share advice without offending often trade partners, neighbours, alliances or aggravating further potential adversaries.

If in doubt please reach out for some advice. Prevention is far better than the cure with these heinous incidents

Never pay money or give out information without expert advice first.

Our friendly professionals are here to help.

Warren Risk, Crisis, Intelligence Consultants

Keeping you, your family, your staff safe in a complex world of risk

Contact us today for friendly confidential advice and support

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About this report and disclaimers

Our Kidnap Reports are developed normally when the risks changed quite significantly, either in specific regions or generally, or annually after our Kidnap Response and Intelligence Directive complete an analysis of known incidents, trends and events.

For ease we divide the report normally into the primary continent types such as Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas, but add the Middle East and other primary risk regions as the focus required, occasionally using MENA too. Obviously Country cross over can occur with such terms, but country incident and trend analysis considers this data as best we can. Our aim is to provide generic clear risk management messaging rather than an academic statistical analysis.

We use open source data, private confidential insurance underwriter response reports and data, and our own confidential client support and crisis response information, along with information from our Intelligence Directive to endeavour to make our reports accurate.

However, we cannot unequivocally ensure all data, information and incidents have been harvested and used to develop such reports and as such the reports accuracy, or if the report is appropriate to any individual, organisation, agency or body, their travel, operations and risks. These are generic reports with generic advice that should not be relied upon in any way without further professional analysis and assessments.

For specific advice and support please contact us

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