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SECURING YOUR MOST PRECIOUS ASSET CHILDREN STUDYING ABROAD

by Michael O'Rourke

Unique to the Family Office business model is succession planning. Preparing the next generation to take the helm begins early, and a quality education remains a foundational cornerstone. Family heads frequently view an international component to education as vital with heirs attending one or more semesters, or even an entire program of foreign study. Quality and reputation carry significant weight when selecting a foreign university, but what of security? The safety abroad of your most precious asset deserves your utmost consideration.

Determining risk for your children before sending them abroad must begin with a comprehensive threat and risk assessment at home. Is there an existing record of threats against the Family Office? Carefully review the public perception of industries in which the family is a known stakeholder and the nations within which the family does business. Negative press previously ignored must now receive proper scrutiny for threats. Perhaps some view the family head as polarising but feel powerless to act. Might radical groups be moved to violence against a vulnerable student alone in a foreign land?

University selection requires a holistic, macro to micro examination from a security perspective. Start with a national level assessment with an eye towards governance and political violence, terrorism, crime, and kidnapping. British citizens should begin research at gov.uk/browse/abroad, while Americans should check state.gov/travel. These government sites are not exclusive to their citizenry; anyone may utilise these resources. Many nations have similar sites, so search beyond the obvious

Scouring international media sources is likely a familiar routine for your Family Office's business and investment activities. Now consider them a key to your security research. Read the online versions of national papers and take a deep dive into local editions that

fly beneath the international radar. Here you will often find news of disturbing trends and incidents that go unreported outside that country's borders.

Working inward, examine those same factors at the provincial or state level, followed by the city. Have terrorists struck previously? Is civil unrest or the targeting of foreigners an issue? Where are the high crime areas, and are there no-go sections that even the police avoid? Is the social climate hostile to a demographic or group to which your child belongs? The answers are relevant because it is unlikely your child will be confined to campus, mainly if the university's buildings are scattered in urban landscape.

Examine security on university grounds. Are there a dedicated security staff? As an example, the security services at Oxford and Cambridge are easy to locate via their respective school websites. In America, most large state universities and some private institutions, including Harvard and Yale, have their own accredited and armed police departments. Are emergency response plans well-rehearsed, and the technology to communicate critical information to the student body in place?

University security in many other countries is more difficult to ascertain from afar. In these instances, a parental visitor, perhaps better, a proper assessment by a private security consultant is in order. Student accommodations at a university or in off-campus apartments must also withstand scrutiny, preferably by a trained professional. Besides overall building and individual living quarters security, vulnerability, when exiting and entering, is considered. Is street and walkway lighting in the area adequate for safe passage after dark? Human traffic patterns at all times of day and days of the week must be known.

Most children of high net worth families studying abroad travel without a security detail. Therefore a solid grounding in personal security becomes mandatory.

Accepting responsibility for such pressing matters can be difficult for young adults. They must commit to maintaining a high level of situational awareness, as we discussed on page 81 in the Autumn 2017 issue.

Varying routes, travel times, and understanding the basics of detecting the surveillance that often precedes a terrorist attack or kidnapping attempt are among the active measures that can disrupt evil plans and put an adversary on the back foot. Taking the proper low-key actions if surveillance is suspected is vital to reaching safety while not forcing a criminal to act precipitously. One needs a mental map of previously verified safe havens, with security services locations at the top of the list. Consider these as islands of sanctuary in a suddenly hostile urban sea.

Recognizing when innocent small talk becomes elicitation designed to reveal privileged information or

uncover vulnerabilities is a valuable personal security skill. When out for an evening, female students must maintain the awareness required to protect drinks from drugging attempts, and they will have additional security concerns beyond those of young men.

Imparting personal security skills, and mitigating threats through careful university selection will serve to reduce vulnerability to a variety of dangers. The goal is to make your child a harder target and convince bad actors to seek more vulnerable prey elsewhere.

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