KIDNAP+ RANSOM INSIGHT
GLOBAL SUMMARY

FOCUS ARTICLE

FIXATED THREAT: MANAGING INAPPROPRIATE AND THREATENING BEHAVIOUR

September 2020 REPORT
WWW.CONSTELLIS.COM
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUMMARY

This issue of Constellis’ Kidnap for Ransom Insight Report covers global kidnapping incidents and trends for the months of July, August and September 2020. The information is derived from multi-source analysis of kidnap for ransom activity and where known, the outcome or resolution of the events. The report covers current kidnap for ransom hotspots at regional, national and provincial levels, with a particular focus on areas where kidnap for ransom activity is increasing.

Statistical analysis of data for July and August 2020 is included on page 13, which displays kidnap for ransom trends by region, victims by nationality and employment sector, as well as identifying the Top 10 countries for the kidnapping of foreign nationals over the reporting period. Additionally, 12-month statistical information (September 2019 – August 2020) can be found on page 17.

The Global Piracy Update gives an overview of the piracy threat by region, providing trend analysis for July and August 2020. It also offers sample cases that took place during these months to illustrate identified trends.

The Cybersecurity section examines current issues affecting companies and individuals in the realm of IT security. This edition explores current cybercrime trends, particularly double-extortion ransomware.

This new tactic combines a ransomware attack with a data breach, meaning that attackers exfiltrate sensitive data prior to encrypting their victims’ networks. With the added risk of critical company and client data being made public, on top of their systems being jeopardised, organisations have been known to pay ransoms in the millions of dollars to retrieve their data. Given the ramifications of such attacks, cyber criminals are expected to expand the use of double-extortion ransomware, in addition to increasing their ransom demands.

The Focus Article examines the subject of fixated threat. Produced by Constellis’ partner Theseus Risk Management, this piece explores what motivates individuals to intrude upon and threaten people in the public eye, including the leadership and employees of prominent companies. Although most such contacts generally prove of little consequence, some may indicate intent to harm the target in some way. Contact of this nature can persist for months and even years if no effective intervention is undertaken. Therefore, a suitable, structured system for managing such inappropriate and threatening behaviour is paramount. Lacking this, organisations and individuals risk consuming significant amounts of time and money, repeatedly diverting security resources in the day-to-day management of the threat.

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Over July–August 2020, there was a decrease of 26% in the number of foreign nationals kidnapped in the Americas. This is consistent with the trend observed since March this year, when most countries in the region began implementing measures, including travel and movement restrictions, to stem the spread of the COVID-19 infection. This has particularly restricted the movement of migrants throughout the region, signifying a lower number of potential targets for kidnappers, especially in Mexico. Having said that, this has not led to any lessening of the threat itself. On the contrary, it has been observed that a number of organised criminal groups have been forced to diversify their business, venturing into kidnap for ransom or depending more on this activity, to make up for lost drug revenue as a result of the coronavirus crisis. Likewise, an increase in fraud, including virtual kidnapping, has been observed throughout the region, including in North America. Of note in this reporting period was a series of abductions of foreign tourists that took place in Mexico, a number of which ended in the death of the victims. Many of the victims were found to have travelled to the country despite travel advisories being in place warning against travel to Mexico, due to both the high rate of COVID-19 infections and the security situation.

**CASES:**

> Los Angeles firefighter Frank Aguilar disappeared on 20 August in the Mexican coastal city of Rosarito, Baja California state, where he had been living since March. Family members who went to visit him that day found his home ransacked and his Jeep and motorcycle missing. The victim’s daughters said the Mexican authorities told them they have video from the CCTV camera at his condominium, showing “concerning scenes”, indicating a violent kidnapping. The family also said the Mexican authorities had been extremely secretive about the event. No ransom has reportedly been demanded to date. The American authorities are currently liaising with their Mexican counterparts and supporting the family.

> A Paraguayan man was arrested in Buenos Aires, Argentina, for trying to steal USD 31,000 from a Belgian retiree by telling him he had kidnapped his son. The suspect was arrested after police on patrol observed the victim’s maid in possession of a bag containing the money, which she had been instructed to give to the criminal.

> A Paraguayan woman who had been missing for eight days in the country. Johanna Díaz had left her home in the city of Princes Town in the afternoon of 24 August, bound for the municipality of San Fernando, where she was going to collect some money she was owed. Her family reported her missing the next day after she did not return and was uncontactable. The family conducted their own investigations, leading them to believe she had been kidnapped and was being held in a property in the locality of Gran Couva. They informed the local authorities of their findings, though the police were unable to raid the residence as they did not have a search warrant. This incident follows the kidnap and assault of another Venezuelan female on 11 August after she boarded a taxi in San Fernando.

> Former Paraguayan Vice-President Oscar Denis was abducted along with one of his employees from his ranch in the locality of Bella Vista Norte, Amambay department, on 9 September. Through fliers distributed in the area, the EPP claimed responsibility for the kidnapping. The militant group has demanded the release of two of their leaders, who are in prison for kidnapping, and the delivery of food worth USD 2 million to 40 impoverished local communities. Denis’ family reported that the group had threatened to execute the former politician if their demands were not met within eight days. Most worryingly, the family said that the group had not yet provided proof of life for the hostage. Denis’ driver was released in unknown circumstances on 14 September. It is possible that he was let go because he is a member of a local indigenous group. Later, on 16 September, the family announced that they had already carried out the requested food distribution. Nonetheless, Denis remains in captivity.

In South America, criminality levels continue to surge. In Peru, Colombia, and Chile, public perception has mainly attributed this increase to the large migrant flows from Venezuela. The recurrence of kidnappings and other violent crimes committed by Venezuelan gangs in the local news have certainly contributed to reinforce this perception. However, recent studies, such as the one conducted by the US-based Migration Policy Institute (MPI) and the Brookings Institution, have ascertained that the evidence collected during their study does not support those views, as the majority of crimes continue to be carried out by local nationals. A similar situation has been observed in Trinidad and Tobago, where xenophobia has led to the targeting of Venezuelan nationals, according to a report of violent crimes. Meanwhile, Paraguay continues to make the regional headlines due to a recent intensification of the conflict between the national security forces and the Paraguayan People’s Army (EPP). During this most recent spike in hostilities, the EPP carried out one of the most high-profile attacks in its history with the kidnapping of a former Vice-President. It is believed that the abduction was in retaliation for the death of the two underaged daughters of an EPP leader in unclear circumstances during a military operation against an EPP camp on 2 September. The controversial event put in doubt the government’s human rights record, particularly in terms of its fight against the guerrilla group; it also provoked a diplomatic row with Paraguay’s neighbour after it was ascertained that the victims were Argentinean citizens. These developments have certainly raised the stakes in the protracted conflict, which could result in the revitalisation of a movement that had already been dwindled into a few dozen followers, mainly dedicated to criminal activities.

**CASES:**

> On 5 September, Trinidad authorities found the body of a Venezuelan woman who had been kidnapping and held in a property in the locality of Gran Couva. She had been held by a local indigenous group. Later, on 16 September, the family announced that they had already carried out the requested food distribution. Nonetheless, Denis remains in captivity.

**Photo:** Infobae

Members of the Gulf Cartel distribute food supplies in Ciudad Victoria, Mexico, to support the population during the coronavirus crisis. (Photo: Infobae)
EUROPE

In an outstanding development, Europe became the region with the highest number of kidnapped foreign nationals over July-August 2020. This was mainly the result of the current socio-political crisis in Belarus. Following the presidential election of 9 August, demonstrations opposing President Lukashenko and the alleged fraud during the elections have regularly taken place nationwide. Civil unrest has been particularly conspicuous in Minsk and other major provincial cities, where protests have often deteriorated into riots. In response, Belarussian authorities have violently cracked down upon the protest movement, with numerous allegations of human rights abuses, including illegal detention, torture and forced disappearance. In the first few days after the vote alone, riot police reported arrested nearly 7,000 people. Among the arrested were also bystanders, among them a number of foreign nationals who happened to be in the vicinity of the demonstrations. The Belarussian authorities have also detained dozens of journalists, including foreign reporters, some of whom have been deported. Opposition leaders and outspoken activists continue to be arrested or forced into exile. As a result of the current instability, a number of western governments have advised their citizens to reconsider travel to Belarus and to avoid gatherings and demonstrations if already in the country.

CASES:

- On 29 July, 32 Russian citizens were arrested at a spa outside Minsk, Belarus. The arrested are reportedly employees of a Kremlin-backed private military company operating in several conflict zones around the world, who, according to some media sources, were on their way to a deployment in Sudan. A thirty-third military contractor was arrested on the same day in southern Belarus. The Belarussian authorities accused the men of plotting to destabilise the country ahead of the presidential elections. It was however assessed that the arrests may have been a political move by President Lukashenko to “extort” Russia’s support.

- Tanguy Darbellay, a member of the Swiss national wrestling team who was in the country for training, was arrested. After news of the arrest broke out, the wrestling team who was only passing by on his way back home when he was arrested. After news of the arrest broke out, the wrestling team who was only passing by on his way back home when he was arrested. After news of the arrest broke out, the wrestling team who was only passing by on his way back home when he was arrested.

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MIDDLE EAST

Over the reporting period, the Middle East experienced an increase of 56% in the number of foreign kidnap victims. The increase was linked to several incidents recorded in UAE. Numbers were particularly driven up by a maritime incident in which 28 Indian sailors were hijacked along with their vessel by suspected Iranian forces off the Emirati port of Khorfakkan. They were subsequently transferred to Iran, where they were held for several days. The incident took place in the context of the Iran-US conflict, in which the vessel was accused of circumventing sanctions against Iran. It is thus unclear what Iran’s motivation for the hijacking was. Additionally, a number of politically-motivated abductions of foreign activists were allegedly committed by foreign agents on Emirati soil. Similar incidents are said to have taken place in the past, though it has not been ascertained if any of these occurred with the knowledge of the Emirati authorities.

CASES:

- Paul Rusesabagina, who saved more than 1,200 people from genocide and inspired the 2004 movie ‘Hotel Rwanda’, was kidnapped while in Dubai, UAE, on 1 September, according to his family. Rusesabagina, who had arrived in Dubai from the US on 27 August, was allegedly abducted by Rwandan intelligence operatives who took him to Rwanda’s capital, Kigali. While it is unclear if Rusesabagina was indeed abducted in Dubai and under what circumstances, Rwandan authorities acknowledged they had arrested him, accusing him of being the ‘founder, leader and sponsor of violent, armed, extremist terror outfits.” They also cited “international cooperation” in apprehending him, though did not provide additional details. Rusesabagina, who is a Belgian citizen and a US permanent resident, did not provide additional details. Rusesabagina’s family claim the charges are bogus and that they have not been allowed to speak to him since his arrest. Human rights activists are concerned that this is the latest example of the Rwandan government targeting critics outside its borders. According to latest reporting, Rusesabagina had his first court appearance on 14 September, where he was charged with 12 counts, including terrorism and other serious crimes. If found guilty, he could potentially be sentenced to life in prison.

- On 15 August, Yemen’s Minister of Information, Muammar Al-Eryani, accused Qatar of abducting a Yemeni citizen and her child at the request of the Houthis, putting their lives at risk. Al-Eryani published on social media a document allegedly evidencing Doha’s complicity with the Houthis, in violation of international laws and customs. The Qatari authorities allegedly kidnapped Hayat al-Baladi’i by deception, and forcibly deported her to Djibouti, from where she would be taken back to Yemen. The Qatari authorities have justified their actions as a humanitarian attempt to reunite them with their family in Yemen. However, it is reported that some family members had threatened Al-Baladi’i with death after she divorced her husband. It is unclear what links her family has with the Yemeni militia.

- Iranian authorities continue to unjustly detain and imprison foreign citizens, including students, journalists, business travellers, and academics, on charges including espionage and posing a threat to national security. The Iranian authorities do not recognise dual nationality, meaning that bi-nationals arrested in Iran are not allowed to apply for consular protection. The threat of unlawful detention increases during periods of heightened geopolitical tension. Foreign detainees are often used as bargaining chips to further Iranian foreign policy interests, in what is called ‘hostage diplomacy’. According to most recent reports, it is believed that there are currently at least 12 foreign nationals and dual citizens being held in Iranian prisons.

- Meanwhile in Syria, an American journalist based in Syria’s opposition-held Idlib province was arrested by militant group Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), on 13 August. Bilal Abdul Kareem, one of the most prominent foreign journalists covering Syria’s civil war, was arrested by HTS forces when coming out of a mosque in the town of Atmeh, in northern Idlib. Kareem was taken from his car, assaulted, and immediately taken to an unknown location. HTS said Kareem is accused of spreading fake news and rumours about the group, despite having been warned against it in the past. His detention follows the 11 August re-arrest of British aid worker Tauqir Sharif, whose case had been highlighted by Kareem after his first arrest in June. Among other things, Kareem exposed HTS’s torture of prisoners. Moreover, back in June, the journalist also reported he had narrowly escaped HTS arrest shortly after Sharif was detained.

- Iranian authorities arrested five Iranians, accused of spying for Israel, Britain and Germany, the Iranian judiciary said on 11 August. The statement also said that two of the accused had already been convicted and given prison sentences. One of the two was identified as Masoud Mosaheb, the co-chairman of the Iranian-Austrian Friendship Society. The Iranian-Austrian dual national was sentenced to ten years imprisonment for allegedly sharing information on Iran’s missile and nuclear projects with Israel’s Mossad and the German intelligence services. The Austrian Foreign Ministry said that although efforts to achieve Mosaheb’s release continue unabated, Iran has not allowed them to monitor legal proceedings, visit him in prison or have access to trial and medical records, as the country does not recognise dual citizenship. According to Austrian media, Mosaheb, 72, has been imprisoned in Iran since January 2019. The Iranian authorities said the other four prisoners worked in the Iranian foreign, defence and energy ministries, and were arrested for passing on sensitive information on vital economic, nuclear, infrastructure, military and political centres.

The Iranian Intelligence Ministry published a video of exiled activist Jamshid Sharmahd where he confesses to terrorism charges. Sharmahd, who is an Iranian-German dual national with US permanent residency, was allegedly abducted from Dubai in late July 2020. (Photo: World Israel News)
AFRICA

Over the July-August 2020 period, Africa observed a drop of nearly 50% in the number of recorded foreigner kidnappings, compared to the previous two-month period. This was due to a decrease in pirate activity in the Gulf of Guinea, where only two successful kidnappings of crew were registered. This is assessed to have been the result of renewed efforts by the Nigerian authorities to combat piracy in the country, which translated into a relative lull in pirate activity over the reporting period. On the other hand, kidnappings linked to militancy and common criminality continued unabated in Nigeria, positioning the country at the top of the regional kidnap ranking. Meanwhile in the Sahel, insecurity continues to spiral amid a widespread Islamist insurgency, rampant criminality and intercommunal violence. Over the reporting period, the situation further deteriorated with the 28 August military coup in Mali. Militant groups operating in the region, known to have their hubs in Mali, may seek to exploit the instability and security vacuum created by the coup by stepping up attacks. In this context, future high-profile kidnappings cannot be ruled out. Aid workers employed by international organisations are at particular risk. Such threats have been exacerbated following a warning issued by the Islamic State (IS) in mid-August in its al-Naba newsletter, in which the group labelled those working for international humanitarian organisations as legitimate targets, as they represent enemy entities, acting as spies and proselytising “blasphemous beliefs”. This warning followed the kidnapping of six French aid workers and their local guide in a wildlife park in Niger on 9 August, which was later claimed by the Islamic State Greater Sahara (ISGS), as well as the kidnap and killing of five local INGO workers by the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in Nigeria on 21 June. CASES:

▶ Six gunmen kidnapped four Chinese construction workers at the premises of the Danatrite Construction Company, near a quarry site in a remote area of Akampka, in Nigeria’s Cross River State, on 22 July. A policeman working with the Chinese expatriates was killed during the abduction. The hostages were released on 16 August, according to the authorities, in a security operation in the locality of Akpaibuo. However, local news sources affirmed that the Chinese workers were released after their employer paid a ransom NGN 22 million (approximately USD 57,000) to the kidnappers.

▶ A male Nigerian nurse, who was abducted by ISWAP in January 2020, escaped his captors following military bombardments of the group’s camps in Lake Chad. The nurse, whose name and organisation are not yet known, was able to flee to safety to a village in Niger. It is reported that several other captives also escaped, but their whereabouts remain unknown.

▶ Another employee of a humanitarian organisation was kidnapped and killed by suspected Anglophone militants in Cameroon. The local national worked for NGO Community Initiative for Community Development (COMINSUD). He was kidnapped on 7 August from his home in Batibo, North-West region, by separatists who killed him later on the same day. The event, another in a recent series of attacks against humanitarian personnel in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, followed the kidnap and murder of a local employee of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), in South-West region in July.

Wreckage of the car carrying the six French aid workers who were killed by ISGS in an attack in Niger in August. (Photo: CNN)

Meanwhile, in Mozambique, after a relative lull following the successful rescue of two high-profile victims and arrest of several kidnappers, abductions of wealthy residents, particularly those of South Asian origins, have begun to be reported on a regular basis once again. South Africa is experiencing a similar situation. However, local experts have suggested that the new wave in South Africa is being led by copycat gangs, as unlike kidnappings committed during the earlier trend last year, many recent ones, despite following the same modus operandi, have been executed in a more amateurish way. It has long been argued that the South African and Mozambican organised crime scenes are closely intertwined. Recent events have suggested that associations may well go beyond trans-border operational capabilities, showing a potential link between South African criminal syndicates and Mozambican terror groups. It is alleged that organised crime syndicates in South Africa, through the kidnapping of wealthy targets, have been providing funds to Islamic State-linked insurgents in northern Mozambique. This inherently represents a heightening of the terrorist threat in South Africa, as the possibility that some of these funds could be channelled into funding terrorist activities domestically cannot be discarded. These events have led to speculation that South Africa is already preparing to send troops to Mozambique. This has not been confirmed or denied by the South African government, which has only said it has been discussing assistance with Maputo.

CASES:

▶ Businessman Artur Magaia, who was kidnapped in August in Maputo province, Mozambique, was released on 15 September. It was reported that after his release, the hostage was taken to hospital and is currently under intensive care. According to local media, the victim was released after his family paid over USD 1 million in ransom. The owner of Empatel Serviços Aduaneiros was kidnapped on 10 August near his home in the Belo Horizonte neighbourhood, an upmarket area of the city of Matola, in the Maputo suburbs. Between January and September 2020, the Mozambican authorities have recorded nine abductions of wealthy businessmen or their family members.

▶ A 72-year-old Indian businessman, who was kidnapped on 2 July, was rescued by South African security forces in a raid on a house in Kliprivier, KwaZulu-Natal province, on 23 July. Reportedly, an undisclosed ransom ranging in the millions of dollars had been demanded for the release of the victim, in addition to a significant sum that had already been stolen from the victim’s bank accounts. Five men were arrested during the raid, including a Somali and an Ethiopian national. Foreign military uniforms, several large-calibre firearms, as well as Islamic State (IS) material were seized at the property. According to investigations by the South African authorities, the five suspects are members of an IS cell based in Johannesburg, and are also linked to previous terrorism cases in the country. It was also revealed that kidnapping for ransom and extortion of businesses were part of the modus operandi of this group, and that their proceeds helped to fund their activities and other IS units abroad, including in Mozambique. These events followed recent threats issued by IS against South Africa should the country provide military support to Mozambique in its fight against IS in Cabo Delgado province.

Islamic State militants in Mozambique’s Cabo Delgado Province. (Photo: Homeland Security Today)
Detentions of foreign nationals in China endured over the reporting period, as the Chinese regime continues to exert what is believed to be ‘hostage diplomacy’, in which detainees are used as bargaining chips in the numerous disputes involving the Asian power. As feared during the onset of its implementation, the Chinese regime has used the Counter-Espionage and National Security Laws to carry out these detentions, accusing victims of posing a threat to national security. In this context, a number of Western countries, including the UK, Australia and the US, have recently issued travel advisories warning against travel to China and Hong Kong, citing the risk of arbitrary detention, arbitrary enforcement of local laws and denial of access to consular services, among other unlawful actions. Additionally, it is reported that dozens of large Western companies are reassessing the security of their expatriate employees in China, as well as plans to send staff to the country as border restrictions are eased.

### CASES:

- The Australian Foreign Ministry said they were informed by Chinese authorities on 14 August about the detention of Cheng Lei, an Australian news anchor working for the state-run English-language television network CGTN. In a press conference on 8 August, the Chinese authorities revealed that Cheng is suspected of “carrying out criminal activities endangering China’s national security,” as allegedly revealed by recent investigations. It is believed that Cheng’s detention may be linked to a search conducted by Australian intelligence agents of the homes of Chinese journalists in June, questioning them for several hours and removing their computers and mobile phones. The raids were part of an investigation into alleged foreign interference linked to former New South Wales Australian Labor Party staffer John Zhang. Mr Zhang has denied any wrongdoing and has launched court action over the investigation. Following this series of seemingly tit-for-tat events, Australian correspondents for ABC in China were rushed out of China for their own safety, following their questioning by Chinese authorities over Cheng’s case. The detention of journalist Cheng Lei is the newest incident in the context of deteriorating relations between Australia and China. Cheng is the second high-profile Australian citizen to be detained by Beijing after writer Yang Hengjun was arrested in January 2019 on suspicion of espionage.

- The Los Angeles Times revealed in an article on 3 September that one of its journalists had been detained and then expelled from China’s Inner Mongolia region, while covering tensions over a new policy that reduces the use of the Mongolian language in education. The newspaper said that the American reporter was surrounded by plainclothes men at a school in Hohhot, the region’s capital, and taken to a police station. There, she was allegedly interrogated, grabbed by the throat and pushed into a cell, where she was held for more than four hours before being forced to leave the northern Chinese region. Three government officials and a police officer took her to a train station and waited there until the train left for Beijing. Reportedly, the journalist was not allowed to contact the US Embassy. Alice Su, the newspaper’s Beijing bureau chief, later confirmed that she was the victim, though she declined to comment further.

In July-August 2020, Asia saw a significant increase in kidnapping activity, slowly reverting to levels observed pre-coronavirus. The main driver of kidnapping activity over the reporting period continued to be the operations of Chinese criminal syndicates, particularly those engaged in gambling activities and loan sharking. This was most predominant in Cambodia, with all victims and perpetrators being of Chinese nationality. These types of incidents meanwhile decreased in the Philippines. However it remains unclear if this was the result of the previous focus adopted by the security forces, as claimed by the Philippine government, or simply as a result of the pandemic. Meanwhile, in an interesting development over recent months, a number of mass kidnappings have been recorded in Papua New Guinea. Papua’s crime rate is among the highest in the world, with threat levels notably increasing in urban areas. While the primary security concern for travellers is petty and opportunistic crime, violent crime, including kidnapping, also poses a serious threat, having affected foreign nationals in the past. Victims of kidnapping in the country are usually released unharmed and relatively quickly, but may face the threat of injury or death in captivity.

### CASES:

- A wealthy Chinese businesswoman living in Cambodia was abducted on 25 August from her business located in Phnom Penh’s Chamkar Mon district. The woman was taken to a rental apartment in Bassac commune, where she was held while the kidnappers demanded a ransom of USD 30,000 from her family in Cambodia. The abduction was reported to the police the next day. In a complaint made by the victim’s boyfriend. Following investigations, the Cambodian police raided the property on 27 August, arresting six suspects, all Chinese nationals, and rescuing the victim. Subsequent investigations determined that the accused had no jobs or permanent addresses in Cambodia.

- Two Chinese nationals were rescued by the Philippine Anti-Kidnapping police (AKG) in a raid at a rented house in Las Piñas City, on 9 August. Two Chinese kidnappers were also arrested in the operation, which was set up following the complaint made by the wife of one of the victims. The criminals reportedly demanded RMB 300,000 (nearly USD 85,000) for the release of the woman. Local police said the camp manager travelled to the site where the hostages were being held and secured their release by paying an undisclosed amount of money.

- Six expatriate workers of unspecified nationality were abducted on 7 July by a gang of five heavily armed men during a raid on their residential camp in Sasesrene, Papua New Guinea’s Western province. The expatriates were rounded up by the criminals, who then forced two of their chauffeurs, also expatriates, to drive them to another camp 50 km away. The drivers were then released to communicate the kidnappers’ demand of PGK 300,000 (nearly USD 65,000) for the release of the hostages. Local police said the camp manager travelled to the site where the hostages were being held and secured their release by paying an undisclosed amount of money.
Statistics for July-August 2020 are drawn from Constellis’ record of 195 kidnapped foreign nationals. Over May-June 2020, Constellis recorded a total of 168 foreign nationals kidnapped across the world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of Victims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia &amp; Pacific</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Belarus (53) .... 88.3%
Cyprus* (3) ....... 5%
Spain (2) .......... 3.3%
Ukraine (2) ....... 3.3%

Nigeria (18) ..... 33.3%
Tanzania* (12) .... 22.2%
Libya (11) ....... 20.1%
Benin (5) .......... 9.3%
SA (4) ............ 7.4%
Ghana (2) .......... 3.7%
Mozambique (1) .... 1.9%
Mali (1) .......... 1.9%

UAE (31) ......... 79.4%
Syria (2) .......... 5.1%
Qatar (2) .......... 5.1%
Iraq (1) .......... 2.6%
Saudi Arabia (1) .. 2.6%
Yemen (1) .......... 2.6%
Oman (1) .......... 2.6%

Cambodia (10) .... 35.7%
PNG (6) ........... 21.4%
Philippines (4) ... 14.3%
China (2) .......... 7.1%
Afghanistan (1) ... 3.6%
Malaysia (1) ....... 3.6%

Mexico* (9) ........ 64.4%
T & T (2) ........... 14.3%
Pakistan (4) ....... 14.3%
Ecuador (1) ....... 7.1%
Haiti (1) .......... 7.1%
Argentina (1) ..... 7.1%

SOUTH AFRICA (4) 2.1%
BENIN (5) 2.6%
PAPUA NEW GUINEA (6) 3.1%
MEXICO* (9) 4.6%
CAMBODIA (10) 5.1%
LIBYA (11) 5.6%
TANZANIA* (12) 6.2%

SA = South Africa
PNG = Papua New Guinea
T & T = Trinidad & Tobago
* Including Migrants

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JUL-AUG 2020

REGIONAL ORIGINS OF VICTIMS

MOST VICTIMIZED SINGLE NATIONALITY

01 Russian
02 Indian
03 Chinese
04 American
05 Burundian
06 Egyptian
07 Unknown
08 Ukrainian
09 Pakistani
10 Iranian

MOST VICTIMIZED ORIGIN BY REGION

REGION ORIGIN
Africa Africans & Europeans
Americas North Americans
Asia & Pacific Southeast Asians
Europe Europeans
Middle East South Asians

VICTIMS BY SECTOR

UNKNOWN (33) 16.9%
MIGRANTS (15) 7.7%
BUSINESSPEOPLE (13) 6.7%
PROFESSIONALS (8) 4.1%
CONSTRUCTION (8) 4.1%
TOURISM (6) 3.1%
DEPENDENT (3) 1.5%
UNSKILLED (2) 1.1%
MINING (1) 0.5%
NGO (1) 0.5%
MARITIME (48) 24.7%
OTHER (41) 21%

DISCLAIMER: These statistics herein presented are the result of a compilation of kidnapping incidents involving foreign nationals only, which have been reported in the media and other open sources. The information contained and its results are therefore partial as result of the incomplete nature of open-source material. Thus, this report should be taken only as a reference of general trends, taking its limitations into consideration.

REGION OCCUPATIONAL SECTOR
Africa Maritime
Americas Tourism
Asia & Pacific Businesspeople
Europe Other
Middle East Maritime
**Statistics**

**September 2019 - August 2020**

**Top 10 Countries for the Kidnapping of Foreign Citizens in Sep 2019 - Aug 2020**

- **Libya** (113) 9.7%
- **Nigeria** (113) 9.7%
- **Iran** (80) 6.96%
- **Mexico** (70) 6%
- **Philippines** (67) 5.8%
- **Belgium** (53) 4.6%
- **Cameroon** (52) 4.6%
- **South Africa** (52) 4.6%
- **Mexico** (41) 3.2%
- **Ghana** (41) 3.5%

**Regional Geographical Distribution of Victims**

- **Africa**: 43%
- **Middle East**: 18%
- **Asia & Pacific**: 18%
- **Americas**: 12%
- **Europe**: 9%

**Numbers of Victims**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of Victims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of the World</td>
<td>477 (41.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Statistics for September 2019 - August 2020**

These statistics are drawn from Constellis’ record of 1,161 foreign nationals kidnapped worldwide.

**Top 10 Countries for Foreign Nationals Kidnapped**

- **Libya**: 113
- **Nigeria**: 113
- **Iran**: 80
- **Mexico**: 70
- **Philippines**: 67
- **Belgium**: 53
- **Cameroon**: 52
- **South Africa**: 52
- **Mexico**: 41
- **Ghana**: 41

*(Including Migrants)*
There were 66 maritime incidents recorded over July and August 2020, which represents a 5% increase on the 63 incidents registered during the previous reporting period (May – June). As per established trends, the coronavirus pandemic continues to have a negative impact on maritime security due to an increase in criminality around the world. The majority of the recorded incidents consisted of low-profile robberies (32%) and attempted thefts (48%), in addition to a number of suspicious approaches, while hijackings were 6% of the total. There were more kidnaps, with six incidents recorded, most of them taking place in the Gulf of Guinea (GOG).

Meanwhile, maritime security incidents persisted in the Gulf of Mexico. Though most incidents consist of low-profile robberies, violent ones have seen an increase. This has prompted the US government to issue several security alerts for the region. Of additional concern, tension between Greece and Turkey continued escalating in a dispute over gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean. Most recently, following Turkey’s stated intentions to commence a drilling survey in waters close to the Greek island of Kastellorizo, Greece signed a deal with Egypt to set up a maritime security zone in early August. Despite this, Turkey’s research vessel ORUC REIS was spotted sailing in waters between Crete and Cyprus on 11 August. Possible low-level clashes cannot be discounted in the mid to short-term. Meanwhile, incidents in the Persian Gulf linked to the various geopolitical conflicts engulfing Iran persisted, with a number of shipment interdictions, hijackings and armed attacks over the reporting period. Tension between Iran and the UAE further escalated after the UAE announced it had agreed to normalise ties with Israel. It is believed that, among other things, this will boost the Israeli oil pipeline, which runs from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. Additionally, unconfirmed reports have suggested that an Emirati-Israeli intelligence base is being set up in Yemen’s Socotra Island. If confirmed, this will certainly raise animosity in the region. In the current state of affairs, future violent maritime incidents in the area are likely.

The Gulf of Aden (GOA) and the wider East Africa region recorded a very slight increase in maritime incidents over July and August. Most of the recorded events consisted of attempted robberies, with only one successful theft recorded off Somalia on 20 August, targeting a tanker that was anchored after having suffered mechanical problems. A false report on 16 August suggested that the Greek-owned chemical vessel AEGEAN II had been hijacked by six armed men after having developed engine trouble. It was later clarified that the individuals who boarded the ship were Somali security forces from Garadfoo, who had taken the vessel to Bareeda. This was later confirmed by the EU Naval Force on 22 August. It is assessed that the ongoing piracy threat in the region was what most likely led to the misreporting. In other news, the three remaining Iranian hostages, part of the crew of the Iranian fishing vessel FV Siraj, which was hijacked in March 2015, were finally released on 20 August. The release reportedly took place with the assistance of the Hostage Support Partnership, a pro-bono humanitarian group seeking to release long-term hostages in Somalia.

There were more than 50 reported attempted thefts (48%), in addition to a number of suspicious approaches, while hijackings were 6% of the total. There were more kidnaps, with six incidents recorded, most of them taking place in the Gulf of Guinea (GOG).

The number of incidents recorded in the Gulf of Guinea (GOG) remained largely unchanged. Most incidents in the period consisted of suspicious approaches and attempted robberies. There were four kidnapping incidents, with a total of 29 crew abducted. In continuation of the trend observed in recent months, Nigerian pirates have carried out attacks further into international waters in order to bypass national security patrols and responses. Nevertheless, following pressure from the shipping industry, the Nigerian Navy carried out more security operations over this reporting period, which resulted in several arrests of pirates and disruption of attacks. In addition, a Nigerian court convicted three suspected pirates for hijacking a ship in March, which secured a ransom of USD 200,000 out of the USD 2 million originally demanded for the release of its crew. Three expatriates and six Nigerians, all employees of a private security company, were also convicted for “aiding and abetting terrorism, kidnapping and possession of illegal firearms” after they facilitated the ransom payment on the same case. These convictions are the first following the introduction of the new anti-piracy law, which came into force last year.

Meanwhile, maritime incidents in Southeast Asia are on the rise, most of them still recorded along the Singapore Straits, and mainly comprising criminal boardings for theft. No hijacking or kidnapping incidents were observed in this reporting period. Nonetheless, the curfew in the Eastern Sabah Security Zone (ESSZone) remains in place, given the ongoing threat posed by Philippines-based groups. Meanwhile, territorial disputes in the South China Sea persisted, with a notable military buildup in the area. While concerned countries have not taken any active military action against what is perceived to be ongoing Chinese hostile acts, the situation remains very unstable, with future encounters possible.

**CASES:**

- On 28 August, pirates boarded the Ghana-registered fishing vessel AP 703 south west of Lagos and kidnapped two Korean crew, taking them on a speedboat towards Nigeria. The incident came only nine hours after a tanker was also boarded by armed men in roughly the same area.
- On 10 July, the Saudi-led military coalition destroyed two explosives-laden boats in the Red Sea. According to a Coalition spokesperson, the two remotely-controlled vessels belonged to Houthi forces and were an “immigrant threat to sea lines of communication, international trade and regional and international security”. The boats were destroyed six kilometres south of the Yemeni port of Saif. The incident came after Saudi Arabia announced the start of a new military operation in Yemen, with fighter jets belonging to the Coalition launching dozens of air raids on several Yemeni provinces. Such events continue to demonstrate the ongoing threat to shipping operating in the area.
- On 17 July, the Emirati Coast Guard shot at a number of Iranian fishing vessels, resulting in the death of two Iranian fishermen. Iran demanded compensation as well as UAE assurance this will not happen again in the future. In an additional response to the incident, Iran detained a UAE-flagged vessel on the same day, claiming it was sailing in Iranian territorial waters illegally. The crew was also arrested.

Crew members of crude oil tanker Gulf Sky. The vessel was hijacked by Iranian forces while at anchorage in Khor Fakkan, UAE, in early July. (Photo: Splash247)
Traditional ransomware remains a pervasive concern for organisations across the world, with cyber criminals continuing to extort millions of dollars from their victims while threatening to wipe their encrypted data. Indeed, ransomware is believed to have cost businesses and government agencies an estimated USD 7.5 billion in the US alone in 2019, through ransom payments and remediation efforts. To make matters worse, hackers have recently evolved their attack methodology via the addition of a further step; combining ransomware with a data breach – known as double extortion. This step takes place prior to the encryption of the victim’s database and involves the extraction of sensitive company data, which will be held to ransom under the threat of publication.

Thus, this two-pronged extortion serves to add pressure on the victim organisation. Having suffered a double-extortion ransomware attack, organisations now not only face the risk of their data being encrypted and deleted, but also it being published or sold online. The first documented case of a double extortion attack occurred in November 2019, when hackers using the Maze ransomware infiltrated US security company Allied Universal, stealing and encrypting data. When the initial USD 3.2 million ransom was ignored, the attackers released a small sample of sensitive company information they had obtained and increased their ransom demand by 50%. Since this attack, the authors of Maze and a number of copy cats (utilising various forms of ransomware such as Sodinokibi, Phobos, Nemty, Clop and DoppelPaymer) have exploited this approach, setting up their own ‘leak sites’ and listing the names of organisations that refused to pay ransoms, along with a sample of stolen data, in a bid to accelerate ransom payments. Thousands of organisations are suspected to have fallen victim to this tactic, including medical research centres, non-profit organisations, law firms and insurance companies.

Ransomware has continued to proliferate into 2020, aided by COVID-19 hysteria and the rapid shift to working from home. Cases grew by 20% over the first half of the year, with some 120 million attacks recorded worldwide. Threats of data disclosure (i.e. double-extortion attacks) are currently estimated to make up less than one third of these attacks, though this trend is gaining traction. Hand-in-hand with panic caused by the onset of COVID-19, cyber attackers sought to exploit fears associated with the pandemic, either by targeting organisations ill-prepared for the shift to remote working or using fraudulent coronavirus-related sites and phishing techniques to infect their targets with malware. Maze hackers received mass condemnation for victimising medical organisations during the pandemic and threatening to disclose patient data. They subsequently released a statement claiming they would no longer target such facilities, and that due to the economic malaise resultant from mass lockdowns, they would offer their victims discounts. Though on the face of it appearing conciliatory, such an approach instead demonstrates these groups’ steadfast intent for financial gain – even at the expense of vulnerable organisations and peoples during a global crisis. Meanwhile, attacks against medical organisations by other groups have continued nonetheless. Average Maze ransom demands are currently in the region of USD 420,000, representing the higher end of the spectrum. Over Q2 2020, overall average ransom payments were around USD 180,000, though in some cases they have risen into the millions.

Compared to traditional ransomware, double-extortion attacks require greater skill to succeed. Where regular ransomware attacks involve gaining access to a network to encrypt data and systems, double extortion not only requires accessing the network, but also the exfiltration of sensitive data without being detected. However, with greater risk comes greater reward for the hackers. While the victims of a ransomware attack may suffer operational damage and high fees to restore their systems, they can avoid paying a ransom with the right tools and backup. Victims of a double-extortion attack, on the other hand, are left with fewer options, even if a data backup is available. Stolen data not only exposes them to operational and reputational damage, but could also place the organisation at legal risk. With the threat of sensitive company or client data being released publicly or sold online, the ramifications of data leaks.

Ransomware is expected to encompass an ever-larger area of the ransomware landscape. This phenomenon will also serve to perpetuate this criminal business model.

Double-extortion attack is expected to encompass an ever-larger area of the ransomware landscape. This phenomenon will also serve to perpetuate this criminal business model.

Given the importance of data, and the heightened value placed upon it by organisations, the double-extortion attack is expected to encompass an ever-larger area of the ransomware landscape. This phenomenon will also likely lead to ransom demands increasing, given the ramifications of data leaks.

### CASES:

- **On 26 August 2020**, medical company Assured Imaging notified over 250,000 of its patients that their data had been potentially compromised in a double-extortion attack in May. A subsequent investigation found that sensitive information had been exfiltrated, including patient contact information and medical histories, prior to the deployment of ransomware, which encrypted the organisation’s medical record system. Upon discovering the breach, the company restored its systems, allegedly without paying ransom, and it is currently reviewing its security protocols to safeguard against further attacks. Affected individuals have been advised to remain vigilant for potential identity theft. In response, several patients filed lawsuits against Assured Imaging, claiming the organisation handled their data recklessly. Moreover, on 13 September, the group behind the attack uploaded a sample of the stolen data online, suggesting they are still attempting to push for a ransom payment.

- **On 14 May 2020**, US cloud software company Blackbaud discovered it had been struck by a double-extortion ransomware attack that potentially exposed the data of almost 3 million individuals associated with various organisations. The breach is believed to have taken place in February. Company officials announced that an undisclosed ransom had been paid in bitcoins, and that they received confirmation from the hackers that the stolen data had been destroyed. Blackbaud has been criticised for its handling of the situation, particularly for the ransom payment, as there are no real assurances that the hackers won’t strike again. The organisation currently has a lawsuit pending against it.

- **During the New Year’s Eve 2020 attack against British foreign exchange company Travelex**, hackers exfiltrated 50B of sensitive client data, including credit card information and national insurance numbers. REvil, the group behind the attack, threatened to release the data unless a ransom was paid. The double extortion also shut down operations for a few weeks, causing significant operational damage to Travelex. According to some international media, the company paid USD 2.3 million in bitcoins, out of the USD 6 million ransom initially demanded.

Threats of data disclosure (i.e. double-extortion attacks) are currently estimated to make up less than one third of these attacks, though this trend is gaining traction. Hand-in-hand with panic caused by the onset of COVID-19, cyber attackers sought to exploit fears associated with the pandemic, either by targeting organisations ill-prepared for the shift to remote working or using fraudulent coronavirus-related sites and phishing techniques to infect their targets with malware. Maze hackers received mass condemnation for victimising medical organisations during the pandemic and threatening to disclose patient data. They subsequently released a statement claiming they would no longer target such facilities, and that due to the economic malaise resultant from mass lockdowns, they would offer their victims discounts. Though on the face of it appearing conciliatory, such an approach instead demonstrates these groups’ steadfast intent for financial gain – even at the expense of vulnerable organisations and peoples during a global crisis. Meanwhile, attacks against medical organisations by other groups have continued nonetheless. Average Maze ransom demands are currently in the region of USD 420,000, representing the higher end of the spectrum. Over Q2 2020, overall average ransom payments were around USD 180,000, though in some cases they have risen into the millions.

Double-extortion ransomware attacks involve gaining access to a network to encrypt data and systems, double extortion not only requires accessing the network, but also the exfiltration of sensitive data without being detected. However, with greater risk comes greater reward for the hackers. While the victims of a ransomware attack may suffer operational damage and high fees to restore their systems, they can avoid paying a ransom with the right tools and backup. Victims of a double-extortion attack, on the other hand, are left with fewer options, even if a data backup is available. Stolen data not only exposes them to operational and reputational damage, but could also place the organisation at legal risk. With the threat of sensitive company or client data being released publicly or sold online, the dark web, including contact information, credit card numbers and medical records, victims are increasingly opting to pay ransoms before the breach is made public. This goes against the advice of the US government and many other authorities, who warn against the payment of ransoms, as there are no assurances the hackers will keep their end of the bargain, and their payment will only serve to perpetuate this criminal business model.
Some people receive attention from the general public, either because their job involves being in the public-eye, because of who they work for, what they represent, or what they are perceived to have said. This may be in the form of unsolicited communication or occasionally a personal approach. This applies to the leadership and employees of large companies and to individuals who have come to public prominence through the sporting or entertainment industries.

Most of such contacts fall into the categories of legitimate enquiry, reasonable complaint or the expression of admiration. However, a significant minority will be strange or inappropriate, expressing anger, making unreasonable demands, or asking for help. Some may be bizarre in nature. A few will be inappropriately amorous or overtly sexualised. Occasionally, communications that are directly or indirectly threatening will be received.

Although these contacts generally prove of little consequence, some may indicate intent to approach or to harm the recipient in some way, whether physically, legally or reputationally. It is frequently the case that contact of this nature can persist for months and even years if no effective intervention is undertaken, consuming significant amounts of time and money, and repeatedly diverting security resources.

**Motivation and Risk Type**

Published research from the Fixated Research Group indicates that different forms of risk (e.g. disruption, persistence, violence) are associated with different risk factors. Associations for each domain of risk also differ according to the underlying motivation. Further, a considerable proportion of cases will be fuelled by underlying personality defects or by mental illness, which in turn influence risk. For this reason, psychiatric input is necessary, both for the understanding of motivation and for risk assessment and management.

In cases involving individual public-figures such as celebrities, intrusive behaviour is frequently driven by the desire to establish intimacy, either because of delusional beliefs that a relationship already exists or through social incompetence. People in any walk of life can be affected by the actions of rejected ex-intimates, where a fluctuating desire for revenge or reconciliation can drive intrusion and the making of threats. However, in the case of organisations with large numbers of customers, inappropriate or threatening behaviour is most often the result of individual grievance. This may develop into resentful quests for vindication and retribution, which see employees and senior executives threatened, and can culminate in disruptive and occasionally violent approaches in an attempt to promote idiosyncratic ideas of justice.

Individuals who engage in such behaviour can become fixated, in that they develop obsessionaal preoccupations with the object of their quest, cause, or grudge. This is then pursued to the detriment of normally functioning relationships with family, friends and other support networks, such as employers, social support groups and healthcare providers. These individuals care little about the anxiety and fear their behaviour may be causing (some actively delight in it); they evidence an overriding sense of entitlement to the attention of the recipient; they may purport to represent a group, but tend to present individualistic tendencies, they also tend not to hide their identity, in order to distinguish themselves from that population engaged in anonymous online trolling.

**The Threat Assessment Task**

The threat of task assessors is two-fold. First, they must separate out, from amongst all those whose behaviour raises concern, those cases most likely to go on to cause serious problems. Then, they must help design plans for interventions, which will reduce or manage that risk. Structured professional judgement instruments are used to help clients identify cases of moderate and high risk, and to inform management plans, most commonly the Communications Threat Assessment Protocol (CTAP) (James, McKenzie and Farnham, 2015) and the Stalking Risk Profile (MacKenzie et al., 2009). These make use of material identified from the recent research in terms of statistical associations with adverse outcomes, which constitute ‘risk factors.’

One of the problems with the published literature in this field is that it has been conducted on individuals threatening politicians, the UK Royal Family, and celebrities. There has been very little research on cases involving companies. Theseus has sought to rectify this by conducting a detailed study of 102 consecutive referrals of threat, persistent complaint or intrusive behaviour upon which it has been asked to advise, 40 of which concerned companies. The results, due for publication this year, confirmed that risk factors found through the study of the groups referred to above remain valid when considering referrals to Theseus overall and to referrals from companies. The study found that alarming or threatening communications were significantly more likely to lead to approach in cases with extreme or mounting levels of anger, in those who stated their intention to approach; in those whose communications contained ‘last resort’ language; and in those who used more than two means of communication (letter, telephone, e-mail, social media). Overall, the study confirmed previous findings that threats in themselves are not associated with approach. Cases that had been going on for more than two years at the time of referral to Theseus were more likely to involve approach. Whilst this may indicate that approach triggered referral, it also suggests that concerning cases were hidden or unrecognised in companies’ complaints mechanisms, and that opportunities for earlier recognition and resolution were missed.

Enforced confinement is likely to cause breakdowns in familial and intimate relationships alike, as well as provide more time to dwell on both the sending and receipt of intrusive and threatening communication. The pressure of Covid-19 on businesses too will have led inexorably to the breakdown of relationships with some employees and suppliers and, where lack of access to finance has led to business failure, with the banks that once supported those businesses and livelihoods. The public announcements and reactions of some prominent figures and organisations over the course of the pandemic have led to a widespread online and offline backlash, no doubt attracting the attention of many whose focus will remain fixed, whatever their motivation. This has all taken place at a time when health services are under immense pressure, and support for those whose mental state may predispose them to engage in such behaviour may not have been readily accessible.

The indicators of unwanted safety, welfare and reputational outcomes contained in worrying communication are well recognised and understood. Key to mitigating the associated risks is the adoption of a structured approach to identification, reporting and triage in those parts of a business most likely to receive it, such as complaints handling, front of house and HR. Such a process, supported where necessary by forensic psychiatric inputs to the risk assessment process, can greatly increase the likelihood of resolution, and thus manage risk within acceptable levels of tolerance.
ABOUT CONSTELLIS

Constellis is a leading provider of risk management, humanitarian, social intelligence, training and operational support services to government and commercial clients throughout the world. Operating in over 45 countries, Constellis’ 20,000 employees bring unparalleled dedication and passion for creating a safer world by upholding the highest standards of compliance, quality, and integrity. Constellis’ forward thinking services span a broad range of synergistic solutions, from the boardroom to the project site, encompassing risk governance, organisational resilience, business continuity management, crisis management, travel security, global tracking, training, protective security, life support, logistics and specialist support such as K9 services and UAV systems.

At Constellis, our number one mission is to secure success for our customers. Constellis combines the legacy capabilities and experience of ACADEMI, Triple Canopy, Centerra, Olive Group, OmniPlex, AMK9, Edinburgh International, Strategic Social and all of their affiliates. The consolidation of companies under the Constellis name allows our clients to rely on one single partner and project experience that spans the globe.

For more information about Constellis, please visit our website at: www.constellis.com

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