EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUMMARY

This issue of Olive Group’s Kidnap for Ransom Insight Report covers global kidnapping incidents and trends over the months of September, October and the beginning of November 2016. The information is derived from multi-source analysis of kidnap for ransom activity and where known, the outcome or resolution of the event. The report covers current kidnap for ransom hotspots at the regional, national and provincial level with a particular focus on areas where K&R activity is increasing.

Statistical analysis of data for the third quarter of 2016 is included on page 22, which graphically displays K&R trends by region, victims by nationality and employment sector, as well as identifying the Top 10 countries for kidnapping of foreign nationals over Q3 2016.

The global piracy update provides an overview of the piracy threat by region, providing statistical trend analysis for the period of Q3 2016. It also offers sample cases occurring through the months of September, October and beginning of November 2016 that serve as an illustration for the identified trends.

The Cyber Security section provides insight into current issues affecting companies and individuals in the realm of IT security. This issue is focused on the threat of information theft, a practice which has increased exponentially in recent years in terms of complexity, effectiveness and geographical spread.

The Focus Article gives an insight into the kidnap threat in West Africa, in particular across Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and Mauritania, assessed to be the primary kidnap for ransom hotspots in the region. While West Africa has recorded impressive economic progress over the past decade, a recent increase in armed conflict, coupled with high levels of terrorism, piracy and organized crime have sparked concerns over regional stability as a whole. Underlying security challenges have in turn contributed to a surge in kidnap for ransom activity, assessed as among the highest of any region worldwide. While local nationals account for the majority of victims, the region is characterised by its heightened threat towards foreign nationals, regarded by threat actors as higher value targets.

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The Americas region registered a marginal increase of 5% in the number of kidnapping incidents of foreign nationals recorded by Olive Group between Q2 and Q3 2016. This rise was primarily driven by activity in Mexico, Venezuela and Brazil which together accounted for 68% of regional incidents between July and September 2016.

Express kidnapping continues to represent the main challenge across the continent, owing to the pervasiveness of the practice in terms of overall numbers, territorial reach and diversity of targets. As in Q2, local nationals remained the primary victims of express kidnapping over the reporting period; the practice also remains the most likely form of K&R activity to be encountered across the continent for foreign nationals. In the most common scenario, a victim is held for a short period (typically less than 48 hours) and released unharmed after a modest ransom is paid either by family members or in the form of a forced withdrawal from the victim’s bank account through various ATMs. At the same time, there has also been a reported increase in the use of violence during such attacks.

**CASES:**

- An example of this emerging threat was witnessed in the kidnapping of Spanish expat Maria Villar Galaz in Mexico City on 13 November. The IBM employee and niece of the president of the Spanish Federation of Football was seized by unknown assailants after hailing a taxi from a street nearby her office in an upscale neighbourhood of the city. According to police reports, the kidnappers had initially sought to conduct an express kidnapping (as evidenced by a number of cash withdrawals from ATMs shortly after her abduction) but later decided to issue a formal ransom demand after learning of her wealthy status. It was reported that the kidnappers demanded €90,000 for her release and that a final payment of €3,000 was made the next day. Her lifeless body was found two days after the incident. It is not clear whether the murder was carried out as result of the low payment or after the criminals learnt of the heavy police response triggered by the high profile nature of the case.

- Additionally, on 15 October, an executive for Mazda Motor Corporation, believed to be a Japanese national, was held for several hours by a group of criminals who intercepted him on his way to work in Irapuato city, central Mexico. He was released in a neighbouring city in the evening on the same day. Police sources confirmed that there were signs of violence on the victim’s body. It is estimated that more than 2,700 foreigners, including Central American migrants, have been kidnapped in Mexico during the last decade, according to the Mexico Peace Index 2016.
AMERICAS

Although traditional kidnap for ransom has lost ground to express kidnapping in recent years, conventional K&R incidents continue to affect foreign nationals in the continent.

CASES:

▶ On 9 October, a Chinese expatriate businessman was rescued in Zarumilla, Peru, after being kidnapped two days earlier in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Reportedly, the victim was intercepted by four men who wore judicial police uniforms outside his business. He was immediately taken to his apartment and robbed of USD 200,000. His wife later received several calls from someone claiming to be a member of Interpol Peru, ordering her to go to Tumbes, Peru, at the border with Ecuador and deliver USD 7,000 for the release of her husband. She then filed a report to the Ecuadorian police who coordinated a rescue operation with their Peruvian counterparts. The alleged leader of the gang, a transit officer from the city of Zarumilla, was arrested during the rescue operation.

▶ In Venezuela, on 3 November, a Spanish businessman died during a police shootout with criminals in Portuguesa state. It is believed the clash resulted from a kidnapping attempt on the businessman. According to the latest police figures, the number of recorded kidnappings in Venezuela has increased by 88% over the past year. Between January and the second week of September 2016 there were 411 reported kidnap for ransom incidents in Venezuela, compared to some 219 over the same period in 2015. Violence during kidnapping incidents has also spiked significantly over the past 12 months, with 18 victims reported to have been killed by their captors during this period, more than double the number in 2015, potentially as a consequence of the increased use of high calibre weaponry during the abduction phases of kidnap for ransom incidents.

▶ In Ecuador on 29 October, the national police rescued an Austrian national who was held inside a cave for eight days by a gang of Colombian and Ecuadorian nationals. Reportedly, the kidnappers demanded USD 350,000 for his release. The victim was reported to have been taken after being lured outside his property by the armed men who had pretended to be in need of help.
Western Europe remained under high threat of potential terrorist attacks, including militant-related abductions, over the reporting period, amid concerns over a backlash from ongoing European participation in counter terrorism operations across the MENA region. Hostage-taking incidents, including the notorious Rouen attack in July, have illustrated the potential modus operandi of extremist groups seeking reprisals for the ongoing Mosul offensive in Iraq and Raqqa campaign in Syria, and while no further IS-linked kidnappings were recorded by Olive Group in Europe over Q3 2016, an underlying risk is expected to continue. At the same time there was an increase in commercially motivated kidnap for ransom incidents affecting foreign nationals from July 2016 onwards, in most cases perpetrated by organized criminal groups.

In Spain, for example, the majority of kidnappings remain linked to drug-trafficking activities, largely involving Latin American nationals. A concerning development is the noticeable increase in virtual kidnappings (a scam where criminals attempt to extort money from victims by falsely claiming to have abducted family members). According to numbers provided by the Spanish Interior Ministry, this crime has experienced a four-fold increase in 2016 with over 500 incidents reported during the first half of 2016 in comparison to the 131 cases across 2015 as a whole. The increase has been attributed to the high success rate of the practice by criminal gangs, with victims regularly paying up to €10,000 in concluded cases. Police investigations have revealed that criminals obtained telephone numbers through directories in the white or yellow pages which are then supplemented by information obtained through social engineering. Reportedly, approximately 97% of the calls have been made from penitentiary centres in Latin America, particularly Chile, and only a small number from Spain. Nationwide, Madrid accounts for the majority of incidents, with the highest frequency of calls targeting the capital’s affluent neighbourhoods, notably Majadahonda or Pozuelo de Alarcón.

In Ukraine, an expatriate Azerbaijani businessman was kidnapped in Kiev on 21 September. The incident followed reports of five similar abductions in the beginning of September, according to the United Congress of Azerbaijanis of Ukraine, which affirmed that two of the victims were released after the payment of a ransom while the others remained in captivity. Members of the Azerbaijani community in the city held a rally outside Ukraine’s Ministry of Internal Affairs on 14 September to protest against the lack of reaction and failure to take appropriate action by the ministry towards the recent increase in crimes against Azerbaijanis. According to the protesters, over 20 Azerbaijani businessmen and their children have been kidnapped in Kiev over the past two years.

In France, on 24 October, Jacqueline Veyrach, owner and president of a luxury hotel in Cannes, was seized in the middle of the day near her home in Nice. Her son was contacted by the kidnappers on the same day with demands for an (undisclosed) ransom. The victim was found 48 hours later inside the boot of a car parked in a north-western district of Nice, bound and with minor injuries. It is unknown if a ransom payment was made. Seven suspects were arrested in connection to the case, including a well-known paparazzi photographer suspected of monitoring the victim, a former British soldier, and an Italian Michelin-starred restaurateur who allegedly planned the attack motivated by a personal dispute. The vehicle inside which hotelier Jacqueline Veyrac was left behind by kidnappers in north-west Nice, France. (LCI)
MIDDLE EAST

Although the number of kidnappings of foreign nationals in the Middle East remains low in comparison to 2015 levels (accounting for only 1% of the global incidents recorded by Olive Group in Q3 2016 compared to 18% in Q3 2015), a high threat to international workers remains in place, owing to an enduring capability and intent by active militant groups.

The ongoing military offensive on Mosul and the recently launched offensive on Raqqa are both important triggers of possible retaliatory attacks by the Islamic State (IS), IS-linked groups or IS-inspired individuals across the Middle East, North Africa, and even western countries. In response to this threat, the US embassy in Iraq on 26 October issued a specific alert warning of potential plots to kidnap US citizens working for non-governmental organisations providing aid to Mosul. The announcement confirmed efforts by militant groups (the identity of which remains unclear) to intercept NGO workers travelling through contested areas of central Iraq, reportedly, demanding to see passports for all travellers in convoys in a deliberate attempt to identify US citizens.

Within conflict zones, a diversion of the state security apparatus to current frontlines, alongside wider socio-economic challenges has contributed to a significant increase in organized crime. Of particular note is the situation in southern Iraq, including Basra province, where oil companies and their contractors have been targeted in the past in kidnapping for ransom and extortion attacks.

CASES:

- One of the most recent incidents was reported on 30 October when two Iraqi engineers, working for an international oil company, were kidnapped by unknown gunmen near the West Qurna concession. The pair were allegedly released the next day during a rescue operation by local security forces. A third local hostage, held in the same property, was also rescued. The incident followed the abduction in May 2015 of three Iraqi engineers who were taken by a criminal gang in the Qurna area. On that occasion, the victims were released following an alleged payment of USD 200,000, 24 hours after their abduction.
MIDDLE EAST

Beyond Iraq, Yemen has retained its position as one of the primary hotspots for the abduction of foreign nationals in the Middle East, with at least three major kidnapping cases involving international workers recorded by Olive Group over the past three months, in addition to news concerning the release of historic captives by militant groups.

CASES:

- **20 September:** Peter Williams, the director of an English language school, was kidnapped in Sana’a by 12 heavily armed masked men, suspected to be Houthi militants. Williams was the only person taken during a raid on the school, suggesting that the incident was a targeted attack.

- **3 October:** Franco-Tunisian Red Cross worker Nourane Houas, who was kidnapped in December 2015 in Sana’a, was released by her captives in the Yemeni capital. The release of Houas is understood to have been linked to the intervention of regional mediator Oman. The identity of her kidnappers as well as the existence of a ransom demand remain unconfirmed.

- **6 October:** Information emerged for the first time revealing the kidnapping of a Greek national which took place in December 2015. According to local sources, a video was obtained in September 2016, in which the Greek national pleads for assistance from his government. The victim’s family stated that his kidnappers had previously demanded a ransom from his employer in Yemen. The identity of the kidnappers and the ransom demand was not disclosed.

- **16 October:** Two unidentified US citizens were reportedly released by Houthi rebels in a “humanitarian gesture” in northern Yemen following the intervention of Oman.

- **19 October:** Australian football coach Craig McAllister was kidnapped in a targeted attack in Aden. 24 hours after his abduction, a video was released showing the victim pleading to his government to pay the ransom demanded by his captors. Neither the identity of the captors nor the ransom amount were specified. It is believed McAllister is being held by a jihadist group.

- **6 November:** US Marine veteran and English teacher Wallead Pitts Luqman was released after being abducted in April 2015 by Houthi rebels as he attempted to leave the country with his family. Oman’s intervention was also reported in this case.

- **14 October:** German journalist Janina Findeisen was released along with her baby, who was born in captivity. It is not clear if a ransom was paid for her release but 2015 reports affirmed her captors, identified to be Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (previously known as the al-Nusra Front) militants, had demanded a payment of €5 million. Later, on 14 October, Russian tourist Konstantin Zhuravlyov was reportedly released after three years in captivity, in undisclosed terms. He had been detained by the Liwa Al Tawhid brigade in October 2013, accused of being a Russian spy for the Assad regime.

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AFRICA

The African continent registered an increase of 21% in the number of reported kidnappings of foreign nationals over Q3 2016, remaining unchanged as the worst affected region for Kidnap for Ransom activity since Q4 2015. During the reporting period, Africa accounted for close to 60% of all foreign victims taken by kidnapping groups worldwide, a product of both enduring regional instability as well as continued use of mass-abductions as a tactic by militant forces. This phenomenon was once again particularly evident in the case of Libya, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and coastal Nigeria.

Libya, for the second consecutive period in 2016, ranked as the primary destination for the kidnapping for ransom of foreign nationals globally.

CASES:

► During the reporting period, one of the highest-profile cases reported was the kidnapping of three western expatriates in the south-western town of Ghat near the border with Algeria on 19 September. The group, comprised of one Canadian and two Italian engineers, were reported to have been employed on a construction project with an Italian firm at Ghat’s airport when they were abducted by militants affiliated with Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The group responsible is reported to be led by Abdellah Belakahal, an Algerian AQIM member now operating independently and carrying out criminal activities in the south-western border area. Italian media reported that the group demanded €4 million as a ransom and had threatened to hand over the hostages to the main AQIM leadership if this was not paid. Reportedly, Belakahal had originally also demanded the release of a number of militants, including his brother, from prisons in Algeria. The hostages were reported to have been released on 4 November. Although unconfirmed, based on past practice, it is possible that the Italian government paid a ransom.

In Nigeria, kidnapping for ransom reached new levels of severity over the reporting period, prompting the country’s House of Representatives to request the Federal Government to declare a state of emergency in October in the wake of a surge in targeted attacks against both foreign and domestic nationals. Over the same period, the Nigerian Police issued a security advisory note, warning of the kidnapping risk to government officials, affluent Nigerians and their family members.

CASES:

► On 29 September the wife of the governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria was kidnapped on the Benin-Agbor road in Delta state. Reportedly, the kidnappers demanded N1.5 billion (USD 4.76 million) for her release. Mrs. Emefiele was released less than 48 hours after her abduction. While Nigerian authorities initially claimed to have rescued the victim, it was later confirmed by police sources that an undisclosed ransom was paid. Local media claimed that the final payment was N80 million (over USD 253,000). Nine suspects have so far been arrested, including two active soldiers.

► Additionally, construction and oil workers, including foreign nationals, continue to be common targets. On 1 September, 14 local oil workers were kidnapped by unidentified gunmen in Rivers State. Their kidnappers demanded N100m (USD 318,000) for their release. They were rescued by Nigerian authorities after 16 days in captivity. Later, on 11 October, a Romanian engineer, working for a construction company, was kidnapped from a work site in Delta State after the criminals overpowered the site’s security. Reportedly, the kidnappers demanded an undisclosed ransom in foreign currency. He was released after four days, without a payment being made, according to Romanian authorities.
AFRICA

CASES:

- Meanwhile in Angola, two expat workers were released in Luanda on 28 September. The victims, a Portuguese citizen and a dual national of Cape Verde and India, had been kidnapped on different days by armed men who demanded USD 3 million for the pair’s release. The first victim, a director of Portuguese investment company SIAP, was kidnapped on 20 September in Talalona, Luanda, while the second, a local merchant, was kidnapped on 19 September from Viana, also in the capital. Three suspects were arrested during the rescue operation, including two Nigerian nationals and one from DRC. According to the police, the three men entered the country illegally and are suspects in at least five other cases of kidnap for ransom of foreign nationals. Since 2015 Angola has witnessed increasing levels of violence against foreign nationals, particularly in the form of criminal kidnappings, leading a number of countries, including China, the US, and France, to issue travel advisories warning of the increased security threat to their nationals.

- Kidnapping for ransom continues to be a widespread challenge in DRC’s contested territories of North and South Kivu where international workers are regularly targeted. In mid-September, a group of 10 Tanzanian and Kenyan truck drivers were kidnapped in Namoyo, South Kivu province while on their way back to Tanzania. The attackers, suspected to be Mai Mai rebels, demanded a ransom of USD 4,000 for each driver, giving a timeline of 24 hours to make the payment. The drivers were released after three days, allegedly after DRC soldiers ambushed the rebels in Kilembe forest. The incident took place in the same area where eight Muslim clerics were kidnapped in August last year, for whom their kidnappers, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), demanded a total of USD 20,000.

- In South Africa, a wealthy Cape Town businessman of Indian origin was kidnapped by six armed men outside his business on 31 October. A number of cash withdrawals were made from the victim’s credit cards soon after he was taken. After two days the victim was allowed to contact his family, passing on the attacker’s demands for a ransom payment of GBP 20 million (USD 25 million) as well as claiming that he had been subjected to torture. It was reported that a rendezvous for the ransom drop-off had been arranged, although at the time of writing the businessman remains missing. The attack is understood to have been the second occasion that the victim had been abducted by criminal groups in 2016, following an earlier incident in January. This year, a number of kidnap for ransom cases have been reported in the country targeting businessmen of Asian origin, wealthy expatriates and South African citizens. Previous incidents include the kidnapping of a Sri Lankan businessman also in Cape Town in September, and the abduction of a Mozambican businessman of Indian origin in Nelspruit in August.

Mai Mai rebels in North Kivu, DRC (Kariakoo)
Recorded kidnappings of foreign nationals more than doubled between Q2 and Q3 2016 across Asia and the Pacific Region, raising the global share of incidents for Asia by 10 percentage points during the reporting period. The increase was driven primarily by Abu Sayyaf activity in Malaysia and the Philippines, alongside a sustained campaign of targeted attacks of western nationals in Afghanistan by militant groups.

In September, the United Nations warned of a growing threat to aid workers in Afghanistan, citing at least 93 abduction incidents affecting NGO staff (the vast majority of whom are assessed to have been local nationals) in the previous nine months of 2016.

CASES:

In a striking example of this challenge, an Australian aid worker was kidnapped in central Kabul on 5 November. Initial reports indicate the female victim worked for the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR). The abductors’ identity and motive remain unclear with authorities currently conducting a search operation for the victim. This incident also exemplifies the increased kidnapping threat against foreign nationals in the country, particularly in Kabul, as warned by the US government since May. Since then, at least four foreign nationals have been kidnapped in the city, only one of whom has been released.

In Pakistan, Asad Tareen, the son of a Balochistan minister, was recovered near the border with Afghanistan on 8 September after more than three months in captivity. It is not yet clear whether Tareen was recovered as a result of a rescue operation or after the payment of ransom. The victim was kidnapped while returning home from college in Pishin, near Quetta in May. No group claimed responsibility for the abduction, however, Pakistan’s Minister of the Interior had previously alleged that militant organisations such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Baloch Liberation Army and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) are behind the kidnapping for ransom industry in Balochistan. The abduction of high-profile personalities from Pakistan’s political scene and their family members is a common occurrence in the country. In many such incidents victims are initially kidnapped by criminal gangs before being sold to larger, more powerful militant groups who can then demand large ransoms, operating secure from their hideouts in rural territories, or across the border with Afghanistan.

In India, the son of a businessman and former city councillor was abducted in northwest Delhi while he was on his way to college in his BMW on 27 September by men disguised as police officers. His abductors demanded Rs 50 crore (US$ 7.4 million), the highest ever ransom demanded in the city. After negotiating for five days, the victim’s father managed to bring down the ransom to Rs 1 crore (US$ 150,000). The money was paid and the teenager was released on 4 October. According to police investigations, the kidnapping was planned by two property dealers who held a grudge against the teenager’s father and had hired professional criminals to carry out the abduction. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Delhi is the city with the second highest number of kidnapping for ransom cases in the country with 33 cases reported in 2015.

In the Philippines, President Duterte this month reflected on the accomplishments of his presidency after 100 days of entering office. According to reports by the Philippines security forces, his ongoing military campaign to eradicate the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the country has resulted in 94 ASG militants killed, allegedly including the Muktadi brothers, two of the group’s senior leaders responsible for a large number of targeted kidnapping incidents across the southern Philippines and Malaysia’s Sabah region over the past two years. Increased military activity directed against the ASG insurgency has also contributed to a wider number of kidnapping releases over the reporting period.

CASES:

Among the victims released over Q3 was Norwegian Kjartan Sekkingstad who was freed after almost a year in captivity. A spokesman for the ASG said the group received PHP30 million pesos (over USD 616,000) for his release, out of the P50 million (over USD 1 million) that was paid in total. Allegedly, the remaining P20 million (US$ 411,000) was given to the MNLF (Moro National Liberation Front) which acted as a broker for the deal.

Also in September, three Indonesian sailors who had been kidnapped in July were released allegedly after the payment of P30 million (US$ 855,400). Later, two Filipinos and another Indonesian sailor were released.

In October, a Malaysian sailor allegedly escaped and three more Indonesian seamen were released by militant groups. In the case of those released, a ransom of RM20 million (almost USD 414,000) had been demanded. While counter terrorism operations have certainly had an impact on the group, the overall preference of ASG to conduct kidnapping for ransom activity remains unchallenged, with at least 19 people reported to have been abducted since early October, including four Filipinos, seven Malaysians, one South Korean, six Vietnamese, and one German. All cases took place at sea off Sabah, Malaysia, illustrating a possible operational shift of the group in response to the current tightened security conditions in the Philippines.
STATISTICS Q3 2016

KIDNAPPED FOREIGN CITIZENS*

Global & Regional GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF VICTIMS

Statistics for Q3 2016 are drawn from Olive Group’s collection of 175 foreign kidnapping incidents between the months of July and September 2016. In Q2 2016, Olive Group recorded a total of 100 foreign kidnapping incidents.

AFRICA 59% AFRICA

ASIA & PACIFIC 24% ASIA & PACIFIC

AMERICAS 11% AMERICAS

EUROPE 5% EUROPE

MIDDLE EAST 1% MIDDLE EAST

1% MIDDLE EAST

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24% ASIA

59% AFRICA

Libya........... 31.1%
Nigeria........ 20.4%
DRC ..........18.4%
South Sudan17.5%
Mali ..........4.9%
Tanzania ......2.9%
South Africa ..1.9%
Angola .........1.9%
Madagascar ..1.0%
Malaysia ......44.2%
Afghanistan 20.9%
Philippines .14.0%
Thailand ......4.7%
Australia ......4.7%
Vietnam ......2.3%
Cambodia ......2.3%
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Pakistan .......2.3%
Kyrgyzstan .....2.3%
Mexico ........26.4%
Venezuela ....21.0%
Brazil .........21.0%
Bolivia .......10.5%
Paraguay ......10.5%
Argentina ....5.3%
Colombia ......5.3%
Ukraine ......75.0%
Spain ..........25.0%
Lebanon ......50.0%

*Results do not include the kidnapping of illegal migrants

1% MIDDLE EAST

5% EUROPE

11% AMERICAS

24% ASIA

59% AFRICA

01 LIBYA 18%
02 NIGERIA 13%
03 DRC 11%
04 MALAYSIA 11%
05 SOUTH SUDAN 10%
06 AFGHANISTAN 5%
07 PHILIPPINES 3%
08 UKRAINE 3%
09 MEXICO 3%
10 MALI 3%

REST OF WORLD 20%

FOR THE KIDNAPPING OF FOREIGN CITIZENS IN Q3 2016

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EUROPE 5%

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Q3 2016

KIDNAPPED FOREIGN CITIZENS

REGIONAL ORIGINS OF VICTIMS

- **AFRICAN** 22%
- **NORTH AFRICAN** 19%
- **SOUTH EAST ASIAN** 19%
- **MIDDLE EASTERN** 1%
- **NORTH AMERICAN** 3%
- **CENTRAL ASIAN** 5%
- **LATIN AMERICAN** 6%
- **SOUTH ASIAN** 6%
- **UNKNOWN** 7%
- **EUROPEAN** 12%

MOST VICTIMISED SINGLE NATIONALITY

- **Egyptian**
- **Ugandan**
- **Filipino**
- **Tanzanian**
- **Chinese**
- **Kenyan**
- **Pakistani**
- **Azerbaijani**
- **Moroccan**
- **Malaysian**

MOST VICTIMISED ORIGIN BY REGION

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<th>REGION</th>
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<td>Central Asian</td>
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<td>Middle East</td>
<td>American &amp; Middle Eastern</td>
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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.

VICTIMS BY OCCUPATIONAL SECTOR

- **UNSKILLED** 36.5%
- **BUSINESSPEOPLE** 20.5%
- **MARITIME** 16%
- **UNKNOWN** 4%
- **MILITARY** 4%
- **TOURISTS** 6.9%
- **DIPLOMATS** 0.6%
- **DEPENDENTS** 0.6%
- **EDUCATION** 1.7%
- **OTHER** 1.7%
- **MINING** 2.3%
- **PROFESSIONALS** 2.3%
- **CONSTRUCTION** 2.9%

MOST VICTIMISED OCCUPATIONAL SECTOR BY REGION

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<tr>
<th>REGION</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Businessmen</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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**GULF OF GUINEA**

Amid an overall reduction in piracy incidents across the Gulf of Guinea during Q1-Q3 2016, Nigeria continues to report a growing number of attacks, with activity currently assessed to be at its highest level for the past five years. Nigeria has experienced an increase of 158% in piracy incidents compared to the same period in 2015, with Q3 2016 representing an increase of 21% with respect to the previous quarter with 17 incidents reported, according to IMB data. The development of this trend has occurred both in the overall number of attacks as well as the spread of targets along Nigeria’s rivers, anchorages and ports, and up to 118 nautical miles from the coast.

So far this year, 13 people have been taken hostage on board vessels in Nigeria’s territorial waters. In recent months, this situation has stabilised to a degree following increased activity by naval patrol vessels with the last successful kidnapping incident reported in April 2016. Additionally, although not featuring in the reports of official maritime organisations, attacks continue to be reported in the local media targeting local nationals, including kidnapping for ransom bids carried out by alleged pirates, mostly off the creeks of the Niger Delta.

**GLOBAL PIRACY UPDATE**

Despite a further reduction in the number of piracy incidents worldwide, kidnapping for ransom and hostage-taking persists as one of the principal forms of attacks against seafarers, particularly off coastal areas of West Africa and South East Asia.

According to the latest global report by the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) a total of 42 attacks were registered worldwide during the third quarter of 2016, the lowest figures since 1996. Africa and South East Asia continue to be the focal points of activity, accounting for 73% of reported incidents globally. Between January and September 2016, 141 incidents were identified by the IMB, a 25% reduction from the same period in 2015. A total of 111 vessels were boarded, five were hijacked, 10 were fired at, and a further 15 attacks were prevented. At least 110 seafarers were also taken hostage and 49 crew members held for ransom during the first three quarters of 2016. Nigeria, Indonesia, Malaysia, Guinea and the Ivory Coast have been identified as the top hotspots for this activity.

**Gulf of Guinea**

On 16 September, chemical tanker Hanze Kochi was attacked and boarded by armed men off Brass, Nigeria. The attackers approached the tanker on a fast boat while it was en route from Port Harcourt to Lagos. The crew retreated to the citadel, after which the criminals proceeded to steal personal belongings from the crew’s rooms. The pirates later fled as the Nigerian navy approached. It is believed the pirates likely intended to kidnap the crew. A similar incident was registered on 17 August when the Nigerian navy averted the hijacking of a British cargo ship and the kidnapping of its 13-man foreign crew off Bonny Island, Bayelsa. In this case, the crew also retreated to the citadel; evading the attempted kidnapping.
Gulf of Aden & Red Sea

No incidents were recorded during the third quarter of 2016, although suspicious activity continues to be reported in the Gulf of Aden, underscoring the fragile situation in the area. While there has been significant progress in suppressing piracy activity against larger commercial vessels, due to 24/7 counter-piracy naval patrols together with self-protection measures implemented by the shipping industry, reports indicate that Somali pirates still possess the intent and capability to resume attacks should opportunities arise. This threat was highlighted in October through an attack reported off the coast of Somalia (the first in two and a half years), and the release of 27 hostages in the same month. According to local sources, Somali pirates are still holding 13 sailors and two Kenyan nationals in Harardheere, Galgaduud region, in extremely poor conditions.

- On 22 October, chemical tanker CPO Korea was attacked by six armed men, shooting at the vessel from a fast-moving skiff, 330 nautical miles off the east coast of Somalia. The suspected pirates eventually broke away after CPO Korea’s crew successfully implemented self-protection measures by increasing speed, altering course and rigging fire hoses to repel the attack. CPO Korea was able to continue her transit to Durban, South Africa, with no casualties.

- Also on 22 October, Somali pirates released a group of 26 Asian sailors who were held hostage for nearly five years, all of whom reportedly had contracted long-term health conditions as a result of their ordeal. The sailors had been held in Dabagala near the town of Harardheere. Three sailors, also part of the crew of the FV Naham 3 which was hijacked close to the Seychelles in March 2012, died, one during the attack and two as a result of illness during captivity. Following the release, a Somali pirate affirmed that USD 1.5 million in ransom was paid, later confirmed by Taiwanese authorities who stated that the ransom was paid by the ship’s owner.

- Later, on 31 October, Kenyan national Louise Njoki, captured by Somali pirates in November 2014, was allegedly rescued by Somali Special Forces in Galmudug. She was kidnapped with her partner (who was rescued in February 2015). Pirates had originally demanded KSh 100 million (about USD 1 million) for each of them. Meanwhile, a spate of attacks have been reported in the Bab el-Mandeb strait since July, primarily linked to the conflict in Yemen. Although this does not constitute piracy, there is a risk that targeted attacks on US and UAE military vessels could spill over into nearby busy sea lanes, disrupting oil supplies and other vital goods passing through the waterway. Moreover, there are growing concerns that further escalation could potentially lead to higher insurance costs for shipments.

- On 26 October, the Galicia Spirit, a Spanish-flagged liquid natural gas (LNG) tanker, came under attack with rocket-propelled grenades in proximity of the Bab el-Mandeb strait, about 8 nautical miles off the Yemeni island of Perim, when en route from Ras Laffan, UAE, to Sokhna, Egypt. It only suffered minor damages from the attack and was able to continue after exiting the area under the escort of a Djibouti warship. Next day, in the same area, Chemical tanker Melati Satu came under attack in similar conditions when en route from Ukraine to India. The vessel escaped unscathed, escorted by UAE and Saudi warships. It is not clear if Houthi rebels were responsible for the attacks.

South East Asia & Indian Subcontinent

There has been a significant improvement in the situation of crime at sea against ships in Asia throughout 2016, compared to the past four years (2012-2015). Incident numbers in all sub-regions, with the exception of the Sulu Sea and coastal India, are presently at their lowest since 2009. According to the IMB, the number of incidents reported between January and September decreased by 54% compared to the same period in 2015, with a total of 72 reported incidents. According to the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), 94% of incidents reported in the region in Q1-Q3 2016 have been armed robberies against ships and only the remaining 6% constitute incidents of piracy. Approximately 73% of the incidents reported during January-September 2016 occurred on board ships while at port and 27% on board ships at sea. An important decrease was also observed in reported incidents involving hijacking of ships for theft of oil cargo, with only two reported incidents in comparison to the 11 reported in the same period in 2015. This trend however, may be related to the drop in oil prices, which has lowered the profitability of such enterprises.

Members of the Philippine coast guard’s anti-terrorist unit apprehend mock pirates who hijacked a vessel during a combined maritime law enforcement exercise with Japanese forces at a bay in Manila (Japan Times)
The decrease in the overall number of incidents reported during Q1-Q3 2016 was most evident in Indonesia and Singapore involving ships while at sea. Other important improvements were reported at ports and anchorages in Bangladesh and Vietnam. In Bangladesh, however, there has been increased reporting of kidnapping of local fishermen, which is not included in maritime data. A growing concern in the region has been incidents involving the abduction of crew from ships while underway in the Sulu Sea. Kidnapping incidents accounted for seven out of the nine incidents reported to ReCAAP categorised as very significant (CAT-1) during the first nine months of 2016, and were all attributed to the Islamist militant Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). This group has typically targeted slow-moving vessels with low freeboards, such as fishing trawlers, tugs and passenger boats. Between September and October, the group released at least nine Asian sailors for whose release the group could have netted around USD 1.3 million. In the same period, the ASG reaffirmed its intent to conduct kidnap for ransom activities at sea, in spite of the reinforced security in the area, particularly on the part of the Philippines authorities.

On 9 September, eleven fishermen were kidnapped in the waterways of the Sundarbans region of Bangladesh. The attack was allegedly perpetrated by members the Sagar Bahini gang in proximity of Dhanshindhr Char, in the Mongla upazila. A ransom of Tk100,000 (about USD 1,300) was demanded for each of the victims by the attackers, who threatened to kill them if this was not paid in five days. At least 67 other fishermen were kidnapped in the area by the group responsible in September.

On 20 October, suspected Abu Sayyaf militants abducted a South Korean skipper and a Filipino crewman from a South Korean cargo ship in the Celebes Sea, off Borneo, Malaysia. About 10 gunmen boarded the MV Dongbang Giant using ropes from a speedboat and abducted the two. The ship was on its way to South Korea from Australia. Other crewmen, who had retreated to the citadel, were not taken. This is the first ASG attack targeting large commercial cargo vessels.

On 25 October, armed pirates in a wooden boat approached, boarded and hijacked a tug towing crude palm kernel oil (CPKO) and took the 10 crew hostage near Bintulu, Malaysia. The pirates stole navigation equipment, crew’s personal belongings and part of the cargo before escaping.

In Central and South America, although maritime crime remains at low levels, the region continues to experience an increase in both the number and territorial reach of attacks. According to IMB data, the region has experienced an increase of 25% quarter to quarter. Incidents of maritime crime in Q3, continued to be reported off Callao in Peru, which remained the regional hot spot. Incidents were also reported in Haiti, Colombia and Venezuela. All incidents recorded in the region in Q3 represented armed robberies while at anchorage.

On 6 October, robbers in a wooden skiff approached and boarded a general cargo ship anchored at port in Callao, Peru. They stole the ship’s properties and escaped unnoticed. The theft was later discovered by crew during routine rounds. A similar incident was reported in the same area on 21 October.

On 2 September, two men boarded a bulk carrier anchored in Port Au Prince, Haiti, and threatened duty crew with long knives. The alarm was raised forcing the criminals to escape after stealing from the ship’s stores.

Americas

Port of Callao, Peru. (ciudadfcc.com)
Cyber security breaches have emerged as a critical challenge for corporations worldwide in recent years, with attacks developing significantly in both complexity and overall numbers.

One of the most pressing issues currently is information theft. Recent assessments have shown that the gap between breach discovery and data loss is widening, with infiltration prevention approaches now running up against increasingly innovative and superior attacks by cyber criminals.

Companies with more valuable data - such as payment card information, personal identification information, and health information - are more likely to be targeted given the growing value of this data on the black market. Common targets of data theft include financial services companies, health care providers and manufacturers. Reports suggest that up to 80% of data theft is carried out by external actors, and in a similar way; the breaches are in most cases identified by external actors as well, including "white hat" hackers, payment companies and law enforcement companies, rather than by corporate security teams. Larger corporations are also particularly exposed to this form of attack, with international corporations typically experiencing an average of over 75 incidents per day. Reports have identified that companies most targeted are located in India, followed by those located in the UK and North America.

Within this environment, ransomware has emerged as an increasingly popular cyberattack tool used for easy monetary gain. Hacking, malware, and social attacks are the primary methods for cyber "breaking and entering" and continue to grow faster than other methods. From 2015 onwards, targets of ransomware attacks have also shifted away from individuals and towards businesses, owing to the higher ransoms that can be extracted from corporations and institutional targets such as those in the healthcare sector.

Vulnerabilities are found in three quarters of websites. Websites have unpatched vulnerabilities, putting users at risk of infection. Over a million web attacks against individuals were reported daily in 2015.

Spear-phishing campaigns continue to target employees. In 2015, spear-phishing campaigns targeting employees increased 55%. Spear phishing involves emails that appear to be from an individual or business known to the company, requesting payments, credit card and bank account numbers, passwords or financial information.

Ransomware use increased 35% in 2015. Cryptolockers are increasingly being used as method of attacks. New targets for such intrusions include smart phones and watches, Mac and Linux systems, previously perceived as attack-proof.

The healthcare sector is experiencing over 20 data loss incidents per day related to ransomware attacks. Almost USD 100,000 in payments have been identified from hospital ransomware victims to specific bitcoin accounts so far in 2016.

INCIDENTS:

- US: February 2016. Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center in Los Angeles paid hackers a ransom of USD 17,000 in bitcoins to regain control of their computer systems after a cyber-attack. The attack locked them out of their systems by encrypting files for which only the hackers had the decryption key.

- Canada: May 2016: The University of Calgary was forced to pay malicious hackers the equivalent of CAN 20,000 in Bitcoins after being hit by a devastating ransomware attack which disabled the IT systems of the institution. The university grappled with security issues for almost a week until the payment.

- Brazil: July 2016. It was reported that a Brazilian hacker who goes by the name of "Ric" offered online the use of a banking Trojan malware for 10 days at a price of USD 2,000. In his ad he claimed that his malware had breached at least 10 banking systems.

- UK: October 2016: It was reported that several of London’s largest banks are looking to stockpile bitcoins in order to pay off cyber criminals who threaten to bring down their critical IT systems. It is believed the decision may have been triggered by the scale and intensity seen in recent attacks - particularly those targeting Twitter, Spotify and Reddit in the same month - and the realisation that it is cheaper to pay off criminals than risk an attack. Telecoms provider TalkTalk lost 101,000 customers and suffered costs of £50 million as a result of a cyber-attack last year.
THE KIDNAPPING THREAT IN WEST AFRICA

Reports have suggested various Western governments spent over USD 70 million on ransom payments between 2006 & 2012.

Despite considerable economic growth over the past decade, the West African region continues to face a number of enduring security challenges posed by persistently high levels of crime, terrorism and piracy. Chronic poverty, coupled with a proliferation of armed criminal and insurgent groups, have in turn given way to the rise of a booming kidnap for ransom market, contributing to some of the highest kidnapping threat levels for any region worldwide. Countries particularly affected by this phenomenon include Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and Mauritania, and while local nationals remain the most common victims of abductions overall, a particularly high threat remains for foreign nationals given the perceived higher value of expatriate captives for the financial and propaganda purposes of militant groups.

From the rise of extremist opposition movements in the Sahel to the enduring activity of Nigeria’s Boko Haram, the emergence of Islamic radicalism across West Africa has presented a growing threat to international business in the region, with radical groups able to mount attacks across international borders. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Mourabitoun, and local cells of IS are active in much of the Sahel and Maghreb and have declared their intention to attack Western targets, claiming responsibility for the kidnapping and murder of several foreign workers in the region.

Kidnapping for ransom is one of the main sources of income for terrorist groups in West Africa, assessed as considerably more lucrative than other activities such as drug trafficking and smuggling. Reports have suggested that various Western governments spent over USD 70 million on ransom payments between 2006 and 2012, providing a major contribution to the operational funds of AQIM and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). Meanwhile in Nigeria, Boko Haram has claimed responsibility for dozens of attacks, mainly in northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad region where the group remains rooted, as well as in neighbouring states including northern Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

Niger

Niger is one of the world’s least-developed nations and is considered a high-threat destination, with the majority of its population living in poverty and continuous instability since independence in 1960.

Ethnic Tuareg rebel groups are present in the restive northern Air Massif region and while violence has subsided in recent years, the risk of a resurgence in tensions and localised instability remains elevated, especially due to the ongoing conflict in Mali. A destabilisation in the Mali-Niger border region also has the potential to heighten ethnic Tuareg tensions in Niger.

Islamic extremists are the main drivers of kidnapping activity in the country. In recent years, AQIM and MUJAO militants have kidnapped a number of Western nationals in the region, motivated by successful past payments. One such case included the alleged payment of €25 million by France to AQIM for the release of four French nationals kidnapped from a uranium mine in Arlit, Niger, in 2010. The group, reportedly, originally demanded €90 million. Although both organizations often release hostages once they receive large ransom payments, a number of hostages have been killed in the past in the absence of payment, for political reasons, or in failed rescue attempts.

While the main kidnapping threat from Islamic extremists in Niger is concentrated along the border of Mali and Niger where these groups have staged numerous kidnappings, other areas considered as having a severe threat of kidnapping are areas along the border with Algeria, Chad, as well as Tahoua, Ingal, Agadez, Nguigmi, and close to the Libyan border. Foreign nationals have been kidnapped in Agadez and Arlit in the past. Despite a recent lull in the kidnapping of expatriates in Niger, possibly linked to the withdrawal of foreign nationals from high-risk areas, the threat of abduction remains significant due to the enduring presence of Islamist militants in the country, who are ready to act should the opportunity arise. An example of this threat is the October 2016 kidnapping of an American aid worker by MUJAO militants who was later taken to the group’s safehouse in Mali.

The presence of militants associated with Boko Haram in the southern Diffa region is currently the most frequent form of violence associated with Islamists in Niger and contributes to the high kidnapping threat in the country.

Moreover, violent crime is at a critical level in Niger, with bandits, as well as Tuareg and Toubou rebels engaging in kidnappings in the past, in a bid to later sell the hostages to extremists.
Nigeria

The security environment in Nigeria remains extremely challenging at present, characterised by a high threat of terrorism by Islamic militants in the north of the country, an active insurgency by militants in the country’s southern Delta region and persistently high levels of violent crime. Such challenges, alongside a largely inadequate security service have translated to some of the highest rates of kidnapping anywhere in the world. Initially confined to activity by piracy groups and delta militant organizations, in the country’s southern oil region, kidnapping for ransom incidents are now routinely reported in the country’s central and western states, representing a lucrative, and relatively low risk means for domestic groups to enhance their finances, and in the case of insurgent actors, offer a bargaining chip with state authorities.

According to the Nigerian police, numbers of kidnapping incidents in Nigeria in 2015 remained unchanged from 2014, with a total of 887 kidnappings recorded, only one more case than the previous year. Current activity nonetheless represents an important increase from the 600 cases registered in 2012. Rivers State, one of the primary operational hubs for the oil and gas industry was the territory which recorded the highest number of incidents in 2015, followed by Lagos, together accounting for 49% of cases at a national level. Recent developments in 2016 have suggested that such trends have continued further, as witnessed in the recent acknowledgement by the Nigerian police that kidnapping for ransom in the country is “gaining traction”. A further indication of this challenge was illustrated in the request of the House of Representatives to the Federal Government to declare a state of emergency in October 2016 over the failure of the security services to prevent attacks across all levels of society.

Militant groups and criminal gangs pose a severe kidnapping threat in the Niger Delta region. While this activity primarily affects affluent local nationals, expatriate workers are also at direct risk, particularly during operations in rural locations of Delta, Bayelsa, and Rivers states. Kidnap for ransom groups are well established. Lagos has also risen as a focal point of kidnapping in the country, although as with the delta, victims are typically released unharmed after a ransom is paid. Profit is the dominant motive for most attackers, although some groups, particularly those active in coastal areas and the delta region’s creek networks also possess political interests. Piracy has at the same time demonstrated a shift from typical hijacking with the aim of stealing ships’ cargo, predominantly petrochemicals, to a focus on the kidnapping of crew, particularly foreign nationals as a result of the decline of oil prices.

Meanwhile in Northern Nigeria, Islamist militant groups Boko Haram and its splinter Ansaru have also used kidnapping as an important tool in their wider regional terror campaigns. Islamic militants typically demand the release of fellow militants and large ransom amounts in exchange for the liberation of their victims. A number of hostages have been killed in the past as a result of failed negotiations or during unsuccessful rescue operations. Most importantly, both groups are known to actively seek to attack foreign workers. While the kidnapping for ransom of foreign nationals has so far only been carried out by Ansaru, Boko Haram possess both capability and intent to strike at expatriate operations, a direction that may develop further through increased integration with the Islamic State and its affiliates in West Africa over the coming six months. While central territories have typically been assessed to possess a lower kidnapping threat level, in recent months, a noticeable increase in cases has been observed, particularly in Kogi, Abuja and Nasarawa states where at least 13 foreign nationals have been kidnapped in the last 22 months.

Much of this increased kidnapping activity has been attributed to southern criminal gangs migrating in search for new operating terrain, and most recently, to an incursion of herdsmen (traditionally engaged in cattle raiding) into kidnapping activities.

Kidnapping incidents in Nigeria in 2015 remained unchanged from 2014, with a total of 887 kidnappings.

Niger Delta militants (TVC News Nigeria)
Mali

Mali presents a complex and highly unstable security environment, driven by the competing efforts of numerous threat groups, including an alliance in the north of the country of Tuareg separatists, Islamist fighters, and organised criminal entities. Radical Islamic militants have benefitted not only from the void left by a weak state in the north and central territories of Mali, but have also actively exploited the rivalry between the Tuareg leadership and socioeconomic grievances among the local population. Moreover, the heavy weaponry in circulation as a result of the Libyan conflict has also acted as an important enabler for these organizations. Islamic terrorist groups with presence in Mali include: AQIM, MUJAO, al Mourabitoun and Ansar Dine. The Malian government reintroduced a State of Emergency on 4 April 2016, extended until 29 March 2017 as result of an increase in terrorist activity in the country, including in southern territories.

Kidnapping, consequently, remains an ongoing challenge in central and northern Mali where kidnap activity is closely linked to Islamist militant activity and is identified as one of the main security concerns for foreign nationals who are specifically targeted by militant groups. Victims have included tourists, NGO workers and diplomats of a variety of nationalities, primarily European. This was particularly demonstrated with the November 2015 attack on the Radisson Blu Hotel carried out by suspected al Mourabitoun militants. The assailants killed 22 foreign nationals after taking 170 victims hostage. Belgian, Chinese, Russian, Israeli and US nationals were among those killed. While these groups have for a long time targeted foreign nationals, following the French and UN intervention in the conflict in January 2013, militant groups have made explicit efforts to target foreign nationals.

Additionally, criminal organisations pose a significant threat of kidnapping in rural areas, most heightened in northern regions where smuggling and trafficking activities are common. These groups have also carried out kidnappings for terrorist groups in return for financial reward.

At present, there are at least five foreign nationals being held in the country:

- A South African/British national and a Swedish tourist were kidnapped from a restaurant in Timbuktu by AQIM in 2011. The group demanded the release of a radical cleric from a prison in the UK.
- A Swiss missionary was taken (for the second time) from her home in Timbuktu in January 2016 by alleged AQIM militants who demanded the release of their fighters in exchange.
- A Romanian security manager was kidnapped in Tambao, Burkina Faso, in April 2015 by al Mourabitoun. According to a hostage video issued in September 2016, there is a ransom demand, although the actual amount was unspecified.
- An Australian doctor was kidnapped from his home alongside his wife in January 2016 in Baraboule, Burkina Faso, by AQIM militants. The wife was released after 22 days for “humanitarian” reasons.
- An American aid worker was kidnapped from Balaak, Niger, by alleged MUJAO militants in October 2016.
Burkina Faso

Although the political situation in Burkina Faso has largely stabilised since the inauguration of a new government in November 2015, the underlying security environment remains fragile. With one of the highest poverty rates in the world, and limited domestic security institutions, Burkina Faso has seen an exacerbated threat of terrorism and kidnapping as militant groups have taken advantage of the security vacuum in the country.

The threat of terrorism is high in the country, in spite of the absence of indigenous terrorist groups. Much of this challenge emanates from regional terror organizations, particularly those based in Mali, which have targeted Burkina Faso in recent years, in particular from 2015 onwards. Regional Islamist actors that could impact Burkina Faso include: AQIM, MUJAO, Ansar Dine, Ansar al Shari'a, al Mourabitoun, and Boko Haram.

While terrorist activity is concentrated along the border regions with Mali and Niger, and most recently the W park area, the threat is unpredictable. Areas bordering the Ivory Coast are also particularly dangerous given pre-existing criminality concerns. An example of the increased threat throughout the country was witnessed in the coordinated attack carried out against two popular Western venues in Ouagadougou in January 2016, claimed by al Mourabitoun, where at least 30 people from 18 countries were killed. The attack marked the first of its kind in Burkina Faso and a significant elevation in the country’s security threat level. Furthermore, the risk of kidnapping by AQIM and affiliated groups is assessed to be on the rise in the country, especially in north-eastern territories where militants retain greater freedom of operation, and have conducted targeted abductions against international workers in the past.

The first-ever kidnapping of a Western expatriate in Burkina Faso took place in April 2015 near the Tambao manganese mining site when a Romanian worker was seized by al Mourabitoun. The incident was followed by the kidnapping of an Australian couple in January 2016 by AQIM in Baboule. In both occasions, the hostages were then transported to Mali. In neither case have formal ransom demands been issued to the wider media, with only one of the three hostages so far released.

Mauritania

Security conditions in Mauritania remain relatively stable at present, although the threat of terrorism is rising in spite of the Mauritanian government maintaining a strong anti-terrorism policy and closely monitoring known extremists within the country.

The ongoing instability in Mali and Libya has heightened regional terrorism risks and concerns. AQIM represents the main terrorist threat actor in the country, having declared war against the Mauritanian government as a result of its participation in the anti-terrorism operations in Mali. The group has also been linked to several attacks in Mauritania in recent years. The threat of targeted attacks and kidnappings by Islamist militants is most severe along the borders with Mali, Western Sahara and Algeria. Although no incidents have occurred in the capital during the last 12 months, AQIM has previously conducted successful attacks in Nouakchott, including suicide bombings. Notably on 27 October 2016, the US Embassy in Nouakchott warned that “terrorist groups are planning to carry out near-term attacks against places where US citizens congregate in Nouakchott.”

Although no recent significant attacks have taken place in the country, the threat remains high especially as AQIM and affiliated groups, particularly al Mourabitoun, have increased their activity in the region and retain their ability to operate across borders. Mauritanian authorities have prosecuted suspected IS affiliates in the country, however, there have been no reports of the group staging successful attacks in Mauritania as of yet.

Westerners are at heightened threat in the remote arid territories of central Mauritania where the presence of the security agencies is limited. Reports suggest that AQIM operates kidnapping both directly and through criminal gangs who carry out abductions on their behalf and/or in return for payment. White most hostages taken in Mauritania have been reported to be released after the payment of large ransoms and prisoner exchanges, (the last of which was reported in 2009) AQIM militants in the wider region have murdered captive foreign nationals when their demands have not been met.
NIGER: October 2016. US missionary Jeffry Woodke was kidnapped from his home in Abalak, Tahoua region, by suspected MUJAO militants. During the attack, Woodke’s security guard and a Nigerian soldier were killed. Local authorities believe he has been taken to the Ménaka region of Mali.

Mali: September 2016. Five Moroccon truck drivers were held hostage for ten hours and robbed of their cargo and possessions by gunmen wearing military uniforms, on their way to Ivory Coast. The gunmen appeared to refer to each other by rank.

Nigeria: August 2016. Two Chinese workers were kidnapped in central Nasarawa state and were allegedly rescued by authorities after two days in captivity, although it is believed a ransom was paid for their release. The two victims worked for an investment company engaged in construction projects in the country.

Nigeria: June 2016. Seven foreign employees of an Australian construction company were kidnapped on their way to work in Nasarawa. They were released within 24 hours south of Menaka in Mali, following an attack on the abductors’ convoy by French helicopters based nearby.

Mauritania: November 2009. Three Spanish aid workers were kidnapped by AQIM after their vehicle was separated from a large convoy along the Nouakchott-Nouadhibou road. The only woman in the group was released in March 2010 for alleged health reasons after converting to Islam. After nearly nine months the two men were released in northeast Mali in August 2010. This followed the release of a militant from a Mauritanian prison. The payment of an €8 million ransom by the Spanish government was also reported.

Mauritania: December 2009. An Italian couple were kidnapped after their vehicle was riddled with bullets in Kobéni, southern Mauritania. The incident was claimed by AQIM, saying that it was in retaliation to the crimes of the Italian government in Afghanistan and Iraq. They were released in north of Gao, Mali, in April 2010 after AQIM prisoners were also released. Reports of an €8 million ransom payment were denied by the Italian government.

Burkina Faso: April 2016. A Romanian security manager was kidnapped while working at a Manganese mine in Tambao. Al Mourabitoun claimed the attack and has so far released two hostage videos, the latest broadcasted on 31 October 2016. The Romanian government said it has not received a ransom demand.

Niger: January 2011. Two young French nationals, one of them an aid worker, were kidnapped from a restaurant in Niamey by AQIM. They were found dead within 24 hours south of Menaka in Mali, following an attack on the abductors’ convoy by French helicopters.

Mali: April 2016. Four foreign staff of the International Committee of the Red Cross were kidnapped while returning to Kidal from a project in the village of Abeibara by armed men on motorbikes, believed to be Ansar Dine militants; in spite of employing armed security escorts. The victims were three Australians, one South African, one New Zealander, and two Nigerians. Their driver was killed in the process. The victims were released after four days, with five of the men severely injured. Later reports indicated the kidnappers received a ransom of €150 million (over USD 470,000) for their release.

Mali: November 2009. An aid worker was kidnapped from her home in Abalak, Tahoua region, by suspected MUJAO militants. During the attack, Woodke’s security guard and a Nigerian soldier were killed. Local authorities believe he has been taken to the Ménaka region of Mali.

Burkina Faso: January 2016. An Australian doctor and his wife were kidnapped in the town of Djibo, near the border with Mali. AQIM claimed the attack, saying the primary motive behind the kidnapping was the release of imprisoned members. The wife was released after 22 days. The doctor remains in captivity and is believed to be currently held in Mali.

ABOUT OLIVE GROUP

Olive Group, a Constellis company, is a leading provider of risk management, protective security, crisis management and enabling support services to governments, international organisations and major corporations across the globe. We specialize in serving the energy, construction, extractives, critical infrastructure, development and national security sectors—assisting our clients in understanding risk and in conducting their operations safely and securely, no matter their location. Olive Group takes pride in our strict adherence to an exacting code of ethics and rigorous focus on standards and compliance—reinforcing the pioneering role we play in fostering stability, efficiency and sustainable economic development.

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