



FLASH Analysis Report

American Hostage Release – Impact on Kidnapping Risks

There is much debate across the United States and throughout the global security and academic community relating to, if and how, the recent trade and release of detained militants for a Military Hostage will impact kidnapping trends generally. Indeed a number of reports have suggested that senior Taliban Commanders or their associates have commented that now such groups will be far more strategic in whom they kidnap, knowing that such a trade for prisoners is possible. But how will this impact the wider trends in global kidnappings?

At the Cavell Group we use a panoply of collection techniques to acquire our intelligence, examining every scrap of information to ascertain the risks and how to best mitigate them, conscious at all times that our clients must continue to do business wherever possible and often in dangerous places. Working on our premise that all such risk management decisions must be made on the balance of probabilities, the facts are that the majority of kidnappings impacting upon our clients are purely for cash and are conducted by gangs specifically in the business of kidnapping for cash, or militant groups requiring cash to fund their various campaigns. Whilst it is possible to infer that this recent high profile trade may have made some groups re-think their kidnapping strategies, most require easy low risk cash and for many kidnapping military personal increases the risk of military intervention and compromise. However, many groups consider 'merchant kidnapping' a low risk strategy, in which they abduct a victim and sell them onto a more organised group with differing agendas. With many cohorts in many regions operating in this form, for those associated in any way with Islamic militants, (especially groups with which comrades are detained or imprisoned) our intelligence identifies significant concerns regarding an increased risk.

For a militant or terror group with comrades detained in Prison in the UK, a British business person could be a valuable target, more so a military hostage could be seen to bring about a similar conclusion to the recent American trade. The same could apply to Australian's with many Islamic terrorists or militant combatants detained or imprisoned in Australia, or likewise a myriad of other countries and their residents around the world.

At this time however, there is no intelligence or evidence to suggest that any such groups have modified their approach or tactics and again in terms of global kidnapping incidents only a small percentage would fall under this remit.

It is tempting to articulate or consider this recent trade in the US as a major shift with major consequences and in regions where Taliban and Al Qaeda associated groups operate or are easily reached by cohorts attracted to 'merchant kidnapping' that is a reasonable conjecture, but in global

terms where the majority of kidnap cases are purely for easy cash any definitive shift in targeting and tactics is unlikely.

Once again however, this demonstrates the vulnerability of those travelling, operating or sending people overseas, especially in regions such as Pakistan, Yemen, Iraq, Somalia, Kenya, Syria and of course Afghanistan where a significant number of Islamic groups with comrades incarcerated in the West already operate and target victims for kidnapping on a regular basis.

In terms of risk mitigation and the balance of probabilities it remains that it is the Operational Parameters associated with your travel that influences your risks the most. When travelling to any region understand the kidnap risks, groups, gangs, militants, terrorists and the recent trends and how you may be perceived as a target for ransom or a political demand is crucial. Does your country of residence, birth, or that of your employee have any association with any likely perpetrators agenda. Are their comrades imprisoned there, etc?

Finally, as we have reported before in more depth, all our intelligence suggest the use of social media is growing amongst militant and criminal groups involved in kidnappings, both for their own intelligence gathering in the targeting of organisations and individuals and in the actual abduction planning. As such you should use any online presence with significant caution and security in mind.

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