

KIDNAP MONTHLY BRIEFING



ISSUE 92 | October 2013

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This is the ninety-second issue in a series of kidnap-focused reports prepared by **Control Risks** on behalf of Hiscox. The Monthly Kidnap Briefing is distributed to select clients in order to keep you informed of the trends in kidnapping worldwide and assess the risk of kidnapping to your business.

This issue includes an overview of kidnapping-for-ransom trends worldwide in September, a brief on kidnapping in Tamaulipas state in Mexico and a focus on kidnapping in Syria.

If you would like to provide us with feedback on the Monthly Kidnap Briefing or inform us of your interest in a specific country or theme that you would like us to cover in a subsequent issue, then please write to kr.guernsey@hiscox.com

Prepared by **Control Risks**

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Latin America



In **Mexico**, kidnappers are increasingly using information available on the internet to lure victims. The ease with which kidnappers can access information about potential victims online means that such scams have become more personalised and consequently more difficult to differentiate from genuine approaches. Although individuals are most commonly targeted, there is precedent for businesses to unwittingly send employees to meet kidnapping gangs that have approached companies with fake business opportunities. In Cancun (Quintana Roo state) a 20-year-old male kidnap victim was rescued and a gang of kidnappers who used Facebook to select and lure victims was arrested on 26 August. The kidnap victim accepted a Facebook friend request from one of the kidnappers, who called herself 'Sarai'. Sarai and the victim began to communicate via Facebook. The victim also received text messages from Sarai, who suggested that they meet at a local bar. After the meeting, the victim accepted Sarai's invitation to a party. When they arrived at the house, a woman and two men – who Sarai introduced as friends – were waiting. The men began to beat the victim. Shortly afterwards, the victim's father received a telephone call demanding a ransom payment of MXN 500,000 (US\$37,000), which was later increased to MXN 1.5m (US\$112,000). The victim was freed by police and three of the four kidnappers were arrested. The kidnappers admitted involvement in four other kidnaps. The incident, which was a variant on a common scam in which kidnap victims are lured to fake business meetings, indicates the increasingly sophisticated targeting tactics that kidnapping gangs are using in Mexico.

Police on 10 September arrested a number of members of a kidnapping gang that had been responsible for at least three kidnaps in **Bolivia**. The gang was made up of 13 people – ten Bolivians and three Colombians – and had been operating in Santa Cruz (Santa Cruz department) since 2012. The gang was responsible for three abductions involving wealthy businesspeople between October 2012 and August. It carried out extensive research on the victims before kidnapping them while they travelled by car and taking them to a country estate 11 miles (18km) from Santa Cruz. The gang managed to secure US\$1.4m in ransom payments; US\$400,000 from the first kidnap, US\$600,000 from the second and US\$400,000 from the third. These payments are considered high by Bolivian standards. The highest settlement to have been paid in recent years was that for former presidential candidate and businesswoman Ana María Flores Sanzetené, who was kidnapped in Santa Cruz in October 2012. A ransom of between US\$500,000 and US\$1m is thought to have been paid for her release. Organised criminal groups are responsible for kidnapping in Bolivia. Another gang made up of Bolivians and Colombians abducted a student in Santa Cruz in July and demanded a ransom of US\$80,000, though the victim was rescued.

Three employees of oil services company Termotécnica working on the Bicentennial Pipeline project were kidnapped on 11 September as they left their residence in the town of Saravena (Arauca department) in **Colombia**. The victims were identified as engineer Yesid Galindo, administrator Eber Morero and driver Nelson Becerra. The Colombian authorities said that they believed that the National Liberation Army (ELN) leftist guerrilla group had carried out the kidnap. The ELN has been implicated in several other kidnaps and attacks on construction crews associated with the 143-mile (230km) first phase of the US\$4.2bn pipeline. President Juan Manuel Santos in July said that the government would not enter into peace talks with the ELN until it had released Canadian national Gernot Wober, who was kidnapped in January from the Casa de Barro gold mine in Norosí in rural Bolívar department. Wober was released in August and the government stated that it would be prepared to start dialogue with the guerrillas. However, the ELN is likely to continue to kidnap both local and foreign nationals.

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Africa

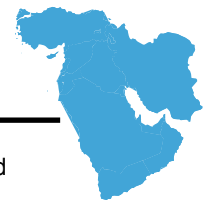


The **Kenyan** capital Nairobi was the scene of a four-day siege that began on 21 September. At the time of writing, it had been confirmed that between ten and 15 attackers armed with AK-47 assault rifles and hand grenades had stormed the Westgate shopping centre (mall) at around 12.00. They proceeded to kill shoppers, targeting non-Muslims and foreigners, before taking around 30 hostages and battling arriving security forces. Among the foreigners confirmed dead were three British, two French, two US, two Canadian (including a diplomat) and two Indian nationals, as well as Australian, Chinese, Dutch and South African nationals, and a Ghanaian diplomat. The siege constitutes the most significant terrorist incident in Kenya since the 1998 US embassy bombing. In the past al-Shabab has tended to launch kidnaps of local and foreign nationals in the porous border region with Somalia; however, an al-Shabab spokesman stated that large-scale attacks like Westgate 'will become common' if the Kenyan military does not withdraw from Somalia. Certainly, similar high-profile attacks and hostage incidents in 'soft' targets represent a credible threat in the short and medium term, and the threat level for Nairobi remains high.

In **Nigeria** Archbishop Ignatius Kattey, second in command to the Primate of the Church of Nigeria, was kidnapped in Rivers state on 6 September. He was driving to Port Harcourt with his wife Beatrice when unknown gunmen abducted them. The kidnappers released Beatrice later the same day, but the archbishop remained in captivity before being released just over one week later. It is not known whether a ransom was paid. However, the targeting of prominent local nationals remains a favoured tactic of financially-motivated criminal gangs in the Niger delta region.

Last month, we were once again reminded of the kidnapping threat posed by Islamist militants in the **Sahel region** when al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) released a video of its seven Western hostages, some of whom have been in captivity for more than three years. The hostages are four Frenchmen kidnapped from a uranium compound in northern Niger in 2010 and a Dutchman, a Swede and a South African who were abducted in Timbuktu in northern Mali in November 2011. The men all appeared to be in good health and urged their respective governments to negotiate with the Islamist militant group, which operates throughout the Sahel region. Although it is not known when the video was produced, the footage of the victims was reportedly recorded in June. The French foreign ministry judged the video to be 'credible'. As such, it provides the most recent proof of life for the hostages.

Middle East



More foreign victims emerged from captivity in **Syria**. German aid worker Ziad Nouri crossed the border into Turkey on 3 September having escaped from his captors after being held in Syria for almost four months. He was one of three German aid workers who had been kidnapped in Harem (Idlib governorate) on 15 May. All were employees of German NGO Grünhelme and had been helping to reconstruct a hospital in the area. The other two victims, Simon Sauer and Bernd Blechschmidt, escaped on 3 July.

Syrian nationals continued to be the target of kidnappers in **Lebanon**. Among the victims was Ahmed Kamal al-Azeb, who was kidnapped on the Taanayel highway (Beqaa governorate) on 9 September. The victim works with his father at a flower plantation. The kidnappers demanded US\$1.5m for his release and claimed that he had been moved to Syria. They also threatened to kill him if the amount was not paid. Azeb was released on 19 September after the family paid US\$10,000. The army arrested three people later the same day and recovered the ransom amount.

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Rare information about kidnapping in **Iran** emerged in September. An Afghan employee of an unnamed manufacturing company on 11 September was kidnapped on his way home from work by a group of compatriots in Yazd province. They contacted his employer two hours later and demanded IRR 20m (US\$800). The police tracked down the caller within hours, and he led them to the victim and additional suspects the following day. The suspects said that they were members of the Taleban who had trained in Afghanistan but had travelled illegally to Iran when things 'went downhill for the Taleban in Afghanistan'. They had carried out the kidnap because they were unemployed and needed money.

In **Oman**, an Indian national was kidnapped by a group of Pakistani nationals in Sohar (al-Batinah region) on 20 September. The kidnappers contacted his family in India demanding OMR 2,000 (US\$5,000) within 24 hours. The Indian embassy in Oman contacted local authorities and the victim was rescued on 23 September.

Asia



Limited details emerged regarding the kidnap of a foreign national in **Pakistan** – a South African man was reportedly abducted on his way to the airport in Lahore on 10 September. The fate of the victim remained unknown. The highest-profile kidnap of a foreign national in Lahore remains that of US national Warren Weinstein, who was taken from his accommodation in August 2011 and remained in captivity as of September 2013. Meanwhile, the trend of targeting doctors in Pakistan continued. A number of new victims were taken throughout the month, including Dr Abdul Manaf Tareen, who was kidnapped in Quetta (Baluchistan province) on 17 September, and Dr Murlu Das, an employee of the Sui Southern Gas Company, who was kidnapped on 20 September in Hyderabad (Sindh province). Three doctors who had been kidnapped in Loralai (Baluchistan province) in June were released by the Tehrik-e Taleban Pakistan (TTP – Pakistani Taleban). The TTP also released eight employees of the Water and Power Development Agency in September after more than one year in captivity. The conditions of their release were not made public.

Kidnapping continued at a high rate in **India**. In addition to the high volume of criminal kidnaps were a number perpetrated by militant groups. Among the victims was Anil Kumar Agrawal, a general manager at a hydroelectric plant belonging to the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation, who was kidnapped on 21 September by elements of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland while driving in Sontipur (Assam state). He was taken away on a motorbike towards the forests of Arunachal Pradesh. It was unclear whether a ransom had been demanded and the fate of the victim remained unknown. Meanwhile, suspected Kuki Revolutionary Front members on 17 September kidnapped three drivers transporting excavators from Assam state to Manipur state. The kidnappers demanded INR 1.5m (US\$24,000) for their release. All three were rescued in a police operation in Senapati (Manipur state) on 19 September. Previously, Garo militants on 1 September kidnapped two students from a market in Meghalaya state. The students were at times held separately, and were moved around to different locations, including some in the jungle. The kidnappers demanded INR 10m (US\$150,000) for their release, but they managed to escape from a house in Assam late on 4 September.

In **Thailand**, 20-year-old student Adisom Srimee was kidnapped from outside the B2 Premier Hotel on Canal Road in Chiang Mai (Chiang Mai province) in early September. He was lured there to a meeting by two of his relatives who had been posing as a girl on Facebook. When he arrived, they stopped their car in front of his and took him to a resort in Mae Rim (Chiang Mai province). They demanded THB 500,000 (US\$16,000) from the victim's mother, but eventually released him on 10 September after they had used his ATM card to withdraw money over a period of several days.

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Europe



In **Russia**, Dagestani Deputy Industry and Energy Minister Ruslan Gadzhibekov was detained on suspicion of involvement in the kidnap-for-ransom of a teenager in the village of Primorsky (Dagestan republic) in July: the teenager was stopped and forced into a car while driving a quadbike. The kidnapers subsequently demanded a ransom of RUB 45m (US\$1.4m) from the victim's father. After receiving the ransom payment on 12 September, they freed the victim. Gadzhibekov was arrested two days later. Gadzhibekov's brother Arsen, a security official in the Dagestan capital Makhachkala, was killed in December 2011. A former mayor of Makhachkala is standing trial for his murder. Dagestan is a high-risk area for kidnapping-for-ransom. The area's volatility stems from a mix of religious extremism and official corruption.

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BRIEF ON LATIN AMERICA



KIDNAPPING IN TAMAULIPAS STATE IN MEXICO

Tamaulipas is a high-risk area for kidnapping-for-ransom: the state had the fifth-highest number of kidnaps in Mexico during the first six months of 2013, according to Control Risks' records. Tamaulipas is strategically important for drug-trafficking organisations because of its proximity to the US. As such, it is perhaps unsurprising that two of Mexico's major drug-trafficking groups have their origins in the state; the Gulf Cartel, and its former ally and now major rival, Los Zetas. The Gulf Cartel controls most trafficking through the Matamoros corridor across the border from Brownsville (Texas, US). However, the group in recent years has been fending off increased competition from Los Zetas. Although the Gulf Cartel retains control of the state capital Reynosa, Los Zetas has established a firm hold over Rio Bravo.

The presence of the two warring groups means that the security situation in Tamaulipas is extremely unstable. The federal government has reacted by deploying the armed forces to the state in a concerted effort to reduce the groups' power there. Both groups have been weakened by recent high-profile arrests. On 17 August, elements of the Mexican army and navy captured Gulf Cartel leader Mario Ramirez Treviño in Rio Bravo. Meanwhile, Los Zetas boss Roman Ricardo Palomo Rincones was arrested on 24 August in Santa Regina, close to the state capital Ciudad Victoria, in a joint operation by municipal and federal security forces.

Although the arrests represented a major public relations coup for President Enrique Peña Nieto in his fight against drug-trafficking organisations, they are unlikely to have a positive impact on crime rates. In fact, changes to Tamaulipas' criminal landscape as a result of these arrests are likely to contribute to an increase in kidnaps and extortions. As drug-trafficking groups splinter and weaken, and an increasing number of organisations fight for profits in the state, they are forced to seek additional sources of income and branch out into activities such as extortion and kidnapping, rather than relying primarily on drug-trafficking to generate funds. There is also the potential for other Cartels to move into the area to fill the vacuum left by the arrests of Trevino and Rincones. However, previous efforts by the Sinaloa Cartel to move in to the area have met with failure.

Employees of local businesses have been subjected to kidnaps-for-ransom. On 2 September, supermarket chain S-Mart closed all of its branches in Tamaulipas for two days after three employees at its Balcones de Alcalá branch in Reynosa were kidnapped against a demand of MXN 1.5m (US\$115,000). It did not re-open the branches until after the employees had been released on 5 September. It is unknown whether a ransom was paid.

In addition to kidnapping-for-ransom, extortion is a major concern for companies operating in Tamaulipas. Extortion is a powerful tool for drug-trafficking organisations, which use it as a tactic to exert their influence and establish control over an area. Paradoxically, in regions where state law enforcement is weak, paying regular extortion payments to drug-trafficking organisations gives some companies and businesses the sense that they are buying protection from other criminal gangs who may operate in the area.

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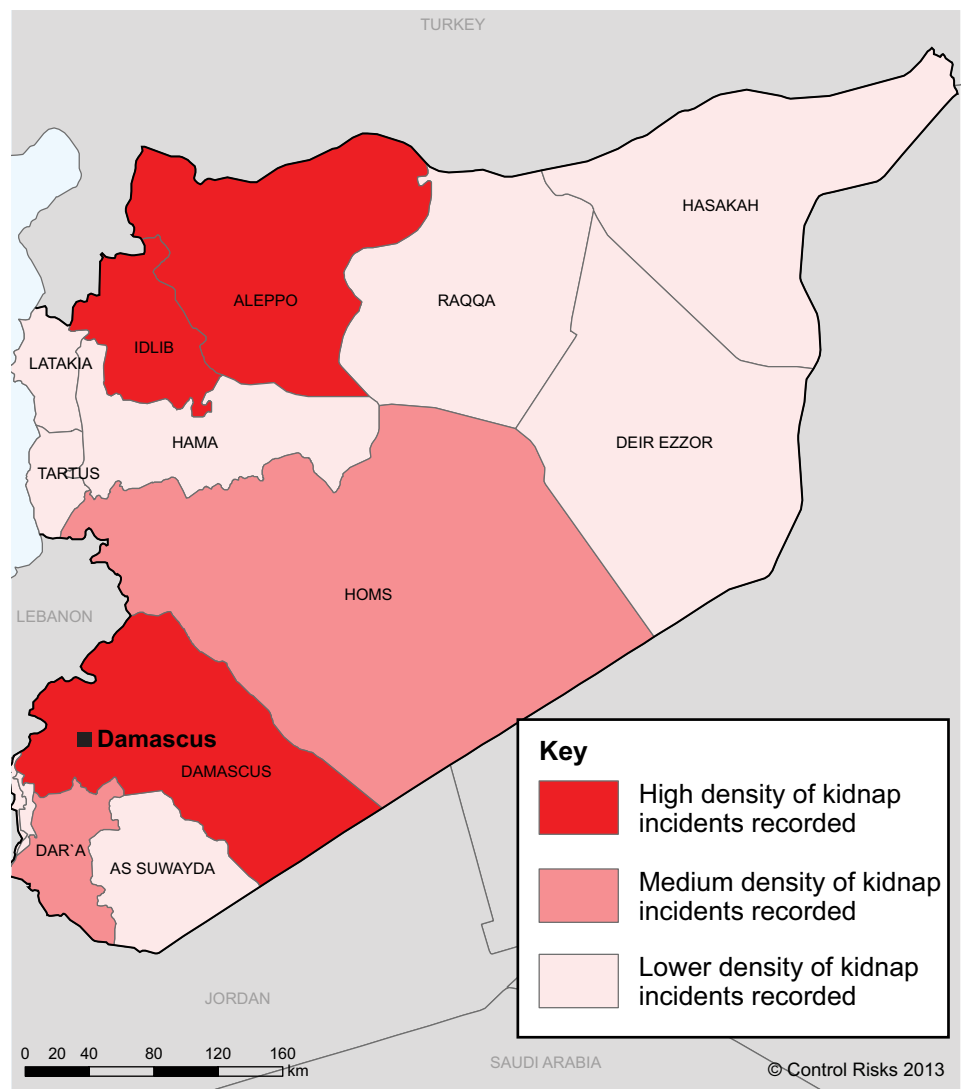
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KIDNAPPING-FOR-RANSOM: ONE OF MANY CRISES AFFECTING SYRIA

Two-and-a-half years into the Syrian conflict, the problem of kidnapping-for-ransom in the country shows no sign of abating. The alarming surge in the number of incidents witnessed in 2012 appears to be continuing in 2013; Control Risks recorded double the number of incidents in the first half of 2013 compared with the same period in 2012. Even so, the number of kidnaps reported in the media represents only a fraction of what occurs on the ground.

Figure 1: Distribution of kidnaps recorded by Control Risks, Jan 2011 – Sep 2013



THE GENERAL PROBLEM

Despite high levels of the crime, media coverage of kidnapping-for-ransom is unavoidably overshadowed by other themes in the conflict, such as the use of chemical weapons, suicide attacks, military bombardments and the humanitarian crisis. The scale of the problem – in particular how it affects local nationals – is therefore difficult to gauge based on absolute numbers of recorded cases alone. Media coverage of incidents affecting local nationals is often confined to high-profile incidents such as that of the 80-year-old father

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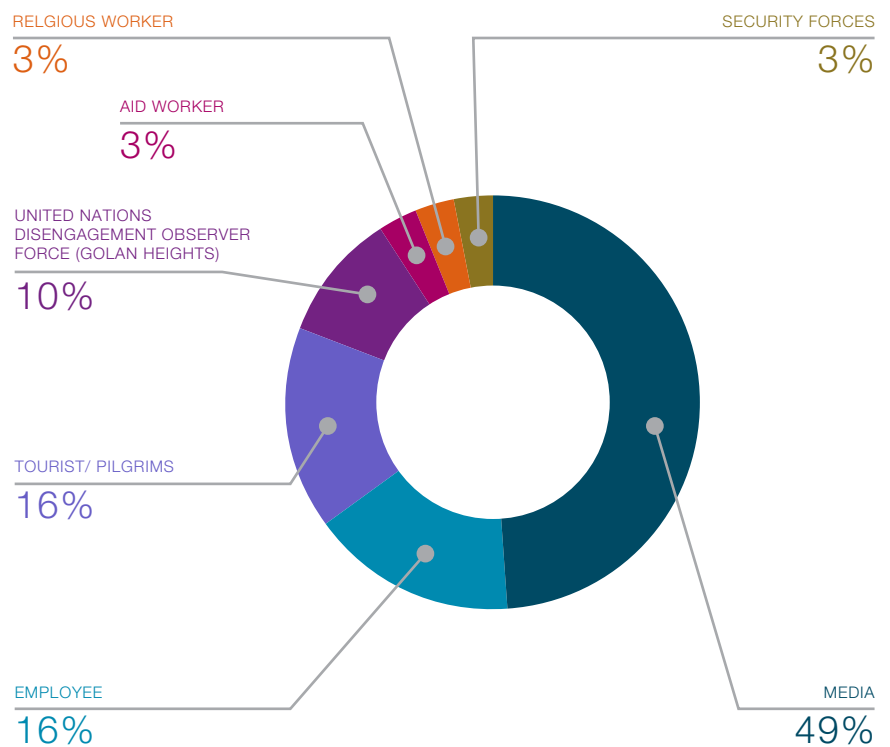
of Syria's deputy foreign minister, Faisal Mekdad, who was kidnapped from his home in Daraa (Daraa governorate) on 18 May. He was released on 6 June, but the conditions of his release were not made public. The kidnap was reportedly carried out in revenge for the arrest of a relative of one of the kidnapers.

Kidnapping-for-ransom also affects Syria's minority populations. In the first nine months of 2013, Control Risks recorded incidents affecting individuals from Syria's Christian, Armenian, Assyrian and Kurdish populations. Such incidents in the main are likely to be financially-motivated. However, a small proportion of kidnaps carried out in the name of Islamist extremist groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra (also known as the al-Nusra front) may also have sectarian motivations.

THE RISK TO FOREIGN NATIONALS

According to Control Risks' records, 55% of recorded victims since the start of the conflict have been foreign nationals. However, that figure is more likely to reflect the imbalance in press coverage in favour of foreign nationals than the fact that foreigners are more frequently targeted. Even so, many kidnaps of foreigners are only reported once the victim has been freed after months in captivity and Control Risks is aware of others that are not reported at all.

Figure 2: Most common foreign national victim types, Mar 2011-Sep 2013



Journalists have been targeted more than any other victim type during the past two-and-a-half years of conflict. These victims have included nationals of Belgium, France, Hungary, Iran, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Mexico, the Palestinian Territories, Poland, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the US. Most recently, Marc Marginedas, a Spanish journalist working for newspaper El Periodico, was kidnapped on 4 September when the vehicle in which he was travelling was stopped on the outskirts of Hama (Hama governorate). His fate remained unknown at the time of writing. The plight of US photographer Matthew Schrier only emerged at the end of July once he had managed to escape. He was kidnapped by Jabhat al-Nusra on 31 December 2012 and held near Aleppo (Aleppo governorate) until his escape on 29 July. It is unclear whether the group made any demands to his family or employers, but they reportedly raided his bank account and used his eBay account to

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buy computers and car parts. He was reportedly mistreated during captivity, though his treatment improved when he converted to Islam. He was held alongside another unnamed US journalist who was unable to escape at the same time.

The withdrawal of many businesses from Syria means that kidnaps of employees of foreign companies have been rare, though a few cases were recorded in 2012. Italian national Mario Belluomo and two Russian nationals, Viktor Gorelov and Abdessattar Hassun, were kidnapped in Latakia (Latakia governorate) on 17 December 2012. All three were employees of a private steel company from which the kidnappers reportedly demanded SYP 50m (US\$700,000) for their release. All three were freed on 4 February in exchange for the release of captured militants by the Syrian government.

KIDNAPPING TACTICS

Many reported kidnaps occur during transit. A popular tactic among militants is to collect victims at illegal roadblocks or ambush vehicles during transit. Many foreign nationals fall foul of this tactic because they believe that travelling with a local guide precludes their kidnap. However, some opposition groups, particularly Islamist extremists, are unlikely to consider the presence of a local national as an obstacle. Control Risks is also aware of cases in which foreign nationals have travelled with a Free Syrian Army escort who has been killed after the group has encountered a pro-government militia. Control Risks' joint venture partner, Travel Security Services, advises against all travel to Syria.

FORECAST

The kidnapping-for-ransom problem is unlikely to improve in the coming months. Militant groups rely on the tactic as a source of income to support their activities and gain publicity for their cause, while criminals, unhindered by the security forces, engage in the crime to supplement their living costs. The kidnapping risk rating remains high.

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Control Risks' services are exclusively retained by Hiscox. In the event of a kidnap, detention or extortion incident covered by Hiscox, clients will benefit from Control Risks' services as part of their insurance policy.

CONTROL RISKS

Control Risks is a leading international business risk consultancy. It offers a range of integrated political risk, investigative, security and crisis management services to corporate, government and private clients worldwide.

Since its foundation in 1975, Control Risks has advised clients on the resolution of 2,427 kidnap and extortion cases in 125 different countries, with 45,789 person-days aggregate duration. Cases have ranged from traditional kidnaps-for-ransom, express kidnaps, hostage takings, ship and aircraft hijacks to political detentions, product extortion and contamination and other threat extortions. Control Risks has a full-time team of Response Consultants, available for immediate deployment in response to a crisis anywhere in the world. Response Consultants will advise on negotiation strategies and on how to manage the various interests of the victim, family, employers, the media, the government and local law enforcement agencies.

The Response Division has its own dedicated team of research analysts. As well as supporting consultants deployed on cases, they maintain the International Kidnap Online Service (IKOS) which follows the trends in kidnapping worldwide and allows clients to assess the risk to their business. In addition to IKOS, Response Research produces commissioned kidnap and extortion analysis of any country or sector. If you are interested in any of these services, please write to response_research@controlrisks.com

For more information about Control Risks, please visit our website at www.controlrisks.com

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Our clients include multinational companies operating in high risk regions of the world, key executives working in commercially sensitive positions and individuals whose wealth or fame may attract the attention of criminals.

Hiscox kidnap and ransom underwriters are the most experienced in the field. Our knowledge of the sector enables us to make quick decisions on cover, no matter how unusual the request. We are highly skilled in handling what may be a very difficult and sensitive emergency. Our specialist policies can be tailored to suit individual needs and circumstances.

We have underwriting teams based in Guernsey, Paris, Cologne, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and at Lloyd's of London.

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