KRE Global Monitor

February - March 2015

In this Issue:

Welcome to the February – March 2015 edition of the red24 Kidnap for Ransom and Extortion (KRE) Global Monitor. This bi-monthly publication, authored by the KRE experts at red24, provides Liberty International Underwriters' (LIU) clients with important information on recent incidents, as well as current and emerging KRE trends. In this edition, we focus on the threat of kidnapping in Lebanon. Our incidents snapshot section provides a short analysis of KRE incidents since February 2015, including details of incidents in Ecuador, Madagascar, Mexico, Nigeria, Philippines, Russia and Yemen. You will also learn more about the team of KRE experts at red24, who provide crisis management services to clients. Together with LIU, red24 can help ensure that your clients are protected before, during and after a crisis. If you have any feedback on the red24 KRE Global Monitor, or if you would like to suggest a specific country, topic or theme for inclusion in a future issue, please do not hesitate to email kre@red24.com

KRE in Lebanon

Situated on the eastern Mediterranean, Lebanon has long been a popular business and tourist destination. However, due to a number of security concerns, Lebanon is assessed to be a high-risk destination and operating environment; these include terrorism, political instability, periodic outbreaks of civil unrest, as well as insecurity stemming from conflict spillover from neighbouring Syria.

The overall threat of kidnap for ransom and extortion (KRE) is considered moderate, but elevated in some areas of the country. Although varying in terms of scope and scale, kidnapping is not a new phenomenon; Lebanon has a history of inter-clan and/or sectarian rivalry, and as a result, reprisal kidnappings have long been a feature of the political and security environment. Kidnappings are conducted for ransom and in response to local and regional disputes. Kidnappings are orchestrated by various criminal and militant groups motivated by financial and political/ideological agendas; the operational areas of these groups are fairly location-specific.

Precedent has shown that kidnapping risk levels, as with other security concerns facing the country, are prone to increase during periods of insecurity and political instability. The civil war between state and non-state armed groups in Syria, ongoing since 2011, has resulted in a significant deterioration in the security environment in Lebanon in recent years; it has also coincided with an upsurge in kidnapping activity, particularly between 2011 and 2013. Due to historical and current developments, political groupings and communities in Lebanon remain strongly divided in terms of support for the regime of Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, and the rebel and non-state armed groups fighting to overthrow it. As such, Syrian developments hold the potential to trigger sporadic outbreaks of localised sectarian violence between rival communities and increase terrorism, kidnapping and other above-mentioned threats in parts of the country. Although the majority of kidnappings since 2011 have been directly linked to the conflict and motivated by sectarian disputes, familial issues and in retaliation for kidnappings within Syria, criminals continue to pose an elevated KRE threat to locals and foreign nationals.
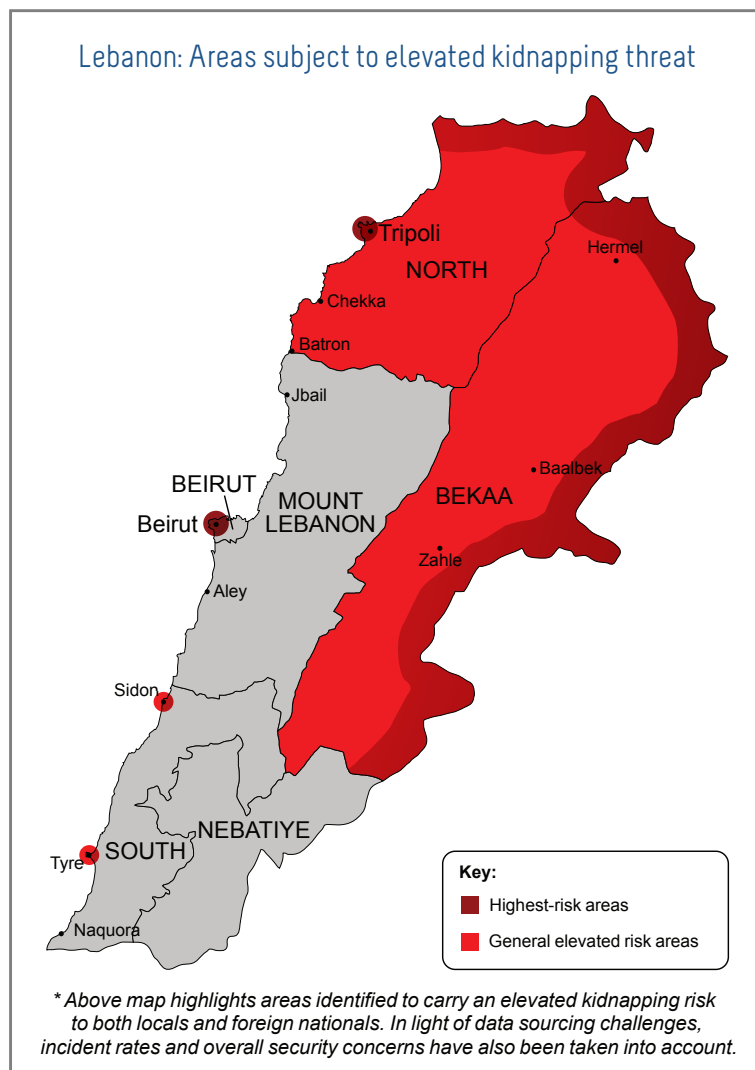
Lebanon has a poor kidnapping reporting rate. The government does not release official statistics on kidnapping or extortion, and locals affected by kidnappings are reticent to report them. According to open source data, at least 76 kidnapping incidents were reported countrywide in 2013; figures for 2014 are unavailable. The actual number of incidents per year is assessed to be higher; in fact, a conservative estimate by red24 would put the annual incident number at as much as 250. Visual information included in this piece is intended to provide a snapshot of current KRE dynamics and trends in Lebanon. Unless otherwise stated, the data set used reflects confirmed incidents, affecting a total of 32 foreign nationals in 2013 and 2014. Syrian nationals kidnapped for reasons other than financial gain have not been included in this data set. Although these incidents are a regular occurrence, targets are usually selected due to familial and/or retaliatory reasons; this type of kidnapping poses a reduced threat to foreign nationals and persons unrelated to these relationships.
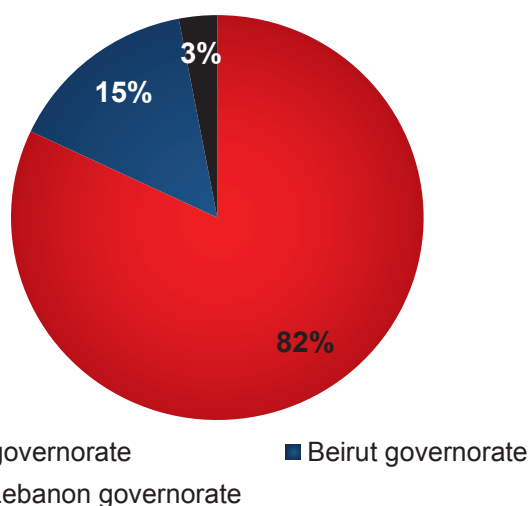
Geographical spread

The kidnapping threat is most elevated in the North and Bekaa governorates. The risk is particularly acute in the direct vicinity of the Lebanon-Syria border region. Despite ongoing efforts to secure this region, the conflict spillover from Syria has extended beyond the border areas, contributing to a lawless and insecure environment where cross-border criminality, banditry and militant activity have increased significantly since 2011. As such, the risk of being kidnapped extends into urban areas in the Bekaa and North governorates, with the towns of Baalbek, Hermel, Aarsal and Zahle considered hotspots for kidnapping and other criminal behaviour. Of the total recorded incidents involving foreigners in 2013 and 2014, a staggering 82 percent occurred in the Bekaa governorate.

Kidnapping activity attributed to rival clans and non-state armed groups also poses a security concern in the northern city of Tripoli. While few incidents have been recorded in Tripoli in recent years, this is more likely to be a result of the low reporting rate, and potentially the reduction in foreign travel to the city in recent years due to the poor security situation. Periodic deteriorations in the security environment in the city make it prone to kidnapping and short-term detentions and as such, the kidnapping risk remains high.

The capital, Beirut, is considered one of the more stable areas in Lebanon, demonstrating higher levels of security and less frequent outbreaks of political and sectarian violence than elsewhere in the country. Recorded kidnapping incidents are certainly far lower in Beirut than the Bekaa governorate. However, it is worth noting that the KRE threat stemming from criminal gangs and crime syndicates remains elevated in Beirut. The number of recorded kidnappings in Beirut and surrounds has been relatively low in recent years; however, locals have been regularly, and foreign nationals sporadically, targeted in kidnappings and extortion by criminal gangs. As the majority of kidnapping activity in Beirut is financially motivated, fewer cases are likely to be reported, with victims choosing to rather meet the settlement demand without taking the matter to the police. The risk level in Beirut is illustrated by the fact that out of the total recorded kidnappings of foreign nationals in 2013 and 2014, 15 percent occurred in Beirut.

Lebanon: Areas subject to elevated kidnapping threat

Key:
- Highest-risk areas
- General elevated risk areas

* Above map highlights areas identified to carry an elevated kidnapping risk to both locals and foreign nationals. In light of data sourcing challenges, incident rates and overall security concerns have also been taken into account.

Geographical spread of foreign kidnap victims

- 82% Bekaa governorate
- 15% Beirut governorate
- 3% Mount Lebanon governorate

Urban centres in the south of the country such as Sidon and Tyre are subject to the same criminally motivated kidnapping threat as Beirut, with locals predominantly targeted.

Finally, there are several Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, including in the vicinity of Beirut and Sidon. Security risks are considered elevated in many of these areas, which are frequently affected by civil unrest, internecine Palestinian conflict and acts of terrorism. The kidnapping threat is also elevated within these refugee camps, and in surrounding areas. Lebanese security forces maintain a strong presence in the vicinity of these camps, but are not permitted to enter. Persons working in the camps, including journalists and aid workers, are subject to an elevated risk of being kidnapped.

Perpetrators: Motives and tactics

Kidnappings in Lebanon are orchestrated by various groups for the purposes of ransom, extortion, political and/or ideological concessions, as well as retaliation, revenge, human trafficking and prostitution. Nonetheless, the primary KRE threat stems from inter-tribal rivalry and the activities of Lebanese and transnational rebel/extremist groups. These threats are fairly distinct with respect to operational capability and geographic location. In general terms, criminal groups pose a secondary threat. However, in some places, distinguishing between groups becomes difficult; this is most true in the Syria border region where criminal, rebel, militant and clan-based kidnapping activity is closely linked

Militant-, rebel- and clan-based threats

Numerous Lebanese non-state armed groups have the operational capacity to conduct kidnappings for financial and political motivations. Clan identity is considered stronger than political affiliation and as such, clans wield significant power. A large number of clans in the north and east of the country are heavily involved in criminal activity, including smuggling, trafficking and KRE.

Tensions between rival clans frequently manifest in spates of reprisal or retaliatory kidnappings of rival clan members. Cross-border kidnappings are a regular occurrence, with Syrian and Lebanese clans kidnapping opposing clan members from across the border. In addition, Syrian rebels and Islamist extremist groups frequently cross into Lebanon to escape Syrian military offensives and to manage the smuggling of supplies from Lebanon into Syria. Some of these groups have established a permanent operational presence within Lebanon, including the al-Nusra Front, as well as other Syria-based militant and criminal organisations.

Kidnappings orchestrated by non-state armed groups occur both in towns and rural areas of the Bekaa and North governorates. The authority of the Lebanese military is still fairly weak in these areas, allowing non-state armed groups to operate with relative impunity. After being abducted, perpetrators often hold victims hostage in their own towns, blocking police from entering. In comparison to purely criminally motivated kidnappings, such incidents can take a while to be resolved, with lengthy negotiations between clan leaders and often further retaliatory abductions common prior to the resolution of an incident. Foreign nationals have been targeted in kidnappings by non-state armed groups in the aforementioned governorates in recent years; incidents would either occur at random, or be carried out by perpetrators with indepth knowledge of the target. These cases have often involved political and/or financial concessions.

Criminal threat

Criminally and financially motivated groups and syndicates feature prominently in Lebanon's security environment; in response to historical periods of instability and economic deprivation, a well-developed criminal underground has developed across the country. The criminal activities of both well-organised, sophisticated groups and low-level opportunistic gangs extend to traditional kidnapping for ransom and extortion purposes, pure extortion and short-term, low-reward express kidnappings.

In the case of KRE, abductions are often well planned; the victim is selected following longer-term surveillance and an indepth assessment of their financial position and liquidity. As such, the risk of being targeted by criminal groups increases in line with duration of travel; short-term visitors are less likely to be affected by traditional KRE incidents, with express kidnappings posing the predominant threat. Individuals conducting longer-term business or recreational travel, particularly those with established and identifiable routes and personal habits, face a higher risk of being kidnapped. Urban and rural criminal groups are reluctant to hold victims for long periods of time, and incidents are usually resolved fairly quickly once payment is settled.

Recent kidnappings of foreign nationals:

- On 15 September 2014, a Palestinian businessman and long-term resident in Lebanon was kidnapped from Baalbek, in the Bekaa governorate, after arriving home from a business trip to Denmark. He was released a day later on 16 September; reports at the time indicated that this was a result of political intervention. However, a ransom payment is suspected.

- On 30 August, a Kuwaiti national was kidnapped from a hotel in Baalbek; the perpetrators demanded a ransom of US$1 million for his release. An unnamed source has stated that he was subsequently released four weeks later after his family paid a ransom of 'several hundred thousand dollars'.

- On 15 July, a Palestinian businessman was kidnapped at gunpoint while looking at property in Khraybeh, Bekaa governorate. The victim was released following a ransom payment of US$100,000.

- On 15 May, an Iraqi national was kidnapped while delivering a ransom to kidnappers to release a family member in Hawsh al-Nabi, Bekaa Valley.The first victim had been freed by the perpetrators, who then extorted an additional ransom payment of US$200,000 to secure his safety. The second victim was targeted when he arrived to pay the ransom at the kidnappers' base with only US$50,000; he was released during a Lebanese security operation on 19 May.

- On 7 February, a Danish national and long-term resident of Beirut was kidnapped in Bekaa governorate. Unknown gunmen, believed to be part of a criminal gang, abducted the foreign national and a local colleague while they were travelling by car from Beirut to the Bekaa Valley. The Danish national was released unharmed on 6 March 2014; it remains unconfirmed whether a ransom payment was made, although one was demanded. It is believed that he may have been transported across the border into Syria and held hostage there.

- On 27 December 2013, two Omani nationals were kidnapped in Baalbek. The pair was rescued during a security operation south of Baalbek on 28/29 December; the motivation for their abduction remains unclear.

Non-traditional kidnapping variants

Express kidnapping

In addition to kidnapping for ransom and extortion, express kidnappings pose a security concern in some urban centres in Lebanon. This type of kidnapping involves victims being held for a short period of time while they are forced to withdraw funds from ATMs and are then robbed of their personal belongings before being released. This form of crime is largely opportunistic and non-discriminatory in nature; individuals from all sectors of society are at risk. The threat is most elevated in Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon and Tyre.

Extortion

Extortion of prominent individuals in the private and public sectors by criminal groups is a growing concern in Lebanon. Traditional extortion is unlikely to affect short-term business or recreational visitors; however, persons with a longer-term presence in the country, particularly individuals with local business interests, face an elevated risk of being targeted by extortionists.
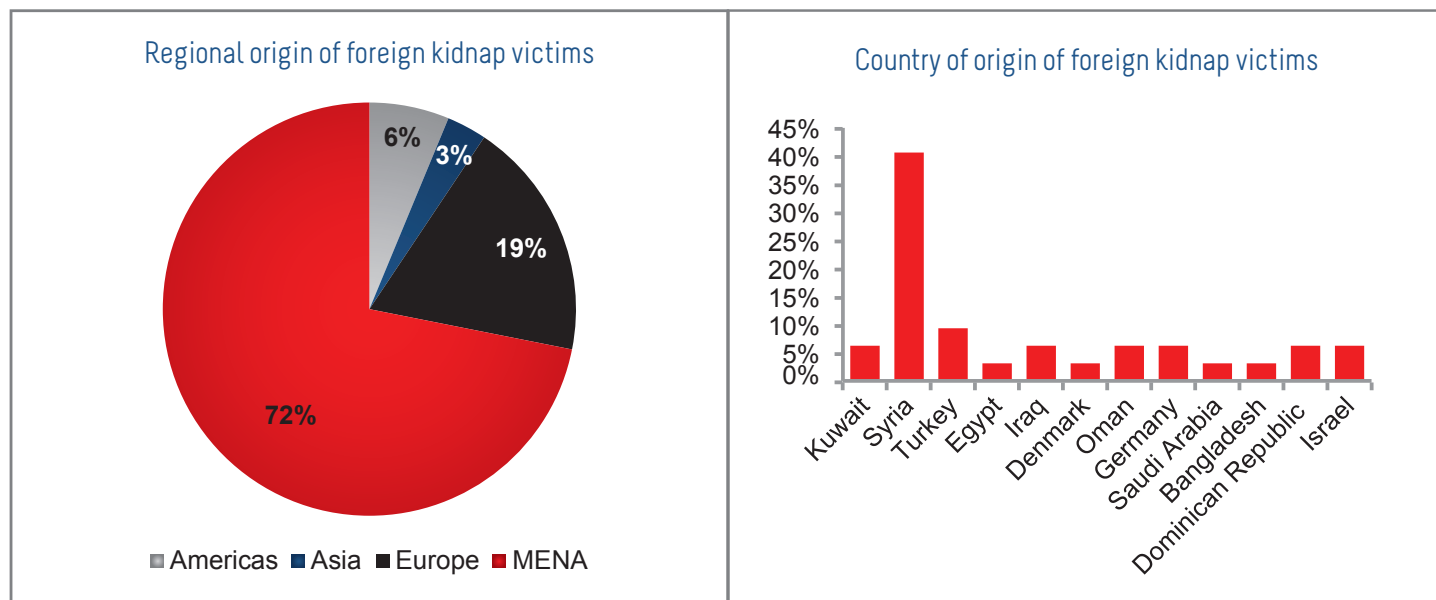
Custodial kidnapping

In the past, family disputes have often led to the 'abduction' of children in Lebanon. The short-term abduction of children by Lebanese fathers or families is a serious concern and numerous cases have been reported in recent years. Women (of any nationality) travelling with their children without their father (who is a Lebanese national) should be aware that the mother must have written permission stating that the father is aware of his child's movements.

Victims

The vast majority of kidnappings in Lebanon affect locals and Syrian nationals. The risk does extend to foreigners; however, the number of recorded incidents remains fairly low in comparison to the above-mentioned primary target groups. When it comes to locals, the KRE risk permeates all levels of society; however, prominent businesspersons and their dependents are most frequently targeted. Victims span all age groups, from young children to retired business personnel; the majority of traditional KRE activity however affects males. After Syrians, foreign nationals from regional states, such as Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, form the majority of foreign victims. In fact, in 2013 and 2014, approximately 72 percent of kidnap for ransom victims were from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Despite this significant number, the kidnapping risk does extend to Westerners, with 25 percent of incidents during this period affecting individuals from Europe and the Americas. The percentage of Asian nationals kidnapped in recent years has remained low. Recent incidents affecting foreigners include the month-long abduction of a Danish journalist over February and March 2014, the November 2013 day-long kidnapping of two German nationals and the 2011 kidnap for ransom of seven Estonian nationals; all of these incidents took place in the Bekaa governorate.

Regional origin of foreign kidnap victims

6% 3%

19%

72%

☐ Americas ☐ Asia ☐ Europe ☐ MENA

Country of origin of foreign kidnap victims

Kuwait, Syria, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Denmark, Oman, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Dominican Republic, Israel

The threat of kidnapping, including to foreign nationals, increases during periods of instability or unrest, particularly if it is linked to actual or alleged foreign intervention in Lebanon or neighbouring Syria. It is worth noting that during such periods, underlying anti-Western sentiment can become elevated, including in Beirut and Tripoli; this increases the KRE risk to foreign nationals.

Recent kidnappings of prominent locals:

- On 25 September 2014, the brother of a prominent Lebanese journalist was kidnapped in the eastern city of Zahle. The perpetrators demanded a ransom payment of US$135,000.

- In late September 2013, a businessman was abducted the Brital area and subsequently transported to the Syrian border town of Rankous. The kidnappers demanded a ransom of US$500,000 for his release. This sparked a spate of retaliatory kidnappings, with several Syrians being abducted to be used as leverage in negotiations.

- On 5 February 2013, a prominent businessman was kidnapped in the southern city of Tyre; the 66-year-old owner of a luxury car dealership was abducted from his vehicle by a group of armed men. The perpetrators contacted his family, demanding a ransom payment of US$3 million.

- On 20 January 2013, the 12-year-old son of the owner of two garment factories was kidnapped near his residence in Beirut by four armed men. The perpetrators contacted the victim's family, demanding a US$1 million ransom payment.
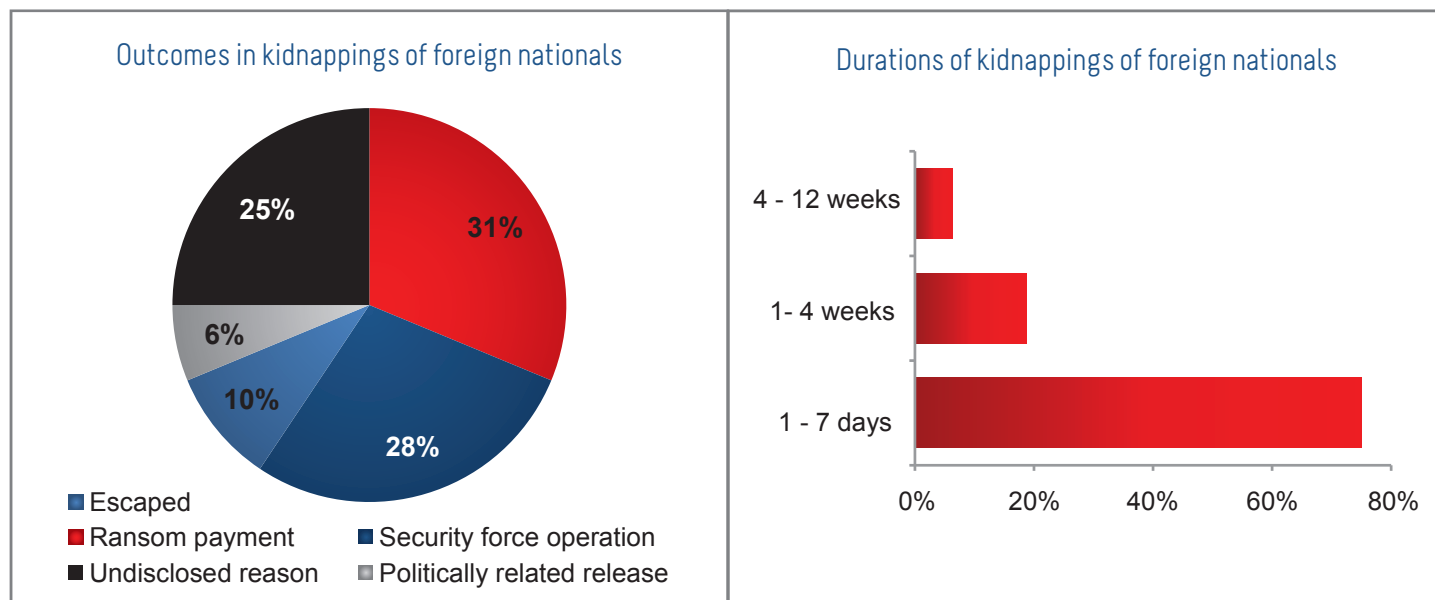
Ransom demands and settlements

Due to the lack of available information, verified data regarding ransom demands and payments in Lebanon is not always available, making exact figures difficult to gauge. Nonetheless, state and private media frequently include financial and other demands in incident reports, which is helpful in formulating approximate figures. The following amounts are included to provide some general guidance on the existing dynamic in Lebanon, rather than to give a concrete indication of future ransom demands and settlement figures. Ransom demands for all victim categories generally range between US$5,000 and several hundred thousand dollars, with average payments of approximately US$75,000 recorded. In past cases involving locals and foreigners, demands have reached US$1 million; settlement amounts have reached US$600,000. The highest ransom demand in recent years was US$15 million; the settlement amount is this case was not disclosed. As is evident from the incident snapshot above, local citizens face high ransom demands.

Political and other concessions are often added to financial demands; in some cases, these are stand-alone demands. In one such example, two Turkish Airlines pilots were kidnapped in Beirut in August 2013. Their captors, whose identities remain undisclosed at this time, reportedly orchestrated the kidnapping as a means of pressing the Turkish government into negotiating the release of nine Lebanese nationals who were abducted by rebel forces in neighbouring Syria in May 2012. The Lebanese citizens who, according to Syrian rebel forces, were members of the Shiite and Syrian government-aligned Hezbollah militant group, were seized near the city of Aleppo. The nine Lebanese and two Turkish nationals were released unharmed on 18 and 19 October 2013, respectively, following protracted tri-national negotiations.

Incident durations and outcomes

Kidnapping durations of both foreign nationals and locals are generally short by international standards, with incidents usually resolved within 1 to 7 days. In the case of foreign victims over the last two years, approximately 75 percent of incidents were resolved within a week, 18.25 percent took between 1 to 4 weeks to resolve, and only 6.25 percent between 4 to 12 weeks. Kidnappings falling into the last category involved the negotiation of political concessions. Depending on the perpetrator, there remains a possibility of persons abducted in these areas being quickly transported across the border into Syria, further complicating and delaying their recovery.

The majority of kidnappings are resolved either through a ransom payment or security force operations: successful hostage escapes are not common. The threat of violence or torture during a kidnapping incident is fairly low, and perpetrators rarely execute hostages. The potential for hostages to be injured or killed increases marginally in the event of a security force operation to gain their release.

Outcomes in kidnappings of foreign nationals

- 25%
- 31%
- 6%
- 10%
- 28%

Legend:
- Escaped
- Ransom payment
- Security force operation
- Undisclosed reason
- Politically related release

Durations of kidnappings of foreign nationals

- 4 - 12 weeks
- 1- 4 weeks
- 1 - 7 days

(0% — 20% — 40% — 60% — 80%)

Outlook

The various political and security challenges facing Lebanon are significant and a long-lasting resolution to these challenges is not anticipated in the medium-term. In addition, an improvement in the conflict in Syria remains a far-off goal; as such, insecurity in the country is likely to adversely impact the security environment in Lebanon for the remainder of 2015 at least. The ramifications of this will continue to be experienced most acutely in the country's eastern and north eastern regions. Regular KRE incidents, as well as kidnappings motivated by other reasons, should be anticipated in the Bekaa and North governorate in the short- to medium-term; an upsurge in incidents as witnessed in recent years cannot be discounted. Sporadic kidnapping incidents will continue elsewhere in the country.

The rise of Iraq- and Syria-based extremist group, the Islamic State (IS), elsewhere in the region is a secondary cause for concern. Recent terrorist attacks and hostage-taking incidents in Australia, Tunisia and France, which have been claimed by IS-affiliated militants, have served to demonstrate the global threat posed by this group. Although Lebanon has not been overly affected by IS-rhetoric to date, the country is subject to an elevated threat from terrorism. Sunni militant groups have orchestrated numerous mass-casualty bombings in Beirut and elsewhere in recent years. As such, a potential infiltration by IS-inspired or affiliated individuals into Lebanon with the intention of carrying out terrorist acts cannot be entirely discounted in the medium-term.

Going forward, the overall KRE risk will be most elevated during periods of increased national and regional political instability and insecurity. Nonetheless, in comparison to other high- and extreme-risk countries in the region, such as Yemen, Libya, Syria and Iraq, risk levels in Lebanon are manageable. Provided that area-specific risk assessments are conducted prior to travel, robust security measures implemented in-country and adequate contingency plans put in place, the risk of being affected will be significantly reduced.

Global Incidents Snapshot

Americas

Colombia, 12 and 25 February 2015: According to reports released on 12 February, a Dutch national kidnapped in the Norte de Santander department in January 2014, was released unharmed. Members of the National Liberation Army (ELN) rebel group, suspected to have perpetrated the abduction, handed the victim over to representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Norte de Santander. In a separate development on 25 February, police dismantled a criminal kidnapping ring in the Choco department; those arrested were accused of kidnapping and then selling hostages to the ELN for as much as US$122,000 per victim. This highlights the interaction between criminally and politically motivated kidnapping groups in Colombia. It also potentially points to a political and tactical move by the ELN to distance the group from direct involvement in kidnappings, while still benefiting from the profits.

Costa Rica, 21 March 2015: A Canadian national and naturalised Costa Rican citizen kidnapped in Santo Domingo, Heredia department, on 20 January was released on 21 March. Details surrounding his time in captivity have not been forthcoming; however, it has been reported that his Canadian relatives made at least two payments prior to his release. The initial ransom demand was US$500,000. The victim had business interests in Costa Rica, and a personal business dispute has not been ruled out as a motivation for his abduction.

Ecuador, March 2015: The Judicial Police (PJ) unit of Pichincha arrested eight local suspects on charges of being involved in an express kidnapping gang operating in Quito. Between September 2014 and February 2015 authorities had received 171 reports of express kidnapping where the perpetrators used illegal vehicles disguised as legitimate taxis to target unsuspecting victims outside shopping centres, restaurants and popular entertainment venues. Once the potential victim embarked on the journey and was identified as a suitable target, the driver would indicate to accomplice vehicles by means of using the left turn signal that the robbery should take place. The majority of reported incidents took place between 22:00 and 02:00 local time so that the criminals could withdraw the maximum amount of money from a series of ATMs; the victims, many of whom had been subject to physical assault, were subsequently abandoned in isolated areas of the city.

Mexico, 1 February 2015: According to reports, a four-year-old child was kidnapped in Ciudad Mier, Tamaulipas state, while visiting the town with his grandfather. The child, a US national from the Texas border town of Roma, was seized when a group of armed men laid siege to a local grocery store. He was found in the neighbouring state of Nuevo Leon several days later amid suspicion that a ransom payment had been made.

Mexico, 6 March 2015: Four local employees of Canadian mining company, Goldcorp Inc., were abducted when returning home from work at the Los Filos gold mine in Guerrero state. The bodies of three of the victims were discovered in a mass grave in the same state on 13 March; the fourth hostage was released under undisclosed circumstances. It is unclear whether the victims were targeted because they were associated with the mining corporation or if the abduction was opportunistic and unrelated. This incident took place a month after 13 employees of Torex Gold's US$800 million Limon-Guajes gold mining project were kidnapped; 11 of the hostages were subsequently released following Mexican army intervention.

Mexico, 8 February 2015: According to reports issued on 8 February, at least ten hostages were rescued in a security operation after being kidnapped near the Media Luna mining area and town of Cocula, Guerrero state. The abduction took place near Iguala, where 43 trainee teachers went missing after a public protest in September 2014. It is unclear what group or individuals are responsible for this most recent incident; however, some local sources have claimed the La Familia drug cartel is involved.

USA, 13 March 2015: A 29-year-old woman was purportedly kidnapped from her partner's home in Vallejo, California. Her partner reportedly received a ransom demand of US$8,500 for her release. She subsequently reappeared at her parent's home, located 400km away, on 15 March, following an anonymous email to a local newspaper stating she would be released on this date. Police have since stated that her abduction may have been a hoax perpetrated by the couple; however, the woman's attorneys claim that she was the victim of a legitimate kidnapping.

Asia

Afghanistan, 9 February 2015: A prominent local businessperson and a tribal elder were kidnapped for ransom while travelling in the Anjil district, Herat province. Both victims were freed in an Afghan security force operation on 12 February; the businessperson's family had alerted security forces after an undisclosed ransom demand was made for his release. Six perpetrators were arrested during the raid.

India, 19 February 2015: According to reports, a Nigerian national was kidnapped and sexually assaulted by a group of four men in the capital, Delhi, on 19 February. While in the Mayur Vihar residential area of the city, the victim allegedly accepted a lift in the car of four locals, who then proceeded to assault her in the moving vehicle. After temporarily being held captive during the incident, the assailants released the woman on the side of the road. Four suspects were arrested on 20 February.

Pakistan, 28 March 2015: According to recent reports, authorities confirmed the release of two Czech Republic nationals who were kidnapped in the Chaghi district of the south western Balochistan province in March 2013. The pair was seized by a group of unidentified assailants after entering Pakistan from neighbouring Iran. It is believed that the Turkey-based IHH aid organisation was involved in the negotiation process.

Philippines, 19 February 2015: A South Korean national, Song Eon, kidnapped in the Lanao del Sur province on 19 January, was released unharmed on 3 February. The victim, an employee of a mining company based in Cagayan de Oro city, was seized while travelling to a business meeting in Saguiaran. A ransom was reportedly paid in order to secure his release.

Europe and Russia

Spain, February and March 2015: Local police have reported an upsurge in virtual kidnappings in a number of areas across the country during the last two months. In late February, several such incidents were reported to police in Barcelona, Girona and Baix Llobregat, in the northern Catalonia region. Police stated that the victims had received phone calls from unidentified persons, who claimed to have kidnapped a dependent (usually a minor) and demanded a ransom payment for their return. Many of these calls reportedly originated in Galicia, north western Spain. In March, a spate of similar incidents was reported in the southern tourist areas of Malaga and Marbella; another incident was also reported in Asturias. In the recent cases, some victims appear to have been specifically targeted (perpetrators had some knowledge of the victim's circumstances); however, many of the calls appear to have been made at random. The average ransom demand was US$10,000; however, the perpetrators frequently settled for significantly lower amounts.

Serbia, 14 March 2015: According to reports, three French nationals kidnapped a two-year-old child in the capital, Belgrade; the perpetrators were caught and the child recovered after police launched a security operation shortly afterwards. According to police, the motivation for the abduction was personal; one of the kidnappers was in possession of a valid French passport for their own biological child, who was the same age as the victim. The perpetrator reportedly planned to use the victim in an attempt to win sole custody of her own daughter; she planned to sue for custody in France and use the kidnapped child during the paternity test in an attempt to prove her estranged partner wasn't the father of her biological child. Charges have been brought against the trio and the case is ongoing.

Russia, 6 February 2015: According to reports released on this date, an Azerbaijani national was kidnapped in Moscow province on 26 January. The victim was seized by a group of assailants outside his home and was subsequently transported to Klin city. The victim, who had been kidnapped before, had well-known wealthy relatives, who were subsequently contacted by the kidnappers, who demanded a ransom of US$3 million for his release. The hostage managed to escape and informed local police; the perpetrators were then arrested.

Middle East and North Africa

Libya, February and March 2015: Numerous kidnappings of local and foreign nationals took place across Libya during the past two months. A prominent local national and an executive employed by the National Oil Corporation (NOC), Samir Kamal, was released on 1 February, approximately two weeks after being abducted by gunmen in the capital, Tripoli. Furthermore, militant groups affiliated with Syria-based Islamic State (IS) drew attention to their presence and operational capability in Libya with the release of an online video on 15 February in which they purportedly executed 21 kidnapped Egyptian nationals in the vicinity of Tripoli.

Libya, February and March 2015: IS-affiliated militants also launched a number of armed assaults on oil industry targets in Libya. A group of unidentified gunmen stormed the central Mabruk oilfield in Libya overnight on 3/4 February. The Mabruk oilfield is located south of the Al-Sidra coastal export terminal; the attackers killed five local guards at the site and abducted some local and foreign workers (Philippine and Nigerian nationals). Similar raids on the al-Dhahra and Bahi oilfields were also reported in early March. Subsequent to this, on 6 March, armed gunmen stormed the al-Ghani oilfield in central Libya. During the raid at least 11 security guards were also killed and parts of the oil site were damaged; ten foreign workers (including Czech, Austrian, Sub-Sahara African, and Philippine nationals) were reportedly kidnapped as well. Two Bangladeshi nationals were reportedly released on 24 March, although details surrounding their release have not been disclosed; the other kidnapped foreign nationals are still believed to be in IS captivity.

Tunisia, 18 March 2015: At least 21 people were killed, including 17 foreign tourists, when gunmen launched an attack and mass hostage-taking in the capital, Tunis. Heavily armed assailants dressed in military uniforms stormed the Parliament building in the city centre, where lawmakers were discussing new anti-terrorism legislation. The assailants then moved to the adjacent Bardo Museum, where they opened fire on a group of visitors, killing at least eight. Several of the facility's patrons, including 17 foreign tourists, were taken hostage and executed by their captors, who were subsequently killed by security forces. IS-affiliated militants claimed responsibility for the attack.

Syria, 4 and 6 February 2015: IS released a video purportedly depicting the execution of kidnapped Jordanian air force pilot, Muatah al-Kasabeh. The victim had been taken captive by the group after militants shot down his war plane over the northern city of Raqqah in December 2014. IS subsequently demanded the release of a female insurgent, held in Jordan on terrorism charges, in exchange for the pilot. However, the deadline for this purported deal passed on 30 January, and the Jordanian hostage was killed shortly afterwards. In a related development, IS alleged that a 26-year-old US aid worker, Kayla Mueller, held captive by the group was killed near the city of Raqqa, following a Jordanian air strike on 6 February.

The strike was launched in response to the execution of al-Kasabeh. The US government has since confirmed the death of the victim, who was abducted in August 2013 in Aleppo; prior to her death, IS had demanded a ransom payment of US$6.6 million.

Syria, 23 February 2015: A Swedish journalist and his Syrian translator were released on 23 February; they were detained in a Syrian regime prison for a week after being arrested at an army checkpoint in the Kurdish town of Qamishli, al-Hasakah governorate. Officials stated that the pair was detained, as the Swedish journalist did not have the correct documentation to be in Syria, and had entered the country illegally. It has since been reported that a Kurdish group negotiated with the regime for the Swedish national's release, which was actioned in return for Syrian soldiers captured by Kurdish fighters.

Yemen, 10 February and 19 March 2015: A Tajik medical practitioner, Gulrukhsor Rofieva, who was abducted by tribesmen in October 2014 in the Marib governorate, was reportedly released on 10 February in the city of Marib. The tribesmen had demanded the release of jailed tribesmen in return for the victim; however, it is not clear if the demand was met. In a separate development, a foreign national and her local translator were kidnapped by unidentified assailants while travelling to work in the capital, Sanaa. Both hostages (employees of an international aid organisation) were released on 19 March following negotiations with tribesmen; although the circumstances of the release remain undisclosed, a financial settlement is suspected.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Cameroon, 20 March 2015: At least 15 people, including local government officials, were kidnapped by armed gunmen near Garoua-Boulai, located in eastern Cameroon. According to reports, a convoy of local councillors were travelling near Garoua-Boulai, located approximately 600km north east of the capital, Yaounde, when the kidnapping occurred; the group was taken across the border to the Central African Republic (CAR). Although there have been no claims of responsibility, suspicion has fallen on supporters of Abdoulaye Miskine, the leader of the Democratic Front of the Central African People (FDPC) rebel group in the CAR. It has been alleged that supporters of Miskine have been pressing for his release, as well as other militants who were detained by Cameroonian authorities in 2013. In 2014, a similar incident occurred during which 15 Cameroonian nationals and a Polish national were kidnapped, in order to press for Miskine's release.

Central African Republic (CAR), 11 February 2015: Kidnapped CAR Minister of Youth and Sport, Armel Ningatoloum Sayo, was released unharmed after being held in captivity for 16 days. Sayo was abducted on 25 January by gunmen while driving to church with his family. The perpetrators demanded a ransom payment of US$8,000 for his release; it has not been confirmed whether this payment was made. In an audio recording released after his kidnapping, Sayo stated that the incident was politically motivated, and triggered by the recent arrest of arrest of Rodrigue Ngaibona, chief of the Christian anti-Balaka militia; Ngaibona is accused of the murder of dozens of Muslims during the coup which removed former Christian president, Francois Bozize, in 2014.

Madagascar, 17 February 2015: A 12-year-old French child was kidnapped outside his school in the south western town of Toliara and held hostage for three days. The French Embassy in the capital, Antananarivo, released a statement on 21 February confirming his release; although the statement offered no further details regarding the incident, it did note that the incident may be connected to a number of high-profile kidnappings for ransom in various locations across the country in recent weeks.

Mozambique, 2 and 5 February 2015: Authorities have confirmed that two Portuguese nationals were kidnapped in the capital, Maputo, on 2 and 5 February, respectively. Five armed assailants abducted the first victim near a busy restaurant on 2 February, while the second victim was reportedly kidnapped near the Presidential Palace on 5 February. Police are currently investigating the kidnappings.

Nigeria, 23 February 2015: Unidentified gunmen kidnapped a female US missionary from the Hope Academy compound in Emiworo, located on the outskirts of Lokoja in Kogi state. It is alleged that the kidnappers initially demanded a US$500,000 ransom in exchange for the victim's release. This demand was lowered to US$300,000 prior to the victim's release on 6 March; however, it has not been confirmed as to whether a ransom was paid.

Nigeria, 5, 10 and 13 March 2015: Two Chinese nationals were kidnapped by unknown gunmen in the Zango Daji area of Lokoja, capital of Kogi state. The victims were conducting construction work in the area. The gunmen, reported to have been dressed in military uniforms, shot and injured the victim's driver and the police officer assigned to guard them. There have been no reports of a ransom demand being made or received. Subsequent to this, on 13 March, three Chinese nationals were kidnapped by a group of 12 heavily armed gunmen in Kogi state. The hostages were seized at their residence in the Crusher area, located on the outskirts of Lokoja. All three victims were released unharmed on 14 March. In addition, a Syrian national was kidnapped by unknown gunmen from a construction site in the Toto local government area of Nasarawa state on 10 March. The gunmen are reported to have frightened off onlookers by firing shots in the air before kidnapping the foreign national. Further details regarding the status of the victim are currently unavailable.

Nigeria, 8 March 2015: On 8 March 2015, media reported that an Israeli national, who was abducted in Lagos, Nigeria, had been released. The victim was abducted by armed assailants while travelling by car to the Murtala Muhammed International Airport. The victim was then taken to an unidentified rural location. The kidnappers later demanded a ransom

of US$500,000. An unknown ransom amount, noted as being below the initial asking amount, was subsequently paid by the victim's employers. The victim has since left Nigeria. The dates of the kidnapping and release were not disclosed.

Piracy

Indonesia, 9 March 2015: A fuel tanker, Singa Berlian, was subject to a short-term hijacking incident by seven armed pirates approximately 50km south of Pulau Repong, which forms part of the Riau Islands province. The pirates boarded the vessel, tied up the crew and transferred fuel from the tanker to another ship. Before leaving, the pirates damaged the tanker's communication and navigation equipment. One crew member was injured during the incident.

Nigeria, 3 February 2015: Pirates boarded Malta-flagged oil tanker, Kalamos, while it was docked at the Qua Iboe port, located off the south eastern coast of Nigeria; the deputy captain was killed and two Greek and one Pakistani crew members were kidnapped. The vessel had a crew of 23 people as well as port security on-board at the time of the hijacking, which was conducted by 15 armed assailants. The three hostages were released in an unspecified location in Nigeria on 25 February; no details regarding the release have been made available.

Somalia, 25 February 2015: Four Thai sailors, who were held hostage for ransom for almost five years, were released in the Galmudug region of central Somalia. The sailors were abducted in 2010 when their vessel, the MV Prantalay 12, was seized by Somalia-based pirates. Six members of the original crew succumbed to illness and died while a further 14 crew members from Myanmar were released to the Puntland Maritime Police authorities and repatriated in May 2011. It is alleged that a ransom was paid to the kidnappers for the remaining hostages; however, the amount is undisclosed.

Somalia, 26 March 2015: According to reports released on 26 March, two Iranian fishing vessels were hijacked by suspected pirates in waters off Somalia's eastern coastline. The incidents were confirmed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which claimed that both vessels may have been involved in illegal fishing activities in Somalia's territorial waters. Details pertaining to the time and place of the attacks have not been made available.

Togo, 3 February 2015: According to reports released on 5 February, Chinese-owned fishing vessel, Lu Rong Yuan 917, was hijacked by unknown gunmen in Togo's territorial waters on 28 January. At least one person was killed during the attack, while three others were reported missing. Subsequent unconfirmed reports suggest that the vessel was recovered after being abandoned by the pirates on 3 February.

Meet the Specialist: Angus T

As a former officer in the Danish Armed Forces, Angus T has extensive experience in operating in volatile environments and the crisis management arena. Angus has handled KRE, extortion and wrongful detention cases around the world, and has strong operational experience in countries such as Afghanistan, Lebanon, Libya, Turkey and Syria. He has developed and implemented release and reintegration programs for hostages and detainees and has had extensive experience in dealing with and assisting the family members of hostages. He regularly interacts with law enforcement agencies and works closely with them in the conclusion of cases. In addition, Angus develops and delivers hostage survival training, pre-deployment briefing programs and Hostile Environment Awareness Training (HEAT) courses to military personnel, corporations, NGOs, journalists and private individuals.

About us

red24's Special Risks advice, assistance and response services are retained by a number of insurance companies in the UK and USA. In the event of a kidnap, hijack, extortion or wrongful detention incident covered by one of our partners, Insureds will receive expert practical advice and assistance from red24, who are always on call to provide whatever help the Insured requires. red24 not only help Insureds achieve the possible release of the insured person, we also provide risk management and pre- and post-loss consultancy. As a policyholder, Insureds will have access to red24 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and will be issued with a number to call in the event of an emergency.

red24

red24 is a leading crisis management specialist. Founded in 2000, red24 provides security information, advice, consultancy and assistance services to corporate entities, private clients and insurance providers across the world. Our team has an unparalleled reputation for providing a comprehensive range of risk management solutions, both to individuals wishing to protect themselves and their families and to companies wanting to minimise the risks to their personnel, operations, reputation and profitability. Our experienced, multi-disciplinary team of experts is ready to help you, your company and your employees 24 hours a day, seven days a week. red24 has operating experience in over 120 countries worldwide and the capability to physically support any organisation across the globe within 24 hours.

Our Special Risks team is led by Jack Cloonan, formerly of Clayton Consultants, and comprises a high-quality team of highly-skilled professionals. Selected for their experience in crisis management, KRE response and negotiation, security management and implementation of risk mitigation strategies, team members have been drawn from various fields, including the military, law enforcement and the intelligence services, and each team member has approximately 15 years of experience in crisis handling.

The red24 Special Risks team is supported by red24's 24/7 Crisis Response Management (CRM) Centre and its multilingual team of analysts and security experts.

Liberty

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• Businesses with traveling employees

• Families

Territory: Worldwide

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