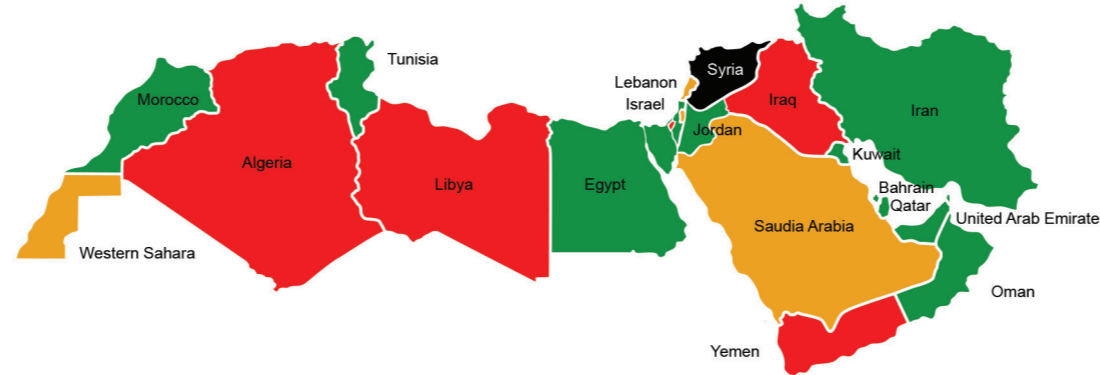


Algeria

- A heightened kidnapping threat stems from criminal gangs and Islamist extremist groups; this is elevated in the north and north east of the country, as well as in the southern desert regions.
- More than 300 kidnapping incidents occur annually, the majority of which affect locals.
- Incidents in the northern regions are generally criminally and financially motivated; however, Islamist extremist elements maintain an operational presence in these areas, and sporadically conduct kidnappings.
- The risk to foreign nationals in particular is most elevated in the south, where Islamist extremist group, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and affiliate/aligned groups maintain strong operational bases; these groups are known to specifically target foreigners, particularly Western nationals.
- Ransom demands and settlements vary in Algeria, with payments generally ranging from US\$30,000 to US\$600,000. Demands frequently involve political/other concessions.
- However, AQIM and aligned groups have demanded as much as US\$25 million in past high-profile cases involving Western nationals. In these instances, settlement figures of between US\$3 million and US\$10 million have been reported

On 21 September 2014, French national and holidaymaker, Herve Gourdel, was kidnapped while hiking in the Djurdjura National Park in Tizi Ouzou province, east of Algiers. Little-known extremist group, Jund al-Khilafa (Soldiers of the Caliphate), reportedly an AQIM offshoot, released a video claiming responsibility for the kidnapping. Stating that it was a reprisal for French involvement in air strikes against Islamic State (IS) targets in Iraq and Syria; the group threatened Gourdel's imminent execution should these actions continue. On 24 September, an online video was released purporting showing Gourdel's execution by beheading.



Iraq

- High countrywide kidnapping risk, which is currently further elevated in certain areas due to the upsurge in conflict between Islamic State (IS) militants and federal and/or Kurdish security forces since June 2014.
- Overall kidnap risk stems from criminal and Islamist extremist groups; locals are predominantly affected, although foreign nationals remain high-value targets.
- The risk is highest in the central and northern governorates, excluding the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)-administered region. Although also marginally reduced, the threat extends to the southern governorates, including Basra.
- The number of Western nationals kidnapped in Iraq in recent years has been fairly low; the majority of incidents involving foreigners have affected non-Iraqi Arab nationals from the wider region.
- General ransom demands range between US\$65,000 and US\$300,000. Ransom demands in high-profile cases involving foreign nationals have reached between US\$2 million and US\$10 million, with settlement amounts undisclosed.
- Reported settlement figures for locals have fallen between US\$65,000 and US\$150,000; however, settlements of as much as US\$800,000 have been reported.

On 11 June 2014, 46 Turkish nationals comprising civilians, diplomatic personnel (including Turkey's consul general) and soldiers were kidnapped from Turkey's consulate-general in Mosul, Ninewa governorate, during an IS advance on the city. Turkish officials confirmed on 20 September 2014 that all 46 hostages were released unharmed. Details pertaining to the release have not been forthcoming; authorities have stated that they were freed during a covert military operation and no ransom was paid, while unconfirmed reports indicate that a prisoner exchange may have secured the deal.

Libya

- Kidnapping activity has continued to increase significantly since the overthrow of the former Muammar al-Gaddafi regime in 2011, with an upsurge in incidents reported in 2014.
- Perpetrators include former rebel and militant groups, criminal gangs, Islamist extremists and region- and city-based militia groups.
- The risk extends to both local and foreign nationals. Foreigners are considered high-value targets and face the most elevated threat in Benghazi and the capital, Tripoli, where scores of kidnappings of foreigners have been reported in 2014.
- Information regarding ransom demands and settlements in Libya is sparse; however, unconfirmed reports indicate that demands of as much as US\$8 million have been made in high-profile cases involving foreign nationals.
- In addition, a demand of US\$830,000 for the dependent of a prominent local has been confirmed; anecdotal evidence suggests that demands and settlement figures for locals would generally be lower.
- The average demand for a foreign hostage is believed to be approximately US\$1 million; although average settlement amounts are undisclosed, a payment of over US\$1 million for an Italian national was reported in November 2014.

Italian national, Marco Vallisa, was kidnapped in Zuwarah, in the north western Nuqat al Khams district, on 5 July 2014. An employee of Italian construction company, Modena Piacentini, Vallisa was seized along with two colleagues; his colleagues were both released immediately after the incident. Vallisa was only released on 13 November. Details regarding his release remain undisclosed; however, unverified reports indicate that a payment of US\$1.25 million was made.

Syria

- The kidnapping risk is rated extreme; this is mirrored by a high incident rate involving local and foreign nationals.
- Threat stems from non-state armed groups, Islamist extremists, government-aligned armed factions, as well as criminal and bandit groups, which are motivated by various financial, political and religious agendas.
- Foreigners, especially Western nationals, are considered high-value targets. Western journalists and aid workers have been targeted specifically by non-state armed groups, including Islamist extremist groups, such as IS and the al-Nusra Front, in 2014. Thousands of locals have also been kidnapped since the start of the conflict.
- Nationals of regional states viewed as being supportive of the regime (Iran and certain Lebanese groups) face a higher risk of being executed or tortured if captured by anti-government groups.
- The average ransom demand for foreign nationals is US\$1 million; however, demands of US\$6.6 million, US\$15 million and US\$132 million have been reported in high-profile cases in 2014. Ransom demands for Syrian nationals range from US\$2,000 to US\$20,000.
- Settlement figures are difficult to confirm; however, anecdotal evidence suggests that payments for foreign nationals have ranged between US\$75,000 and US\$600,000.

As of December 2014, the Islamic State (IS) executed five kidnapped Western nationals in Syria. The US and UK hostages (aid workers and journalists) were all beheaded in separate incidents since August, in retaliation for the launch of air strikes by a US-led military coalition in Iraq and Syria. Despite the clear purported ideological motivations, IS reportedly made ransom demands for several of the victims prior to their executions. It is unclear how many Western nationals are still being held by the group; however, reports indicate that a 26-year-old female US aid worker remains in their custody, and a ransom payment of US\$6.6 million has been demanded to secure her release. In addition, a 43-year-old British photographer and correspondent is also being held hostage by IS in Syria.

Yemen

- With the exception of the Socotra archipelago, Yemen's high kidnapping risk extends throughout the country.
- The threat stems from local tribal groups that abduct foreigners for political concessions and financial rewards, as well as Islamist extremist groups that orchestrate kidnappings for ransom to finance terrorist activity and draw attention to their ideological agenda.
- Kidnapping affects local and foreign nationals. In 2014, foreign aid workers and diplomatic personnel have been particularly affected by kidnapping; nonetheless, a high percentage of kidnappings are opportunistic and, as such, the risk of being targeted extends to all foreign nationals operating in the country.
- No area is immune; although boasting the highest security levels in the country, dozens of foreigners have been kidnapped in the capital, Sanaa, in 2014.
- Average ransom demands can go up to US\$100,000 for locals; however, demands for foreign nationals are generally at least US\$1 million.
- Demands in high-profile cases involving foreigners have reached US\$17 million, with settlements of as much as US\$4 million reported.
- The average settlement figure for foreigners is around US\$1 million; however, settlements of several hundred thousand US dollars have been confirmed in 2014.

On 26 July 2014, a British national who was kidnapped by unidentified gunmen in Sanaa in mid-February was released unharmed. His release was ostensibly the result of negotiations between the government and tribal intermediaries. Unconfirmed reports, which are denied by the British Foreign Office (FCO), indicate that a ransom of US\$240,000 may have been paid, and/or that al-Qaeda-linked militants were released in exchange for the hostage.



General

- There is a low threat of kidnapping in Israel; however, the risk levels are elevated in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, as well as along the shared borders with the Gaza Strip, Egypt and Lebanon.
- Outside of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, criminal kidnap gangs are known to operate in urban centres such as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem; there have been a number of high-profile kidnap for ransom cases involving Israeli businesspeople in recent years.

Gaza Strip

- Subject to a high kidnapping threat, stemming from numerous anti-Israeli and anti-Western armed groups which are motivated to conduct kidnappings for financial, ideological and political reasons.
- Kidnapping risk is also elevated along the Egypt-Israel border. Kidnapping gangs based in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula actively target African refugees seeking entry into Israel from Egypt. Through conspirators in Israel, the perpetrators subsequently extort large sums from the families of victims in return for their release.
- Despite the ongoing threat in the Gaza Strip, the incident rate has remained low, with few kidnappings involving foreign nationals reported in recent years. Israeli security forces and rival political groupings remain primary targets.
- The risk increases during periods of intra-Palestinian conflict, conflict with Israel, and when the territory is affected by general insecurity and lawlessness.

West Bank

- Moderate kidnapping threat, which stems from Palestinian militant groups and their supporters which are active in the territory.
- The threat to foreign nationals increases in areas outside of the territory's primary cities and towns, including Bethlehem, Jericho, Ramallah, Hebron and Nablus, as well as if independent travel is conducted, particularly at night.
- Few kidnap incidents affecting foreign nationals in recent times; however, concerns remain that the overall threat could increase in the event of a breakdown in security in the territory or during future periods of political instability.
- Majority of past incidents affecting foreign nationals have been related to domestic disputes; foreigners have been kidnapped in order to force the authorities to acquiesce to specific political demands. Journalists, aid workers and other foreign nationals operating in the West Bank are subject to an elevated risk.