

MEXICORISKFLASH

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Kidnapping spikes

Mexico is going through a new phase of insecurity that affects all segments of society. The Mexican government's efforts to curtail drug trafficking have been successful in capturing, jailing and extraditing several top cartel leaders. But the government's drug war has provoked counter attacks by drug cartels and driven criminal gangs to turn to kidnapping as an easier and more profitable business than drug trafficking. The kidnapping industry in Mexico has become so profitable that current and former police officers have started their own kidnapping groups.



A false sense of security

Mexicans at risk of getting kidnapped have fortified their residences, hired bodyguards and started using armored vehicles for their daily movements. Unfortunately, due to the high threat levels, this type of traditional security is not enough. It is a false sense of security. Security must be based on the ability to recognize threats, analyze risks and implement crisis-management plans.

Quick facts

35%

Increase in the number of kidnappings from 2006 to 2007

8%

Kidnap victims in Mexico who end up getting killed by their captors

3,000

Estimated number of kidnappings in Mexico during 2007

2,633

Number of murders tied to organized crime from January to August 2008

249

Number of military and police officers killed in the line of duty from January to August 2008

26

Number of Mexican citizens kidnapped in San Diego and transported to Tijuana in 2007

An armored vehicle draws unneeded attention by indicating that the passengers are members of the economic or political elite. For kidnap gangs, it is an easy way to identify a potential high-value target. An armored vehicle is designed to protect against an armed attack and enable the inhabitants to escape unharmed. This protection is lost when the doors are opened and passengers are exposed to a superiorly armed force.

Advice: If an armored vehicle is used as a primary mode of transportation, it is essential to have a well-trained driver and bodyguard. Security can be enhanced with an advance team or counter-attack vehicle. The advance team can lead and clear routes of potential dangers, and the counter-attack vehicle can engage any potential threat, allowing the armored vehicle time to concentrate on breaking contact and escaping from a potential threat. It is also important to vary your routes and have primary and alternate routes on every movement.

Training pays off

Traditional bodyguards are trained to react during an attack and not necessarily to conduct advance planning, which reduces the risk of being kidnapped. The majority of kidnapers are trained and equipped to overpower the security provided by a traditional bodyguard. A true security professional will always be aware of common tactics of local threats. This knowledge enables a security detail team to take preventive measures and react appropriately when encountering a threat.

Advice: Hire a security professional who has the proper training to analyze and reduce threats and, in case of an incident, react according to the circumstances. All security professionals should get refresher training that informs them about the evolving tactics of criminal elements in their areas of operation.

Knowledge is power during ransom negotiations

During a true kidnap for ransom, the kidnapers' main objective is to make easy money without putting themselves at risk. Kidnapers want to reach an agreement with the victim's family members where money is exchanged for the victim's release. In the majority of cases, if negotiations are properly carried out, the victim is released without a problem. In a true kidnap for ransom incident, kidnapers rarely kill their victims.

Advice: Consult a professional kidnap negotiator who can properly analyze risks according to the kidnapping's unique circumstances. The kidnapers' typical modus operandi and estimate of the victim's wealth are key factors during kidnap negotiations. You must demand a proof of life when notified of a kidnapping to make sure you are talking to the right group and before delivering an agreed-upon ransom to make certain the victim is still safe and sound.

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