

CRISIS MANAGEMENT - CONTINGENCY PLANNING

THE URBAN KIDNAP GROUP - TACTICS AND COUNTERMEASURES

INTRODUCTION

This document outlines tactics employed by urban kidnap groups and describes those countermeasures available to potential targets.

Measures to counter the tactics of the urban kidnap group have, as their aim, the reduction of the risk to persons being selected as a target and, if abducted, an increase in their chance of survival during the abduction stage. Despite regional differences, the basic sequence of action of urban kidnap groups, not only in carrying out their initial target selection but also in their detailed follow-up surveillance, is normally the same. Measures to be taken by potential victims to avoid abduction are also basically similar.

Even in an area where the threat of kidnap is high, a potential target who is a resident is unlikely to be at a high risk of attack if he or she has sound knowledge of the tactics of the local kidnap groups and adopts the necessary countermeasures. Such potential targets should be habitually suspicious and should know, in advance, what immediate action to take if an immediate threat to their safety is identified.

Countermeasures include the denying of information helpful to the planning of an abduction and the identification of attempts at surveillance before attempted abduction takes place. However, despite the basic similarities it should be noted that the information and advice given in this document is general in nature; it is intended only as an introduction to a subject which requires detailed study by and on behalf of those persons who are assessed as being at risk.

TARGET SELECTION

A person is often selected as a potential hostage target by an urban group either because of his or her high personal profile (generally as a result of perceived personal wealth or status) or because of their membership of and value to a successful and high-profile commercial organisation: the release of such a hostage is likely to command a high ransom payment. Although the majority of such kidnaps are carried out for monetary gain, the abduction of a high-profile national or political figure is sometimes undertaken with the intention of making demands with political overtones, such as the release of convicted terrorists. It will be appreciated, therefore, that persons who for whatever reason are potential targets of such kidnap groups should maintain as low a personal profile as possible. This action is essential when such persons are living in or visiting areas where the threat of kidnap is assessed as being high.

If travelling in a rural area of a Third World country, a victim of an abduction may not have been specifically targeted because of any recognition of perceived wealth or status, either personal or otherwise: the incident may have occurred solely because the victim is a foreigner and in the area at the time a decision is made by a group to take such action; such decision may have been made in order to publicise a cause and to bring pressure to bear on First World opinion. In such circumstances, hostages will normally be taken in groups. All persons intending to travel to rural areas of Third World countries in which kidnapping of foreigners is known to be a current threat should therefore be advised accordingly. No further reference is made in this document to kidnap in Third World rural areas.

INFORMATION GATHERING BY INDIRECT MEANS

After selecting their potential target, kidnappers attempt to collect enough information by indirect means and with minimum risk to themselves in order to determine whether or not the person selected is, in fact, a suitable and safe target for attack: it is necessary for them to determine when, where, and

how the kidnap operation could best be carried out.

There are many sources from which useful information can be gained by the group. Daily newspapers, magazines, and television news programmes provide pictures of victims and other personal details of potential targets. Public telephone books provide addresses. Internal office documents such as internal directories and publications of commercial organisations and chambers of commerce are particularly rewarding; they often supply photographs and details of personal addresses.

Sports and social clubs also publish lists and information: club circulars provide a forecast of events, as well as the names of individuals responsible for organising or hosting activities during the year. Universities can provide a rich source of information, particularly the names of those students who are closely associated with a targeted family. The local church can also often provide useful information.

Additional sources of information can include:

- Office documents and diaries.
- Office staff, including personal secretaries.
- Family and friends of a potential target.
- Domestic staff.
- The garage staff servicing the target's car.
- Travel agents.
- Staff of favourite restaurants of the target.
- Doctors, dentists, or their reception staffs.
- School staff.

It will therefore be appreciated, from study of these examples, that any person or organisation connected with the selected target, be it on an occasional or regular basis, is a potential and indirect source of information to a kidnapper. Although such information may not be imparted willingly or deliberately, much detail is often made available unwittingly. Care should therefore be taken by potential targets to ensure that the principles of information security are strictly enforced; in particular, the necessary action should be taken in connection with the handling and distribution of all information concerning personal routines, whether relating to business, social or family activities.

INFORMATION GATHERING BY DIRECT MEANS

Following the gathering of information by indirect means, further action by the kidnappers may be necessary to obtain more precise and detailed information, either by open and direct means or by trickery and deception. The risk is small to the kidnapper but marginally higher than by the initial and indirect means described in the previous paragraphs. **Members of the group will make every effort not to increase the alertness of the target or of his or her family. Tactics employed may include the following:**

- **Telephone Enquiries:** Kidnappers may make direct telephone enquiries to home or office to obtain information about the target's movements: household or office staff may not wish to offend a caller for fear that a complaint will subsequently be made to their employer about their behaviour. Telephone enquiries can therefore be a valuable source of information.
- **Staff Infiltration:** Kidnappers may attempt, sometimes by applying coercion, to obtain direct

assistance from members of staff employed by their selected target. If time is available, they may also seek to infiltrate one of their supporters into the target's employ: for example, the Tupamaros in Uruguay and the Shining Path in Peru have obtained such assistance from domestic staff, as have the Irish Republican Army. Domestic staff whose families are threatened by kidnap groups are likely to put family loyalty before loyalty to their employer.

- **Personal Visits:** Visits may be made to the target's house: for example, "plumbers" visited General Dozier's apartment before his kidnap; the Tupamaros inspected Sir Geoffrey Jackson's car while it was being serviced in order to gain information about its defences.

SURVEILLANCE TECHNIQUES

Kidnappers are likely to watch the home and the office of the target for some weeks and to take photographs: their surveillance party may disguise themselves as roadmen or joggers, and as mothers with push-chairs. Surveillance is also carried out by sympathisers at social clubs and public venues. Women are very useful in this phase since their presence is likely to arouse less suspicion. The aim is to become familiar with the target, and with his or her family and environment.

Such surveillance may often occupy weeks and, during this surveillance, the most important information sought by the group usually includes:

- **Vehicle Details:** Colour, make, registration number.
- **Car Parking:** Place, guarding arrangements, entrance and exit locks in use.
- **Social Routine:** Places frequently visited; points of call, including shopping areas, sports, social and religious venues.
- **Journey:** Departure and arrival times; routes taken; identifiable travel patterns.
- **Personal Information:** Personal description, including clothing.

At this stage the group may be assessing the accessibility and vulnerability of more than one potential target: they seek minimum risk. Targets with no identifiable routines and who apply sound personal security principles are normally discarded in favour of a more vulnerable target: for example, kidnappers in Guatemala in 1981 told their female victim that they had first examined the routines of her father and her brother; both had been alert and well protected and posed too many risks "so we took you" they said, "because your security was poor".

However, even if a person is well protected by security guards, as was Signor Aldo Moro, it may still be possible for such a person to be abducted:

- **Aldo Moro attended Mass daily at the same church and at the same time:** he thus had an established and easily identifiable routine.
- **A flower-seller was absent from the street:** the Red Brigades had sabotaged his vehicle to keep him out of the way and his absence was not noticed: had the suspicions of a guard been roused and had he, as a result, checked the street thoroughly, he might have seen the abduction team in waiting further up the same street.

To counter the threat of direct surveillance, it may be appropriate for the entire household of a person assessed to be at risk (including teenagers, domestic staff and personal drivers) to carry out a realistic counter-observation campaign, watching out especially for:

- People loitering near the residence, especially at the beginning and end of normal working hours.
- Unknown vehicles parked nearby, with one or more apparently innocent-looking persons inside.

- Unusual callers at the residence, or unexpected telephone callers making enquiries about one or other of the occupants.
- Vehicles or motorcycles apparently following members of the family while driving, especially if observed more than once.

A diary should be kept readily accessible in the home. In it should be recorded any suspicious incidents, with details and dates, including the registration number, type and colour of suspect vehicles and motorcycles. If a kidnap subsequently takes place, these details may be of critical importance in helping to identify the kidnappers.

ABDUCTION TACTICS

It must be assumed that the representatives of the kidnap group responsible for snatching the victim and transporting him or her to an agreed rendezvous or hideout are armed; such a group, usually five or more in number, sometimes includes women. They operate in stolen vehicles, often with false number-plates. An abduction team may go to elaborate lengths to achieve surprise: for example, in an incident in Guatemala City, some nineteen members of a gang posed as policemen and abducted their male victim from an apartment block, giving the impression to witnesses that they were arresting him.

Research by Control Risks of the 2,580 kidnaps worldwide, recorded during the period 1980 to 1988 shows that 47 (1.8 per cent) were injured during the abduction and that only 32 hostages (1.2 per cent) were killed during the total period of the incident. The people most likely to be shot during a kidnap attempt are chauffeurs or security guards, or a victim who resists unsuccessfully, particularly if an attempt is made at self-protection by using a personal weapon. The amount of force directed against the victim will normally be in direct proportion to the extent to which he or she resists or endangers the attackers. If weapons are used against attackers, weapons will be used in response: if the attackers are frightened, the danger to the victim increases dramatically.

Research also indicates that the majority of kidnaps take place either inside the residence, immediately outside the office, or when travelling in a private vehicle on these open road between the two points. A comparative breakdown of these three most likely places of attack, expressed in percentage terms, is as follows:

- **At the Residence:**

- Inside the home - 29%
- Immediately outside - 20%

- **At the Office:**

- Inside the office - 9%
- Immediately outside - 10%

- **On the Road:**

- Between office and residence - 22%
- Travel on other local journeys - 10%

The most probable abduction times are between 0800 and 0900, 1700 and 1900, and 2230 and midnight. These are the periods during which a selected target is most likely to have been seen

regularly travelling along an identified route at an unchanging time and in a vehicle the details of which are also known.

Additional points to note in connection with the possible abduction tactics of urban kidnap groups are as follows:

- If the target is travelling in a vehicle, the normal method of attack is to block the road with one or more other vehicles, then to open the doors of the target's car, using crowbars if necessary, and bodily remove the victim into a waiting getaway car; however, sometimes the victim's car is used as the getaway vehicle.
- Alternatively, the group may use deception. For example, on the occasion of the kidnap of Mr Don Tidey in Ireland in 1983, what appeared to be a roadblock manned by police was in fact an ambush mounted by members of the Irish Republican Army: they took him from his car, leaving behind his daughter who he was taking to school. One of the reasons he hesitated to drive out of the ambush was fear for her safety.

POST-ABDUCTION TACTICS

Immediately following an abduction, the victim must anticipate rough treatment: for example, he or she may be forced to lie flat in the vehicle; either a blow to the head or drugs may be used to keep the victim comatose. Efforts to resist the attackers at this stage when physically dominated by them will encourage physical punishment to be inflicted. A hood will normally be used to mask the victim and possibly a watch will be removed, even at this early stage. A preliminary search may also be made to identify whether the victim is carrying a weapon or is in possession of a homing device or other suspicious object.

Whatever vehicle is used by the abduction team as the getaway vehicle, it is likely that it will be abandoned and exchanged for another after a short distance. The victim can therefore expect to be driven in a series of different vehicles, probably up to a maximum of three. The route selected may be deliberately tortuous, not only to frustrate possible surveillance but also to disorientate the victim.