

OUTREACH OPPORTUNITY: Western-Based Friends and Family May be Forced to Pay Ransom for African Migrants to Criminal Entities With Possible Terrorist Ties

It is likely that US or other Western-based friends and/or family members of African migrants who fall prey to the kidnapping-for-ransom (KFR) schemes of Libya-based criminal networks with possible terrorist ties, may be forced to make ransom payments. Such scenarios provide first responders and community leaders with outreach and engagement opportunities to potentially assist intergovernmental authorities and the international community in identifying the modus operandi, participants involved in this illicit activity, terrorism-financing leads, and the relationships between criminal networks and terrorist organizations. This assessment is based on reporting of the large and growing number of African migrants being trafficked,^a exploited, and held for ransom in Libya by organized criminal networks.

SCOPE: This product promotes awareness and coordination among intergovernmental authorities and the international community, including law enforcement, immigration, customs, legal entities, and NGOs, to combat the complexities of KFR schemes abroad.

According to the International Organization for Migration, as of April 2017, an estimated 20,000 refugees and migrants were being held by criminal gangs in irregular detention centers in Libya. Some of these Libya-based criminal gangs and networks may be partnering with terrorist groups to exploit the vulnerability of migrants for revenue gain and to also smuggle recruits into Libya from sub-Saharan Africa. Many victims of these criminal networks begin their journey by agreeing to be smuggled^b into Europe^c and the Middle East but find themselves deceived, coerced, or forced into an exploitative situation, for labor or sex, during transit and held for ransom—resulting in their friends and family being contacted for financial assistance.

- In Late March 2017, three individuals were arrested in Kenya for facilitating the travel of ISIS recruits from Kenya and Somalia to Libya, as well as facilitating illegal immigrants to enter Europe, according to open-source reporting. Also, in early April, four individuals were arrested in Kenya for human trafficking, terrorist financing, and smuggling at a refugee camp in eastern Kenya. According to

^a Human trafficking is a crime involving the exploitation of someone for the purposes of compelled labor or a commercial sex act through the use of force, fraud, or coercion. If the person is younger than 18 years old and is induced to perform a commercial sex act, it is a crime regardless of whether there is any force, fraud, or coercion.

^b Human smuggling involves the provision of a service—typically transportation or fraudulent documents—to an individual who voluntarily seeks to enter a foreign country illegally.

^c Europol estimates that more than 90 percent of the migrants traveling to the EU use facilitation services, which in most cases were provided by criminal groups.



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Kenyan authorities, the subjects were facilitating refugee movement to Nairobi, Kenya, for document purposes to enable them to travel to Europe and Canada.

- As of early April 2017, heightened trafficking awareness facilitated international collaboration among African authorities on how terrorist organizations are linked to Magafe—a notorious Libya-based criminal network believed to be involved in kidnapping, extortion, smuggling, and trafficking in 12 countries, mostly in northern and eastern Africa. While the exact relationship between Magafe and terrorist groups remains unclear, investigators determined that the Magafe network uses 10 routes to transport terrorist recruits from Kenya to Syria and Libya via land, air, and sea, according to open-source reporting.
- Also as of early April 2017, Kenyan authorities believed that illegal immigrants transiting through Libya were kidnapped for ransom by the Magafe network and purportedly released on payment of \$2,000 to \$7,000. This ransom was transferred through hawalas in Kenya to Mogadishu and later to ISIS. Some of the victims held in Tripoli have been asking for financial assistance from their relatives, according to open-source reporting.

OUTLOOK:

The international dimension of most criminal- and possible terrorist-related KFR operations involves partnerships and collaboration among governments and law enforcement. Many KFR operations, and the compressed time frames resulting from payment deadlines, can hamper international cooperation and make coordination difficult to achieve. Law enforcement and international partnerships play a vital role in identifying and pursuing KFR operations, and distinguishing between terrorist and criminally motivated kidnapping remains difficult, particularly in the initial stages of an operation. What begins as a smuggling situation may develop into a trafficking and kidnapping situation.

It is vital for first responders to build rapport and trust with US and other Western-based ethnic communities for timely information gathering on overseas kidnappings. Some friends and relatives of victims residing in these communities may be wary of or distrust law enforcement because of previous interactions with authorities abroad, which were perceived to abuse their power or be corrupt, and may choose to deal directly with the kidnapers out of fear that harm may come to the victim(s) if authorities are notified. Outreach by first responders and community leaders, in particular to communities with large ethnic populations from geographic regions with high kidnapping rates who may know a friend or relative who are victims of KFR operations, provides better insight into:

- 1) A more accurate number of how many individuals are being kidnapped.
- 2) How the ransom proceeds are being sent abroad.
- 3) How criminal organizations are colluding with terrorists.
- 4) Identifying if there are any US or other Western connections.



FIRST RESPONDER'S TOOLBOX

In addition, there is a need for financial investigative skills and good working relationships with the financial sector, given that ransom payments are typically deposited in bank accounts designated by the kidnapers or that the money flows through unlicensed or alternative remittance systems, such as hawalas or virtual currency. Third-party intermediaries are also often employed as negotiators.

First responders who are advised of a KFR operation overseas may rely on a variety of testimonial evidence from friends and relatives, and/or documentary evidence from financial ransom transactions and text messages, to assist in building a case. Assuming that the friend or relative does not have telephonic access to the victim, the following list may provide assistance in collecting pertinent information from the friends and relatives who were directed to provide ransom payment.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: The following are a series of questions, collated from government and open sources, which may assist authorities in identifying individuals involved in KFR activities; in discovering terrorism-financing leads, the modus operandi, and participants; and in detecting relationships between criminal networks and terrorist organizations. The information obtained from the interview will probably determine the extent of collaboration needed among law enforcement and governments for follow up reporting and further vetting. Due care should be taken in collecting and maintaining the information pertaining to the victims of these crimes. These victims, in certain circumstances, may be eligible for "T" and "U" visas related to prosecutions, which would afford special protection related to this information. In addition, much of the information requested is sensitive personally identifiable information, which should be held securely and disseminated on a need-to-know basis.

INTERVIEWER QUESTIONS FOR THOSE WHO PROVIDE RANSOM PAYMENT:

- Name:
- DOB:
- POB City:
- POB Country:
- Sex:
- Citizenship(s):
- Phone Number(s):
- What is their relationship to victim?
- How and when did they become aware of the individual being held for ransom?
- Did they contact other authorities regarding this matter?
- How did the kidnapper provide proof of life for victim (to help ensure that this is not a virtual kidnapping scam)?



FIRST RESPONDER'S TOOLBOX

- Have they confirmed that the victim is missing or being held for ransom through an additional victim's family or friends? If yes,
 - Who?
 - What is their relationship to the victim?
 - Where did the victim stay in the foreign country?
 - Names of friends/family and contact information of all relevant parties.
 - Names or identifiers of smugglers.
 - What was the victim's route of travel and mode?
 - Did the victim report any unusual contacts?

IDENTIFYING INFORMATION OF THE VICTIM:

- Name:
- DOB:
- POB City:
- POB Country:
- Race:
- Sex:
- Citizenship(s):
- Nationality:
- Current or last known location?
- Any information on the health status of the victim?
- Photo of the victim?
- Passport information?
- Does the victim have a phone? If yes, what type of phone?
 - Cell-phone number(s)
 - E-mail address(es)
 - Social-networking accounts
- Names and contact information for victim's family member or close associates?

RANSOM QUESTIONS:

- When did they receive the ransom demand?
- What method of communication did they receive the ransom demand through? (phone, text, e-mail, secure-messaging application, or some other means of communication)
- What was the cell phone number(s), text, or e-mail address(es) used to demand ransom?
- Were there any voicemails, text, or e-mails saved?
- What electronic device and number did you use to communicate?
- Who spoke, what was said, and in what order? Establish a timeline.
- How much money was demanded?
- How much money was sent?



FIRST RESPONDER'S TOOLBOX

- When was the money sent?
- Was a payment inside the US or other Western-based country?
- Which remittance system was used to send the money (hawala or wire, for example)?
- Any specific instructions/directives on who or where to send the money?
- Do they know the name of the hawala or the location of the hawala broker?
- What language(s) was spoken?
- What type of accent?
- Was there any background noise (music, other languages being spoken, for example)?

OTHER QUESTIONS: If the kidnapped victim was released and has reestablished contact with the relative or friend who assisted in the ransom payment:

- Why did they depart their home country?
- What route was used to smuggle them to their destination country?
- Where and when were the victims kidnapped and where were they taken?
- Were there others being held hostage with them? Describe the circumstances.
- What languages were being spoken?
- Are they aware of any other victims?
- Do they know if any of the kidnapers have connections to associates in the US or other Western countries?
- Describe the types of exploitation/trafficking they witnessed/experienced?
- Do the victims recall any names or identifiers of the kidnapers?
- Have they contacted any other authorities regarding this matter?

ONLINE RESOURCES:

- For KFR incidents, contact your local FBI Field Office available at www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices
- Human Smuggling and Trafficking Center available at <https://www.ice.gov/human-smuggling-trafficking-center>
- Migrant Smuggling Networks Joint Europol-INTERPOL Report Executive Summary May 2016 available at <https://www.europol.europa.eu>
- Evidential Issues in Trafficking in Persons Cases 2017 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime International Organization for Migration available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2017/Case_Digest_Evidential_Issues_in_Trafficking.pdf





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