



RANSOM KIDNAPPING AND ITS REPERCUSSIONS ON COUNTER-TERRORISM EFFORTS

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At the start of the American war in Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda was one of the major terrorist organizations that began kidnapping for ransom. With the rise of maritime piracy and the subsequent kidnapping of sailors and large ship captains for ransom, the phenomenon spread throughout the world and was identified as one of the primary sources of funding for terrorist organizations.

Organized Crime

Ransom Kidnapping has evolved into an organized crime or a full-fledged mafia, beginning with kidnapping, then negotiations and mediator interference. It now has political and social implications, as well as a significant economic aspect, which has revived the kidnapping for ransom business and phenomenon. This crime directly jeopardizes people's lives, hostages and abductees. Thus, addressing it has become a highly sensitive issue that requires exceptional precision and complex considerations. It is intertwined with other issues; some are objective, others are not, but specifically with popular attitudes and public opinion, particularly in countries where these factors influence government decisions .

Thus, there is a dire need to reconsider and even denounce views that justify ransom payment under the pretext of protecting the abductee's life. It is worth noting that these views often arise on the European scene more than anywhere else, specifically among academics and intellectuals, drawing upon the fact that refusing to pay ransom puts people's lives at risk.

However, the vision is more accurate and balanced when it comes to the political aspect and government attitude. In other words, unlike academics, sentiment does not cloud the judgment and decisions of European politicians. One seminal book in this regard is

Joel Simon's We Want to Negotiate: The Secret World of Kidnapping, Hostages and Ransom .

It is also crucial to investigate the aspects and implications of the ransom kidnapping phenomenon, which has resulted in many negative phenomena that complicate or undermine counter-terrorism efforts, particularly once it has become a profitable, stand-alone business .

Regarding values and principles that supposedly govern policies and resolutions, the rise and persistence of ransom kidnapping ultimately creates ties between security services and terrorists. This means the absence of any animosity or fundamental conflict between terrorists and security services, which revokes the most important value in war.

Keys to Confrontation

Ransoms in general are a comparatively old phenomenon that started in the 1930s and flourished in the 1960s among European groups, such as ETA in Spain, the Red Army Faction (RAF) in Germany, and the Red Brigades in Italy. Undoubtedly, the resurgence of the phenomenon through al-Qaeda and ISIS is a sign that it needs to be addressed by all means without responding to terrorists or meeting their demands. Meanwhile, there are updates on the situation that must be addressed before it becomes difficult to manage, such as the rise of terrorist activity, particularly kidnappings, their concentration in specific regions such as Africa, Afghanistan, and Iran, as well as their targeting of a specific category of hostages. These updates adversely affect the counter-terrorism efforts, given that submitting to terrorists' demands results in the continuance of such a phenomenon, failure of countering efforts, and growth of terrorist activity and scope as long as ransoms yield huge profits.

European governments are comparatively more responsive and lenient in relation to ransom payment than the US and Britain. Americans are not completely blameless, but they are more astute when it comes to ransom payments. They reach an agreement through mediators, especially when hostages are taken in Iran or during piracy.

Ransom kidnapping is increasingly regarded as an indirect route to terrorist organizations because it ensures their survival and promotes the formation of new ones, particularly in light of the high unemployment and declining economies in African countries. The advantages gained from getting in touch with security services in countries that negotiate hostage releases with terrorists create friendly relationships

and understanding between terrorists and such security services. Ransoms may entice further terrorist groups to join the cause and access fresh, probably simpler funding sources. Many nations also think that by refusing to readily accept ransom payments, they are making life tough for terrorists.

Intertwining Aspects

The rise of ransom kidnapping in all its forms—the kidnapping of individuals, ships, or tankers—is inextricably linked to money. According to a 2014 UN report, ISIS earned between \$35 and \$45 million from kidnapping for ransom alone. Furthermore, between 2004 and 2012, \$120 million in ransom was paid to al-Qaeda, mostly in North Africa. There are several implications to such cash flows to terrorist organizations, especially with the complexities and difficulties that impede national and international counter-terrorism efforts, including:

1. The failure of counter-terrorism and extremism efforts is primarily due to political and security flaws in laws or procedures in some countries, particularly in European countries. In this regard, the financial or economic aspect is important, where the limitation of laws and procedures in some countries is essentially regarded as a kind of leniency with terrorists, whereas combating terrorism requires power and decisiveness. What exacerbates the situation is some countries' unwillingness to implement international resolutions and agreements aimed at cracking down on terrorist organizations within Europe itself.
2. In some cases, governments are held accountable for kidnappings for ransom. Terrorist organizations are occasionally funded by legitimate and legal economic entities, some of which are non-profit organizations, such as licensed charity associations. The work of these organizations makes it difficult to track down terrorist financing sources. Furthermore, acquiring new financing sources introduces new challenges to tracking and surveillance, undermining international CTF efforts.
3. Paying ransoms implies submission to terrorist organizations, which means that countries responding to such pressures act as if they are not involved in the fight against terrorism, or even pose as responsible international actors. This is especially astounding. So how are Arab and Muslim countries accused of supporting terrorism while some European countries openly do so? Despite the

importance of protecting citizens' lives, the increased kidnappings indicate that terrorists see these countries' stances as a huge weakness that will serve their interests.

4. There is a significant disparity in ransom amounts, indicating that terrorist organizations are managing this type of terrorism realistically. The amount demanded for ransom varies depending on the nature and importance of each hostage. Political or diplomatic hostages are not like ordinary citizens. Hostages taken in non-democratic countries differ from those taken in democratic or rich countries that value their citizens.
5. Terrorist organizations seek easier domains for kidnapping in light of the extensive international counter-terrorism efforts. As a result, they travel to Africa, which has become their primary target. This can be attributed to the prosecution of those responsible for this phenomenon in the Middle East, African countries' positive response to international counter-terrorism efforts, and the stability and coherence of some political regimes; additionally, domestic conditions in Africa facilitate kidnappings for African terrorists or terrorists looking for a safe environment to carry out their crimes. As a result, the chances of success appear to be high.

What Next?

Kidnappings have progressed from a casual to a professional practice. Terrorist organizations are now competing for kidnappings, as ransoms have become a significant source of funding. The estimated proceeds of this crime in 2020 were \$50 million. They enabled terrorist organizations to expand around the world, primarily in Africa. Furthermore, the process of paying a ransom gives terrorists political and moral authority. There is a certain level of implicit recognition when you negotiate with them as opposed to attacking them. Some countries logically deny paying any ransoms, which is partially true because they did so through mediation procedures rather than directly.

Nonetheless, because terrorist organizations' power is manifested in their economic capacities, the steady flow of financing them impedes counter-extremism measures.

Indeed, the rise in the number of kidnappings and terrorist organization' attempts to find safe havens for their operations demonstrate that negotiations between terrorists and governments have transformed these activities from a crime to a trade that sometimes serves the interests of powerful figures in the mediation process.

In addition to piracy on open seas and charges against charitable organizations, ransom kidnapping has grown to be a significant source of funding for terrorist groups; hence, rigorous adherence to globally endorsed counter-terrorism regulations is essential. Otherwise, these attempts will be fruitless for a number of reasons, including the fact that ransoms are enticing to terrorist groups and are one of the easiest ways to obtain finance. Terrorist groups like taking hostages from wealthy nations that are open to negotiating the release of their citizens .

Given their worries about the public opinion in Europe and the possibility of allegations of weakness and failure in front of their governments, the implied rationale for European countries to comply with terrorist demands for ransom can be understood domestically. As a result, they quickly pay the ransom and decide that doing so is preferable to killing the hostage. Practically speaking, submission to terrorists' demands is extremely serious as terrorism still afflicts countries that respond to terrorists. European citizens are even the most targeted.

As a result, Western countries in general and European ones in particular are faced with the moral dilemma of having to balance protecting the abductees' lives with adhering to all international anti-terrorism commitments. The international community has no choice but to vigorously combat the phenomena in order to dry up one of the wellsprings of the sources of terrorist finance, ransoms, as giving in to the demands of terrorists and outlaws has never decreased terrorist crimes and threats.