

Political Kidnapping An Operational Methodology

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Contents

Preamble	5
Kidnapping Operations:	6
Why was this method adopted?	
The Tactical Conditions for Political Kidnapping	
Conclusion	
About the Author	
About Policy Analysis	
About Gulf Research Center	
GRC Publications	

Preamble

The kidnapping of persons has its roots deep in Arab history, stemming from traditions of tribal or desert diplomacy. Indeed the taking of persons from other tribes (katifa - snatching or abduction) was, until relatively recently, a major feature of the region's intertribal warfare. The objective of this traditional activity was to apply pressure on hostile tribesmen by issuing demands, the fulfillment of which would lead to the safe return of their son or daughter. Demands would be, as they are today, financial, moral or political; although hostages would rarely be killed. Nevertheless, retention of the hostage for some years was not unusual. The kidnappings taking place in Irag today are ones far departed from the traditional practices of Arab (and indeed, other nations) tribal warfare which were governed by a strict protocol, ensuring decent, gentle and safe treatment of the captives. The brutality shown by Iraq's modern kidnappers makes this distinction clear.

Kidnapping Operations:

The activities of kidnapping and holding of persons are divided into several categories that can be defined on the basis of the identity of the party that carries out the kidnapping and holding operation, and on the basis of the goals to be realized through the kidnapping operation. Generally speaking, it may be said that there are three major categories of this type of activity, namely:

First: Personal Kidnapping Second: Organized Criminal Kidnapping Third: Organized Political Kidnapping

In this paper, we shall focus on the fundamentals of the third category of this type of activity.

During the past six months, the emergence of a new style has been recorded in the strategies of the Islamic/Jihadi armed organizations. Although this style was used extensively during the nineteen-seventies and eighties by a number groups associated with the Palestinian resistance and by organizations involved in the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), the fundamentalist organizations, particularly Al-Qaeda Islamic and organizationally / ideologically related groups, had not previously resorted to this method. Hence, the developments witnessed by the confrontation arenas in Iraq and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the past months, which are characterized by the use of kidnapping and holding of persons, is considered a new development that merits study and assessment.

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During the last four months (since March 2004), this activity came into the open for a second time, as groups that operate in Irag, claiming responsibility for these acts under the names of various Islamic/Jihadi organizations, staged kidnapping and sequestration operations in Irag in lieu of the previous method of summary executions at a site of attack. There are, no exact figures of the number of those who have been kidnapped in Iraq for political ends during this period, but the number may be put at twenty individuals of assorted nationalities during a period of two months. Generally speaking, kidnapping and sequestration operations have been conducted at a rate of ten cases per month. However, the kidnapping of foreign nationals in Iraq during the month of April 2004 registered the highest recorded rate ever of "individual kidnapping operations", when 43 foreign nationals were kidnapped in less than twenty days. The kidnapping and execution of an American citizen working in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia last June was a critical development. It signaled the intent of terrorists operating in the Kingdom to institute this same strategy of kidnapping and holding in the pursuit of political objectives, rather than those of material gain and criminality with which the world had, to some extent at least, become familiar.

Moreover, the criminal and personal kidnapping (for material gain, revenge, punishment or sexual assault) became a wide spread phenomenon in Iraq, shortly after the toppling of the regime in April 2003 and the resultant widespread collapse of security. Thus, the number of persons kidnapped by the *criminal* organizations as an immediate consequence of the security disorder and the absence of state authority has reached a daily rate that has far exceeded that of politically motivated operations. In most cases of criminal kidnapping the objective of the operation was precise, namely, for the purpose of obtaining a financial ransom in return for the release of the hostage. The revenue of this alien "industry" on society and the state has been estimated at tens of millions of dollars. The focus of these gangs' criminal activity has therefore shifted from the potentially hazardous conventional stealing and burglary, to the kidnap and holding of persons which has proved more efficient and provided an easy and secure source of the great material profit sought by these criminal groups. The phenomenon of the sale and exchange of hostages has also spread amongst criminal gangs operating in Irag, alongside and in co-operation with politically or religiously-motivated groups, within a framework of what has come to be known as "contractual kidnapping". Ganos mav however go beyond this by making an opportunistic capture of a hostage, subsequently offering them for sale to religio-political organizations, based on an assessment of the hostage's value. The result of this is that organizations have the option to secure a hostage, previously untargeted, and dispensing with the need to mount a capture operation.

Why was this method adopted?

Jihadi armed groups (the nature of which are responsible for the carrying out of attacks of this type) most commonly do not operate a public, political wing. The chief consequence of this is that there is no way to demonstrate the groups' continued existence, other than by committing more terrorist acts. The credibility of such

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organizations, their prominence in the landscape of international affairs and in the minds of men locally and nationally, is crucially dependent on their ability to carry out operations continuously and unceasingly. To stop operating for any period of time would be an indication of the authorities' success in neutralizing the ability of these groups to carry out their operations, and a practical declaration of the organization's collapse and demise. In the majority of cases, statements and declarations made by leaders of this type of organization are not taken seriously until after the organization has carried out a military/terrorist operation. It is therefore in the nature of these organizations to try to perform any type of operation in order to exhibit the ongoing survival of the organization and to preclude the other side from assuming or proclaiming victory.

Groups may resort to kidnapping of persons because it fulfills a terrorist organisation's broad strategic objectives as well as being a tactically advantageous method. These ideas can be summarized in the following points:

1. Winning "free publicity". This type of operation allows the terrorist organization to control the periods of time between initial kidnap, issue of demands, execution and release of remains, therefore enabling them to extend this time to achieve maximum publicity. This period of time may last for days and possibly for several weeks, during which the name, history, demands, and statements of the organization would constitute leader articles in the local media, those in the nation to which the hostage belongs, and possibly in the wider world. It comes as no surprise then, that this type of terrorist action is considered among the best methods for securing a wide spread media interest in the organization and introducing its identity to the public.

- 2 Obtaining money. This might be from an enemy of the group, the national authority or a foreign state (to which the hostage would probably belong) as a source of material funding for the organization. This has been the case in a number of kidnapping operations and the abduction of Iragi citizens and foreigners which have taken place in Irag during the past months. Several civilians; professionals and businessmen working for major foreign companies (not necessarily therefore politically important) became victims of this type of terrorist activity. It is believed that their release was secured after payment of a substantial ransom in various currencies to groups that beginning to were kidnapping foreigners consider а basic and leaitimate source for financing their organizations and the resistant or Jihadi activities.
- 3. Exchanging the kidnapped person(s) with detained prisoners belonging to the terrorist organization or its sympathizers, and even the remains of those killed, in some cases.
- 4. Scoring political gain. The aim of an operation may be to affect a change in a nation's policy by making well-defined political demands directed at the country to which the victim(s) belong, with which they should comply within a time frame determined by the group. Typically, the demands are related to

the country's domestic or foreign policies. Similarly, this type of operation may induce political crisis among states, with the effect of disrupting or destabilizing an alliance. In the field of international relations, a state's inability to prevent the capture of a native or foreign national on its territory or at least to guarantee their protection is taken as an indication of weak authority and damages an authority's domestic and international prestige. It may also lead to damage to confidence in dealings between the victim's nation and that in which the operation is being carried out, especially in the formulation of a strategy to secure the safe release of the hostage. Problems may arise in any number and combination of the following factors:

Potential disagreement over whether there should be negotiations with the kidnappers at all;

Differences in the approved method and timing of the negotiation process with the kidnappers;

Concessions to the kidnappers;

The possibility of an assault upon the kidnappers' lair in the event of the discovery of its location and whether the hostage(s) might be saved by such an operation.

Disagreement over the official reactions, particularly over the possible declaration of the state as "an unsafe state", which would prompt the issuing of an order to evacuate the foreign subjects: officially or

unofficially, partially or completely, gradually or immediately, individually or collectively.

Another factor which aggravates the crisis of determining the international stance regarding the way to deal with kidnapping situations is that the transactions between the authorities of the state concerned and the authorities of the victim's home nation come under considerable public scrutiny and the pressures of the crucial time factor; as the kidnappers usually set a deadline for the execution of their demands before carrying out their threats to liquidate the victim.

The Tactical Conditions for Political Kidnapping

It would be wrong to think that political kidnappings, particularly the kidnapping of persons regarded as 'high value targets', are acts requiring simple planning or straightforward implementation. Although there is a similarity between the technical requirements for carrying out the kidnapping of persons in some respects and those for assassinations, political kidnapping is in fact more complicated and involves more thought and preparation that other terrorist means.

In brief, a politically-motivated kidnap operation involves the following preparations:

1. The decision by the leadership of the terrorist organization to adopt kidnapping either as a basic strategy of the organization or a transitional,

temporary tactic. Having made the decision to carry out such operations, the "target" is identified. It may an individual or a number of people. In general, there is a direct positive proportional relationship between the capacity of the terrorist organization, and the political importance of the person targeted for kidnap. The higher the capabilities and potentials the organization possesses, the higher the political importance of the target to be chosen, and *vice-versa*.

Following the leadership's decision to adopt the method of kidnap as part of the organization's activities, the leadership draws up a general strategy for this method, by determining the political, media, and, possibly, the material demands to be laid down as conditions for the release of the hostages. The time-frame for the satisfaction of demands will also be decided upon, also whether it may be extended or not depending on negotiations. There will also be a strategy for dealing with the media during the kidnap (issuing statements, the kind of language to be used, video tapes, etc.), and whether the operation is to be attributed to the real and explicit name of the organization, or whether the operation should be attributed to a fictitious organization. The fate of the hostage in the case of non-fulfillment of demands, a strategy to deal with the possible discovery of the site of detention or in the worst case (for the kidnappers at least) any attempt at interdiction by security forces will also be considered and decided upon. These types of considerations will only really be made in earnest once the operation has begun; contingencies being difficult to foresee very far in advance.

2. The appointment of a special group, the task of whom is to follow and observe the movements of the "targeted" person. Such group will carry out the following tasks within a period that might extend to several days, or even weeks before the date set for the implementation of the operation:

Drawing up a round-the-clock, accurate schedule of the daily movements of the "targeted" person throughout the days of the week.

Monitoring the places of residence, work and social entertainment frequented by the targeted person; assessing the locations and studying the possibilities of clandestine infiltration or armed assault. Access to and from the location of attack will be studied and detailed plans will be drawn up. These may include photographic or video records. Modes of transport used by the target will also be scrutinized. Groups may go so far as to examine the target's driving style if considered necessary.

Determining the physical strength of the target and his/her possible resistance to kidnap; verifying whether they carry weapons or not; whether they are protected by security guards; and estimating the size and effectiveness of the protection group, if any is apparent.

A detailed dossier on the identity of the "target" will be compiled. This will contain details of their personal or family life, through monitoring their communications (tapping their phone, if possible). The group will also attempt to gather human intelligence, making contact with those working with or for him, such as domestic servants or security personnel.

On the basis of this information, the method of kidnap is determined and planned; including the location of attack, the timing, preparing the element of surprise and terror in order to paralyze the target psychologically or physically, and determining the method and route of escape or evacuation.

- 3. The selection or creation of a group that will carry out the kidnap, receiving the signal for eventual implementation from the monitoring group (the membership of these two groups is normally different). This is done after finalizing the method and details of the operation, such as the choice of weapons and equipment to be used, the giving or denial of permission to kill the protection personnel, members of the family or friends (if present on location), as well as decisions over how to deal with members of the public or security forces in the case of their involvement, and whether it is acceptable to kill the target in the event of operational failure.
- 4. The preparation of a 'protection and evacuation group' to provide help and contingency plans for the 'implementation group' during the initial capture operation. This help will include the provision of armed cover in the event of an exchange of fire as well as provision of a secure and expeditious

withdrawal from the area of operations in cases of success or failure. They may also be tasked with video or photographic documentation of the event for release to the media or for their own training or propaganda purposes.

5. The preparation of a number of secret hiding places and safe-houses that are selected after scrupulous study. The hostage may be transported to any one of these locations as events demand or permit. The hiding place may be regularly changed and locations are always protected, monitored and camouflaged. Mines and explosives are placed in the location where the hostage is held (or even on the body of the hostage) to prevent the success of any assault upon the location by security forces. The captors will understand that to stay in one place for any extended period of time will increase their chances of discovery and therefore the failure of the operation.

The hostage's guards will also be selected. These men perform one of the most important roles in the entire operation. Not only do they have to ensure that the hostage does not escape but they are also the organization's interface with the victim. This relationship can be complex. The captors will establish on what level, and in what measure to communicate with the victim and whether they wish to psychologically manipulate them, either to bring about an element of control or to simply affect their morale in one way or another. The organization may also wish to exploit the hostage as a source of intelligence.

Preparing secure means of communication and 6. negotiation with the state authorities or with the agency for which the victim works. Communication with the outside world makes the group vulnerable and if done badly could result in the discovery of the group's location and the frustration of the operation. Immediately after a kidnapping operation, there will be a considerable increase in the intensity of security services' human and electronic surveillance activities upon terrorists' communications both themselves well amonast as as between themselves and concerned parties (victim's nation, company, negotiators etc.).

The scrutiny of communications is considered by security forces dealing with kidnap situations, among the most basic and important sources of intelligence that can assist in discovering the fate of the hostage(s), obtaining vital information regarding the way the terrorist organization functions as well as in the acquisition of information that may help to liberate the hostage in the event of an armed assault by security forces being allowed or required. The process of negotiation or dictation of conditions is carried out either through personal messages or through announcements in the written, visual or aural media, through telecommunications, or through one or more covert or overt mediators.

Mediators naturally play a vital role in bringing about an end to the crisis, particularly if all parties concerned agree on their role and express their confidence in them. The mediators would eventually perform the negotiations and the transmission of conditions, concessions, attempts to strike deals and obtain commitments and guarantees for the faithful implementation thereof. Hence, the leaders of the terrorist organizations will lend a great deal of importance to, and expend great efforts in, selecting or approving the role and identity of negotiators and/or mediators.

7. Finally, there is a general belief that the credibility of the terrorist organization will be tested right from the first instance of a kidnapping operation. During a group's first operation of this type, there is therefore a tendency to adopt a hard line during negotiations with the aim of emphasizing the group's readiness to perform the threats issued as part of the demands laid down. This hard line may manifest itself in minimal flexibility of demands and time-Embryonic groups may, for example, frames. display a greater readiness to carry out a threat to liquidate a hostage immediately after the expiry of a time limit. They may also attempt to capture more than one hostage to make sure their credibility is reinforced.

There is a great danger that the credibility of a group will be undermined by the mishandling of a first operation. This might be due to the display of a greater-than-normal flexibility in negotiations, an operational gaffe or a general inability to withstand the pressures associated with such activity. Should this happen, the next operation performed by the group will, almost certainly, be carried out under a new name, or in some cases under the guise of a 'hardline splinter group' of the original. These measures will ensure that their previous short-fallings will not in any way affect the conduct of future operations.

Conclusion

This type of kidnapping is a hitherto unfamiliar phenomenon in Iraq and is the direct result of the collapse of the state's authority and the inability of the occupation authorities to uphold security and the rule of law. The security vacuum that has ensued provides the perfect conditions for the activities of groups pursuing these kinds of criminal activity. The large numbers of foreign workers attracted by the reconstruction efforts provide terrorist groups with rich pickings for kidnapping operations.

The problem does, however, not only concern foreign nationals working in Iraq. The kidnapping of Iraqi nationals has been a phenomenon largely ignored by the newly-formed Iraqi Police and the occupation authorities, representing an apparently low political priority. Possibly hundreds of Iraqi's have fallen victim to political kidnappings with revenues estimated at many millions of US Dollars for their captors.

The sudden increase in the rate of kidnappings during April 2004 (43 instances in 20 days) cannot have been a coincidence. It is likely that there was a widespread realization during this period, amongst the terrorist community, of the enormous effectiveness of this tool of extortion. Clearly a large proportion of the resources of these groups became exclusively devoted to pursuing political kidnap as a tactic to destabilize the occupation.

It is not the purpose of this paper to make any suggestions as to a strategy aimed at tackling the threat posed by terrorist kidnappings in Irag. Rather it is intended to inform the reader on the phenomenon. taking him/her through the thought process and the method by which these operational attacks are prosecuted. In doing so, the author intends to create an awareness of the issue to foster intelligent analysis and informed debate. contributina to enhanced an understanding of this relatively new type of terrorist activity.

About the Author

Dr Mustafa Alani took up the position of Senior Advisor and Director of the Security and Terrorism Studies program at the Gulf Research Center on August 20, 2004. Prior to his appointment at the GRC, he worked as Senior Consultant on Security and Fellow at the Royal United Service Institute for Defense and Security Studies (RUSI) Whitehall – London. Dr Alani worked for many years on studying political Islam and the activities of Islamist fundamentalist groups. He is known for his major contributions in Arab and international media on most issues related to the Middle East political developments, security, and defense. He has published on various topics related to security and strategic issues.

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