

KIDNAP+ RANSOM INSIGHT

GLOBAL SUMMARY

FOCUS
ARTICLE

**BACK TO THE FUTURE - MILITARY COUPS
IN WEST AFRICA AND THE SAHEL**

November

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUMMARY

This issue of Constellis' Kidnap for Ransom Insight Report covers global kidnapping incidents and trends for the months of September and October, as well as November 2021. The information is derived from multi-source analysis of kidnap for ransom activity, and provides the outcome or resolution of the events where known. The report covers current kidnap for ransom hotspots at regional, national and provincial levels, with a particular focus on areas where kidnap for ransom activity is increasing.

Statistical analysis of data for September and October 2021 is included on page 13, which displays kidnap for ransom trends by region, victims by nationality and employment sector, as well as identifying the Top 10 countries for the kidnapping of foreign nationals over the reporting period. Additionally, statistical information for the period of November 2020 – October 2021 can be found on page 17.

The Global Piracy Update gives an overview of the piracy threat by region, providing trend analysis for September and October 2021, as well as sample cases over these months, to illustrate identified trends.

The Cybersecurity section examines current issues affecting companies and individuals in the realm of IT

security. This edition provides an insight into legislation surrounding ransomware payments, particularly in the US. In response to the heightened threat of ransomware, the Biden administration is seeking to put measures in place to safeguard US interests. One such measure is the Ransomware Disclosure Act, which will require victims of ransomware attacks to report ransom payments to the authorities. Other actions are also being taken in the US and internationally to curb ransomware payments; however, as cybercriminals have demonstrated repeatedly in the past, they will inevitably try to find ways to circumvent any new laws.

The Focus Article explores the recent coup phenomenon observed across West Africa and the Sahel region, shining a spotlight on events in Sudan, Mali, Guinea and Chad. The piece seeks to compare commonalities and draw parallels between the military takeovers in these respective countries, and provide an overview of the transition from civilian to military rule in each instance. At the same time, the root causes, outcomes and likely scenarios of the coups are examined, as is the regional and international impact of the collapse of democracies sweeping across the region.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GLOBAL OVERVIEW	03
Americas	03
Europe	05
Middle East.....	07
Africa	09
Asia.....	11
STATISTICS	13
GLOBAL PIRACY UPDATE	19
CYBERSECURITY	21
FOCUS ARTICLE.....	23
ABOUT CONSTELLIS	26

GLOBAL OVERVIEW

AMERICAS

Over September - October 2021, the Americas recorded 73 foreign victims of kidnapping, 47% less than the previous reporting period. This was due to a decrease in reporting of mass abductions of migrants. Having said that, these continued to be a common feature in trends in the region, particularly in Mexico. Of most note there has been the exponential increase in cartel-related violence in the internationally renowned resort city of Cancún and its environs. This is by no means new; however, it has recently spread, directly affecting tourist areas, even in daytime. While violence of this sort is aimed at local nationals linked to criminal groups and their activities, it carries a high collateral risk for visitors. For example, on 20 October, two foreign nationals died and three others were injured in a shootout at a restaurant in the nearby beach resort of Tulum, carried out by suspected cartel members. This area, including Cancún and the Riviera Maya, is one of the main tourist attractions in the country. However, it has also emerged as one of the most disputed territories for organised criminal groups, given its strategic location in the Caribbean and its being a large market for drugs and other activities, such as extortion. In addition to a number of local gangs, at least four of the major cartels are believed to be present in the area: Los Zetas, Cartel de Sinaloa and Cartel del Golfo, and most recently, the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación, which has been blamed for the most recent wave of violence.

CASES:

- ▶ On 4 November, two men were killed in a confrontation between drug gangs at the Hyatt Ziva Riviera in Puerto Morelos, south of Cancún. According to reports, 15 assailants armed with “long guns” arrived on boats and stormed the hotel’s beach area, killing a presumed drug dealer. A second gang member was subsequently killed after he was found by the attackers, hiding inside one of the hotel’s rooms. One unidentified person, who local sources suggest was a tourist, was injured after being struck with the butt of a weapon. Another individual was said to have received bullet wounds. Local media also reported that an additional person was kidnapped and taken on a boat to an unknown location. Meanwhile, government officials said there were no serious injuries and no tourists were seriously hurt or kidnapped.
- ▶ While kidnaps for ransom have become less common in recent years, this continues to be a serious concern across Brazil. In a recent incident, on 14 September, a Paraguayan man who had been held captive for eight days was rescued by police in Miracatu, São Paulo state. The man was kidnapped in Praia Grande on 6 September by at least three armed criminals who initially demanded USD 300,000 from his family. After negotiations, the gang reduced the ransom to

USD 100,000, which had to be paid by the end of 15 September. However, after an agreement was reached with his family, the victim was told he would nonetheless be killed after payment, so he could not identify the kidnappers. The Paraguayan claimed he was tortured and kept with little food throughout his captivity. He said his captors were a professional gang and that other foreign people had been held hostage in the same property. The victim also said that the criminals had bragged about obtaining at least USD 500,000 a week from kidnapping, which was more profitable than drug trafficking. The gang allegedly identified potential targets through Facebook, selecting those who seemed to be able to pay in dollars. According to the authorities, the Paraguayan man was targeted as his brother is a well-known professional football player.



Mexican army deploys following attack at the Hyatt Ziva Riviera Cancun. (Photo: The Sun)

On 10 November, the US Department of State urged US citizens to make plans to depart Haiti due to the country’s deepening insecurity and a severe fuel shortage that has affected a number of critical services, including transport, water supply, telecommunications and medical care. The shortage was created by a blockade imposed by gangs in yet another show of their control over the country. In addition to demanding the payment of HTG 50 million (nearly USD 500,000) per container leaving the Varreux terminal, the leader of the G9 gang syndicate has demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Ariel Henry. While the blockade has been temporarily lifted, the political demands remain, in an indication of the evolution of these groups from simple criminal organisations into players on the political scene. In this context of lawlessness, kidnapping has continued to soar. According to a September report by the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti, at least 328 kidnaps were reported to Haiti’s National Police in the first eight months of 2021, compared with a total of 234 for all of 2020. Meanwhile, local NGO Center for Analysis and Research in Human Rights (CARDH) places the number of abductions so far this year at around 800. Whereas local nationals remain the main victims, foreign nationals are also being targeted.

CASES:

- ▶ A group of 17 missionaries from the Ohio-based religious organisation Christian Aid Ministries was kidnapped by armed gunmen on the outskirts of the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince. The victims, comprising 16 US citizens (including five children) and a Canadian, were taken at gunpoint from their bus in the area of Ganthier, in Croix des Bouquets, as they were travelling to the village of Titanyen. The abduction was claimed by the ‘400 Mawozo’ gang, which has been responsible for a series of kidnappings of foreign nationals in the past, including two French citizens in April. It is reported that the group has demanded a ransom of USD 1 million per hostage. In a video shared by the gang on social media on 21 October, its leader, Wilson Joseph, threatens to kill the victims if he does not get “what he is demanding”. In the footage, Joseph also threatens Prime Minister Ariel Henry and the chief of Haiti’s National Police, Leon Charles, who he accuses of having killed a number of his subordinates. Despite the threats, the US government confirmed in early November that proof of life for some of the hostages had been received. Two of the missionaries, whose identity was not disclosed, were freed on 21 November under unclear circumstances.
- ▶ Jean Pierre Ferrer Michel, a 79-year-old expatriate American pastor who was kidnapped by the ‘400 Mawozo’ gang two weeks before the group of 17 foreign missionaries, was released by his captors on 25 October. The pastor had been kidnapped on 3 October from his church in the Port-au-Prince area of Delmas 29 by heavily armed individuals dressed in uniforms of the Haitian National Police. Two other church members were also taken, though one, a female, was released soon after. Despite a payment of USD 300,000 having

been eventually made to the kidnappers, the two hostages were not released. An additional USD 250,000 had to be handed over to the kidnappers to obtain the pair’s release.

- ▶ Three truck drivers who were kidnapped in Haiti in September were released on 14 November by members of the ‘400 Mawozo’ gang. The circumstances leading to the men’s release were not revealed. However, earlier reports claimed that the kidnappers had demanded USD 200,000 for the release of each hostage.



Wilson Joseph, leader of the ‘400 Mawozo’ gang, threatening on video to kill the kidnapped American missionaries if his demands are not met. (Photo: Yahoo News)

EUROPE

Europe saw a considerable increase in the number of foreign kidnap victims during this reporting period. Though this was mainly attributed to a reported mass abduction of migrants in Greece, single-victim cases also increased. The majority of these incidents were linked to organised crime activities. These continue to be the main driver of kidnap activity in the region and kidnap appears to be on the rise as organised criminal groups increasingly use it to settle scores. Once again, Spain recorded the highest number of abductions involving foreign nationals. There, Marbella has been identified as a global hub for organised crime as a result of its strategic location. The city is within reach of main drugs production centres such as Morocco and the area between Málaga and Granada, a growing marihuana production centre in Europe. Additionally, it is located within one hour of the British tax haven of Gibraltar, just across from Algeciras, a well-known transit and entry point for drugs. According to the Spanish Intelligence Centre against Terrorism and Organised Crime (CITCO), at least 113 organised groups with members from 59 different nationalities have a presence in Marbella, thus explaining the high levels of criminal violence in the city.

CASES:

- The Spanish National Police rescued a kidnapped Belgian and dismantled the drug trafficking gang holding him captive. He was abducted on 5 October as he was about to get in his car in the locality of San Pedro Alcántara, 10 kms west of Marbella. He was taken to a property in the town of Coín, where he was held and tortured for five days until his rescue. The kidnappers contacted the family and demanded EUR 1.5 million for the release of the victim, reportedly on account of a drugs consignment his captors accused him of stealing. It was reported that before the incident, the victim and his family had received a series of 'warnings' regarding the payment for the missing product. Investigations however continued after the rescue of the Belgian citizen, leading to the arrest of more members of the gang. At least 12 suspected members have so far been arrested, including the group's leader. French and Spanish nationals were among those detained. Though the gang was mainly based in Málaga, it had a presence as far away as Ceuta, on the north coast of Africa.
- A similar situation prevails in southern France. On 13 November, an investigation was opened in Marseille after CCTV cameras recorded the kidnapping of a man. The footage showed a man being pursued and subsequently pushed into the boot of a car in Belle-de-Mai district. The vehicle was found abandoned, with traces of blood, on a vacant lot a few hours later. The authorities suspect the incident is linked to the settling of scores between gangs.

- On 28 October, Greek authorities announced they had rescued nine Pakistani migrants who were being held for ransom in the northern city of Thessaloniki. Three Pakistani suspects were also arrested. Police said they had been alerted to the case on 25 October by relatives of the one of the victims who resided on the island of Lesbos. An operation was then set up with the family of the missing man, who would arrange to deliver the ransom on the evening of 26 October. The first suspect was arrested when he showed up with the hostage to carry out the exchange. With information provided by the arrested suspect, police raided several apartments in Thessaloniki, from where they freed the other eight victims and arrested two more suspects. The kidnappers had allegedly demanded ransoms between EUR 1,000 and 2,000 for the release of the hostages.



Image of the rescue of a kidnapped Belgian national in Marbella. (Photo: Spanish National Police)

Kidnaps with other motives can also take place on the continent, albeit on rare occasions. This includes traditional kidnap for ransom, tiger kidnapping, express kidnapping, and abductions of a political nature. Over the reporting period, a number of kidnaps with ransom demands in cryptocurrency were recorded. This follows a global trend in which the use of cryptocurrencies is expanding beyond cybercrime, as more 'traditional' criminals resort to them in a bid to avoid the detection of payments. As cryptocurrencies are not yet generally in public use, with most individuals not knowing how to get or use them, kidnappers wanting to demand ransoms in cryptocurrencies typically target individuals involved in the IT domain, particularly cryptocurrency traders.

CASES:

- Ukrainian authorities are currently investigating a number of employees of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), suspected of the kidnap for ransom of a foreign IT specialist in 2020. The victim was arbitrarily arrested and held by the suspected SBU officials, who told him he was wanted in Russia, where he had allegedly committed a crime. He was let go after he paid USD 200,000 in Bitcoin. The suspects have so far been suspended and placed under house arrest.
- A man in Kaliningrad, Russia, was the victim of express kidnapping and attempted murder on 27 September. He was reportedly dragged out of his car, blindfolded and held at an unknown location for 24 hours. Using force, the assailants forced the victim to give them access to his Binance account. They subsequently transferred the funds, allegedly amounting to USD 523,000, into their own crypto wallets. After stealing the money, the criminals took the man to a forest and left him for dead after suffocating him. The victim however survived and made it to the nearest village where he received first aid and contacted the police.
- Spanish authorities are investigating the kidnap and robbery of Zaryn Dentzel, CEO of IT company Tuenti, on 2 November. Dentzel reported that five men with Eastern European accents entered his apartment in Madrid and held him for hours. By means of threats, physical assault and torture, the men forced him to reveal the passcode to one of his crypto wallets, containing several million euros in Bitcoin. The gang also stole other valuables from his home, including all his electronic devices.

- On 13 October, Italian police rescued a 25-year-old British man who had allegedly been held hostage for eight days at a property in the town of Monte San Giusto, Marche region. The victim was ostensibly kidnapped by a group of four people in Florence while on holidays in the country. His captors made him call his parents in the UK to request EUR 7,000 to secure his release. The man's father contacted the National Crime Agency (NCA), which in turn alerted the Italian police. Four individuals, including Italian and Moroccan citizens, were arrested. It has been speculated in the media that the incident could have been staged by the alleged victim; however, this has not been proved by the authorities.



Italian police escorting kidnapped British youth after his rescue. (Photo: Il Valore Italiano)

MIDDLE EAST

Over September and October 2021, the Middle East saw a decrease of 17% in the number of kidnapped foreigners, with only 33 victims recorded. This decline was the result of an absence of any maritime incidents, which typically involve the detention of dozens of individuals. Mass abductions however continued in Syria's north-eastern province of al-Hasakeh, where foreign refugees continue to be targeted for abduction, illegal detention and other violent activity. Human rights organisations and other NGOs have repeatedly attempted to draw greater attention to this issue, but to little avail. Most of the targeted individuals, who include women and children, have or are believed to have links to the Islamic State. This makes them particularly vulnerable to local power brokers, who use their detentions to claim they are removing all remnants of the group. Elsewhere in Syria, kidnaps for ransom are most common in areas not controlled by the government, where criminality levels tend to be higher. According to local reporting, a recent deterioration of security has been observed in Assad-controlled areas, including Damascus, despite the large presence of military and security services.

CASES:

- ▶ On 25 September 2021, the Syrian Democratic Forces (QSD), a US-backed alliance of Syrian militias based in north-eastern Syria, detained four Iraqi refugees and three Syrian IDPs during a security operation in Hole camp in al-Hasakeh for unknown reasons. Several Iraqi refugees were later released. It is unclear if the released individuals were those detained earlier that day or on another occasion.
- ▶ On 9 September, Izzat Al-Khatib, owner of Al-Baik Bank, was kidnapped while returning from work in the Al-Zahira area of the Syrian capital, Damascus. According to local reports, he was accosted by three young men who claimed to be members of the secret police. Initially, the men demanded that Al-Khatib pay USD 150,000 on the spot, and threatened to arrest him for illegal dealing in dollars if he did not pay. The businessman refused to do so, which prompted the assailants to kidnap him. The criminals later called the victim's family, demanding they pay the amount requested from the businessman. After negotiations, the parties agreed to a payment of USD 100,000. The family carried out a private investigation into the perpetrators, discovering that one of the kidnappers was the son of a businessman, and the other two were university students. The information they obtained also indicated that the suspects were somehow connected to the regime's security services.
- ▶ Kidnaps for ransom by people impersonating the security services continue to be reported in the United Arab Emirates' less affluent areas. In early October, a

Sharjah Court convicted a man from a Gulf country for kidnapping, theft, impersonation of security officers and indecent assault of two African women. According to the victims' testimonials, they were travelling in a taxi when two Arab men, showing fake IDs accrediting them as police officers, demanded to check the women's documents. After doing so, they offered to take them to their residence. Once there, they raped them and stole their valuables. After holding them against their will for some hours, the suspects dropped the women off in an isolated area.



Al-Hole refugee camp in northeastern Syria. (Photo: The New York Times)

Instability continues to plague Iraq, most recently exacerbated by the 10 October parliamentary elections. Preliminary results indicated that the political bloc headed by populist cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr won the election. As was expected, those blocs and parties that fared poorly in the polls, particularly the Iran-aligned Fatah Alliance, have called for protests against the results. These have escalated into violence on a number of occasions. Protests have also shown anti-foreign sentiments, with groups calling for the departure of 'occupation forces' and demanding that the US abides by the set withdrawal date of 31 December 2021. These calls were renewed following rumours circulating on social media that US troops would remain beyond the stated date. At the head of the unrest have been Iran-linked militias, many of whom have threatened attacks on US forces if they fail to withdraw by the end of the year. The threats are assessed to be credible, as these groups have orchestrated such operations on a regular basis since early 2020. If Shia attacks renew in early 2022, they will likely follow previous patterns, involving Katyusha rockets or explosive-laden drones against US military posts or diplomatic facilities, as well as IEDs targeting Iraqi contractors supporting the Coalition. While no kidnaps of foreign nationals attributed to pro-Iranian militias have been recorded over recent months, the series of events in 2020 and early 2021 are evidence that this is a threat that cannot be disregarded, particularly during such a politically charged period. Of further concern have been recent reports that these groups have bolstered their ranks after launching a call for volunteers on 19 November, to confront US forces.

CASES:

- ▶ The US Department of State announced on 2 November a reward of up to USD 5 million for information leading to those responsible for the abduction of US citizen Ihsan Ashour in Baghdad on 13 December 2019. Ashour was kidnapped amid government reform protests in Tahrir Square by 10 to 12 armed masked men. The assailants, believed to be linked to Iran, accused him of being a spy and tortured him whilst in captivity. He was released in May 2020 and is currently in the US.
- ▶ Criminal kidnapping is also an enduring threat in Iraq. On 31 October, four Bangladeshi workers were lured to Iraq by a compatriot who had promised them jobs. After arriving in the country, the victims were offered accommodation in an apartment in the Shamiya area of Nasiriyah. Once there, the suspect tied them up and stole their money and passports. While trying to escape, one of the victims died after jumping from a window of the apartment, which was on the third floor. Iraqi police cordoned off the site and rescued two other hostages. The remaining victim disappeared in unclear circumstances, while the suspect escaped.
- ▶ Israel has a moderate crime rate, with criminal abductions being a rare occurrence. On 3 September, a Haifa resident was arrested for carrying out a tiger kidnapping the previous day. Pretending to be a member of the security department of a bank, he convinced a female employee of the establishment to accompany him to a police station to give a statement regarding a robbery at

the bank the previous year. Instead, he took the victim to an unknown destination, where he blackmailed her with intimate photos he had taken against her will. He then forced her to go to the bank wearing a fake explosive vest and subsequently order the manager to make an electronic money transfer of NIS 3 million (nearly USD 1 million). A large number of police units was deployed to the bank, as officials feared the explosives were real. Though the woman was arrested, she was released after questioning. The suspect had no criminal record and allegedly carried out the crime to fund medical treatment.



Supporters of Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr celebrate the results of the parliamentary elections in Baghdad's Tahrir Square. (Photo: CNN)

AFRICA

Africa once again recorded the highest number of abductions of foreigners globally, with over 45% of all victims recorded by Constellis. This was in spite of the absence of piracy cases, which are typically responsible for high numbers in the region. This reporting period, however, the levels observed were attributed to high rates of kidnap for ransom in South Africa, including mass kidnaps of migrants and a number of high-profile incidents. Indeed, South Africa is currently experiencing a kidnap crisis, part of a generalised increase in crime linked to a number of factors. Among these are the violent unrest over July, the economic malaise due to the COVID crisis, the easing of COVID restrictions allowing criminals to move more freely, and most recently the increase in load shedding. Latest official reports say that 2,000 abductions were reported to the South African police between July and September, 36% of them in Gauteng province and 20% in Kwa-Zulu-Natal. According to the authorities, the great majority of cases were express kidnaps which started as carjackings, while at least 50 were traditional kidnaps for ransom. In a trend common to southern Africa, businessmen of foreign origin, particularly Indian, and their family members have been the targets of sophisticated kidnap for ransom gangs, who commonly demand very large ransom payments for the release of hostages.

CASES:

- ▶ A Portuguese businessman was kidnapped as he left his business in the Rosettenville area of Johannesburg, on 4 September. According to witnesses, after forcing the businessman's vehicle to a stop with their car, the criminals violently abducted the Portuguese man along with one of his employees, who was released soon after. The expatriate was released on 12 September. According to a family member, the kidnappers had initially demanded a ransom of ZAR 2 million (USD 133,000), which was later reduced by half. It is unclear if that was the amount finally paid by the family. After his release, the victim expressed a desire to sell his business and assets in order to return to Portugal. After the incident, the Portuguese community said they are concerned that a ransom payment could set a dangerous precedent that could lead to the further targeting of members of the community.
- ▶ The four young sons of Nazim Moti, a wealthy South African businessman of Indian origin, were kidnapped on 20 October on their way to school in Polokwane, Limpopo province. The children, aged six to fifteen, were abducted by a group of seven armed men, who were reportedly very violent. According to the boys' driver, they were intercepted by two vehicles. The assailants subsequently shot at their car and indiscriminately into the air. The children were then taken out of their vehicle and forced into one of the kidnappers' cars. The authorities believe the kidnappers may have fled with the victims

to Gauteng. The children were returned to their family after three weeks in captivity, on 10 November. Though the conditions of their release were not disclosed, local media claimed that the Moti family paid a ZAR 50 million ransom (USD 3.1 million).

- ▶ On 15 October, South African police rescued 50 kidnapped Ethiopian men from a house in a Gauteng suburb. One suspect was also arrested in the operation. According to police reports, the victims had been trafficked from Ethiopia and were supposed to be reunited with family members already in South Africa. However, the man transporting them refused to release them unless their relatives paid some extra money. Neighbours said they had witnessed some odd activity at the property, with minibuses constantly arriving at night.



ZIDAN (6) ZYADD (11) ALAAN (13) and ZIA (15)
MOTI

20 OCTOBER 2021 • LIMPOPO
They were last seen when they were forcefully removed from the scholar transport by a group of 7 men. The children were forced into a Mercedes Benz and then drove in the direction of the R81. Their cell phone were later found dumped at Flora Park.
ANYONE WITH INFORMATION, PLEASE CALL THE FOLLOWING NUMBERS:
WESTERNBERG SAPS: 082 565 8566 | CAPT NTLANE RASEDILE
MISSING CHILDREN SOUTH AFRICA: 072 647 7464
Join the fight today and assist MCSA in bringing children home safely.
SMS MCSA to 41006 to donate R25.00 today!*

Poster requesting information on the whereabouts of the kidnapped Moti brothers. (Photo: Missing Children South Africa)

As an indication of the deteriorating security conditions across a number of African countries, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 22 November urged Chinese citizens and firms working in Africa to leave high risk areas on the continent. Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) were specifically listed, as the abduction of Chinese nationals has recently become a common occurrence. Though the warning followed two incidents in the space of two days, this is not the first time that the Chinese authorities have issued such directives. However, given the number of ongoing projects on the continent, and the continued development investments driven by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the presence of Chinese nationals is growing in these areas, and thus also their exposure and targeting by threat actors. Given the evidence that local security forces are not able to ensure the safety of Chinese expatriates and projects, security has become a considerable concern to Chinese companies. In line with these concerns, China may reconsider the role of Chinese private security companies, which have so far taken a secondary role in many countries. Growing from simply supporting the local security forces and providing consultancy services, they might attempt to gain the right to operate armed security.

CASES:

- ▶ On 21 November, gunmen killed a police officer and kidnapped five Chinese nationals working at a gold mine in the DRC's South Kivu province. A Congolese army spokesman said that the incident occurred at around 2 am, when the living quarters of the Chinese workers were attacked by around 14 armed bandits in Mukera, Fizi territory. Some media reports suggested that a number of local nationals, including soldiers, were also abducted during the attack. In a similar incident three days later, two Chinese citizens were killed and eight others kidnapped in Djugu, Ituri province, where the group allegedly carried out informal gold mining operations. The attack was attributed to CODECO militias.
- ▶ Four suspected kidnappers were imprisoned in Nigeria's Ondo State on 22 November, accused of kidnapping two Chinese nationals, both employees of Chinese company Wewood Ltd. The incident took place at Omotosho on the Ore/Ijebu-Ode expressway, where they held their victims with both firearms and knives, and robbed them of their valuables.
- ▶ On 2 November, Malian officials announced that three kidnapped Chinese nationals had been released.

The foreign victims reportedly escaped their captors on 31 October and were rescued by Malian security forces the next day. No group claimed responsibility for the abductions. The three Chinese expatriates were kidnapped by unidentified assailants along with two Mauritanian colleagues from a construction site in Nara town, southwestern Mali, on 17 July. The two Mauritians were released under unknown circumstances on 27 July.



CODECO militias in Congo's Ituri Province. (Photo: Congo in Conversation)

ASIA

Asia was the region with the least number of foreign kidnap victims recorded, despite a minor increase on the previous two-month period. The low numbers are attributed to low reporting of incidents involving Chinese gaming operators across south-east Asia. This coincides with China's stated objective of combating transnational crimes involving Chinese nationals in the region, particularly cross-border gambling, kidnapping, and telecommunications fraud, by strengthening cooperation with countries where these activities are more common, particularly the Philippines and Cambodia. In 2018, China launched a crackdown on betting, which is illegal in China, except for Macau. The crackdown intensified in 2020 by criminalising cross-border gambling, and has continued in 2021. Though this is said to have had a more economic rationale, it also has a security aim, as these activities are precursors of other crimes, such as kidnapping, loan sharking, prostitution and human trafficking. China has also used its influence, especially economic, to force the hand of other countries into complying and arresting those involved. In a similar tactic, China has continued to use its hostage diplomacy to achieve its geopolitical goals or resolve international disputes. This is typically carried out through arrests, most commonly alleging charges of activities against national security (such as spying), or travel bans.

CASES:

- ▶ On 15 October, Philippine police arrested three Chinese and a Filipino in Pasay City, also rescuing a Chinese hostage. The security operation took place at the premises of a Philippine Offshore Gaming Operator (POGO), where the victim had been held since his abduction in Manila on 2 October. The suspects had allegedly demanded PHP 300,000 (nearly USD 22,000) from the man's relatives in exchange for his release.
- ▶ On 11 September, Cambodian Military Police arrested 15 Chinese men who had allegedly kidnapped two compatriots on Sihanoukville's Ochheuteal beach the previous day. The two victims were also rescued. The suspects were found to be in the country illegally. The reasons behind the kidnapping are unclear.
- ▶ Japanese police are searching for two Mandarin-speaking men who held a Chinese businessman hostage on 4 October. The businessman was attacked as he was arriving at his home in the Arakawa district of Tokyo. The criminals bound him and threatened him with a bladed weapon. After ransacking his home, the victim was forced to contact one of his workers and ask him to bring money. The assailants escaped after collecting the bag, which contained about JPY 110

million (USD 988,000). The man's family was not at the property at the time, suggesting that the assailants had been watching his movements before the attack.

- ▶ After more than 1,000 days in a Chinese prison accused of spying, Canadian nationals Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig were released on 24 September. Their freedom came on the same day that charges against Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou in the US were dropped and she was allowed to return to China. Wanzhou had been under house arrest in Canada, pending extradition to the US on fraud charges. Spavor and Kovrig were arrested in China on 10 December 2018, just nine days after Canada arrested Meng.



15 Chinese nationals arrested in September by Cambodian police for kidnapping countrymen in Preah Sihanouk. Guns, assault rifles, and bullet-proof vests were confiscated from their hideout. (Photo: Khmer Times)

In Afghanistan, a further deterioration in security has been observed since the Taliban takeover. Despite the Taliban's hard-line ideology and the return of extreme punishments, a spike in serious crime has been observed in the country in recent months. This has been primarily attributed to the economic crisis caused by the conflict and the isolation of the country under the new Taliban regime. Reporting of criminal kidnaps has increased throughout the country, with local businessmen, prominent professionals, and children as the main victims. According to the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI), over September and October, over 40 traders and businessmen were kidnapped for ransom in Afghanistan, with many of the victims having died. Reportedly, these incidents mainly occurred in Kabul, and the provinces of Kandahar, Nangarhar, Kunduz, Herat and Balkh. Meanwhile, the Taliban government claimed in mid-November that kidnapping had declined in the country since August, as over 80 kidnappers had been arrested and 12 victims freed by Taliban forces. Moreover, in response to the concerns expressed by ACCI, the Afghan Interior Ministry reportedly said that the government will soon be issuing weapons licences for businessmen. As the Taliban government focuses its efforts on containing the threat posed by the Islamic State and the remaining anti-Taliban resistance, it is highly likely that criminality will continue to increase in the country.

CASES:

- ▶ A child, who was kidnapped in Kabul, was recovered in southern Kandahar province on 20 November. Three suspects were also arrested during the operation. According to Afghan officials, the kidnappers had demanded USD 500,000 as ransom.
- ▶ On 10 November, the Taliban administration's intelligence office announced the rescue of a young man who had been held hostage for 25 days in Kabul's Paghman district. According to the Taliban official, the kidnappers had demanded USD 6 million in ransom for the man's release. It is unclear if the abductors were arrested or not.
- ▶ Renowned Afghan psychiatrist Mohamed Nader Alemi was killed despite his family paying a USD 350,000 ransom for his safe release. The doctor's body was found dumped on a street of Mazar-i-Sharif, on 18 November, after the kidnappers called the family to provide the exact location. The body bore signs of torture. An Interior Ministry spokesman said that Taliban forces in Balkh Province had arrested eight suspected kidnappers believed to be behind the abduction of Alemi and other people. Two victims were rescued during the same operation. Alemi

was abducted on 20 September in Mazar-i-Sharif. The kidnappers had initially demanded a ransom of USD 800,000. According to the Alemi family, the psychiatrist had been receiving threatening calls in the months prior to his abduction.

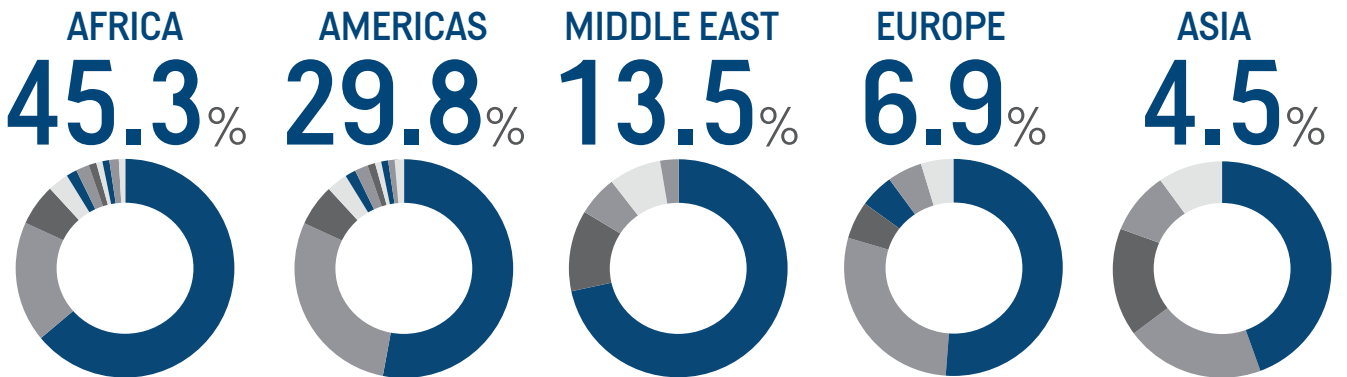
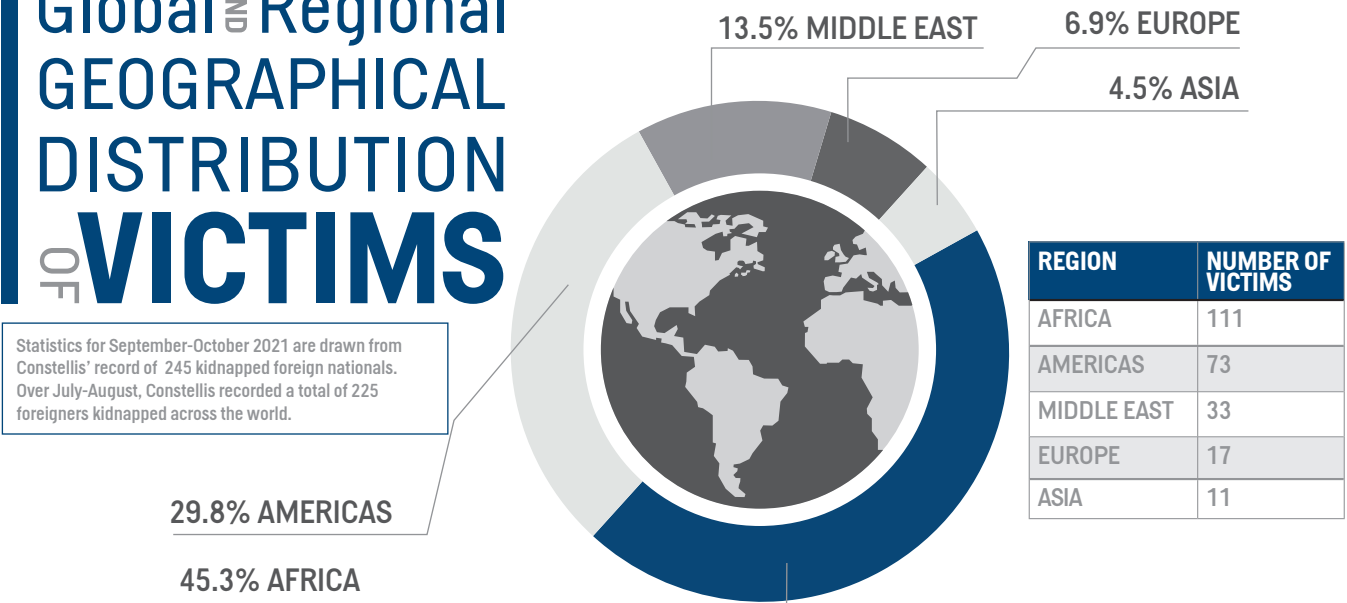


Taliban fighters patrol a neighbourhood in Kabul, Afghanistan. (Photo: The Indian Express)

KIDNAPPED FOREIGN CITIZENS

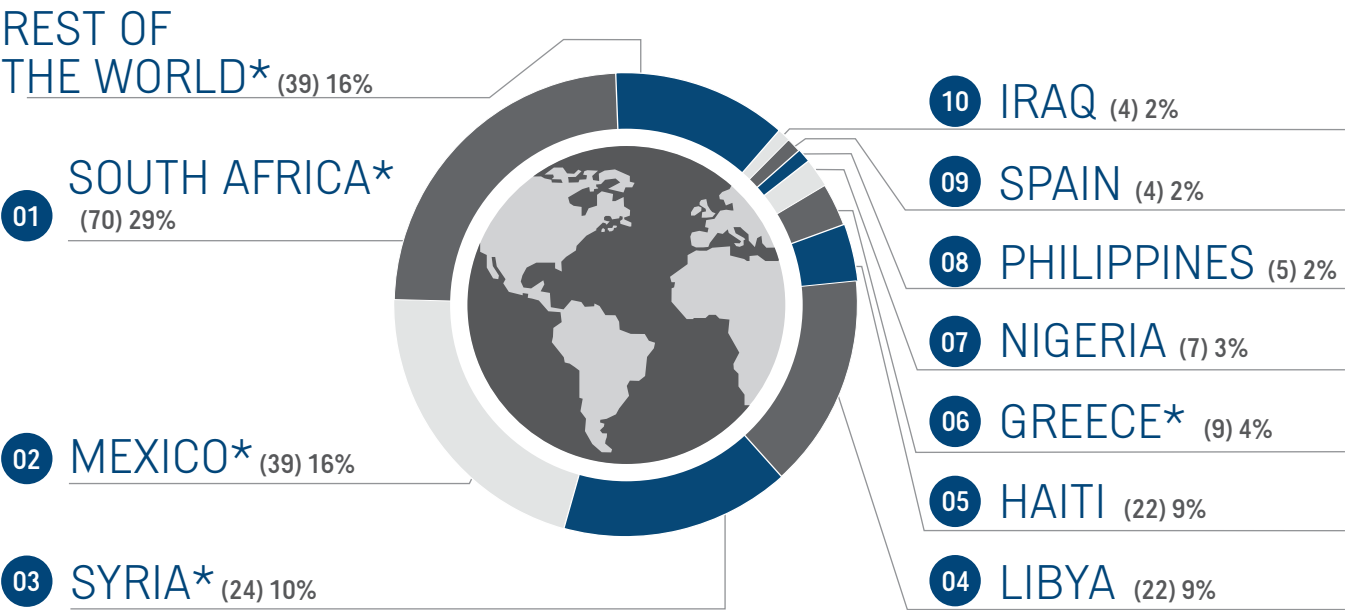
Global AND Regional
GEOGRAPHICAL
DISTRIBUTION
OF VICTIMS

Statistics for September-October 2021 are drawn from Constellis' record of 245 kidnapped foreign nationals. Over July-August, Constellis recorded a total of 225 foreigners kidnapped across the world.

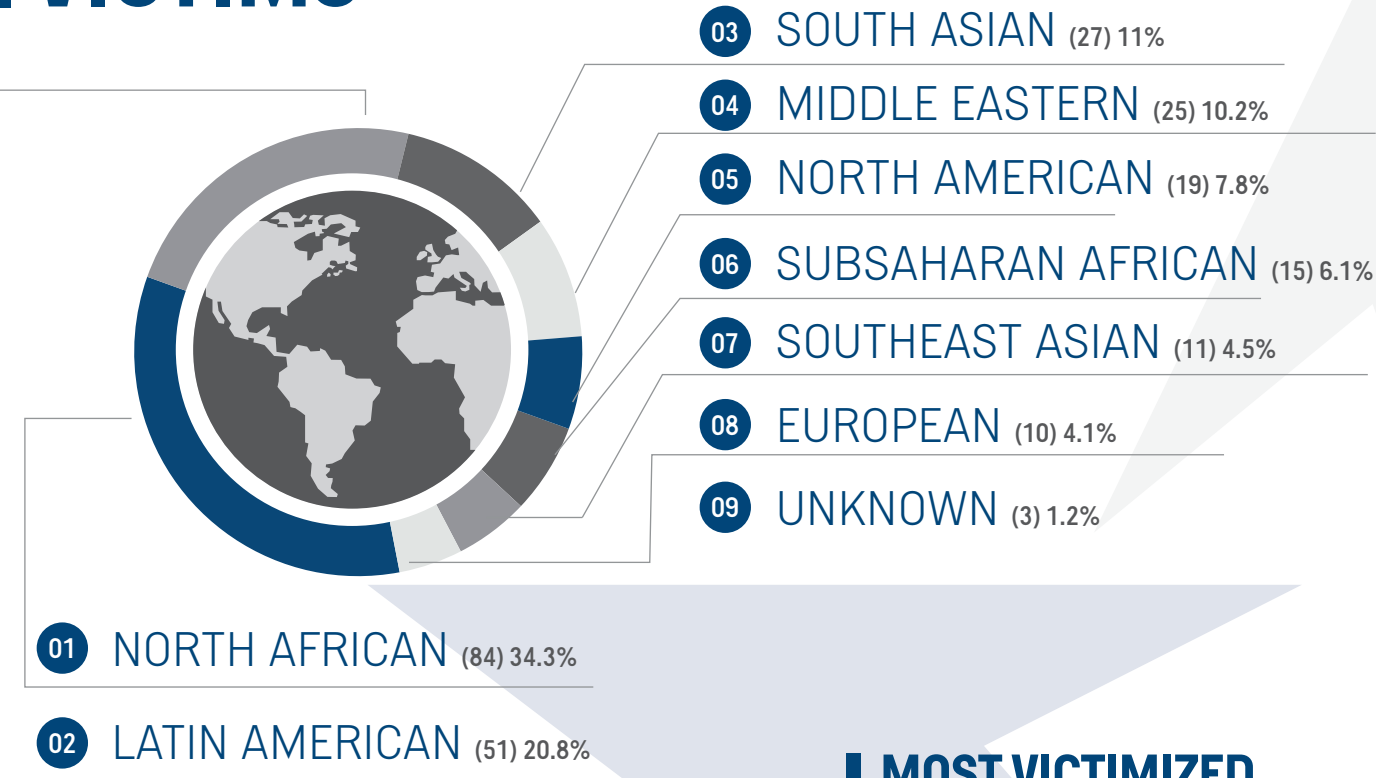


South Africa* (70).....63.1%	Mexico* (39).....53.3%	Syria* (24).....73%	Greece* (9).....52.9%	Philippines (5).....45.4%
Libya (22).....19.8%	Haiti (22).....30.1%	Iraq (4).....12%	Spain(4).....23.5%	Cambodia (2).....18.2%
Nigeria (7).....6.3%	Colombia (3).....4.1%	UAE (2).....6%	Russia (1).....5.9%	Afghanistan (2).....18.2%
Equatorial Guinea (3).....2.7%	Paraguay (2).....2.7%	Saudi Arabia (2).....6%	Ukraine (1).....5.9%	Malaysia (1).....9.1%
Mozambique (2).....1.8%	Argentina (1).....1.4%	Turkey* (1).....3%	Czech Republic (1).....5.9%	Japan (1).....9.1%
Zambia (2).....1.8%	Brazil (1).....1.4%		Italy (1).....5.9%	
Algeria* (1).....0.9%	Panama (1).....1.4%			
Ethiopia (1).....0.9%	Peru (1).....1.4%			
Kenya (1).....0.9%	Trinidad & Tobago (1).....1.4%			
Gabon (1).....0.9%	US (1).....1.4%			
Djibouti (1).....0.9%	Chile (1).....1.4%			

TOP 10 COUNTRIES
FOR THE KIDNAPPING OF
FOREIGN CITIZENS IN SEP - OCT 2021



ORIGINS OF VICTIMS



MOST VICTIMIZED SINGLE NATIONALITY

- 01

Ethiopian
- 02

Egyptian
- 03

American
- 04

Iraqi
- 05

Cuban
- 06

Haitian
- 07

Chinese
- 08

Indian
- 09

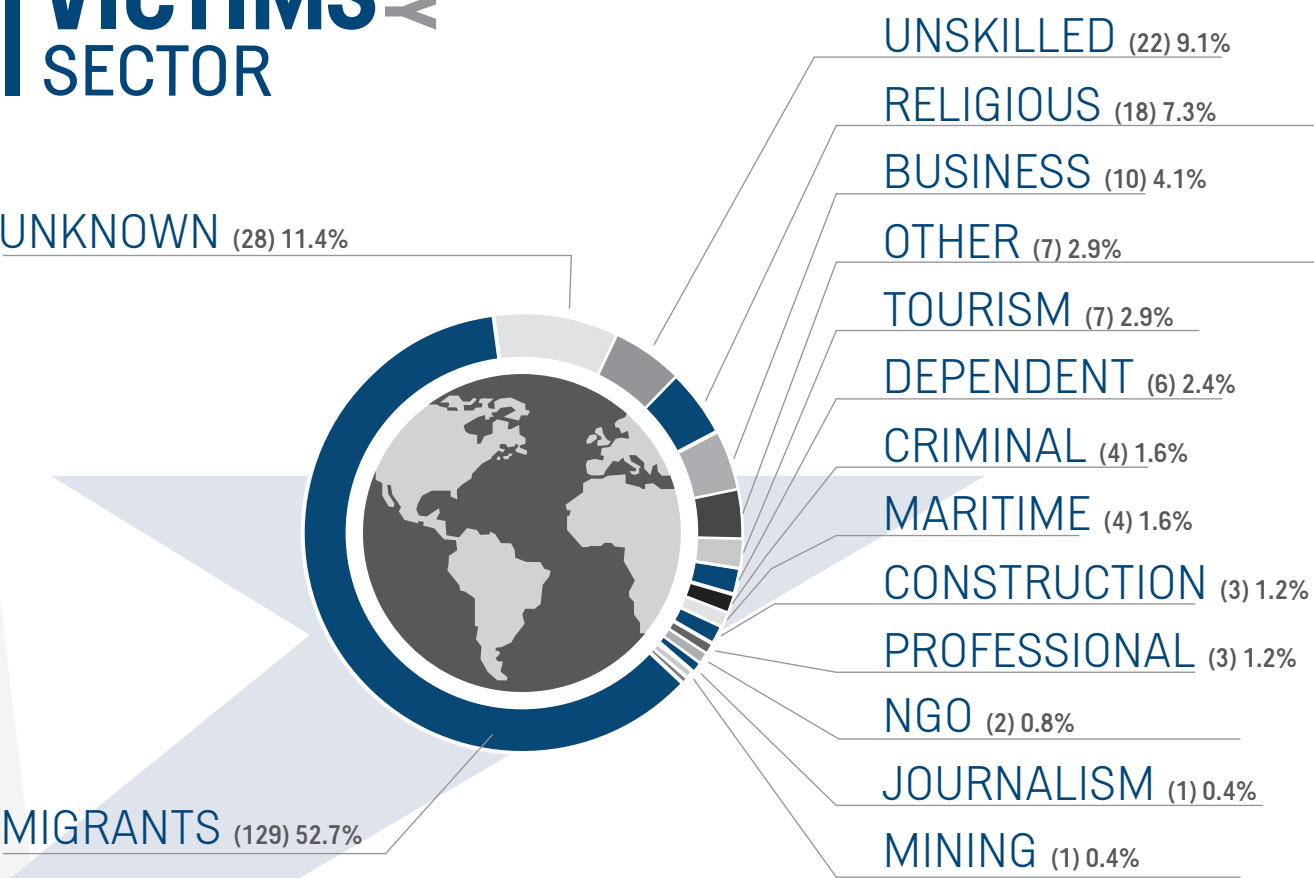
Honduran
- 10

Pakistani

MOST VICTIMIZED ORIGIN BY REGION

REGION	ORIGIN
Africa	North African
Americas	Latin American
Asia	Southeast Asian
Europe	South Asian
Middle East	Middle Eastern

VICTIMS BY SECTOR



MIGRANTS (129) 52.7%

MOST VICTIMIZED SECTOR BY REGION

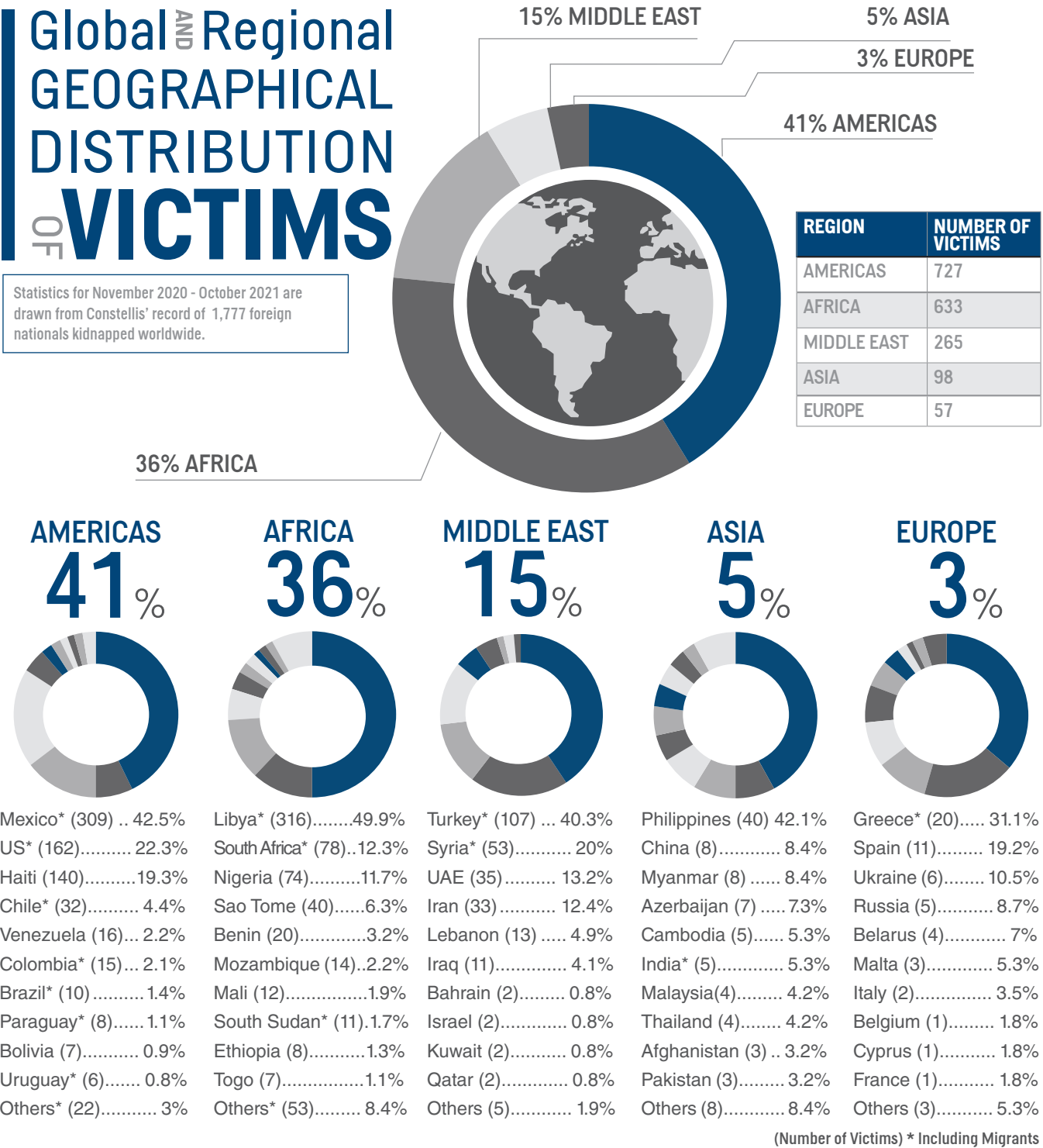
REGION	OCCUPATIONAL SECTOR
Africa	Migrants
Americas	Migrants
Asia	Unskilled
Europe	Migrants
Middle East	Migrants

DISCLAIMER: These statistics herein presented are the result of a compilation of kidnapping incidents involving foreign nationals only, which have been reported in the media and other open sources. The information contained and its results are therefore partial as result of the incomplete nature of open-source material. Thus, this report should be taken only as a reference of general trends, taking its limitations into consideration.

KIDNAPPED FOREIGN CITIZENS

Global AND Regional
GEOGRAPHICAL
DISTRIBUTION
OF VICTIMS

Statistics for November 2020 - October 2021 are drawn from Constellis' record of 1,777 foreign nationals kidnapped worldwide.



GLOBAL PIRACY UPDATE

Constellis recorded 57 maritime incidents between September and October, a 9% increase on the numbers reported in July and August. Piracy attacks in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) and Asia accounted for most events (37% each), while the Gulf of Aden (GoA) recorded 9% of the total incident count. As per established trends, all kidnappings took place in the GoG, despite an intensified effort to prevent piracy in the last few months by GoG states and international partners. Meanwhile, sea robberies continued to increase in southern Asia, especially in the vicinity of Singapore.

In other areas of concern, there were at least seven piracy attacks reported in South America, most of which took place off the coast of Peru. While so far the majority of piracy incidents in the region remained low-profile and mainly targeted fishing vessels, during this reporting period, pirates in South America targeted a product tanker, two containers, and a bulk carrier. Moreover, pirates used weapons such as knives and guns during at least three of the attacks. The most high-profile event was off the coast of Ecuador, when an underway containership was fired on in an unsuccessful attempt at boarding. Maritime security experts warn that further incidents of a similar nature could increase if no action is taken against pirates.

There were five maritime incidents in the Gulf of Aden (GoA) over September and October, three more than the last reporting period. While there were no reported kidnappings or any successful criminal boardings, there were at least three suspicious approaches off the coast of Yemen, in addition to one attempted boarding, thus highlighting the ongoing risk to maritime operations. Meanwhile, the Yemeni conflict dominated reporting for a successive period. In evidence of the threat to maritime security, on 21 September, the Arab coalition announced the thwarting of an imminent attack in the Salif region of Yemen after they destroyed two booby-trapped boats allegedly belonging to the Houthis. A week before the incident, Houthi rebels targeted Yemen's Mocha Port with drones and missiles, causing significant damage. As a result of the ongoing risk to commercial vessels in the region, the US Maritime Administration (MARAD) issued

in September a revised advisory to commercial ships passing through the GoA, the Red Sea, Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. MARAD warned that attacks linked to the conflict in Yemen are increasingly moving into the maritime domain, including the use of limpet mines, explosive boats, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), which could target commercial vessels such as tankers or freight carriers. Meanwhile, Israel's navy also stepped up its activities in the Red Sea in mid-September, due to the growing Iranian threat to Israeli shipping.

Compared to the 13 maritime incidents reported in the GoG over the last reporting period, Constellis recorded at least 21 events over September and October, accounting for an increase of 70%. The rise corresponds with the beginning of the dry season, when piracy attacks historically increase. Attacks are likely to remain high over the last two months of the year, as weather conditions in the region improve, and the transfer of goods grows during the winter season, thus increasing maritime traffic and creating more opportunities for pirates. The number of incidents recorded over September-October 2021 were at 24% of those registered over the same period in 2020. This reflects the positive impact that the series of anti-piracy initiatives launched by GoG coastal states and other international navies earlier this year have had so far. That being said, unless an international legal framework for the handing over and prosecution of pirates is created, taking into account the involvement of different jurisdictions, the current 'catch and release'

approach will continue to fuel piracy in the years to come. As such, it is yet to be determined whether piracy in the region is declining as part of a long-term trend. In the meantime, as evidence of the lingering kidnapping risk, there were five abductions this reporting period, with 15 crew taken hostage in total. As a result, the Maritime Domain Awareness for Trade – Gulf of Guinea (MDAT-GoG) increased the threat warning of piracy in waters off Nigeria.

Pirate activity in Asia remains high, particularly in the eastbound lane of the traffic separation scheme (TSS) in the Singapore Strait. Piracy attacks increased 40% in September and October, with 21 events recorded. All the registered incidents comprised successful criminal boardings, half of which resulted in robberies. Of note in this reporting period, a cluster of incidents was reported off Nongsa Island, Singapore. An increase in attacks was also reported at the Manila South Harbor Quarantine Anchorage in the Philippines, with pirates targeting anchored vessels. While the attacks have so far been low-level and opportunistic, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) warns that more pirates are turning to violence in the region, either threatening or assaulting the crew with knives and guns. No kidnappings were recorded for another consecutive period. However, the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) continues to warn of the ongoing threat in the Sulu-Celebes Seas and waters off Eastern Sabah, particularly the waters off Tawi-Tawi. Meanwhile, tension in the South China Sea continues to grow because of a series of territorial disputes involving China. While no incidents of real consequence have been registered so far, the current increasing militarisation of the area creates an environment where skirmishes cannot be discounted. While not directly affecting commercial shipping, this brings a considerable collateral risk to vessels transiting the area.

CASES:

- On 18 October, around 1.64nm NW of Punta Jambeli, Ecuador, six individuals in a speedboat approached, fired upon and attempted to board the container ship LARS MAERSK while she was underway. The Master increased speed and commenced evasive manoeuvres, resulting in the speedboat aborting and moving away. Crew and ship were reported safe.
- On 18 October, an Iranian warship reportedly prevented a pirate attack targeting two oil tankers it was escorting in the Gulf of Aden. According to an Iranian Navy commander, at least five pirate speedboats approached the tankers and opened fire, though there was no damage reported. The warship reportedly returned fire, forcing the pirates to leave the area.
- On 25 October, the Vanuatu-flagged offshore support vessel MONTET TIDE was boarded by an unknown number of attackers 51nm SW of Bioko Island, Equatorial Guinea. Though details of the incident are scant, the kidnapping of three of the 14 crew members on board was reported. The victims were identified as Cameroonian nationals Baya Victor Bosco, Tandu Evaristus (seaman) and Vanwick Njiman (oiler). It is unknown if a ransom has been demanded. The incident occurred 193nm east of the attempted boarding of the container vessel MSC LUCIA, which occurred the same day.



Containership LARS MAERSK was attacked while underway in Punta Jambeli, Ecuador. (Photo: FleetMon)

CYBER SECURITY

LEGISLATING RANSOMWARE PAYMENTS IN THE US

Despite many government agencies around the world, such as the FBI, advising against payments, many targeted businesses opt to pay their attackers, as they assess this to be the quickest, cheapest and quietest way to restore access to their networks and data, and ultimately resume operations. As targeted organisations are not currently obliged to report these payments, the majority go under the radar. According to the Department of Justice (DOJ), around seven out of eight cybercrimes go unreported. Known ransomware payments in 2020 are believed to have amounted to at least USD 350 million worldwide, representing an increase of more than 300% against 2019. Ransomware attacks in North America over the same period grew by 158%, with the average ransom payment also increasing by 170%, to USD 312,000.

Amid this spiraling ransomware crisis, in which ransom demands and payments are skyrocketing, coupled with major attacks and the heightened impact on the economy and national security, the Biden administration is putting in place new countermeasures. One such measure is the Ransomware Disclosure Act (RDA), proposed by US Senator Elizabeth Warren and Representative Deborah Ross. If approved, public and private entities (not individuals) targeted by a ransomware attack will be required to notify the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) of a ransom payment, no later than 48 hours after it was made, and provide the following information:

- the amount demanded and paid
- the date the demand was made
- the date the ransom was paid
- what currency was used
- whether or not the victim receives federal funding
- and as much information about the attackers as possible

The RDA also makes provision for a website, through which victims can declare ransom payments, and

instructs the DHS to publicly report all information disclosed from the previous year. The identities of victims will however be protected in these reports.

Lawmakers behind the RDA identify the critical lack of data surrounding the payment of ransoms as a key barrier to understanding the full extent of the problem. With this information blackout, they argue, the true amount of money flowing from the US into the pockets of cybercriminals and their state backers cannot be ascertained. The new information will allow for a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon, and as such, the DHS will be better equipped to understand and counter the threat.

At present, the RDA is just a proposal, and would need to be approved by both the House of Representatives and the Senate to be incorporated into legislation. At this early stage, some have already raised concerns on how the bill may be circumvented. For instance, if the payment of a ransom is made through an offshore intermediary, would the payment still need to be disclosed? Should such loopholes be closed, the RDA may go some way to painting a more accurate picture of the ransomware threat, and indirectly discourage victims from paying.

The RDA is not the only weapon in the government's arsenal against the payment of ransoms. The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) issued an advisory on 21 September 2021, 'strongly discouraging' ransomware payments. In this advisory, the OFAC noted that the payment of ransoms during cyberattacks may breach various laws, such as the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) and the Trading with the Enemy Act (TWEA), thereby attracting potential penalties.

Other countries are also attempting to legislate against ransomware payments. For instance, the Dutch Ministry of Justice is reportedly putting legislation in

place that will ban insurance companies from paying ransoms to cybercriminals. This regulation is aimed at indirectly removing the financial incentive for hackers by discouraging victims from paying. In France, AXA Group announced in May that it was going to suspend reimbursements to policyholders for ransomware payments, which was an industry first. This decision by the insurer followed discussions within the French government over the legal status of ransomware payments. Most recently, India announced on 24 November it is looking to ban most cryptocurrencies. While such moves are assessed to be a significant step forward in attempting to stem the spread of ransomware attacks, payment prohibitions alone will not be enough. As hackers have shown time and time again, they will continue to evolve their methods to remain ahead of the curve, and so it is vital that organisations are given the tools and support to protect themselves against cyberattacks, when unable or unwilling to pay a ransom.

CASES:

- On 21 September 2021, in a one-of-a-kind case, the US Treasury sanctioned virtual cryptocurrency exchange Suex for its part in facilitating ransom payments, prohibiting US entities and individuals from working with the company. According to the US Treasury, 40% of Suex's transactions relate to some form of criminality, with at least USD 13 million passing through the exchange being derived from ransomware attacks.
- On 2 July 2021, IT solutions provider Kaseya announced it had been infected with ransomware, which cascaded down to approximately 1,500 of its clients worldwide. While it is unclear how many affected organisations paid a ransom to REvil, the cybercriminal group behind the attack, Kaseya declined to pay the USD 70 million ransom demanded. Instead, they opted to work with the FBI and the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency to investigate the attack and formulate a decryptor key. This was achieved on 21 July, and the key was disseminated to all other affected organisations. Since February 2021, Europol has confirmed that five hackers linked to REvil have been arrested, who between them have reportedly extorted up to EUR 500 million.



(Photo: Harvard Law Review)

FOCUS ARTICLE

BACK TO THE FUTURE - MILITARY COUPS IN WEST AFRICA AND THE SAHEL BY CONSTANTINE PAPADEMETRIOU



Soldiers of the putschist military junta entering Mali's capital, Bamako, as Malians celebrate the overthrow of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, on 21 August 2020. (Photo: weltsolidaritaet)

'Military regimes in Africa have performed worse than their civilian counterparts; furthermore, performance should not be at the expense of legality. Although civilian administrations have consistently failed African populations, military involvement in politics remains an aberration that must be resisted.'

Adeoye O. Akinola, Head of Research and Teaching at the University of Johannesburg's Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation.

Over the past year, military coups and attempted coups have been something of a regular occurrence in West Africa and the Sahel region. Most recently, the term 'coup within a coup' has been coined there to depict the growing imbalance between civilian decision makers and the military elites. Democratic theory states that civilian decision makers are accountable to the people, whereas the military must abide by the civilians; advise them but not impose their ideas on them. This democratic ideal has been taught to militaries worldwide. However, over the past decade the limitations of this theory have been demonstrated in the aforementioned regions, where armed security forces are largely in control of the brittle democracies of Sudan, Mali, Guinea and Chad, as the reigning instability has allowed them to take centre stage. The use of force is often strengthened by the help of external actors who train and equip these forces, originally to tackle non-state actors and enforce state authority. Although the principle of 'civilian oversight and accountability' comprises an essential

part of the training, the unwillingness or inability of the armed forces to provide a democratic framework make such values redundant.

Since its independence in 1956, Sudan has flirted with democratic rule on several occasions, but all these attempts were abruptly ended by the armed forces. In 2019, after 30 years of military dictatorship under Omar al-Bashir, there was renewed hope when peaceful protests brought his reign to an end. Although many Sudanese hoped this would spell the end of the armed forces' rule, this did not happen, with the army seizing power again in April 2019. In the aftermath, the security forces continuously attacked protestors until mediators persuaded the latter to allow the army to stay in power until the elections, scheduled for 2022. However, on 25 October 2021, as election time was approaching, Sudan's top General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan dissolved Sudan's cabinet and the joint military-civilian Sovereign Council, also detaining the civilian leaders. Prime

Minister Abdalla Hamdok, who had embodied the push to full civilian rule, was confined to house arrest.

Following the coup, the US and the World Bank moved swiftly to suspend aid to Sudan, amounting to nearly USD 2.7 billion in total, whilst international leaders called for the release of Hamdok and the other detained officials. The regime became increasingly isolated internationally as the African Union (AU) suspended Sudan's membership and the Arab League urged for the restoration of the transitional government. Though Hamdok has now been reinstated in a new power-sharing agreement with coup leader General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, it is unclear how much real power the civilian leaders will hold under this scheme.

Mali's path to democracy has also been a turbulent one. In August 2020, following months of anti-government civil unrest, elements of the Malian Armed Forces orchestrated a mutiny in which several government officials were detained. Among them were President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta and Prime Minister Boubou Cissé, who eventually resigned having dissolved the government. Despite the chaos, the opposition and many activists took to the streets to celebrate these events, in renewed hope of change. Moreover, despite the international community imposing sanctions on Mali, the excitement quickly subsided after the putschist leaders agreed to an 18-month transition back to democracy, beginning with the appointment of a new civilian President and Prime Minister, to culminate in elections on 27 February 2022. However, it was soon clear that the new regime would not be any better than the system it overthrew.

In this context of enduring instability, another military coup was staged within 10 months, triggered by President Bah Ndwa and Prime Minister Moctar Ouane's push for greater civilian involvement in government. The leader of the initial coup, Colonel Assimi Goïta, arrested and ousted Ndwa and Ouane, claiming they were trying to sabotage the democratic transition. Goïta seized power and became the vice-president of the 'interim' government, pledging to hold elections in 2022, as planned. Amidst another backlash from the international community, most markedly from France, the UN, EU, and the US, the military was urged to hand power back to civilian leadership and release those

detained. Despite a series of threats and sanctions, including a suspension from ECOWAS and French threats to withdraw from the country, Goïta continues to serve as head of government. This clearly showed once more that the military junta remains the power broker in Mali and that they intend it to remain this way.

The last straw occurred when the country's 'transitional' military government announced in early November that general elections would no longer be held in February 2022, as had been promised. As a result of the 'delay', the EU has suspended two training missions in Mali, and placed individual sanctions on Malian military leaders resisting a return to democracy. Western countries have also tried to inflict pressure on Mali's military regime, threatening to cut military support, and with France announcing the beginning of the departure of its troops from the country. This however has not fazed the Malian military regime, who in response have sought support elsewhere, particularly from Russia. Thus reports emerged that Mali is close to striking a deal with Russian security company Wagner Group to provide military contractors to fight the Islamist insurgency. Although there is no conclusive evidence of the Kremlin's future role in Mali, Russia is seen as the geopolitical beneficiary from the political turmoil currently playing out in the country. Moreover, Malians see Russia in a more favourable light than France, as the latter's intervention in the region is accused of having neo-colonial objectives.

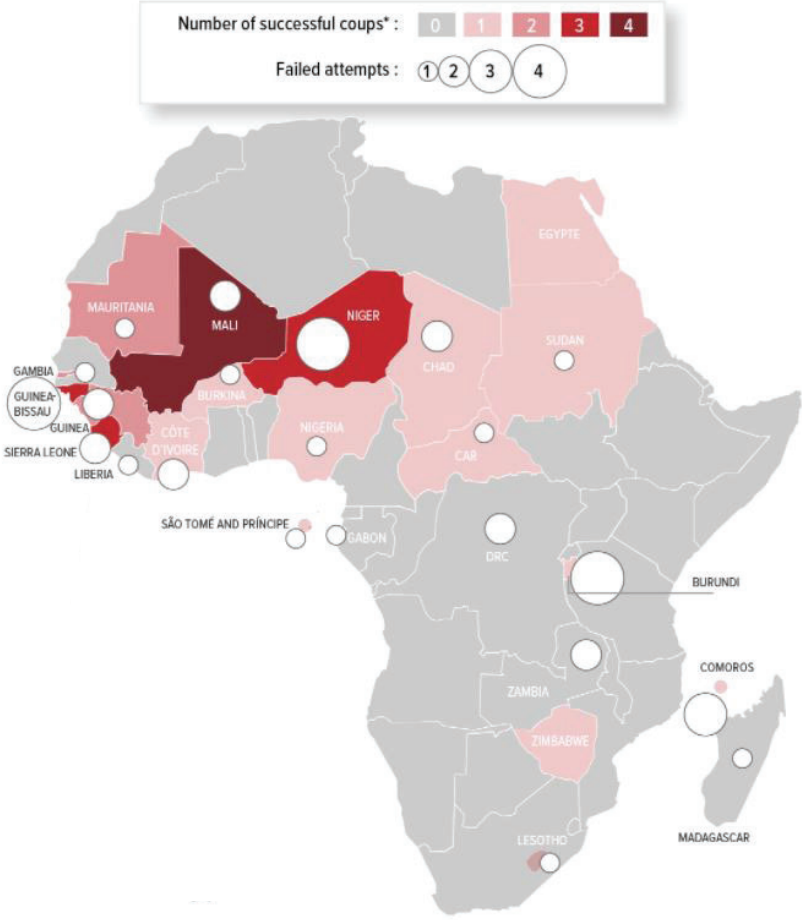
Guinea's military also staged a coup in September, ousting long-standing President Alpha Conde. Guinea's coup leader and current interim president, Mamadi Doumbouya, has also 'guaranteed' the country's transition back to democracy, intending to form a 'government of national union'. He also pledged to move away from the 'personalisation of political life,' which he said best describes the corrupt and autocratic rule of Conde. Interestingly, no timeframe was given and opposition leaders claim they have not been consulted about any transition. Both regionally and internationally, the military coup was met with disdain. Whilst many Guineans celebrated Conde's overthrow, this scenario feels like a step back for the country's democratic and economic credentials, with any hope for democratic rule likely to be short-lived.

Chad is another example of a stagnant democracy. Following the death of President Idriss Deby on 20 April 2021, having just secured a sixth term since coming to power through a coup in 1990, the military quickly gained power and installed Deby's son. Mahamat ibn Idriss Deby, a military commander himself, is now serving as interim President of an 18-month Transitional Military Council, following the dissolution of both Parliament and the cabinet, as well as the suspension of the constitution.

Though the military has claimed that these measures are only provisional and intended to guarantee a secure democratic transition of power, these words don't carry much weight. This has already been evidenced by the military government's disproportionate use of force against protestors. Idriss Deby had managed to avoid any repercussions from the lack of democratic rule during his time in power due to his ability to turn

the military into an instrumental tool in the fight against terrorism. However, this did not hide the dictatorial nature of his regime, plagued by human rights violations both at home and abroad.

Military leaders justify coups as acting on behalf of the people. However, history has shown time and time again that military power grabs inevitably lead to harsher systems of governance than the ones they replace, with even greater state-sanctioned violence. Any seemingly popular, democratic moves made by military juntas, such as the release of political prisoners, may be seen as pouring cold water on local, regional and international pressure, rather than any genuine desire to serve the people. Regardless of the motives behind a military coup, it is imperative that regional and international bodies do not turn a blind eye to further violations. Moreover, violations made by fallen governments should not be forgotten either.



Infographic showing the 30 military coups that have taken place in Africa since 1990. (Photo: The Africa Report)

ABOUT CONSTELLIS

Constellis is a leading provider of risk management, humanitarian, social intelligence, training and operational support services to government and commercial clients throughout the world. Operating in over 45 countries, Constellis' 20,000 employees bring unparalleled dedication and passion for creating a safer world by upholding the highest standards of compliance, quality, and integrity.

Constellis' forward thinking services span a broad range of synergistic solutions, from the boardroom to the project site, encompassing risk governance, organisational resilience, business continuity management, crisis management, travel security, global tracking, training, protective security, life support, logistics and specialist support such as K9 services and UAV systems.

At Constellis, our number one mission is to secure success for our customers. Constellis combines the legacy capabilities and experience of ACADEMI, Triple Canopy, Centerra, Olive Group, OmniPlex, AMK9, Edinburgh International, Strategic Social and all of their affiliates. The consolidation of companies under the Constellis name allows our clients to rely on one single partner and project experience that spans the globe.

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CONTACT

For more information on this report please contact:

BEATRIZ SANCHEZ-GARRIDO
Information Analysis Manager
beatriz.sanchez-garrido@constellis.com

For all inquiries on Constellis’ advisory & consulting services please contact:

MARK ALLISON
Vice President, Crisis & Risk Services
Mobile: +44 7791 495 057
mark.allison@constellis.com

 www.constellis.com

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