



# Travel Advisories Add Kidnapping Indicator



Product of the Research & Information Support Center (RISC)

In 2018, the U.S. Department of State introduced the Travel Advisory system, wherein every country around the world received labeling providing tiered levels of advice ranging from Levels 1-4; the higher the level, the higher the risk. Travel Advisories at Levels 2-4 have clear reasons for the level assigned, identified via standardized risk indicators. The body of each Travel Advisory contains more information about the nature and location of these risks, as well as specific advice for those who choose to travel there. Fifteen months after the system went into effect, the Department has unveiled its first significant modification: the addition of a new, separate indicator for the threat of Kidnapping and/or Hostage taking.

Assistance to U.S. citizens affected by kidnapping and hostage taking overseas is a critical priority for the State Department. In an effort to communicate the risk of kidnapping and/or hostage taking to U.S. citizens traveling or living overseas more clearly, the Bureau of Consular Affairs on April 9 added a “K” (representing Kidnapping and/or Hostage Taking) indicator to the current set of standardized Travel Advisory risk indicators. The “K” will join indicators for important security issues such as terrorism (“T”) and crime (“C”) on travel advisories for 35 countries where kidnapping and/or hostage taking are a security concern. By adding the K indicator to the current set of risk indicators, the State Department intends to help improve the traveling public’s

understanding of this risk, and ensure that critical information about kidnapping and hostage taking is a prominent part of all travel-security decision-making.

Introduction of the “K” indicator occurs alongside an update in the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM), the basic organizational directive for the State Department. There, a new definition of Kidnapping and Hostage Taking as pertaining to the Travel Advisory system now notes that the indicator exists wherever:

*“criminal or terrorist individuals or groups have threatened to and/or have seized or detained and threatened to kill, injure, or continue to detain individuals in order to compel a third party (including a governmental organization) to do or abstain from doing something as a condition of release. – 7 FAM 042 Appendix A*

## TRAVEL ADVISORY RISK INDICATORS

E – Time-Limited Event

C – Crime

T – Terrorism

U – Civil Unrest

H – Health

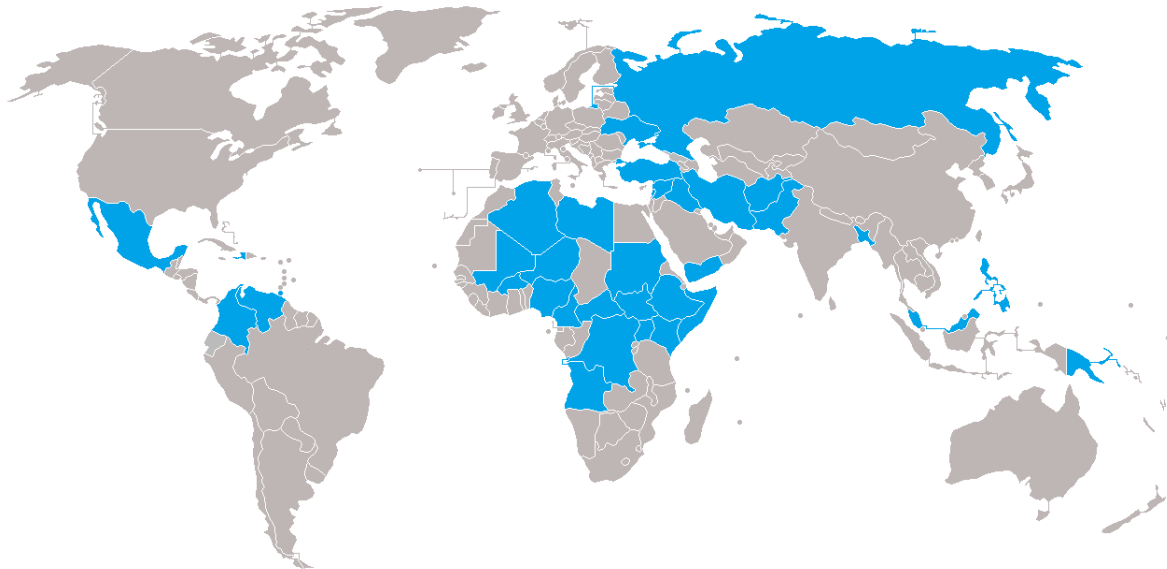
N – Natural Disaster

**K – Kidnapping & Hostage-Taking**

O – Other Risk

Countries where the “K” indicator is now in force are as follows:

- |                                |                         |                          |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Afghanistan                 | 13. Iraq                | 25. Russia               |
| 2. Algeria                     | 14. Kenya               | 26. Somalia              |
| 3. Angola                      | 15. Lebanon             | 27. South Sudan          |
| 4. Bangladesh                  | 16. Libya               | 28. Sudan                |
| 5. Burkina Faso                | 17. Malaysia            | 29. Syria                |
| 6. Cameroon                    | 18. Mali                | 30. Trinidad &<br>Tobago |
| 7. Central African<br>Republic | 19. Mexico              | 31. Turkey               |
| 8. Colombia                    | 20. Niger               | 32. Uganda               |
| 9. D.R. Congo                  | 21. Nigeria             | 33. Ukraine              |
| 10. Ethiopia                   | 22. Pakistan            | 34. Venezuela            |
| 11. Haiti                      | 23. Papua New<br>Guinea | 35. Yemen                |
| 12. Iran                       | 24. Philippines         |                          |



It is important to note that most of these countries are locations where the existing Travel Advisory had already communicated a risk of kidnapping; this change simply elevates the prominence of this risk. Note that the risk of kidnapping may be localized in some countries, rather than nationwide. For example, in Malaysia, the advisory refers to the threat of kidnappings-for-ransom and violence from both terrorist and criminal groups specifically in the eastern area of Sabah State. In comparison, the kidnapping risk in some countries like Nigeria is widespread. Per guidance language, it is important to read the entire Travel Advisory to understand the nature and location of indicated risks. Note that areas within a country with localized risks identified via indicators often but not always correspond with areas that assessed at a higher risk level

Private-sector security managers with questions about the nature and location of identified risks in a Travel Advisory should [contact the OSAC Analyst](#) that covers the country/location of concern. Below are several resources to consider when planning for travel to areas where kidnapping and/or hostage taking are prevalent security threats.

- OSAC Products: Resources include products developed for specific incidents but including best practices usable in any relevant situation.
  - [Kidnapping: The Basics](#)
  - [Active Shooter and Kidnapping Response Tips](#)
  - [Personal Readiness & Emergency Preparedness \(PREP\) Guide](#)
  - [Kidnapping in Angola: Mitigation Techniques](#)
  - [Kabul Kidnapping Thwarted by Evasive Driving](#)
- FBI Resources: The FBI is the lead U.S. investigative agency for kidnapping incidents abroad involving U.S. citizens.
  - [Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell](#)
  - [Virtual Kidnapping](#)
- [Hostage US](#) & [Hostage UK](#): Independent non-profit organizations that provide support and pro bono professional services to hostages and their families during and after a kidnapping.