

The Circuit

ISSUE
44

For Security And Protection Specialists

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On the ground in Iraq

PROTECTING JOURNALISTS

It just got more dangerous

3 Keys to EP Success

TIGER KIDNAPPING

ARE YOU BEING TARGETED?

By: Orlando Wilson



BREAKING NEWS: PROTECTING JOURNALISTS JUST GOT A LOT MORE DANGEROUS

Politics and motives aside, I think everyone can conclude these are very dangerous days for journalists, advocates of free speech or anyone else for that matter that voices an opinion.

The recent case of Saudi Arabian columnist, Jamal Khashoggi, who was murdered inside of the Saudi consulate in Istanbul perfectly highlights this worrying trend which saw 2018 become the

most dangerous year on record for journalists. Recently released figures from Reporters without Borders (RSF) state that, in 2018, more than 80 reporters have lost their lives from incidents related

to their work, 348 found themselves imprisoned and a further 60 held hostage. These figures are up 15 percent on the year previous.

For the security consultant who is providing services to journalists, activists or opposition politicians these clients can give you some unique challenges as the threats can include harassment and arrest by local or state police, as well as threats from opposing parties, etc.

Personal safety and security is something many take for granted especially in Europe and the US, but these days there are extremists on all political sides, from all religious backgrounds. So, if you or your client are voicing your opinions on any form of media, especially if you know your views may upset or offend others, then you need to think about your security as well as that of your family's and colleagues.

When you're considering your personal security, you need to think of all threats and make plans to avoid or if necessary, deal with any issues.

Most security consultants across Europe and the US do not consider the threat from Police or Government Agencies but, all it takes in most places these days is for one of your critics to make an accusation against you, and you will find the police knocking on your door. This is where you need to know your rights and have a good attorney's phone number to hand.

If you believe your home or office could be raided, or that of your client, you need to take precautions, and again, know your legal rights. You should take a look at the overall security of your home and office even if you don't have an active threat against you. Consider a CCTV system externally and internally, preferably with the footage uploaded to the cloud with trusted 3rd party access. There are many cases of kidnappings and assassinations where criminals will disguise themselves as police, this is a very complicated situation, and you and your client need to know your right and what to do in this situation to verify police IDs. ►

In my opinion, the basis of all personal security is counter-surveillance and being aware of your surroundings. Before the criminals attempt an assassination or kidnapping, they will put you under some form of surveillance, be it physical or electronic. The favored places for targeted attacks are at the victim's homes, workplaces or vehicles, so be extra vigilant approaching or leaving these locations. If you take regular routes to work, use the same coffee shops, etc. ensure you are carrying out,

at the very least, some basic counter-surveillance drills.

Here I list some recent examples assassinations of journalists and will highlight some similarities and make some recommendations of possible precautions that the victims could have taken.

17 January 2017, Honduras

Igor Padilla, a presenter with Canal HCH, was shot in the city of San Pedro Sula where he was filming. Apparently, he received a phone call and



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stepped out on the street to take it where he was ambushed by four men in police uniforms. He died of multiple gunshot wounds on the way to the hospital.

In such situations counter surveillance and being aware of what's happening on the street is your best defense. Employing trained protective surveillance personnel is also an option but finding trained and trusted security personnel is always a big problem.

April 23, 2017, Maldives

Yameen Rasheed, a prominent blogger, was stabbed to death in the stairwell of his apartment building, police later blamed religious extremists for the attack. He had received multiple threats to his life and had

claimed to be frustrated by the lack of police action or concern.

He knew he was under threat and he should have taken precautions when entering and leaving his home and office. In many places, weapons for self-defense are prohibited but having a basic reaction plan in place for an attack is essential.

24 May 2017, Russia

Dimitri Popkov, the editor of a local newspaper in the Krasnodarski province, was shot five times in his backyard sauna. He had stated before his assassination that his newspaper's investigations had become "an obstacle for local officials who are now threatening and intimidating journalists."

He knew he was upsetting people but perhaps ►

thought his high-profile status would protect him, it didn't. As I said earlier, homes are favored locations for attacks, and we can assume he will have lowered his guard while in his sauna. Some CCTV and essential counter-surveillance may have helped him live a little longer.

29 April 2017, Turkey

Saaed Karimian, the founder of the Persian-language GEM TV channel, and his business partner were shot dead in Istanbul by masked gunmen who opened fire on their vehicle. The assassination vehicle and weapons were later found burnt.

For them to be ambushed, they must have been watched, followed or had a fixed routine. This was a professional hit, so once the ambush was in motion, they were dead men. Counter-surveillance and awareness are the essentials that can save your life...

“ She knew she was under threat but took no serious precautions. You should always report threats to the police, but most police departments will not take the threats seriously without solid evidence. ”

17 January 2018, Brazil

Jefferson Pureza Lopes was shot and killed in his home by two gunmen that forced their way in. He had been receiving threats and was a critic of local government officials.

He knew he was under threat and should have at least upped the security in his home and had procedures in place on how to greet visitors and what to do in the event of an attempted break-in or attack.

March 21, 2018, Mexico

Leobardo Vázquez Atzin, a local reporter in the Veracruz state, was shot and killed at a restaurant he owned. He had anonymously started a

Facebook page " Enlace Informativo Regional" and had been critical of local officials; he had been receiving threats and also offers of bribes to stop writing about the officials, but he kept writing.

They knew where he worked, so he was an easy target. He knew he was under threat so he should have taken precautions. If you are going to be critical of potentially dangerous people anonymously then ensure you are 100% anonymous!

15 May 2018, Mexico

Juan Carlos Huerta, a TV host and Director of a radio station, was shot and killed as he left his ▶





Jamal Khashoggi

home in Villahermosa, the capital of Tabasco state.

This was a targeted assassination, I expect the gunmen were waiting for him to leave home. Again, the home was the location of the attack. Maybe some CCTV covering the street and possible surveillance location could have identified out of place people, those hanging around for no reason before he left the house.

**25 February 2018,
Slovak Republic**

Jan Kuciak and investigative reporter and

his girlfriend were found shot dead in their home. Kuciak had been working on stories concerning fraud by government officials and prominent businessmen.

Once again, the victims home was the location of the attack. Basic plans and procedures should have been in place for such things as answering the door to strangers and alerting others that there was a potential problem.

From these mixed examples you can see some of the fundamental

mistakes these people made, these are just a few of the attacks on journalists from 2017 to present.

Extrajudicial Arrest, Kidnapping or Killing

The recent murder of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at Saudi Arabia's consulate on October 2, 2018, in Istanbul, Turkey, highlights the issues that can occur when people, who for a wide variety of reasons are targeted for extrajudicial arrest, kidnapping or assassination by government agencies.

The incident with Jamal Khashoggi was preceded in 2018 by the very murky assassination attempt of the former Russian GRU officer and double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter in the UK. The UK government claims it was a political assassination ordered by the Russian Government, but there are many inconsistencies and gaps in that story, and regardless of what the real story is, it was still a possible political assassination attempt.

For most people when

they think of kidnappers and the like, they will have visions of masked criminals snatching people from cars and off the street, they will not be thinking of police or government agencies; false or extrajudicial arrest is the same as kidnapping and happens regularly.

From a kidnapping and crisis management viewpoint this can be the most challenging type of incident to deal with because the abductee has been snatched by an organization that has the local law on their side. If you, your friends, clients or associates think they could be targeted politically for whatever reason then you need to have a crisis plan in place. Even in supposed first-world countries it's very easy for people to be arrested for being vocal about their beliefs. In first-world countries, if charged and convicted, activists and journalists can still get jail time and hefty fines. In non-first-world countries, journalists can endure all types of issues ranging from assaults, jail time, sexual assault or assassination. ►

The basis of all security or crisis plans is the threat assessment, and this needs to be very thorough and cover all aspects of the personal security of those that could be targeted and include a lifestyle check to identify anything where they could be set up for an arrest. Police and government agencies planting evidence is also an issue that has been around since law enforcement first evolved and must be taken into consideration, the result of such actions can lead to long prison terms for the victims if they are unable to prove they were set up.

Decent local private investigators or trusted people need to be at hand to follow-up on potential arrests or disappearances to confirm what has actually occurred. Most of the time family members, friends or associates will not be in proper emotional state to do a logical follow-up investigation and could end up getting arrested themselves.

Personally, I have little time for attorneys, most are leaches, but there are a few good ones out there, you need to find them and have their numbers at hand in case



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of any legal issues or arrests. Over the years I have seen quite a few clients retain the services of supposed high-end attorneys who have done absolutely nothing for them.

Always have bail or payoff money available, in many countries a quick donation to the right people can solve problems, so, have the funds available and know the right people. In more complicated locations know the procedures for bailing someone out of jail if they are arrested, have the money available and have a bondsman's number ready.

Get a support network in place that in the case of an arrest or political abduction can be alerted to make the relevant people aware of the situation, this could mean alerting embassy's, politicians or journalists. Its best for this to be done through third-party players as those that are directly associated with those arrested or detained could also be targeted and its best they are not seen to be antagonizing the situation. ▶

Unlike conventional kidnap for ransom situations, social media can play a significant part preventing someone going from being arrested to disappeared and being found dead in a ditch somewhere. Police, government agencies and their associated political groups, for the most part, have a public image of being respectable and they will try to maintain that. They can defend themselves for arresting and investigating activist's etc. but, if people who were last seen in their custody turn up dead, it can result in unwanted questions and attention. Have a social media crisis response plan in place!

For me, the essentials of personal security is counter-surveillance, always be aware of what's going on around you, always be mindful of who is watching or following you and keep your communications and computer security tight. In incidents where you

must attend a meeting be very careful and try to choose neutral, public locations and have someone watching your back who is able to video and report any potential threats or hostile incidents.

In such cases as Jamal Khashoggi, where he went into the Saudi Arabian consulate, a location where he knew he was not welcome and had absolutely zero personal security but went anyway to pick up a marriage license, all I can say is look for other options and don't put yourself in dangerous situations. Could the marriage license have been posted, could he have sent a courier or attorney, or could he have waited?

It always best to avoid any potentially hostile situations, but if because of your career or personal beliefs you can't avoid them, then at least have a crisis plan in place.

Orlando Wilson has worked in the security industry internationally for over 25 years. He has become accustomed to the types of complications that can occur, when dealing with international law enforcement agencies, organized criminal and Mafia groups. He is the chief consultant for Risks Inc. and based in Miami but spends much of his time traveling and providing a wide range of kidnapping prevention and tactical training services to private and government clients.