

BACK IN ONE PIECE:

Security While Travelling Abroad

Part 2

By Robert Redenbach & John Bigelow

It is an unfortunate part of the job that security professionals will often find that their work takes them to parts of the world that will often be less stable, hence the need for security professionals. As such, the chances of becoming involved in a dangerous incident could be said to be greater for security professionals.

In the last issue of Security Solutions Magazine, we looked at a variety of precautionary and planning measures that one could take prior to departing on an overseas trip to help minimize their chances of becoming involved in an incident. In this issue, Robert Redenbach looks at what to do when, despite your best precautions, things have taken a turn for the worse and you find yourself at the centre of a bad situation.

Your worst fears have been realized. You awake in the middle of the evening to the sound of gunfire to find that hostile forces are storming your hotel, or you are caught at a checkpoint where all has gone wrong. You may even find that you are one of many hundreds of other people who have been caught in the middle of a coup or unexpected military action. Regardless of the circumstances, the brown stuff has hit the fan and you need to start taking action – fast!

First and foremost – MAKE A DECISION! Acknowledging that action will always beat reaction, you cannot afford to indulge in indecision. Indecision in general is bad news; indecision in a high-risk situation can, literally, be lethal. So, MAKE A DECISION. It may not be the best decision, and it may not even be a good decision, but at least if it is YOUR decision you are capitalizing on the irrefutable fact that action will always beat reaction.

Because there are so many potential variables involved, it is simply not possible to have a firm plan etched in stone. That said, deciding on some basic 'actions on' before the major problem is both wise and prudent. And keep in mind that deciding to do nothing

is not the same thing as not making a decision. Sometimes, you just have to go to ground and wait for a window of opportunity to present itself.

Do not let someone else make important decisions for you. Never voluntarily forfeit your capacity to influence the transition from your state of confusion to obtaining a result. Of course, if you are in a team environment or you have other people you are responsible for, you need to work with the realities of the dynamics around you, but that does not permit passive, bovine-like complacency. In one way or another, if you are going to influence the outcome of the situation, you need to be actively involved in formulating and/or implementing a solution to the problem at hand.

Where are the safe havens and who or what should be avoided? The answers to this will, in part, be influenced by the research you did before the situation arose. For example, staying at a five-star hotel may seem a more appealing option when planning the trip, but if it is a five-star hotel that is so expensive that only wealthy foreigners could afford to stay there, then perhaps a safer option is a less ostentatious and less high-profile hotel that is less likely to be a target for terrorist attack.

Should you try to get yourself out of the country or do you bunker down and wait? Work out, in advance, ways that you could do both. Again, the physical and physiological capacity of the people you are travelling with will influence your options, but the point is you need to have more than one ace up your sleeve. Depending on your research before your trip and the manner in which events are transpiring during your trip, you may even decide to prepare and carry an emergency 'grab bag' with emergency rations (protein bars and so on), basic first aid, torch, water and so on.

What should you do if you are taken hostage? First and foremost, as stated earlier, make a decision. However, this time your decision

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should be based on the concentric circle principle. For example, if you imagine a series of concentric circles, the outermost circle is the point where you are taken hostage. At that point, two things occur simultaneously:

1. The potential for error from the attackers is at the highest and you have the greatest chance of escape. Variables (for everyone involved) are at a maximum level. Once the abduction has taken place, and the hostage situation progresses to the next inner circle, the chance of escape decreases and continues to decrease as each inner circle is reached. For example, imagine you are walking down the street, a car pulls up and three men burst out and move to grab you. As difficult as it is to escape at that point in time, your chances are better than once they have grabbed you and put you on the floor of their car. Then, once they handcuff and blindfold you (another concentric circle), your chances of escape decrease even further. Once they take you to their safe house, chain you to a wall in a cellar, and then beat, injure and weaken you, you progressively enter more and more circles. As such, your greatest chance of escape comes at the initial outer circle.

2. The greatest likelihood of death happens within the first forty minutes of abduction. Among other things, this is influenced by the aggression, fear and pressure the attackers are experiencing at that point in time (and yes, they do experience fear – it may not be a fear of you, but they still have superiors they have to answer to, and so on). So, if you cooperate and survive the initial concentric circle, you have a better chance of surviving the entire ordeal.

Bottom line: if you think you have the skill/weaponry to resist at the initial point of abduction, then RESIST! If you do not think you have what it takes to successfully resist, then COMPLY! Either way, it needs to be your

decision; you cannot hedge your bets. Again make a decision – do not let your opponents decide on your behalf.

Let us say that, for whatever reason, you have been taken hostage. It is worth noting that many people who have been taken hostage, and survived, have had NO hostage survival training whatsoever. This indicates that survival is a fluid and non-precise science, but survival is possible. Also, what is interesting is that many survivors have demonstrated similar strategies or plans. The most common of those include:

1. Do not argue with your captors. Especially do not debate politics, religion or philosophical interpretations of right and wrong.

2. Do not complain or demonstrate animosity towards your captors. Of course this is easier said than done, but it is important to demonstrate (or at least try to demonstrate) composure and dignity.

3. Build a bridge between you and your captors. For example, let them know that you are a real person. You have a family who loves you, children who need you and so on.

4. If they offer you food or drink, take it. Some people will say “But what if it is poisoned?” The answer to that is – what if it is not?

5. Politely ask for additional benefits. For example, an extra blanket at night or something to read. Do not be aggressive when you do this, and do not be impatient either. Over time, gradually increase your requests.

6. Mentally prepare yourself for a long ordeal. If you are wrong and you are released or rescued early, that is great. However, believing it will be over quickly just sets you up for disappointment.

7. Try and make yourself of value to your captors. Naturally, this will depend on the circumstances, but there have been documented cases of captives doing things such as tending gardens and teaching English, which has subtly changed the dynamics of the situation.

8. Establish routines. This is a way you can demonstrate (to yourself) that you have some control over your situation. Even if it is as simple as cleaning your cell and doing basic stretching or isometric exercises at certain times during the day, then do so.

9. Keep mentally active. Recite multiplication tables in your head, write poetry, keep a record of how long you have been prisoner, do all these things and more. Keep mentally active. Keeping mentally active includes always being on the lookout for an opportunity to escape. Keep track of what is going on around you. For example, when do the guards change? Are there weaknesses in their approach? Even if you can never actually follow through with an escape, the mental engagement associated with planning an escape is an effective, and worthwhile, defence against despondency.

10. Have faith in something. Whether it is faith in your country to rescue you or is faith in your family to believe that you will come home well and strong or faith in your own ability to endure, hold strong to that faith.

There are plenty of people who have been taken hostage and survived, for days, weeks, even years. Furthermore, there are plenty of kidnap attempts that are foiled every day by non-compliant victims. The main things to remember are prepare, plan, decide, take action and be strong. ■

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