

AFGHANISTAN & THE TALIBAN

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

COUNTRY INFORMATION

Please check travel.state.gov for the most up-to-date country information.

The Taliban conducted an insurgency for two decades against the Afghan Government and forces from the United States and other countries. In February 2020, the U.S. and the Taliban signed the Doha Agreement that led to the withdrawal of international forces in exchange for commitments on counterterrorism and other assurances. In 2021, the Taliban took over Afghanistan and announced an "interim government" based in the capital, Kabul. The U.S. Embassy in Kabul has suspended operations, and the U.S. government is not able to provide emergency consular services to U.S. citizens in Afghanistan.

- Since 2021, the Taliban, a U.S.-designated **Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT)**—has focused on efforts to portray themselves as the government of Afghanistan and gain international recognition. While abducting foreigners would undermine these efforts, the Taliban has detained several U.S. citizens for perceived violations of Taliban-imposed "laws" or edicts.
- The U.S. State Department currently recommends U.S. nationals **DO NOT TRAVEL to Afghanistan (Advisory Level 4)** due to armed conflict, civil unrest, crime, terrorism, and kidnapping. Travel to all areas of Afghanistan is unsafe and the risk of kidnapping or violence against U.S. citizens in Afghanistan is high. Given the serious risks, U.S. citizens should not travel to Afghanistan to accompany eligible family members for relocation.
- Qatar** serves as the United States' protecting power in Afghanistan.

CONTACT INFORMATION

U.S. nationals traveling abroad should participate in **State Department's Smart Travel Enrollment Program (STEP)**, which informs local U.S. Embassy officials of your travel and provides U.S. nationals with important security updates. <https://step.state.gov>



The U.S. Embassy in Kabul suspended operations on August 31, 2021. Department of State's Afghanistan Affairs Unit operates from Doha, Qatar.

U.S. citizens seeking assistance should contact the **Consular Affairs Afghanistan Call Center at 833-741-2777 or 606-260-4379, or email afghanistanACS@state.gov.**

To speak with **Consular Affairs in the United States**, please call: 1-888-407-4747.

KEY PLAYERS

GENERAL DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE (GDI):

GDI is the Taliban's primary intelligence service and functions chiefly as an internal security organization focused on countering anti-Taliban threats and foreign intelligence services. The GDI oversees armed personnel who surveil the public and monitor compliance with Taliban-issued edicts and directives.

THE HAQQANI NETWORK (HQN):

The HQN—a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization and SDGT—is part of the broader Taliban, maintains positions in the Taliban-controlled government, and shares the Taliban's goals and interests, including achieving international recognition.

DETENTION TACTICS

Westerners continue to be at risk of being arrested and detained by the Taliban. The Taliban may detain U.S. and Western citizens for perceived violations—in some instances under dubious circumstances—and may use U.S. citizens to gain concessions. In some instances, foreigners are detained for relatively minor infractions, which allows the Taliban to more closely scrutinize the detainee's activities for perceived criminal activity.

The Taliban does not regularly permit the U.S. to conduct welfare checks on U.S. citizens in detention, including by phone. Detention can be lengthy and while in detention, U.S. citizens can have limited or no access to medical attention and may be subject to physical abuse.

MOST COMMON ACCUSATIONS FOR DETENTION



Espionage



Proselytization



Lack of Proper Documentation

FREQUENTLY TARGETED INDIVIDUALS FOR ENHANCED SCRUTINY



Journalists



Businessmen



Humanitarian Workers



Faith-based Organization Members

Western individuals and personnel associated with NGOs, foreign partners associated with Western countries, and members of minority groups are at particular risk for surveillance. The Taliban may monitor travelers and gather as much information on them as possible using extensive human intelligence networks and other means.



Photography of military installations, including equipment or troops, may lead to detention.

WEST AFRICA

COUNTRY INFORMATION

Please check travel.state.gov for the most up-to-date country information.

- Burkina Faso:** The U.S. Department of State currently recommends U.S. citizens **DO NOT TRAVEL to Burkina Faso (Advisory Level 4)** due to terrorism, crime, and kidnapping. Kidnapping and hostage-taking is a threat throughout the country, and the U.S. government is unable to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens throughout most of the country because U.S. government personnel are restricted from traveling to regions outside the capital due to security concerns.
- Mali:** The U.S. Department of State currently recommends U.S. citizens **DO NOT TRAVEL to Mali (Advisory Level 4)** due to crime, terrorism, and kidnapping. Terrorist groups continue plotting kidnappings and attacks in Mali, and the U.S. government is unable to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens throughout much of Mali as U.S. government employee travel outside Bamako is restricted due to security concerns.
- Niger:** The U.S. Department of State currently recommends U.S. citizens **RECONSIDER TRAVEL to Niger (Advisory Level 3)** due to the risk of crime, civil unrest, terrorism, and kidnapping. Terrorist groups continue plotting kidnappings and possible attacks in Niger and operate in the areas bordering Mali, Libya, Burkina Faso, and throughout northern Niger. Due to security threats, the U.S. Embassy restricts U.S. government employee travel outside of Niamey, which limits the ability of the U.S. Embassy to assist U.S. citizens in these areas.

CONTACT INFORMATION

U.S. nationals traveling abroad should participate in **State Department's Smart Travel Enrollment Program (STEP)**, which informs local U.S. Embassy officials of your travel and provides U.S. nationals with important security updates.
<https://step.state.gov>

To contact the State Department if you or a family member is endangered, please call: **1-888-407-4747** if you are located in the U.S. and **+1 202-501-4444** if you are located overseas.



KEY PLAYERS

ISIS-West Africa (ISIS-WA):

ISIS-WA formed in 2015 and 2016 when a faction of Boko Haram broke off and pledged allegiance to ISIS and by 2019 reportedly controlled hundreds of square miles of territory in the Lake Chad region where it governed according to a strict interpretation of Islamic law. ISIS-WA has kidnapped and murdered aid workers and Christians, and receives some funding from hostage-taking operations.

ISIS in the Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS):

ISIS-GS emerged in 2015 when a faction from the al-Qa'ida-affiliated group al-Murabitoun split and pledged allegiance to ISIS. It has carried out attacks in the Sahel region and seeks to replace regional governments with an Islamic state. It has gained strength and ground in Mali, and has probably received funding from hostage-taking operations.

Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM):

JNIM describes itself as al-Qa'ida's official branch in Mali and the Sahelian arm of al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and seeks to eliminate Western influence in the region and establish an Islamic state centered on Mali. The group is predominately active in Mali, but also conducts operations in Burkina Faso and Niger, and has received funding through hostage-taking operations.



HOSTAGE-TAKING THREATS

- Burkina Faso:** The threat of hostage-taking remains persistent throughout Burkina Faso, including in Ouagadougou, and especially in the Sahel and Est regions. Burkina Faso had its first kidnapping incident involving a Westerner in 2015. Since then, there have been multiple high-profile kidnappings of Westerners – many of which coincided with the escalation of terrorist activity throughout the country.

- Mali:** Hostage-taking poses a real and pervasive threat in Mali, particularly in Mali's northern and central regions. NGOs and faith-based organizations have been targeted for hostage-taking by terrorist groups. Terrorist groups active in Mali include ISIS-GS and JNIM, who have targeted foreigners for kidnapping-for-ransom schemes.

- Niger:** There is a persistent threat of hostage-taking of Westerners in Diffa and Tillabéri regions. The country faces threats from Mali and Nigeria-based terrorist groups, which include JNIM and ISIS-WA. The border region with Mali continues to be of concern; there are frequent and ongoing reports of terrorists and affiliates crossing into and through Niger from Mali.

FREQUENTLY TARGETED INDIVIDUALS



Foreigners/
Dual Nationals



Humanitarian
Workers



Non-governmental
Organization
Workers



Faith-based
Organization
Members

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

COUNTRY INFORMATION

Please check travel.state.gov for the most up-to-date country information.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is an authoritarian state governed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The CCP retains tight control over government appointments and often seeks to suppress threats to its power through political repression, mass censorship, and surveillance of its citizens.

- The PRC aims to reshape international order and displace the United States as the regional hegemon in the Indo-Pacific, including by building a military to rival that of the United States and advancing reunification with Taiwan.
- The U.S. Department of State currently recommends U.S. citizens RECONSIDER TRAVEL (Advisory Level 3) to the PRC due to arbitrary enforcement of local laws, including by issuing exit bans, and the risk of wrongful detention. PRC authorities have broad discretion to detain and prosecute foreign nationals for alleged espionage. Additionally, U.S. nationals who maintain dual citizenship with the PRC traveling or residing in the PRC may be detained without access to U.S. consular services or information about their alleged crime, and may be subject to interrogations and detention without fair and transparent treatment under PRC law.

CONTACT INFORMATION



If you are arrested or detained, ask police or prison officials to notify U.S. Embassy Beijing or the nearest U.S. Consulate General immediately.

U.S. nationals traveling abroad should participate in State Department's Smart Travel Enrollment Program (STEP), which informs local U.S. Embassy officials of your travel and provides U.S. nationals with important security updates.

<https://step.state.gov>

KEY PLAYERS

Ministry of State Security (MSS):

MSS is the PRC's civilian intelligence service and oversees intelligence collection and counterintelligence activities in the PRC and abroad.

Ministry of Public Security (MPS):

MPS oversees the PRC's domestic civilian national police, which serves as the first-line force for public order; its primary mission is domestic law enforcement and maintaining order.

People's Armed Police:

The People's Armed Police continue to be under the dual authority of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Central Military Commission. Its primary missions include internal security and maintaining public security.

DETENTION TACTICS

The PRC's updated national security laws, which took effect in July 2023, expand the definition of espionage and give Beijing more ability to penalize what it considers threats, including by detaining U.S. nationals and issuing exit bans. PRC authorities have broad discretion to claim that many types of documents, data, statistics, and other materials are state secrets to detain and prosecute foreign nationals for alleged espionage. PRC laws also enable PRC intelligence and security services to target and collect on U.S. citizens, U.S. businesses, and government institutions under the guise of investigations for national security, increasing the risk of detention.

- U.S. nationals continue to be at risk of being wrongfully detained for alleged violations of PRC national security laws. They may be subject to interrogations and denied access to U.S. consular services or information about their alleged crime.
- The government arbitrarily enforces local laws, including by carrying out arbitrary and wrongful detentions and through the use of exit bans on U.S. citizens and citizens of other countries without due process of the law.
- The PRC uses arbitrary detention and exit bans to compel individuals to participate in government investigations, to pressure family members to return to China from abroad, to influence authorities to resolve civil disputes in favor of Chinese citizens, and to gain bargaining leverage over foreign governments.
- In most cases, U.S. citizens only become aware of an exit ban when they attempt to depart the country. There is no reliable mechanism or legal process to find out how long the ban might continue or to contest it in a court of law.

MOST COMMON ACCUSATIONS FOR DETENTION



Espionage



Criminal Behavior



Alleged violations of national security laws

FREQUENTLY TARGETED INDIVIDUALS FOR ENHANCED SCRUTINY



Dual U.S./PRC citizens or U.S. nationals of Chinese descent



Current or former U.S. military members or government personnel



Business Travelers

Any U.S. citizen with current or prior U.S. government, military or law enforcement experience—even those with indirect ties—may be subject to additional scrutiny by PRC security services.

HAITI

COUNTRY INFORMATION

Please check travel.state.gov for the most up-to-date country information.

The U.S. Department of State recommends U.S. nationals Do Not Travel (Advisory Level 4) to Haiti due to kidnapping, crime, civil unrest, and poor health care infrastructure. In the aftermath of the 2010 Earthquake, 2021 Haitian Presidential assassination, and growing political and economic instability, the U.S. Government has observed an increase in kidnappings for ransom (KFRs) in Haiti. During that time, multiple high-profile KFR events have occurred in Haiti, such as the 2021 kidnapping of 17 missionaries and the 2023 kidnapping of a nurse and her daughter. KFR actors surveil victims and use social media to identify and target victims.

CONTACT INFORMATION



U.S. Embassy Port-au-Prince –
Boulevard du 15 October, Tabarre 41,
Route de Tabare, Port-au-Prince, Haiti;
+509-2229-8000, +509-2229-8900;
acspap@state.gov

The U.S. government has limited ability to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens in many areas of Haiti due to security conditions.

Travelers should participate in **State Department's Smart Travel Enrollment Program (STEP)**, which informs local U.S. Embassy officials of your travel and provides U.S. nationals with important security updates.

<https://step.state.gov>

To contact the State Department if you or a family member is endangered, please call: **1-888-407-4747** if you are located in the U.S. and **+1 202-501-4444** if you are located overseas.

KEY PLAYERS

400 Mawozo Gang:

400 Mawozo, created in 2016 and part of the G-PEP gang alliance, is currently the largest active gang geographically in Haiti. 400 Mawozo is Creole French and loosely translated as "400 inexperienced men" or "400 simpletons." The gang consolidates its power in Croix-des-Bouquets, a neighborhood north of Port-au-Prince. 400 Mawozo is most known for the October 2021 kidnapping of 17 missionaries, for which they demanded a ransom of \$1 million USD per person.

G-9 Gang Alliance:

Jimmy "Barbeque" Cherizier, former Haitian National Police officer and revolutionary figure, leads the G-9 Gang Alliance, which has been responsible for a large volume of violent crimes around the Port-au-Prince area. In early 2024, a journalist was kidnapped while attempting to interview Cherizier. The primary revenue for the alliance is extortion schemes, to include KFRs.

Village de Dieu Gang:

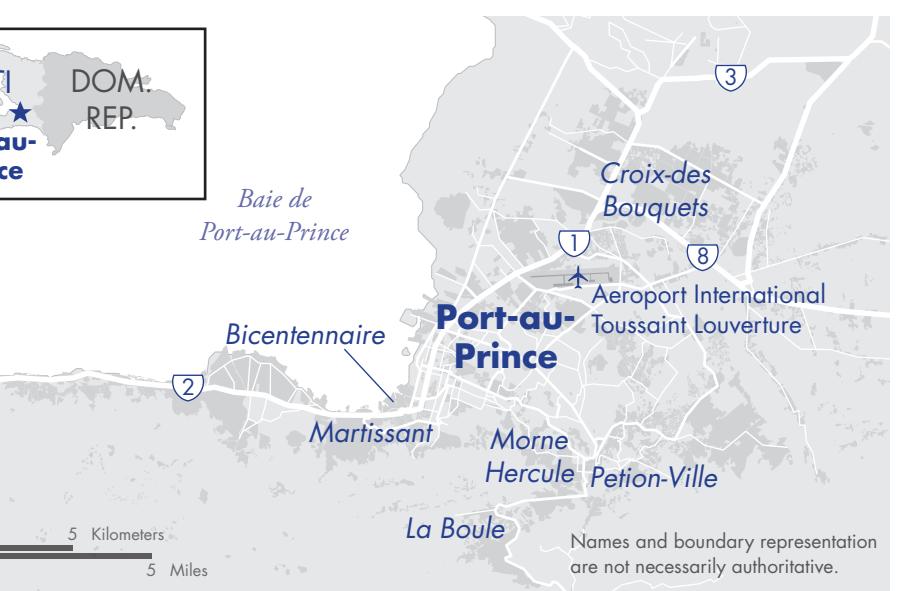
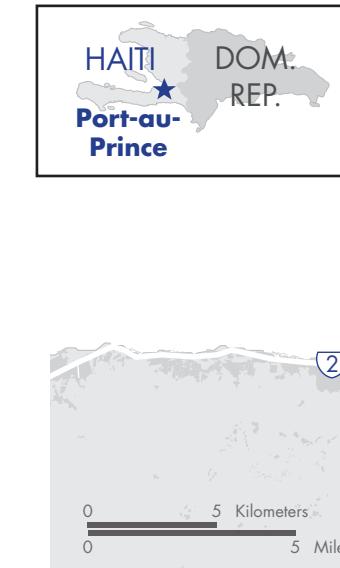
The Village de Dieu Gang, part of the G-PEP alliance, is an active kidnapping gang in Port-au-Prince. The Village de Dieu gang operates in Village de Dieu, Martissant 23-29, and Bicentenaire areas of southwestern Port-au-Prince. Because Village de Dieu is one of Port-au-Prince's most impoverished areas, many residents protect the gang due to financial reliance and fear. The Village de Dieu gang is also known to use the names "Senk Second" (five seconds) or "Segond" (seconds), because it allegedly takes the gang 5 seconds to commit a crime. Gang members frequently wear police uniforms while conducting a kidnapping to look less suspicious.

Ti Makak Gang:

The Ti Makak ("Little Macaques" or "Little Monkey") Gang operates in the Laboule (Fessard) area of Haiti. The gang garnered attention after killing a police officer in an anti-gang operation in January 2021 in Laboule 12. Ti Makak was also responsible for murdering prominent politician Eric Jean-Baptiste and news reporter Romelo Vilsaint in late October 2022. Ti Makak is involved in extortions, kidnappings, and the abduction, often murder, of unsuspecting victims.

Grand Ravine Gang:

The Grand Ravine Gang, part of the G-PEP alliance, operates in the Grand Ravine, Martissant, Pont Breya, Morne Hercule, Cite Jean-Pierre, and Petion Ville areas of Port-au-Prince, and exerts control over access to National Route 2 and the Great South. Grand Ravine is also known as "Gran Ravine" or "Grande Ravine." Grand Ravine is known to challenge other gang's territory through kidnappings for ransom.



Map of Port-au-Prince, Haiti depicting areas controlled by key Haitian gangs.

TRAVEL TIPS

Do Not:

- Post travel pictures on social media while still abroad
- Reveal financial, citizenship, or employment details
- Travel alone

Do:

- Establish and follow a routine check-in timeframe with trusted business and/or family contacts
- Store important contact information, emergency cash, and copy of passport separately from phone and wallet
- Establish a "proof of life" or "security question" catchphrase that only you and your family members or trusted contacts can answer (e.g. SSN, employee ID#, favorite toy as a kid)
- Heed warnings of local authorities and the U.S. Embassy
- Remain situationally aware and do not hesitate to contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate

FREQUENTLY TARGETED INDIVIDUALS



Westerners/
U.S. Citizens



Humanitarian
Aid
Workers



Faith-based
Travelers



Journalists



Individuals
with Perceived
Wealth (any
nationality)

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

COUNTRY INFORMATION

Please check travel.state.gov for the most up-to-date country information.

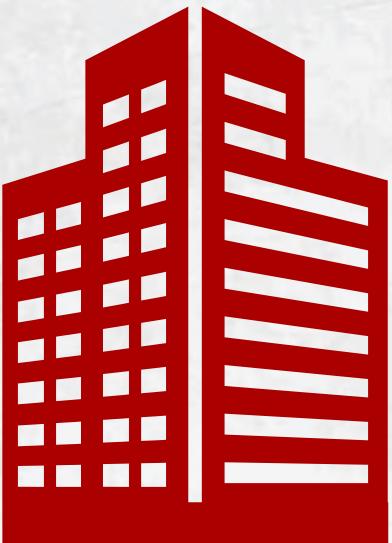
Iran became an Islamic republic in 1979 after the ruling monarchy was overthrown and conservative clerical forces led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini established a theocratic system of government with ultimate political authority vested in a learned religious scholar, referred to commonly as the Supreme Leader. U.S.-Iranian relations became strained when a group of Iranian students seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in November 1979 and held embassy personnel hostage until mid-January 1981. The U.S. cut off diplomatic relations with Iran in April 1980.

- Switzerland is the U.S. protecting power and provides limited consular services to U.S. citizens in Iran. The U.S. government does not have diplomatic or consular relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. The U.S. government is unable to provide routine or emergency consular services to U.S. citizens in Iran.
- The U.S. Department of State currently recommends U.S. citizens DO NOT TRAVEL to Iran (Advisory Level 4) due to the increased risk of terrorism, civil unrest, kidnapping, and the arbitrary arrest of U.S. citizens.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you are arrested or detained, ask police or prison officials to notify the Embassy of Switzerland Foreign Interests Section.

U.S. nationals traveling abroad should participate in State Department's **Smart Travel Enrollment Program (STEP)**, which informs local U.S. Embassy officials of your travel and provides U.S. nationals with important security updates. <https://step.state.gov>



U.S. Embassy/Consulates General

Embassy of Switzerland – Foreign Interests Section

– 98-21-2254-2178; Pasdaran, Shahid Mousavi St. (Golestan 5th), Corner of Paydarfarad St. No. 55 Pasdaran Ave, Tehran, Iran

To contact the State Department if you or a family member is endangered, please call: **1-888-407-4747** if you are located in the U.S. and **+1 202-501-4444** if you are located overseas.

KEY PLAYERS

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC):

IRGC is a highly institutionalized parallel military force to Iran's regular armed forces, and is heavily involved in internal security. The IRGC has significant influence in the political and economic spheres of Iranian society, as well as Iran's foreign policy. Its Quds Force also conducts intelligence operations. The IRGC reports to the Supreme Leader.

Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS):

MOIS falls under the Interior Ministry, which reports to the president, shares responsibility with the IRGC for law enforcement and maintaining order.

Ministry of Interior: Law Enforcement Command:

The Law Enforcement Command is the uniformed police of Iran and includes branches for public security, traffic control, anti-narcotics, special forces, intelligence, and criminal investigations.

DETENTION TACTICS

Iranian authorities continue to unjustly detain and imprison U.S. nationals, particularly dual U.S.-Iranian nationals. Iranian authorities routinely delay consular access to detained U.S. nationals and consistently deny consular access to dual U.S.-Iranian nationals. Iranian authorities have also prevented the departure of U.S. citizens from Iran.

Iran has a long history of participating in the hostage-taking and detention of U.S. and Western nationals, dating back to the Iranian Revolution in 1979, and uses the tactic to try to gain leverage against Western countries. Iran will use Westerners as bargaining chips for Iranians held in Western prisons, sanctions relief, and the unlocking of billions in frozen assets.

- Typically, immediately after arrest, there is a period of incommunicado detention that often includes solitary confinement, followed by efforts to obtain false confessions. There are often significant delays before detainees are informed of the charges against them.
- The Iranian government does not recognize dual nationality and will treat U.S.-Iranian dual nationals solely as Iranian citizens, and may consider even U.S. citizens without Iranian passports to be Iranian nationals.

MOST COMMON ACCUSATIONS FOR DETENTION



Espionage



Posing a threat to national security

FREQUENTLY TARGETED INDIVIDUALS FOR ENHANCED SCRUTINY



Dual U.S./Iranian citizens or U.S. citizens



Current or former U.S. military members or government personnel



Business Travelers



Academics



Journalists

MIDDLE EAST

COUNTRY INFORMATION

Please check travel.state.gov for the most up-to-date country information.

Iraq: The U.S. Department of State currently recommends U.S. citizens **DO NOT TRAVEL to Iraq (Advisory Level 4)** due to terrorism, kidnapping, armed conflict, civil unrest, and Mission Iraq's limited capacity to provide support to U.S. citizens. In Baghdad, militia groups use kidnappings to undermine U.S. diplomatic, military, and economic objectives in Iraq.

Syria: The U.S. Department of State currently recommends U.S. citizens **DO NOT TRAVEL to Syria (Advisory Level 4)** due to terrorism, civil unrest, kidnapping or hostage-taking, and armed conflict. Exercise extreme caution due to the risk of wrongful detention. The U.S. Embassy in Damascus suspended its operations in February 2012, and the Czech Republic serves as the protecting power for the United States in Syria. U.S. citizens are targets of kidnappings by al-Qa'ida and ISIS affiliates, and abductions or unjust detentions by the Syrian government. The U.S. government is unable to provide routine and emergency services to U.S. citizens in Syria.

Yemen: The U.S. Department of State currently recommends U.S. citizens **DO NOT TRAVEL to Yemen (Advisory Level 4)** due to terrorism, civil unrest, crime, health risks, kidnapping, armed conflict, and landmines. The U.S. Embassy in Sana'a suspended its operations in February 2015. U.S. citizens in Yemen, particularly dual U.S.-Yemeni citizens are at risk of being kidnapped or detained by al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), ISIS affiliates, criminal elements, and non-government actors. The U.S. government is unable to provide routine and emergency services to U.S. citizens in Yemen.

CONTACT INFORMATION

IRAQ: U.S. Embassy in Baghdad – 0760-030-3000, al-Kindi Street, International Zone, Baghdad, Iraq; BaghdadACS@state.gov; <http://iq.usembassy.gov/>

SYRIA: The Government of the Czech Republic serves as the Protecting Power for U.S. interests in Syria. The range of consular services the Czech Republic provides to U.S. citizens is extremely limited. U.S. citizens in Syria who seek consular services should contact the U.S. Interests Section of the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Damascus at USIS_damascus@embassy.mrz.cz.

U.S. citizens in Syria who are in need of emergency assistance, and are unable to reach the U.S. Interests Section of the Embassy of the Czech Republic or must make contact outside business hours, should contact the U.S. Embassy in Amman, Jordan, 962-2-590-6950, Emergencies: **962-6-590-6500**; Amman-ACS@state.gov.

YEMEN: There is no U.S. Embassy or Consulate currently in Yemen. YemenEmergencyUSC@state.gov; <http://ye.usembassy.gov/>

KEY PLAYERS

ISIS:

Since 2019, ISIS has transitioned into an insurgency, reverting to guerilla warfare and more traditional terrorist tactics, developing sleeper cells, and assimilating into the broader population in Iraq and Syria. ISIS targets governments or groups that oppose its hardline Islamist ideology, including military forces and security services, government officials, perceived Sunni rivals, Westerners, and religious and ethnic minorities. ISIS targets U.S. citizens for attacks and hostage-taking.

al-Qa'ida and Its Affiliates:

al-Qa'ida affiliates are motivated by a desire to obtain ransom payments and prisoner releases. In Yemen, AQAP routinely kidnaps foreigners or purchases them from tribes and uses kidnapping-for-ransom operations for funding. AQAP has kidnapped Western nongovernmental employees, including aid workers and tourists, and has purchased hostages from tribal groups. Hurras al-Din, al-Qa'ida's affiliate in Syria, remains committed to supporting the Syrian jihad.

Iranian-aligned Shia Militia Groups (SMGs):

Iranian-aligned SMGs want to overthrow the Iraqi Government and install a government based on Shia Muslim laws and precepts. They are involved in attacking and abducting anti-government protesters in Baghdad and raise funds through criminal activities, including kidnappings-for-ransom.

Huthis:

In January 2024, the U.S. Government designated the Huthis as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist group, after the Huthis began launching attacks against international maritime vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. In Huthi-controlled areas of Yemen, the Special Security Forces and other security groups administered by the Huthi's Revolutionary Committee patrol and staff checkpoints, and will stop foreigners, interrogate, and possibly arrest them. The Huthis have accused U.S. citizens of being spies for the U.S. government, subjecting them to strict surveillance and arbitrary detention.

Syrian Regime:

U.S. citizens are also targets of abduction and detention by the Syrian regime. Family members seeking to obtain information about their missing or detained loved ones themselves face risk of detention, abuse, and exploitation when inquiring directly with the regime. Detainees are often held in detention centers for years under harsh and unsanitary conditions without any information provided to their loved ones on their status.

U.S. nationals traveling abroad should participate in State Department's **Smart Travel Enrollment Program (STEP)**, which informs local U.S. Embassy officials of your travel and provides U.S. nationals with important security updates: <https://step.state.gov>. To contact the State Department if you or a family member is endangered, please call: **1-888-407-4747** if you are located in the U.S. and **+1 202-501-4444** if you are located overseas.



HOSTAGE-TAKING & DETENTION THREATS

- Iraq:** The threat ISIS and SMGs pose to conduct kidnapping and hostage-taking operations remains high. In Baghdad, the kidnapping threat comes almost exclusively from militia groups, who may use it as a method to undermine U.S. diplomatic, military, and economic objectives in Iraq.
- Syria:** U.S. citizens remain a specific target, and U.S. citizen victims have had diverse professional backgrounds, including journalism and humanitarian work. U.S. citizens held captive by ISIS have been murdered by the group, which has released videos of the killings and publicly taken responsibility for the deaths. The Syrian government also conducts intense physical and electronic surveillance of both Syrian citizens and foreign visitors, and conversations on the topics of politics, religion, and other social issues could lead to arrest.
- Yemen:** Since the beginning of Yemen's civil war in 2015, the Huthis have systematically and unlawfully detained U.S. citizens, particularly dual U.S.-Yemeni citizens. During detentions, which in some cases have lasted well over a year, U.S. citizens have not been able to contact their families or receive U.S. welfare visits or visits from international humanitarian organizations. AQAP has also held Westerners since 2015.

FREQUENTLY TARGETED INDIVIDUALS



Westerners/Dual Nationals



Humanitarian Workers



Academics



Journalists

NIGERIA

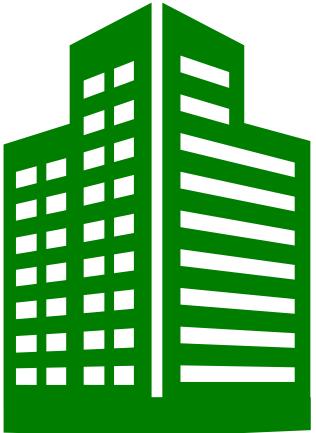
COUNTRY INFORMATION

Please check travel.state.gov for the most up-to-date country information.

The U.S. Department of State currently recommends reconsidering travel to Nigeria (Advisory Level 3) due to crime, terrorism, civil unrest, kidnapping, and armed gangs. Some areas have increased risk. In Nigeria, the threat of criminal kidnappings for ransom (KFRs) exists mainly in the southern part of the country, while at the same time, there is a threat of terrorist hostage-taking in northeast Nigeria, where terrorist groups are most active. Travelers are encouraged to be vigilant at all times and follow the travel tips outlined below. Do Not Travel to:

- Borno, Yobe, and northern Adamawa states due to terrorism and kidnapping;
- Bauchi, Gombe, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Sokoto, and Zamfara states due to kidnapping; and
- Abia, Anambra, Bayelsa, Delta, Enugu, Imo, and Rivers states (with the exception of Port Harcourt) due to crime, kidnapping, and armed gangs.

CONTACT INFORMATION



U.S. Embassy Abuja, 1075 Diplomatic Drive, Central District Area, Abuja, Nigeria; **+234 209 461 4328**; **abujaACS@state.gov**

U.S. Consulate General Lagos, 2 Walter Carrington Crescent, Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria; **+234 201 460 3400**; **LagosACS@state.gov**

The U.S. government has limited ability to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens in many areas of Nigeria due to security conditions.

Travelers should participate in State Department's Smart Travel Enrollment Program (STEP), which informs local U.S. Embassy officials of your travel and provides U.S. nationals with important security updates. <https://step.state.gov>

To contact the State Department if you or a family member is endangered, please call: **1-888-407-4747** if you are located in the U.S. and **+1 202-501-4444** if you are located overseas.

KEY PLAYERS

Sophisticated Criminal Elements:

Criminal actors in Nigeria, primarily motivated by financial gain, perpetrate the majority of KFRs against all victims, but namely Western and Nigerian citizens. Taking place in rural and urban areas, these criminal KFRs frequently start as carjackings or robberies and progress – sometimes through violence – into kidnappings. Ransom payments generally resolve criminal KFRs peacefully.

ISIS-West Africa (ISIS-WA):

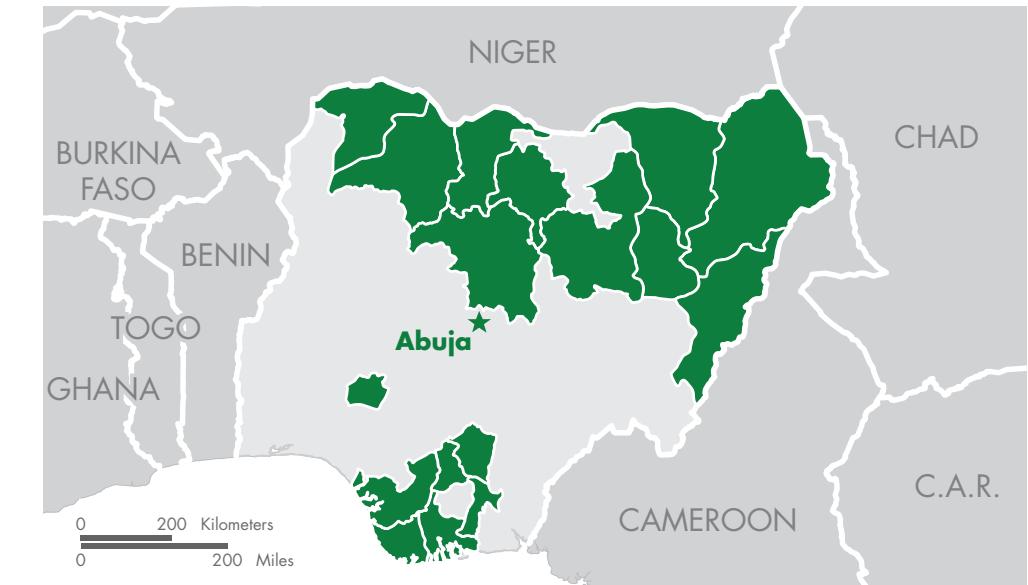
ISIS-WA formed in 2015 and 2016 when a faction of Boko Haram broke off and pledged allegiance to ISIS and by 2019 reportedly controlled hundreds of square miles of territory in the Lake Chad region where it governed according to a strict interpretation of Islamic law. ISIS-WA has kidnapped and murdered aid workers and Christians, and receives some funding from hostage-taking operations.

Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM):

JNIM describes itself as al-Qa'ida's official branch in Mali and the Sahelian arm of al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and seeks to eliminate Western influence in the region and establish an Islamic state centered on Mali. The group is predominately active in Mali, but also conducts operations in Burkina Faso and Niger, and has received funding through hostage-taking operations.

Boko Haram:

Boko Haram launched an insurgency and campaign of terror against the Nigerian Government in 2009. Since 2015, the Nigerian military has dislodged Boko Haram from almost all of the territory it previously controlled, although the group continued to operate in Nigeria, including in areas around the Lake Chad basin. The group targets tourists and other foreigners (particularly businessmen), wealthy civilians, and government leaders to kidnap for ransom or kill.



Map of Nigeria depicting areas that the State Department recommends travelers avoid.

TRAVEL TIPS

Do Not:

- Post travel pictures on social media while still abroad
- Reveal financial, citizenship, or employment details
- Travel alone

Do:

- Establish and follow a routine check-in timeframe with trusted business and/or family contacts
- Store important contact information, emergency cash, and copy of passport separately from phone and wallet
- Establish a "proof of life" or "security question" catchphrase that only you and your family members or trusted contacts can answer (e.g. SSN, employee ID#, favorite toy as a kid)
- Heed warnings of local authorities and the U.S. Embassy
- Remain situationally aware and do not hesitate to contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate

FREQUENTLY TARGETED INDIVIDUALS



Westerners/
U.S. Citizens



Humanitarian
Aid
Workers



Faith-based
Travelers



Journalists



Individuals
with Perceived
Wealth (any
nationality)

THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

COUNTRY INFORMATION

Please check travel.state.gov for the most up-to-date country information.

The U.S. Department of State currently recommends U.S. citizens DO NOT TRAVEL to Russia due to the unpredictable consequences of the unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russian military forces, the potential for harassment and the singling out of U.S. citizens for detention by Russian government security officials, the arbitrary enforcement of local law, limited flights into and out of Russia, the Embassy's limited ability to assist U.S. citizens in Russia, and the possibility of terrorism. Western travelers to Russia should have no reasonable expectation for privacy as the Kremlin and Russian security services maintain broad surveillance authorities of foreigners in the country.

CONTACT INFORMATION

The U.S. government's ability to provide routine or emergency services to U.S. citizens in Russia is severely limited, particularly in areas far from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, due to Russian government limitations on travel for embassy personnel and staffing, and the ongoing suspension of operations, including consular services, at U.S. consulates.



U.S. nationals traveling abroad should participate in State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP), which informs local U.S. Embassy officials of your travel and provides U.S. nationals with important security updates. <https://step.state.gov>

KEY PLAYERS

Federal Security Service (FSB):

The FSB is the largest security service in Europe and is the most powerful security service in Russia with close ties to President Putin. It is responsible for counterintelligence, antiterrorism, and surveillance of the military. The FSB has a counterintelligence arm specifically responsible for monitoring foreigners in Russia.

Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR):

The SVR has historically close ties to the Kremlin. Unlike the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), it is tasked with intelligence and espionage activities outside the Russian Federation. SVR consists of several special state agencies and is tasked with protection from external threats.

DETENTION TACTICS

- Russian security services have detained U.S. citizens on spurious charges or for minor criminal infractions, singled out U.S. citizens in Russia for detention and harassment, denied them fair and transparent treatment, and convicted them in secret trials or without presenting credible evidence, frequently levying prison sentences that are not commensurate with the severity of the alleged crimes. Detained U.S. citizens can spend several months in pre-trial detention before their case enters the court system.
- Russian authorities may not notify the U.S. Embassy about the detention of a U.S. citizen and may delay U.S. consular assistance. If you are detained, ask the police or prison to notify the U.S. Embassy immediately and to provide you with access to U.S. consular officers.
- Pro-Kremlin media outlets may leverage opportunities to exploit the cases of detained U.S. citizens if it can be used to further Moscow's political objectives or otherwise denigrate the U.S.
- Recent legislation has expanded the ability of Russian authorities to detain, question, and arrest individuals suspected of acting against Russia's interests, including posts on personal social media accounts, engaging with foreign and international entities, discrediting the Russian state or military, and advocating for the rights of LGBTQI+ persons.

MOST COMMON ACCUSATIONS FOR DETENTION



Espionage



Criminal Behavior

Police do not need to show probable cause in order to stop, question, or detain individuals. Please comply with the requests of local law enforcement officials.

Frequently Targeted Individuals for Enhanced Scrutiny



Business Travelers



Journalists



Tourists



Academics

Any U.S. citizen with current or prior U.S. government, military or law enforcement experience—even those with indirect ties—may be subject to additional scrutiny by Russian security services.

VENEZUELA

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

COUNTRY INFORMATION

Please check travel.state.gov for the most up-to-date country information.

Nicolas Maduro claimed the presidency in Venezuela for his second term in 2018 in an election boycotted by most opposition parties and widely viewed as fraudulent. The Maduro regime places strong restrictions on freedoms of expression and the press. In 2019, the U.S. Department of State announced the withdrawal of diplomatic personnel from U.S. Embassy Caracas.

- The U.S. Department of State currently recommends U.S. citizens DO NOT TRAVEL to Venezuela (Advisory Level 4) due to crime, civil unrest, kidnapping, and the arbitrary enforcement of local laws. Reconsider travel due to wrongful detention, terrorism, and poor health infrastructure. The U.S. government has limited ability to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens in Venezuela.

CONTACT INFORMATION

U.S. citizens traveling abroad should participate in State Department's **Smart Travel Enrollment Program (STEP)**, which informs local U.S. Embassy officials of your travel and provides U.S. citizens with important security updates. <https://step.state.gov>



The U.S. Embassy in Caracas suspended operations in 2019 and cannot provide protection or consular services to U.S. citizens in Venezuela.

U.S. citizens in Venezuela in need of assistance, or those concerned about a U.S. citizen in Venezuela, should contact Embassy Bogata at <https://co.usembassy.gov/services/contact-acs-form/>.

To contact the State Department if you or a family member is endangered, please call: **1-888-407-4747** if you are located in the U.S. and **+1 202-501-4444** if you are located overseas.

**This document does not represent the official views of the U.S. government.*

KEY PLAYERS

BOLIVARIAN NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE SERVICE (SEBIN):

SEBIN plans, formulates, directs, controls, and executes civilian intelligence and counter-intelligence policies and actions. SEBIN investigates crimes against the government and provides protective details for government officials.

GENERAL DIRECTORATE OF MILITARY COUNTER INTELLIGENCE (DGCIM):

DGCIM is an organ of the Bolivarian National Armed Force (FANB), and has broad powers to execute counter-intelligence activities and to prevent subversive activities.

BOLIVARIAN NATIONAL GUARD (GNB):

GNB is part of the Venezuelan armed forces and reports to the Defense Ministry and the Ministry of Interior, Justice, and Peace. The GNB is responsible for maintaining public order, monitoring borders, and providing law enforcement in remote areas.

DETENTION TACTICS

Regime-aligned security forces have detained U.S. citizens for long periods. The Maduro regime does not notify the U.S. government of the detention of U.S. citizens, and the U.S. government is not always granted access to those U.S. citizens. The regime plants or manipulates evidence to falsely frame targets, including planting weapons or political propaganda, or using torture to pressure detainees to make false confessions.

- Typically, immediately after arrest, there is a period of incommunicado detention that often includes solitary confinement, followed by efforts to obtain false confessions. There are often significant delays before detainees are informed of the charges against them.
- U.S. citizens have been incarcerated under allegations that follow the anti-U.S. narrative of the time, such as terrorism and spying, and are later used for leverage in political negotiations.

Frequently Targeted Individuals for Enhanced Scrutiny



Travelers crossing the Colombia-Venezuela border



Current or former U.S. military members or government personnel



Journalists and Documentarians



Conspiracy and Espionage

Most Common Accusations for Detention