



Hostage & Wrongful Detainment Entities and Stakeholders

There are several people, organizations, government agencies, and nonprofits that might be involved in response or engagement when an American is taken hostage or detained overseas. While Hostage US is completely non-operational and we cannot assist in any response efforts of a hostage situation (i.e., advise on response strategy or be involved in negotiations), it is important that you know who might be involved and understand what their role might be.

Government(s)

There can be several governments involved depending on the situation (i.e., if the hostage or family has more than one citizenship or if the in-country government is involved).

In-country Government

The government in the country where the person is being held:

- The US Government will establish communications with the government of the country where the person is being held. This will be coordinated through the US Embassy on the ground in-country.
- Local police or intelligence agencies in the country where the person is being held might assist in gathering information to help locate them.

US Government

Hostage Enterprise - Legislation

In 2015, President Obama issued the Executive Order 13698, “Hostage Recovery Activities” which established the structures of the hostage enterprise within the US government.

Along with the Executive Order, President Obama issued the Presidential Policy Directive-30 - Hostage Recovery Activities, colloquially known as PPD30. PPD30 addressed “US Nationals Taken Hostage Abroad and Personnel Recovery Efforts” and clarified and provided policy guidance for the agencies in the hostage enterprise and on hostage recovery, communicating with hostage-takers, and prevention.

The Robert Levinson Hostage Recovery and Hostage-Taking Accountability Act, passed in December 2020, clarifies the criteria for what the US government will consider a wrongful detention. These are the cases that will be managed by the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs (SPEHA) office. The defining criteria hold the power to move a case from Consular Affairs’ purview to the SPEHA office at the State Department. The SPEHA office provides the highest level of diplomatic support to the cases of Americans being held by foreign governments for political purposes.

Hostage Enterprise Agencies

- Hostage Response Group (HRG)
 - National Security Council level deliberative group that ensures high-level accountability and oversight of cases
 - Allows issues to be elevated to the highest level in government
 - Can assist in ensuring the cases are priority issues
 - Deliberates possible action and available response options on both hostage and wrongful detainee cases

- Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell (HRFC)
 - Made up of representatives from over 30 agencies whose sole responsibilities are to respond to hostage cases
 - Representatives who work at the HRFC are employed and paid by their parent agency
 - Led by a director from the FBI and a deputy director from the State Department and is physically located in FBI headquarters
 - Includes representatives from all intelligence agencies and all the relevant parts of the US Government (DOJ, DOD, HHS, etc.)
 - Key positions include the director, deputy director, family engagement coordinator, victim's specialist, and the intelligence community issue manager for hostage affairs.
 - Family Engagement Coordinator:
 - Ensures the family is included as a co-equal collaborator in the recovery of US hostages
 - Victims Specialist:
 - Assigned to a family and will attend meetings and be the family's principal point of contact
 - Intelligence Community Issue Manager for Hostage Affairs:
 - A representative on the HRFC from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence
 - Provides tailored intelligence support to hostage recovery
 - Declassifies critical information to share with families

- Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs (SPEHA)
 - Housed at the State Department and reports ultimately to the Secretary of State
 - Led by an ambassador-level Special Presidential Envoy of Hostage Affairs and appointed by the President
 - Lead for diplomatic engagements on all wrongful detention and hostage cases (although hostage cases are rarely resolved diplomatically)
 - Meets with foreign leaders to discuss a release
 - Advises on operational tactics for release
 - Brings response-related plans to the Secretary of State
 - Provides insights in strategy meetings with policymakers
 - Levinson Act criteria determines the eligibility of cases to be under SPEHA purview



Congress

- Senate
 - Senators' offices can assist with advocacy on Capitol Hill in the state the family or captive resides
 - Two senators represent each state
 - Senate offices can bring pressure on the government to continue to work for the release
 - Senate offices can access resources in their state and advocate for families to receive public benefits or other special requests because of the captivity
- House of Representatives
 - Similar to Senators, Representatives can bring pressure on the US government to respond and act
 - Each congressional district has a representative to support their constituents and families can approach the congressperson in the district the family or captive resides

Consular Affairs

The Bureau of Consular Affairs at the State Department is focused on the welfare of American citizens abroad. In countries where the US has a diplomatic presence, Consular Affairs will be the lead on detention cases before they are determined to be "wrongful."

Consular Affairs has country desks at their headquarters in Washington, DC for each country with whom the US shares diplomatic relations. The country desk officers give families detailed briefings on the area where their loved one is being held.

Other Governments

If the person being held has multiple citizenships, the government of their other citizenships might be involved as well. Similar to the involvement of the in-country government where the person is being held, the governments of their other citizenship will likely establish communications with the US government and intelligence agencies and will work together on recovery efforts depending on the country of the other citizenship. Hostage International assists with cases of citizens of any country other than the US being taken hostage and Hostage Italia assists with cases involving Italian citizens.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO)

Third-party intermediaries (TPI)

Third-party intermediaries are individuals or organizations that are outside the government and can be involved with different aspects of the strategy and/or actions involved with negotiations to bring the hostage or wrongful detainee home. They might also assist with information gathering to assist with rescue activities. Typically, TPI's will focus on response, advocacy, or other support—or a combination of these.

Response Focused

- Family members – family members will often want to be involved in the response and find as much information as possible about the hostage-takers and come up with unique solutions to the kidnapping to propose to their response team and the US government
- Employers – the hostage's employer may be involved in the response especially if they were kidnapped while working overseas, and the employer may or may not be offering support to the family
- Insurance firms – the hostage employer insurance policies could cover aspects of a hostage-taking, especially if the employer has kidnap and ransom insurance

- Crisis response companies – these are companies that help advise in the negotiations process and are often contracted to an organization or the response companies written into their kidnap and ransom insurance policies
- Negotiators
- Investigative firms
- Other organizations or non-governmental / independent organizations working in the country that may be able to help by visiting the detainee or gathering information/intelligence
- Lawyers
- Regional experts at think tanks or universities

Advocacy Focused

- Family members
- In-country and US-based advocacy organizations that may help to advocate for the detainee’s freedom
- Media and journalists
- Fringe diplomacy
 - Former US government officials
 - Business executives and other influential people willing to help
 - Celebrities

Response NGOs to Know

- Richardson Center for Global Engagement
 - Engages with and initiates diplomatic talks with countries and communities not usually open to more formal diplomatic channels
 - Works with wrongful detainee families to fight for freedom
- Freedom Initiative
 - Human rights organization work for the release of political prisoners and the issues they represent through advocacy, individual casework, public relations, and legal action.
 - Specialized focus on political prisoners in the Arab world

Advocacy NGOs to Know

- James W Foley Legacy Foundation
 - Advocates for the freedom of all Americans held hostage abroad and promotes the safety of journalists
 - Conducts research studies on the experience of hostages and families and collects data to improve public awareness of hostage and wrongful detainee issues and to advocate publicly for release and hostage policy issues
- Amer Fakhoury Foundation
 - Aims to fundraise for families of hostages and wrongful detainees and runs a monthly spotlight on cases and simultaneously fundraises for that family for the month
 - Also focuses on human rights issues in Lebanon
- Other organizations to note
 - Hostage Aid Worldwide: uses research and data to provide insights on hostage cases
 - Alliance of Families Against State Hostage Taking: raises awareness about state hostage-taking and increases the pressure on Tehran to release them
 - Press freedom groups such as Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters Without Borders
 - International Committee of the Red Cross
 - Amnesty International