

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

**NEW REPORT DETAILS HOW CHINA, RUSSIA, AND OTHER STATES
DETAIN FOREIGNERS FOR POLITICAL LEVERAGE**

Expert involved in hostage negotiations with China says governments must do more to deter countries from resorting to “hostage diplomacy.”

[LINK TO REPORT](#)

(New York, NY – September 14, 2023) Drawing on one of its author’s first-hand experience with international hostage negotiations, a new report by The Soufan Center (TSC) delves into the growing practice of “hostage diplomacy.” [Citizens for Leverage: Navigating State Hostage-Taking in a Shifting Geopolitical Landscape](#) illustrates a severe and growing risk that international travelers may be arbitrarily detained by foreign authorities to be used as political bargaining chips with their home governments. The report draws on the lived experience of co-author and TSC Senior Research Fellow Vina Nadjibulla, who helped secure the release of two Canadian nationals from China after they were imprisoned in what was widely considered an act of state hostage-taking.

To halt hostage diplomacy, the world needs a better model

This paper, co-authored by Ms. Nadjibulla and TSC Research Fellow Stephanie Foggett, illustrates how prominent “abductor states” in recent years have been utilizing the tactic of state hostage-taking to fulfill geopolitical ends. “With the return of great power competition and increase in geopolitical tensions, detaining foreign nationals for leverage is increasingly becoming part of the foreign policy toolkit and statecraft of authoritarian states like Iran, Russia and China,” says Ms. Nadjibulla.

To better understand the practice in today’s geopolitical climate, the authors explore and compare national trajectories and policy responses from the US, Canada, and the UK. The paper points to the overhaul of the US hostage recovery system – undertaken in response to the murders of several Americans captives by ISIS in 2014 – as a potential model for other governments to learn from. “Given the complexities of both the response and deterrence dimensions of state hostage-taking, impacted countries like the US, Canada, UK, and others need both robust national capacities as well as coordinated collective responses,” says Ms. Nadjibulla. “No country can effectively face this challenge alone.”

While there are clear geopolitical implications to state hostage-taking, this paper also highlights the human costs. “Each case of state hostage-taking is a human tragedy,” says Ms. Foggett. “Not only must hostages and their families navigate the hardships of arbitrary detention by abductor states, but they may face opaque response systems set up by their own governments.” Beyond offering findings that national governments can use to deter hostage diplomacy, the report also offers recommendations for how they can better support their own citizens who are currently or have been victims of this cruel practice.

THE SOUFAN CENTER

ABOUT THE SOUFAN CENTER (TSC)

Based in New York, The Soufan Center (TSC) is an independent non-profit center offering research, analysis, and strategic dialogue on global security challenges and foreign policy issues, with a particular focus on counterterrorism, violent extremism, armed conflict, and the rule of law. Please contact Stephanie Foggett with any media inquiries or interview requests:

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