

American Citizen Kidnapped in Pakistan

An American citizen has been kidnapped from his temporary home in Lahore, Pakistan, according to police officials and the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan.

The man, who has been identified as Warren Weinstein, was abducted from his home in an area called Model Town by six masked gunmen on Saturday. Weinstein, who is employed by the Virginia-based consulting firm J.E. Austin Associates, has resided in Pakistan for the past seven years while working on a development project financed by the U.S. government.

The gunmen overpowered the guards who were stationed at the front gate, then stormed into the house and snatched Weinstein from his bedroom.

According to associates of Weinstein, he had made efforts to assimilate with the local culture by adopting the region's dress style and speaking limited Urdu. Weinstein was scheduled to leave Pakistan on Monday.

His abduction comes on the heels of the U.S. State Department's recently issued warning to Americans on the risks of traveling in Pakistan. Although no one has yet to claim responsibility for Weinstein's kidnapping, there have been numerous incidents of foreigners being kidnapped by criminals and Islamic extremists in recent months, including a July 2011 incident when a Taliban-affiliated group claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of a Swiss couple in Baluchistan, Pakistan. And because relations between the U.S. and Pakistan have notably deteriorated within the past year, the danger for Americans located in the region will likely continue to rise.

Jim Jacobson, president of the Michigan-based humanitarian

group Christian Freedom International, is also well aware of the growing danger of life in Pakistan. Jacobson, who helped a family of persecuted Christians rent a house in Model Town, was surprised to learn that Weinstein was living in the area and had even recognized the house that he had been staying in.

“Very few Americans have ever stayed in Model Town, Lahore,” said Jacobson, whose organization has provided hundreds of Pakistan’s minority Christians—who also face growing persecution, harassment and kidnapping at the hands of Islamic extremists—with desperately needed food, clothing, medicine and even political advocacy.

Officials are also concerned that the increased risk will limit the ability of aid workers to assist in some of the most underdeveloped regions of the country.