



Complex Environments



**SPECIALIST LEGAL ADVICE AND SUPPORT IN
COMPLEX AND HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS**

An aerial photograph of a densely packed urban area, likely in a conflict zone. The image shows a street filled with cars, with buildings on either side that appear damaged and cluttered with debris. The overall tone is dark and somber, reflecting the 'hostile environments' mentioned in the text.

“They are widely regarded as the leading law firm globally that responds to incidents in complex and hostile environments.”

HFW is an international law firm with a team of over 700 lawyers working in 22 offices across the world.

As global volatility continues to rise, businesses are increasingly required to operate in hostile and complex environments. We support clients in developing practical strategies to manage systemic risk, navigate uncertainty, and respond to major incidents to secure decisive outcomes.

Our specialist lawyers deliver contentious and non-contentious legal advice to clients across a broad range of sectors including logistics, energy & resources, aviation, shipping, mining, construction, insurance, reinsurance, commodities, infrastructure, security, humanitarian operations, international trade, technology and defence.



“Their work is crucial, outstanding and depressingly necessary.”

The HFW Complex Environments team is an elite specialist group providing clients with legal advice and operational solutions to help manage and resolve major incidents.

Our clients include corporations, insurers, financial institutions, risk and security companies, family offices, NGOs, governments and all businesses operating in high-risk environments.

We are trusted by many of the world's leading companies to handle and respond to incidents which pose an existential threat to the organisation's business, personnel, and reputation.

The team assemble and deploy the required multi-disciplinary expertise, project manage the response, and work side-by-side with clients throughout the lifecycle of an incident, offering legal advice and operational solutions in relation to:

- Major Incident Crisis Response
- War, Political Violence and Terrorism
- Seizure and Detention of People and Property
- Hijacking, Piracy, Kidnapping and Extortion
- Ransom Payments – including funding, logistics and compliance
- Malicious Risk
- Drug Seizures and Smuggling
- Sabotage, Blockade and Civil Commotion

- Evacuation
- Unlawful Killing and Active Shooter
- Confiscation, Expropriation and Sovereign Rights
- Special Projects
- Political Detention
- Asset Recovery
- Reputation Management

We provide solutions to help manage and resolve major incidents, often in dynamic and unpredictable regions and environments. The team is frequently called upon to work discreetly and confidentially on some of the most high-profile and complex incidents globally, that often make headline news. We help clients anticipate and mitigate potential liabilities and exposures. Through our agile and pioneering approach, a number of our incident resolution strategy blueprints have become industry standard.

We undertake on-the-ground urgent investigations, preserving and taking evidence to support potential litigation and intervention by authorities. We act as evidence custodians and, backed by legal privilege, we support clients in dealing with the multi-jurisdictional disputes and investigations that often develop after a major incident.

The team assists with crucial communications strategies that align public relations, regulatory

obligations, and stakeholder engagement. We often work alongside our clients' internal crisis management teams, operational responders, technical advisors, public relations team, brokers, and insurers.

Environmental, social and governance (ESG) principles pervade the team's work. Listed and regulated companies are amongst those who trust us to navigate compliance, anti-money laundering, bribery, terrorism, sanctions and statutory/regulatory notifications, which are particularly prevalent in challenging environments.

The Complex Environments team consists of experienced commercial litigators and specialist counsel with extensive global litigation experience, technical experts with specialist industry knowledge, ex-military personnel with combat experience, former government employees with sector experience and contacts, and media experts who can implement public relations strategies – all drawn from our global network.

The team also has a repertoire of global contacts commensurate with an international law firm which has engaged in crisis management worldwide for over 140 years. We utilise our sector and regional experience, and with our 22 offices globally, we work across all time zones and provide a 24/7 global response.

Our Experience

- Our team has supported clients with resolution strategies during major incidents worldwide, including in recent times, Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, China, DRC, Egypt, Ecuador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Mexico, Nigeria, Papa New Guinea, Philippines, Russia, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Syria, Togo, Turkey, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Yemen, making use of our contacts in governments, the military, private military/security, financial institutions, regulatory, and intelligence agencies.
- Over the last 20 years, the team has helped to secure the release of over 2,000 hostages and recovered billions of dollars' worth of property, bringing unparalleled experience in all forms of resolution strategy and ransom payment. **Richard Neylon**, who heads the **Complex Environments** team, is recognised as the leading lawyer globally in this field.
- We have worked to release personnel, property, vessels, commodities, cargo, artwork, artefacts, and cash, seized or detained by states, de facto authorities, insurgents, and organised crime.
- We have specialist experience in managing the complex and sensitive response to terrorist incidents, particularly kidnappings and extortion, and we are very familiar with navigating the English Terrorism Act 2000 and international equivalents. We regularly interact with government agencies and law enforcement on these issues.
- We deal with allegations of smuggling, improper licensing, customs violations, interference with sovereign rights and resources, and international maritime boundary disputes.
- We have been at the centre of industry's response to recent major conflict zones.
- We assisted Special Risks insurers and worked alongside Response Consultants to deal with assets and personnel affected by the withdrawal of military forces from Afghanistan.
- We have worked with clients to develop bespoke claims management structures to deal with the exposures and volume of claims that have arisen after major incidents, such as casualties, major losses and natural disasters.
- We were instructed by war insurers/operators of 30 vessels stranded in Ukraine as a result of the Russia-Ukraine war. The team supported the initial crew evacuations and subsequently handled complex trading disputes, constructive total loss (CTL)/coverage issues, and the sale of post-CTL distressed maritime assets. We were also embedded in responding to Houthi attacks on shipping in the Red Sea.
- The team provided urgent crisis response support to clients affected by hostilities between Iran and the United States in 2026, advising on personnel safety and evacuation, the aftermath of state led hostile acts, operational disruption, insurance exposure, asset recovery and rapidly evolving contractual risks and disputes in a fast moving and highly volatile environment.
- We have designed and managed bidder platforms to structure invitations to tender and distressed asset sales, especially following major loss incidents and in hostile environments. This includes choreographing the distressed sale of US\$ 250 million of assets which became an economic total loss in a war zone, arising from the Ukraine-Russia war.
- We are regularly called upon to pursue urgent court applications such as preventative injunctions, freezing injunctions, production orders, anti-suit injunctions, and other protective measures. In a recently reported London High Court anti-suit injunction case, arising from a US\$ 40 million precious metal fraud, we forced our opponents back to London and then defeated their substantive claim.
- We co-founded the Hostage Support Partnership, a pro bono humanitarian organisation that works worldwide to free hostages, particularly those who do not have access to the means or resources to secure their release.
- The Complex Environments team have won various international awards and accolades from prominent organisations, including being "commended" and "recognised" by the United Nations Security Council for pro bono work securing the release of "forgotten hostages".
- The Complex Environments team's cases frequently overlap with HFW's criminal, regulatory, security, and sanctions specialisms, and the team works closely with the firm's Fraud and Insolvency, Global Investigations & Enforcement, Data Protection, and Cyber Security teams.



**For more information about the capabilities of our
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HFW has over 700 lawyers working in offices across the Americas, Europe, the Middle East and Asia Pacific. For further information about our complex environments capabilities, please visit hfw.com/Complex-Environments.

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