



THRESHOLDS FOR DEPARTURE/BENCHMARKS FOR RETURN

THRESHOLDS,
BENCHMARKS,
AND THE USE OF
RECESSION IN
THE DECISION-
MAKING
PROCESS FOR
GOSPEL
WORKERS AND
THEIR
ORGANIZATIONS.

A Collaborative
Document.

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Introduction

One of the biggest challenges to ministry is dealing with threats. Sometimes the most stressful situations arise not from facing an external threat but making the decision to stay or go. During these times relationships are often tested. Trust between field workers and their leaders may well be lost if stay-go decision making is handled poorly. But the reality is, this stress often does not end with the decision to leave; decision making in the return process can be just as stressful. In some cases, field personnel have resigned from their original sending organization and returned to a mission field with another mission agency or on their own because of disagreement over the departure and return process. In other circumstances, it has taken years for senior leaders to repair damage and regain trust lost with field workers over these stressful decisions.

The process field workers and leaders use to develop their thresholds (or tripwires) for departure should also be used to develop their benchmarks for return. Some individuals with a higher risk tolerance might find living with a few of these thresholds to be tolerable. Others may desire more stability to thrive and want to ensure more of these thresholds are present.

Bottom line, if leaders are finding several of these thresholds (or lack thereof) are causing personal anxiety, fear, or hyper-concern, they should certainly address the situation and take steps to help individuals, families, and teams thrive. These thresholds and benchmarks can help leaders take measures intended to decrease the vulnerabilities of field workers allowing them to stay when threats increase, decide to relocate personnel to an area away from the immediate threat that allows ministry to continue, or come to agreement to evacuate completely to avoid tragedy.

Thresholds and Benchmarks

To help with the departure/return process, my colleagues and I developed 21 thresholds and benchmarks for consideration. While not exhaustive, they do include:

1. **Targeted Attacks:** Has there been any targeting of expats in cities or the countryside in the past 14 days?
2. **Basic Services (water, sanitation, and electricity):** Are potable water, sewer (if installed versus septic tank system) and electricity (as it is normally available) currently available or been restored?
3. **Foodstuffs:** Are the markets open and basic necessities stocked? Is food being rationed? Is there significant price gouging going on making key food stocks prohibitive? Has there been at least seven days of uninterrupted business with stores and vendors?
4. **Fuel:** Is fuel available? If so, is it rationed? Is there significant price gouging going on making daily life and ministry prohibitive?
5. **General Medical:** Are basic medical services available? Are the hospitals utilized by organization personnel open and operating?
6. **Personal Health:** Do members of your teams need a specific medication or medical support that must be replenished regularly? If so, is access to those items available from the local pharmacies or other vendors?



7. **Communications:** Are they better or worse than normal? Are mobile phone and internet networks up as usual, or down? If down, is it due to vandalism or local government control? If due to government control, perhaps they are not finished with their control actions and still feel threatened.
8. **Consular Services:** Is the embassy or nearest consulate open, staffed, and functioning? If not, are there any of their services that you cannot thrive without (Passport renewal, Warden network information, evacuation assistance, etc.)?
9. **Foreign Governments Concerns:** Are foreign governments evacuating (or allowing the return) of non-essential diplomatic staff?
10. **Host Government Concerns:** Are very senior members of the government fleeing the country, or are senior members of the government publicly disavowing the senior leader?
11. **Rebellion and Mutiny:** Are military or law enforcement organizations (especially in the capital) rebelling or mutinying against the current government in light of a shifting balance of power (political shifts, tribal/ethnic shifts, civil war, etc.).
12. **Local Relationships:** What are your local relationships saying? Are they afraid to go out? Are they saying the situation is dangerous for them? Are they recommending you shelter-in-place, depart, or wait to return? Do they feel they can no longer protect you?
13. **Overland Travel Safety:** Are protesters blocking the roads and restricting travel between cities and, especially, to the airport or train stations? Have the roads been clear at least 10 days? Are there reports of criminal checkpoints being established on roads and national or expats being robbed or assaulted?
14. **Urban Travel Safety:** Are protesters blocking city streets? Is the government continuing the use physical response (tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, or live ammunition) against participants? Are protests in the immediate area deteriorating into looting, vandalism, and acts of arson? Are there reports of criminal checkpoints being established on city streets and nationals or expats being robbed or assaulted? Has it been at least seven days since this kind of activity took place in your area?
15. **International Airport:** Has the international airport (and/or small regional airports as appropriate) been open without restrictions for at least 14 days?
16. **Public Ground Transportation:** Are the local, large city and border crossing train stations open without restrictions for at least seven days? Are buses, taxis, and other local forms of transportation (Jeepney, Tuk-tuk, Rickshaw, other) operating without restriction for at least seven days?
17. **Land Border Crossings:** Are land border crossings open? Are there larger than normal numbers of people trying to leave (escape) the country causing greater lines and waiting? Are there political protests at the land border crossings inhibiting traffic flow? Are there reports of assaults, robbery, or other issues at or near border crossings presently? Are there other reasons related to the land borders to NOT attempt a land departure from, or return to, the country?



Developing Congruency Between Departure and Return

If a decision was made to depart, then when should a return be attempted? First, we need to establish a good memory as to why we left in order to develop reliable benchmarking for a successful return. What were the reasons for leaving specifically? What specific thresholds/tripwires were met that triggered the departure? Have those specific issues now dissipated? Can they now be adequately abated or mitigated? Remember, there should be congruency in assessment and analysis for why you left and why you should return. In other words, a similar decision-making process that justified departure should be applied in your justifications for return. That congruency in threshold benchmarking adds to consistency in decision making for the individual, family, team, and ministry. This, in turn, allows individuals to have not only agreement, but buy in with decision making. Remember the wisdom of Proverbs 18:13: "If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame." Instead, We must be of one mind AND one heart in our desire to return. As Proverbs 11:14 says: "Where there is no guidance, a people fall, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety."

I believe that the Lord wants us to not only be wise in our decision making; God wants us to be SUCCESSFUL. For that success, God has laid out a seven-step decision making process in His word. Essentially:

Clarify the Decision. I have been part of crisis discussions before where the team could not even agree on what exactly they wanted to do. Avoid that by quickly clarifying, "What is it exactly that we are trying to do?" and "What is the intended end goal/outcome?"

Seek Biblical Wisdom. Are we making our decisions based more on our feelings and/or desires, or are we seeking biblical wisdom in this decision-making process? Seeking wisdom from God requires studying the Bible to understand what God has to say about your decisions. That said, it is important to understand the difference between knowledge and wisdom. "Knowledge" is having the right information. If you have wrong or misleading information about what the Bible says, there is a real possibility of making poor decisions that are (at best) misinformed, or (worse) sinful. **WISDOM** is necessary in order to apply what the Bible has to say about your situation. Even then, biblical wisdom is not enough. We need to use the following steps to ensure we have good wisdom in our decision making.

Seek Godly Counsel. Godly council, including council from professionals **OUTSIDE** the organization, is critical to avoid the "echo chamber" effect of listening to a group who already agrees with itself. While an outside opinion is valuable, I highly recommend that those you speak with not only be good security practitioners, but they must also understand and share your values when it comes to calling and risk. Remember Proverbs 15:22, "Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed."

Prioritize Prayer and Agreement. Prayer and agreement within the body of Christ is critical to success. In the case of making stay-go and return decisions, it is important that both headquarters and field personnel have agreement through prayer.

Consider the Alternatives. Are there alternative choices available that will help us fulfill our mandate or mission? Instead of evacuation, are there relocation opportunities inside the country that allow us to mitigate risks and continue the mission? Likewise, are we called to a place or to a people? Are there alternatives to returning to a dangerous place that allow us to fulfill our mission such as engaging a diaspora population of our people group located in another country?



Hold Fast to Your Choices. Once a choice is made, hold fast to that decision. Far too many Christians “wade out into the water” only to turn around and return to the shore. Remember, calling does not change just because circumstances do.

Trust the Lord. Regardless of the final decision, now is the time to trust the Lord with our decision. Trust leads to peace, empowerment, and fulfillment in our choices and out calling. Trust that the Holy Spirit will empower your obedience and make your path straight. Remember Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." Also, Isaiah 58:11, "And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail."

Closing Thoughts

Undoubtedly the stay/go and return decisions are stressful. The decision-making process can be filled with friction from disagreements and misunderstanding. Sometimes it seems that we may have made the wrong decisions. Regardless, we should draw comfort from the fact that the Lord is **SOVERIGN** in our decision making and **LOVES** us unconditionally. We must remember who we are and why we are doing what we are doing. Let the same values that led to your calling to go to the nations reinforce your priorities and steps along the path.

If you have any questions, Concilium stands ready to help. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us. May this document empower the Gospel to reach every language, people, tribe, and nation!

I hope this resource is helpful to you!

Scott Brawner
Concilium President



About the Author

Scott Brawner is President of Concilium and the Executive Director of the Risk Management Network. He is an expert in the field of safety, security, and crisis management for gospel workers serving with Christian missionary and humanitarian organizations, and creative access entities. Scott is one of the most widely traveled and experienced leaders in his field with work and ministry in more than 110 countries around the world.

Scott accepted Jesus as his personal Savior in January of 1987 and served in the United States Army with the First Ranger Battalion in Operation Desert Storm in 1991.



Scott was called to Gospel ministry in 1992 and is a licensed and ordained Southern Baptist minister.

Scott holds a BA degree in History and a MA in Christian Education. Scott has worked in mission sending and security endeavors for more than 20 years, including founding and leading the Fusion ministry now operated by the International Mission Board and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Prior to starting Concilium in 2014, Scott served for seven years as Director of Risk Management for the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (IMB). During that time, Brawner partnered with security directors from multiple US mission agencies and NGOs to create the Risk Management Network (RMN), an interactive network of Evangelical security and risk management professionals. The RMN includes security professionals serving evangelical organizations and churches representing more than 100,000 missionaries and NGO personnel globally. Brawner has coordinated this network since its inception.

In 2010, in collaboration with the US State Department Bureau of Diplomatic Security's Overseas Security and Advisory Council (OSAC), Brawner and other faith-based security leaders in the private sector created a Faith-Based Working Group at the State Department. Scott served as co-chairman of this group and continues to champion the needs of faith-based organizations throughout the US Government.

In 2013, Brawner was asked by the US Secretary of State to join the prestigious OSAC Council. The Council is comprised of only 34 private sector and public sector member organizations that represent specific industries or agencies operating abroad to provide direction and guidance to develop programs that most benefit the U.S. private sector overseas. Scott now serves the Council in a Senior Advisor role.

Professional affiliations include Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), Risk Management Network, American Legion, US Army Ranger Association, NGO Security Network, and the International NGO Safety and Security Association (INSSA).

Scott lives in the United States with his wife and three children.

