



**SOLACE** GLOBAL

# Advice During Civil Unrest March 2021

## Executive Summary

For those who do not intend to be there, being caught up in a protest, regardless of the cause, can be frightening. For both travellers in an unfamiliar environment and locals, unrest should be avoided, especially when clashes are occurring. In the coming weeks and months, there is an increased risk of unrest in Minneapolis whilst the trial of Derek Chauvin, the former police officer charged with the murder of George Floyd, is underway. This risk extends across the United States and, to a lesser extent, globally.

## Trial and Protest Risk

The trial officially began on 8 March, with a full jury successfully sat on 23 March. The opening statements are now expected to begin on 29 March. The accused, Derek Chauvin, is charged with second-degree unintentional murder and second-degree manslaughter. The killing last year resulted in a series of protests and demonstrations in the United States. Some of this national unrest escalated to violence and saw rioting as well as the deployment of the National Guard. Globally, protests also occurred, again the vast majority were peaceful.

It is likely that there will be associated civil unrest in the build-up, during and following the trial, which may not end until May. While the vast majority of this unrest will be peaceful, the risk of violence and disruption cannot be ruled out. As such, travellers in Minnesota, where the trial is taking place, as well as in the wider United States should employ caution.

There is already a heightened level of security in Minneapolis. Access to, and in the area around, the Hennepin County Courthouse in Central Minneapolis is restricted. The authorities have erected fencing with barbed wire in the area. There are also restrictions around other government buildings in the city. Aside from Minneapolis, demonstrations in 2020 were most notable in Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles New York, Philadelphia, Portland, Seattle and in Washington DC. Associated protest action is also possible globally.

Regardless of the cause of the unrest, protest action can be daunting for those not wanting to be involved, especially if in a foreign environment. Whether the protest is connected to the Black Lives Matter movement, the coup in Myanmar or over lockdown restrictions, unrest can result in travellers being caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. As such, our advice is to always avoid protest action, and vacate an area if it is encountered. By their nature, protests can be confrontational and incite a hostile response, escalating into violence without warning.

## Advice for Travellers

The best way to mitigate against being caught up in a protest is to avoid it altogether! As such:

- Keep up to date with the latest media reports and avoid areas where unrest is expected.
- Look to vacate an area quickly and calmly if a crowd is gathering. Do not stay to see what happens or what is going on.
- Similarly, if you come across a demonstration already underway, do not get curious to see what is going on.
- Avoid leaving your accommodation or other safe indoor location if you are aware of unrest occurring. Only leave once you know peace has been restored.
- If in an area known for being a focal point of possible unrest, such as the city's main square or known protest location, regularly check embassy updates and media sources.
- If you are aware of a protest underway, use a map to ensure that any movements you do will not come in proximity to the unrest. Keep abreast of any movements of the protest.
- If going to an area where unrest is common, do not go alone. Having two or more people will help maintain situational awareness. If out in a group, remain together and avoid splitting up.

- If you hear that police have employed crowd control methods, avoid the area.

## Advice if Caught Up

If you are caught in unrest, even in peaceful unrest, you should always be looking for a way out as quickly and safely as possible. This may not be immediately possible, but should always be your ultimate goal, whether as an individual or as a group.

### When on Foot

- Firstly, trust your instincts and be prepared to think on your feet. You will stand a much better chance regardless of the protest size and violence level if you remain aware of your surroundings and remain as calm as possible. Most protest crowds will pass by quickly.
- Look to blend in with the non-violent sections of the crowd. You want to avoid the attention of both the police and the rioters by positioning yourself as a non-violent bystander.
- Move WITH the crowd until you find an opportunity to escape. Avoid glass shop fronts and stay on your feet.
- Always look to stay at the edge where it is safest, you do not want to get penned in and risk being trampled or targeted by police. If you are located in a central part of a large crowd, move diagonally towards the edge.
- Avoid riot control weapons. While this may seem obvious, you want to avoid the front of the crowd where clashes with police are most likely. Remain aware of signs that police may be employing non-lethal weapons, such as people running in the opposite direction.
- If caught in a tightening crowd which is restricting movement and possibly even beginning to crush people together, create space for yourself by grabbing your wrists and bracing your elbows away from your sides, bend forward slightly to give yourself room to breathe, look to stay on your feet.
- Do not get involved on either side. If a protest has escalated to violence, the police will see anyone not in uniform as a potential threat. Listen and do exactly what they say, do not try and be a hero and help either side. Police will not hesitate to use tear gas, fire rubber bullets, or use water cannons on any perceived threats until they have the situation back under control.
- In some cases, globally, police have used live ammunition in an attempt to disperse protesters. In the unlikely event that shooting breaks out, get to the ground and lie as flat as possible.
- Once you do get away from the crowd, walk in as calm a manner as possible, running will only draw attention to you or your group.
- Get indoors in a safe space as quickly as possible. If you get a chance once at the edge of the protest to enter a side street or better into a safe indoor space, take it. If you can lock the doors and windows, then do so.

### In a vehicle

Where possible, being in a vehicle can help you vacate an area quickly. However:

- NEVER drive through a crowd.
- If you are in the path of a crowd, look to turn down the nearest road, turn around or even reverse as long as it is safe to do so.
- If you cannot drive away, park the car, lock it up and leave it. Walk away and seek shelter.
- Should you not have time to park and/or getaway; stop moving, turn the engine off and lock the doors. Remain calm, look to show no anger or hostility at the crowd.

## After a Protest

- If it is unsafe to remain where you are, or there is the risk of further unrest in your location, you should look to seek a place of safety in a different, less volatile, area.
- Report any damaged or lost goods to the police and/or insurance provider.
- If you have been injured, seek medical assistance.
- Look to update your family, friends and business on your whereabouts, especially if you are seeking shelter away from your hotel or residence.
- Anticipate increased security throughout the city.
- Ensure you are fully aware of any possible temporary restrictions in your area, this could be road closures, limits on access to areas or even curfews. Adhere to all instructions issued by police.
- Be aware that further unrest could occur, ensure that you continue to monitor for the latest news and updates either via local news, social media or your relevant embassy.

## Advice if Arrested

- In the unlikely event that you are detained by police or the military, do not resist. Go along peacefully and adhere to all instructions given. Look to contact your embassy, lawyer, travel provider and/or insurance.
- If in the US, give your name and address but do not answer any further questions, instead ask to speak to a lawyer.



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